

Interest Link Borders

Core Volunteer Training Materials



CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| The Need for the Service | 1 |
| How the Service works diagram | 3 |
| Detailed Aims for service users | 5 |
| Information about learning disability | 7 |
| The needs of people with learning disabilities | 11 |
| The Role of Volunteers | 14 |
| Volunteer traing, support & supervision | 16 |
| Feedback quotes from service users, carers and volunteers | 18 |
| Listening and communication skills | 22 |

The Need for the Service

1. The need for the Service

The project is needed because although most adults with learning disabilities now live in the community, they are often still effectively socially excluded from it: many have been separated from the rest of the community throughout their lives and have very few social contacts and little experience at making new friends. It is also often impossible for them to travel to and use facilities by themselves because of their disability, the large distances involved and poor local transport links, and almost all are on benefits and thus have limited means. These factors make it extremely difficult for most adults with learning disabilities to participate in the community and pursue their interests and hobbies in the normal way that most others take for granted. As a result, there is a need for a service which can help them overcome these difficulties.

2. How Interest Link Borders can meet the need

Interest Link Borders can help to answer the needs of adults with learning disabilities for access to activities and social contact by offering a befriending service which links service users one-to-one with compatible and trained volunteers who can meet up with them or visit them on a regular basis.

(a) The benefits for service users

By being linked with volunteers, service users can do the activities they choose in a normal manner in the community. Being linked can also help them to acquire social skills, self-confidence and a sense of independence. On a more general level it can also hopefully assist in breaking down the barriers between people with learning disabilities and the community in general.

(b) The advantages of involving volunteers

- ◆ The involvement of volunteers is central to the service: they are drawn from service users' communities and are the ideal agents to enable service users' participation and integration in those communities.
- ◆ It is also much appreciated by service users that the person helping them is doing so not because they are paid to or feel obliged to, but because they want to.

(c) The activities service users and volunteers do

Decisions on activities are entirely up to service users, their carers and volunteers. Activities have included, for example, playing golf, bowling, cycling, swimming, crafts, bird watching, shopping, going to local club meetings, going to the cinema, cafe or pub or just being visited at home.

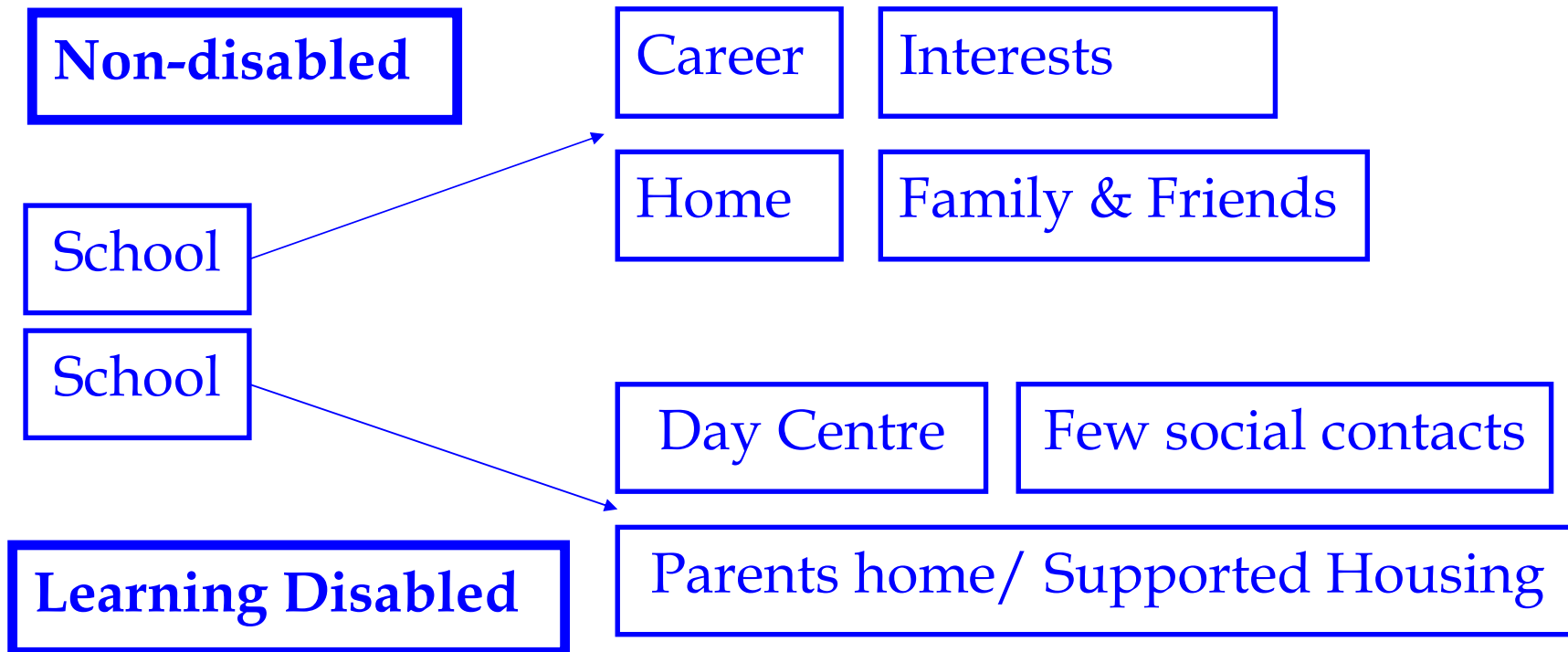
(d) The respite provided to carers

The service relieves carers of some of their responsibilities for a few hours on a regular basis. Carers also know that service users are doing something they enjoy and possibly pursuing interests that carers may not share but would like service users to be able to enjoy.

