

## Hear Our Voice #CTMLockdownVoices Series

### Learning Disabilities: the ‘new normal’ – Supported/Independent Living BUBBLES across Rhondda Cynon Taf

*“I am not happy about all these things around bubbles. When ‘the germ’ came I left supported living and went to stay with my family for a few months. Now lockdown is ending I have come back to my own home and now the staff are telling me I cannot do the things I want to like seeing my family” – Darren, RCT People First Member*

As lockdown measures began to ease across Wales in July 2020, many people with learning disabilities and their parents and carers, as with many other people in society, developed a sense of excitement and relief that they would be able to meet together once again and start to establish a ‘new normal’ that allowed re-connection with one another and re-engagement in societal activities. As Welsh Government announced the approval of the creation of an extended ‘bubble’ between two households, many families quickly identified who and how they would regain social contact with in line with the new guidelines released, understanding their duty to protect not only themselves but the wider population in reducing the risk of a second wave. The guidance issued around ‘extended bubbles’ outlined that members of two different households were now able to form a bubble and visit each other’s homes, including overnight stays. Alongside the announcement and release of this guidance for extended bubbles, the opening of holiday homes, hotels and holiday parks was also approved. As a result, many families saw an opportunity to instigate overnight stays with their loved ones, and/or go on holiday (within the UK) together. However, whilst both of these things were acceptable for the general population, for those living in supported/independent living they were either told that they were prohibited from doing so, or that they would need to self-isolate in their bedrooms for a 14 day period upon their return to their house.

Many members of both RCT People First and The Grapevine started to raise their concerns in relation to these rules and how they felt they were being treated unfairly. Whilst all appreciated the need for safety to be the number one priority, they also recognised the negative effects lockdown had on the mental wellbeing of themselves and their loved ones and were looking to establish a way that they could re-connect and spend time with one another. A key criticism that emerged from the concerns being raised was the lack of communication, conflicting information and the confusing messages being provided by RCTCBC and the supported living providers. To try and bring some clarity to the situation, and to help establish a way forward into a conducive post-lockdown environment for those in supported and independent living, the Our Voice Matters project facilitated an online conversation between all interested and invested parties to address concerns and co-produce an action plan to move forward together.

The below illustration outlines the key themes that emerged from the conversation:

We need to look at how we can re-connect people with both work and voluntary opportunities, because these could have a positive impact on their mental health

Legislation is **CONFUSING!**

It feels like we are living in the days of **INSTITUTIONALISATION**, back to the days of a **DRACONIAN** system

There are challenges for everyone during this pandemic but we must learn through the process to make things better

We need to help people understand **RISKS** to themselves and the other people they live with, especially those who are shielding

We need to work **TOGETHER**

Guidance are **NOT** rules and this complicates things

Minimising **RISK** to everyone needs to be the key priority

Current information is **CONFUSING** and that causes **INCONSISTENCIES** in the rules for people in Supported Living

We need to consider the risks to people's **MENTAL HEALTH**



**Learning Disabilities The 'New Normal': Supported / Independent Living**

Wednesday 12th August 2020  
12.00 noon - 1.30 pm

Q & A Zoom session will be held between Supported Living Providers, Local Authorities, people with learning disabilities and parents and carers to establish a way forward for Supported/Independent Living Services throughout the pandemic.

To help guide the session, the following three questions have been identified by people with learning disabilities as priority areas to address their concerns and anxieties about Supported / Independent Living:

1. What are your guidelines around us being able to return to work opportunities such as paid work & volunteering?
2. When and how can I have access to my family & friends
3. When can I resume my social life, eg going to the pub, going on holiday, accessing leisure facilities

Registration will be via Eventbrite tickets: [CLICK HERE](#)

PEOPLE FIRST LIMITED

We need to help people reconnect with families safely

Supported Living **IS** considered a **BUBBLE**

There needs to be agreement of all house members for you to form a **BUBBLE** outside of the house

Everything is constantly changing, it is evolving on a daily basis

People with learning disabilities are being treated differently - lockdown has finished for most people in society, but they are still being segregated and restricted - no concern for their human rights and the overarching principles of the SSWB Act, 2014 by not allowing people to be involved in decision making

Information is **NOT** being adequately communicated to Parents/Carers

Action Points for moving forward:

1. Supported/Independent Living Housing Providers have been asked to have conversations with tenants/users of services to discuss how re-connection with family/society can happen in a post-lockdown environment.
2. Supported/Independent Living Housing Providers have been asked to look at the risks associated with tenants/users of services re-engaging in work and volunteering placements.
3. Ongoing talks with Public Health Wales are needed to inform the decisions and implementation of actions relating to 'bubbles' and the re-connection of tenants/users of services with their family/society. It is important that we work together more as we move forward to establish a consistent approach towards the interpretation of guidance being issued.
4. Supported/Independent Living Housing Providers have agreed to tell/explain to tenants/users of services and their families why they cannot support them to form a 'bubble' or re-engaging in societal activities, in a way they can fully understand.
5. Bespoke individualised risk assessments are needed for every tenant/user of services to establish what is deemed safe and appropriate for them, providing as much access and freedom as possible. This should promote a move away from generic/generalised application of guidance; no one size fits all approach but instead a person-centred planning approach.
6. A clear communication strategy needs to be established to ensure that tenants/users of services and their parents and carers are provided with regular updates on restrictions and how we can open up the world in a safe way to those in supported/independent living housing. This needs to be done in both a timely manner and in a coherent way that promotes understanding, especially when the guidance and rules for people in supported/independent living housing are different to what is being published by the media for the general population.
7. Joe Powell (All Wales People First) to express the concerns raised within this conversation within both Welsh Government and Public Health Wales Forums and to feedback any offered response, guidelines or actions, to help increase clarity and consistency in approach.