

Editorial: January 2010, Volume 3, Number 8

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I would like to welcome readers to Issue 8 of IQJ and to the new decade. In the UK, the only country I feel qualified to talk about, difficult times lie ahead for many people who are most dependent on public services. While I am not given to pessimism, I do believe that there are strong advantages in knowing what might be coming. My reading of the runes tells me that the cuts in public spending, that even politicians are predicting (some more than others), will be very much more savage than our leaders are prepared to disclose before the coming general election.

While we will all be affected to some extent, I can imagine that those of us using services that are not provided for in law will be more affected, as will people who belong to categories that are only small and negligible minorities in terms of voting power. In the field of childhood disability, I anticipate children below school age and their families, and young people leaving school and their families being severely affected. I foresee expected new or expanded projects and services failing to materialise, and reductions in support that infants, young people and their families have benefited from up to now.

In my particular field of early childhood intervention, it will be a bitter blow if the progress of the first decade is stopped in its tracks or even regressed. I have no strategy to offer as, for most of us, the economic climate is as much a given as the weather. The winter comes and we shiver.

But I do have an appeal – and that is for honesty from the leaders of public services. The need for honesty and open communication is my theme for the Alphabet of Helpful Hints (H is for Honesty) in this issue. Disabled people, their families and their practitioners need a continual flow of accurate information about changes to types and levels of service provision. With this clear information we know what to expect and we have some chance of, if possible, being prepared for it.

If the cuts are underhand and unheralded, we could have a situation (and this would not be a novelty) of angry, frustrated or depressed service users haranguing their practitioners while the most senior managers keep safe in the comfort of their executive suites. This would not be fair to service users or practitioners. I would like to go one stage further and ask that elected officers and senior managers develop pro-active strategies to prevent frontline practitioners having to take the flak from users who are forced to manage with significant reductions in support.

Because cuts are inevitable, whatever the flavour of the new government, such practitioners as nurses, therapists, teachers and care workers will find themselves trying to maintain standards against all the odds. In this issue of IQJ there are many examples of such values, commitment and enterprise. Tony O'Sullivan's Lead Article about Lewisham's Kaleidoscope Centre describes the results of a massive effort to improve joined up working by co-location of services. Professor Hilton Davis, in the first part of an interview for IQJ, discloses what motivated him to develop his internationally renowned Family Partnership Model, while Patrick Hastings describes the philosophy and evolution of the Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy.

Beth Cox writes about Child's Play's successful effort to include disabled children in picture books, Nic Crosby gives a clear account of Individual Budgets and Self-directed Support for children, and Deborah Berkeley, in Episode 8 of her Diary for IQJ, tells of her disappointment as a parent of a disabled child, in failing to secure a post for which she felt very well qualified – and much in need of the income.

Fiona Curtin inspires us with brave work in a children's hospice in Zimbabwe, and Jane Pearson describes a successful parent support group in which parents and practitioners find solutions to the challenges of children with social communication difficulties. Gerry

German, in the Opinion piece, protests that schools are not fit for our children and goes on to envisage smaller schools with happier children.

Short of money we will be, but in the UK we will not be short of committed practitioners and parents with ideas and energy, and with an unswerving commitment to a better deal for our children.