



# Relationships Matter

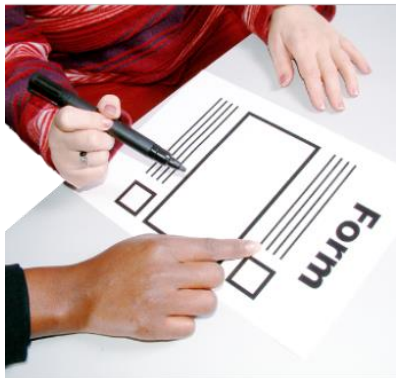
The first report from the  
How's Life? survey





In 2019, SCLD and partner organisations made the '**How's life?**' survey.

The survey asked people with learning disabilities how they felt about different aspects of their lives.



The survey was designed to be completed by people with learning disabilities, with or without support from a family member, advocate, or paid supporter.

1232 responses were received.



This is a summary of findings from the Survey. It is about relationships and loneliness.

It also looks at issues to do with happiness, choice, and support.



These topics are the focus of our first report because they are so important to people with a learning disability.

Many people with learning disabilities continue to face barriers. The barriers exclude them from relationships open to other citizens.



During The Covid-19 crisis some people have had their support reduced or stopped. That means the issue of isolation is more important and relevant than ever.

## Background



Scotland's first learning disability strategy, '*The same as you?*' worked towards people with a learning disability moving out of institutions and into the community.



The '*Keys to Life*' strategy recognises that relationships, of all kinds, are essential to the wellbeing of people with learning disabilities.

Relationships are important for people's sense of belonging and social inclusion.



But people with learning disabilities continue to face barriers that exclude them from full participation in society.

Social isolation and loneliness remain a problem for many.



The results of the survey also show that many people with a learning disability still experience very high levels of loneliness.



They do not get to see loved ones as often as they would like.

Very few people with a learning disability are in an intimate or romantic relationship.

## Key findings

The Survey found that very few people who responded to the survey were in intimate relationships:



### **A very small number of people live with a partner**

Only 5% of people lived with a partner, compared to 56% of other citizens.



### **A very small number of people are married**

Only 3% of people were married compared to 47% of other citizens.



**People in older age groups were less likely to be in a relationship.**



**People living in mainstream accommodation were more likely to be in a relationship than people in supported accommodation.**



**People living in medical settings and care homes were very unlikely to be in an intimate relationship.**

### **Contact with loved ones**

The survey found that a number of people did not see loved ones as often as they would like and many were lonely:



**Some people (21%) did not see their family as often as they liked.**





**Some people (19%) did not see their friends as often as they liked.**



**Some people (27%) in a relationship did not see their partner as often as they liked.**



**Older people were less likely to see their family or partners as often as they liked.**

**Younger people and people with additional conditions and/or disabilities were less likely to see their friends as often as they liked.**



**Over half of people (52%) occasionally, sometimes, or often felt lonely.**

**Some people (9%) often felt lonely, compared to 5% of other citizens.**

## Support and choice



The survey found that people who got enough support and choice were more likely to see loved ones as much as they liked and less likely to be lonely.



**People who got enough support were much more likely to see family, friends and/or partners as much as they liked than those who did not.**

**People who got enough support were much less likely to be lonely.**



**People who had lots of choice over their free time were much more likely to see family, friends and/or partners as much as they liked.**





**People who had lots of choice over their free time were much less likely to be lonely.**

There was a strong link between not needing support and being in an intimate relationship:



**A lot more people (44%) who *did not need support* were in a relationship compared to 18% of people who needed support.**



**A lot more people (23%) who *did not need support* lived with a partner compared to 3% of people who needed support.**

## **Relationships matter**

People wrote in their own words that relationships were important to them:



Family was the most common answer given when people were asked to tell us the most important things in their life.

Friends was the second most common answer.



When asked what one thing they would change a small number of people expressed a strong desire to find a romantic partner.

Seeing enough of family, friends and not feeling lonely were all associated with higher levels of happiness.

## **Moving forward**



People with a learning disability need the right support to allow them to be included in all parts of society and to lead a healthy, happy life.

Strong relationships are a really important part of this and help people to feel happy and connected to their community.



Support that encourages people to have and maintain different types of relationships, including intimate relationships if people wish, is very important.

If we are to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic in a fair and inclusive way, we need to change the way we do things.



We need a different approach to social care and total change in society's attitude towards people with a learning disability.

All citizens deserve relationships and to be recognised as human beings.



For that to happen there must be proper funding, strong leadership, and a commitment to the equality and human rights of people with learning disabilities.



**This Easy Read report was produced by People First (Scotland) and the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities.**

