

# The Disability Diamond Theory



How to achieve your  
personal life goals

Martyn Sibley

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# Foreword



I am Martyn Sibley, the author of the Disability Diamond Theory. I am 28 years old and have experienced a lot in life so far, in terms of both challenges and opportunities. I have been disabled since birth and to some this would have meant a life of reliance, dependency and basic existence. Thankfully, this has never been the case for me. I grew up very included in my local community with great friends, I was a gregarious but good school student and had a very 'normal' upbringing. I then went to university and gained a degree in Economics, and a Masters in Marketing, I had many amazing new experiences (such as learning to drive) and a taste of independent living, partying and travel. Subsequently, I moved to London, learnt how to employ and run a care team, found my own flat and travelled the world around my busy schedule of work and play.

I now run my own social enterprise. My vision is to change the world for disabled people using new media. Kind of flowery sounding, but I cannot define it in a clearer way than that. This is because the change has to come from disabled individuals, as well as society as a whole. I plan to help this on the way with my blog [www.martynsibley.com](http://www.martynsibley.com), online magazine [www.disabilityhorizons.com](http://www.disabilityhorizons.com), webinars, e-courses and by using new media to enable people to share their knowledge and experiences too. As the Philosophy page on my site explains; I believe strongly in educating people less aware of disability, but The Disability Diamond Theory defines and discusses how disabled people can be more self reliant and empowered. The theory therefore ties together all of my work with and for disabled people.



The biggest lesson I have learnt in life is the importance of balance. The theory I have conceived balances my personal experiences, with the experience of others. It balances my professional and academic knowledge of disability as a social problem, with different views held by people in this field. It balances my values, beliefs and instincts, but with thought for the values of others' too.

For those who have read some of my blogs and 'Disability Now' articles, you will know I have a political and activist side <http://martynsibley.com/video-blog-of-hardest-hit-march>. The 'campaigning' section within this book allowed me to express this. I want to say a big thank you to the disabled 'war-horses' who fought for and won the right to live independently before my generation - This theory and my quality of life would not exist without you!

My hope is for this theory to work alongside collective disability rights campaigning. I believe that if individual disabled people aspire to and achieve greatness, societal change and improved provision for disabled people will follow. The Diamond theory is a sign of our progress and is written for disabled people, their friends and families who require simple information to use in every day life. The theory takes the best bits of everything and condenses them into a clear and applicable structure. If this theory appears too complex or impractical, then I've not achieved what I have set out to do.

Of course, no theory is ever complete or perfect. I hope by thinking up, writing and sharing this theory that you, the readers, will then feedback the good, the bad and the ugly. I think by providing a template for disabled people to set higher goals, achieve more and reach life fulfilment is a good start.

I have tried to intertwine my story throughout the explanation of the Disability Diamond Theory. This is to give real-life relevance and explain how I have created this approach. All of my projects (the online magazine, webinars and e-courses) have input from a variety of other disabled people.

I hope you find this book interesting, logical, enjoyable and most importantly useful.

As always, drop me a line with any questions, thoughts or feedback: <http://martynsibley.com/give-me-a-shout>

# Introduction & background



Up until the age of 22 I had no concept of disability being a social problem. I was aware that life had been difficult and sometimes seemed unfair. The fact I couldn't play competitive football as a 10 year old being a big gripe (however this barrier was overcome in the end too). I just saw my life as anyone else would, except some things were impossible and the rest was achieved differently or over longer timescales.



Hanging out in Manchester with school friend Matt Sutton and uni friend Rich (god on wheels) Currie

After university I received my first education in disability politics and academic models. This was mainly during the time I worked for the UK disability charity Scope. I attended training courses, became a trainer myself, carried out research, fundraised, participated in campaigns, and many other projects on disability issues. I do not want to get in too deep as regards disability politics because with any model (as we will learn with the Diamond Theory) there are always exceptions. The crux of the Diamond Theory is to simplify the political and academic discussions and use them for practical and useful means. The model I was taught, the model that liberated me from feeling disempowered by my impairment, and the model I use in my work is: the social model of disability.

