

Hidden Crimes, Secret Pain

Comments by Mencap

1.0 About Mencap

2.0 General comments

- 2.1 Mencap welcomes the development of a regional strategy for addressing sexual violence in Northern Ireland
- 2.2 We welcome, too, the recognition in the consultation document that some adults, as well as children, may be particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and that they may experience particular difficulties in taking action against the abuser.
- 2.3 We believe that the Strategy should also address the most appropriate ways to address vulnerable people who are perpetrators of sexual violence.
- 2.4 We note that the report highlights the dependency that children with disabilities may have on adults for their care needs (2.49) and suggest that the report should also acknowledge that the circumstances it describes for children can also be relevant for some men and women with a learning disability.
- 2.5 We believe, too, that some vulnerable groups, such as people with a learning disability, are likely to experience particular difficulties in accessing the support and legal services available to others.
- 2.6 We believe that the Strategy should examine and identify specific actions and recommendations about the approaches that are required to address the distinct needs and circumstances of people with a learning disability. We believe that people with a learning disability will be excluded from the outworking of the strategy if this work is not undertaken.
- 2.7 We suggest, too, that any research undertaken and any reporting systems devised should incorporate and report on the experiences of children and adults with a learning disability.
- 2.8 In our experience families play a key role in supporting people with a learning disability of all ages. We believe that the Strategy should consider the needs of families/carers who are supporting individuals who have experienced sexual violence.
- 2.9 We believe that the Strategy should consider the role that education and social services should play in developing the understanding and skills of people with learning disability about personal relationships, risk taking, speaking out, advocacy etc

- 2.10 We believe that the Strategy should consider the role of government in promoting and enhancing the rights of vulnerable people, such as people with a learning disability, including challenging public attitudes and assumptions about learning disability and about their right to enjoy equal opportunities and experiences.
- 2.11 We believe that children, young people, men and women with a learning disability will require different services because of their distinct needs. These services will include programmes to support understanding about personal relationships, assertiveness, and rights etc as well as counselling services and independent advocacy services to support individuals and their families if and as they decide to take action against an abuser. In addition, training for those involved in the criminal justice system including the police, solicitors and judges to enhance understanding of learning disability and issues such as consent and accessibility will also be required.

Policy & Information Manager – Mencap NI

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