EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

AGE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

SUBMISSION FROM PEOPLE FIRST (SCOTLAND)

Social Isolation impacts

As people with a Learning Disability we experience social isolation in our lives due to being treated as “Different” from our childhood throughout our young and adult lives then into old age.

If a child does not go to the local school and instead attends a “special” school they do not have the opportunity to develop friendships within their local area, they do not walk to school with their classmates or meet up with them at the park after school.

That child does not join local sports teams because they get home from school at different times and miss the training sessions or do not hear about the team in the first place due to inaccessible information and other barriers to communication.

This segregation and negative societal view has been shown to lead to even greater isolation and reluctance to participate in community due to the well-founded fear of falling victim to hate incidents and crimes which can cause people to avoid leaving their homes.

Going to the local pub with a support worker not a friend isolates people, having to leave events at certain times to get back for your support worker to finish shift isolates people. Not going to college courses which are mainstream isolates people, not having paid employment prevents the development of working and social relationships and isolates people.

Not understanding the information sent from your child’s school about a parent’s evening or meeting and missing it isolates people.

The following statements and comments were gathered from members of local People First groups within Lothian.

Things that make me feel isolated

- Being in hospital and having no visitors
- Losing someone I love
- People I live with going out and leaving me on my own.
- When staff don’t have time to talk to me
- When staff leave and I have to get used to new staff
- When I was diagnosed with a serious illness. Having someone to share this with is important.
Things that make me feel included and valued

- Being a member of People First and meeting my friends at meetings and representing People First at meetings.
- Celebrating big events with family and friends.
- Spending time at work
- Going out with friends
- Taking care of other people#
- People taking care of me
- Having my own house
- Going to my club
- Feeling wanted, welcome and needed.

If you are a wheelchair user you can’t always go out on your own. Some people need two people to go out. If they are not available then that person may not be able to go out.

Some of our members have no-one to talk to when they have a problem.

Sometimes it is hard to get someone to come with you to medical appointments. It can feel lonely going on your own and sometimes you don’t understand what is being said.

Sometimes staff are too busy to do things with members. They say ‘yes, I will speak to you in a minute’ but they don’t always do so.

Not having a partner can feel lonely.

Not having someone to share bills with can be hard.

Some members felt that it was hard dealing with medication and medical issues. It is easier if you have someone to share this with.

One member feels lonely where he is living. He would like to see his family more.

One member said it is hard when you lose a flat mate.

The comments above were gathered from groups of People First (Scotland) members who vary in age and other characteristics but who all have a Learning Disability.

These stark differences in our lives illustrate real and significant isolation when compared to the experience of the rest of society.

Our common reliance on benefit as our only income, low employment rate, limited access to mainstream schooling and then further education, poorer health, lower life expectancy and the lack of opportunity to develop unpaid relationships are
documented in many reports and strategies. All illustrating our isolation, in younger age, older age and throughout life.

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