The story is that originally disability was viewed through the 'medical model'. This meant that the problem was with the individual, they needed to be medically cured and/or improved, and until then they should be excluded from mainstream society. As disabled people understood this model to be incorrect they fought back. Over time a new model was born and this explained disability through 3 types of barriers constructed by society. The individual has a medical condition (or impairment) but they are only disabled by three types of barriers:

- **Physical barriers** – when a flight of stairs are between myself and my destination, I am disabled. When a ramp or elevator is present I am able.
- **Attitudinal barriers** – when a bus driver sees my wheelchair and decides it is a big hassle to help me, I am disabled. When they treat me on merit, assist me as necessary, and see me as a customer, I am able.
- **Organisational barriers** – these are seen by the policies and procedures in government, organisations and businesses. If I attend an interview and they see 'problems' from my being in a wheelchair, I am disabled. If they interview me on my ability to do the job, and figure they will work out any obstacles later, I am able.

This is a very quick explanation of the social model and its application. Essentially if the barriers are removed by society; disabled people will see full inclusion in society. Today, the debate continues as to how apt this model is. For people with chronic fatigue and pain, the social constructs of society are less relevant; medical advancements in say pain relief are more important. This doesn't mean the medical model prevails, but that the social model needs to

account for this. Some have named this perspective as the 'individual model'. For a deeper understanding and a plethora of articles you can visit <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/>.

I can say that regardless of your favoured model, the Diamond Theory includes both someone's impairment and the external barriers that are in the way of their goals. The key is to know one's limitations (disabled or not) but equally to never discount anything. The Diamond Theory is different from previous models because it focuses on the individual and it has a clear practical application. To allow for people's differences and outline how it should be applied in the real world is what separates the Diamond Theory from all of the models created before it.

As much as the disability models are important, the Diamond Theory is about living. Again, disabled or not, humans go through life stages. From being born, to our first day at school, our first kiss, living by our own means, having friendship and companionship, career progression, fun, travel, new experiences, always learning, and essentially having happiness. This train of thought reminded me of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We strive for each rung of the triangle – from basic needs to self-actualisation and peak experiences: It is all human nature.

## Diagram of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs



So you will see how the Diamond Theory takes generic life stages, encourages you to set aspirational goals, understand the barriers, remove them one by one and have the confidence, the philosophy and the resources to achieve this.

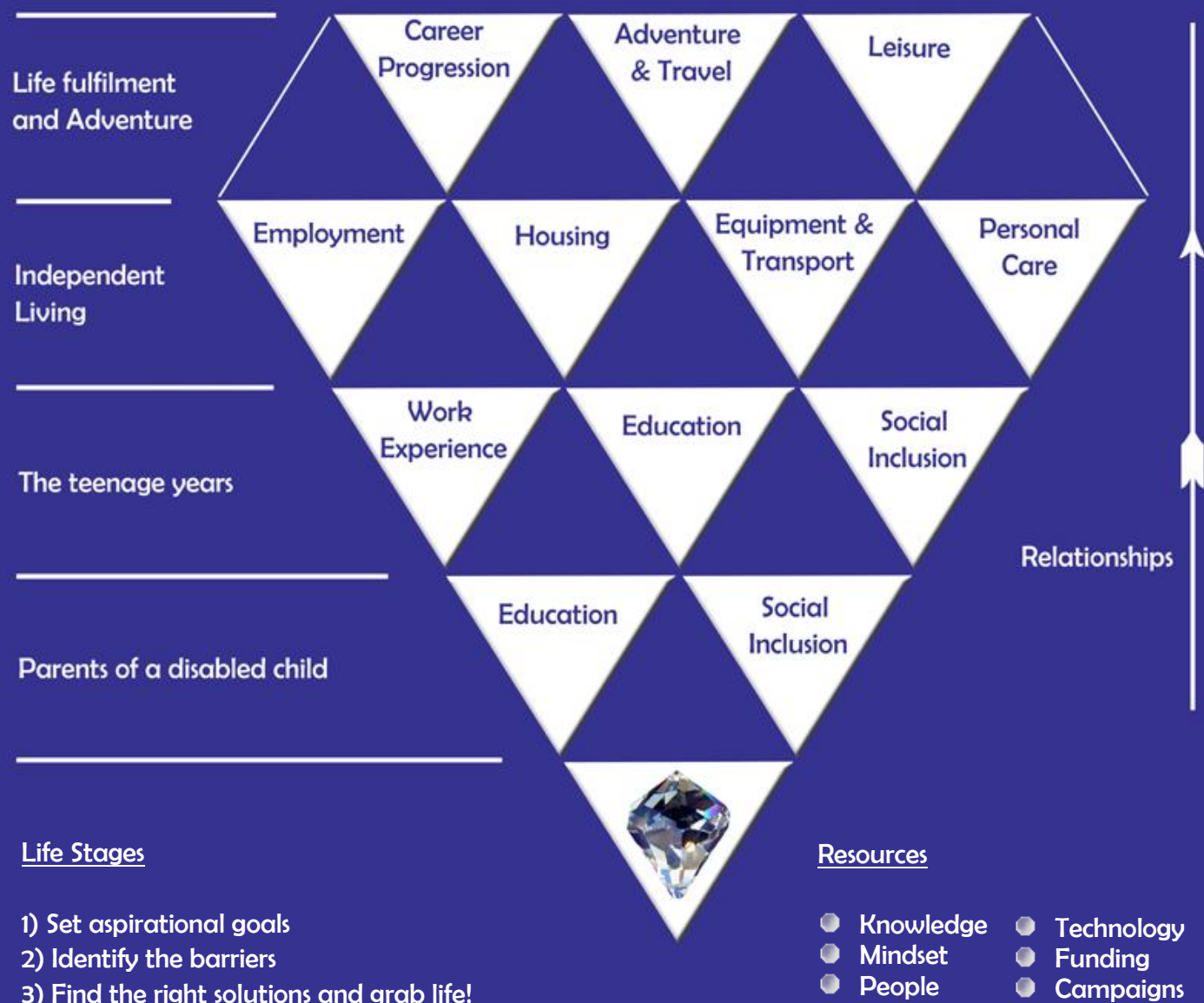
This theory will involve asking yourself tough questions and reflecting on whether you are living your life the way you truly want to. My personal experiences will act as an illustration and case study to the theory. However, my goals and my solutions will differ. Ensure you use your own situation; set goals you really want to achieve and go on your own journey. This is just a way to help you gain clarity and offer some support and advice along the way.

