Learning Disability and Autism: Making Justice Fairer for People Like Me

My Learnings from the USA and Poland



By Dr Mark Brookes MBE

Part 1
Introduction





1.1 Video Introduction

1.2 About Me

1.3 My Churchill Fellowship Goals

1.4 What I Will Share With You



Part 2
My Learnings Poland

2.1 Polish Association of People with Intellectual Disabilities (PSONI)

Visit 24th February 2025

2.2 OSCE, Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Visit 25th February 2025



Part 3
My Learnings USA

3.1 The Arc National Convention, Columbus

Visit 30th October to 6th November 2024

3.2 The Arc National Center of Criminal Justice and Disability (NCCJD)



My Learnings Austin, Texas

3.3 The Arc of the Capitol, Austin, Texas

Visit 30th May 2025

3.4 SAFE Austin, Austin, Texas

Visit 30th May 2025



My Learnings New Jersey

3.5 The Arc of New Jersey – Criminal Justice Advocacy Programme (CJAP)

Visit 3rd June 2025

3.6 The Blue Envelope Programme

Visit 3rd June 2025



My Learnings Washington DC

3.7 The American Bar Association

Visit 4th June 2025

3.8 The International Association of Chiefs of Police

Visit 4th June 2025



My Learnings Oregon

3.9 The Arc of Benton County, Corvallis, Oregon

Visit June 6th - 9th June

3.10 The CommCard Programme



Part 4

Key Learnings and Opportunity for Change

4.1 Summary of Key Learnings

4.2 How can I use these learnings to make lasting change in the UK?



Part 5

Thank You

Part 1

Introduction to my Fellowship



My Churchill Fellowship let me travel to learn how to make justice better for people with learning disabilities like me

My travel included three different trips that I took between November 2024 and June 2025



In this video I talk about why I applied for the Fellowship, what I learnt and what I hope to achieve back in the United Kingdom

Video Introduction



About Me

I have a learning disability

I have been doing advocacy work for over 30 years!

I am currently the Advocacy Lead at Dimensions UK, who support people with learning disabilities and autism

I have an honorary doctorate in law from the University of Kent

I was honoured with an MBE from the Late Queen in 2019 and received this from Princess Anne at Windsor Castle in 2021

What I Care About

Speaking up for people who don’t have a voice.

I want everyone to have power over their own lives.

Lived experience voices included “at the table”.

Fighting disability hate crime and ensuring people with learning disabilities and autism have equal access to justice.

My Experiences in the UK:

I have been a victim of disability hate crime;

I led on advocacy for Dimensions Hate Crime campaign, ***#Imwithsam*** to help people with learning disabilities and autism understand what hate crime is and how to report it.

Many people don't know that the hate they face is a crime.

Some people live with abuse every day.

This is why fighting for equal access to justice is so important to me.

I have also worked with and trained over 2000 frontline police officers across the UK to better support people with learning disabilities and autism.

I have worked with the Crown Prosecution Service, the Mayor's Office of London Policing and other Governmental bodies to help make the criminal justice system more accessible for people with learning disabilities and autism.

My Churchill Fellowship Goals and how they Changed

At the start, I wanted to learn about how police and other criminal justice professionals respond to disability hate crime in other countries.

I wanted to travel to the USA and within Europe to see what they do differently to the UK.

After I started my research, my goals shifted as I learnt that there was a lot of exciting work in the USA that was based around fairness and equality in the criminal justice system and I was eager to learn more about this.

I want to bring back those learnings to:

- Help police and frontline workers in the UK learn from people with learning disabilities;
- Push for more widespread lived experience training for police and other frontline professionals;
- Advoate use of communication tools for people with learning disabilities and autism;
- Push for better data on disability hate crime in local UK areas.

My Churchill Fellowship Goals and how they Changed

I also discovered that there is a lot of great work on disability hate crime happening within Europe.

I talked to many organisations in Europe on Microsoft Teams about the work they are doing to combat disability hate crime.

There was so much great work that I didn't have enough time allocated within my grant to explore this in depth as much as I would want to.

I hope to continue my Europe research with these organisations when I have the funding to do so.

I was able to spend two days in Warsaw where I concentrated on specific work which supports the reporting of disability hate crime. This is an area I am very passionate about because disability hate crime is significantly under-reported in comparison to other hate crime strands.



What will I share with you?

I met many kind and inspirational people who are doing great work for people with learning disabilities and autism.

I will share what I learnt during my travels at each of my destinations. My learnings include lots of ideas and knowledge around:

Police Training

Communication Tools

Advocacy and breaking down barriers

Victim and Defendant Support



Part 2

Learnings from Warsaw, Poland

Warsaw Chapter of the Polish Association For People with Intellectual Disabilities (PSONI)

"PSONI was born as an association of parents and families of people with intellectual disabilities. And now we are evolving to invite more and more self-advocates to have their voice in our association. And they are really in a process of change."

Monika Zima-Parjaszewska, *President of the Main Board of PSONI*



In Conversation with PSONI

I had a great chat with PSONI about health, supported employment, self advocacy projects and the under reporting of disability hate crime.

They are working hard to change laws and systems so people with learning disabilities and autism get justice and equal rights.

They want to stop institutionalisation and make sure people are empowered to use their rights.

