



Impact Report 2022-2023

March 2023



Contents

Introduction	Page 3
A reminder of what we wanted to do	Pages 4-5
What we did in Year Three	Pages 6-9
The difference it has made	Pages 10-13
What else did we do?	Pages 14-15
What have we learnt?	Pages 16-17
What next	Pages 18-19
Appendices	Pages 20-26

We welcome another opportunity to demonstrate how we have continued to support people with learning disabilities across Dorset, many of whom were adversely affected by the impact of Covid-19. We share how our beneficiaries (members) have managed over the last year, as we all returned to a 'new normal'.

In this year's report, we also wanted to make reference to the wider context of how all people with learning disabilities fared during the pandemic. At the end of this report, we share some key findings from a number of research projects and reports, including how the inequalities that individuals with a learning disability across the country continue to experience, were exacerbated by Covid-19. We encourage you to read these, as we think it gives a deeper understanding of how our work addresses issues on a local level, and how these concerns very much reflect the inequalities seen across the UK.

Thanks to all our funders, we have been able to support individuals at a time when statutory services are still stretched to the limit. By picking up issues early, and providing early intervention, we have prevented many from reaching crisis point and ensured others maintained their health and wellbeing - notably avoiding social isolation, getting annual health checks, addressing online abuse, supporting with housing issues etc.

To recap on how Covid-19 impacted on the physical and emotional health of people with a learning disability across the UK over the last two years, it inevitably had a significantly negative effect for many, including those whom we

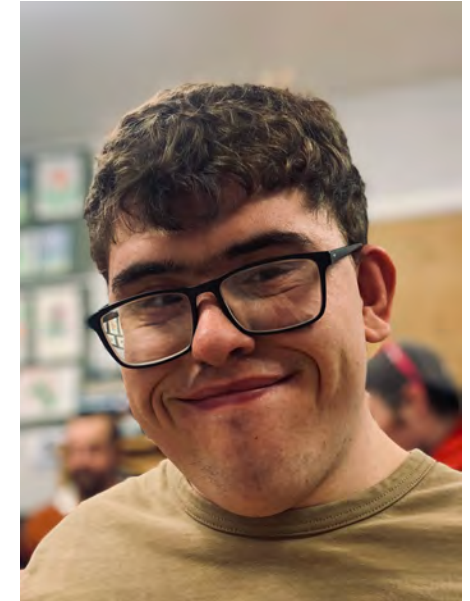
we support across Dorset. It continues to affect our members today, as individuals return to a 'new normal'. Our team continue to ensure all are supported and concerns are addressed.

During the pandemic, many of our members struggled with a lack of routine, such as being able to leave the house, or seeing family and friends. Although all society experienced this, routines can be very important to someone with a learning disability, and the negative effects for some were profound. Many members also struggled to understand Covid-19 restrictions. Our team provided accessible updates as and when the rules changed. Many were also worried about how their physical and mental health was being impacted. Our team responded quickly and creatively - phone calls, online social groups, a new magazine Connect with Covid-19 updates, local information, activities, and much more, depending on individual and group needs.

Fears around the increased vulnerability of people with a learning disability being more susceptible to Covid-19, notably the higher number of deaths to Covid-19 of people with a learning disability, meant that many members have taken much longer to return to the community. Some even now, in 2023, are reluctant to leave their homes or be in public community spaces.

The future is still seen as uncertain, with many feeling that life has not fully returned to normal. Others have been eager to rejoin their community, embracing their new freedom and re-establishing friendships and activity with renewed enthusiasm and vigour.

The team continued to support our members both individually and collectively in areas ranging from housing, employment, benefits and online safety to friendships, health and community participation - and more.



For those with specific concerns, the team helped address these at the earliest opportunity, with appropriate support or signposting, avoiding issues escalating and becoming more serious for the individual, and/or costly for services to resolve.

As the last two years, we have used our position of trust within the Dorset community and support members, in particular where needs were less well served by mainstream provision, to keep individuals safe and well. This has predominantly been achieved through addressing members' social isolation, improving mental health and physical wellbeing, and providing opportunities to speak up.