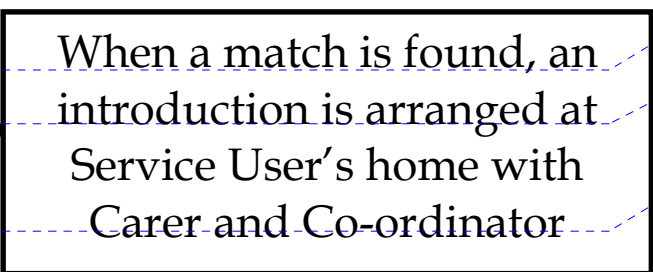
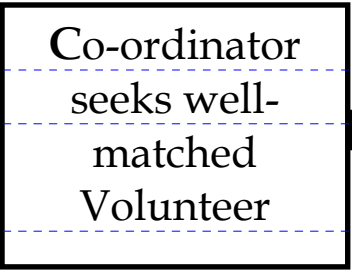
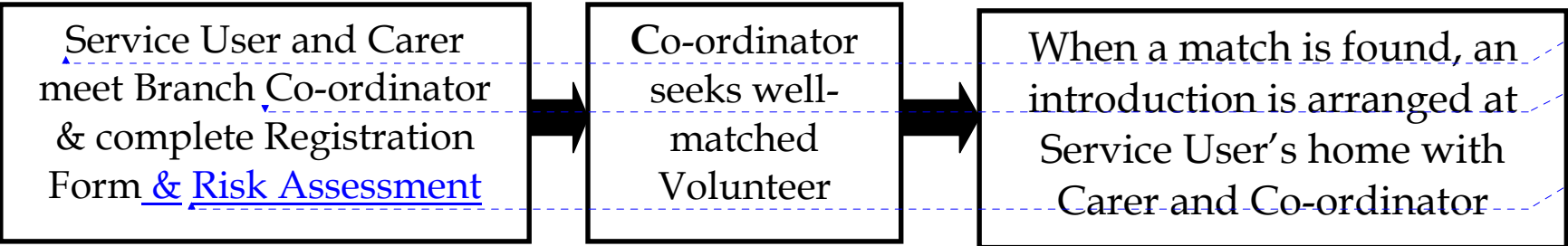
Interest Link Borders: Why the service is needed

Typical Life Paths

Lives which are not that different at school age
diverge radically on reaching adulthood



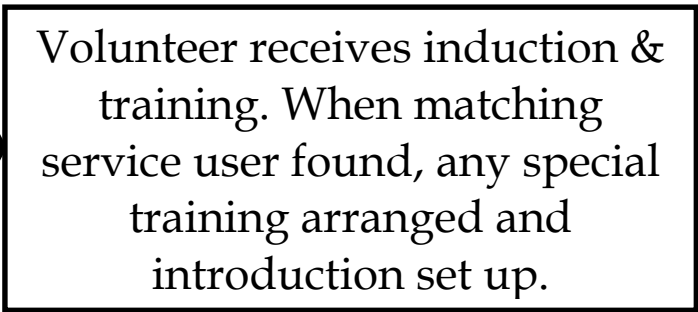
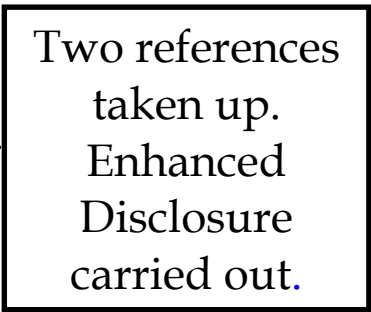
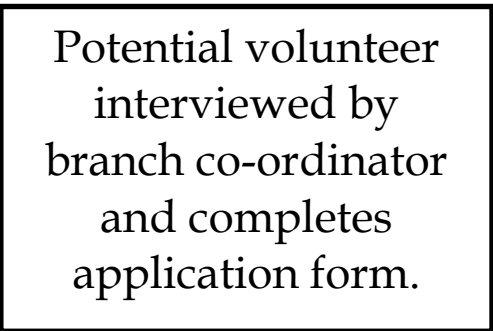
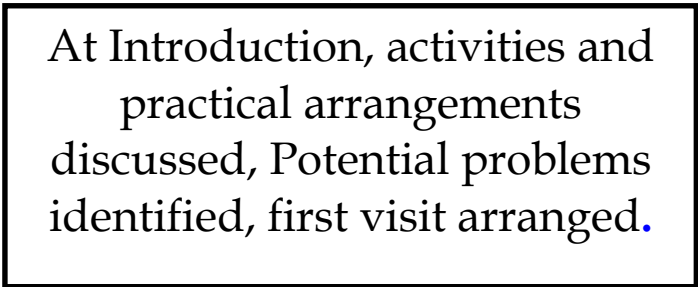
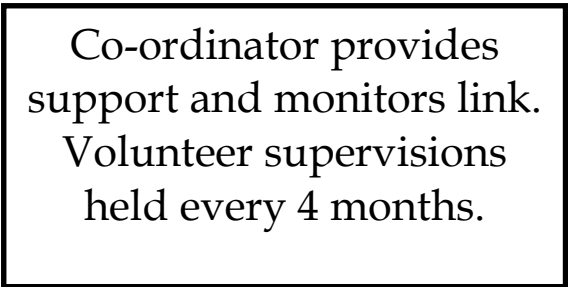
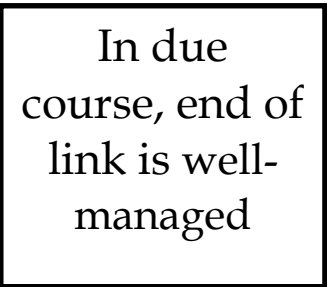
How the Adult Service works



