

## Complaint to the BBC by British Stammering Association, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

As Chief Executive of the British Stammering Association, I am expressing our utter dismay at the way that Mr Henry (and the BBC) felt it legitimate to mock stammering in a show that is meant to raise funds to support people with disabilities. It may not have occurred to you but stammering, like other disabilities, is covered by the Equalities Act and people who stammer have the right to protection under the Act, just as, for example, people with cerebral palsy. What might we look forward to next time – Lenny Henry mimicking someone with cerebral palsy?

In his introduction to Red Nose Day, Lenny Henry said “we’re going to give you a night you’ll never forget” and he was true to his word.

Somehow, it seems, that stammering, and children who stammer, are still fair game for public ridicule. This is particularly depressing after the excellent awareness raising campaign we mounted in the wake of the release of *The King’s Speech* – we had hoped that such crass and insensitive behaviour would have become a thing of the past, particularly from the national broadcaster, and especially from Comic Relief.

We have been contacted by a number of parents of stammering children who told us that this is *\*precisely\** the kind of language that their children will hear, every day, in the playground from those who bully them “Spit it out, haven’t got all day”. Well, as of Friday night, the bullies have the official sanction of the BBC.

Humour can be difficult to judge. Unfortunately, the scene with *The King’s Speech* didn’t even have the saving grace of being funny. I put it to you that you, and Mr Henry, made a serious misjudgement here. There are many children who stammer who have been active in fundraising activities for Comic Relief and they, no doubt, will have been just as ‘delighted’ as their parents to see their stammer mocked like this; “it’s n-n-n-nine hours long” indeed.”

I am delighted that the Red Nose Appeal has raised such a spectacular amount which will, no doubt, be put to excellent use. I would have preferred it had happened without you seeing fit to resorting to this kind of behaviour. I am also delighted to note that you have seen fit to remove the relevant video clip from Youtube, though it can still be seen on iPlayer.

I would be grateful to receive an official statement from the BBC about this issue. I hope that, on reflection, you will agree with us, and those who stammer, that on this occasion you have misjudged and caused serious and widespread offence to people who stammer and those who support them, and I look forward to a public statement to that effect.

Norbert Lieckfeldt  
Chief Executive