Project to Highlight

The Radio SoVo Project

This project is really great because it lets people like me make their own radio shows and podcasts.

They talk about fun stuff like music and events, and it helps them learn new skills and feel included.

I think we could do something like this in the UK to share our stories and show everyone what we can do!

How could this improve outcomes for people with learning disabilities and autism in the criminal justice system?

Accessible, nationwide and/or local radio/TV co-produced by people with learning disabilities means:

Quicker way to spread important messages

More exposure to wider audience, reducing stigma

Raises awareness of communication needs?

OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)



OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

What is ODIHR?

Full name:	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
Where:	Warsaw, Poland
Part of:	OSCE (a group of 57 countries working on peace and rights)
Main job:	Help countries build democracy, protect human rights, and follow fair laws.

"Because it's a security organisation, we see hate crimes as a security threat. There's actually 57 participating states in the OSCE... all those states have agreed that hate crimes can pose that threat to security and wider stability and that's one of the reasons why we have a mandate to work on hate crimes and to assist states."

Ruth Burns on the role of OSCE/ODIHR, their global scope and political commitments

Special Focus: Civil Society Reporting

Most hate crimes are never reported to police.
That's why the community groups taking responsibility to collate hate crime and hate incident data is really important.

What ODIHR Does About Hate Crimes

Collects information on hate crimes from:
- Governments
- Civil society groups (charities, community organisations)

Publishes a yearly report showing:
- How many hate crimes happen
- Which groups are targeted
- What countries are doing (or not doing)

How Does ODIHR Help Local Community Groups?
Collates data reports and fills in missing official data
Provide free tools to help make reporting easy and safe
Runs training workshops
Teaches civil society organisations how to spot, record, and report hate crimes



Here is a video of me explaining why I visited ODIHR and why I want Civil Society Organisations in the UK to get involved and submit hate crime data to ODIHR

ODIHR Information & Resources



[ODIHR – Civil Society Hate Crime Reporting]

[ODIHR Reporting Template for Civil Society]

[Latest Hate Crime Data from 2023/24]

Disability hate crime is under-reported. We need to do more as a community to speak up for those whose voices are lost within the criminal justice system. I urge all UK social care providers to learn more about what ODIHR do and participate in hate crime/hate incident data collection each year. Please see the above resources for more information.







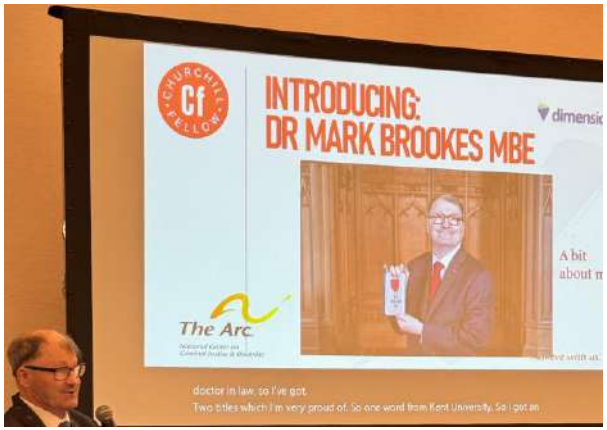






Part 3

My Learnings from the USA











The Arc USA
National Convention 2024
Columbus, Ohio

Who I Met
The Arc
National Convention 2024



The Arc®

National Center on Criminal Justice & Disability®

My USA Journey started in Columbus, Ohio, at the Arc National Convention, November 2024

Here I met Leigh Anne McKingsley, Senior Director at the Arc National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability (NCCJD). She connected me with US partners for my Churchill Fellowship.

Leigh Anne's kindness and leadership taught me so much about US disability advocacy!

At the convention, I also met Diane Scottaline and Misha Marie from Arc of Benton County, (CommCard Programme). I talk more about CommCard in Part 3.10 of this report.

I connected with Donna and Daren Parsa, parents of Eric Parsa, who tragically died when the police held him in a prone restraint.

I also met many self-advocates and social care professionals working across the whole spectrum of political and social issues in USA society.



The Arc USA

During my conversations with Leigh Anne McKingsley, she explained that the Arc was Founded 75 years ago by parents fighting for their kids.

They wanted their children with disabilities to live at home, not in institutions.

Today, the Arc has 550 state and local chapters across the US.

Leigh Anne heads the National Center of Criminal Justice and Disability, funded mostly by federal grants.

During the Convention, I gave a short presentation at the NCCJD annual breakfast which you can see here.



About the NCCJD

"we work with families and courts to change systems, not just train officers"

Leigh Anne McKingsley, Senior Director of The Arc NCCJD

I spoke to Leigh Anne about what the NCCJD do well. She explained they:

Train police to understand behaviours of people with learning disabilities, autism, or brain injuries.

Builds community teams with families and courts to support people like me.

Share lived experience stories to teach officers.

Advocate for and facilitate survivor-led, co-produced training.

Fight for funding to keep programs going.

NCCJD Training Tools and Resources

Leigh Anne and I talked about the work that the NCCJD do across the USA.

There is a lot of innovative and exciting work that I can report on but this is a small selection I have chosen to highlight.

Links to NCCJD resources are provided.

