



Mental Health: Lennox Castle

Leaving Lennox Castle

Allan Williamson:

Up until the late seventies there was no real planned discharge programme for the hospital. And really thereon in, the discharge of residents was very much based upon being able to shoot on people into facilities, as and when they became available. Now that started off as a bit of a trickle. And then mainly on the back of voluntary organisations, a number of voluntary organisations in Scotland, and increasing provision within the community, that increased the capacity for the hospital to downsize. It wasn't people moving into supported living. It was people moving from a very large institution, to maybe a slightly smaller institution. But it was nevertheless still people moving into shared living situations. It was then that the hospital population probably reduced quite significantly within a relatively short period of time. It was opportunistic as opposed to planned. It then became planned and structured, but very much dependant upon people being able to be slotted into facilities who were fitting people into resources, rather than designing resources around individual needs.

As an organisation, increasingly we are moving away and dismantling shared living unless it's an expressed choice of an individual. At one time, the majority of our activity, was within a shared living context. That is not the case anymore. And we have a very active programme supported by Communities Scotland, of physically dismantling what were shared accommodations, and reconfiguring them, into individual accommodations. Which are truly personalised to that individuals needs. So yet, again designing the accommodation, designing the support around individuals, rather than merely fitting somebody in to a pre-existing, pre-determined situation.

I think there are still huge amounts of work to be done in helping ordinary members of the public engage positively with people with learning disabilities. And importantly being able to sustain that engagement. Because very often the person with the learning disability, may need an awful lot of help to sustain that engagement. It's all very well for an organisation that is paid to care, to do the bridge building, and say 'right okay, we will support you to go along to the Highland Dancing Club'. But essentially, that person is getting paid to do a job, and that is a fairly unnatural dynamic. A much more natural dynamic, is that the person goes along to the highland dancing club, makes friends at the highland dancing club, and if that person needs help to go to that highland dancing club, his friends help him to go to that highland dancing club. And that's a much more natural process. And I think that's the big job that we have to do, as an organisation. And that other like minded organisations have to do, in terms of developing inclusivity, is building networks of people round individuals. And building a network which is not dependant upon paid care. My life is not dependant upon paid care. Yes, I need to pay people to do certain things, to support me in my life. But I don't need somebody who is paid to care for me, to do everything in my life. And I think to get the variety of people, get a circle of support around an individual. Which, who is there because they want to be there. Not because they're getting paid £9 an hour or £10 an hour. It's a much more effective and sustainable relationship with an individual.