

Disability Hate Crime... raising awareness, good practice and next steps in Wales

Disability hate crime has been recognised as an offence for 7 years, but sadly it has only taken until recently and some true horror stories in the press for action to be taken. Karen Warner, Learning Disability Wales looks at the need to raise awareness of people with learning disabilities on recognising disability hate crime and being able to report it. She shares examples of good practice, partnership working and research on disability hate crime in Wales.

'There can be no more important human right than to live in safety and security. Its absence prevents us from living our lives to the full. And for some, its absence has led to the loss of life itself. For many disabled people in Britain safety and security is a right frequently denied'. Trevor Phillips, Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Karen Warner, Learning Disability Wales looks at the need to raise awareness of people with learning disabilities on recognising disability hate crime and being able to report it.



Law

Disability hate crime did not become an offence recognised in law until 2003; so although crimes were committed, they were often termed as 'bullying'. In Mencap's 'Living in Fear' report in 1999, 9 out of 10 people with learning disabilities had reported being bullied. This varied from name calling, being beaten up to having their head hit against the wall. All of this can now be seen as a hate crime. Hate crime often

starts with small incidents such as name calling, but it often moves on to threats, damage to property, physical assaults and even murder. The perpetrator sees they can get away with the small things, so sometimes they believe they can get away with something more serious. 'Getting away with Murder' was the title of an excellent report produced by Scope in 2008 which looks at disabled people's experiences of hate crime in the UK.

Acceptance

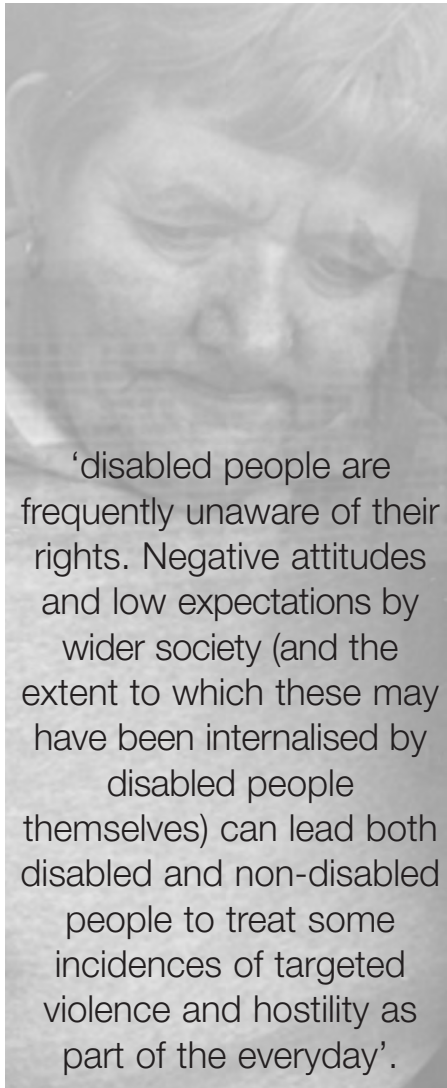
Research has shown that hate crime is a strong term and it is not one that people think of when it happens to them. People often accept it as part of their everyday life or mistake it for 'anti-social behaviour'.

People with learning disabilities living in the community are increasingly finding themselves the victims of 'mate crime'. 'Mate crime' describes the abuse of people with learning disabilities by people who pose as their friends and then exploit them. Sadly, many people with learning disabilities are socially isolated and often lonely. They may also lack the cognitive ability to distinguish people who genuinely care about them from those who do not, and may welcome any forms of companionship that are offered. As we know from the press, some people have been tortured and murdered by people they considered friends.

People are often unaware of their rights. In Equality and Human Rights Commission research it says 'disabled people are frequently unaware of their rights. Negative attitudes and low expectations by wider society (and the extent to which these may have been internalised by disabled people themselves) can lead both disabled and non-disabled people to treat some incidences of targeted violence and hostility as part of the everyday'.

Reporting

Often people are not sure who to tell, they may not want to go to the Police for instance believing that the Police will not take it



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seriously even if they do report it. Reporting forms use difficult words and language which is off putting. Also if people go to the Police, they live in fear that the criminals will target them even more.

There are so many words used to encompass disability hate crime which can be confusing for anyone. These are some of the words that are used – bullying, harassment, abuse, domestic abuse, robbery, theft, damage, intimidation, anti-social behaviour, assault, violence, prejudice, hostility. Without being too critical, the EHRC inquiry is called 'disability related harassment' with a small sentence in the easy read saying 'bullying and hate crime are also

types of harassment'.

There is some good work going on around Wales and the UK to help people report disability hate crime and support them afterwards. But there is more work needed in helping people with learning disabilities recognise they are a victim of a disability hate crime before they can be in a position to report it.

What is happening in Wales?

Torfaen People First: Talk About it

Torfaen People First received money from the Home Office to help people with learning disabilities recognise hate crime, talk about it and have the confidence to report it. The project came about after members of Torfaen People First had a chance to talk to trainee police officers about the incidents and crimes that they had been subjected to. The project involved the production of a DVD, workbook and easy read leaflet. The workbook contains people's real life stories. The training for people with learning disabilities has enabled people to talk about their experiences and look at what is needed to support victims of hate crime. Also members received training on using the True Vision Hate Crime Reporting Pack. This pack is in Easy Read and contains a reporting pack and reporting form. It was produced by Photosymbols on behalf of the Home Office. True Vision explains some of the terms used such as harassment, intimidation, damage, bullying.