Grab a pen and paper, read on, discover the values and challenges of this model, jot some of your goals, barriers, and potential solutions down and start taking the first steps towards living the life you truly dream of.

# Diamond Theory



The below diagram outlines the Diamond Theory. The writing below will guide you through how the theory works, but for now just familiarise yourself with the different attributes of the diagram.



## How to use the Diamond Theory

The diagram is self-explanatory. You can see the 4 main stages of life (to the left of the diagram) and how they are broken down further into sections (in the diamond itself). This makes up our Diamond of life goals; I know, a little cheesy, but a must in this type of book! It also gives you the 'Resources' to overcome the barriers in your way. Finally there is the 'Philosophy', this is for you to use with the diagram and with life in general..

I devised this philosophy from my own experience of progressing through life with a disability. By having big dreams, but setting lots of smaller and achievable goals, life is less scary and moving forward is less daunting. This approach enables you to see the progress you are making, taking small steps towards the bigger picture you dream of.

I have already mentioned this, but to reiterate: your impairment, your dreams, your barriers and your solutions will differ from my own. By all means read how I have overcome my barriers, but this is only intended as an illustration or guide, every reader will have their own goals and paths. Start taking the first steps towards living the life you truly dream of.

# Life Stages



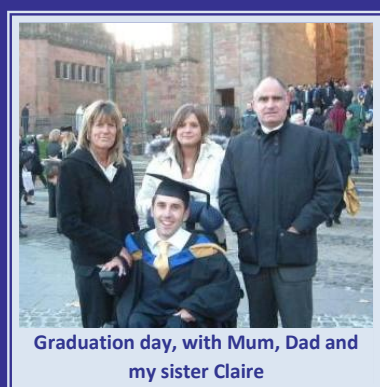
In The Diamond Theory there are 4 life stages. These stages are fully explained in every blog, webinar and e-course I run, but a broad explanation of why these particular stages are included are outlined here. Read on for the why, and look up my other projects for the how.

## Parents of a Disabled Child

Starting at the bottom tip of the diamond and the beginning of the Diamond Theory, we see 'Parents of a disabled child'. This is where our journey through life begins. If it was later in life that you acquired your disability (or "impairment" as correct within social model speak) then it is a matter of finding your own place on the diamond.

The importance and relevance of this section is twofold:

Firstly a young child cannot make their own decisions; decisions that will affect them for the rest of their life.



