

# Rights and Responsibilities

Fair Treatment for Adults with Learning Disabilities



**April 2008**

*Jennifer Lerpiniere and Kirsten Stalker*

Applied Educational Research Centre, Crawford Building,  
University of Strathclyde, 76 Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1PP



University of  
**Strathclyde**  
Education



# The aims of the study

We wanted to find out if the **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)** had helped **service providers** to treat people with learning disabilities fairly.

The **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)** is a law that makes it illegal for disabled people to be treated unfairly.



**Service Providers** are places such as supermarkets, cafes and museums where people go to get something or do something.

To find out about this we talked to:

- ✓ People with Learning Disabilities
- ✓ Carers of People with Multiple Disabilities
- ✓ Disability Organisations, like the Disability Rights Commission
- ✓ Service Providers



We asked them:

- ✓ what they knew about the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)
- ✓ what they knew about **disability discrimination**
- ✓ whether people with learning disabilities were treated the same as everyone else

**Disability discrimination** means treating someone unfairly because they have a disability.



# What we found out

## What people knew about the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)

Most people with learning disabilities had heard of the Disability Discrimination Act but **few knew much** about it. Carers seemed to **know even less** about the Act. They didn't have time to find out about it because they were so busy looking after their sons or daughters.



Some people with learning disabilities knew the Act was about **promoting rights** and **equality** for disabled people. Disability organisations told us it was about **treating people fairly** and **including them**. Some service providers thought it was to help people have the **same access** to their service as everyone else.



Some carers and most service providers thought the Act was mostly about improving access to buildings and public places – more for wheelchair users than people with learning disabilities. Not all service providers knew it was about treating people fairly in other ways too, like printing a menu in big letters.

A few service providers knew a lot about the Disability Discrimination Act. One of these was a bowling alley who welcomed customers with learning disabilities. They helped people to count scores and find the right bowling balls.



# What people knew about 'discrimination'

Some people with learning disabilities did not know the word discrimination. Others said it meant **being unfair** to disabled people and **not treating people with respect**.



Disability organisations thought that a good service provider would **welcome people** and **ask them to join in activities**. A good service provider would **give out information without waiting to be asked**.

People with learning disabilities from a black and minority ethnic background face '**double discrimination**'. This is when people experience **racial discrimination** and **disability discrimination**.



Not very many service providers knew a lot about discrimination. Only a very few understood it was about people **not being included in society**. They tried to make things fair by **listening to what people wanted** and **doing what they suggested**. A museum told us that they set up tours by discussing with people what they would like to know or do when they visit.

Service providers knew it was **unfair to be rude** to people and to **prevent people from doing something**. A few knew about using **big writing**, though they said they didn't always use big writing.

Almost all the service providers would have to **work hard to make their service welcoming to people with learning disabilities**.



# Are people with learning disabilities fairly treated?

On the whole, people found that staff in places like shops and sports centres **treated them quite well**. For example, people told us about staff helping them to count their money. One man told us about a member of staff who spent time showing him how to use his mobile phone.



Many people with learning disabilities and carers had also experienced **unfair treatment**. A few people had been asked to leave a pub after one drink or not been served at all. A bus driver had refused to accept one man's bus pass. (This man staged a sit down protest on the spot!) Some carers said that they did not always get the best care for their sons or daughters. Being treated like this made most people feel embarrassed, angry and upset.



People told us about staff and other customers who were impatient and rude, such as whispering about someone when they were leaving.



We were told that some places (like banks) had strict rules that they would not change to help people with learning disabilities.

# Information

People also thought that lots of information was hard to understand:

- the **print was too small** on things like bus timetables and café menus
- there were **too many long words** on information about bank accounts
- there were **not enough pictures** at doctors' surgeries or train stations
- 24 hour clocks confused some people



Some people with learning disabilities always went to the same pub or used the same taxi service because the staff treated them well. They did not know if they would be treated well in other places.

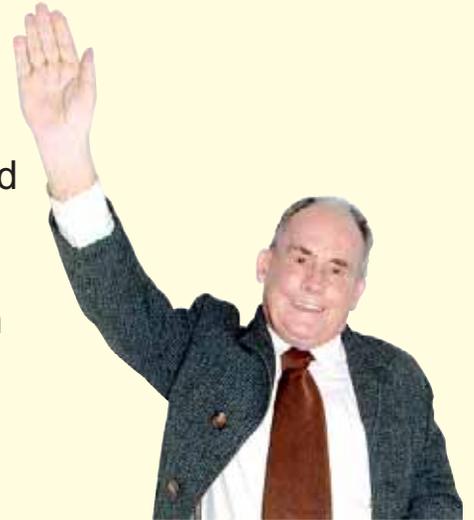


# What should people with learning disabilities do if they are unfairly treated?

7

People with learning disabilities told us it could be **very hard to stand up for yourself** when you have been unfairly treated. We asked them to tell us what people should do if they have been treated unfairly like this. We got lots of different answers.

- People just had to **accept the situation** (such as being asked to leave the pub after one drink) even though it wasn't fair.
- People should stand up for themselves and **prove their innocence**, even though they had done nothing wrong.
- People could **write a complaint letter** or ask to **talk to the manager**. They could ask a support worker to help them do this.
- They could **arrange a meeting** to talk to staff and 'explain what it's like being 'disabled' and give them ideas about how to provide a better service'.



Disability organisations suggested that **places like social work offices** should be trained about the Disability Discrimination Act so they **could help people who had been treated unfairly.**

# Rights and Responsibilities

## Fair Treatment for Adults with Learning Disabilities



### More Copies of the Report

For more copies of this report  
or to listen to a recording of this report please go to  
<http://www.strath.ac.uk/eps/centresdivisions/aerc/disability>  
The full report can also be found on this web page.



### If you need Help or Advice

If you have been unfairly treated you can contact one of the Equality and Human Rights Commission helplines below for advice.

**0845 604 5510 - Scotland Main Number**

**0845 604 5520 - Scotland Textphone**

**0845 604 6610 - England Main Number**

**0845 604 6620 - England Textphone**

**0845 604 8810 - Wales Main Number**

**0845 604 8820 - Wales Textphone**

Many thanks to the Quality Action Group, Stirling,  
for their comments on this report.



Images © Copyright 2006 Photosymbols Ltd. All rights reserved.