Members of Torfaen People First have trained the local police to raise awareness of how hate crimes can escalate from small incidents which result in more serious crimes and how they affect people's lives. The materials have also been used to train support workers to consider how they can support victims and the police. If someone has been a victim of an incident or crime they may not want to report it to the Police. There are some 3rd Party reporting centres, but either there are not enough or they are not known about. The project resulted in the opening up of 3rd party reporting centres so people could report an incident or crime in places where they went in their daily lives such as Torfaen People First, the gateway club and Workwell.

As a result of the project reporting has increased dramatically. In the whole of the Gwent area, only 6 hate crimes were reported in 2009/2010. In the first 5 weeks of the start of the project, 4 people with a learning disability had reported an incident or crime in the Torfaen area alone.

In 2010/11 the Home Office has given further money to roll out the 'Talk about it' project over the Gwent police authority area where Torfaen People First will work with the Police Community Cohesion Team. It would be good if this resource was rolled out across Wales.

Bridgend People First summer school

In July this year Bridgend People First held a summer school to teach people with learning disabilities about hate crime, and to design some new hate crime materials for use in their schools project. During the 2-week course, students had to research and present to a panel of experts a project about hate crime. They also designed some questions for a question time session about hate crime in Bridgend, to a panel of experts (a magistrate, South Wales Police, Deputy leader of Bridgend County Borough Council, and a member of the local Adult Protection Committee). They also designed and tested out new teaching materials and did a day of drama to act out hate crime.

Safer Wales

Safer Wales is a 3rd Party reporting centre. If someone reports an incident or crime to them, it can remain confidential unless the person gives permission for Safer Wales to tell the Police. Learning Disability Wales assisted Safer Wales on making their reporting form easier to read and understand. Mencap Cymru and Safer Wales are working together to use the freephone learning disability helpline as a way for people with learning disabilities to report disability hate crime.

All Wales Police, Disability Wales and Disabled People's organisations: Disability consultation and involvement forum

Partnership work has been going on in Wales with the Police and disability organisations, including Learning Disability Wales, to work strategically to explore what can be done to tackle the issues around disability hate crime. After two forum meetings, a draft strategic implementation plan is being developed. It aims to raise awareness within statutory agencies and communities. To aid the reporting, identification and management of disability hate crime, 'tools' will be developed and multi-agency partnerships formed. A communication strategy will be developed to include the publishing of hate crime statistics and communicating good practice.

Mencap Cymru 'ARC' campaign

Recently Mencap Cymru has begun work on disability hate crime: It is called their ARC campaign. A = Awareness. R = Reporting C = Convictions. They want:

- to raise awareness amongst people with a learning disability about what hate crime is and what their rights are.
- people with a learning disability to be more confident, and have the correct mechanisms in reporting hate crime.
- the work they do in raising Awareness and Reporting to increase the number of successful convictions under the banner of Disability Hate Crime.

They will be meeting with people with a learning disability from across Wales to not only raise awareness of hate crime, but also to gather information from service users on their experiences and stories they may have heard from friends/family.

All Wales Hate Crime Research project

The project is being undertaken by Race Equality First, in partnership with Cardiff University and Cardiff and Vale Equality and Human Rights Network. It is investigating hate crime in relation to all the recognised equality strands. A survey will be going out by the time this article is published. As a result of the project it aims to offer capacity building activities for organisations which may include workshops around good practice and policy development.

Some initiatives in the UK

EHRC inquiry on disability related harassment

The Equality and Human Rights Commission across the UK are currently undertaking a formal inquiry into disability related harassment. It is a major inquiry covering England, Scotland and Wales using a variety of methods for collecting evidence. It did include an Easy Read questionnaire. It is also looking into the actions of public authorities and how well they are addressing disability hate crime. Learning Disability Wales are assisting the inquiry and is part of the UK advisory group. A final report with recommendations is due out in May 2011.

Cross government action plan on hold

On a UK level, in 2009 the government published a cross government action plan on hate crime. Since the coalition government came in to power this May, the action plan has been on hold.

Facebook – Disability Hate Crime Network

Sign up for networking and information across the UK. Currently 1,667 members. Created by Stephen Brookes, Disability and Equality Trainer.

Definitions

Disability Hate Crime

“A hate crime is any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person’s disability or perceived disability’.

Disability Hate Incident

As above but a non-crime.

References/further information

All Wales Hate Crime Research Project. Mair Rigby
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Mencap Cymru ARC Campaign contact
Simon.Stranks@mencap.org.uk

Safer Wales. For more information and on-line reporting form
<https://www.saferwales.com/>

True Vision Disability Hate Crime Reporting Pack – includes information book and reporting form. Available from
<http://www.photosymbols.com/downloads.htm>

‘Getting away with Murder: Disabled People’s experiences of Hate Crime in the UK, Scope, Disability Now magazine and UK Disabled People’s Council, 2008. <http://www.scope.org.uk/help-and-information/publications/getting-away-murder>

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