Just Policing (launching 2026)

Online training with US Dept. of Justice COPS Office

Focus: Community policing, disability awareness, co-produced content

Pathways to Justice

Builds local disability response teams for people in the justice system

Co-trains police, professionals, and self-advocates

Funding is a challenge, but NCCJD always seeking grants.

Crisis Response Intervention Training

(A partnership with the IACP –see Slide 68)

Raises awareness of mental health and neurodivergent behaviours

Focus: De-escalation and safety

The Eric Parsa Story

An example of the excellent work the NCCJD do, is through the story of Eric Parsa.

I met Donna and Daren Parsa at the convention.

Their son Eric died after police held him in a restraint hold far too long.

Eric had limited speech and couldn't say he couldn't breathe.

Donna and Daren work with Leigh Anne and the NCCJD to:

- Raise awareness
- Train police to respond safely and empathetically

Watch their story on PBS NewsHour: PBS News hour segment.



"They* [the police] *didn't want to hurt him, but he shouldn't have died. There must be a better way."
Donna Parsa

The Arc NCCJD
Why I am Inspired to Share their Work

I learned about *Just Policing* and *Pathways to Justice.* These programs put people with disabilities ant the heart of training ,so our voices matter.

They show police and communities how to understand behaviour and de-escalate crises.

The Parsa family's story showed me how NCCJD turns tragedy into change, training police to be safer and more empathetic.

Leigh Anne's passion for change gives me real hope.

My Learnings from The Arc USA National Convention and the NCCJD

What I love about this connection with the Arc USA and with Leigh Anne McKingsley, is the ability to collaborate together and share information across borders.

We have so many similarities in the issues we face in both the USA and in the UK and we can learn from each other. Making these connections is key.

The Arc USA National Convention inspired me because self-advocates, professionals and change makers all came together.

It would be great if UK social care organisations could work together and host something similar.

We could showcase what people with learning disabilities can do and how social care organisations and wider society can support us to live better lives

NCCJD inspires me to seek funding opportunities to help me push for reform.



The Arc of the Capitol Area
Austin, Texas

From Left to Right

Caleb Alford– Associate Executive Director of Mission & Impact

Mark Brookes – Churchill Fellowship

Leigh Anne McKingsley: Senior Director of the Arc National Center for Criminal Justice and Disability

The Arc of the Capitol Area

I spoke with Leigh Anne and Caleb about the challenges of funding and disability rights in Texas;

We talked about supported employment and the neuro-diversity employment programme, which helps people into good work.

We also talked about education cuts. I worry this will stop people getting fair schooling, which affects jobs, housing and can lead to more people with learning disabilities unfairly within the criminal justice system.

This is why I am so passionate about speaking up and advocating for people with learning disabilities.

The Arc of the Capitol Area

Why am I Inspired to share their work?

The Arc of the Capital Area does really important work for people with learning disabilities and autism.

They help kids with disabilities stay out of trouble with the law by giving them support and guidance.

They also help adults with disabilities live better lives with programs that support them for a long time, like guardianship to make sure they are safe.

Their job programme helps people with autism or ADHD, get tech jobs at places like Dell by showing people's skills in a way that's easier than speaking at hard interviews.

This helps people to feel independent and successful, even when people don't always see what we can do.

Project to Highlight

Juvenile Justice Services Programme

My Learnings

I was inspired by how The Arc helped a girl who was jailed because people didn't know she had a disability. They got her out when her mum advocated for her. This shows how important it is to speak up.

Their Juvenile Justice programme helps young people with learning disabilities stay out of trouble and fix problems when they happen.

I want to learn what the UK is doing to support kids and young adults better. I will share my connection with The Arc of the Capitol with my networks in the UK and get a discussion going on the things we could be doing better for young people.



SAFE Austin

From Left to Right

Shell Swartz – Disability Services Director

Leigh Anne McKingsley: Director of the Arc National Center for Criminal Justice and Disability : with Lily the King Charles Spaniel

Mark Brookes – Churchill Fellowship

Anna Belle Burleson – Associate Director

Hannah Wolff –support worker for Mark Brookes

SAFE | stop abuse for everyone

“It's all about choice. We are here. We don't coerce you to come. If you are a victim and you learn about us….you take that power back and you choose to come to us….It’s the foundation for victim service agencies."

Shell Swartz on giving survivors the agency to seek help, on their own terms.

I spoke with the team at SAFE Austin about the vital support they provide to victims of abuse.

I learnt about how SAFE helps people with disabilities who got hurt by crime.

I heard about how a big issue for the disability community is that victims often have a lack of choice. This might be due to money or lack of support to get to places or even in knowing where to go.

SAFE is all about giving power back to people.

Shell Swartz, Disability Service Director, spoke of the need for mobile support.

Counsellors and other victim support professionals need to be *"going out to victims with help, like in homes or places they stay".*

This struck a chord with me because, in a sense, I am in a similar position where I have very few friends and no personal support at home. It is difficult for me to access services so this is a very important issue for me.



SAFE Austin inspired me with their whole person view.

They said people are often treated in separate parts: mental health OR Autism OR learning disability OR trauma. But these things should be viewed as a "whole" as they link together.

Healing Circles give victims a safe place to share stories and start healing.

A trained counsellor facilitates the group to ensure everyone feels safe and heard. The goal is to help people feel stronger, less alone and start healing from bad experiences.

