



## *Valuing People and Us*

In March 2001 the Government delivered a White Paper entitled ‘Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’. It called for “Good quality services [that] will provide the right care for people with additional or complex needs. This includes people with ...autism”

It identified areas of concern with existing forms of care. It stated:

“Young disabled people at the point of transition to adult life often leave school without a clear route towards a fulfilling and productive adult life. Day services frequently fail to provide sufficiently flexible and individual support. Some large day centre’s offer little more than warehousing and do not help people with learning disabilities undertake a wider range of individually tailored activities. Disabled young people and their families often find the transition to adulthood both stressful and difficult. Starting adult life should be a time of opportunity for young people. The Government wants to see more young people taking part in education and training, which will help them lead productive adult lives and find employment. People with learning disabilities are often socially isolated. Helping people sustain friendships is consistently shown as being one of the greatest challenges faced by learning disability services.”

To address these issues “these aims, services will need to demonstrate that they are listening carefully to the views and experiences of people with Learning Disabilities and their families which should also play a critical part in the education and training of paid staff..., and to be as independent as they wish to be.”

What follows with additional quotes is how west London Community College meets these challenges in order to provide a service that Values People.

### *Listening carefully to the views and experiences of people with Learning Disabilities*

Developing this point the White paper states “The Government’s objective is to enable people with learning disabilities to have as much choice and control as possible over their lives and the services and support they receive...Services should respond to the wider aspirations of people...A person-centred approach will be essential to deliver real change in the lives of people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities should be fully involved in the decision making processes that affect their lives”

## **PCP Timetable/Care Plan**

The current timetable takes on board this approach. Instead of traditional situation where students have to conform to the needs of the course we create courses that conform to the needs of the student. The basis of each session is each student's individual needs and aspirations. They are fed by each student's 'care plan'. A care plan is an assessment document completed by the student that identifies both their current situation and where they wish to be by the end of their time with us. With their Key Worker they develop targets that will enable them to travel between these two points. These targets collectively inform what sessions we run their content and the approach we take. Each session is tailored to be relevant and individual.

Developing this idea the paper also says "Listening to what people with learning disabilities had to tell us about their lives has helped us understand the need for change... People with learning disabilities played an important part in the consultation process. Their contribution has been of central importance... Meeting their needs is essential to providing a good service." We address this in three ways:

### **Counselling**

As part of our holistic approach to working with the students each student receives a half hour counseling slot a week where they can discuss and resolve issues external to college life.

### **Student development meeting**

At WLCC all students take part in a weekly Development Meeting. In it student's views on how the college is run are explored and developed. These opinions have a direct impact on how the college operates. This not only helps us provide a relevant service but it is also further empowers the students.

### **Key Work Meeting**

Each student is provided a personal Key Worker who meets with them on a weekly basis for half an hour. These meetings are focused around how the individual experiences college. Individual information on how to improve or maintain the service is gained at this point and the care plan is monitored here too. In a one to one environment some students feel more comfortable to share these views.

Another strand of this approach can be seen in the papers acknowledgement and praise of "Some authorities have already begun to enable service users to play an effective role in the design and delivery of training to both managers and front-line staff." It is an approach taken to its logical conclusion in our ASDAT project.

## **ASDAT (Autistic Spectrum Disorder Awareness Training)**

ASDAT is a new business project that is run by the students. Recognising the need for a clearer understanding of Autistic Spectrum Disorder in the wider community the students have developed their own professional presentation explaining the disability. Drawing as it does on both personal experience and accurate research it offers an insight that other presentations cannot provide. As paid trainers the students are given a sense of empowerment and ownership not just over their disability but because they are in a role where they are the experts supporting the mainstream community.

## **Helping People Sustain Friendships**

The government seeks to *“Help people develop social skills and the capacity to form friendships and relationships with a wider range of people”*

### **Football Team**

On a semi regular basis the colleges football team plays in a league being developed by the MCFA and the FA designed to include people with disability in sport. So far they have remained unbeaten and both college players and spectators enjoy the experience. Trained by a regular professional on a weekly basis after hours the students also have a chance to get fit and improve their teamwork skills.

*The paper also identifies “It is important that people can receive accessible sex education and information about relationships and contraception.”*

### **Image in Action**

Image is a year long course designed to explore and educate students with disabilities in the complexities and subtleties of a variety of different relationships. This compliments the work of Club Amigo but has many constructive benefits of its own. It provides a safe environment for students to address issues concerning their own identity, behaviour and wants. All these issues are difficult for many but are particular issues for our students.

