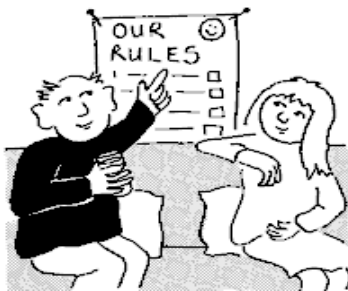


DISABILITY AWARENESS AND EQUALITY TRAINING - THE BIG PICTURE

Disability awareness training conjures up in many people's minds images of legal seminars on the ins and outs of making premises accessible to wheelchairs users. Whilst important this is only a small part of the bigger picture - training and raising everyone's awareness needs to encompass topics much wider than many think.

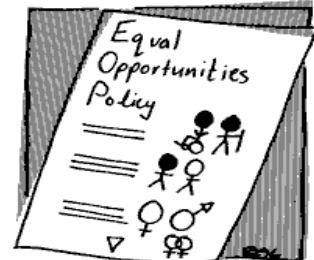
These notes are a general summary and background, they contain reference to government directives and changes, changes which are designed to improve and enhance the life choices of persons with a learning disability. At the heart of these changes is each person given opportunity of creating their own individual person centred plan. No longer will the learning disabled live in isolated supported units but be integral to their local community with support if required tailored to their needs.



We all in our working lives need to be aware of particular responsibilities resulting from these changes. But more importantly this knowledge is a life skill which each person needs to have to. These notes on several occasions make reference to the fact there is often no clear cut lines or boundaries, learning disability has a broad and wide spectrum and each individual is unique often having more than one disability. It can therefore be difficult on occasions for particular services or support to be accessed as restrictions in the services own governance, guidelines and policy are often too precise and specific. Current on going changes and initiatives highlight the need for everyone to have a broad knowledge outside of just their own specific working role, there needs to be in place good cross department working practices and a willing enthusiasm to work in partnership with others to ensure members of the learning disability community have equal opportunities and changes do produce a modern and better provision for the 21st Century.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

Does play a part - Managers for instance need to know their responsibilities to stay compliant. With over 6.8 million disabled people of working age, issues around inclusion and understanding the inequalities suffered in society by people with disabilities plays an important role.



In the work place it is all about providing equal opportunities to both staff and customers with disabilities, being more sensitive to their needs and dispelling the many myths around disability.

Training can also directly support the Disability Equality Duty which came into effect December 2006. This requires public sector organisations to promote disability equality in everything they do, including procurement. Companies therefore that can provide evidence on good practice on disability can gain a competitive edge when tendering for contracts.

The DDA encompasses all disabilities, physical, learning disability, sensory disabilities (blindness, deafness) and mental health to name a few.

What is a disability?

The DDA says that a disability is a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This definition is much wider than many people expect, and depending on severity, can include conditions such as dyslexia and diabetes. But with this definition there is a wide and broad grey band where the boundaries are, individuals may have capacity and ability to achieve some day-to-day activities while finding others impossible.

Known effects on the Learning Disability community.

1.

A report issued 6th March 2008 in which Andrew Dismore MP, Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights says:-


" It is extremely depressing to see, 10 years after the introduction of the Human Rights Act, the way people with learning disabilities are treated when using our services. The evidence has shown us that the consequences of a lack of awareness of people's rights can be devastating".

2.

People with a learning disability are more likely to be subjected to Hate Crime:-

- Physical Attack - Such as physical assault, damage of property, offensive graffiti, neighbour disputes and arson.



-  Threat of Attack - including offensive letters, abusive or obscene telephone calls, groups hanging around to intimidate and unfounded malicious complaints.

- Verbal abuse or insults - offensive leaflets and posters, abusive gestures, dumping of rubbish outside homes or through letterboxes and bullying at school or in the workplace.



- Acquisitive crime - mugging



3.

A survey of Scottish people with learning disabilities in 2006 found 20% experienced hate crime attacks at least once a week.

If these figures were reflective of England around 32,000 adults would experience Hate Crimes every week. That means more than 190 incidents every hour of every day.



What is being done?

The Government white paper '**Valuing People**' 2001 was a New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century.

The white paper identified '**There are major problems, including**'

- Poorly co-ordinated services for families with disabled children especially for those with severely disabled children;
- Poor planning for young disabled people at the point of transition into adulthood;
- Insufficient support for carers, particularly for those caring for people with complex needs;
- People with learning disabilities often have little choice or control over many aspects of their lives;
- Substantial health care needs of people with learning disabilities are often undermet;
- Housing choice is limited;
- Day services are often not tailored to the needs and abilities of the individual;
- Limited opportunities for employment;
- The needs of people from minority ethnic communities are often overlooked;
- Inconsistency in expenditure and service delivery;
- Few examples of real partnership between health and social care or involving people with learning disabilities and carers.
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'Valuing People' Vision key points

- **Four key principles - RIGHTS, INDEPENDENCE, CHOICE, INCLUSION** lies at the heart of the paper. Legislation confers rights on all citizens, including the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, applies equally to all people with learning disabilities.



- **Better life chances for people with Learning Disabilities** Transition from childhood to adulthood can be a difficult process for children with learning disabilities and their families. The white paper is to ensure continuity of care and support and equality of opportunity for young people and their families, so that as many learning disabled young people as possible take part in education, training and employment.