I liked how this empowers people to feel safe and listened to.

I want to see safer spaces like this in the UK.





The Arc of New Jersey
Criminal Justice Advocacy Programme
("CJAP")

North Brunswick, New Jersey
3rd June 2025

From Left to Right

Tim Barlow , Blue Envelope Programme, **Mark Brookes,** Churchill Fellowship, **Jennifer Catalano,** Case Manager, CJAP, **Robyn Holt,** Director CJAP, **Hannah Noel,** Case Manager, CJAP

The Arc of New Jersey Criminal Justice Advocacy Programme ("CJAP")

"We help 1,200 people with IDD across 20+ counties. We give legal aid, train police, and offer other ways instead of guardianship. We get 70% of cases sorted before court."

Robyn Holt, Director of CJAP

At the Arc of New Jersey I met Robyn Holt and her team. They showed me the amazing work they do within their Criminal Justice Advocacy Programme, or CJAP.

CJAP helps people with learning disabilities, autism or other neuro-diversity. They can be victims, people in trouble, or witnesses.

I learnt that, of the 1200 people who are engaged with the CJAP programme, 60% are victims and 40% are defendants. CJAP also helps with going to court and supporting families.

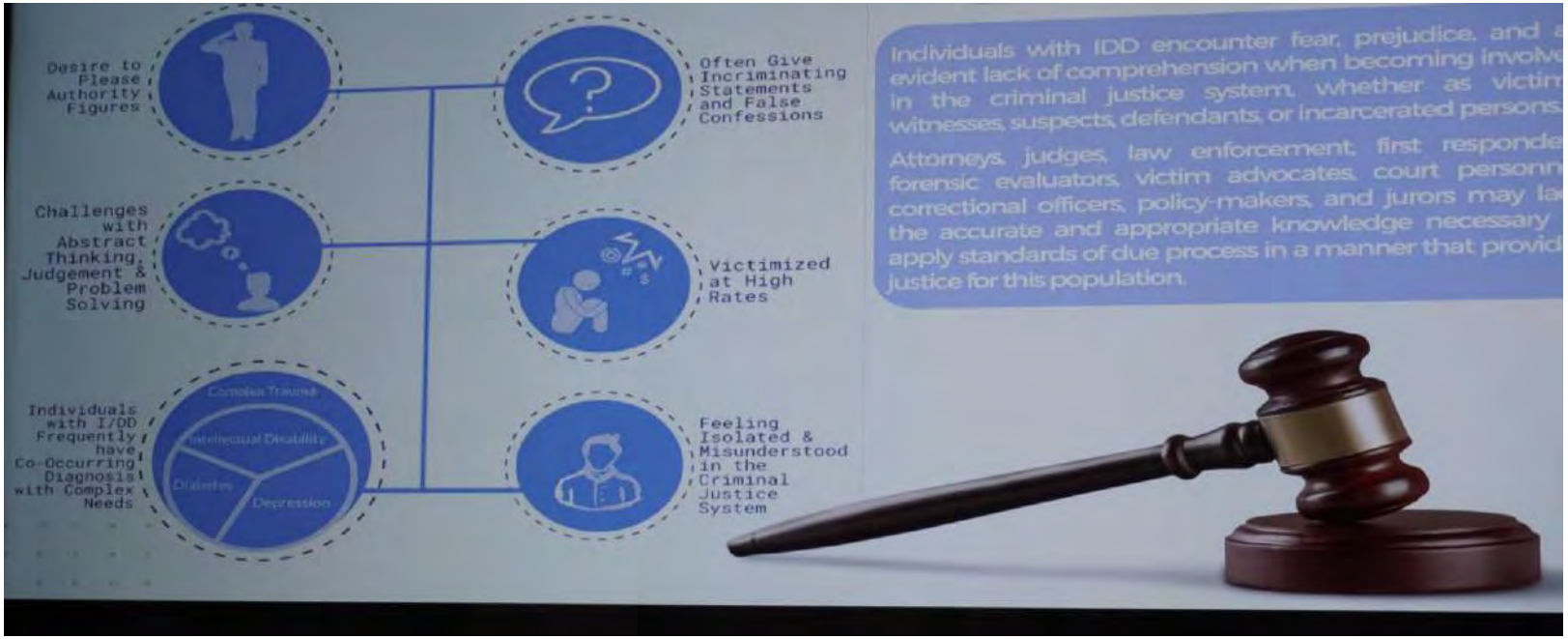
Why is the Criminal Justice Advocacy Programme so Important?

Robyn and her team told me about CJAP. It offers alternatives to prison for adults.

CJAP supports people with learning disabilities and autism through the whole justice process, and create Personalised Justice Plans which provide information on a person's disability and how it affects their behaviour and communication.

I learned that around 10% of US prisoners have a learning disability or autism, even though they make up only 2-3% of the general population. The system is not fair!

Personalised Justice Plans - What They Are and Why They Matter



CJAP makes a Personalised Justice Plan (PJP) for each person. It explains their support needs and is shared with lawyers an judges.