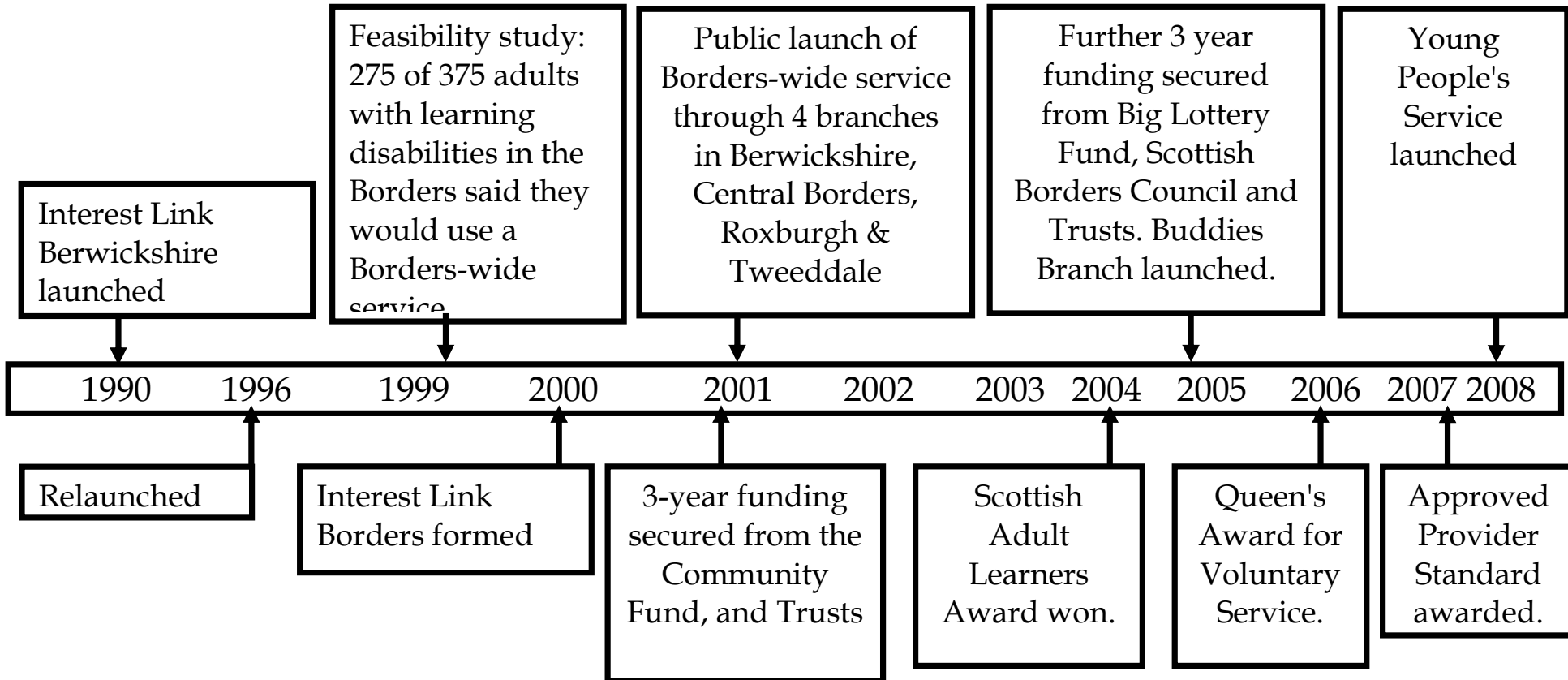
Formatted: Font: 18 pt, Not Bold

Deleted: ¶

Formatted: Font: 18 pt, Not Bold



Interest Link History



Aims for service users

Interest Link's aims are based on "the five threads of normalisation" and "the five essential service accomplishments" implied by them.

It seeks to assist the people who use the service in developing:

1. **Community Participation:** this is about the people we know, spend time with, and can call on for help in times of need. These people include friends, family, housemates, co-workers, neighbours, fellow club members, and many others. People usually like spending time with people who respect them who take time to listen and think what they say and do are important.

Each person should have the chance to spend time with people whom he/she enjoys being with.

Each person should have the chance to meet new people and make more friends.

Each individual should have the chance to keep in contact with his/her family.

2. **Community Presence:** this is about the times that we leave our homes to go to other places. This could mean going to the shops, the cinema, the pub, the theatre, a football match, the bowling club, the local fete, or any other place. This can also mean going to a friend or family member's house for a meal or party, or visiting the neighbours.

Each person should have the chance to visit new places and try new things to do.

Each person should have the chance to go to the places they enjoy going to.

Each person should be able to go into any public place and help should be provided if there are any difficulties with this.

Each person should be helped to go to places where they might not be able to manage on their own.

3. **Choice:** this is the many ways we let other people know what we want or don't want like or don't like. People can do this by speaking (saying yes or no); by using signs or pointing; by sharing their feelings (smiling, frowning, or looking angry); and voicing their feelings by laughing, crying, shouting out loud or screaming.

Every person should get to do things and learn about things that have to do with the choices they must make and be helped to understand the choices they have. Then they will know better what to choose what they really want.

Interest Link Borders Core Volunteer Training Materials

Every person should get the help they need to make others understand that they have made a choice and what that choice is.

Other people should be encouraged and helped to understand and accept the choices that people make.

4. **Respect:** this is something we want from those we care about and who spend time with us. People show that they respect us when they are happy to see us and they take time to listen to what we say and see what we do. People respect us when they think we can manage our own lives, even if we need some assistance sometimes. They think what we say and do are important, both to us and to others.

Every person should have the chance to do the things that will cause others to respect them.

Every person should be helped to share their talents, their time, and their special gifts. so that others will respect them for what they can give to the community. This may mean having a job, volunteering, or just helping out other people when they can.

5. **Competence:** this is being able to do the things we like to do and need to do.

Every person should have the chance to do things they can do on their own. Every individual should always have help to do the things they can't do on their own.

Everyone should be given the amount and type of support they need to do the things they want and need to do.

