

Out of Sight: report reveals abuse and neglect of people with a learning disability at institutions like Winterbourne View

Families have reported serious cases of abuse and neglect of people with a learning disability in institutional care. In a new report, Mencap and The Challenging Behaviour Foundation warn of the risk of *another Winterbourne View*, unless the Government takes strong action to stop people with a learning disability being sent to large institutions, often hundreds of miles from home.

In total, the charities have received 260 reports from families concerning the abuse and neglect of people with a learning disability in institutional care, since the Winterbourne View abuse scandal was uncovered by the *BBC Panorama* team in June 2011.

The joint report, *Out of Sight*, details a number of serious incidences reported by families, including physical assault, sexual abuse and the overuse of restraint . both physical and in terms of overuse of medication. It also explores the plight of families to have their loved ones moved closer to home.

There are currently hundreds of people with a learning disability in assessment and treatment units like Winterbourne View, and other similar institutions. Many of these are located hundreds of miles from home, where people are at particular risk of neglect and abuse.

While units were developed to provide short-stay specialist treatment plans for people with a learning disability who have experienced a crisis, in reality over half (53%) of patients remain for two years or more, and nearly a third (31%) stay for more than five years¹. Assessment and treatment units have been described as *dumping grounds* by learning disability experts.

Mencap and The Challenging Behaviour Foundation are calling on the Government to urgently address systemic failings in the care of people with a learning disability, by closing large institutions and developing appropriate local services.

Vivien Cooper, founder of The Challenging Behaviour Foundation, says:

Many hundreds of people with a learning disability are being sent away to care institutions hundreds of miles from home, where they remain for years unnecessarily, at risk of neglect and abuse. Our report details the deep concerns that families have for their safety and welfare.

Mark Goldring, Mencap chief executive, says:

We fear that unless the Government commits to a strong action plan to close large institutions and develop appropriate local services for people with a learning disability, there is a very real risk that another Winterbourne View will come to light.

The Care Quality Commission's recent inspection programme of 145 hospitals and care homes for people with a learning disability revealed that half of services failed to meet essential care and safeguarding standards.²

The report, *Out of sight*, can be viewed at www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk

Notes to editors

For further information, please contact Pasca Lane on the Mencap media team on 020 7696 6017 or email pasca.lane@mencap.org.uk.

- **About Mencap**

There are 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Mencap works to support people with a learning disability and their families and carers by fighting to change laws and improve services and access to education, employment and leisure facilities. Mencap supports thousands of people with a learning disability to live their lives the way they want.

We are also one of the largest providers of services, information and advice for people with a learning disability across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. People with a learning disability and their carers can find out more about our services by calling Mencap Direct on 0300 333 111 or by visiting www.mencap.org.uk

- **What is a learning disability?**

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities . for example household tasks, socialising or managing money . which affects someone for their whole life.

People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complex information and interact with other people.

The level of support someone needs depends on individual factors, including the severity of their learning disability.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

Behaviour can be described as challenging when it is of such an intensity, frequency or duration as to threaten the quality of life and/or the physical safety of the individual or others and it is likely to lead to responses that are restrictive, aversive or result in exclusion.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation provides information, support and training around challenging behaviour associated with severe learning disabilities, and leads the Challenging Behaviour National Strategy Group which seeks to influence policy and practice nationally on behalf of individuals who challenge and their families.

Severe learning disability is a developmental disability meaning the individual has a significantly reduced ability to learn new skills. Individuals with severe learning disabilities typically have very limited communication skills, often non verbal, and need help with daily living skills such as eating and dressing. Challenging behaviour shown by individuals with severe learning disabilities may include aggression, self injury, disruptive and destructive behaviours, stereotyped behaviour, and is most often due to their lack of ability to communicate their needs.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation was founded in 1997 by Vivien Cooper, parent of a son with severe learning disabilities and behaviour described as challenging. Today the Challenging Behaviour Foundation is in regular contact with over 4500 families and professionals across the UK. There are an estimated 30,000 individuals in England with severe learning disabilities and behaviour described as challenging.

For more information visit www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk or contact:
The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

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