

4.11 Learning Disability

Outline

The World Health Organisation defines learning disabilities as a 'state of arrested or incomplete development of mind'. Somebody with a learning disability is also said to have 'significant impairment of intellectual functioning' and 'significant impairment of adaptive/social functioning'.

This means that the person will have difficulties understanding, learning and remembering new things, and in generalising any learning to new situations. Because of these difficulties with learning, the person may have difficulties with a number of social tasks, for example communication, self-care, awareness of health and safety. A final dimension to the definition is that these impairments are present from childhood, not acquired as a result of accident or following the onset of adult illness.

Learning disabilities are often categorized as mild, moderate or severe. People with a learning disability vary a great deal in the support they may need, some people may require help with washing and dressing for example, while many others will live quite independently with much less support.

There are 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Like all of us, they are individuals who want different things in life and need different levels of support. Most people with a learning disability are treated as 'different'. This may include having limited choice and limited control over their own lives as well as face challenges and prejudice every day³.

- Less than 1 in 5 people with a learning disability work (compared with 1 in 2 disabled people generally), but we know that at least 65% of people with a learning disability want to work. Of those people with a learning disability that do work, most only work part time and are low paid.
- Just 1 in 3 people with a learning disability take part in some form of education or training.
- Children with a learning disability are often socially excluded and 8 out of 10 children with a learning disability are bullied.
- 1 in 2 families with a disabled child live in poverty.
- At least half of all adults with a learning disability live in the family home - meaning that many don't get the same chances as other people to gain independence, learn key skills and make choices about their own lives.
- 58,000 people with a learning disability are supported by day care services.
- People with a learning disability are 58 times more likely to die aged under 50 than other people. And four times as many people with a learning disability die of preventable causes as people in the general population.
- 75% of GPs have received no training to help them treat people with a learning disability.
- Less than a third of people with a learning disability have some choice of whom they live with, and less than half have some choice over where they live.
- 7 out of 10 families caring for someone with profound and multiple learning disabilities have reached or come close to 'breaking point' because of a lack of short break services.
- 29,000 adults with a learning disability live with parents aged 70 or over, many of whom are too old or frail to continue in their caring role.

Key Issues

- Northamptonshire is estimated to have higher populations of people with a learning disability than its statistical neighbours, and this population is predicted to rise as the population grows. In Northamptonshire the numbers of people with a learning disability in 2008 were:

³ Mencap Facts about learning disability <http://www.mencap.org.uk/page.asp?id=1703> (web page visited on 14/12/09)

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- 10,500 people aged 18-64 of which 2,400 will have a severe or moderate learning disability, which are the highest numbers across its statistical neighbours.
 - 2,100 people aged 65 or over of which 280 will have a severe or moderate learning disability,
- All Northamptonshire districts are predicted to experience an increase in the number of people with a learning disability, with Corby recording the greatest relative increases and Northampton recording the largest absolute increases.

Consequences

In line with general population changes people with a learning disability are living longer and may have ongoing support needs for a greater number of years than previously anticipated. People with Down's syndrome are more likely to experience early onset dementia. Support services for older people will need to develop the skills to support people with a learning disability. Support services for people with early onset dementia may be needed.

The lack of reliable, locally collected data concerning the population of people with learning disabilities in Northamptonshire has an impact on how the needs of this group are met.

Key Documents

Foundation for people with learning disabilities. 2009. *Foundation for people with learning disabilities website* (Online). Available from: <http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/information/learning-disabilities-introduction/>.

Department of Health. 2009. *Valuing people now: From progress to transformation. A consultation on the next three years of learning disability policy* (Online). Available from: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_081014

Emerson, E. 2008. *Centre for Disability Research Report 2008:6 Estimating future need for adult social care services for people with learning disabilities in England*. Lancaster: Centre for Disability Research (CeDR).

Emerson, E. 2009. *Centre for Disability Research Report 2009:1 Estimating the future numbers of adults with profound multiple learning disabilities in England*. Lancaster: Centre for Disability Research (CeDR).

Emerson, E. and C. Hatton. 2004. *Institute for Health Research: Estimating future need/demand for supports for adults with learning disabilities in England*. Lancaster: Institute for Health Research.

Foundation for people with learning disabilities. *Foundation for people with learning disabilities website* (Online). Available from: <http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/information/learning-disabilities-introduction/>.

Institute of Public Care. 2009. *Working Paper 1: Estimating the prevalence of severe learning disability in adults*. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University.

Mencap. 2009. *Facts about learning disability website* (Online). Available from: <http://www.mencap.org.uk/page.asp?id=1703>.