Therefore, their parents or guardians are responsible for writing those first chapters. As the philosophy will show us, aspiration is key and feeling defeated is dangerous. The biggest goal for a disabled person is inclusion; therefore a parent should value this most, alongside understanding their child's limitations and the barriers in the way. Gaining social and educational inclusion (the two sections on this part of the diagram) will give the child a good base.

For me, to attend the local primary school, learn the curriculum suitable for my intellect and have my physical needs supported was vital. This also meant that I attended friends' birthday parties and was fully integrated in the village where I lived. All of my blogs, webinars and e-courses unashamedly state inclusion was right for me, but it was a long struggle and sometimes very, very difficult. If you disagree and feel your child could not manage without the support of a special school, then your gut instinct may be right. However before reaching that decision aim to explore all other possibilities and the potential benefits they may provide.

Secondly the value, beliefs and attitudes a parent holds will transfer to their child. I am known for my positive, happy and optimistic personality. I always say this is down to my parents. They protected me from negative situations, they fought for me when required and they allowed me to have sad moments. However, they never allowed me to dwell on my disability; taught me the value of manners and instilled a belief in me that I could do anything!

We still laugh today about the 'manners talk'. This is where I had commented as a youngster on how many times I had to say please and thank-you in a day. Mum expressed her understanding how frustrating it must be to ask for everything, but that these words were worth so much. More recently, many of my care PA's have mentioned feeling appreciated and that they like working with me partly because I always say please and thank-you - so mum was right after all.

## The Teenage Years

Moving up the diamond we reach 'The teenage years', a difficult time for any person. Hormones running wild, battling with who you are, who you want to be, alongside friction with parents and teachers, and then the additional complexities of being disabled: a real minefield. I would say this stage also falls into two parts. Whilst we have the 3 sections – social inclusion, education and work experience – both the disabled person themselves and their parents will have influence at this stage of the theory.

If you are a disabled teenager; I understand how difficult things feel. If, however, you can do well in school, continue to look after your body (with physio etc), maintain friendships in and out of the classroom, then you can give yourself more chances to achieve what you want in life. By getting good qualifications, having great mates, relationship experiences and some work experience; by the age of 20, you will be able to go on and do so much cool stuff. For the record, a little bit of rebellious fun is also good for anyone!



Parents; at this stage its time to take more of a backseat. Your child isn't now incapable of making decisions; they will have their own beliefs and aspirations and will probably think that they know best! Also, this stage is inevitably moving towards the moments when parents do have to let go and let their child move towards independence. However, especially at 13, your actions and attitudes as a parent will play as big a part as before. Subtlety is the key. My mum could tell you so many stories of my being fretful, moody, frustrated and sometimes rude. She knew I needed to go through these years slamming the odd door, having rebellious moments (some great stories in my projects on this) and asking big questions. My parents drove me in our clunky accessible excuse for a car and ferried me to the odd nightclub. It wasn't as often as I would have liked, but it was a lot for them. We compromised, and I am so grateful they did those things enabling me to do 'normal' teenage activities.

It is important to understand that the teenage years bring the same challenges and joys whether you are disabled or not. To embrace the added complexities of being disabled; accept some things are too much; other things will take longer; and ultimately know that everyone can come out the other end smiling is a good philosophy.



There is not an official bridge between childhood and adulthood. A lot of research shows how difficult this 'transition' period is for disabled people. Social services pass disabled people from the children's team to the adult department, and many other processes do not allow for the smoothest of experiences (for example having suitable housing and sufficient budget for care). Whilst the Diamond Theory cannot solve this, it can explain why stage 3 is so difficult and provide encouraging advice on the way to achieve full independence.

One of my online seminars (webinars) is on the teenage years. In the 1 hour session, I present for 45 minutes on how to apply the Diamond Theory and share useful personal experiences on this topic. The last 15 minutes is then for attendees to ask me specific questions. The delegates see the contents of my screen (powerpoint slides, word documents and websites) while I talk live into a microphone. You cannot however see me presenting live, a common misunderstanding with webinars. The content is very helpful and many have feedback on the value gained from asking me questions. I sometimes offer a Skype chat to help an individual identify their goals, barriers and solutions.

## Independent Living

Welcome to stage 3 – Independent Living. You may need to brace yourself for this one having thought that things would have eased up by now, but nope: it gets trickier. Despair not, because I, and many other disabled people have achieved independent living!