Acknowledgements: ELCAP (East Lothian Care and Accommodation Project)

Information about learning disability

What is learning disability?

People with learning disabilities are in most ways just like anyone else. The difference is that people with learning disabilities will have more difficulty in learning how to do things and in adapting to new situations. There can be a great variation in the degree of learning disability. Sometimes the disability can be so mild that it is barely noticed; other people have such profound learning disabilities that they will always need help and support in every aspect of their lives.

The term "learning disability" is now used because people who had been called "mentally handicapped" in the past rejected this term because they felt it set them apart from other people. The new term "people with learning disabilities" reminds us that they are people first, just like anyone else.

Learning disability is **NOT** the same as mental illness. Mental illness can take many forms, from depression and anxiety to conditions such as schizophrenia. Many of these conditions can be cured or controlled, and many are short-term. Anyone can develop a mental illness - including people with learning disabilities. But learning disability can't be "cured". People with severe and profound learning disabilities may also have physical disabilities which may need nursing care. But first and foremost, their needs are social and educational. With education, support and opportunities, people with learning disabilities can achieve a great deal - just like anyone else.

How many people have learning disabilities?

It's not possible to give exact figures. Firstly, it's not always obvious when someone has a learning disability. The statistics can tell us how many children go to special schools for people with learning disabilities, how many adults go to training centres or resource centres, how many live in hostels, homes or hospitals, etc. But most people with learning disabilities live at home with their families, while some go to college and some have jobs. Sometimes there aren't enough training centre places for everyone, and some older people with learning disabilities have never received any kind of special service. So some people will "slip through the net", and never be recorded as having a learning disability. As a very rough guide, it is reckoned that one person in a hundred has a learning disability. This can range from a disability which is hardly noticed to disabilities so profound that the person needs a great deal of support to perform any task.

Causes

Anyone can have a baby with a learning disability. There are probably about 300 causes of learning disability, but it's not always possible to define them. Nowadays it's thought that we should be more concerned with the person as a human being, rather than with what caused their disability. Learning disability is something which is usually present from birth, or shortly afterwards but it can also be caused by later events such as an accident.

Associated conditions

Depending on the type of the learning disability, the person may have associated medical conditions, such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, language difficulties and behavioural difficulties.

Another common associated condition is epilepsy. This happens when there are disturbances in the normal electrical activity of the brain, and results in the person having seizures. In some cases, motor impairment (which may be referred to as cerebral palsy) may also occur in association with learning disability. However, it is important to remember that all these conditions can occur without any learning disability and vice versa.

Some severe learning disabilities may be accompanied by physical disabilities, and some types of learning disabilities may be prone to certain medical conditions, eg, some people with Down's syndrome may have respiratory and heart problems.

Some types of learning disability - such as Down's syndrome - can be detected in the unborn foetus. Others -such as phenylketonuria - may be controlled through diet. But it is by no means always possible to know when a child will be born with a learning disability.

Despite all these problems, people with learning disabilities are just ordinary people who need a bit of extra help and want to be involved in activities like everyone else

Families

When parents discover that their child has a learning disability, it can be a very distressing time. They may feel a variety of confusing emotions, from grief and shock to guilt and anger. They may have difficulty in accepting that their child is different, and in accepting that many of the hopes and expectations they had for him or her may not be fulfilled. They may feel lonely and isolated.

Every parent looks forward to milestones for their child, such as their first job, wedding, and children of their own. Many parents of adult children with learning disabilities may never see some of those landmarks. and so will take time to adjust their outlook and expectations. But parents do come to terms

with having a child with a learning disability, and develop different expectations and take joy in different achievements
Support from other parents in the same situation can be invaluable in helping families adjust to having a child with a learning disability.

Services which can help

Much can be done to help children with learning disabilities and their families, and the earlier help is given the better. Parents can get professional help and advice from people such as health visitors, family doctors, paediatricians, social workers, therapists (such as occupational therapists) and psychologists. In some cases, they can get practical help such as State allowances, free nappies, aids and equipment, adaptations to the home or rehousing to suit the child's needs. Children with learning disabilities are entitled to home teachers and nursery places.

Education and training

Everyone with a learning disability - no matter how severe or profound - has the right to education between. Ideally, children with learning disabilities should have some sort of nursery education before the age of five. Traditionally, education for children with learning disabilities has taken place in different types of "special" schools or classes which cater for their special needs. But many children will benefit from being in a "mainstream" (local) school, and increasingly the trend is for this to happen, wherever possible. Some children, however, will benefit more from attending a special school. Depending on their degree of learning disability or associated problems, some children may need specialised services such as speech therapy or psychological services.

After school

After they leave school at 16 or later, many people with learning disabilities will go to centres called adult training centres (or adult resource centres or social education centres). There they will get further training to learn new skills to help towards independence. They will be taught practical and social skills such as using money, cooking, and travelling by public transport. Some people will go to college to learn these sorts of skills. Some people will benefit from government schemes for unemployed people. Others may find jobs in the same way as anyone else. There are a number of schemes which can help people find work, and also a growing number of schemes to give them extra help and support at work.

Income

This is a big issue for people with learning disabilities, because even if they have a job, these tend to be low-paid. Most people with learning disabilities do not find work and so must live on welfare benefits. If the learning disability is severe, at least one parent may have to stay at home and look

after their son or daughter. The cost of caring for someone with a learning disability can be high. If the person with a learning disability does find work, they may lose out on other benefits, and the family could be worse off.

Independent living

Most people with learning disabilities live at home with their families and always have done. It is important to plan for the future, as people with learning disabilities are, on average, living longer than they did in the past. Many will outlive their parents.

Traditionally, if people with learning disabilities did not live with their parents, they would have lived in large institutions such as hospitals. Although there are still hospitals like this in existence, current thinking is for people with learning disabilities to live in the community - just like anyone else. There are many different types of housing for people with learning disabilities, but the general trend is for these homes to house a small number of people, as this is felt to be more natural than a large, impersonal institution.

