

Design for resourcefulness and self-reliance

It's well-recognised that spinal-cord-injured (and other disabled) people have an acute need for design; for the ergonomic adaptation of products you use and environments you inhabit. But the principle underlying my project is more that design as a discipline, or thought-process, can help alleviate the dramatic loss of confidence and diminished motivation that can result from a sudden physical impairment. As a structured way of approaching problems, design can help to re-build confidence.

I'm developing a new model of design-training for spinal-cord-injured people focused on the goals of self-reliance and creative resourcefulness. The project includes inspirational introductory design presentations/workshops at the specialist spinal units in the UK and Republic of Ireland and a residential design workshop for spinal-cord-injured people and carers.

I've developed the proposal in consultation with lots of specialists – it's been welcomed by Aspire, The Back Up Trust, the Spinal Injuries Association, RNOH Stanmore, Stoke Mandeville Spinal Injuries Centre, Queen Elizabeth National Spinal Injuries Centre (Glasgow), two independent occupational therapists and 12 designers, five of whom are spinal-cord-injured or otherwise disabled.

One of these designers pointed out that many who have survived a devastating injury will have come to realise, of necessity, the greatest design lesson of all: that you can change yourself. The objective of this project is to extend that hope to many more by showing how design can increase your confidence and will to adapt.

I'm doing this project as Director of Design at the RSA. The RSA is the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, a 250-year old society devoted to social progress and the realisation of human potential.
(www.theRSA.org)

You can email me your thoughts on this proposal at emily.campbell@rsa.org.uk.