



# Active, Connected, Included

How people with learning disabilities become more included in community life

Guidance, questions and tips for supporters and families



# Introduction

People with learning disabilities have the right to live fulfilling lives and to be included in their communities. People with learning disabilities may need a little more support and encouragement to be able to take part in activities in their communities, but that shouldn't stop them! Use this guide to support you to support the person with a learning disability to be involved in their community.

Before you start think about these questions:

- Do you feel that you have the skills and resources that you need to identify suitable community based activities?
- Do you feel able to engage with community led groups to encourage them to include the person you support in their activities?

If the answer to these is anything other than a resounding YES! we hope this guide will help to get you started.

This guide is in **four parts**:

- This part is for the people who support a person with a learning disability in either a paid or unpaid capacity. This could be family members or paid support workers for example.
- One part tells people with learning disabilities about their rights and is written in an Easy Read format.
- One part explains the thinking and ideas behind what we have done.
- The other part is for people who organise activities and groups in the community.

**Step 1 So you know the person you support well, you know what they want to do with their time, you know what they like, and you know who they are.**

**Do you know where they can go?**



**Find out more...**

**Person Centred Planning** is a process that is used to help people to plan for their future. Good planning can help the person identify what they want their life to be like and is supported by a group of people who care about them and are committed to making things happen.

These techniques can help to ensure that what the person wants in their life is at the forefront of their day to day activities.

**More about Person Centred Planning:**  
**[www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/)**

Sometimes it is assumed that a person with a learning disability should only go to activities that are provided as part of a specialist service providing activities and services to people with a learning disability.

This does not have to be the case. If the person you support has an interest in a particular activity, out if it is available in the wider community.

Sometimes special groups just for people with learning disabilities are set up that will do the same activity as a local community group. However some local community based activities can be easier to get to and might even cost less money and engaging with a wider range of people might help the person with a learning disability to develop their confidence and social skills. Other members of the community may also find they are interacting with a person with a learning disability for the first time, thereby increasing their own skills and confidence.

Keep your eye out on online and community notice boards or on websites like **[www.ALISS.org](http://www.ALISS.org)** or other local sources of information for activities in your area. Activities run by local community groups might not have thought about how they can include a person with a learning disability in their activities so be prepared to make some helpful suggestions. You might suggest that you join the person for the first few sessions until they and the other members of the group feel comfortable.

## Step 2: It can be difficult for people with learning disabilities to get to unfamiliar places.

### Do you need to provide some support for route planning or travel training?

There may be a challenge here for people who have been involved with support services and social work for a long time. There have been changes in the ways in which people with learning disabilities are supported with a recent focus on making more use of informal support and participating in community based activities.

Adapting to this requires a change in mind-set and a new set of skills for (perhaps) both the supporter and the person who is supported.



It can be difficult for any of us to go somewhere new. Think about all of the different skills that we need and all of the different bits of information that we need to know:

- **Knowing what is on, where it is, and what time it is on**
- **Knowing how long it will take to get there and when you need to leave**
- **Reading bus or train time tables**
- **Understanding directions**
- **Managing money to be able to pay fees**

You may need to give some help to the person you support. They may need to learn the journey to the venue, or need to be supported to manage their money.

**Step 3: Even after finding a suitable, affordable and easy to get to activity there might still be some other barriers in the way.**

**You might need to approach the person or group who runs the activity to discuss any changes that are needed.**

Some groups will require some paper work to be completed for new members on enrolment or other formal procedures. Ideally those running the group will be able to give any help that is needed but it would be a good idea to check this out beforehand.

The people who run the group might not have considered that someone may need to bring a supporter along with them. This could be for moral support or it may be for a specific support need. Perhaps this support is only needed for the first few sessions to allow some settling in time. Using the idea of creating a circle of support could work well in the small scale setting of a group or activity. Help to make introductions and make the person you support feel comfortable with at least some of the other attendees.

The people involved in the group may not have met someone with a learning disability before; they might feel anxious about doing or saying the wrong thing. Attending the group along with the person you support and offering encouragement and reassurance can be beneficial.



