

## Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [anghydraddoldebau iechyd meddwl](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [mental health inequalities](#)

**MHI 40**

**Ymateb gan: | Response from: All Wales People First**

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I am submitting this response for the call of evidence to the experience of mental health inequalities. The response is provided on behalf of All Wales People First members with learning disability. We are the national umbrella of self-advocacy groups for people with learning disabilities in Wales. We are the only organisation led by and for people with learning disabilities in Wales. They are our members and they make all of the important decisions within the organisation.

Our members as people with learning disabilities are disproportionately affected by mental health difficulties for several reasons. One of the key reasons is the fact that people with learning disabilities have more barriers to employment and fewer opportunities for friendships and meaningful relationships than the general public. Having a learning disability is therefore more likely to place our members in a situation of isolation and loneliness than the general public.

According to research, people with learning disabilities are more likely to experience negative life events and have access to fewer resources and coping skills – “Every person is different, but people with a learning disability may be particularly vulnerable to negative life events and might not have the mechanisms for coping with these” [Learning Disability and Mental Health - Mental Health Research | Mencap](#)). This is certainly the case for many of our members, who have been especially vulnerable and struggled with their mental health throughout the pandemic. Covid exacerbated pre-existing poor mental health for many of our members with learning disability. For example, we are aware of members who have suffered severe anxiety related attacks and illnesses, such that it was necessary to visit the accident and emergency department during pandemic conditions. Only one of those members we are aware of has regular access to mental health support via a counsellor.

Below are some extracts from member's Life in lockdown diaries since April 2020. Although there are lots of references to anxiety and feeling down as a result of the Pandemic conditions, several members have ongoing struggles with their mental health during non Pandemic conditions and these were merely exacerbated by the Pandemic. Many of those members have no

specialist mental support other than perhaps on an informal basis through a support worker. Some members developed some short-term coping mechanisms of their own at the start of lockdown, or with the help of housemates or family. Yet none said they had access to, or knew how to access mental health support during the pandemic or prior to.

*"Anne's in the other room today. She's not feeling too good. Time is passing really slowly and it's only Midday on a Thursday. Sundays are usually the worst for that kind of feeling. It's really difficult finding things to occupy and satisfy my mind. I'm so used to being out and about"* Anne and Neil's Life in Lockdown diary May 2020

*"You've caught me on a good day today. Yesterday was pretty bad. I had a bit of a downer...The news is pretty confusing for me right now and people don't always explain what it means which gets me down. I don't understand if things are better or worse on any given day, and that makes me feel anxious"* Ffion Life in lockdown diary April 2020

*"I'm feeling quite lonely and isolated most of the time right now. I live on my own independently, and whilst I feel that is usually a good thing, because it means I can make my own decisions and life choices, being in lockdown on my own doesn't feel so great. I usually have to be careful to look after my mental health as I have anxiety"* Lucy Life in lockdown diary May 2020

*"The lockdown changes have put our relationship under pressure a bit more than usual, but we do our best to support each other emotionally"* David Life in lockdown diary May 2020

*"When we chatted last week, I was feeling really motivated and positive. Later that day I had a meeting with Cardiff University and during the meeting I felt unwell with chest pains and had to cut the meeting short. I was ill for a couple of days and I rang the doctor. The doctor said it might be a pulled muscle, but I think it might have been a bit of anxiety"* Sophie Life in lockdown diary June 2020

*"My anxiety is really bad at the moment. I feel so emotional about not having physical contact with friends and my fiancé...and not being able to go to work"* Stacey Life in lockdown diary June 2020

*"I'm tired today. I was at the hospital until the early hours with chest pains again". Sophie Life in lockdown diary November 2020.*

Life in lockdown diary updates available at [www.allwalespeople1st.co.uk](http://www.allwalespeople1st.co.uk)

The Welsh Government largely acknowledges and recognises the mental health needs of people with learning disabilities and the barriers to wellbeing through key legislation such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014). It acknowledges the importance of citizenship, community access, putting people at the centre of the decisions that affect their wellbeing choices and places a focus on preventative services, which in theory ensures that people get the support they need as and when they need it. The Welsh Government also clearly recognises the key link between isolation and loneliness and mental wellbeing. It has shown a strong commitment to addressing these issues.

However, the reality is that current legislation is having very little impact. Our members tell us that this new legislation has not improved their experiences of using services or getting their wellbeing needs met. There is an enormous disconnect between aspirational Welsh Government legislation and implementation at a local authority/ Regional Partnership Board level. Unless this is addressed and unless the Welsh Government and the Regional Partnership Boards work together to close these gaps, nothing is going to change. Of course timely access to suitable mental health support is crucial for people with learning disability. It is also essential that the core issues which cause isolation and loneliness are addressed, otherwise they will continue to give rise to and exacerbate mental health difficulties for people with learning disability.

The action we need going forward is to implement the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act. I believe this legislation is heading in the right direction and it is key to better alternatives for all people with learning disability in Wales. However, this will not happen unless Welsh Government, local authorities and Regional Partnership Boards work together to make the act a reality. Unless people with learning disabilities have relationships, purpose and an opportunity to live as active and equal citizens they are always going to be more vulnerable to mental health difficulties.

Joe Powell - Chief Executive on behalf of All Wales People First

**Joe Powell**  
**Chief Executive**