

The British Institute of Learning Disabilities welcomes the publication of *'Services for People with learning Disabilities, Challenging Behaviour or Mental Health Needs'* authored by Professor Jim Mansell

However, the initial preface is not encouraging in terms of government commitment to a very vulnerable group whom it is acknowledged are not well supported; it is clear the recommendations are not mandatory and no extra money will be made available to commissioners to enable the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

It should also be remembered that this is a revised edition of a report issued in 1993 some fourteen years ago. It is indeed sad that this revised edition reflects on the notion that although in some areas provision has 'moved on' yet for people with complex, challenging behaviours and high individual support needs provision has not kept pace.

When one reads this report we are reminded of recent inquiries that have exposed inappropriate and abusive care of people with severe learning disabilities and complex needs, and after just five pages, the Cornwall investigation is mentioned. No one working in the field can fail to be shocked at such ill treatment of the most vulnerable within society and the fact that it is still occurring.

In the context of lack of future new money, the foreword by the Under Secretary of State for Care Services, Ivan Lewis concludes with the statement 'I am committed to reinvigorating the learning disability agenda' but this rings rather hollow at a time when services for people with learning disability appear to be subject to ongoing budget cuts

The Mansell report, 2007, places emphasis on the responsibilities of commissioners to ensure that services meet the needs of individual people and their families or carers. Commissioners should be focussed and committed to ensuring that services can deliver a high level of support and appropriate care to people who have complex needs, who can challenge services and there is a strong emphasis that this support should be provided locally.

BILD wholly supports the emphasis on commissioners taking responsibility for the commissioning of appropriate services, whilst acknowledging the limitations that they often work under as professionals. They may not

have adequate professional experience of supporting people who require specialist support, there can be limitations on the resources available to them and there are the day to day pressures of case loads to manage including addressing urgent and emergency requests for care and support.

The report recognises the need to develop the level of expertise within teams and services that are supporting people, which are often limited by the level of skills, training and overall experience that they have.

The report recognises the importance of teams and service providers working together to share experience and expertise and therefore maximising opportunities for positive outcomes for the service user. BILD has, over the years, recognised the need to support professionals at all level and develop skills within the workforce through offering a range of publications, learning opportunities and conferences aimed at professionals, families and carers. It is acknowledged that more must be done at a national level to develop workforce skills in the support of people who require more intensive support; this report comes at a time when specialist Learning Disability Award Framework (LDAF) units have ceased to exist in favour of the shorter induction Learning Disability Qualification (LDQ).

Large teams of staff who have limited skills are much less effective than smaller, focussed teams who can deliver good quality outcomes for people based on a level of expertise and understanding. In keeping with this the development of specialist teams to support services is seen as invaluable, (paragraphs 62 and 63 of the report.) BILD welcomes the recommendations related to workforce development and will strengthen our links with national bodies, including the Sector Skills Council, to promote the development of specialist training at all levels.

BILD recognises that service delivery must be flexible and varied if truly person centred services are to be developed and delivered. BILD is encouraged that the report focuses on the development of a range of appropriate services being available to individuals to reflect personal need including the increased use of direct payments and 'alternative day placements' (paragraph 55, 56).

BILD believes that all people who have a learning disability have a right to a life which fulfills their personal potential, and for people who have additional needs and behaviour which can challenge services this means services and support must be:

- Individualised; the service must be able to respond to individual need and adapt to meet the changing characteristics of the person as they grow and develop.
- Effective: services must be resourced effectively to enable them to deliver high quality service to people and deliver on promised outcomes. Approaches should be evidenced based.
- Sufficiently Resourced: services must have access to sufficient funding and development opportunities to enable the creation of appropriate person centred services that can meet need. Staff should have access to specialist training and skill development.
- Holistic and creative: services should focus on the 'person and as whole' developing social and emotional wellbeing, supporting transitions and developing proactive life plans. Responses must be based on individual need and this will require on going assessment and planning throughout the person's lifetime.
- Preventative and proactive: developing models of delivery and care that work in a proactive manner in-putting resources at the front line of care delivery as opposed to acting reactively to difficulties that have presented themselves.
- Developed locally: relationships are important in developing individual emotional wellbeing. The use of residential schools and placements far from home has an impact on all the family as well as the person who has a learning disability. This is a practice which should be avoided wherever possible.

BILD will continue to work at a national level to promote the rights and independence of all people who have a learning disability.

As an organisation we will promote the principles and recommendations of this report which also promotes current best practice and enables us to have a clearer vision for service delivery in the coming years.

It is expected that services must be:

- Commissioned for individuals

- Delivered based on need
- Available and delivered locally
- Delivered by trained staff with support from a team of 'experts'
- Focussed on appropriate delivery, with in-put across services and joined up thinking.

A note of concern must be expressed as to how specialist individualised services will develop if there is no commitment to further government funding and when funding for the development of specialised training is hard to access.

The report its self acknowledges that whilst the wider world of services for people who have learning disabilities has 'moved on' since the publication of Valuing People in 2001, the specialist field of 'challenging behaviour' still appears to have 'lagged behind'.

Bild would agree that with the increased provision of community based placements there appears to have been an over reliance on expensive placements, away from where the people live and have their roots and relationships. In the past BILD has raised concerns about 'specialist provision' being neither specialist or appropriate to meet need:

*'I would suggest that the only specialist aspect of the service falls into one of these categories:*

- 1. They have the word autism in the company name*
- 2. They offer services only to people with a diagnosis of autism*
- 3. Two members of their team have specialist training'*

Powell (2005).

It will require a great deal of commitment on the part of Learning Disability Partnership Boards, Commissioners of Services, Health Services, Sector Skills Councils, the Commission for Social Care Inspection, the Healthcare Commission and other stakeholders and partners for the recommendations of this report become a reality to be experienced by people receiving a service or support

Organisations, leaders, managers and all who are passionate about improving the quality of the lives of people with learning disabilities with challenging behaviour or mental health needs must take responsibility and

work together to take the agenda forward in creative and determined ways.

BILD for its part will continue to build on our portfolio of work focusing on best practice and behaviour support. We have increased the range and quantity of courses and conferences planned for 2008.

Improving Practice in Challenging Behaviour will be the focus of our national conference in May, to be addressed by Professor Mansell. We will champion behaviour support as a key theme building on the influential and respected work we have undertaken to date, using our own expertise and that of the experts in the field.

Importantly, BILD will continue to work with other organisations and individuals at a national and local level to improve both practice and the lives of people who have learning disabilities. This report is to be welcomed, the challenge has been set for us, and we must now respond.

Powell S. et al (2005) Learning Disability Bulletin; Adults with Autism. BILD, Kidderminster.