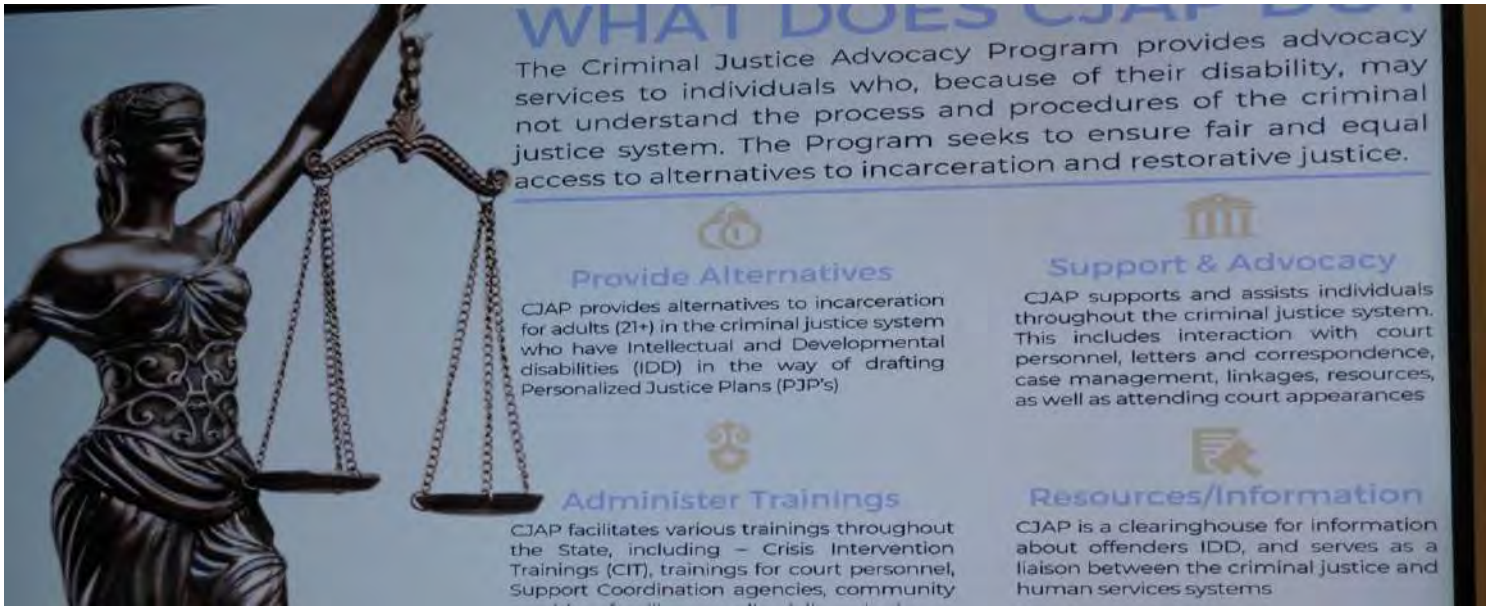
The plan can suggest better options than prison, like:

- Mental health support
- Day programmes
- Treatment centres

CJAP stays involved until the sentence ends.

This personal approach helps make justice fairer.

Why is the Criminal Justice Advocacy Programme so Important



CJAP helps by:

Supporting people in court.

Training police and judges to recognise our different ways of thinking and provide reasonable adjustments.

Creating Personalised Justice Plans to educate and inform courts about an individual's ongoing support needs.

They also monitor people in prison or on probation through to the completion of their sentence.

It showed me we can treat people with learning disabilities and autism better in the justice system.

Professional Training

"We've trained 500 officers in 2024 on recognising IDD in courts and [at police] *stops."*

Robyn Holt, Director of CJAP

CJAP Also Trains Police, Lawyers and Judges.

They show officers how to spot if someone has a learning disability or autism.

Training helps police, and others in the criminal justice system, to understand behaviours and give people more time, or other reasonable adjustments.

I do similar work in the UK, with co-produced and co-led, lived experience training.

CJAP reminded me why this type of training should be mandatory for police and other frontline professionals in the UK.

Voices of Lived Experience

I spoke with two families who are engaged with the CJAP programme. Their feedback highlighted how CJAP has positively impacted their lives and provided better experiences and outcomes within the criminal justice system.

"CJAP made me feel heard in court—they explained my disability so the judge understood."

"It gave my family hope when my son was in trouble. They helped him get fair treatment."

"They can really make a difference in the other person's life. To have hope that there's somebody out there fighting for them because no one understands them."

What can the UK learn from the CJAP Programme

People with learning disabilities need **fair treatment** in the justice system.

CJAP shows how **support and understanding** can help people stay out of prison and have equal access to justice.

Personalised Justice Plans help judges and lawyers understand what support someone needs.

Training for police and judges is very important. It helps them know how to treat people with learning disabilities.

In the UK, we need:

- Better **training for police and courts**
- More **support for people in trouble**
- Plans like the ones CJAP use to help people get **fairer outcomes**

Everyone should feel **heard, understood, and safe** in the justice system.

The Blue Envelope Programme

While at the Arc of New Jersey, I learned a lot more about the Blue Envelope programme.

I met and spoke with Tim Barlow who is instrumental in engaging police departments across the US to enrol in the programme and support people with communication difficulties within their communities .



