

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

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PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES TO HAVE INDIVIDUAL BUDGETS

Since the publication in 2001 of the White Paper *Valuing People*, a Government Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century, key themes have been *choice* and *control*. Recent policy documents such as the White Paper *Our Health, our Care, our Say: a New Direction for Community Services* continue to echo this theme. The introduction of direct payments and individual budgets will be key issues in commissioning services in the future.

A recent report (April 2007) from the Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) draws attention to the fact that 'around 70% of the money councils spend on social care for adults with learning disabilities is used to buy residential, nursing care or day care services.' This is seen as tying councils into long term and expensive care that can not easily alter as people's needs change.

The likely trend for the future will be a shift away from residential care towards self-directed support. Resource allocation will be based on the disabled person's own assessment of their needs and they will then decide how to use the budget to pay for their support. This support can be in the form of conventional services e.g. paid support assistants or support from family, friends and the local community.

It is encouraging to see individual choice being given such a high priority. However it is a concern about how much vulnerable people are given support and information about the consequences of such choices and options. Might they be open to exploitation by those looking to gain financially from offering support that is outside conventional arrangements? Will all people with learning disabilities be able to manage their finances in such a way? Will everyone be able to adequately assess their own needs?

What can churches do to help?

- *Be aware of the needs of any adults with learning disabilities in their congregations.*

- *Be aware of the opportunity to help as an advocate for someone with a learning disability in the process of assessment of needs. (For more information about local advocacy schemes see the website of the Foundation for People with Learning Disability www.learningdisabilities.ork.uk)*
- *Read on the website about Circles of Friends. Many people with learning disabilities count their paid carers as their closest friends. This is a challenge for church members.*

Sheila Stephen

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Salt and Light Papers is a series of occasional papers on contemporary issues of social concern. It is published online by the Affinity Social Issues Team. Its purpose is to help Christians to think through questions of relevance to our place in the world around us. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Social Issues Team.

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