What we wanted to do



1

To create Action Groups so that issues affecting the lives of people with learning disabilities can be addressed at the earliest opportunity

2

To empower people with learning disabilities to take the lead in addressing their concerns successfully; to develop stronger self-advocacy skills; have a better understanding of their rights; build peer networks so they may more confidently, effectively and independently address the inequalities they experience daily

3

Enable people with learning disabilities to develop stronger, more productive relationships with key decision makers (i.e. statutory services, housing, health bodies), who will realise the benefits that working together can produce significant improvements for all

4

Develop an increased awareness and empathy from the community for people with learning disabilities, who will in turn find the community a more inclusive and fairer environment to live in and engage with

5

For People First Dorset to have a better understanding of how to create cost effective and sustainable solutions for people with learning disabilities, so we can better address the inequalities they experience daily

What we did in Year Three

2022 – 2023

We are hugely grateful to our funders, who have enabled us to continue supporting beneficiaries (our members) in the different ways they have needed. It has meant that members have been able to carry on coping well despite the ongoing difficult situations many have found themselves in, and as regulations and restrictions continued to change over the year, though thankfully at a lesser extent than the previous two years. Please find below a snapshot of our work during the last year:

1. COVID eased, with almost all restrictions lifted and life returning to a 'new normal'

2. Speaking Up groups resumed in person, increasing from 10 to 13 each month

There are three new groups are taking place in Weymouth, East Dorset and Purbeck.

3. Friendship Club resumed almost all activities in person

There was a huge demand for friendship activities to resume in person, notably for discos and our bi-annual Big Night Out nightclubbing event in Bournemouth (run with People First Forum, attracting around 400 people with a learning disability). There is still demand from some members for a monthly online group, which continues to be popular for this minority.

4. Re-launch of Bridport Friendship Club

Following much demand, and the ending of a key social group in Bridport, we re-launched our Bridport Friendship Club, thanks to funding from People's Health Trust. It is already very popular!



5. Supported employment opportunities

We ran a year long project supporting people with learning disabilities seeking employment, working with Dorset Council's newly appointed supported Employment Provider Pluss. Our team, including those with lived experience, worked alongside Pluss, supporting them to engage with businesses and local groups.

6. Partnered with new venues

Members have sought out new venues as they return to normal, mostly cafes, pubs and other public spaces where individuals feel safe, supported and welcomed.

7. North Dorset

There have been more difficulties with transport in this mostly rural area with poor public transport, particularly in the evenings. Key concerns centre around residential homes who struggle to take residents to activities in the evenings, due to lack of staff support.

8. Dorset Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group

We have had a successful year taking an active role in the new Dorset Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group. One member of staff, who has a learning disability, is leading on this work, with support from our Operations Manager. PFD is committed and actively involved in taking this work forward. Being on the group has also enabled the PFD team to secure training from an experienced ACAS advisor, helping develop the teams confidence in all areas relating to EDI.

9. Singing Group

A singing group has begun with members and is proving to be very popular. The group have already performed at a local church and are planning further performances later this year.

10. Dorset Hospital Consultation

Members have, with support from staff, supported the latest Dorset Hospital consultation which helps to understand the views of people with learning disabilities on changes and updates to the hospital.

11. Life skills

Themes that have been covered in events include online scams, staying safe online, budgeting, cost of living, housing, employment and many more

12. Creativity

The Friendship Club has continued to work creatively, offering a range of activities suited to members wishes and needs. These include online and in person quizzes, scavenger hunts, picnic, walks, crafts, games, clay modelling, drawing, ghost walks and much more.

13. Online Groups

As well as our own online groups, we are also encouraging members to join the successful and well supported free online workshops and meetings run by Learning Disability England. Here individuals can not only meet others from the across the county online but importantly discuss issues with their peer group and collectively resolve concerns.

14. Annual Health Checks

The team have worked hard to ensure that all members are aware of Annual Health Checks, and how to receive them. We have also worked with health services to create a comprehensive Annual Health Check pack for each GP surgery in Dorset. These were circulated last year.



15. Dance Sessions

A short course of dance sessions were held in person in January and February 2022, proving a popular way for members to re-engage with physical activity.



16. Wellness Workshops

As members returned to activities and their community, a series of online and in person wellness workshops were held from January to May 2022. These were aimed at supporting individuals wellbeing as they returned to the 'new normal', and were well attended with positive feedback from members.