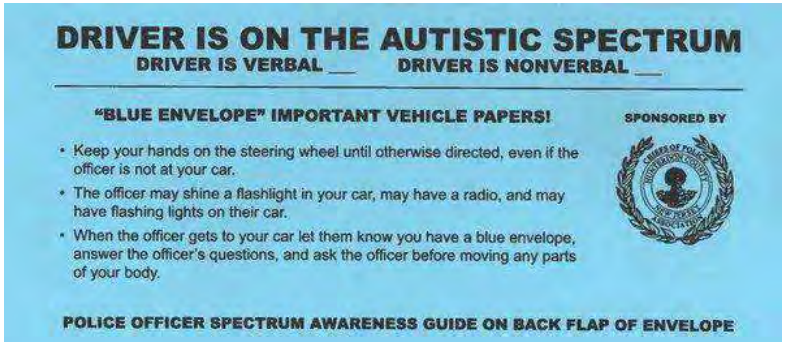
Tim shared his son's experience with police at a traffic stop and explained:

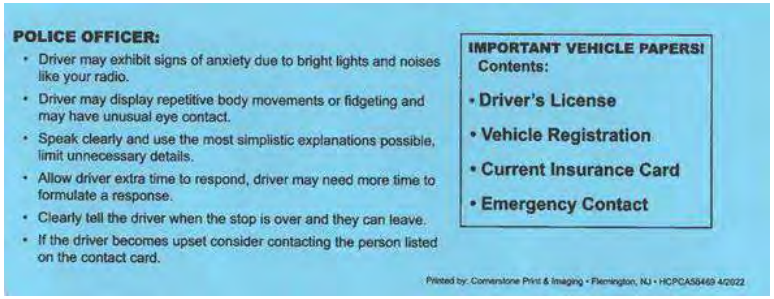
"My son froze during a stop, speaking robotically—police thought drugs. The envelope alerts officers to support needs. Surveys showed training is key, so we formed motor vehicle subcommittees." Now, 200+ police departments use it. It cuts problems by 30%".

Here is a PBS news segment featuring Tim Barlow at the launch of the Blue Envelope Programme.

The Blue Envelope programme is a simple resource available for people with learning disabilities, autism or communication difficulties.

You put it on your car dashboard. If police stop you, it tells them you have a disability. It lists what you need, like extra time to talk or no loud noises. It helps keep things calm and safe when you are interacting with the Police.





My Learnings The Blue Envelope Programme

Blue Envelope is an easy way for people with disabilities to communicate with police at traffic stops.

I was inspired by the positive outcomes Tim Barlow has got with the use of this communication tool.

I will ask disability advocates in the UK what they think of this idea and whether it would work here.

This is a very interesting area and is potentially overlooked in the UK.

We could start research on whether similar issues are reported in the UK with drivers who have a learning disability and/or autism.

The American Bar Association Commission on Disability Rights

In Washington DC I met with, Bob Dinerstien, Amy Allbright and Sarah Katz of the American Bar Association.

We discussed barriers for disabled law students and lawyers.

They told me how some people get good support to study but then lose support when they start working.

I learned how important it is to keep support going for people with learning disabilities and autism who are graduating into professional roles.

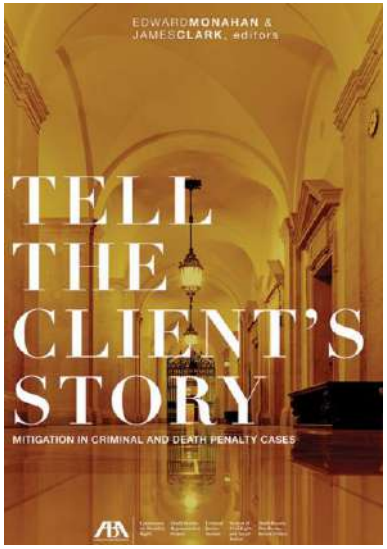
"Stigma in law is huge; competitive environments make disclosure hard, but accommodations like extra time help retention."

Amy Allbright, American Bar Association

PROJECT TO HIGHLIGHT

The ABA have published the following book which is a popular resource:

Tell the Clients Story : Mitigation in Criminal & Death Penalty Cases



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT

This book explains how to use evidence of disability to make trials fairer. It helps stop unfair punishments and argues for fairer sentences.

I believe it is important that people with learning disabilities and autism in court feel heard, supported and not unfairly judged.

THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCAITION TOLD ME:

This publication is for the criminal justice system and talks about showing evidence of mental health and disabilities when helping clients.

The book talks about building a team of experts to show evidence, like how a disability affects someone, to make trials fairer.

What can the UK learn from the American Bar Association

I was really interested around the work that the American Bar Association was doing.

I was inspired by how they supported students and lawyers with disabilities to become Lawyers and stay in their roles.

It is important that people with learning disabilities and/or autism get the reasonable adjustments that they need to make sure that they are protected in their careers and supported to stay in their jobs.

I work closely with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in the UK, particularly around learning disability hate crime.

I will bring the trial resource “Tell the Client’s Story” to their attention and share it within the CPS Hate Crime External Consultancy Group to talk about how people with learning disabilities in the Criminal Justice System can be better supported in Court.



International Association of Police Chiefs (IACP)

From Left to Right

Mark Brookes – Churchill Fellowship

Kelly Burke– Senior Program Manager

International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)

Across the Potomac from DC, I met with the Kelly Burke of the IACP in Alexandria, Virginia.

