

Disability Insight

Take a look around you

25th February 2016 – Focus on Learning Disabilities

“It’s important for people with a learning disability to lead independent lives and be part of their community. Having a job, socialising with others and learning new things are some of the things that are important for our future. But, to be given this opportunity, we may need some support.” Patient and Client Council (2015): What Matters To Me?

1 About learning disabilities

Definitions of what is a learning disability vary a lot. Most, however, include three elements:

- reduced intellectual ability
- difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money
- affecting someone for their whole life.

The range of learning disabilities is very wide. Learning disabilities cover a wide spectrum, ranging from mild to moderate, severe and profound. Some are visible whereas others are hidden.

Learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, are not a learning disability. Autism is not a learning disability either. Many people with a diagnosis of having an autistic spectrum disorder may also have a learning disability (60-70%) but not all do.

2 Living with a learning disability

To learn more about the experiences of people living with a learning disability, click on any of the links below:

Supported by BSO Equality Unit

 HSC Business Services
Organisation

Christina and Michael's story

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-learning-disability/about-learning-disability/be-me/be-me-christina-and-michael>

Michael's story

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-learning-disability/about-learning-disability/be-me/be-me-michael-hughes>

Sharon's story

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-learning-disability/about-learning-disability/be-me/be-me-sharen-snook>

Eoin's story

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-learning-disability/about-learning-disability/be-me/be-me-eoin-kenny>

Videos: <http://www.positive-futures.net/news-media/video>

Audios: <http://www.positive-futures.net/news-media/audio>

Many people and their families in Northern Ireland speak of their experience of living with a learning disability. They describe the exclusion they experience in many parts of their lives. This includes work, training, housing, and relationships. Being excluded means not being listened to; having fewer opportunities than other people (day opportunities, lack of transport, access to work and training); bullying or restrictions on personal relationships.

They also tell us that what is important are staff attitudes, knowledge and skills; access to information on support and services; access to respite and involvement of carers.

People have particular concerns for those who have complex needs, including people who have a severe or profound learning disability and people who have complex health needs or challenging behaviours.

3 Supporting people with a learning disability in the workplace

The needs of people with a learning disability can vary greatly from one person to the next. At the same time, from listening to people who live with a learning disability there are a number of things we can do to better include people in day-to-day life and in the workplace. We need to recognise that some people we work with or come into contact with through our work may have a learning disability, whether visible or hidden. We know that negative attitudes towards people with a learning disability have a significant impact on their lives. Attitudes are about how we think, feel about and act towards a person.

Practical steps to being inclusive involve communication and information. Mencap guidance tells us that working with someone with a learning disability may challenge our idea of what communication is, and how we make ourselves understood. Some simple rules you can follow for good communication: always use accessible language, avoid jargon or long words that might be hard to understand. In person: many people with a learning disability prefer that we communicate with them face-to-face and one-to-one. In writing: it is a good idea to use bigger text and bullet points, and to keep writing at a minimum of 16 point. Also think about using images and symbols. On the phone: the best way to talk to someone with a learning disability on the phone is slowly and clearly, using easily understandable words.

For further guidance including 10 top tips for communication, see the Mencap website:

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-learning-disability/information-professionals/communication/communicating-people-learning-disability>

If your work involves undertaking consultations or organising meetings, be mindful to ensure that people with a learning disability can take part. The information you provide when you invite people to a meeting, how you circulate it and the way the meeting is run will be key. For further information on involving people with profound and severe learning disabilities see the Mencap website

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/involveMe>

If you manage a person with a learning disability discuss with them what reasonable adjustments they may need.

4 For staff who are carers of a person with a learning disability

The Health and Social Care Board are currently developing a web portal on Learning Disability. It will bring together information on services in Northern Ireland. Many of you will be already aware of organisations providing support to people with a learning disability and their carers. For others, you may find the following useful as a starting point:

Mencap <https://www.mencap.org.uk/northern-ireland>

Arc NI <http://arcuk.org.uk/northernireland/>

VOCAL Independent advocacy services for people with a learning disability
<http://vocallighthouse.com/>

NOW <http://nowgroup.org/> Positive Futures <http://www.positive-futures.net/>

New Horizons Partnership <http://www.newhorizonspartnership.co.uk/>

Sources and further reading

Mencap <https://www.mencap.org.uk>

Equal Lives Report (Bamford Review 2005)

<https://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/Equal%20Lives%20Report.pdf>

British Institute of Learning Disabilities <http://www.bild.org.uk/>

Foundation for People with a Learning Disability

<http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/>

Patient and Client Council (2015)

[http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net/uploads/research/What Matters To Me Report.pdf](http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net/uploads/research/What_Matters_To_Me_Report.pdf)

Public Health Agency

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/Intellectual%20Disability.pdf>:

Key facts

- People with a learning disability live longer now than ever before.
- People with a learning disability are often socially excluded and exposed to negative perceptions and unwelcome behaviours. Many are prevented from equal participation in education, employment, leisure and social pursuits.
- In 2010/11 in the UK, only 6.6% of adults with learning disabilities were reported to be in some form of paid employment.
- 8 out of 10 children with a learning disability are bullied.

“It’s necessary that [our] views are heard and that we work together because we need to be part of any decision making that impacts on our lives. Learn from us and we can help make services better for everyone!”

Patient and Client Council 2015 What Matters To Me?

