

# LEARNING DISABILITY WEEK 2024



## Learning Disability Week 2024

Do you  
**see**  
me?

Learning Disability Awareness Week is taking place on 17 - 23 June 2024. This year the theme is 'Do you see me?' which is all about being seen, heard and valued.

### MEET SHORT BREAKS CARER, ANGELA, WHO DISCUSSES WHAT THIS YEAR'S THEME MEANS TO HER

Angela, along with her husband, Vince, have been short break carers since 2021. Angela and Vince currently provide short breaks for 3 young people. One of these young people is Jack\* (17), who visits Angela and Vince one weekend per month.

Alongside her short breaks fostering role, Angela has been a coach for Special Olympics since 2006 when the Ireland games were held in Ulster. Angela states, "I was approached by a parent who asked if I would be interested in joining Ballymena Bocce club. I stayed here until 2009 when I moved house to Portadown and then I found Ripples Special Olympics club. Here I am a coach in swimming, 10 pin bowling and football. I was appointed chairperson of the club and enjoyed 10 years in the role before I was appointed chairperson of the Ulster region and a place on the Ireland board in 2023."

For Angela, "Special Olympics offers young people the opportunity to compete in sport with peers of similar ability. Divisioning ensures that athletes will only be competing against those of similar ability. This means that the athlete's self-esteem is not damaged by competing with those who are at a higher level. Athletes also get the chance to meet new people and form social relationships. We all travel together to competitions and this is always a great way for athletes to get together and have fun. If an athlete progresses in competition there is a chance that they will be involved in residential competition. **This is a huge milestone in their development.**"

For young people with a learning disability, having access to Special Olympics removes a barrier to social inclusion that they may have otherwise encountered. Angela says, "**Special Olympics is designed to look at the ability of the athlete, not the disability.**" During a short break, Angela has brought Jack along to Special Olympics events, as it offers pivotal social opportunities that he may have otherwise not had access to. "The young person enjoys the social side of getting to know the other athletes and the coaches."

Angela states, for this year's theme, "Do you see me?", it is about "how we as short break foster carers and coaches should look at the child in our care. **We need to see the potential in the child and help them to recognise and reach their potential.**"

If, like Angela, you have an interest in providing short break care, all you need is a spare bedroom and a minimum commitment of one overnight per month. We provide allowances, training and dedicated support. \*Name anonymised



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