Prior to this, the first 2 stages balanced the sensible with the fun. Inclusive access to education and work experience enables one to get out there, gain employment and live by their own means. Meanwhile social inclusion gives someone the softer skills of interaction, communication and having fun! Independent living should encompass and be the means to both. This is why stage 3, Independent Living, is broken into 4 sections; Employment, Housing, Personal Care and Equipment/Transport.

Parts of these sections could equally been seen as ‘resources’ (as described later on). They are so significant that they are goals within their own right too. To go through all the minefields of working, finding affordable/suitable housing, having a social care assessment, understanding the budget, recruiting Personal Assistants, running a care team, knowing the equipment you require, receiving funding or finding the money to buy the equipment, and having the confidence to seek out and use whatever accessible transport may be available to you – there are a lot of goals to reach. So let’s take a deep breath and a moment to digest this.

The first 2 stages showed the need for a base or platform by which to progress through life. Assuming you want a good, happy and fulfilling life, you will be working towards stage 4 and the top of the diamond. Well, stage 3 is the widest part of the diamond for a reason. You have a lot to accomplish.

I would say from leaving home, achieving these 4 sections and feeling content took me 5 years (minimum). There isn’t always an order or ideal method.

Firstly I found work whilst living back at my parents after university. I had started to have doubts how easy it would be to find work as a graduate in 2006 and as a disabled person. Fortunately my Dad saw an article for an administrative role with Scope and forced me to apply (I was in denial about leaving university and wanted to procrastinate the work phase of life for a bit). Luckily I did and the rest is history. I would add that to know your needs and communicate them to an employer is so important. Most employers will happily follow your lead, especially if you show great potential in your employment abilities. My projects go into lots of details around CV writing, applications, interviews, starting a job, access requirements, ‘Access to work’ funding and so on.

After one year in this role, I was offered a transfer to London (my dream city). This sparked a long and difficult house-hunt. Affordable meant inaccessible, accessible meant unaffordable. I drove from Cambridge multiple times, to find there were steps into the houses (having been told by email there were not). Eventually after 2 months of commuting to my new job, (totally worn out) I found an accessible flat that was affordable and had a room for my Personal Assistants.

Then came the even trickier bit. At university I had Personal care assistants, but funded by the local authority I grew up in. Making a permanent move means transferring your care budget. So in moving to London I underwent the hardest 6 months of my life. The new authority cannot help until you move, but how can you move when you have



Posing in my fully adapted car

no care? I go into lots of detail on this in my projects too, but needless to say I had to be creative in the way I paid my care staff, started out in London and eventually had my new care package set up. All is well that ends well. One of my webinar topics and upcoming e-courses is devoted to how you can achieve this: keep an eye on my website for details.

Alongside this, I needed to obtain the right equipment for my flat. I had to speak with my social worker and occupational therapist about new hoists, slings, shower seats and the possibility of a wet room. This all had to be identified, paid for and ordered.

Finally living in London, where the main form of mobility is the tube and only 1/3 of the stations are accessible, transport was another hurdle. I had already learnt to drive with my hands, in a fully adapted car, so I had an outlet. However the traffic was hard work and what if I wanted a drink whilst progressing to stage 4 on my diamond? 😊 I spent many days using trial and error with the buses, taxis and my wheelchair. I assessed factors such as time, stress and cost. I think now I have most occasions and journeys sorted, but it took a lot of effort.

## Life fulfilment and adventure!



On my travels in Germany.

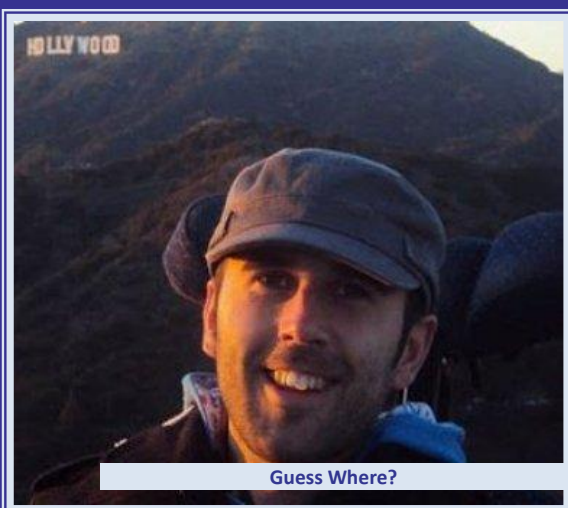
Last and not least (or ever completed for that matter), we have stage 4. As you move toward self-actualisation on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, having overcome your individual and social barriers, you move to the diamond's summit: 'Life fulfilment and adventure'.

