Julie's story about changing a system one podiatrist at a time

Changing a system one podiatrist at a time

What happens when people with disability are recipients of poor service in the allied health space? Mostly nothing. The therapist is rarely challenged. There is a huge power imbalance between the well-spoken therapist and the client with disability. People have the option to choose another therapist but there is always another client to take their place, or, they may just accept the poor service because they feel it is too difficult to change.

This story is perhaps a little unusual because I did not attend the podiatry consult I’m writing about. My daughter, who lives with Rett Syndrome, went to a podiatry appointment to pick up a pair of customised orthotics with her support staff. What happened at the “fitting and consultation” was told to me soon after the appointment by her support staff. Suffice to say there was little fitting and consulting but there was an invoice.

I resisted the urge to ring reception and demand to speak to the podiatrist and I did not make a formal complaint. I honestly felt this podiatrist needed to be educated about people with disability. I decided to attend my daughter’s next scheduled podiatry appointment in six weeks and speak directly to the podiatrist.

There was another twist. When I attended the next appointment, the podiatrist was on holidays. I asked this new podiatrist what do you look for/how do you check orthotics when a client is nonverbal and severely intellectually impaired. He explained how you would conduct a visual examination and then talk to the support staff about what might be normal for a particular client etc. I asked him what would I have to look for/check if I thought the orthotics were uncomfortable and he explained that staff should check for any red marks etc and to take photos if necessary. I asked

him to check my daughter’s orthotics. I then described the service my daughter had received.

I told the podiatrist that I had the feeling that had I or my husband accompanied our daughter to pick up her orthotics, as we had done in the past, I would not have to have this conversation. I felt that because my daughter now lives in supported accommodation and presented with support staff, she was not offered the same level of care she had previously been given. I felt that because my daughter had a disability her life was viewed as being of lesser value. The podiatrist hung his head and put his head in his hands. He told me I was entitled to make a formal complaint to the board of this well-known podiatry chain.

I decided not to make a formal complaint but to email the podiatrist I had spoken to a list of suggestions on how the chain could provide better care for people with disability. I did not blame the individual podiatrist but questioned why the leadership team did not have any guidelines or protocols around working with people with disability. The spirit in which I wrote the email was to offer practical ways to improve their service.

I received a reply email saying the leadership team had been notified and discussed my suggestions and had reacted favourably. Sometimes, it is better to tell people how their actions made you feel and how their poor service impacted on you, rather than using the raised voice or formal complaint. We now have 2 podiatrists who have been made aware about how people with disability should be treated. An organisation has been asked to account for what leadership they give to their practitioners. I have a daughter who now receives good service from a podiatrist that once dismissed her. I have witnessed the changes that have been made.

A young woman of Asian decent. She is smiling.

Who is it for?

People with intellectual disability,

Family and carers,

Professionals

What is it about?

Ways to get better health care,
How professionals, family and carers can respect health rights,
Asking for changes so you can be safe and take part,
Common health conditions

Who made it?

Julie

When was it made?

It was shared here 4 months ago.

This story was made by

Julie

Julie is a member of the Our Health Space community.