



Disability: Leadership, Resistance and Culture

Maresa Mackeith – Young and Powerful



Young and Powerful (1997-2002) was a group of disabled and non-disabled young people who went to mainstream schools. They campaigned for all children to be included in schools together, supported by the Alliance for Inclusive Education, but they made their own decisions with residential get together and actions. (Left: Maresa and Young and Powerful protest outside Nottingham County Hall)

Maresa Mackeith was not allowed contact with other children at her Comprehensive school. Maresa has cerebral palsy. She cannot talk, but communicates by facilitated communication. Maresa was put in a separate room. At the end of the 2nd term she wanted to invite some children she had met to her home. “The teacher refused to give the invitations out saying ‘they are not ready to come to your house’. I asked the Young and Powerful group for help”. When they got to County Hall, the Director only saw them because they made a lot of noise and there were TV cameras. Eventually he agreed to investigate. Meeting them again his attitude had completely changed. “He said it was worse than we had said and I could choose any school in Nottinghamshire to go to”. Maresa moved to a new school in Yr. 9. They took seriously what she and her family were asking for: a chance to take part in ordinary lessons.

“I got the assistance I needed and began to flourish with a circle of friends. I loved the learning and felt satisfied and stretched. I got 6 GCSEs and went on to do ‘A’ levels, eventually a university degree in English. To me that education was a lifeline. I need assistance for everything except thinking, so I wanted to express my thinking and have access to knowledge. Communication and Education are Human Rights and disabled people are human. I do a combination of writing and talks in education and elsewhere to try to persuade the world that we must include everyone in the action of living.”

Maresa is a founder member of Quiet Riot, a group fighting for the rights of those without speech.



Touch

In 1913, Helen Keller

“considered it a priceless gift and a deep responsibility to think”
and “a time for loud voiced, open speech and fearless thinking...”
against “individualism, conquest and exploitation...”

In Quiet Riot that is what we do
we think
and through the conduit of others
we voice that thinking.

Nearly a century later
Paul Thomas wrote,
‘...my mind does excel
My mind instructs me to move

My limbs often
Will not comply.’

We all can be seen as mute and helpless
But we know what we can give:
The power of connection....

We must ally ourselves to
and act with
the millions of invisible bodies who enable us to survive
the countless souls who live and die unrecognized.
We know we are connected.

Maresa Mackeith

