

Let's Chat... *about* *Inclusive Education*

Hosts Gordon L. Porter, Jacqueline Specht and Diane Richler



Guest: Genia Stephen

*Parent, Presenter & Podcast Host:
Good Things in Life
Brockville, ON*

Genia Stephen, RM, MSc., is a mother and sister to individuals with intellectual disabilities and medical complexities. Having a younger sister and son with disabilities has involved her in a lifetime of experience and training in the disability field under premier thought leaders and mentors. Genia notes that the early experiences of parents as they discover that their child has a disability is a difficult one. When her own mother found out more than 40 years ago that her sister had a disability, she had never met anyone with a disability. Her mother was worried and afraid. Fortunately, she was introduced to another parent further along the journey and that made a real difference. When Genia's own son has a disability, she started her parenting journey at a much different place than her mother.

Genia is a practicing midwife and medical advocate currently completing her MSc. in Evidence-Based Health Care at the University of Oxford. Based on her experience in this role she observes that things haven't changed much in the more than 40 years since her mother began that journey. This led Genia to create her highly regarded podcast.

Founder and host of the *Good Things In Life For Kids With Disabilities* Podcast, Genia provides an alternative to the typical social media and web resources that focus on diagnosis and treatment. Genia challenges parents to come together around a shared vision of a positive and inclusive life for their sons and daughters with disabilities.

"Genia Stephen helps kids with intellectual disabilities build inclusive lives at home, at school and in the community. With more than 37,000 downloads, her podcast now gives other parents access to her world-class disability parenting education, complete with courses and membership.

Featured in *Travel Without Limits* Magazine, *Citizen Network*, *Toronto Summer Institute*, *Inclusive Education Canada*, *Community Living Ontario*, *Don't IEP Alone* Podcast, and *Inclusive Education Podcast*, Genia speaks about creating a positive vision for kids with disabilities. Her goal is to help them get "the good things in life" through lives with valued social roles and social capital, and medical safeguarding."

Key Issues in this Chat Session:

- 1. Closing the Gap:** Genia has found that most people have limited experience or interaction with people with barriers to learning. Thus, when parents find out they have a child with a disability, they immediately google it and don't always get appropriate information. Genia grew up with a sister with disabilities and has a son with disabilities. She created her podcast – *Good Things in Life* - to close the gap between what she has learned from experience and what parents just discovering they have a child with a disability know.
- 2. Remaining in the Heart of the Community:** Since he was very young, Genia has made sure her son has remained in the heart of the community. Genia recommends that parents prevent segregation and isolation from happening. Back-peddling and trying to reintegrate him with his peers in the community after it happens is difficult.
- 3. Integration from a Young Age:** Genia explained that her son's experience transitioning into school was relatively smooth because he had been enrolled in the daycare program adjacent to the school prior to kindergarten. Genia notes that integrating her son within the school and community as early as possible was key to his teachers being aware of his needs. Because her son met his peers when he was very young, he has maintained strong social connections with them.
- 4. Setting Higher Expectations:** We live in an ableist society. With many people having limited interaction with and awareness of people with disabilities, expectations of achievement for people with disabilities are often set very low. Genia found herself doing this with her son before he entered school. She challenges us to question the expectations our society has for people with disabilities.
- 5. Growing Your Community:** Genia recommends that parents ensure that their child with a disability is involved in the community, especially so if things are not going well in school. She also reminds us that community is not necessarily geographically limited – online spaces may provide valuable opportunities for belonging and building relationships as well.

Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. Share a meaningful interaction you have had with an individual with disabilities or someone who is experiencing a barrier to learning?
2. How does our ableist society limit the opportunities for interaction between people with and without disabilities?


Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. In what ways have you developed your expectations for people with disabilities? How would you describe them?
2. How might you change your expectations of people with disabilities after listening to this chat with Genia?

GOOD THINGS IN LIFE

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Help your child with significant disabilities to build positive inclusive lives at home, at school and in the community.

Good Things In Life provides ideas, concepts & conversations that support kids with intellectual disabilities.

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