

Make a difference to people's lives

A DVD about what it's like to work with people with learning difficulties features three support workers. They all feel they are making a real difference to people's lives.

What is it like to work with people with learning difficulties? A group of voluntary learning disability organisations, part of the Lancashire Learning Disability Consortium (LLDC), has produced a DVD that gives a real-life insight into the work.

The DVD features local people who tell their own stories and gives a true-to-life introduction to the different aspects of working with people with learning difficulties.

Entitled *WOW (The Wonder Of Working with people with learning disabilities)* the DVD will form part of a new recruitment pack being sent to schools, job centres, colleges and universities to encourage more people to consider becoming support workers.

"Everybody needs the chance to live a life of their choosing, and you could help people to achieve this". That's the DVD's message. It features Lancashire support workers of all ages who describe how fulfilling and rewarding they find their jobs, and illustrates the different ways in which people with learning difficulties are supported to live full and interesting lives.

Rose Trustam, Chair of LLDC, explained: "People tend to have a simplistic view of what the job of a support worker entails which doesn't reflect the variety and range of opportunities that are available. The work is highly valued and it taps into skills and talents that many people have naturally. We provide training to help staff develop their skills and specialist knowledge which includes workbase qualifications. As the DVD shows, it is a highly satisfying and rewarding job that offers good career opportunities and experience for those who want it."

The DVD shows how people with learning difficulties have a variety of needs and abilities. It shows how staff support people with a range of practical household tasks, to participate in leisure activities as well as supporting them through difficult times. Examples include: supporting someone to go to the gym, to a café or to work; helping them go shopping, prepare a meal or even go with them on holiday. Research carried out by the LLDC shows that, whilst salaries and conditions are broadly comparable with other jobs in the service sector, staff working with people with learning difficulties feel involved in something really worthwhile.

Rose Trustam says...

At Integrate we've been taking social work students on placements since the 1980s and have highly valued their contributions – from providing an external and at times critical or questioning eye to offering service users support in the transition to having their own tenancies.

At the same time we have offered students the chance to do 'real social work', with the result that many social workers, who never dreamt of working in the learning disabilities area, qualify with the kind of values and commitment we need in this work. Across the year, we have worked in partnership with UCLAN and in the next issue we will describe the work of the three managers here who have been seconded on the social work training course and who now provide practice teaching for students.

We will discuss some of the opportunities there are for students working in the learning disabilities field and the wide variety of opportunities for learning in our field – not least of which is principles and values-driven work.

Rose Trustam is Chief Executive of Integrate (Preston & Chorley) Ltd, Chair of the Learning Disability Consortium and a member of Community Living's editorial board.