Some people with learning disabilities will be able to live completely independently in the community. Others may need occasional support from professional staff. But even people with profound learning disabilities can live in the community, provided they are given constant help and support. However, the cost of such housing is high, and there is a significant shortage of suitable accommodation.

Friendships and community life

Like other people, people with learning disabilities want to make friends and be a part of their community. But it can sometimes be difficult for people with learning disabilities to do this.

This happens for a number of reasons. Most people make friends through school, work, clubs or because they share a hobby or interest. Some people with learning disabilities may have physical disabilities, and so it may be difficult for them to travel, and many leisure clubs and activities do not have access for people with physical disabilities. Also, some people will avoid people with learning disabilities because they are "different". This is partly because, in the past, people with learning disabilities have used different, specialised services, and so have not had the chance to mix with other people.

By and large, there is no reason why people with learning disabilities should not use the same leisure facilities as everyone else. This mixing - known as "integration" or "inclusion" - is felt to be more beneficial for everyone.

Acknowledgements: ENABLE

The needs of people with learning disabilities.....are just like your needs

Like other people, people with learning disabilities need

Choices.....Employment....Their Own Homes....To Speak For Themselves.....Opportunities.....Friends

JUST LIKE YOU!

About one person in every, 100 is labelled as having a "learning disability" or "mental handicap" because they have difficulty in learning or in carrying out tasks that most other people can do easily - to the extent that they will need extra help if they are to lead a normal life. The extent of their difficulty, or in other words the severity of their handicap, can vary enormously. Some may only require extra help and consideration during schooling while those who are most profoundly handicapped may also have physical disabilities and always need help from other people. But in almost every other respect people with learning disabilities are **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE.**

In the distant past, the community, often found it easy to treat people with learning disabilities just like other people. Life was slower and less demanding and there may have been a place for all, whatever their abilities. But in the 1800s, the pace of change grew and society suddenly became much more complicated. It was then that people with learning disabilities became vulnerable. Suddenly society seemed to see only, that small part of people which was different, and almost lost sight of the fact that, in most important respects people with learning disabilities are **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE.**

At this time the first services for people with learning disabilities began to develop - a kind of residential care which tried to shelter people from the complexities of this new Industrial society. And perhaps this new "sophisticated" society didn't want to cope with people who couldn't adapt quickly to rapid changes in everyday life. Large hospitals were founded, usually outside the city boundaries, where people were given basic custodial care when their families could no longer look after them. The majority, of children and adults continued to be cared for by their families and this is still the case today. Later, it was recognised that children and adults with learning disabilities should have access to education and training but these services were also set up in a way which continued to segregate them from other people. Unfortunately, in shielding people with learning disabilities, the rest of the community was prevented from knowing about them and seeing them as real people with real needs. That's why we need to remember that people with learning disabilities are essentially **JUST LIKE US.**

JUST LIKE US they need **OPPORTUNITIES**. We need to recognise that people with learning disabilities can accomplish many things and that they should get the chance to do so. We need to stop looking at what they can't do and start looking at what they can do. This can include providing education appropriate to their needs, and allowing them to develop their abilities as much as possible. For some that may mean being educated separately in Special Schools because their needs are so specific, for many it means that they need the opportunity to receive their education in ordinary schools with other children, but with special provision for their special needs. Slowly services are changing and acknowledging that people with learning disabilities have the right to positive expectations about their future. If they, are given the right opportunities people with learning disabilities can achieve a great deal. **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE.**

People with learning disabilities need **EMPLOYMENT**. It's a normal thing to want a job. For many of us, finding a job can be difficult and few of us get the job that we really want. But a job of some sort is important, not just because of the income, but because a job gives you self-confidence and status in other people's eyes. It identifies you as a person who is able to support yourself or who is making a contribution to society rather than depending upon it. Although the job opportunities for people with learning disabilities maybe few, jobs can be provided through special schemes, or sometimes just by employers and other workers accepting that people with learning disabilities have something to contribute too. People with learning disabilities need real jobs, **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE.**

People with learning disabilities need to be able to make **CHOICES**. For people who are severely handicapped, the available choices may be very limited, but that doesn't make them less important. Sometimes other people restrict the choices open to people with learning disabilities "for their own good" or make decisions for them. But we all like to choose what we do and when we do it, what and when we eat, what to wear, where we buy our clothes, how we spend our leisure time, where we live, who our friends are: in many other ways, we like to choose how we live our lives. We all accept that sometimes our choices may be restricted by money, by our jobs, or by other circumstances, but for all of us what matters is that we can make some decisions about what happens in our lives. People with learning disabilities need to be able to have real choices, **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE**

People with learning disabilities want **A HOME OF THEIR OWN**. Home is an important place in everyone's life. It's where we feel we belong, where we should be able to relax and be ourselves, where have a space of our own - perhaps our own room, where we can have our own belongings around us, where we can have some privacy. The majority of people with learning disabilities live at home with their families but many adults still live in long-stay institutions. We now believe that adults with learning disabilities should have the right to the same kind of lifestyle as other people. Most of us leave

the parental home as soon as we are old or able enough. Perhaps we might leave to get married, share a flat with friends, live in a bedsit, buy our own home, move into a student residence, or take up a council tenancy. It is a sign of our adulthood and independence. For many adults this will still mean sharing a home with others but usually with a small group of people whom we trust and like, and where everyone has an equal say in the running of the home and a reasonable expectation of enjoying most of the features of home life mentioned above. How many of us would like to share our home with hundreds of other people where we had little privacy, and severely restricted choices about meals, clothes, baths and all the other activities we associate with home? That's why long-stay hospitals are slowly being closed down and why people with learning disabilities want to live in an ordinary home, in an ordinary community, **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE.**

