
Reviews

Sexual Abuse and People with Learning Difficulties: developing access to community services. By David Simpson. Family Planning Association, 27–35 Mortimer Street, London W1N 7RJ. 1994. Pp 25 £5.99

The demand for counselling and help for people with learning difficulties after sexual abuse exceeds the supply. Several well-established mainstream agencies with skills and experience on issues related to sexual abuse exist but appear unaware or unresponsive to this group's needs. Thus a gap exists. This report describes a project which tried to bridge this gap by establishing local partnerships between advocacy groups and mainstream agencies.

The most important feature was the use of self-advocacy to enable the full participation of people with learning difficulties in its planning and transaction. Describing their experience and stating their needs powerfully challenged the investment of the agencies not acknowledging the gap. The increased awareness was emotionally painful for all involved. Attention had been paid in the planning phase to address this by allowing everyone time and space to process their feelings and reactions. The two day workshops ended with all participants setting action plans for themselves, identifying obstacles to change and how these might be overcome and evaluating the experience.

The outcomes were identified in a meeting held three months later. This showed that there had been changes in all involved in level of awareness, knowledge, action and local contacts. All participants said that the meeting with local people with learning difficulties had created the greatest change for them. This underlines the importance of personal contact and reflection to enable change.

The report also lists what the organisers themselves learnt from running the project. This included many practical aspects such as the use of audio-taped information and arranging transport for people with learning difficulties.

A very important consideration was how to balance the need to make the workshops as safe as possible for people with learning

difficulties without restricting contributions from other participants too much. This included providing individual support if disclosures about abuse occurred.

The report also contains very useful statements of how people with learning difficulties want to be treated and advice from them to mainstream organisations on meeting people with learning difficulties.

I highly recommend this brief, well written and presented report to anyone planning a similar exercise to establish a partnership between user and provider agencies. It is also a powerful reminder to providers of small specialised services of their important role in facilitating access and increasing acceptability of mainstream services for their users. The report reinforces the importance and challenges in getting out and establishing the effective partnerships which are needed in the community.

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It Could Never Happen Here!. The prevention and treatment of sexual abuse of adults with learning disabilities in residential settings. Produced by ARC and NAPSAC with assistance from the Social Services Inspectorate/Department of Health

This document is based on information collected during a two-day workshop in 1993 organised by NAPSAC (National Association for the Protection from Sexual Abuse of Adults and Children with Learning Disabilities) and ARC (Association for Residential Care) and funded by the Department of Health and the Social Services Inspectorate.

The issue of the abuse of people with learning disability has only become widely discussed among professionals in the last five years. This document sets out clearly the implications of our current state of knowledge and the responsibilities of organisations which provide services for this group of people. Unfortunately, it only deals with sexual abuse, and although this may be the most