

Gateway Reference no. 16474

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To: All Partnership Boards
ADASS
SHAs
Deputy Regional Directors
National Forum of People with Learning
Difficulties
National Valuing Families Forum

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Dear Colleagues

Learning Disabilities: 2011/12

As I leave my role as National Director for Learning Disability, I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support with the wide programme of work that has been delivered under the Valuing People Now programme over the last few years. I also want to say a personal thank you for your generous support to me and Scott Watkin, the Co-National Director. There have been significant achievements under VPN which would not have been possible without the help of our partners in partnership boards, the NHS, local authorities and people with learning disabilities and their family carers.

Valuing People Now remains the national policy for people with learning disabilities and work will continue to support and improve the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families. The National Learning Disability Programme Board, chaired by the Minister for Care Services, has a central role in shaping national policy working across Government and with key external partners. The Board will be considering new terms of reference at its next meeting against the background of rapid new policy-making across Government to ensure that key policies and programmes on housing, employment and health properly address the requirements of people with learning disabilities including those with the most complex needs.

How far have we come?

It is important to remember how far we have come. There has been real progress since the launch of the VPN strategy in January 2009 which should not be overshadowed by events at Winterbourne View - which will be the subject of a DH Review. I have witnessed first hand how local commissioners and providers working with people with learning disabilities can make radical changes to the way they live and work. There are a multitude of examples showing what has changed in the lives of people with learning disabilities as they move from residential settings (including campuses) to supported living in the community. Recent research by the University of Chester which traces the journey of residents from the Orchard Hill Hospital to community living provides ample evidence of how lives can and have changed in significant ways.

A key element of enabling continuing change is to support, strengthen and further embed local leadership and commissioning practice through the development of a strong set of outcomes and tangible service improvements for learning disability, firmly set within the new NHS outcomes framework and the Adult Social Care and Public Health outcomes frameworks.

The Six Lives Progress Report was published in October 2010; the Report of the Public Health Observatory, People with Learning Disabilities in England 2010 was published in January 2011; the Government published its response to 'Raising our Sights: services for adults with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities' by Professor Jim Mansell in February 2011.

The 2009/10 Valuing People Now Annual Report was published in December 2010 and partnership boards have been invited to complete reports for 2010/11 to show what progress has been made locally in the last year. The reports will give vital information for new, developing organisations like HealthWatch and Health and Wellbeing Boards. The Public Health Observatory will continue to publish reports on its website, and the link for published annual reports from Partnership boards is- <http://www.improvinghealthandlives.org.uk/projects/partnershipboardreports>

The progress continues

The progress continues with annual health checks continuing for at least another year 2011/12; better care in some acute hospitals and more use of patient passports; closure of the final few campus places; and the good results from employment demonstration sites,

Project Search and Getting a Life (GAL). The Department has worked closely with the Department for Education to build in learning from GAL into the Green Paper 'Special Educational Needs and Disability' and with DWP on the Sayce Review of Specialist Disability Employment Programmes published on 9 June - DWP will shortly be consulting on the Review.

I am confident that policy colleagues in the Department will continue to work very closely with external partners as we enter a time of change to ensure that the voice of people with learning disabilities and family carers remains at the heart of policy at a national level.

Kind regards.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anne Williams". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "Kind regards."

Anne Williams
National Director for Learning Disabilities