People with learning disabilities need **FRIENDS**. Few of us like doing things by ourselves all the time. We all need friends with whom we can talk and laugh, and share feelings and events. And one of the interesting things about life is that sometimes our friends are like us and sometimes they are not. Friends can be fat or thin, rich or less well-off, cheerful or grumpy, tall or short, clever or not so bright, old or young. We don't always want to spend time with people who think the same way or like the things that we do. Sometimes we're attracted to people just because they're different from us and add something to our lives. We might have some best friends whom we've known for a long time or we may have just recently met someone and made friends with them. People with learning disabilities will often have difficulty in making new friends. This is partly because they don't always get the chance to meet new people, especially people outside their family circle who don't have learning disabilities, but also because making friends is a skill which can be hard for those with a learning difficulty. Interest Link exists to help find friends for them, because people with learning disabilities need to be able to offer and receive friendship. **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE.**

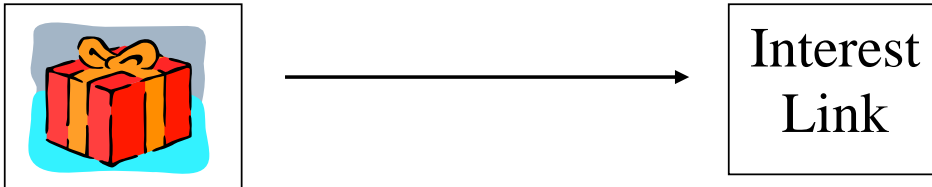
People with learning disabilities want to **SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES**. This isn't always obvious because sometimes people have practical difficulties in speaking and communication with others: More often it's because their opinions are dismissed by professionals or by others who think that they know best. However, even those with the most severe handicaps are capable of expressing themselves in some way and of letting us know what they want. Perhaps the challenge is not for people with learning disabilities to speak for themselves but rather for us to listen to them. People with learning disabilities have a voice that wants to be heard, **JUST LIKE OTHER PEOPLE**

Acknowledgements: ENABLE

The Role of Volunteers

1. Volunteering – A Gift or An Exchange?

When someone volunteers they offer themselves – which often makes it seem like a one way process:



Although the “gift” element in volunteering is important, each volunteer also needs something from the agency.

An ideal solution is when the “offers” and “needs” match.

| | Volunteer | | Interest Link | |
|---------------|---|---|--|---------------|
| Offers | Time Experience Skills Qualities Attitudes | → | Tasks done -in a particular way -to a particular standard | Needs |
| Needs | Job Satisfaction Support Fulfilment Motivation | ← | Clearly defined work Information Support Response to motivation | Offers |

Acknowledgements: Marilyn Thomas, The Volunteer Centre UK

2. Volunteer "Job Description"

Introduction

Volunteers are linked to an adult with a learning disability. You are linked to one person only and will normally meet them weekly, or fortnightly. This can be for a few hours in the afternoon or evening or longer, depending on the availability of both of you and what you like to spend your time together doing. It might be that you make a regular arrangement on the same day each week, or the time and day may vary from meeting to meeting.

What you do

The main focus of a volunteer's involvement is to establish a friendly and supportive relationship with the person to whom they are matched. This can involve a wide range of ordinary or exciting activities, but can just as helpfully mean spending time together at the person's home, or going for a walk.

Volunteers might do some of the following with their link,

- go swimming
- walk up the Eildons
- watch a film at the cinema
- go shopping together
- visit an art gallery
- have a cup of tea and a chat
- go for a picnic to the seaside
- make a meal together

What you need

Although not exhaustive, the following attributes are important

- An ability to "be yourself" in this role.
- An ability to make a good relationship with the person.
- An ability to work sensitively with their parents/carers.
- An ability to use ordinary places and activities and not places "specially" for people with learning difficulties.
- A commitment to use support and supervision with the branch co-ordinator.
- To have a few hours free at least once a fortnight either in the evening or during the day.

Acknowledgements: FRENZ

Volunteer training, support and supervision

This topic is covered in depth in the Policies section of this pack:

- ◆ Training & Development Policy
- ◆ Volunteer Policy
- ◆ Volunteer Support & Supervision Policy

1. Training

a. General aims:

- ◆ Training ensures that volunteers know the importance of treating service users as normal people, of being reliable, committed, patient and practical and of anticipating and avoiding physical or emotional situations which might distress a service user.
- ◆ Volunteers must also be sensitive to the particular circumstances and needs of the person they are linked to and be able to minimise the effect of these in the activities done and in the relationship.
- ◆ However, it must not be forgotten that the most important thing volunteers bring to the befriending relationship is their own character and interests: if volunteers are overtrained or too regimented then “normal” relationships with service users could be difficult to form.

b. Areas covered by training

General training covers:

- a. The values and aims of the project and what it tries to achieve
- b. How the service works,
- c. Disability awareness: what causes learning disability, the problems it creates for those affected by it, the experiences of life they will have had and the unmet needs that the project tries to address
- d. Listening and communication skills
- e. Boundaries
- f. Confidentiality
- g. Support & Supervision
- h. Health & Safety

Interest Link also offers training in First Aid , epilepsy awareness and moving and handling awareness.

c. Delivery of training

- ◆ One-to-one training from a Branch Co-ordinator
- ◆ Group sessions
- ◆ This Volunteer Pack

2. Supervision and Support

Volunteers with Interest Link take on a high degree of responsibility: taking a service user out on their own into situations that may be new for both of them. They need to know that support from the project or from carers is readily accessible. To this end the co-ordinator is always available for volunteers to ring and emphasis is also placed on developing the volunteer/carer relationship.

