



## **Committee Inquiry into Post Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities**

### **Response by Positive Futures**

#### **1.0 Positive Futures: Achieving Dreams. Transforming Lives.**

At Positive Futures, we're positive about people. People with a learning disability, those with acquired brain injury and people on the autistic spectrum. Where others see problems, we see possibilities. We have transformed lives and contribute to do so. We speak out for the rights of those who need our support. We work closely with decision makers, such as politicians at Stormont and Westminster, to ensure that public services are the best they can be.

- 1.1 We support individuals and families across Northern Ireland. We provide Supported Living Services, Peripatetic Housing Support Services, Residential Short Breaks, Adult Placement Services, Family Support Services for children and families, and special projects Better Futures (family supports for older carers), and Better Together (bringing together young adults with a learning disability and other young people to pursue shared interests).

#### **2.0 Key Points from Positive Futures**

People supported by Positive Futures wanted to share their views and experiences in relation to further education, training and employment – these are available in Appendices 1 – 7 within this report.

- 2.1 As an organisation we believe people with a learning disability can identify what they want to do, but they do need good information, support and advice – person centred planning. They need clear information about what further education, training and employment opportunities are available and how to access them.
- 2.2 Some important practical issues must be considered in relation to further education, training and employment for people with a learning disability:



- **Support** to know all of the options and choices available – day opportunities / services (Health and Social Care provided), further education, training, employment and leisure opportunities. Accessible information is needed;
- **Support** to plan and access such opportunities;
- **Support** to try, test and see if the options available meet their individual needs;
- **Support** to make changes – it's not easy to change if you have been used to doing the same thing for a long time, for both the person and their family;
- **Support** to get out and about through transport - this is particularly important in rural locations. Accessing opportunities can be dependent on transport availability;
- People with a learning disability require **ongoing support** to manage their lives and the mix of day opportunities / services (Health and Social Care provided), further education, training, employment and leisure opportunities they avail of.

- 2.3 There must be a wide range of further educational courses open to people with a learning disability. People are often repeating courses year after year due to a lack of alternatives.
- 2.4 College, work skills training and social enterprise should be significant preparation of the future and aimed at progression into the workplace.
- 2.5 Employment offers people a level of independence, but many feel that there are not enough hours or paid employment available. Most people with a learning disability in employment really value their job and like to work, but are concerned that paid employment will affect their benefits.
- 2.6 Support to organise a work placement is important. Also there appears to be little flexibility of arrangements for placement and employment and it can be difficult to change a work placement if things are not working out.



### 3.0 Areas for Action

Given that the 'Delivering the Bamford Vision' action plan 2012 – 2015 which sets the commitment from all Government Departments to deliver the Bamford Vision is overseen by the Bamford Interdepartmental Senior Officials Group and the Bamford Interdepartmental Ministerial Group, the opportunity for strong interdepartmental working and collaboration to meet the needs of people with a learning disability is available.

- 3.1 The Health and Social Care Board completed a review of Day Services and Day opportunities in January 2014 – '*Regional Learning Disability Day Opportunities Model*'. This has been completed by Health and Social Care in isolation of other partners in delivering opportunities for people with a learning disability in further education, training and employment.
- 3.2 The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Department of Education and Department for Employment and Learning should work in collaboration to develop a clear post-school pathway for people with a learning disability including all the options for day opportunities, further education, training, work and leisure that are available for people with a learning disability. We must ensure joint commitment to develop, fund and **sustain** person-centred opportunities.
- 3.3 Government Departments should work in collaboration to ensure there is a clear pathway and early initiation of transition planning for young people with a learning disability leaving school.



## Appendix 1

### **Information from Sarah Ogle, member of Positive Futures' Advisory Board for people with a learning disability, on employment for people with a learning disability**

Sarah has written this out as something she would like to share with MLA's:

*"Jobs are very important and can be very hard for someone who has just come out of school. I think more help is needed not just when the person has left but in the last year, so that they have a better understanding about the ins and outs of a job.*

*For example, what to wear to interviews and jobs time keeping, what to do with money, social skills and cleanliness. Travel training, for example on how to get taxis or buses, how to use the phone, reading timetables for trains and having the right money. Talking to outsiders on a daily basis.*

*Reading and writing are very important and talking to helpers when you need help or someone to talk to. People that need a little extra help may find all of the above really hard to do, but it is very very important not to feel intimidated by any of it. Everybody has their problems with work and stuff and we all have feelings and want to be seen and heard.*

*Thank you for listening, all I ask is small steps can make a big difference."*



## Appendix 2

**What some people supported by Positive Futures in Omagh say about opportunities for people with a learning disability when they leave school**

***What do you think of the range and choice of opportunities available for people with a learning disability when they leave school?***

We do not think there are a lot of opportunities. When we left school we did not know about what was available. No one talked to us about work or training or volunteering or asked us what we wanted to do. We were just told were we had to go.

***What service would you like to see available?***

We would like to see more volunteering opportunities. We should have been told by someone before we left school what things we could do and join but that didn't happen.

Social Workers talked to my family but I didn't really know what was happening. My family knew better though so that is probably why they didn't ask me.

***What do you think are the barriers to you doing what you want after leaving school?***

- You don't get bullied after school so that was good.
- It can be hard as sometimes leaving school was scary as I didn't want to go somewhere new but I couldn't stay at home all day.
- Sometimes family want you to go to tech even though you don't want to go and you might just want to get a job.



