

Society Guardian: Independent living, extracts from articles, 2006

Richard Hamer is director of Ownership Options in Scotland, a not-for-profit organisation that specialises in disabled people and home ownership.

A self-directed assessment of all of the support required - this means that disabled people would be in control of the assessment, and where possible they would be able to carry out their own, with support if necessary.

Sue Bott, executive director of the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL).

There are two sides to disability equality. On one side of the coin there is disability rights encompassing issues such as equal opportunities in employment and access to shops, transport and leisure facilities. On the other side there is the concept of independent living, which is about disabled people having choice and control over the support they need to go about their daily lives.

While not shying away from the need for additional resources, supporters of the bill are keen to point out that with the disabled person in control of their support, they decide on the most appropriate services, and these often cost less than other services.

An Audit Commission report found that the provision of basic equipment to people with visual impairments would reduce the number of injuries from falls, saving the NHS an estimated £130m a year.

Many of the changes made or in progress need to be considered in the light of Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People, the report published by the prime minister's strategy unit nearly two years ago.

The report has already made a difference now that families with disabled children no longer face a means test to get grants for adapting the family home, and it has helped "push disability up the agenda".

And there are concerns about the demise of the commission.

Individual budgets look set to be the next big thing in social care. Formally announced early in 2005, they are currently being piloted in 13 local authorities and are now a key proposal in the government's agenda for the modernisation of public services.

The idea behind them is that disabled people and other users of social care services will receive a single assessment that will cover a range of different sources of support. Following this the service user will be told the amount of money available to pay for their support and they will decide how that money will be spent.

What may remain of concern is the wider financial situation, particularly with many

organisations run by disabled people, and other service users facing cuts in funding.

Local Authorities often look only at price, says Aspis, and don't consider the added value user-led groups can offer, for example their disabled members' own experiences, which can be vital to help other disabled people.

Earlier this year the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL), a group representing more than 100 user-led organisations, signed an important protocol with the Association of Directors of Social Services. The protocol encourages local authorities to value the contribution made by user-led groups and supports local authorities in developing user-led groups where there are none in existence.

“If you haven't got a strong movement of organisations run and controlled by disabled people, then how can the government say they are listening to disabled people?” says Lee.