Handout 4: Stereotypes About Disability

People often make sense of the world by grouping people into categories in ways that they think helps them to understand them better. This categorising is called stereotyping and it is often negative and usually completely unjustified. Stereotyping ignores that we are each individuals with our own ways of behaving, feeling and thinking.

People with a disability have been the subject of many stereotypes that are still common today in Western culture. Common stereotypes include that they:

- need looking after and protecting;
- can't make informed decisions;
- are eternally children;
- cannot be parents;
- don't have the same feelings as other people;
- have unusual and challenging behaviour;
- have no sexual feelings or needs;
- are sexually deviant.

Many stereotypes are contradictory e.g. people with a disability have no sexual feelings but they are also sexually aggressive.

The consequences of these stereotypes are often negative. For example:

- They have been overprotected and not given opportunities to learn through risk taking
- They have been segregated from the community
- They have not been supported or have been denied meaningful relationships
- They have had decisions made for them and so not had control over their own lives.