We talked about disability, police training and interrogations.

She acknowledged there was not much data about disability hate crime.

Prosecutions are rare, and people are scared to report incidents.

I was not surprised, because the UK has the same problems. It reminded me how much more work needs to be done.

"We wanted to create that training for society to have the conversation when it's not mental health. ... [learning disability] *is so invisible in our population that it was hard to get people to talk about it or understand that. We refocused* [training] *on how an officer would experience behaviour in the field rather than diagnosis"*

Kelly Burke, Senior Program Manager, IACP

Disability and the IACP

The IACP collaborates with the Arc through Leigh Anne McKingsley at the National Center for Criminal Justice and Disability.

Two programs I want to highlight are:

CRIT Training (Crisis Repsonse and Intervention Training)

Interrogation Project (due 2026)

CRISIS RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION TRAINING (CRIT)

CRIT Training

Helping Police Understand People Like Me

CRIT is a 40-hour training for police to help support people with learning disabilities, autism or people with mental health conditions.

It teaches police to stay calm and not get upset when we act differently.

They do pretend situations (role-plays) to practice helping people feel safe.

It's not just one lesson—it's all about understanding our behaviours – and not about our diagnosis.

My Learnings from the IACP CRIT Training

I felt hopeful and encouraged learning that this training was taking place because it helps the police understand how we are. People with learning disabilities need time and space to tell our story.

Police and people with learning disabilities and/or other neurodiversity need to work together more to reduce communication issues during police interactions.

I was really inspired by the active participation by the police, for example, using practical workshops and role plays for real-life scenarios in the community. I thought this was great!

This helps people with learning disabilities and autism feel comfortable and confident when talking to the police.

I got to experience a role play during my visit to Oregon (you can view this here). I found this experience really empowering because it gave me a lot more confidence—especially as I am not used to talking to police with guns!

The Interrogation Project

This is a new project on Interviews and Questions which focuses on building trust in police questioning for people like me!

This project is in created in partnership with The Arc NCCJD. It is about making police interviews fair for people with learning disabilities.

They have a National group of experts, police, and people like me to share ideas on understanding our rights and avoiding mistakes like false confessions.

In 2026, they'll make a big report with tips and a short list of key things for police to do.

They'll share it everywhere, like websites, social media, and webinars to help police build trust and keep people safe.

My Learnings from the IACP Interrogation Project

This is a good way of moving forward to help police support people with learning disabilities being interviewed to understand what they are asking.

It is important that people with learning disabilities know:

- who the police are;
- why they are asking questions;
- that they have a right to accommodations/reasonable adjustments such as time and support to give answers to questions.

Projects like this are welcomed and will provide better outcomes for those in the criminal justice system.

I am excited to learn more about this project once it has been finalised in 2026.

I will share this information with my criminal justice contacts within the UK so that progress can be made to ensure better outcomes for people like me.

The Arc Of Benton County, Corvallis, Oregon











I met Diane Scotterline and Misha Marie at the Arc National Convention in 2024. I was so impressed by the CommCard Programme they run at the Arc of Benton County that I decided to travel to Oregon to learn more about it!

From Left to Right

Misha Marie – Director of Access & Empowerment.

Mark Brookes – Churchill Fellowship

Diane Scotterline – Executive Director

The Arc Of Benton County, Corvallis, Oregon

I was warmly welcomed to Corvallis and shown their local projects.

I joined a tai chi class with people with learning disabilities.

It was good to be part of their group and see how health and community can come together.



The Arc of Benton County Charity Shop

What I found inspiring here was that inside the shop, they run an art class. People with learning disabilities create beautiful paintings and drawings. They can also sell their work in the shop! This shows me how community projects can give people confidence and happiness.





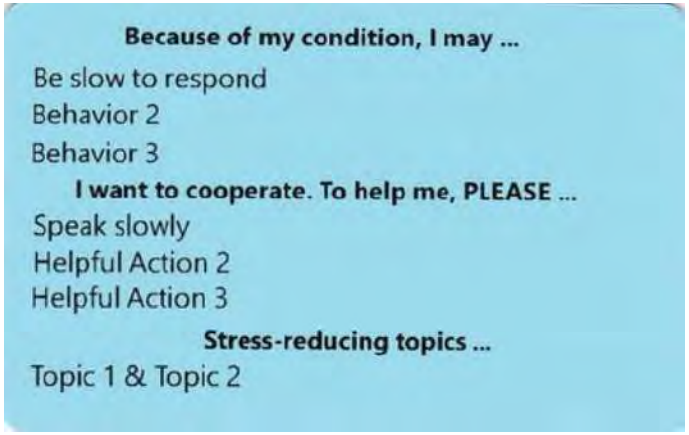
The Arc Of Benton County CommCard Programme

While in Corvallis, Misha Marie ran a training session for new users of the CommCard, which I attended.



What is the CommCard Programme?





The CommCard is a communication tool.

It is a wallet-sized card that tells police or professionals about a person's disability and communication needs.

It helps people feel safe.

I thought it was a simple but very powerful idea. I wanted to learn everything about how it works.

My Learnings from the CommCard Programme Training Day

I took part in the CommCard training session.

About 20 people attended, including people with learning disabilities, autistic people, and some with brain injuries.

Local police came along to role play real-life situations with us.