17. Coping with Anxiety Workshops

The team also held two Coping with Anxiety workshops in January 2022, supporting those individuals who had struggled with their mental health. These were extremely popular as they enabled many individuals to reduce their anxiety as they returned back to the community.

On the back of this, four relaxation and mindfulness sessions were then held in March and April, further embedding the ability of members to manage their anxiety and mental health.

18. Health Eating Workshops

In February and March, a small group who were struggling with food preparation, took part in some Healthy Eating workshops, learning how to create and prepare simple meals themselves. This was particularly useful for members living independently, of which a few have continued with further support from the team to develop their shopping/cooking skills and confidence.

19. Staying Safe Online Workshops

With the rise of some members falling prey to online scams, we have continued to hold regular Staying Safe online workshops at events, with support from the local Community Police safety team, as well as the online safety team at Dorset Council. This has been particularly important as we have seen a significant rise of individuals struggling to manage their boundaries around online safety.

20. Environment Workshop Exhibition

An Exhibition was held at Dorset Museum in April 2022, following the successful Environment Workshops, showcasing members work and allowing others to see what participants had learned and understood. This was well attended and those attending reported feeling proud of what they had accomplished.



21. Regular Communications

The team have continued to talk regularly with members, actively listening to find out what their needs are at any given time and then responding dynamically, innovatively and swiftly with support as people's needs changed.

22. Connect

Connect, our eye catching and accessible booklet (introduced in year one to support members with information about key Covid-19 updates, health and wellbeing activities and with information about our events) has continued to be produced monthly or bi-monthly, posted to over 650 members and circulated by email to a further 500 plus stakeholders.



23. New films

With some members taking longer to re-join activities because of Covid-19 fears, and younger individuals struggling to 'see' what we do, this year we made a film aimed at adults with a learning disability to showcase our work and how attending the events may benefit an individual. Please do take a quick look on our website page to watch this, and if you have time, our other fabulous short videos on the People First Dorset YouTube page.
<https://www.youtube.com/@peoplefirstdorset623/videos>

24. Independent living

The four members who moved out of their family homes last year into their own new home have continued to be supported by our team, as they re-adjust to their new environment.

25. Local Authority Consultations

The team are fully engaged in ensuring the voices of people with learning disabilities are heard and valued in two Dorset wide consultations to improve day services and adult social care services.

26. Other groups, projects and research

We receive many requests to take part in interesting research, projects, panels, workshops etc. Although we are sadly unable to do them all, we are pleased that this year we have been able to take part in the following:

a) Wellcome Connecting Science – one of our members has continued to be part of the Community Advisory Panel who are exploring how community voices can be better involved in discussions about covid and the science that underpins society's response to the pandemic.



b) Manchester Metropolitan University Older People's Research –one of our colleagues with a learning disability is employed in this research project, which aims to find out how people with learning disabilities can be better supported when they grow older.

c) Southampton University - we continued to work with Southampton University and other arts based facilitators to carry out a pilot which explores the potential of arts-based activities as a foundation for friendships and self-advocacy work that includes people with profound learning disabilities.

d) Warwick University Medication Support Interventions Research - one of our colleagues with a learning disability is on the Project Advisory Group of this research which seeks to advance knowledge in helping people with learning disabilities and/or their carers to benefit from medicines they need while minimising unintended effects from these treatments.

The difference it has made

Feedback and notable outcomes

1. Case studies



Mary

Summary of Mary's situation

Mary moved to Dorset just before the pandemic. She lives independently but requires support for her learning disability and some mental health issues such as anxiety. Mary's parents live in the area but are elderly so can only provide limited support.

When she moved into the area, Mary had no support from services. She also had no friends in the area.

What Mary needed support with

Mary needed help to build social networks and connect with local support services.

She also wanted to explore opportunities for meeting someone to build a long-term, romantic relationship.

Response from People First Dorset

Initially we engaged with Mary by telephone and email, so she became comfortable with staff. We helped by signposting Mary to other organisations who could support with her mental health.

Mary then began to join group video calls with other members. Once she had spoken with a few other members she began joining Speaking Up meetings and the Friendship Club social events in her area.

The more Mary attended our Speaking Up meetings the more she grew in confidence. Before long Mary began to talk openly and share her anxieties with other members of the group, in turn gaining strong peer support at meetings.

