

Get Behind the Manifesto!



All Wales People First are updating their Manifesto in preparation for the National Assembly for Wales election in May 2011. Yvonne Boxall, advisor, reports and suggests how people can support them.

"Democracy is a right, it is your right. You have the power to influence how things get done. Now it's up to you to exercise that power. Show people that you want change to happen. Stand up and be counted. Be responsible for saying to society, I matter as much as you do".

Cynthia Arthur

We are fast approaching another National Assembly for Wales election in May 2011 but this time it feels particularly challenging for people with learning disabilities. News of 'a tidal wave of cuts' is gloomy to say the least, the climate at its most inclement for the most vulnerable. Cynthia's words,

written for conference delegates back in 2006 have even more significance today. In People First we are stepping up to the challenge, preparing to update our People First Manifesto so that in the clamour for a piece of the ever diminishing cake, people with learning disabilities are not forgotten and not left with just the crumbs.

New Expectations

The 2011 People First Manifesto will set out new expectations on a new Welsh Assembly Government. In some ways it will bear a resemblance to the 2007 Manifesto which placed responsibility upon the Government to uphold the **fundamental rights** of people with learning disabilities. It started

out as a 27-point 'Charter' but then became a rights based statement putting clear, specific, measurable and realistic expectations upon a new Government. The statement fell under nine headings; these are as relevant today:

- The right to control our lives
- The right to speak up for ourselves
- The right to respect
- The right to personal growth
- The right to be included in the same activities as everyone else
- The right to friendships and relationships
- The right to choose how and where we live
- The right to good quality health care
- The right to good quality support

2006

In 2006 the Manifesto was taken forward by our Public Affairs Group, made up of People First members, who learned ways of working with and influencing politicians using the Manifesto and its aims as a means of engaging with politicians at every opportunity. As it filtered out to our members across Wales, All Wales People First developed an Election Toolkit to help people with learning disabilities understand the voting process and how to hold hustings around the Manifesto's aims. The toolkit linked the strategic role of the Manifesto to the hustings events and to longer-term policy decisions. It described the identities and aims of the different parties and the Assembly structure.

At the time our members felt it put All Wales People First on the political map and took us a step above what we had done before. Darren Locke, Chair of the People First National Council says:

'It was an important step. It felt like walking into the Lion's den.'

A lot of people felt empowered by the Manifesto – this was one of the best ways to make a statement about their lives. A lot of people took it to their politicians. A lot of people turned up to the hustings and spoke about issues very important to them. It was great to do things on this scale. There were some people that wouldn't normally speak but suddenly they wanted to say to politicians what they felt. Some politicians still remember it today. Some politicians really took it on board.'



Most importantly it raised the professional image of people with learning disabilities in the political arena.

Candidates from all the political parties were enthusiastic. They said:

This Manifesto is too important to be left on the table. This needs to be carried on after the election. You need to make whoever is elected's life hell on earth until you get this adopted by the WAG.

This Manifesto is brilliant – it's short and to the point. You can see exactly what it is that you care about.

I welcome the Manifesto. It is yours; it is straightforward and very hard hitting. I don't think anybody would disagree with the principles.

I was particularly impressed by the People First Manifesto's emphasis on rights. This has to be a top priority with any political institution like the Assembly.

People First Manifesto 2011

The new Manifesto will be based around the same rights headings but it will take account of changes that have happened in Wales since 2007 and will make better links with national initiatives

that are taking place in Wales, such as Citizen Directed Support, Learning Disability Wales 'Access to Employment' group's lobby on employment and work that is happening in other disability organisations.

All Wales People First has done a lot of work to engage people with learning disabilities in politics over the last 2 years. The 'Switched on to Politics' project which included Learning for Leadership, a personal development programme, helped people to understand the relevance of politics in their lives, engage with politicians and leaders and start to use their personal skills and experience as leaders in their own right, to influence and effect change. We are confident that this project, combined with our one day Voting and Politics workshops, has equipped people with the motivation and knowledge they need to get out and exercise their democratic rights. But if the People First Manifesto is to have the impact we want, it needs to have the endorsement and support of the wider community of learning disability organisations. We all need to get behind it.



How can YOU get behind the Manifesto?

Here is a list of things that individuals, organisations and service providers can do:

- 1) Make sure we don't reinvent the wheel. Tell us about important national initiatives that are taking place that need to be linked to the Manifesto.
- 2) Foster the right to vote. Apathy about politics is endemic; set a good example and take an active part yourself.
- 3) During the 2011 canvassing period, make sure you have a copy of the People First Manifesto and take every opportunity to challenge the candidates on the statements.
- 4) If you support people with learning disabilities in their everyday lives, make sure they are registered to vote and encourage and provide people with the support they need to get out and vote. Their vote matters.
- 5) Help people with learning disabilities to attend (or organise their own) hustings. Join together with people and organisations in the same political region – there is strength in numbers! All Wales People First has information on how to organise hustings in its Election Toolkit.
- 6) Endorse the Manifesto, sign up to it. You can do this electronically, with a photo (instead of a signature) and send it to us, by email, at info@allwalespeople1st.co.uk. Get other people, including your local politicians, to do it too.



Plans

Our plan is to launch the 2011 Manifesto at the Senedd between November and December. In the meantime look out for the People First Manifesto on the All Wales People First Facebook site. The first draft will be available following our national conference on 14th and 15th September where delegates will have the opportunity to be involved in speed debates, facilitated by experts in their fields, about all aspects of their lives. You can get involved in the debate by using the Facebook comments box to make your contributions to the Manifesto.

A final word from Darren Locke: *This year we need to go back to*

the Senedd, involving more people. We need to get more photos of politicians holding the Manifesto and supporting it. It's important that people are positive, not negative with politicians. We need their support and we get that by behaving like politicians ourselves, being reasonably pushy and hanging in there, winning them over to support us. Right up to the date of the election. And beyond.

Learning Disability Wales is supporting the work of 'getting behind the manifesto'

Adrian Roper, Chair of Learning Disability Wales and Chief Executive of Cartrefi Cymru said

"Learning Disability Wales is striving to enable people with learning disabilities develop a strong voice and have their status recognised as full citizens. I can't think of a better way of achieving our aims as 'getting behind the manifesto'".

Learning Disability Wales are planning on holding a campaign meeting in late autumn which will be a further opportunity to support the manifesto.

*Yvonne Boxall
Advisor*