

Hi my name is Craig Kelly and I am the president of the very first Ability Board. I also have an intellectual disability but that's not who I am. The Ability Board is an advocacy group who fights for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities in education and employment. I want to share with you something very personal. I finally have the courage to speak openly about this. It is just one of many stories of when I was discriminated against just because of who I am.

When I first started in Ability@Work in 2018 I started job searching. When I finally got an interview, I was very excited. Myself and my Job Coach prepared for this interview for days and I felt confident before I went into the interview. It was going great until I mentioned the fact that I had a Job Coach. They asked me what a Job Coach was. I told them they help people with disabilities find employment and I knew straight away they did not want me to work there or even hire me to give me a chance. I knew when their faces fell and I could tell by their body language. I was really upset because of this. I felt like a fool. I said to my job coach; do I even have the confidence or heart to go to another interview because of getting denied and thinking no one would ever want me. Ability@Work helped me through this because I thought to myself I would be no good anywhere else. I'm still very nervous of interviews especially if there is more than one person there. That experience still really affects me to this day.

It took a lot of work to pick me back up from the anxiety I was feeling about my future. I just thought I was useless and I'd never be anything. After a while my Job Coach encouraged me to get involved in advocacy. That's how I became President of the Ability Board. The election campaign really changed my life for the better. It was such an exciting time. It made me feel so powerful and important. The day of the election was one that I'll never forget! I have learnt now that having a disability is nothing to be ashamed of. The more we talk about it, the more it will be accepted. I have an invisible disability and I always found it hard when it came to the end of an application and the company asks you to tick a box if you have any disability. I never knew what was the right thing to do. Would they never accept me if I tick yes? Would they even meet me to give me a chance? Now I just always tick yes. I don't want to work for a company who wouldn't even interview someone with a disability. But it took a long time for me to get to this stage!

The Ability Board want to talk to the people in charge of Irish companies who can really make change in a workplace. We believe we can change recruitment to make it more inclusive by becoming part of interview panels in Irish companies.

We also want to give companies Disability Awareness training with the help of Ability@Work staff. There is no point in giving disability awareness training if you have never had to deal with the barriers we face every day. We're the ones that should be training people.

The Ability Board want to bring Easy to Read to businesses, public places and tourism. Easy to Read documents are made up of short, very simple sentences that just have the most important messages on them. Easy to Read uses pictures to help people understand better. We can make decisions if we can understand what's going on. Easy to Read needs to become something that everyone in the country understands. We want to make this a reality.

As president of the Ability Board I want to be the voice for other people with different abilities in Ireland. I know it's my duty to do this. I want to change how people look at the word disability. I want to teach people about how you can be part of the change. I want to make sure that we're treated as equals and not like children. Even as adults we are often treated like children. People make decisions for us all the time. The Ability Board want to change this.

We are the real definition of Nothing about us Without us!