Communication Strategy
Adults with Learning Disabilities
## Communication Strategy – Adults with Learning Disabilities

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| Where to get a copy | Communication Plan Project Officer  
St George’s Industrial Estate  
White Hart Lane  
Wood Green N22 5QL |

| Related Documents | Haringey Council-Corporate  
Communications Handbook Booklet 9  
Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust |

| Author Further Information | Communication Plan Project |
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1 **Background**

1.1 **Introduction**
How we communicate with people with Learning Disabilities is probably the most important factor in how we as a local authority provide information and services to one of the most marginalised groups in our community.

In addition, since the publication of the government’s white paper, “Valuing People” there has been an expectation that organisations working with people with learning disabilities develop policies to improve communication.

Although there has been some attempts to improve how the council communicates with people with learning disabilities in some service settings there has not been a consistent whole council approach.

The policy and guidelines propose a number of recommendations in relation to the use of symbols and photographs, style of language and developing individual plans.

1.2 **Aim**
The aim of this specific communication strategy is to act as addition to the on going development of the authorities communication policy and to ensure it also meets the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

It will do this by extending the Person Centred Planning approach already adopted by the authorities specialist services by supporting expertise and knowledge in communication.

1.3 **Approach**
Through the community strategy, the council aims to improve the life of local people by ensuring that it works on its priorities to improve services in addition to its commitment to respect and celebrate diversity and being inclusive and open.

The purpose of this strategy, through the use of a Person Centred Planning approach,

- Focus first on listening to the person to find out what they want to do and what their aspirations are and how they want these fulfilled;
- Engage with individuals and with those who know them well, those whose job it is to support them and those who arrange fund the support to achieve this through planning together;
• Put plans into practice by organising how people receive support into their everyday live;
• Ensure that we check ourselves to see if we are doing it right – review.
• Ensure that this is a whole council approach

This strategy focuses on the listening aspect of the way we work, and to further develop our Person Centred approach to providing support to Haringey residents with a learning disability.

The underlying assumption is this:
To listen to people, we have to know how each person communicates, and be able to communicate with them. In many cases this is already happening. Where we don’t know this, we have to find out and bring about practices that help us identify how someone communicates and that help us communicate with them, and embed this into service and organisational systems.

Effective communication is therefore a gateway to our providing the desired and required support, which also needs to be maintained. Continuous support means continuous listening and engagement with service users and their allies. The graphic below illustrates the main Person Centred Approaches we need to use to support people.
1.4 What do we want to achieve
A structured and planned promise to support and improve people’s communication, in their lives, in the organisation, so that they can exercise rights, make choices and have control of their lives.

Embed communication in service structures, in organisational structures, and enable Haringey Council to become a better listening organisation to meet the needs of Haringey residents with a learning disability.

1.5 Why do it?
The assumption is that it would be very beneficial to the people we support as a whole, and those who support them, and not doing it would have the adverse effect of making things harder for all. However more specifically:

Benefits:
- Central role of communication in people’s lives.
- It will enable AS and PCP to be delivered more effectively
- It will ensure support and systems are informed by service users
- Focuses people’s work (organisation)
- Substantial increase in our listening
- Avoids the assumption that it happens
- Provides a way of doing things in practice.
- Tells service users, families, funders and staff that we are committed to driving and maintaining communication with individuals as a fundamental aspect of our work.
- It will give people opportunities to participate
- It will make it someone’s job to be looking for improvements
- Ensuring that gains are maintained
- It will help create a more enabling organisational culture.

Drawbacks – if we don’t do it:
- Communication can easily slide off the table efforts by the organisation, pre and during Project Include can get lost.
- Service users and staff having unmet expectations.
- Service users will miss out opportunities
- Communication could show increasingly as ‘challenging behaviour’
- People and their aspirations will not be listened to
- We will not fulfil our aspiration to
- Risk of staff working under their own assumptions about people, resulting in inappropriate support
- Give in to service pressures
- Lack of consistency, fragmented approaches not corporate
- The community would miss out enrichment by service users and not have this as part of our growing and learning.
- Staff skills might will not be upkept
- Isolation for service users and staff
1.6 Implications
The task of this strategy is to link the identified requirements into existing systems (for example as part of service plans) and create systems that work.

The implications are as follows:

Press and publicity – Ensure that all publicity that is targeted to Residents with a learning disability follows the agreed guidelines. Ensure that an effort is made to ensure that all council’s documents can be made accessible if required.

Customer Service / Reception – To ensure staff understand the differing needs of residents with a learning disability and are trained to meet their needs.

