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## EDITORIAL

**Peter McGill, Tizard Centre**

The main articles in the current issue of TLDR illustrate quite nicely the range of issues that have to be considered in improving the quality of life of people with learning disabilities. The review by Chris James and James Stacey of the effectiveness of psychodynamic interventions is inevitably focused on the individual and the extent to which individuals in distress may be helped by this kind of therapy. Hilary Brown's subsequent commentary provides some very clear illustrations of the kinds of distressing situations faced and the ways in which we are not always very good at dealing with them in helpful ways. So one of the things we certainly need to work for is the availability of skilled support which can make a big difference to the quality of life of both individuals with a learning disability and their families or carers.

But, of course, many of the issues that individuals or their families face are shared and require action not just at an individual level but beyond this. The article by Jayne Lingard, Vivien Cooper and Mick Connell describes an attempt to improve quality of life through working at a broader organisational level. This article and the accompanying commentary by Alison Giraud-Saunders illustrate how difficult it is to bring about change at this level and identify some potential solutions. Interestingly, one of the problems reported was a lack of skill and understanding of the support needs of individuals, showing how individual and organisational levels are really inseparable. Individual change depends upon organisational support, organisational change requires an understanding of individuals and their needs.

### **In memoriam**

I note with regret the passing during 2013 of three significant contributors to better quality supports for people with learning disabilities. **Cliff Cunningham (1941-2013)** was a teacher and psychologist best known for his work at the Hester Adrian Research Centre in Manchester, UK. He established a longitudinal study of children with Down syndrome which had both academic and practical impact, contributing, for example, to early intervention projects (e.g., Cunningham et al, 1986) and the communication of a diagnosis to new parents.

**Mary Myers (1930-2013)** was a British psychiatrist who was one of the authors of "An Ordinary Life" (King's Fund, 1980). This seminal publication of 1980 was enormously influential in directing attention to the notion that people with learning disabilities could and should live ordinary lives in "ordinary houses in ordinary streets" rather than the institutions where thousands still resided (and, sadly, still reside in many parts of the world).

**Arthur Dalton (1937-2013)** was a Canadian psychologist whose research contributed greatly to an increased understanding of the relationship between Down syndrome and Alzheimer dementia and, more generally, issues associated with ageing in people with learning disabilities (e.g., Janicki & Dalton, 1999).

In reflecting on these contributions to improving the lives of people with learning disabilities, it is very notable how the work they did remains highly relevant in the present day. The availability of effective early intervention to support families remains limited, there are still many people with learning disabilities whose lives are far from "ordinary", and the issues arising from ageing become

more salient all the time as the proportion of people with learning disabilities reaching old age grows.

## References

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