



## **'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People' Response to the Analytical Report**

### Introduction

The Disabled People's Forum and Inclusive Living Sheffield Ltd worked together to organise an event to enable disabled people to discuss the Analytical Report and respond to the consultation questions. The event was held on 3rd August 2004 and was attended by more than 30 disabled people. Disabled people unable to attend the event were invited to make written comments and an individual response is attached to this paper.

While the Analytical Report was welcomed, particularly the move towards using a social model of disability to shape policy, a number of concerns were discussed. These are described in the responses to the questions detailed below.

### Questions

#### 1. Do you broadly agree or disagree with the approach of the report?

It was agreed that using a social model of disability is the best way to bring about change and improve the lives of disabled people.

The following issues were raised:

- Much of the language used in the report reflects a medical approach to disability
- The Report is inaccessible to many disabled people because it is difficult to understand, uses too much jargon and is not based on use of plain language
- The starting point for this Report should have been through working with disabled people to identify their hopes and aspirations. Disabled people need the opportunity to identify their problems and their needs
- Effective consultation with disabled people should be carried out by disabled people

- The Report was not widely circulated to groups of disabled people and many will have been excluded from consultation. The Report was more widely circulated to Social Services and Health Authorities so it is likely that many responses will be made **for disabled people** rather than by them.
- The Report is not widely available in a variety of formats. These could have included a video with British Sign Language, pictograms, CD, audiotape, etc

2. Look at the 'Analysis of Issues' section at pages 16-28 of the report.

- Do you broadly agree with this section?
- Are there any particular issues in this section that you strongly agree or disagree with?
- Have the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit missed anything out of this section?

There was some broad agreement with the analysis of issues. Areas seen as particularly important included:

- Disability Equality Training widely available for a range of people, e.g. Ministers, employers, disabled people, statutory organisations' employees
- Disabled people should be involved in policy design and development
- Needs-led assessment and self-assessment facilitate change
- The popular belief that disabled people are unemployed/unemployable needs to change
- Key workers are very useful tools for disabled people and parents of disabled children
- The benefits system often prevents disabled people from taking up employment opportunities
- The most effective way to reduce barriers in our society is to 'design them out' with a universal approach rather than 'add-on'

Issues disagreed with or missing from the Report included:

- Elements of the Analysis were seen to be patronising and to be examples of issues that have been raised by disabled people on many occasions, but not addressed
- The main purpose of the Report was related to reducing the number of people receiving disability benefits rather than improving the quality of life
- The Report emphasises the importance of empowering disabled people. This seems to refer to empowering individuals, but makes no mention of the need to provide better support for organisations of disabled people. It is not possible to 'give power' to individuals, people need to be given the opportunity to 'take power'. Empowering

organisations of disabled people can be the most effective way to support disabled people

- Issues affecting deaf people were ignored. It was proposed that deaf people should have access to a personal budget that would enable them to book BSL interpreters as they require and that BSL should be part of every school's curriculum
- Quality of life issues, e.g. leisure activities, are missing from the Report
- Support for non-paid work and those holding remunerated positions, e.g. Nonexecutive Director on NHS Trust Board, should be provided and the value of voluntary work recognised
- Government is increasingly demanding that disabled people should be represented on advisory bodies, etc, but without remuneration
- Reliance on volunteers, including disabled people, to staff many organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau's

3. Looking at the whole report are there any parts you strongly agree with? And strongly disagree with?

Key priorities in the Report were agreed to be:

- Provision of Disability Equality Training facilitated **by disabled people**
- Increasing funding available to support disabled people to become trainers
- Revision of the benefits system to remove the 'benefits trap'
- User-led services and support for organisations of disabled people
- Provision of key workers to link up service provision
- Work with young people to promote independence from the beginning

4. Page 14 of the Report sets out a framework for the government's goals. There are five bullet points,

- Which one of these do you think would result in the greatest improvement in disabled people's life chances?
- Way?
- How would you go about implementing it?

The bullet point that was identified as being most likely to bring about improvement to disabled people's life chances was,

"Clear articulation of the relative rights, roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders"

This should be combined with acceptable minimum standards for accessible services and resolution of the 'benefits trap'.

It was felt that, although specific stakeholders can be identified, all citizens have responsibility in reducing discrimination.

Comments made about the framework included:

- There is a contradiction between 'minimum standards for accessible services... irrespective of where they live' and "local flexibility and variation". For example, different local authorities impose different rates of charging for Community Care services provided by Social Services. This can result in different charges for the same services; the 'postcode lottery' remains
- Different local authorities have different criteria for assessing a direct payment and pay different rates resulting in varying amounts being paid to people in similar situations
- Whose vision underpins the framework - the government's or that of disabled people?
- The framework is segregationist in that it would apply to disabled people without reference to equality for all. There was discussion of the tension between a specific framework for disabled people and a more general framework related to equality. For example, there is concern that a single equality body will not effectively address discrimination of disabled people

It was felt that the most effective way to implement the framework would be through legislation promoting full **civil rights** for disabled people.