Staff working in LD Services – Ensure they make all information accessible through the use of Person Centred Planning

Commissioners – That all contacts (not just specialist LD Services) place a requirement on contracts to adopt this approach

1.7 Development and monitoring
It is proposed that an implementation / monitoring group should be setup to ensure that these guidelines are fully implemented.
2 Definitions

2.1 Definition of a learning disability

Learning disability includes the presence of:

- A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with;
- A reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning);
- Which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development.

This definition encompasses people with a broad range of disabilities. The presence of a low intelligence quotient, for example an IQ below 70, is not, of itself, a sufficient reason for deciding whether an individual should be provided with additional health and social care support. ‘Valuing People’ is based on the premise that people with learning disabilities are people first. We focus throughout on what people can do, with support where necessary, rather than on what they cannot do (‘Valuing People’ 2001:14-15)

2.2 Learning Disabilities – facts and figures

- According to ‘Valuing People’ (DoH, 2001) at a national level it is estimated that there are about 210,000 people with severe and profound learning disabilities of which around 65,000 children and young people; 120,000 adults of working age and 25,000 older people. In the case of people with mild/moderate learning disabilities, lower estimates suggest a prevalence rate of around 25 per 1000 population – some 1.2 million people in England.
- In Haringey there are 1,000 people with a learning disability that are known to our services. It is felt that there are approximately another 4,000 with some level of learning disability.
- People with a learning disability can find it difficult to understand new or complex information.
- People with a learning disability learn new skills in different ways.
- People with a learning disability need support to be independent.
- 3 out of 10 people with a learning disability have a visual impairment.
- 4 out of 10 people with a learning disability have a hearing impairment.
- 3 out of 10 people with a learning disability need support when moving around.
- People with a learning disability need support when reading and writing.
- People with a learning disability need support to understand abstract concepts such as time, colour or numbers.
- People with a learning disability need support to understand and produce speech.
2.3 Respecting everyone

- All people communicate and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at all times.
- Haringey Council and TPCT work to give everyone the same quality of service.
- We are committed to eliminating discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin or race, gender, HIV status, marital status, religious belief, responsibility for dependants, sexuality or unrelated criminal conviction.

3 Policy Statement

Communication is about sharing information, ideas, thoughts and feelings with others. We can communicate by speaking, writing, moving our body or using other signals. We can communicate by using pictures, symbols or objects of reference.

There is a need to communicate in a way that everyone understands. It is therefore evident that we need to communicate in a way that people with learning disabilities can understand as well.

Communication underpins everything we do and is part of our development.

4 The Legal Context

4.1 Valuing People 2001

There are four key principles at the heart of the Government’s proposals in Valuing People: Legal and Civil Rights, Independence, Choice and Inclusion.

The government states that ‘people with learning disabilities currently have little control over their lives, though almost all, including the most severely disabled, are capable of making choices and expressing their views and preferences’ (Valuing People 2001: 44).

‘Valuing People’ (2001: 44) highlights that one of the problems is that within services it is not observed ‘enough effort to communicate with people with learning disabilities in accessible ways’. Also, it continues, that ‘one of the challenges for public services is to find ways to give people with learning disabilities more control over their lives’. One proposed way is through ‘improving information and communication with people with learning disabilities’ (Valuing People 2001: 45).
The government expects organisations working with people with learning disabilities to develop communication policies.

4.2 The Disability Discrimination Act

Under S.21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, since October 1999 service providers have had to consider making “reasonable adjustments” to the way they deliver their services so that disabled people can use them. Making “reasonable adjustments” includes providing a supporting aid or service, which would enable disabled people to use a service; for example, putting information into an accessible format. National Minimum Standards for Care Homes brought in under the Care Standards Act 2000, and Regulations under that Act, require organisations working with people with a learning disability to communicate in their preferred method of communication and to produce documents in a format that people can understand.

5 The Purpose of this Strategy

- To ensure effective and functional communication with people with a learning disability is at the centre of all the Council’s policies and practices.
- To ensure that everyone in Haringey involved with people with a learning disability will use the person’s preferred means of communication.
- To ensure that all information will be in an accessible format for people with learning disabilities.
- To ensure that the Translation and Interpretation Unit of the Corporate Communication Department offers the option of documents being produced in an accessible format for people with learning disabilities and for this option to be on the language panel of all Council documents.
- To identify standards for staff training and support and to ensure that staff from all services and agencies with direct or indirect contact with people with learning disabilities will have training on Communication.
- To set standards for effective communication environments for people with learning disabilities within all areas of the Council and TPCT
- To establish a resource library with Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ACC) resources (e.g. photos, symbols, objects of reference) available to anyone in Haringey.
- To define and agree areas of responsibility.
- To agree recording, monitoring, evaluation and success criteria for communicating with people with learning disabilities.
- To make plans and take steps to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ when communicating with people with learning disabilities in using their preferred means of communication.
• To give access to a wider range of communication means to people with learning disabilities.