It became apparent over time, through conversations at meetings, that Mary could be making herself vulnerable when using dating websites, which she had engaged with, in the hope of finding a romantic relationship. She openly sought support from staff and her peers about how to be safer when using dating websites. It was clear upon further conversations that Mary was indeed putting herself in quite some danger.

Outcomes for Mary from our support

The team supported Mary to understand the risks she was taking on the online dating agencies. Mary also engaged with local mental health services, who further supported her.

Mary now feels she is lucky and happy to now have a safe and supportive space at Speaking Up groups, to talk with staff and her peers. She has made friends at the groups and socialises with them outside of the meetings.

Mary also reports that she feels more able to make decisions which protect her personal safety and wellbeing when using online dating websites.

Paddy



Summary of Paddy's situation

Paddy has autism and epilepsy. He was living independently, with daily support from his mother, who sadly passed away last year, and so Paddy's father became his main carer.

Soon after this, Paddy's father had to go into hospital for a period of time, so Paddy received support from various extended family members.

Paddy found this very difficult, losing his regular, consistent care, while also grieving the loss of his mother.

What Paddy needed support with

Paddy needed a safe space to speak about the loss of his mother. He had quickly become quite isolated and was losing confidence fast as he struggled to deal with the sudden changes to his care, and bereavement.

Response from People First Dorset Initially our team began calling Paddy weekly to chat. This soon progressed to a weekly 1:1 walk where Paddy would speak about his daily life, and how he was feeling in his grief. This helped him get used to socialising again, in turn rebuilding his confidence, and with meeting other people. .

Eventually Paddy decided to try attending his local Speaking Up meetings, becoming much chattier. Soon he began to feel comfortable at the meetings and more confident at talking and mixing in the group setting.

Outcomes for Paddy

Due to the support, Paddy became able to talk about his loss and feelings with others, becoming an active contributor at Speaking Up meetings, sharing with and supporting other members.

As a result of Paddy feeling confident and safe enough to speak about his loss in the Speaking Up meetings, it enabled others in the group to feel comfortable too and the group have since had some powerful conversations around bereavement and grieving. His increased confidence meant Paddy started attending other social events run by People First Dorset.

Tricia

After finishing college in 2022, and doing some volunteering locally, Tricia joined her local Friendship Club group. She explained she wanted a job, so the team referred her to Pluss, the Dorset Council appointed job support scheme, who we are working in partnership with. Tricia now attends a job club and is exploring paid work opportunities.

She has also become an active member of Friendship Club, supporting the staff team to do quizzes at events and more.



2. Members taking the lead

People with learning disabilities remained at the core of our work during the year, leading the response to activities and events as individuals re-emerged from the pandemic. This ensured the team could support members in ways which worked best for them.

The ways which work best to engage with members, so the team can understand their changing needs, is through frequent and ongoing conversations at our events, in meetings, on zoom and by phone. This ensures members continue to fundamentally shape delivery. These communications have been very much led by our Management Committee of 7 members, who sit alongside the trustees and oversee governance and operations of the charity.

They have continued to meet monthly and this year have introduced a 'reporting board' which they take to events, and talk with other members, to hear their thoughts and feedback. This ongoing communication is vital in ensuring the team, and trustees, learn how beneficiaries are coping and of immediate concerns, enabling us respond to changing needs and develop our response accordingly, supporting members to cope with activities which meet needs.

3. Collaboration and networking

There has been continued collaboration with local organisations such as the Local Authority, CCG (now Dorset Health), Dorset Healthcare and many other professional bodies. Working either formally or informally in partnership with others enables us to share outcomes, ideas and improve services.

The use of online can also help increase efficiencies for all, ensuring we can continue to monitor and improve services and outcomes, creating better use of time when possible. We have continued to link, through Learning Disability England, with many other self-advocacy organisations around the country to find out how they are managing and sharing best practice.

4. Improved understanding of rights

Members have indicated they have a better understanding of their rights (i.e. to employment, for the right care and support) through building peer support groups and developing their self-advocacy skills. Members are telling us what they need and how they need it, confidently engaging with staff.

It is thought the smaller groups have enabled members to develop skills more effectively.





What else did we do?