- **More choice and Control** Few have real choices or control over their lives. Not many people receive direct payments and advocacy services are underdeveloped and have very little involvement in the planning process of developments. Person centred planning is essential to deliver real change.



- **Improving Health.** Many people with learning disabilities have greater needs than the rest of the population and are more likely to suffer with mental health issues in addition to often having additional disabilities

What is a learning disability?



Learning disability is a label which is convenient for certain purposes, but people with learning disabilities are always people first.

- Different ways of defining and classifying learning disabilities are used. But this can lead to confusion as everyone is different, individual and often have more than one disability.
- The causes of learning disabilities are not fully classified, but are mainly environmental or genetic factors, or chromosomal abnormalities. Persons who have suffered head trauma also can be referred in some circles as having a learning disability.
- Support for people with learning disabilities has moved away from the medical model, large NHS units and support, to a social model based on local community inclusion and integration.

Terminology

The 'learning disability' label is convenient in discussion and for planning services. But people who carry that label wear many others, such as being a friend, neighbour, relative, employee, colleague, fellow citizen. A label describes just one aspect of a person, but does not capture the whole person.

Many people prefer and refer to themselves as having learning difficulties and some professionals also do the same to describe an overall impairment of intellect and function. There is no clear consensus and confusion is often caused, however whatever label is used it should be clear, inclusive and positive



Definitions

The World Health Organisation defines learning disabilities as:
"A state of arrested or incomplete development of mind"

Learning Disability is a diagnosis, but it is not a disease, nor is it a physical or mental illness. Unlike mental illness so far as we know it is not treatable.

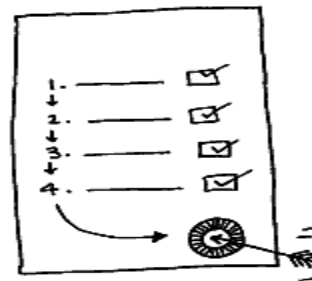


Internationally three criteria are regarded needing to be met before learning disabilities can be identified:

1. Intellectual impairment

IQ is one way of classifying learning disability:

- * 50-70 mild
- * 35-50 moderate
- * 20-35 severe
- * Below 20 profound



However, there are serious problems using IQ alone. Measurements vary during a person's growth and development. Also many have individual strengths and abilities which do not show up in IQ tests. In addition it is important to take account of social functioning and adaptability.

2. Social or Adaptive dysfunction

Measuring an impairment of social functioning can be difficult, at the extreme though it can be poor skills of eating and drinking or not keeping warm and safe. Other impairments such as communication, relationships and social ability can have a major impact in not being able to function in a modern society. In addition the extent of a person's difficulty with understanding, learning and remembering new things especially when learning about a new situation can present them with great difficulty.

3. Early onset

The third criterion is that these impairments can be identified in the development period of life. They are present from childhood, not acquired later as a result of an accident, adult disease or illness, or dementia. However many people who have suffered a head trauma, as a result of a car accident for instance, will receive support from services designed for learning disabilities and this can often cause confusion between support services regarding responsibilities and roles.

Other definitions

Within mental health legislation, the criminal justice system, and in relation to social security benefits, other terms and criteria may be used. It is important to recognize that these exist for a specific legal purpose. This means that someone who fits the definition for one piece of legislation may not be covered by another.

Classifications

All levels of learning disability are points on a spectrum, and there are no clear dividing lines between them or indeed people with mild learning disabilities and the general population. Some individual with mild learning disabilities may even not be diagnosed because they function and adapt well socially.

Most persons with a learning disability can therefore given the chance manage well with varying levels of support ranging from access by telephone to a support worker on a needs only basis perhaps once or twice a year, supported shopping for an hour a week while others with more profound conditions need 24/7 care.



Numbers

Just as there is no consensus on terminology, there are no official statistics that tell us precisely how many people there are with learning disabilities in the UK. However reliable sources suggest while on a statistical basis 2.5% of the population should have a learning disability under 2%, up to 1,204,000 of the UK are generally recognised out of UK population of 60.2 million (Nov 2007). This may in part be due to higher mortality rates with severe conditions but also to persons with mild conditions not being identified.

Causes

There are a number of good reasons of finding out where possible the cause of a learning disability and often it is the individual who wants to know. Having a record of the cause can also help to ensure a range of other services can be accessed and being able to distinguish between the learning disability and mental health or physical disabilities also being suffered can therefore be important. Particularly when, as with mental health problems they are treatable. In addition some forms of learning disability are an indicator to anticipate certain other health conditions occurring and are therefore planned for. Genetic counselling may also be needed for the family and the individual with increasing numbers of persons with a learning disability planning to be parents themselves.

- 50% of people with mild learning disability no cause can be found.
- 5% of people can be diagnosed due to genetic causes.
- 40% of people with severe learning disabilities are caused by chromosomal imbalance.
- A very large percentage cannot be diagnosed as a result of a particular cause.
- Higher rates can also be related to large families, overcrowding and poverty.
- Research increasingly points to organic causes such as exposure to alcohol and other toxins prior to birth as well as hypoxia at birth.