6 Procedures

6.1 Face to face communication
• To facilitate and actively reinforce the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication systems (e.g. Makaton signs, symbols, photos) when people with learning disabilities use little or no speech.

• Makaton is an internationally recognised communication programme, used in more than 40 countries worldwide. Makaton uses speech together with a sign (gesture) and/ or a symbol (picture), suitable facial expression, eye contact and body language. Only key words are signed alongside everyday speech.

6.2 Written communication
Written communication needs to be in an 'easy to read' format.

The question of whether text is ‘easy to read and understand’ depends very much on the abilities and experience of the reader. Some people can read long documents others will find it difficult.

The concept of ‘easy to read’ cannot be universal and it will not be possible to write in a way that everybody understands. However, easy to read material is generally characterised by:

• The use of a simple, straightforward language
• The avoidance of technical language, abbreviations and initials
• A clear and logical structure
• Use of certain fonts and size
• Use of symbols and pictures

6.3 Information technology / resource requirements
• The implementation of the proposed policy and guidelines requires the use of Non Standard Software Applications that provide users access to a range of photos and symbols.

• It is agreed that in order to facilitate effective communication with people with learning disabilities there is a need for a range of different Non Standard Software Applications enabling users to choose the best possible image/picture on each occasion. We agree to use:
  A. Photosymbols: a set of 1500 images, featuring models of people with learning disabilities. Photosymbols are
designed for people who find words hard to read. They are clear photos.

B. **CHANGE Picture Bank**: a bank of pictures for everyday life. They were developed by people with learning disabilities who change hard words into easy words through line drawings.

C. **Writing with symbols 2000**: computer application where you type the text and symbols pop up. This application includes Makaton signs and symbols as well as Rhebus symbols and Picture Communication Symbols.

7 **Training**

It is being recognised that communicating with people with learning disabilities needs specific skills.

7.1 **Target groups**

- All people who work directly with people with a learning disability
  - Learning disability staff
- All people who have contact with people with a learning disability
  - Corporate communication unit
  - Reception staff
  - Call centre staff
  - Customer services centres
  - Complaint and feedback services
  - General Practitioners’ Centres
  - Hospital staff
  - Health Professionals
  - Education services
  - Staff supporting students with a learning disability

7.2 **Types of training**

The Training Programme will include:

**Communication Awareness Training** – a one day course designed as an introduction to communicating with people with learning disabilities.
It includes the history of people with learning disabilities, what communication is, why and how we communicate, the role of feedback (verbal/non verbal), why a person with a learning disability may have communication difficulties, what the participant can do to improve communication.

The trainers utilize role plays, communication activities, as well as more formal presentation styles in order to deliver this training.

**Advanced Communication Training** – this two day course is designed for those working with people with complex needs, with those who exhibit behaviours that challenge services, and for those who wish to become communication ‘champions’ or facilitators.

Communication ‘Champions’ will take the lead on communication in their work place. They will be given ongoing support from the Speech and Language Therapy Service for Adults with Learning Disabilities.

The course will include the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems, such as symbols signing, objects of reference, use of photographs.

There is a component on communication and behaviour that challenges services, highlighting the role of communication in those who present with challenging behaviour.

In addition there will be a focus on how to implement communication plans in the working environment, such as how to create communication passports, visual timetables, Makaton signing etc.

**Accessible Information Training** - This is a one day course for all staff that want to learn how they can make different documents more accessible for people with learning disabilities. It will include looking at the language used and how pictorial representations can help facilitate the reader's understanding.

**d) Makaton Signing Training;**

This is a two-day course for all staff that work with people with learning disabilities whose preferred means of communication is not speech. It is delivered by a qualified Makaton tutor.

Makaton is a unique language programme offering a structured, multi-modal approach for the teaching of communication, language and literacy skills for people with communication and learning difficulties.
It leads to a nationally (internationally) recognised certificate.

8 Monitoring

The following people will monitor the delivery of the Communication Plan:

- Head of Haringey Learning Disabilities Partnership
- Head of Corporate Communication Unit
- Head of Haringey Speech and Language Therapy Service
- Speech and Language Therapy co-ordinator of Haringey Learning Disabilities Partnership
- Manager of Translation and Interpretation Unit
- Director of Communication of Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust

9 Bibliography


Camden Teaching Primary Care Trust and Camden Council (2004) Getting the message across, the Camden Learning Disabilities Service communication plan.

International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap (ILSMH) European Association (1998) Make it Simple, European Guidelines for the Production of Easy – to – Read Information for People with Learning Disability, for authors, editors, information providers, translators and other interested persons.


Royal National Institute of the Blind: www.rnib.org.uk/access/ visited on 11/10/05

Appendix 1 - Guidelines