### **Find out more...**

**Circles of Support** is a model of providing support to ensure that the person at the centre is connected to their community.

The same model could apply in a smaller scale within one community group. You attend alongside the person you support for a while with a view to helping them to make connections with others in the group.

Try to find, for example, someone else who lives nearby or takes the same bus that can support the person with travel to or from the activity.

**More about circles of support:**

**<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/a-guide-to-circles-of-support.pdf>**

## Step 4: How well can the person you support talk up for themselves?

### Are they able to easily communicate their needs and wants to new people?

To be able to fully participate, a person needs to be able to express themselves and be understood. They need to have the skills and confidence to ask for changes to be made or help if they need it.

As a group, people with learning disabilities have more limited opportunities to gain access to their community.

Lack of experience from both members of the wider community and people with learning disabilities themselves can mean that both are apprehensive about communicating with each other.

You can help ease this by supporting the person to attend activities for a period of time and helping them to get to know others and support the development of a shared understanding.





## Step 5: Sometimes views held by professionals, family members or others in the community might prevent a person from getting involved.



The perceptions of others may prevent a person with a learning disability from taking part.

Support workers or family members might think that only activities specifically for people with learning disabilities are suitable.

Well-meaning but overprotective attitudes can stop someone from getting involved, for example, worrying that the person might not cope or might be treated badly by others.

A better dynamic might be to listen to what the person wants and try to make that happen for them rather than starting from what you know is available.

### Find out more...

**RISK Enablement** is a principle in social care that aims to encourage and support people to be able to take risks.

**More about RISK Enablement:**

[www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=18710&section=4](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=18710&section=4)



### Think about...

...what support you can give to minimise any negative outcomes; the risk that things go well is worth taking.

## Step 6: You've done everything you can to ensure that the person you support can have opportunities to be involved in community based activities.

But they still don't want to do it...



Some people with learning disabilities have spent much of their life participating in activities separately from other people. They may not feel that they are welcome or able to take part in mainstream community based activities.

People with learning disabilities often experience negative feedback from the wider community which may make them reluctant to attend activities that are more mainstream.

Groups of people who experience regular discrimination can feel like they are not a full member of society. The person may really want to go to something but still refuse to go. This could be because of their own lack of confidence or because of not feeling like they identify with being part of the community. The experience of being marginalised might mean they don't see themselves as welcome to things that are "open to all".

You may need to accept that they are not ready. You may be able to help the person to make small steps in this direction.

Remember that rushing someone into something they are not ready for might not be the best course of action. But just because they are not ready now does not mean they will never be ready.

### Think about...

...when you have gone somewhere new.

Did you have any anxiety about it? What did you need to make you feel more comfortable about taking that first step?



## Step 7: Other external factors might prevent a person getting involved in their community.

**You can't fix this alone.**



Economic and political factors come into play here as does the culture of Health and Social Care Partnerships and provider organisations.

What can you do? Campaign and engage in civil and political movements to create the change that is needed. You and the person you support can do this together. Local action has been effective in making changes to communities; for example, in campaigning to have bus stops reinstated where timetable changes have led to a removal.

If there are barriers within the organisation that supports the person you can start a conversation about the issues.

Questions to consider and raise with managers and decision makers include:

- **Does your organisation already encourage the people you support to get involved in the community?**
- **Are staff encouraged to work in this kind of way?**
- **Is time an issue?**
- **Is training provided to ensure staff have the skills they need?**
- **Do staff have access to the tools and resources they need to support people in this way?**

### Example...

**Stay Up Late Scotland** are campaigning to change working practices so that people who need support do not have to cut their nights out short to be home for the end of the support worker's shift.

**More about Stay up Late Scotland**  
[www.stayuplate.org](http://www.stayuplate.org)

**The Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities**  
**Suite 5.2**  
**Stock Exchange Court**  
**77 Nelson Mandela Place**  
**Glasgow**  
**G2 1QY**



**[www.sclد.org.uk](http://www.sclد.org.uk) | 0141 248 3733 | E: [admin@sclد.co.uk](mailto:admin@sclد.co.uk) | T: @SCLDNews | F: @ScotCommission | Insta: @sclدnews**