



## review

### All about us! The Story of People with a Learning Disability and Mencap

Brian Rix (ed.)

Mencap, 2006, £20 hb, 448 pp.  
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This book is compiled and edited by Lord Brian Rix, President of Mencap, and celebrates 60 years of the society (1946–2006). There are contributions from Lord Rix himself and others, including service users and carers. This is an excellent chronicle of the first 60 years of the society and describes the challenges faced by people with learning disability and their carers over this period. It provides a historical perspective of this marginalised population and also highlights their success stories.

The prologue provides a comprehensive account of doctors in the Victorian era who cared for people with learning disability. The rest of the book covers the history of Mencap, the views of its officers and of people with learning disability and their carers. It also provides a socio-political account of the impact of the legislative and policy changes over the past 60 years and the move from institutional care to living in the community. The

final section describes the society's initiatives and activities through its regional and other offices/alliances.

Historically, the move from the medical to the social model of care for people with learning disability has not been easy. It was made possible through several initiatives, including that of Mencap, which provided a platform for the voices of users and carers to be heard. Particularly impressive were Lord Rix's own initiatives and commitment to bring about these positive changes that were thought to be impossible to achieve. The account of his own experience as a parent and carer will indeed inspire many others.

Despite these significant improvements, the current situation is far from rosy and this has been aptly mentioned in the various chapters. Particularly important are the existing gaps between the policies and their implementation, in spite of the emphasis on rights, inclusion, choice and independence for people with learning disability (*Valuing People* White Paper; Department of Health, 2001).

The book highlights the past and recent initiatives of Mencap, including those aimed at reducing health and social inequalities (annual health check for all, advocacy for people with learning disability, support for elderly carers and

for carers who are looking after people with profound or multiple learning disabilities). An emerging theme from the users and carers' accounts is the barriers they have faced in being heard and receiving the right support from the statutory agencies. The success stories also point towards solutions to overcome such barriers.

Readers will particularly enjoy the historical perspectives, socio-political aspects of policy development and legislative changes, views from people with learning disability and how their lives have changed, reflections from parents and carers, and finally the information about past and current Mencap initiatives.

I believe that this book should be an essential read for all professionals who wish to understand the obstacles faced by people with learning disability, and how some of these have been overcome in the past few decades.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (2001) *Valuing People*.  
Department of Health.

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