Life cannot always be full of fun and good times. Even when it is, it has to be paid for somehow. Quite often disabled people feel lucky to have a job at any level and career progression might be seen as a luxury. I feel that part of being aspirational is to find a job that is enjoyable, fulfilling and pays well. This way you can enjoy every

day and going to work is very much included in that. It means that you know what your reason and purpose for getting out of bed is. This is a challenge for everyone, but I feel strongly that disabled people should not shy away from work or have their ambition dampened. If every avenue is explored and work is impossible then a sense of fulfilment may need to be sought in another way. My concern is that many disabled people lack the confidence and knowledge of what they can do in employment. The 'resources' section will explain the importance of having the right mindset – positivity, can-do and confidence. From my experience the finer details of how career progression can be achieved will be worked out in time!



The grin after having flown a plane in 2009



Guess Where?

As a result of employment, career progression and job fulfilment, you will have the financial means to satisfy the following sections: leisure and travel/adventure. There is so much to do here, and great fun to be had. Whether your goals are about having friends over for dinner, dining out, clubbing, watching football and music concerts, playing sport, travelling further afield for a weekend, flying a plane, grabbing some winter sun, travelling the world, climbing up or skiing down a mountain – the world is your oyster (disclaimer: these are all my likes – check out the video blogs <http://martynsibley.com/category/video>).

# Relationships



In USA with Srin, Tina and Hugh

Some of you may be wondering why 'relationships' isn't in the diamond and why it is separately to the right of the diagram. This is not because I am feeling shy or allowing this aspect to be a taboo. I know relationships and finding love is a big deal to many, and is sometimes more complex for disabled people. The reason I didn't include it as a section is because it needs its own larger explanation. Relationships with family, friends, partners and professionals define us and are crucial to our progress.



Enjoying some sunshine with Billy

I know my relationship with my parents is different to that of a non-disabled person (in a very good way). As it is with my sister: who isn't disabled. My friends have all had to plan nights out around me and accessible pubs. My ex-girlfriends had to assist me in ways most partners would not foresee. Finally, holding a good relationship with professionals has enabled my needs to be understood, the right advice to be given and me to progress in life successfully.

Whilst some people seek advice for their concerns over finding love, relationships really are broader than that. Always appreciate those close to you. Regarding the specifics of finding love; I am not keen to share so much personal information on this or give advice because nobody has the answers. I am happy for you to read the following blog article as a current insight into this part of my world <http://martynsibley.com/summer-series-relationships>. For anyone with specific questions I am always happy to speak in confidence about this topic from my personal experience.



With my amazing sister at my step brother Robbie's wedding

# Resources



Throughout the life stages there have been common themes of goals, barriers and resources. Before we can finish with the overarching philosophy, you need to be presented with the tools required for your solutions. I have broken them into 5 areas:

## Knowledge

As the political philosopher Thomas Hobbs once said “knowledge is power”. You require the knowledge of the best goals to choose, the barriers in the way, the appropriate solutions and the right information. If you do not have this, which in most cases you will not, then you can utilise the other resources too. Disabled people are generally not experts in healthcare, social care or the benefits system, for example. If social care is identified as a barrier, you should speak to the ‘resource’ that is your social worker and seek out the relevant knowledge. Over time you will retain this knowledge and become the expert, making everything quicker and easier.

## Mindset

When setting your goals, identifying your limitations, seeing the external barriers, choosing which resources to use and for when things feel too hard – this is the most important resource. The types of mindsets are to:

- Always approach life with confidence and positivity: People respond better to this and it helps you to see the best in every situation and the light at the end of a tunnel.
- Be innovative, have dedication and never give-up: Often the solutions to problems around disability involve creative thinking. I used to turn the light switch on with a wooden spoon and open a can of coke with a knife as a lever. By sticking with a problem, trying one solution and then a different method if necessary, you will succeed. Just know when to continue trying and when it is time to rethink.
- Smile! As we touched upon, people are so important for your progress. My experience has taught me that people respond to and feel warmth from a smile.

