The 2019 Social History of Learning Disability (SHLD) Conference:

Belonging and not belonging

16th and 17th July 2019, the Open University, Milton Keynes

Ideas for presentations (call for papers)

This year, the SHLD group will celebrate its 25th anniversary. This means that our 2019 conference will be a very special one. We wanted to make sure we picked a topic that we all felt was really important, to help mark this milestone in the group’s history. After lots of thinking and talking, we decided that the 2019 conference should be focused on ‘belonging and not belonging’.

Why ‘belonging and not belonging’? Most people say that feeling like they belong is really important to living a ‘good life’. But we also know that for many people with learning disabilities and their families this can be very difficult to achieve. If you don’t feel like you belong, life is difficult. Feeling like you do not belong can also make you physically and mentally unwell. So we need to talk more about belonging; to understand what belonging means to people; and to find better ways to help more people with learning disabilities feel like they belong.

Ideas about how to support people to ‘belong’ have changed over time
Because we are the Social History of Learning Disability Group, we are always interested in taking ‘the long view’. This means looking at how things were in the past as well as how they are today. We want to learn more about belonging for people with learning disabilities in history.

Some of the questions we might explore at the conference are:

- Where did people feel they belonged in the past?
- What was life like before the institutions?
- What did belonging mean for people confined in institutions?
- What happened to a sense of belonging when people left institutions?
- What are people’s experiences of belonging today?
- What words did people use to talk about ‘belonging’ in the past?

We want to hear from lots of different people at the conference. If you gave a talk at a previous SHLD conference that touched upon the issue of belonging (even if you didn’t use that term), you might want to come back and update us about how your research or work developed.

**We welcome talks from:**

- People with learning disabilities
- Parents and carers
- Support workers
- Health and social care professionals
- Service providers
- Academic researchers
- Students
- Advocacy organisations and advocates
Here are some ideas of topics that might be good for this conference. We haven’t covered everything here, but we hope it will get you thinking…

- Personal stories of belonging and not belonging (today or in the past)
- Belonging and not belonging in different places and spaces (examples could be school or college, the local community, learning disability services, leisure activities, paid and unpaid work, self-advocacy groups, research projects…)
- Belonging and relationships
- Things that have helped people to belong
- Things that have prevented people from belonging
- ‘Big ideas’ about belonging and how these have changed over time.

Because this conference is also about celebrating and reflecting 25 years of research into the social history of learning disability, we welcome talks on:

- The role of research in terms of belonging for people with learning disabilities
- The role that history might play in helping us to understand experiences of belonging and not belonging
- The ways in which learning disabilities history fits with mainstream social history. Does it belong in those wider discussions?

Some photos from the SHLD archive – one of our early conferences with some familiar faces, including founding members Dorothy Atkinson and Jan Walmsley
This conference will help us think about belonging, together. It will also be a chance to look back on 25 years of the SHLD group and to think about: what next? Finally, we really hope the conference will be an opportunity to reconnect with old friends and make new ones: a conference where everyone feels like they belong.

**What next? Sending in your ideas for a talk**

If you are interesting in giving a talk at this conference, please send your idea to us by **Friday 1st March 2019**. Sometimes this is called an ‘abstract’, which means a summary of what you would talk about at the conference. We will also need a title for your presentation. The conference committee will review all of the summaries we receive and make a decision about which talks can be included. We will let you know our decision by Friday 15th March 2019.

Please remember that people with learning disabilities are on the conference committee. It is really important that your summary is accessible and easy to read. We have attached some guidelines on how to write an accessible summary and presentation.

**Please send your summary to Lee Woodham by 1st March 2019 at the following address:**

**Shld-conference@open.ac.uk**

OR

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies
The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA
Useful information:

• SHLD conferences are inclusive events and everyone is welcome. If you plan a talk, please remember that it needs to be accessible.

• Conference presentations are usually 20 minutes, plus another 10 minutes for questions.

• Like most conferences, we have to charge fees for people to attend. But we also provide a number of free and cheaper places for people who need them. You will need to apply for these free or cheaper places nearer the time. We will send information round about this once the programme has been agreed.

• People who present at the conference will be offered a free place if they need one.

• We can reimburse reasonable national travel expenses for people who present at our conference if this is needed. We cannot cover accommodation costs. Please note that if you are planning to present as a bigger group (more than 4 people) we may not have the budget to pay for everyone’s travel expenses.