

The newsletter of Community Living
the magazine committed to equal citizenship for people with learning difficulties

A warm welcome to EQual Citizens

A warm welcome to this issue of EQual Citizens, the newsletter of *Community Living*. Our aim with this newsletter is to bring you the latest news about learning difficulties and, in accordance with the reputation *Community Living* has earned, we try to represent the perspective of people with learning difficulties themselves.

The newsletter is designed so you can follow up the stories. Wherever possible, links are provided to larger documents or web sites.

In this issue:

- * Government under fire after its open access site on spending plans receives malicious comments about disabled people
- * Charity celebrates big increase in numbers voting
- * Poll shows majority think people cannot live independently or work full time
- * Celebrity Watch: Frankie Boyle puts his foot in it
- * Giving children and young people a future
- * Help raise money for The Outsiders
- * Log on to an exciting new forum
- * Respond re-opens its Helpline



In the summer issue of *Community Living*:

- **Hidden people**

How many people are prisoners in their own homes? It is shocking to think that even today parents of people with

learning difficulties find it easier to keep their children locked away at home. Working for the RNIB Gill Levy heard about several of these 'hidden people'. In the first of a series about this neglected group she writes about Albert whose story has a happy ending – but many were not so lucky.

- Where now for the Independent Living Fund?
- Independence need not equal social isolation
- When carers become the cared for
- Assessing needs requires an element of human judgement
- Student section: We have ways of communicating...

Why not take out a subscription? It costs only £27 a year for individuals, £23 for students, £45 for authorities. Get TWO subs for the price of one (delivery to one UK address).

STUDENTS - when you take out a subscription you can get all four issues in Volume 23 for only an extra £10. These include articles written by Paul Williams, who recently retired as social work lecturer at Reading University. These cover: the rewards of a career in learning disabilities; building a positive value structure; assessment; and communication.

By subscribing you can support our aim – to achieve for people with learning difficulties everything we would want for ourselves.

To subscribe online log onto

http://www.elfrida.com/comweb/subscription_online.htm

or download a form from the web site: www.communityliving.co.uk

Would you like to write for *Community Living*? Email your ideas to the editor: elinor.harbridge@virgin.net

Community Living is published quarterly by the pioneering charity The Elfrida Society with support from KeyRing, Three Cs, Integrate (Preston & Chorley), Generate, Southdown Housing Association and Respond.

Government under fire after its open access site on spending plans receives malicious comments about disabled

people

The government has had to close the interactive element on its website inviting people to post their suggestions about public spending after it received a number of offensive comments about disabled people.

A typical comment was that there should be new criteria for DLA and incapacity benefit in order to “take some people from the ‘disabled’ bracket and put them into the ‘too lazy to work’ bracket”.

Both the Treasury and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) were flooded with complaints about the site. The EHRC has now passed the complaints to its legal enforcement team “for consideration”.

An anonymous contributor to the Choice Forum said: “It shows the lack of knowledge people have about disability, the rates and conditions of allowances. Vulnerable people always will be an easy target, for society, media and the government. The government seems to be promoting an anti disability culture which is not helped by always singling out people on disability benefits and going on and on about the costs of social care”.

However, you can still submit your ideas for improving public services through the Spending Challenge website using the form on the home page. Go to: <http://spendingchallenge.hm-treasury.gov.uk/>

Government will be looking at the responses over the summer and will publish their decisions in October. These will determine how public money will be spent for the next four years.

Srabani Sen, Chief Executive of Contact a Family, says: “I cannot stress enough how important it is that as many families with disabled children as possible speak up. This is a critical time and decisions taken now will affect families with disabled children for the next few years”.

Contact a Family will be raising the following issues:

- The importance of investing in services to support disabled children and their parents**
- The importance of easing the financial pressures on families by making the right benefits available and also taking steps to help parents take up jobs if appropriate (affordable childcare, flexible working, etc)**
- The importance of investing in parent participation so that families can drive the development of services locally.**

Click on the link above and have your say. The amount of time left to influence these vital decisions is very limited.

