

**'IMPROVING THE LIFE CHANCES OF DISABLED PEOPLE'
CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

Voice UK, Ann Craft Trust and Respond are three separate learning disability charities which focus on abuse, crime and protection issues.

Voice UK supports people with learning disabilities who have experienced crime or abuse. We also support their families, carers and professional workers.

Ann Craft Trust works with staff in the statutory, independent and voluntary sectors in the interests of people with learning disabilities who may be at risk from abuse.

Respond provides a range of services to victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse who have learning disabilities, and training and support to those working with them.

Together we feel that we have a wide range of expertise and experience, which enables us to respond to the report.

- We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit's Consultation 'Improving the life chances of disabled people'.
- We welcome the Government's ongoing commitment to improve life for people with learning disabilities, and recognise that significant steps forward have been made in recent years.
- The Government's aspiration that 'all disabled people in Britain by 2025 should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and will be respected and included as equal members of society' is highly commendable.
- We feel strongly that the Government must provide adequate funds to achieve the goals set out in this report.
- We welcome the establishment of a new 'Office for Disability Issues'. We see this as an important step forward in harmonising disability issues in Government. We note that the departments involved are DH, DWP, DfES, ODPM and DFT. We recognise the difficulties caused by the Minister for Disabled People being based in DWP, and feel that it is important to note that many issues link to other Government Departments. However, we feel that there are other Government Departments that would benefit to being linked to the new Office for Disability Issues. For example, our work in campaigning about better access to justice for people with learning disabilities lies in the remit of the Home Office. We suggest a procedure for more inclusion of Departments, in the recognition that disabled people's lives, like everyone's, cover all areas of Government policy.
- We recognise the Government's focus on empowerment and independence. We wholly support these aims, but we also feel that we must point out the vulnerability of some people with learning disabilities, and the continuing need for protection from abuse, which must not be ignored merely because it may not fit comfortably with the Government's current agenda.
- We note your statement in the current situation and causes' section (p47) that 'One in four disabled people have experienced hate crime or harassment.'

Joint Response from Voice UK, Ann Craft Trust and Respond

The recognition on p54 of indirect discrimination is also useful. We believe that this must be tackled and feel that your report is a useful starting point to do so. However, it cannot be done with good intentions alone, and recommendations in the report must be implemented with a suitable degree of priority by all parties concerned.

- You have noted on p131 that young people with less severe impairments, such as those with mild or moderate learning disabilities, often have little or no contact with services as they are not deemed eligible, particularly once they are adults. We believe that it is crucial for people with learning disabilities to receive any support needed in order to educate and empower in order to prevent potential abuse, particularly at the time of transition to adulthood.
- Chapter 7 of the report focuses on employment. Whilst we welcome the Government's aim to increase employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities, it is important to remember that financial abuse of people with learning disabilities does occur, and the recommendations in the report will go some way to prevent this.
- Particularly important is the point about 'engaging employers to improve their attitudes towards disabled people and their understanding of what it means to employ a disabled person.' For example, the recent case of a man with a learning disability from Leicester was employed in a supermarket for 29p an hour must never happen again.
- We are also concerned that disabled employment does not become tokenistic, and that a real effort is put into finding suitable jobs for people with learning disabilities.
- We note the statistic that 37% of employers said they would not take on a worker with a mental disability. We would advise that included in the recommendations to employers on p188 there should be some information about preventing abuse in the workplace.
- We believe that independent living is an important aspect of treating people with respect. We would add a note of caution that it is not suitable for all people with learning disabilities, and would never want it to become a one-size-fits-all policy.

In particular reference to direct payments, we are concerned that the apparent lack of information provided about the opportunity to make criminal record checks for those people providing services.

- It is helpful to recognise that outdated attitudes still exist, for example the idea that people with learning disabilities cannot be parents (p197). These must be recognised before they can be changed. The suggestion to address this by ensuring that disability is always highlighted as part of mainstream programmes is useful.
- We suggest that an area that could have been included in your report is addressing problems when abuse or crime happens in the lives of disabled people.

In conclusion, we welcome the report and feel that there are opportunities to make some positive amendments to make a real improvement to the life chances of people with learning disabilities.