

New national statistics show need for services to support adults with learning disabilities in Scotland

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The number of adults with learning disabilities known to local authorities in Scotland is equivalent to the population of the Western Isles, according to new statistics released today. In 2008, over 25,000 adults aged 16 and over were receiving support to live in the community from their local authority's learning disability services. They represent nearly 6 in every 1,000 adults in Scotland. 1% were of Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British background. 11% also had a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

A national policy for adults with learning disabilities was one of the first initiatives of the devolved Scottish Government. "The same as you?" (May 2000) set a clear direction that people with learning disabilities should have access to the same opportunities as all other Scottish citizens. To monitor progress, Scottish councils have been collecting information annually since 2003 on the services they provide. The latest figures present the most detailed information to date on adults with learning disabilities in Scotland.

They show:

- more adults get involved in a variety of activities during the day

In 2003 37% attended a day centre for five days a week, compared with 12% in 2008. In 2008 25% took part in a wider range of other day opportunities such as leisure and education and 16% had support from a Local Area Co-ordinator, who helped them become involved in their local community.

- most people no longer live in large group homes

Only 10% lived with 4 or more other people with learning disabilities, 20% lived with between 1 and 3 other people with learning disabilities and 70% were the only people with learning disabilities in their accommodation.

- families provide a significant level of care throughout adulthood

48% lived with a family carer, mostly parents. 1 in 5 aged 35 and over still lived with a family carer.

- labour force participation is low

18% had a job, but only 6% were working for 16 hours or more a week.

The Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability co-ordinated the collection of information on behalf of the Scottish Government. Director Lisa Curtice says:

“Adults with learning disabilities are a minority that must be taken seriously in Scotland. These statistics should encourage local authorities to continue their efforts to implement “The same as you?”. It is not just social work services, but education, employment, leisure and housing services that need to plan how they will support them to live independent lives.”

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Notes to Editors:

1. Statistics Release: Adults with Learning Disabilities Implementation of ‘The same as you?’ Scotland is published on 10th August 2009 on the eSAY page of the SCLD website <http://www.sclد.org.uk/sclد-projects/esay.xhtml>. The Annexes provide breakdowns for each local authority in Scotland.
2. 25,252 adults with learning disabilities were known to the local authorities in Scotland in 2008. This corresponds to approximately 5.9 adults with learning disabilities per 1,000 population aged 16 and over.
3. The number of adults with learning disabilities known to local authorities increased by 40% between 2003 and 2008. Between 2007 and 2008 the number increased by 2,377 (10%). This may be because of changes in the definitions used.
4. This was the first year for which information was requested on the number of adults with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A diagnosis was reported for 11 % of those for whom this information was known. However only 202 adults with a diagnosis of autism were identified who did not have a learning disability which suggests that at this point local authorities have only reported on those with an ASD diagnosis who were known to learning disability services.
5. In previous years the information on which this series of Statistics Releases on Adults with Learning Disabilities in Scotland was based was derived from an annual return in which aggregate number were required separately for each item. From 2008 Local Authorities were asked to use the eSAY dataset as the vehicle for supplying information <http://www.esay-online.co.uk>. This meant that an anonymised individual record was required for each adult known to the local authority and that the definitions used corresponded to those in the National Learning Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder

Dataset Version 4.1

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/PublicServiceReform/efficientgovernment/DataStandardsAndeCare/ASDV41>

6. Figures for 2008 relate to all adults with learning disabilities known to the local authority as at November 2008. In previous years they related to adults using services in a typical week. Comparisons between 2008 and previous years should be made with caution.
7. Previous statistics releases are available on the Scottish Executive website <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/Publications>
8. “The same as you?” review of services for people with learning disabilities was published in May 2000. Its 29 recommendations for developing learning disability services set out a programme for change over 10 years. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/12778/File-1>
9. The Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability is a partnership of 12 organisations set up by the Scottish Government as a national centre for excellence to provide information, training and research to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families. <http://www.scd.org.uk>
10. Someone with a learning disability finds it difficult to learn and to cope with everyday life. Learning disability can affect the way a person takes in, remembers and expresses information. People usually have learning disability from birth or sometimes from early childhood. Although it is a permanent condition, people with a learning disability can learn with the right sort of support. A learning disability it is not an illness. It is not the same as a mental health problem, although some people with learning disabilities also experience mental health problems. People with learning disabilities vary a great deal in the help they may need. Some require help with complex medical problems, some require support with everyday living and many others will live quite independently with much less support. About 2% of the population is thought to have a learning disability. There is confusion regarding the terminology used. Sometimes learning disabilities are called intellectual disabilities and some people prefer the term learning difficulties, although in education this is used to mean people with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia who are not included in the definition of learning disabilities. Living with a learning disability can make it difficult to function independently in society and communicate with other people. The right services and support can make a difference to whether that person is able to fulfil their potential. The day-to-day lives of people with learning disabilities and their families have always been affected by the way they are perceived and treated by the communities they live in. It is important to see someone with a learning disability as a person with human rights, as a citizen and a part of society. They can experience discrimination and inequalities in their access to services. Providing advocacy, support with decision-making and accessible information can help more people to be included.