5. Potential solutions to the problems encountered by disabled people are given on pages 17, 19, 21, 23, 25 and 27.

- On each of these pages name the two solutions that you think are most important
- How would we implement these?

The potential solutions were seen as being generic rather than relating to just one theme. Six were identified that would be effective in improving life chances for disabled people.

1. Assessment should be needs-led rather than service-led and should identify the role of services in reducing disabling barriers.

Implementation - through separating the process of assessment from that of allocating resources from tight budgets. Currently workers who carry out assessments must work within a very limited budget framework and this can mean that unmet need is not recorded.

Assessors should be independent. Advocates who are not linked to service provision should be available to support service users.

2. Empowering young people and their parents to take part in planning, making decisions and being informed about choices.

Implementation - through enabling young people to experience independence. This could be achieved through provision of funding to support mentoring involving disabled young people and independent disabled adults. Such a system should be independent from special

schools. Opportunities could be made available for young people to experience having choice and being in control by using trained PAs to support them. This would make apparent the potential of direct payments as a tool in the provision of care.

3. Empowering individuals through removing disabling barriers and improving access to information. Access to information is essential to enable disabled people to improve their quality of life. Currently both finding information and getting it in an appropriate format present huge disabling barriers

Implementation - through applying a social model of disability to service provision in all aspects of life. The potential solutions described on page 21 reflect a medical approach with references to health, relief from pain, condition management etc. Health issues are very important, but can move the focus of discrimination by society to that of individual impairment.

Through improving access to information and making it available in appropriate formats.

4. Improving financial incentives both for disabled people to seek employment and for employers to improve employment practice in relation to disabled people.

Emphasis is placed on providing work-related skills for individual disabled people. More work is needed with employers to:

- reduce discriminatory practices
- educate employers to understand the valuable contribution disabled people can make
- increase knowledge of the range of 'reasonable adjustments' that can be made.

The value of voluntary work in its own right should be emphasised. Some disabled people neither desire to, nor are able to, enter into paid employment. This does not mean they do not make a useful contribution to society.

There are instances when inappropriate pressure is applied to disabled people to get them into work in order to reduce the number of benefit claimants

Implementation - reform of the benefits system and provision of access to work support for voluntary work.

5. Recognising the wide roles of disabled people in society.

Implementation - linked to Disability Equality Training and the involvement of disabled people in the design of policy.

6. Removing the 'cliff-edge' between work and employment.  
Implementation - see 4. above.

Christine Barton on behalf of Inclusive Living Sheffield Ltd and the Disabled People's Forum

9 August 2004

Comments from John Mitchell  
16 June 2004-07-26

Question 1 - I broadly agree with the approach of this paper. I fully endorse its content and intentions but, in my opinion, the analysis is incomplete.

Question 2 - I broadly agree with the analysis on pages 16 - 28. I strongly agree with the statements made. However, I feel that the analysis reflects a largely 'provider' perspective. It understates the desire of individual disabled people for full equity and empowerment.

It will be difficult to provide effective empowerment without clear evidence about the problems disabled people experience and the effectiveness of different responses to them. It is disappointing therefore that the document has no plans for collecting evidence from disabled people either about their aspirations and barriers or about the effectiveness of any measures which are taken to enable them to regain their autonomy.

The specific items that I would like to see added to the report are:

Page 18 - Key Issues: question - 'how can we identify the needs of individual children without better methods of gathering evidence?'

Page 19 Add four further potential solutions:

- Provide common evidence for all stakeholders about individual aspirations and barriers.'
- Collect service user feedback on barriers in 'mainstream' services.'
- Establish the penalties of lost autonomy for all stakeholders'
- 'Design-out' the barriers that create exclusion and penalties

Page 23 - Disabled People in Routes to Employment: Add further potential solution:

'There is a need to match individual profiles of barriers with individual portfolios of support and these should be 'portable' so that they can be used wherever they are needed rather than just in, say, education or in employment.'

Question 3 Subject to the above reservations, I agree with the report

Question 4 I regard the five objectives as desirable. However, they cannot be satisfactorily achieved without systematic evidence from, and participation by, disabled people. It is of paramount importance that the penalties of excluding disabled people are clearly exposed to all stakeholders since they are likely to provide a formidable 'driver' towards the removal of barriers and the achievement of full inclusion.

Question 5 - Many of the solutions suggested are inter-related and it is therefore not easy or particularly useful to try and disentangle them.