I joined in and showed my CommCard to the police. I felt what it was like to use the card. It made me feel understood and safe.



The CommCard Programme

I also met Cody Gotchall and his father John.

They helped the Arc of Benton County create CommCard after Cody had a very bad experience with the police.

They told me their story.

It was upsetting to hear what Cody went through. But it was inspiring to see how they turned something painful into something that could help thousands of people.

My Learnings from the CommCard Programme

CommCard is a really great idea. I spoke with current users of the CommCard and several of them commented how it had even changed their lives.

Watching the role plays showed great communication between the police and the person with lived experience. You could tell that the role plays worked by the way police spoke calmly and the user was able to remain calm and felt understood.

I asked the police officers a question around how they got involved with the Community. They responded: *"by getting out there and getting in contact with the Arc and seeing if they could come and do a talk around what the police do"*.

This felt important to me because, police reaching out and engaging with the people with learning disabilities is key for improving communication between police and our community. This is one of the major things I have been trying to change throughout my career in disability hate crime.

What Can I do to Bring the CommCard Programme to the UK?

Cody and John told me CommCard is copyrighted.

If I want to bring it to the UK, I would need a licence.

The cost is small.

This made me think seriously about a UK pilot of CommCard.

With some funding, we could make this work and help people feel safer with police.

I will set up focus groups, inviting people with lived experience supported across different UK social care organisations to talk about Communication Cards and how they might work in the UK.

I will reach out to my Police contacts in the UK to talk about interactive training with people with learning disabilities and autism to help establish trust within the community.

I will look into different funding/grants that are available that would allow me to pilot this programme and take it to social care organisations.

I will set up communications with John & Cody Gotachall, and the Arc of Benton County to see how this pilot might work with their help (and within the copyright).

Part 4

Summary of Key Learnings



Summary of Key Learnings – Poland & USA

Police Training

- In the USA, training like Just Policing and Pathways to Justice draw on lived experience and are built from within our local communities.
- I learned about CRIT, a training course for police which focus on de-escalating crisis and use of role plays with people with lived experience.
- In Texas, the Juvenile Justice programme works with police to keep young people out of jail.
- In Poland, PSONI and ODIHR support police and the criminal justice system to know more about disability rights and hate crime.

Communication Tools

- In Oregon I saw CommCard, a wallet card that tells police your support needs.
- In New Jersey I learnt about the Blue Envelope programme for use at traffic stops.
- In Warsaw, PSONI's the Radio SoVo project lets people with disabilities speak up in the media and fight stigma.

Summary of Key Learnings – Poland & USA

Advocacy & Breaking Down Barriers

- At the Arc National Convention, self-advocates, families, and professionals worked together.
- In Texas, jobs programmes help people with disabilities get work and stay away from the justice system.
- The American Bar Association use disability evidence and adjustments to make trials fairer.
- In Poland, PSONI moved from families leading to self-advocates leading, and they fight against hospitalisations and focus on inclusion in the community.

Victim & Defendant Support

- In New Jersey, CJAP make Personalised Justice Plans. Most cases end before court.
- In Texas, SAFE Austin give survivor-led support and mobile support to victims. They also run Healing Circles.
- ODIHR in Poland have the ability to produce better hate crime reporting across 57 member states and to share data.

How Can I Use These Learnings to Make Lasting Change in the UK

Police Training

- Continue to advocate for mandatory lived experience training for police, lawyers, judges and other frontline professionals.
- Set up focus groups and/or share resources across my networks to discuss programs like Pathways to Justice, Criminal Justice Advocacy, *Just Policing* and *CRIT Training* in a UK context.
- Role plays and scenarios help police understand and calm things down. I will advocate for more active participation and engagement by police in our local communities.

Communication Tools

- Set up Focus groups to discuss piloting the CommCard in the UK to support safe police interactions.
- Explore a UK version of the Blue Envelope programme for traffic stops.
- I can push for creation of more digital and physical resources to help people communicate.

How Can I Use These Learnings to Make Lasting Change in the UK

Advocacy & Breaking Down Barriers

- Speak across the social care sector to raise awareness of disability rights and hate crime.
- Search for funding opportunities so I can help create and host a national event, like the Arc USA National Convention, where social care providers can run workshops, talks and hear from people with lived experience.
- Self-advocates must be involved in in policy-making decisions that affect them. I will continue to push for inclusion.

Victim & Defendant Support

- Talk to the Hate Crime External Consultancy Group, run by the UK Crown Prosecution Service, about my learnings and how we can produce fairer court outcomes for people with learning disabilities.
- Advocate for healing circles and mobile victim support for people with learning disabilities in the UK.
- I will work with UK Government agencies and social care organisations so that disability hate crime is properly reported and recorded locally.

This has been a great experience for me. To learn from people from the United States and Poland around different aspects of disability within the criminal justice system has been fantastic.

Connecting with the Arc USA, has been a great learning experience. They do lots of work with people with learning disabilities and professionals to support people with lived experience to have better lives. I was really inspired by all the people I met.

Thank you to the Churchill Fellowship for all your support and for making this opportunity happen.
Thank you also to Dimensions UK, my employer, for giving me the time to fulfil the dream.

Finally, thank you to everyone in the USA and Poland who I met and who helped me with my journey.

