

'I do have rights to stand up'

by Leticia Hodson

The information age opens the world up for people with Down syndrome through increased access to information, social networks and technology that aids communication and accessibility, but it also increases the risks of exploitation, abuse and crime. Last year a young man with Down syndrome in his 20s spoke candidly to me about an incident of sexual harassment that he had experienced. His message was so powerful and clear that I asked him and his family if we could share his experience and words about how this exploitation made him feel, as this perspective is rarely heard so articulately and passionately.

The following content is an edited transcript of the video interview.

The man's identity has been withheld at his and his family's request.

(ellipses denote repeated phrasing which have been deleted for ease of reading)

Life can be a quite... Life can be a bit ... embarrassing at times... Sometimes I get upset about what happened to me in the past.

Because... This going to take some courage and bravery. Because I was working in a café. A customer ... was sexually harassing me for no reason.

First, I told my parents, my sisters, my friends then the next step was to talk to the police. I remember that weekend I was so upset because there are some people out there that if they come across a person ... who does have some sort of special need, they can look at it as sometimes a different way. Because they think I'm weak for a reason because people say that I'm weak because I do have a disability.

And they do take advantage ...and they want to trick me by giving me mixed messages about very inappropriate stuff like he wants to do. Like he was sending me very inappropriate messages in my phone.

It was all about sex stuff but...this what I think. I do have rights to stand up. When at the café, I was scared to stand up because ... he ... this is what he doesn't know about ... people like me, they have a need and they want to put them down to make them feel down because ... if happens to come across me, if I do have a disability, they want to treat me different because what I have.

... It was against the Human Nation of Down syndrome. It still ... gets me upset what happened because I do have rights to stand up and I do have Down syndrome and that makes me proud. I'm not going let people in about discrimination. They want to something ... right under government law to be sexually harassed to people like me... vulnerable.

I just don't get it. It still gets me upset, right. It really does.

Well, with I'm still moving on from it. Because I would like to make awareness for people like me ... and say to stand up. Don't let people ... take advantage of your need. Respect our need, what we have. Don't go against it. It's not right.

That weekend... I was upset ... I didn't want to be downstairs. I wanted to be in my room crying about it.

Down Syndrome Australia has recently released a Social Media Guide for people with Down syndrome to help people use the internet and social media safely. See page 27 for more information about this important resource.

Leticia Hodson is the Managing Editor of Voice.