## People

This ties in with the ongoing goal of relationships. Although there will be cross-overs, the types of people who can assist with certain areas are:

- Professionals such as Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapist’s, social workers and charities: giving you specific knowledge/advice on your goals, highlighting personal limitations, potential barriers and solutions
- Friends, family and other disabled people: assisting you to maintain this mindset by listening, understanding and advising. This could include peer to peer support and advocacy, sometimes via charities/councils as well

- Support worker/PA – For physical support in transferring, personal care, housework, in employment and other enabling tasks.

## Technology

We all live in a world of technological 'need'. Just take a look around a typical kitchen and appliances are everywhere. I personally feel technology could go further in supporting disabled people, particularly in dropping the prices of specialist equipment. Nonetheless certain technological resources are a powerful tool in reaching life goals. These types include:

- Everyday appliances - you'd be surprised how helpful items such as a phone, laptop and the internet are. There are the obvious benefits of social inclusion through social networks (twitter and facebook for example). There are also tips I have such as using your phone to 'miss call' a PA for help in the night – no need for shouting or a buzzer system and it doesn't cost a penny.
- Adaptations to everyday products - there are some cool assistive technology products. From kitchens with height adjustable sides and hobs that ignite with special pans, beds that adjust your lying position, and bathrooms with roll in showers. In their absence life is hard, once adapted life is improved, and once they are a part of everyday design they will make inclusion a step closer.

For example my car has an automatic electric door, an automated ramp, wheelchair drive in access, hand controls and gives me full independence. This is an everyday car, but is heavily adapted and is a lifeline for easy transport. I discuss how I applied for my car, learnt to drive it and use it, in my webinars.

- Specialist equipment - this one is easy. For me it is an electric wheelchair to move around with seat adjusting specifications. It is also my shower chair that sits over the bath. Lastly specialist equipment for me is a hoist to lift me between my bed, my wheelchair and my bathroom. Without which my PA's backs would be destroyed. Consider what specialist equipment could help you and make some enquiries on where to find them.



My first car (or tank!)

We live in a world where disabled people are a minority and have an unfair climate to live within. There is no escaping this fact. There is a choice whether to fight an economic and political system or work within it. Overall both are required, but as explained; the Diamond Theory leans more towards working with existing provision. The next 2 resources balance this issue. My personal feeling is to use the above resources, look for funding anything with a cost first, and then use campaigning as a last resort. I would expect a campaign or two in life, but don't let it rule your life.

## Funding

To access the right people and required technology can cost money. If the cost is due to being disabled then it should not come from your pocket. The government should provide you with the means to pay for social care and adapted/specialist equipment. Therefore try speaking to the right 'people' on where and how to receive funding. Some streams of funding I have used in the UK are:

- Disability Living Allowance – for the additional costs of living with a disability eg. travel
- Social Care or Direct Payments – for the costs of employing someone to carry out personal care and social support
- Access to work – for the costs in the workplace of specialist equipment, building alterations, employing someone to assist you and for their transport/hotel on work trips to be funded
- Motability – towards an adapted car
- Disabled facilities grant – for adaptations in the home relating to your disability eg. A house extension or changing the bathroom into a roll in shower.

At some point all will check your medical suitability and some funders will check your financial situation. There are always forms to complete. There are also many more funding streams such as trusts, charities and companies.

It depends on your own barriers and solutions. Therefore get in touch with the right people and begin the baby steps.

## Campaigns

I was wary of this because if you put all of your energy into making a building accessible, changing people's attitudes towards disability and overthrowing local/national government policy (even as a solution to your barrier) then your disability may come to define who you are. By this I mean that all energies are thrown into campaigning, and therefore progression through the diamond stalls, and blame for this can all too easily be attributed to third parties.

Ideally a campaign is requesting fair and relevant changes such as to a local school, nearby shop or pub, the transport system, a social care policy or aeroplane company procedure. I will be running projects on this matter, because it is a key part of reaching your goals. Just be wary that it doesn't consume you and become an excuse for not striving for self-fulfilment.

As Mahatma Ghandi said "be the change you want to see in the world". Applied to this theory, if individuals with impairments strive for self-fulfilment and reach their social and employment potentials, then they automatically will become more valued members of society. When society places better value on its disabled citizens, then accessibility will become the standard rather than a 'luxury' to be campaigned for.

My campaigning CV includes a fundraising campaign for my first wheelchair when I was 3; an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to get access at the local secondary school and a hard fight for my current social care package. When campaigning, win or lose, keep all other options open. By this I mean always have a second solution ready, or be willing to think 'outside of the box'.

