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Representations of the 'Good Life': Hospitality Training for Young People with Learning Difficulties at The Special Needs Hotel, UK

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Title: Representations of the 'Good Life': Hospitality Training for Young People with Learning Difficulties at The Special Needs Hotel, UK

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Abstract:

This paper examines representations of young people with learning disabilities in the popular television documentary series 'The Special Needs Hotel'. The TV series followed the experiences of young people with a learning disability as they received hands-on training in 'the art of hospitality' at the Foxes Hotel & Academy in Minehead, England. Drawing on the work of Hall (1997), we used a reflective approach in this paper to identify how the hospitality work and the trainees are represented. The method of inductive thematic analysis was used to determine the key communication about hospitality training for people with a learning disability in the episodes. The data collection involved both researchers watching separately all three episodes of *The Special Needs Hotel*, and then we used investigator triangulation to validate and draw common themes (Denzin, 1970). The researchers held frequent conversations about their analysis and discussion of the scene descriptions (Harris, Tregidga, & Williamson, 2011). The key themes which emerged from our analysis will be presented. Some possible implications of the identity and ideals constructed in this documentary series are discussed—in particular, those relating to the impact of images and language used, boundaries and strategies for accessible environments, and the social pursuit of enabling the 'good life' and 'independence' through hospitality training for people with learning disabilities. This study suggests more fundamental concerns about the training and employment of people with disabilities in the hospitality industry. It also considers broader notions of hospitality toward a group of young people who are more excluded from the workplace than any other group of disabled people.

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