1. Influencing, Values, Messaging, Communication, Away Day

We have continued to develop our communications and influencing work. This included bringing the whole team together, as soon as it was possible, for an Away Day in May 2022. This included staff, trustees, Management Committee and Advisors.

All agreed that this was a very positive experience, to come together after such a time apart, not only to reconnect as a team but also to revisit some key areas of our work. We were also able to agree on our values, as well as consider our messaging.

Our values are:

Values 2022



Welcome

We are **welcoming**: we are open to all adults with learning disabilities and their supporters



We have **fun**: we meet in the community making friends and joining in activities



We are **visible**: we put an end to the hidden lives and isolation of many people with learning disabilities



We are **stronger together**: our members take their ideas and concerns to those whose decisions affect their lives



We promote **fairness and equality**: we challenge the barriers we sometimes face

2. Wellbeing strategy

We developed a wellbeing strategy, aimed to ensure staff are also supported at all times, and in particular as we come out from the pandemic and during the cost of living crisis.

This included mental health first aid training for the team; workplace assessments; coaching and/or mentoring for team members.

3. Hybrid working environment

We have continued to offer a hybrid working environment, wherever is reasonably possible. Working online can bring greater and quicker results for individuals – i.e. less travel means we can have more meetings and conversations online. We equally appreciate the value of coming together in person, and ensure the balance is carefully maintained of remote and face to face.

4. Developing long term sustainability of self-advocacy organisations

People First Dorset have been part of a small working group leading a national conversation to explore the future of self advocacy organisations, along with Learning Disability England and the Open University.

5. Easy Read

We are continuing to develop our Easy Read services doing regular work for the local authority, and some national organisations including the House of Lords.

6. Management Committee and Trustees

Both the Management Committee and Trustees have respectively continued to meet monthly. A member of the Trustee board, who has lived experience of a learning disability, also now sits on the Management Committee.

7.Database

Our Operations Manager has completed the new database, and trained up our Office Manager. This will allow us to have a significantly improved ability to record and monitor outcomes.



What have we learnt?

1

Continually listening to members and their changing needs is imperative in being able to offer effective services and solutions.

2

That continued support has been vital.

3

With the right support members have been resilient.

4

That we can adapt at pace, being flexible and creative as services are amended according to the changing needs of members post pandemic.

5

To be creative as we work with others in trialling solutions to work with harder to reach individuals i.e. people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

6

That strong mental and physical health/ wellbeing has become a priority for members, as vital as friendships.

7

That just because the pandemic has eased, there are still huge inequalities our members experience, and with funding ever competitive to secure, plus the cost of living crisis, it is even more imperative that we continue to support individuals to be resilient and that PFD continues to work collectively with other organisations to deliver cost effective, sustainable and robust solutions.

8

It can be very difficult for many people with learning disabilities to understand continued key messages, such as new laws, guidelines or information from government or how to stay safe, and that much reinforcement and easy read ways of demonstrating such messages are vital. For example, the new Voting ID requirements will be difficult for many members, who often do not have a passport or driving licence, creating another barrier to being able to vote.



9

People continue to need a lot of support finding their new 'normal'.



What next?

Our primary concern going forward is supporting our members to continue adapting to a 'new normal' whatever that might look like, which of course is ever uncertain. For some who have experienced stress and trauma over the last two years, the response that is needed continues to be quite significant.

Beneficiaries have had very different experiences of the pandemic too. Some were very soon out and about, keen to 'get back to their new normal'. Support for them to ensure they stay safe and understand any future changes is key. Others have barely left the home over the last two years and are still understandably anxious about doing so, particularly those with underlying health conditions. Support for them to continue to manage their health and wellbeing, as well as maintaining friendships, is imperative.

In the coming year, we anticipate continuing to run a hybrid of activities, both in person and online, including some smaller and additional meetings/events, as well as working more intensively with some individuals to build up their confidence.

Support for each individual, whatever their anxieties are at any given time, will be essential for a long time to come. Also important will be opportunities to listen and share experiences so that beneficiaries learn and develop skills to support each other.



Without funding from the Lottery, People's Health Trust, Henry Smith, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Dorset Council and others, we would not have been able to respond to the needs of adults with learning disabilities across Dorset as needed. Our continued conversations with members and carers tells us that they have coped as well as they did, because of the continued interaction and activity from People First Dorset.