In addition,

- The Branch Co-ordinator will keep in close contact with you during the first few weeks of a link to ensure it is running smoothly.
- The Branch Co-ordinator will arrange a meeting with you every four months to check that you are happy in the link, see if the link can be developed in any way and ask if there is any training you would like.
- There will be ongoing training & social events for volunteers
- Volunteers can include comments and problems on their monthly expenses form.

Feedback quotes from service users, carers and volunteers

(Taken from an independent evaluation)

Everyone Needs A Pal - The Clients' Perspective

Magic

That is how one Interest Link service user describes the service he receives.

It's not good - it's brilliant, it's superb...

is how another service user sees it.

Interest Link service users without exception are very positive about Interest Link and about their volunteers.

My volunteer has helped me with a lot of things...he's a pal...everyone needs a pal.

Some service users particularly value the extended contacts their volunteer brings.

I've met my volunteer's family, too.

Others, perhaps less outgoing by nature, are quite happy just to have their volunteer as a new contact in their lives. For two service users their Interest Link volunteer is actually the **only** regular connection to any kind of social life outside that provided by their immediate family.

I don't go out any other night of the week, only with my volunteer.

Interest Link service users enjoy their time with their volunteers: that enjoyment is often due to the new experiences that having a volunteer opens up for them as well as to the enriching of their self esteem through the development of new relationships.

I wouldn't have gone to Berwick (a market town about twelve miles from this client's home) without my volunteer.

I like my volunteer a lot...he's very cheery.

I'm getting on very well with my volunteer. When we go out he buys me a drink and now I buy him one, too.

The real value of volunteers to service users is perhaps best captured in the words of a service user whose volunteer (whom he had known for some time) had indirectly helped him a lot in coming to terms with the loss of his mother.

I feel as if my volunteer is part of my life as well.

From The Outside World - The Volunteers' Perspective

Interest Link volunteers, both past and current, believe they get as much out of their volunteering as their Interest Link service users do.

It's given a structure to my week...I'd been looking for things to do and it's introduced me to new people.

Their self esteem has improved, too.

It makes me feel good. It gives me the chance to make a difference.

One ex volunteer has only given up because he has got a full time job, largely as a result of his Interest Link volunteering. He was particularly positive about the difference Interest Link made to his life.

It has been very beneficial for me.

One volunteer's sense of the social difference between his life and the life of his service user was particularly telling.

We're from the outside world.

Another volunteer talked of his initial uncertainty and difficulty *finding a way in* to his service user, a difficulty that with the co-ordinator's support, he was able to overcome.

The practical and ever ready support of the Interest Link co-ordinator is much appreciated. Volunteers welcome his regular checks with them on the progress of the link and feel that the organisation is very well run.

I knew he (the co-ordinator) was always there when I wanted him....I think it is run perfectly...there are no loopholes.

They particularly appreciate the Interest Link system where the co-ordinator introduces them personally into the homes of their links.

It helps a lot to know the carer/parent as well...it shares the responsibility ...and it's nice to know you are trusted.

It is also true that volunteers are finding that their social networks have extended (in rather the same way as service users) as a result of their Interest Link work. They are very keen on the training events so far organised and interested in attending more of these. One male volunteer finds his link has now become linked with his social network. He is club secretary of a group which meets every two weeks and his Interest Link service user comes with him.

..it's the common interest that's the thing...

Giving Us All A Bit Of A Shake - The Family And Carer Perspective

Interest Link service users are either still living at home with parents/brothers and sisters or they are living in supported residential accommodation with varying degrees of independence. Interest Link makes a difference to the lives of clients' families and carers as well as to the lives of service users. One mother speaking about her daughter

She can go out with someone completely different now...before it was just me...now she has new ordinary folk to be with and she can get away from me for a bit...

Another parent feels

I am getting too old to do the things my son is interested in.

And another

It makes me feel happier that my son is doing something different now. I feel less guilty. I know he is really interested in this activity but I never was...now the volunteer does it with him and it has taken the guilt away..

The total dependence on the family for social life is lessened.

Before the Interest Link volunteer came along, my sons could not go out in the evening unless I took them. There's no public transport at that time and you have only yourself and your car to rely on.

Interest Link volunteers are good for the mental health of families and carers who see Interest Link activities and outings as

breaking the routine...that's good for us...it gives us all a bit of a shake.

Parents and carers see differences in the self esteem of their sons and daughters and those they care for, too.

They come out with a lot more now...they hear what's happening in the town and bring the news back to us...which makes a change.

Several parents and carers can see the difference meeting not just a volunteer but also the volunteer's family makes..

especially when there's contact with children because they don't really have that contact any other way.

Parents and carers recognise the extent of a volunteer's commitment, too.

It's a big commitment for them after all.....

Interest Link Borders Core Volunteer Training Materials

It was this and not any concerns about volunteers that worried them. The only anxiety that parents/carers have is that the volunteer might for very understandable reasons stop coming.

I hope it will go on and that folk won't let them down...a lot of things have started for them in the past and then fizzled out...

With that anxiety aside, parents have no other worries about Interest Link. They have every confidence in the organisation, its system for registering volunteers, its procedures for matching volunteers to service users, always introducing them to the family first. For many of them their son/daughter first heard of Interest Link via a professional worker already known to and trusted by the family so that, no doubt, minimises any possible concerns. They were especially confident in the co-ordinator.

The views of professional carers

Staff working in residential accommodation who have by law a duty to care for all their residents are particularly impressed by the Interest Link co-ordinator's procedures for volunteer screening and matching and support. The co-ordinator introduces Interest Link volunteers being matched with service users living in supported accommodation to the clients' key workers, in the same way that he introduces by home visits volunteers to parents of service users living at home. After that initial introduction Interest Link works to the principle that the Interest Link volunteer is for that particular service user not that particular residential unit.

It's their own volunteer...especially for them...that's really important for people living in residential accommodation like this.

This key worker also feels very positive about the benefit to male residents of male volunteers.

So many of us working in this field are female..

