



Short Interview with Liisa Kauppinen

(Winner Her Abilities Award 2019 /category of Rights)

What is your response to winning Her Abilities?

I was extremely surprised when I received information of my nomination for Her Abilities Award. I have to say that I am greatly honoured to be receiving such an important award - I am glad and proud for this recognition. I also hope that this will inspire and encourage women with disabilities around the world to act for their rights, for better living conditions in the grassroot, national and international levels.

What is your vision for an inclusive society?

For me, the idea of inclusive society is one of the most beautiful thoughts I can think of and I believe we all should be working towards this goal together. It is beautiful because it entails the idea of equal opportunities for everyone: to live, to participate, to receive services and to be in interaction with others. To be a child – not a disappointment – but a child who is loved and accepted as s/he is has to be in the heart of an inclusive society. Why? Because it is the only way to guarantee equality. We need to support children to receive good self-esteem, development and growth to become equal persons. This leads us to education and to right for education, which will only realise and come true when children have environment without barriers this including also social interaction and communication in education and right to receive information and understanding. I also want to point out that people with disabilities are required in all areas of life – in political decision-making, finding economic solutions and all other spheres of life as leaders, experts and citizens. Only through broad participation of people with disabilities we can balance this unequal situation we still have in societies and to improve acceptance of people of disabilities and living conditions as compared to others. This would also benefit everyone and all societies, because I believe that people with disabilities have a lot to give, so much talent and capacities that is not fully used or even given opportunity not locally or worldwide.

What barriers have you faced in life and how did you overcome them?

The most difficult barriers I have faced with are the ones with attitudes. It has been so difficult for me to understand why people continuously want to deny the use of sign language. Sign language and also sign language interpretation have enabled me to work as an executive director in the Finnish Association of the Deaf as well as president in the World Federation of the Deaf – in my career I have worked all the time in cooperation with officials, civil servants, political decision-makers or people with disabilities to mention some. Why this is not allowed? By this I especially refer to the situation of deaf children. It took years to get sign languages accepted and recognised in the international level in the CRPD. This included numerous negotiations and consultations with state representatives and cooperation among the disability movement, but at the end this concluded to a great result. The best way to change attitudes is to take the perspective of the other person and to think how this person feels or experiences. Only through this and through discussions we can truly understand each other and find mutual understanding. I have to say that negotiations in the CRPD process were wise and I am



greatly thankful for them that they accepted sign languages and the use of sign languages in this treaty. I hope this enables to reduce and eventually abolish discrimination deaf people still face with. This is just an example about deaf people and I know other people with disabilities have different barriers and experiences in discrimination, but our mutual goal is to erase these barriers and to change attitudes.

Let me thank you for giving me this award although I don't feel I am receiving this alone. This award belongs to many, to women but also to men, not only to adults but also to children. This award means a world to me.