It is not possible to calculate the possible value of our work and intervention, but it is likely that if even a small group of members had reached crisis point, that the costs of support would have been substantially greater the cost of our intervention.





Appendices

We ran 340 Events

Between 1st April 2022 & 31st March 2023

83



116



1944

Attendees



11

Online



22

Bespoke Workshops

(healthy eating,
environment, anxiety
and women's group)



Research

This research aims to gather vital insight into the experiences of loneliness and mental health of people with a learning disability during the pandemic.

What is a learning disability? Many participants felt that the majority of people have a poor understanding of what a learning disability is, which in turn fuels instances of bullying and discrimination. Recent research by Mencap (2021) supports this claim, finding two thirds of people in the UK do not know what a learning disability is. Many participants discussed feeling lonely, isolated and misunderstood by others because of their learning disability.

Post Covid

As England builds back following the worldwide coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the country is facing a mental health crisis (Mind, 2020). Prolonged periods of isolation due to national lockdowns have meant loneliness is now a more prominent issue than ever, defined as ‘a discrepancy between what we need and hope for in social relationships, and what we actually have’ (Waldron, 2010, pp.2). Poor mental health and loneliness are intrinsically linked, and may cause or result from each other (2013). Prior to the pandemic, limited suitable mental health services existed for people with a learning disability in the community, and the services that were available were often inaccessible or provided by professionals without any specialist training (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2020).

Existing issues have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, with many people with a learning disability feeling isolated and disconnected from support (Willner et al, 2020). Enjoying an active social life and having a circle of support can help people with a learning disability to feel happier, included and valued (Mason et al, 2013; Chadwick, Wesson and Fullwood, 2014; Wilson et al, 2017). However, research suggests that prior to the pandemic 1 in 3 young people with a learning disability spend less than 1 hour outside their home on a typical Saturday (Mencap, 2016). Feelings of loneliness appear to have intensified during the pandemic, with recent research by Flynn et al (2021) showing that 41% of people with a learning disability felt lonely with no one to talk to at least some of the time in a four-week period during the pandemic. Much of the existing literature exploring the experiences of mental health and loneliness of people with a learning disability is now outdated or does not consider the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this urgent issue, qualitative research is needed to ensure better support can be provided to people with a learning disability.

Research on wellbeing/loneliness/inequality

Research led by Hastings and Hatton, and authored by Flynn et al. (2021), found severe reductions in social care and support for people with learning disabilities, associated with negative impacts on wellbeing and mental health, with two-thirds of their sample having experienced anger, sadness or anxiety (Flynn et al., 2021)

Research over recent years has shown that people with learning disabilities face daily exclusion and inequality, with evidence demonstrating higher risk of abuse, isolation, discrimination, loneliness, unemployment and long-term mental health conditions (Cooper et al., 2015; Emerson and Baines, 2011; Malli et al., 2018; Wiseman and Watson, 2021).

Human Rights Research

In 2008, the Joint Committee on Human Rights presented the UK government with a striking report on the human rights violations which are experienced by people with learning disabilities, resulting from the neglect of government policy towards their health and social care, in such a way to dehumanise them and create a system that allows abuse, discrimination and indifference, perpetuating a life of isolation, poverty and social exclusion (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2008). The report highlighted the failure of government and public authorities to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities, stemming from limited understanding, funding and commitment to human rights. Further, in 2016, an inquiry from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concluded that since 2010 UK Government policies had resulted in ‘grave and systematic’ violations on the rights of disabled people, including concern on evident negative attitudes and discrimination towards people with learning disabilities, high suicide rates among this population, limited

employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities, and cases in which no attempt was made to resuscitate people with learning disabilities (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Despite these damning reports, people with learning disabilities remain one of the most excluded groups in the UK. Evidence from the first wave of the pandemic found people with learning disabilities socially isolated and worried about lost support, lost routine, and decreased health and wellbeing (Flynn et al., 2021).

