

Valuing People Refresh

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By the time this edition is out, the Valuing People refresh may be published. Glass half full or half empty? To an extent, it depends on what you use as your end point. If it is all people living the lives they want, then there is just a smattering of water in the bottom of the glass. However, if it is measuring, whether a fair number of people have better lives since 2000, then maybe it's half full.

My own view is that policy changes little. Government cannot, historically has not, and morally should not be setting the pace. The bigger an organisation is, the more difficult it is to keep in touch with what is happening on the ground – organisations don't come any bigger than central government.

Policy can only ever be reflective of what happens to get noticed and seen by people as being progressive and better – usually by the time it is noticed, the real innovation is happening elsewhere.

We would be managerially and intellectually bankrupt if we were to wait for government to tell us what to do, anyway. What other sector waits for policy pronouncements to give them ideas of new products or services to develop. I bet Apple, Tesco or Malmaison don't. They obsess about what their customers want, try and second guess what they would like next, and then get on with providing it. We need to learn from this, particularly as more people will have their own money to spend.

However, we cannot get away from the fact that because government directly fund so much of our service delivery, then policy does have an important part to play – but it cannot be an excuse to hide behind and avoid innovation and change.

What would we (Paradigm) like to see in the Valuing People refresh (and each Learning Disability policy in all of the UK countries)?

Firstly, we think that there should be a huge focus on day services. Modernisation has not worked. It is a measly set of words which too many people have hidden behind, that has resulted in the reproduction of a model which continues to struggle to meet the needs of people with learning difficulties – albeit on a smaller scale. This focus should be on employment, with an expectation that, if necessary, all existing day service resources should be focused on employment – not pretend jobs, but real jobs that you and I have. There should also be a focus on further education, and opportunities for people to use their leisure time in whatever way makes sense for them.

Secondly, there should be a focus on people's general health. It is a national scandal that so many people with learning difficulties die prematurely and receive poor health care. GPs, in particular, should have clear rewards and incentives for getting the healthcare of people with learning difficulties right.

Thirdly, the barriers to home ownership which exist in some high cost areas should be removed. The rules for DSS mortgages should be updated and it should be possible for every person with a learning difficulty who wants to, to buy their own home.

Lastly, Individual Budgets should be rolled out for everyone. This should be made clear and unambiguous. People have a right to be in control of their own lives. The Independent Living Bill becoming an act of parliament should be made a priority. This will enshrine all of this as a right.

A lot more needs to be done, but the original Valuing People made the mistake of trying to focus on too much. Lets have something that in two years time will show massive progress.