



Recovering the hidden histories
of people with learning
disabilities from Black and
minoritized ethnic
communities.

Faculty of Wellbeing Education
and Language Studies (WELS)

Contents

Project description	3
School	3
Unit	3
Members	3
Aim	3
Methodology	4
Contribution	4
Website	4
PhD/EdD/DHSC project	5

Project description

School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Unit

Centre for Society, History and Learning Disabilities (SHLD)

Members

Name	Website	Email address
Prof Liz Tilley	OUPPS (Open University People Profile System)	Elizabeth.tilley@open.ac.uk
Prof Lindsay O'Dell		Lindsay.ODell@open.ac.uk
Dr Ned Redmore		Ned.redmore@open.ac.uk

Aim

Since 2021 The Open University has undertaken a scoping review and pilot research to address issues of diversity, equality and inclusion in the history of

learning disability, specifically to recover the missing histories of people with learning disabilities and their families from Black and minoritized ethnic communities.

Methodology

In the scoping review and pilot study conducted at The Open University between 2021–2024 we deployed a range of methods including archival research and oral history interviews. The study was conducted alongside historian activist Paul Christian, a Black researcher with learning disabilities who co-developed the research questions, conducted interviews, and collaborated on data analysis, output development and public engagement activities.

Contribution

The research we have conducted to date addresses calls to diversify the history of learning disability and ensure that the stories and experiences of people with learning disabilities from Black and minoritized ethnic communities are captured in the historical record. One of the recommendations that emerged from our pilot study was to further develop this research through a doctoral project.

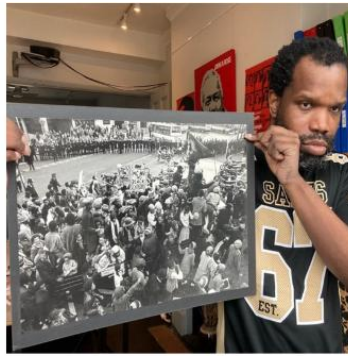
Website

Please visit [The Social History of Learning Disability](#) website for further information about the group's work. A website for the new Centre for Society, History and Learning Disabilities will be launched in 2026.

PhD/EdD/DHSC project

The PhD project would build on previous research conducted by The Open University in collaboration with Paul Christian to develop new knowledges at the intersection of learning disability and Black British history. More specifically the PhD project would research the lives and experiences of people with learning disabilities who were admitted to the UK's learning disability long-stay hospitals between 1960–2000, a significantly under-researched aspect of British social history. The PhD project would utilise a mixed methods approach, combining archival analysis (e.g. documents pertaining to the institutions) with oral history techniques (specifically interviews with former residents of the institutions, their families and staff). Through our scoping and pilot work, The Open University has ascertained that learning disabled people of colour were sent to at least 15 of these institutions across the UK during the mid-late 20th century and we have identified a number of leads both in terms of participants and archival records. There is an expectation that this project will have an inclusive/participatory design, with the PhD researcher working alongside co-researchers with learning disabilities in some capacity.

The PhD would contribute to a wider programme of research at the **Centre for Society, History and Learning Disabilities** in WELS, which is focused on using history to help us better understand the present. This involves work that seeks to identify the historical roots of the ongoing and systemic health and social inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities and their families.



[photos of Paul Christian, with permission of Paul Christian and Dr Sue Ledger, visiting researcher at the OU]

