

REACH support for living an ordinary life

In November, Paradigm in partnership with the Housing and Support Alliance launched a fully revised version of *Reach: Support for living an ordinary life*. A new version of Reach was much needed to reflect the present context. The core purpose of the new resource is to:

- clarify the standards of support for living to ensure that 'supported living' doesn't become a model that people can simply tick as 'achieved'.
- ensure that in the current climate of dwindling financial resources and tightening budgets, we remain committed to quality support that values the range of resources available to people, for example the community, family, skills exchanges and friends.
- show how *Reach* can help people with direct payments or personal budgets.
- ensure that we focus on the concepts of 'ordinary lives' that adheres to the values codified in Human Rights legislation.

Supported Living

First launched by Paradigm and partners in 2002 *Reach* was designed to encourage Supported Living. *Reach* offered a set of voluntary standards; they remain the most widely recognised standards in relation to supported living.

Supported Living at its core was about ensuring each person is able to live their life as they choose. It was about living life with the same choice, rights and responsibilities as other citizens. It wasn't about a model.

Sadly in 2013, there are still people who believe Residential Care is as good as it gets for people with learning disabilities. There are others who have 'ticked' the box of de-registering properties and claim they are offering supported living but when asked 'Did the people choose who they live with, who supports them, where they live?' the answer is often: 'Well, not really.'

Supported living has become a *service type, model*, rather than a way of supporting people to have *real choice and control* over their lives.

This needs to change.

Imagine it's you and you were made to live in a way you haven't chosen, with people you haven't chosen to live with, to have regular personal care carried out by people you haven't chosen and maybe don't like? Unacceptable for you? Unacceptable for everyone.

Why *Reach* support for living an ordinary life?

In 2013 we are not talking about *whether* people should have choice and control over their lives. We are talking about human rights. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Life, for all us is an ever-changing reality. We don't fix our life at one point in time and accept that as our lot. We try new things, make mistakes, learn from experiences and seek support of friends, family, community and sometimes paid supporters. This helps us make sense of it all and plan for the future

Reach: Support for living an ordinary life recognises that no two lives should be the same. The focus is on the individual. This enables the support provider to see how well they are doing in creating the circumstances that allows people to live a life of their choosing.

Reach: Support for living an ordinary life focuses on real conversations not assessment. Live, warmly conducted conversations encourage aspirations - choosing where you live and how you live and with whom is the start. It is a conversation that should never end.

Reach is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability. This states that all people are entitled to:

Self-determination: 'I can say what matters to me and how I want to live.'

Inclusion: 'I'm included in my community and benefit from the services everyone uses.'

Personalised support: 'I get the assistance I need to live as I want.'

What do we mean by an 'ordinary life'?

The goal of the Ordinary Life movement in the 1980s was to see disabled people 'in the mainstream of life, living in ordinary houses, in ordinary streets, with the same range of choices as any citizen, and mixing as equals with others, and mostly non-disabled, members of their own community' (Towell D (1988) *An ordinary life in practice. King Edward's Hospital Fund for London*)

There has undoubtedly been progress. Good person-centred practice has led to people achieving more of their own goals. A greater focus on the variety of resources in people's lives (e.g. friends and community) has encouraged everyone to look beyond just paid support. People with personal budgets and the freedom to truly self-direct are living fuller, more meaningful lives.

However, the reality for many people – possibly the majority - who access support from organisations is that there is often a worrying lack of input over who supports them, when the support is received and how this attends to what really matters to them as individuals. The care and support industry has placed so much importance on meeting minimum standards and 'professionalising', the most important aspects of care and support have been lost - listening to what people say and then doing something about it.

An 'ordinary life' is about having the same opportunities as everyone else: the chance to work, love, have friendships, happy times, sad times, a home, to live with people you want to live with. It's not complicated, but somehow the systems we have created have made achieving something ordinary difficult.

The Reach resource

The Reach standards consist of a series of high-level outcome-based statements in a user-friendly format setting out expectations and rights regarding quality support for living.

The eleven standards set out what people should expect from their team or agency offering them support for living an ordinary life as a citizen.

The *Reach: Support for living an ordinary life* pack has two main parts:

a) The *It's My Life manual* is designed mainly for use by or with people who receive support and their family and friends. It is also useful for organisations to find out how well they are doing in supporting each person.

It explains to individuals what rights they should expect from the support they have in their life. This may be paid support, but it also includes the support provided by friends, families and the wider community. It goes on to help individuals figure out if they are getting good support, if they have the home and lifestyle they want and to create a plan of action.

b) The *Service review manual* will mainly be used by organisations providing support and those responsible for monitoring to find out how a service or organisation overall is doing. It helps organisations to understand what really good quality 'support for living an ordinary life' is, and will ensure that they are always working to make sure this is offered to the people they support. It will also assist support providers and commissioners to meet their responsibilities to the people they support and the relevant regulatory bodies. One life, one set of standards; one process.

Reach: Support for living an ordinary life is NOT an assessment tool. Reach is a resource and set of standards to encourage people to explore what support for living an ordinary life looks like for a person.

Used honestly, with integrity, Reach will help people to identify desired changes, create a plan and take action.

Supported Living has always been about ensuring ordinary lives. We have lost our way. It is time for all of us to re-think and get us back on track. Support for LIVING....one person, one life.

For more information about the *Ensuring an Ordinary Life* network or to order *Reach* (published by Pavilion) please see www.paradigm-uk.org or contact Paradigm on 020 8870 8643 / jeanetteg@paradigm-uk.org