In an ideal world change is achieved from individuals achieving their aspirational goals and society collectively nurturing this. By using the right resources above, goals can be reached, society can be improved and it doesn't have to seem like one long, hard campaign.

By combining the 4 life stages and the 5 resources at your disposal, there is one last piece of the Diamond Theory puzzle: This is the Philosophy by which to use the Diamond and by which to live your life.

# Philosophy



The philosophy offers a guide to living everyday life. In setting a goal, defining the barriers, overcoming them with the right resources; you are grabbing life and putting this philosophy in to action. It is explained below:

## Set aspirational goals

Use the life stages to help understand where you are within the bigger picture. Once identified, the idea is you can progress through the diamond, allowing you to head towards the more interesting parts of life. For many people becoming independent is a big enough goal, it can take years to achieve (as I know too well) and is therefore a massive challenge in itself. It depends on every individual how far through the diamond they aim, but as they say aim for the stars and you might just reach the moon.

## Identify the barriers

We mentioned the personal and external barriers. This does not mean that everything is impossible. For example I cannot walk, lift anything heavier than a book or shower by myself. In the winter I cannot go outside for long or I can catch pneumonia. I cannot go clubbing anymore without a 3 day hangover. Some limits relate to disability, some do not. With some planning and the right mindset, none of these has ever stopped me from reaching a goal, but they are barriers nonetheless.

When you choose a life goal it can seem far away, too big and very daunting. By identifying each individual barrier in the way, you can break the goal into lots of smaller ones. Once you see the world in this way, you can see the issues that stop you from reaching your goals and dreams (personal limitations, access to the physical environment, attitudes of people and organisational policies). By understanding them, knocking them down one by one with the resources, and progressing at your own pace, you can and will get there!

## Find the right solutions and grab Life!

This is simple, can sound cheesy but I live and die by it. Once you have considered part one and two, there will still be reasons you can find why you shouldn't try something. What if it goes wrong? What if I don't like it after all? I could just stay safe and not try.

- I had issues with starting nursery – mum questioned how they could refuse me when some of the kids were still wetting themselves, whilst I just was not so mobile.
- Going to secondary school I had to leave my friends at the local inaccessible school and travel further away on the 'special bus'.
- Going to university, people other than my parents had to do my personal care.
- Moving to London I had to learn how to manage a care budget, recruit Personal Assistants, run a house, go to work and still keep a social life.

- Having travelled all over the world I have overcome wheelchair breakdowns abroad, inaccessible accommodation and dodgy transport.

It was never easy or simple. However my dreams and ambitions are such that I sat down looked at what I wanted, assessed the barriers, used the resources of the Diamond Theory and then just went and grabbed life. As I will continue to do. Essentially you should never let your disability stop you from doing anything!

**Please Note:** For anyone who is a parent, family member, friend or professional to a disabled person, you have a big part to play. Parents/guardians; a child's foundations are defined by your early input. Friends and family should always encourage aspiration. Professionals are a key resource and have a responsibility to facilitate ambition and fulfilment at every stage.

# In Conclusion



It is difficult to conclude the Diamond Theory because in some way this is only the beginning. I sincerely hope that this book has:

- Given you an understanding of why disability is still a social problem
- Enabled you to realise you are not the only person frustrated by this
- Offered an insight into my personal experiences as a disabled person
- Motivated you to not ever feel shy or 'grateful' because of your disability
- Made you feel more confident in your life goals and ambitions
- Explained a framework in which you can set lots of smaller goals, to identify the barriers in the way, create the right solutions from the many available resources, and that it has encouraged you to go and grab life whole heartedly!

I would love to hear your thoughts on reading this theory and also your personal experiences of moving through the Disability Diamond of life goals. This ebook has very much been my personal story, but my webinars and e-courses draw on other disabled peoples experiences. If you are an organisation interested in commissioning my projects for your service users please do get in touch here: <http://martynsibley.com/give-me-a-shout>

Please stay in touch, checkout my blog <http://martynsibley.com/>, online magazine <http://disabilityhorizons.com/>, the free disability webinar series I run, the upcoming e-courses and many other useful projects I am working on with and for disabled people.

And remember that "knowledge is power" and you should "be the change you want to see in the world!"

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# The Disability Diamond Theory

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**How to achieve your  
personal life goals**

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