*Finally the paper says “Good services will help people with learning disabilities develop opportunities to form relationships, including ones of a physical and sexual nature.”*

### **Club Amigo**

Club Amigo is an after hours group that meets once every six weeks. Recognising the difficulties people with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder with socialising the club provides a fun environment to develop both friendly and romantic relationships. The club has taken place in different venues and had different themes such as Summer BBQ, a fireworks night and a Christmas party at a club. Attendance continues to grow and we are seeing one or two relationships emerge!

## **Family involvement**

Like us the Valuing People White Paper acknowledges “Carers face many problems and challenges. They need: To be treated as valued partners by local agencies, not as barriers to their son’s or daughter’s greater independence... Statutory agencies do not always properly recognise the extent of carers’ contribution or its value.”

## **Parent Support Group**

Parents of young adults with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder play a crucial role in their care. This can be a largely thankless and stressful task. The college offers a monthly forum for parents to discuss common issues and support each other.

## **“To be as independent as they wish to be.”**

The White Paper states “While people’s individual needs will differ, the starting presumption should be one of independence, rather than dependence, with public services providing the support needed to maximise this... Good quality services that promote independence, choice and inclusion will lead to good outcomes for people with learning disabilities.”

## **Independence**

Is a session to designed to promote an understanding of all the practical considerations concerned with living independently .This so far has covered paying bills, buying furniture, promoting sources of support and First Aid.

## **Tuck Shop Meeting**

This session is set up by the students to maintain the Tuck shop they run. Students make all the decisions regarding stock and staffing and complete a weekly Budget and Profit book. This compliments the work done in the Budgeting sessions but also promotes the students independence skills. The success or failure of the project is the result of their work.

## **Cookery/Enterprise**

Similar to Tuck shop this session serves two purposes. It helps develop cooking skills but also supports financial skills when students sell the meals that they cook.

## **Budgeting**

Our current students all have a variety of difficulties managing their own monies. In many cases this is because in common with many people who have a disability family

and or carers have assumed financial control. In other cases issues arise when this support has not been given. This session seeks to equip each student with the ability to effectively manage their own money.

### **Critical Thinking**

Students with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder traditionally focus on a series of interests that directly relate to them. These sessions encourages them to research present and discuss world events. In doing so it equips them with an ability to assess and then hopefully better access the world they live in.

A key barrier to social inclusion for people with an ASD is acknowledged by the paper when it states the need to “Help people develop social skills and the capacity to form friendships and relationships with a wider range of people” We address this primarily in two sessions.

### **Emotional Literacy**

This is a two tiered session designed to enable students to recognize and address their own and others emotions. Adults with an ASD have difficulty with developing both these skills and it can if unaddressed be a major barrier to understanding others intentions. It is addressed to aid social communication and promote inclusion and problem solving.

### **Social Practice**

This session is a highly personalised session that seeks to address student’s specific issues with communication when out in the community. So far this has included identifying different social relationships (for example how do we interact with professionals, how we interact with friends), using mobile phones and listening to and giving drink orders. There has been an element of peer mentoring once one individual has acquired a skill they are encouraged to pass it on to another.

### **Finding Employment**

The White Paper also acknowledges that employment is a key part in developing independence. Its states “Very few people with learning disabilities – probably less than 10% – have jobs. Our objective is to enable more people with learning disabilities to participate in all forms of employment, wherever possible in paid work, and to make a valued contribution to the world of work.”

## **Step Up**

Is a project under development designed to gain our students entry in into employment. Part of this is an ongoing Vocational Skills course designed to give students the practical skills they need to look and apply for jobs. As part of this program students are encouraged to take part in either internal or external work experience placements with a view to transferring these skills to full time employment.

## **Health**

The paper believes a “healthy diet and exercise will be particularly important for narrowing the gap between the health of learning disabled people and the population as a whole”

## **Swim/Gym**

All students are members of a local swimming pool which also offers a gym service. Students attend weekly and are encouraged to push themselves either by developing their own exercise routine or in some cases by attending swimming lessons for the first time.

## **Protecting Vulnerable Adults**

Finally the paper makes it clear “Good quality services for people with learning disabilities must support them to lead lives safe from harm and abuse, whilst enabling them to lead fulfilling lives.”

## **Safeguarding**

In addition to the college Safeguarding policy, which the students are aware of, students attend a Safeguarding session to ensure they are able to identify potential abuse. Staff also undergo regular POVA training.

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