**

Transcript: Laurence Clark – accessible housing in the usa

Laurence Clark:

I’ve come to America to find out about independent living here. Today I’m in Washington D.C. joining some disabled people who are campaigning for affordable and accessible housing.

*[A number of people in wheelchairs are gathered together outside the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A demonstrator describes why they are there]*

Demonstrator 1:

So the issue is that, ADAPT is at HUD because we um…we… ADAPT has advocated with HUD for a really long time.

Laurence Clark:

What is HUD?

Demonstrator 2:

Housing, Urban, Development. Acronyms are not my best! *[laughs]*

Demonstrator 1:

And it basically controls the funding that goes to public housing authorities across the United States. And public housing authorities control housing for people who are low income. And there are lots and lots of people with disabilities in America who are very low income.

*[The demonstrators sit in the road with banners saying things like ‘I’d rather go to jail than die in a nursing home]*

Demonstrator 1:

So, what happens is, they feel like they’re stuck in whatever institution that they’re in and they can’t get out. And what also happens is because of institutional pressure things happen like, you’re never told that you can live in the community. They’re never told that there are choices, so they think that they’re going to stay there until they die.

*[Laurence interviews another demonstrator]*

Laurence Clark:

Do you live in a nursing home?

Demonstrator 3:

I was in a nursing home for twelve days and that was in seventy one and I had a terrible time, they treated me like a dog.

Demonstrator 1:

I would say that the general perspective of HUD is very much, ‘how much can we do with X amount of dollars?’ But the thing is that they don’t always fall down. Maybe what we should be doing is, that when we have X amount of dollars, we should be building houses that have universal design.

Demonstrator 3:

I will never once ever… I won’t ever have another nursing home! That’s how I feel about it!

*[The demonstrators sing and chat outside the HUD building]*

Demonstrator 1:

The things is, HUD has made progress, over the last couple of years they have appointed more people that deal with the full disability issue and what they’re doing, but they move very slowly and when you meet with HUD, what happens is you sit down and it’s a bit like making a deal and they’ll say ‘well ok, we’ll give you one thousand units of housing for this and that.’ And it’s kind of like, you know what? Screw that. We’re talking about the whole system that needs to be reformed here. We’re not playing monopoly.

*[Laurence is outside of the HUD building with another demonstrator. The chanting continues]*

DEMONSTRATOR 4:

This is how you fight it! Do you know what I mean? No sittin’ around any more America!

Demonstrator 1:

We have local public housing….

*[The noise from the demonstrators gets louder]*

Demonstrator 1:

Oh – we gotta go!

*[She rushes over to the other demonstrators who are making even more noise. At the front, stands a girl chanting into a microphone]*

LAURENCE CLARK:

The girl up there, it’s her first time!

CAMERAMAN

Do you want to go in?

LAURENCE CLARK:

No *[laughs]*. No – I dread to think what they would do to a foreigner. I’m a little bit nervous even sat here.

*[Laurence talks to some demonstrators]*

LAURENCE CLARK:

So, there are police over there…

DEMONSTRATOR 4:

Yep! They’re all watching us from the sides, like, what are these crazy people doing?’

*[Time has moved on, the demonstrators have left the outside of the building and are in another building]*

DEMONSTRATOR 4:

They said ‘we’re not going to give you a letter, we’re not going to give you a meeting, whatever, so the team leaders were like, yeah, we need to leave, cos nothing’s going to happen. So we tricked the police and we walked out and we took up three blocks and we blocked the street, so we had all of these cars going around the kerb, because they wanted to get out, so then we had a bunch of people in wheelchairs all sitting on the ground, so they couldn’t move. And the police were like, picking up people, picking up wheelchairs and moving them. Finally they gave up, so no one was getting out. We had all of these cars backed up, it was crazy. So in the end, they gave us a meeting and a letter, saying that we could meet with the secretary and talk about ADAPT and talk about what we wanted and all that kind of stuff, which is great, because no other activist group has had that happen.

*[The demonstrators chant and sing ‘we want to live’ together]*

*End*