## Appendix 3

### What the 'Positive Achievers Group' in Newry said about Education, Training and Employment

#### ***What did you do when you left school?***

***(Most people taking part in this group are now in their 40s and 50s)***

- I was bored out of my mind, I tried to get a job but there wasn't much choice. I got a job packing in Cunningham's factory, it was stinking but fun.
- We went to England, partly because there weren't any jobs.
- I got a job in the Mill – but they wouldn't let me work the machines because I had a learning disability and they said weren't insured for me to use them.
- I was involved with Mencap and Pathways, they helped me get a job in Dunnes.
- I helped mammy do housework because the factory said it was too dangerous for me to use their machines.
- I lived in England and got a job in a packaging factory. I'm dyslexic and they helped me fill in a form. I was offered two jobs but couldn't take them because I had to use public transport and I couldn't do that.
- I worked in a timber yard and then I joined another company and went in lorries with the men delivering stuff.

#### ***What options are there now for people with a learning disability when they leave school?***

- Go to the Job Centre.
- Go to a Day Centre.
- You can find a job on the internet.
- You can go to tech and do a course.
- You can join a scheme and get trained up.
- You can go and work in a charity shop, florist or hairdressers.
- Go to the place they had their work experience in school.

#### ***What do you think of this range of opportunities?***

- There are far more choices for people now than what there were years ago.
- People with a learning disability can do far more courses these days – I'm going to the tech and I'm learning to read and write.



- There are lots of choices for people – if they want to do any of it. Some people are just happy to be on benefits.

***What would you like to see happen?***

- I think people with a learning disability should be given the opportunity to try and have a job – just because you can't read and write doesn't mean you can't do something in the workplace.
- I would like to see people get jobs and get off the streets.

***What would stop people from doing what they want after school?***

- People don't understand what we need.
- Maybe they can't get to where they need to if they can't use public transport and can't drive.
- Some people don't try. They are happy to get benefits and not work. They lie in bed all day – there are jobs if you try – you just need to go to the Job Centre.
- It's hard for everyone to get a job but it is worse for people with a learning disability. People know you have a learning disability as soon as you open your mouth and they treat you differently. You are made feel like you can't do things.
- It's very hard to live with having a learning disability. We need people to listen to us and understand us.
- People still take advantage of us and don't give us a fair chance sometimes.



## Appendix 4

### **What the Participation Group in Fermanagh said about Education, Training and Employment**

#### ***What do you think of the range and choice of opportunities available for people with a learning disability when they leave school?***

The group felt the choice was very poor at the moment. They feel that daycare is not always what they want and that college courses are all the same and just repeat year after year with very little choice or support at college to help people achieve. Jobs are hard to get as people don't really give you a chance and places that you would like to work won't give you a job. Also some projects start up and people go to them like the social farming, and then they are asked to pay £40.00 a day to return. They can't afford this.

#### ***What service would you like to see available?***

The group would like more schemes available to help them get proper employment. Schemes that do not affect their benefits whilst they try things out and learn new skills. Schemes that also don't cost them money to attend or cost money for them to travel to and from.

They also would like more college courses available which better meet their individual needs. Also more volunteering opportunities for people with a learning disability in areas like childcare, caring for others etc.

#### ***What do you think are the barriers to you doing what you want after leaving school?***

- The benefits trap
- Little choice out there in the community
- Community ignorance around people with a learning disability and how much we can do
- No appealing further education courses
- No money to be able to do some things.





## Appendix 5

### What people supported in Cookstown said about Education, Training and Employment

#### ***What do you think of the range and choice of opportunities available for people with a learning disability when they leave school?***

We think there are a good range of opportunities available. We attend adult centre, college, work placements, local base / drop in centre, 'Superstars', and Gateway.

There are also places like the leisure centre, hub, cinema for leisure activities. These are all in our local town where we live.

More opportunities should be available.

Schools should have more information before the person leaves.

Possibly more 3<sup>rd</sup> level colleges especially geared for adults with learning / physical disabilities i.e. Parkanaur college.

#### ***What service would you like to see available?***

More opportunities to learn skills for example housekeeping, budgeting, time keeping / telling the time.

Think it would be a good idea if prospective employers or services visited schools to inform people with a learning disability on what is available.

More learning support workers are needed.

Social Workers should be more involved.

Before they leave school pupils should get a chance to try and visit different places i.e. college.

#### ***What do you think are the barriers to you doing what you want after leaving school?***

Not a big enough range of tech classes for adults with a learning disability with support workers present. Not being able to travel independently to places.

Too many assessments before you can start training / course.

Distance / travel to college.



## Appendix 6

### What people supported in Magherafelt said about Education, Training and Employment

***What do you think of the range and choice of opportunities available for people with a learning disability when they leave school?***

One person we support said she went to the Day Centre straight after school. She didn't have a choice to go anywhere else.

***What service would you like to see available?***

Different Services like opportunities for jobs, learning new skills at “*my pace and level*” etc.

***What do you think are the barriers to you doing what you want after leaving school?***

People not treating me like an individual.



## Appendix 7

### What some people we support said about their recent experiences of education, training and employment

Gary said he would like more opportunities for apprenticeships and in organisations which would understand his needs around his autism. He was keen to get a placement in a car workshop and go college to learn skills for car sales. There was no place for him anywhere and the one he did find weren't prepared to support the risk issues in relation to his support.

Gary is now supported through Promote Action and does a placement 2 days per week, however he wants a full time placement and the chance to do a *"real course"*.

Jackie said she went to college to do a social care qualification and found it very difficult. She was supported through Positive Futures but was unable to continue. Jackie does a lot of work placements i.e. in the Croft Community kitchen, Glenraig farm and in a nursing home. She loves her work placements, however feels she would like some financial recognition as they are all voluntary roles.

John has been trying to get an IT course through college for a while however hasn't been able to. He is now starting the Mencap LiveNet one.

Gary, Jackie and John said they found the limited experiences they did have at college good and loved the fact they were attending a *"real school"*. They found the interactions with the other pupils quite difficult and Jackie said she wanted to have support with her at all times there but this wasn't possible.