Vulnerability and difference

Fineman's approach starts from the basis that all people share common characteristics but that there are differences between them (Fineman, 2004). According to Fineman, we are all vulnerable; it is, she argues, part of the universal human condition. We are all susceptible to change and physical or social harm. Vulnerabilities are then embodied and embedded (Fineman, 2015; Fineman, 2017). Embodied differences are those that arise from biology, development, social relations or conventions. These include identity categories, such as ethnicity, gender and disability, and the way in which these have been constructed to create hierarchies and bias. People with learning disabilities are often excluded because they have been marked as incapable, inferior, weak or dangerous, for example. This exclusion is not universal; it is socially imposed, contingent and can take many forms (Scully, 2014). Vulnerabilities are also embedded in 'social relationships and within societal institutions'

(Fineman, 2015). These economic, social, cultural and institutional relationships create embedded differences and it is these, Fineman argues, that shape our lives and create vulnerability. Emphasis is placed not on the individual, but on the structural, societal or institutional failings that cause vulnerability. People with learning disabilities are thus made vulnerable through social systems that exclude, actively harm and invisibilise, to render them devalued in everyday communities. These combine with and reinforce embodied vulnerabilities.

Vulnerability during Covid

Based on these findings, this paper has explored how people with learning disabilities have been made vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. These vulnerabilities are both embodied, in that they are underpinned by greater risk of morbidity and mortality, and also embedded in social processes and practices. Vulnerabilities are produced not just because of people with learning disabilities' increased risk of acquiring and dying from the virus, but also because of inappropriate, inadequate and discriminatory social structures, and the processes and practices that they are embedded within. As Scully (2014) argues, vulnerabilities associated with an impairment can be 'amplified through structural and institutional processes that distribute unequally the resources that people might use to shield themselves and foster resilience against the impact of disability' (Scully, 2014). Our findings demonstrate the social production of

vulnerability experienced by people with learning disabilities.

While the marginalisation of people with learning disabilities is not new, they have, in this pandemic, faced the same crisis in a new form. To date, almost all of the official dialogue surrounding people with learning disabilities and COVID-19 has focused on their clinical vulnerability to the virus, largely ignoring the social and cultural practices that have placed them at increased risk. As we look back over the course of the pandemic and our longitudinal data, we see a focus from government on the biomedical, with little consideration for social dimensions and the impact these have on health and wellbeing.

Systemic inequality

Over the last two decades, governments across the UK have received evidence, reports and advocacy on the systematic inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities, stemming from limited understanding, neglect and indifference (Health and Social Care Committee, 2021; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2008; Mencap, 2007; Scior and Werner, 2015; Simmonds et al., 2018). They have had a long time to act, but have shown little willingness to do so. In December 2021, the UK Government published a follow-up report to the 2016 inquiry by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, covering actions in 2020 and 2021 taken in line with United Nations recommendations for

welfare reform, accessible information and consultation (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021). The UK Government's reported actions to these recommendations do not, however, reflect the information told to us by people with learning disabilities and their families, and as seen in numerous pieces of research conducted during COVID-19. Independent inquiry, review and accountability continue to be needed to ensure that governments in the UK transform the health and social landscape into one that empowers people with learning disabilities to reduce health inequalities, vulnerabilities and help them to reach their potential.

Vulnerability and need for reform

In our analysis and by employing Fineman's vulnerability paradigm we have shown how the response of the governments has increased risk and vulnerabilised people with learning disabilities, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and imposing new. Given this, it is not surprising that people with learning disabilities have suffered poor health outcomes and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. These inequalities are not new and urgent reform is needed; for people with learning disabilities, returning to the status quo is not an option. Governments must work in partnership with people with learning disabilities, families and disability organisations to build back a better and fairer society, addressing the challenges that contribute to poorer health, wellbeing and quality of life. In order to understand and respond to the harms that people with learning disabilities have

experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to pay attention to the ways in which they are made vulnerable, the processes involved in making them vulnerable and the consequences on their lives.



Grupos em Português
Inglês e Espanhol
Faltas: 3 e 4
Faltas: 3 e 4

N.Y. CITY
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



What we did March 2022 - March 2023

an update of what we did in our third year of funding, which we were able to do in person (almost all of the time).

To find out more, visit our website:

www.peoplefirstdorset.org.uk

People First Dorset

2 Herringston Barn, Winterborne Herringston,
Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9PU

Tel: 01305 257600

Email: office@peoplefirstdorset.org.uk

Registered charity: 1106963