IN THE AUTUMN ISSUE OF COMMUNITY LIVING:

YOUR INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO PEOPLE'S ENTITLEMENTS



Charity celebrates big increase in numbers voting

United Response celebrated a doubling in the number of people with learning disabilities they support who voted at the last election at an event at the House of Commons earlier this month. Speaker John Bercow praised the charity's achievement, saying: "Making Parliament more accessible is a passion of mine, which is why I admire what United Response is trying to do."

Yosief Semere, who has learning disabilities, said: "Politics needs to be made accessible with more pictures, bigger writing and less jargon."

More than 40 per cent of people it supports voted in the recent general election, compared with 16 per cent in 2005. As well as United Response, other charities campaigned to promote the right to vote for people with learning disabilities in the run up to the election, including Scope and Mencap.

United Response are also sending all 232 new MPs a copy of *Making Democracy Accessible*, a multimedia guide providing practical advice on how MPs can communicate in an accessible jargon-free and visually engaging way.

Poll shows majority think people cannot live independently

or work full time

People with learning disabilities are the most discriminated against group in society and that failure to understand them leads to widespread prejudice a recent research project has found.

A poll conducted by social care provider Turning Point found that nine out of ten people believe individuals with a learning disability still experience discrimination, with more than half (51 per cent) thinking they are the most discriminated against group in society. This comes above other groups often perceived to experience discrimination including homosexuals (44 per cent) and ethnic minorities (40 per cent).

The research shows that expectations about what individuals with a learning disability can achieve are low with a third of respondents thinking they cannot live independently or undertake full time employment.

Nearly a quarter of people surveyed (23 per cent) expect those with learning disabilities to be living in care homes, while nearly one in ten (8 per cent) say they would expect them to be cared for in a secure hospital out of town.

The survey also reveals a lack of knowledge about what constitutes a learning disability. For example, just under a third (32 per cent) wrongly identified mental illness as a learning disability, while almost a quarter (24 per cent) classified dementia as one.

For more information visit www.turning-point.co.uk

This survey will be explored further in the next issue of Community Living.

Frankie Boyle puts his foot in it



I've struck a rich vein when it comes to celebrities making gaffes about disability, says Louise Wallis in her new column taking a critical look at celebrities. In this issue of *Community Living*, she talks to Sharon Smith about her verbal exchange with the comedian Frankie Boyle which he described as "the most excruciating moment of his career".

Well, serve him right for cracking jokes about people with Down's Syndrome,

ridiculing their hairstyles, clothes and the way they talk.



Giving children and young people a future

Paradigm is driving the Aspirations For Life Campaign with partners Pure Innovations, Skillnet, Building Bridges, IBK and the Council for Disabled Children. Aspirations For Life is a campaign funded by the Department for Education as part of the Valuing Employment Now strategy. The campaign will raise aspirations and expectations for children and young people with learning disabilities with a particular focus on employment.

Aspirations For Life will develop new ways of working with children and young people with learning disabilities, their families, and the range of professionals involved in their lives.

The website goes live soon: www.aspirationsforlife.org

The Outsiders, a band made up of adults with learning difficulties, will be playing at The Big Soup, Springfield Mills, Oakworth Road, Keighley

Hope on 13 August from 7.30 - 11pm . Come along and help them raise money for the band. Tickets £6 .



To book tickets email theoutsiders1@live.co.uk or contact liz on 0781 2723272

Log on to an exciting new forum

The LDForum.net has been launched by Inspired Services who describe it as ‘the friendly online forum for people with learning disabilities, their friends, families, advocates and supporters’.

The forum offers a new way to chat and debate the issues of the day, in real time, so there are no time delays in posting. It also acts as an ever increasing information database and enables people to search for their chosen topic.

It is quietly moderated, to keep spam and unwanted posts away, thus allowing for immediate debate on anything that people want to talk about.

Additional features include a photo competition and a section about people's own stories.

Respond re-opens its Helpline

Respond’s Helpline, offering invaluable advice and support for vulnerable people who suffer trauma or abuse, had to close temporarily last year because of lack of funding.

It is now open again and can be contacted on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons.

Go to their website www.respond.org.uk for further information.