Learning Disabilities in the Criminal Justice System

Neisha Betts

KeyRing
... We're Life Changing

What is a learning disability?

The term is used in relation to individuals who have the following characteristics:

- A significantly reduced ability to understand complex information or learn new skills (‘impaired intelligence’)
- A reduced ability to cope independently (‘impaired social functioning’)
- A condition which started before adulthood and has a lasting effect

‘Valuing People’ (Department of Health, 2001)

Everyday things people may need help with?

- Filling in forms
- Explaining things
- Following instructions or directions
- Managing a home
- Concentrating for long periods
- Managing money
- Using public transport
- Telling the time
- Keeping appointments
- Remembering information
- Reading and comprehension
- Writing
- Understanding social norms

First-hand experience...

Lee talks about having a learning disability in prison

(ch.1/ 4.31mins in)

Offenders with learning disabilities

- 1-10% of adult prison population
- Up to 25% of children and young people
- Typically mild-moderate
- Not always known to services
- High numbers of ‘borderline’ cases



Critical factors for success

- Learning disabilities expertise in healthcare teams
- Screening with a validated tool
- Established protocols for positive screens
- Close relationships with local agencies
- Clear lines of communication with partners



First-hand experience...

Danny talks about his cycle of re-offending

(ch.3/ 5.12mins in)

Screening, Identification and Assessment

The role of criminal justice staff
The role of health care staff



Support for offenders with learning disabilities

In the criminal justice system...





In the community...

Support for offenders with learning disabilities

Support within the criminal justice system

- Appropriate Adults (police)
- Intermediaries (courts)
- ‘Special Measures’ in court (Criminal Practice Direction)
- ‘Reasonable Adjustments’ at all stages
- CJS staff already trained in LD awareness (police, courts, prison, probation)
- Local/national CJS charities



First-hand experience...

CJ talks about being arrested

(ch.2/ 1.39 mins in)

Support for offenders with learning disabilities

Working with community partners

- Liaison and Diversion services
- Learning disability teams / Social services
- Specialist housing
- Disability employment leads
- Local day centres / Peer support groups
- Drug/alcohol programs (adapted)
- Secure / specialist hospitals
- Family & carers



First-hand experience...

Lee talks about his community support after prison

David talks about his time on probation in group therapy

(ch.3/ 6.16 mins in)

Easy Read in the Criminal Justice System



South Essex Partnership University NHS
NHS Foundation Trust



Have you been arrested or charged and you need extra support?

Your local Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Team may be able to help.

Local Services, Local Solutions SEPT

Have you been arrested or charged and you need extra support?

Your local Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Service may be able to help



Our service is here to help vulnerable adults and any children or young people.



Our team of experts can give support for anyone who is a suspect at the police station or a defendant at magistrate's court.



When we say 'vulnerable' adults we mean people with:



- learning disabilities or learning difficulties
- mental health problems



- alcohol or substance misuse issues

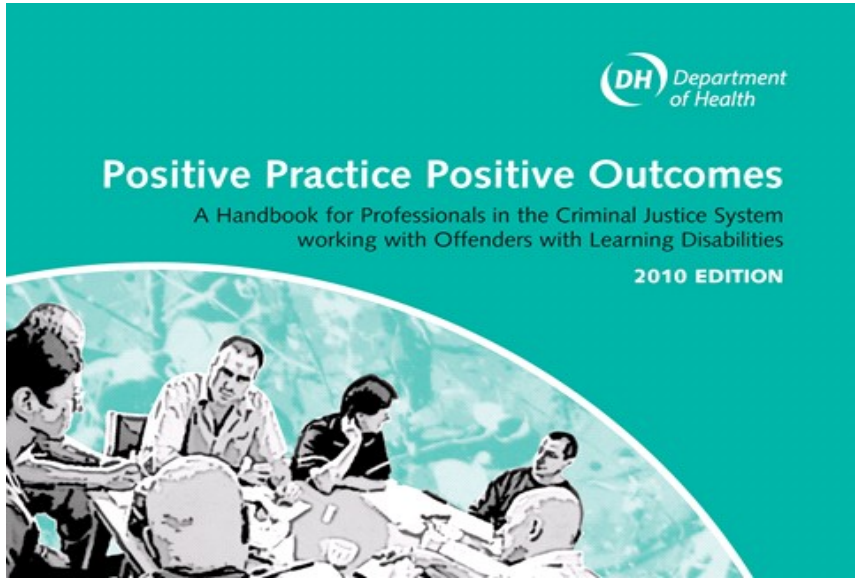


- housing issues

First-hand experience...

‘Risky Business’ perform a sketch about bad and good communication

(ch.2/ start)



- HMPPS Toolkit for prison and probation staff on learning disabilities and learning difficulties (HMPPS Intranet)
- Magistrates mental health and learning disabilities online guidance (PRT)
- Keyring.org/cjs

Any questions?



Neisha.Betts@Keyring.org