She feels too that there is a distinct gender difference in the way volunteers approach their volunteering - men being happier to do something active and specific, a shared and well defined activity like going to the gym or going to the accordion club while women prefer

to go with the flow, be more flexible and varied in what they do

For those working with Interest Link service users with more profound difficulties there were some concerns that are dealt with in the final section of this report.

Communicating & Listening

Many of us in a variety of roles or life experiences will come into contact with people with learning disabilities

Not all of us are experts or claim to know everything about how people with learning disabilities think and how they reason, communicate, learn and utilise language.

As adults, there are many hidden messages in what we say to each other. Sometimes our body stance, actions, or facial expressions can mask what we are actually trying to say.

We often use humour to hide from embarrassment or criticism; as a result, the messages we give out are not the messages which are being received.

e.g. "that's really good work, for you"

Does the person interpret that to mean

"I'm really impressed by your work" or

"I really did not expect much from you, you've done better than I thought you would" ?

By encouraging people with learning disabilities to give clear messages and to question ambiguity (what they are not sure of, doubt and uncertainty), we can reduce the confusion and hurt that may be caused unnecessarily as well as lack of understanding.

Language

We all use language in different ways.

The people that you are going to be working with may have limited vocabulary.

- There is a need for clear communication - watch and listen.
- The language you use should take into consideration the age and ability of the young disabled adult.
- When offering choice or guidance, do not give too much information at the one time.
- Do not presume or take for granted that you will immediately know and understand what young people mean when they use certain words and language or that the young person understands or knows what you mean.

All people with learning disabilities are not the same. What they experience, their environment and social upbringing shapes their language use and understanding.

How do we communicate?

The face and body, not the voice is the major organ of communication. Only a fraction of the Brain is dedicated to verbal communication. The vast majority of communication with other people is non-verbal.

A large percentage of what we pick up from other people focuses (without us being aware of it) on non-verbal signals:

- Eye movements
- Facial gestures/expressions
- Tone of the voice
- Speed of response to a question
- The move of a hand (e.g. speak to the hand not the face)
- Tip of the head, etc
- Silence

As one part of the brain processes the words, the other areas are processing and responding to all the non-verbal actions and signals that accompany the words.

Non-verbal communication dominates our lives, words will fail us if they are ALL that we use to communicate: they are a complement to our non-verbal actions.

Putting meaning into words

- Most effective communication involves verbal and non-verbal combinations of words and matching actions.
- Facial expressions are the most important form of communication, when the words do not match the expressions, trust the expression!
- To really communicate, use your eyes, smile, touch (if appropriate), watch the tone of your voice and be consistent in your actions.
- Eye contact is important, but remember that it can make some people feel very uncomfortable. If you can make eye contact it will add meaning to what you say.

Tips

Be yourself

Take it slowly; be aware of what messages that you are sending out
Listen to what they are saying

Credits: Jackie Dougall, Leap Project, Ayrshire Central Hospital

Active listening: do's & don'ts

DO

- ✓ respond to the service user, by nodding, making eye contact and showing that you are interested
- ✓ express empathy
- ✓ be aware of the service user's body language
- ✓ say if you don't understand
- ✓ use your own words to repeat back to the person what you think you have heard, to check if you have understood them [or to show that you have]
- ✓ allow the service user to finish what they are saying
- ✓ let silences happen, as they are a natural part of communicating
- ✓ accept that it's OK to have a different opinion, but don't force your opinion onto the service user
- ✓ try and keep focused on what is being talked about

DON'T

- ◆ interrupt the service user, or finish their sentences
- ◆ look distracted or continually stare at the service user
- ◆ be judgmental
- ◆ feel that you have to give advice or solutions to problems
- ◆ get into arguments over what is being said
- ◆ use the time to sort out your own problems, past or present

Active listening: key skills

- **Reflecting:** both meanings and feelings
- **Paraphrasing (interpreting):** do this occasionally to describe the meanings and feelings you perceive. The service user will correct you if you are wrong.
- **Summarising:** the ability to summarise the service user's feelings and concerns from their perspective
- **Good questioning:** use of prompts, open ended questions, and probing where necessary

Using open questions

Open questions have the following characteristics:

- They ask the respondent to think and reflect.
- They will give you *opinions* and *feelings*.
- They hand control of the conversation to the respondent.

| Usage | Example |
|--|--|
| As a follow-on from closed questions, to develop a conversation and open up someone who is rather quiet. | <i>What did you do on you holidays?</i> <i>How do you keep focused on your work?</i> |
| To find out more about a person, their wants, needs, problems, and so on. | <i>What's keeping you awake these days?</i> <i>Why is that so important to you?</i> |
| To get them to feel good about you by asking after their health or otherwise demonstrating human concern about them. | <i>How have you been after your operation?</i> <i>You're looking down. What's up?</i> |

A closed question can be answered with either 'yes' or 'no'

Using closed questions

Closed questions have the following characteristics:

- They give you *facts*.
- They are easy to answer.
- They are quick to answer.
- They keep control of the conversation with the questioner.

Interest Link Borders Core Volunteer Training Materials

This makes closed questions useful in the following situations:

| Usage | Example |
|---|--|
| As opening questions in a conversation, as it makes it easy for the other person to answer, and doesn't force them to reveal too much about themselves. | <i>It's great weather, isn't it?</i> <i>Where do you live?</i> <i>What time is it?</i> |
| For testing their understanding (asking yes/no questions). This is also a great way to break into a long ramble. | <i>So, you want to move into our apartment, with your own bedroom and bathroom?</i> |

- Allowing **silences**
- Creating a safe, friendly, unthreatening **environment**
- Building **rapport**
- Maintaining good **eye contact**
- **Congruent body language:** i.e. the way you look is consistent with what you are doing
- **Empathy:** tuning into what the service user is feeling and having some understanding from their point of view