

The same as you? 2000 -2012: Consultation Report

Response on behalf of SPRED Glasgow

The Board of Management of SPRED Glasgow welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the evaluation of *The same as you?* (SAY). SPRED is a voluntary organisation and registered Scottish charity that works within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Glasgow to enable people affected by a learning disability to take their rightful place in their parish communities. Although we speak from a specifically Roman Catholic perspective we believe that this issues that we raise in our response will apply also to other faith traditions.

We take as our starting point that people with learning disabilities are made in the image and likeness of God and share the same dignity of all human persons. SPRED therefore endorses the principles that underpin SAY, that "people with learning disabilities [have] the right to be included in, and contribute to, society, to have a voice, and to have access, with their families, to support to live the life of their choosing." We believe that this includes the right to experience and develop the spiritual dimension of their lives. Our work among people affected by a learning disability has shown us that they are often intensely aware of this dimension of the human experience but that churches need to create opportunities for people with a learning disability to express their spirituality. SPRED does this by means of forming small communities of faith, attached to parish communities.

SPRED is disappointed that the consultation report makes no mention of the rights of the person with a learning disability to express the spiritual dimension of their life. We recommend that the new strategy and action plan that are to be developed make specific reference to the spiritual dimension of life and of the rights of the person with a learning disability to be supported to participate fully in the life of their church or faith community.

While a person with a learning disability is living in the family home, it is likely that they will be known in their parish community and it will be straightforward for contact to be made with the relevant SPRED group. Family carers are supportive of the work of SPRED and find that becoming part of a SPRED group enhances the life of their relative. Not only does SPRED enable its members to participate fully in the religious tradition in which they were raised but it also offers them an experience of one to one friendship, which, despite the findings of the SAY evaluation, is often lacking in the lives of those with a learning disability. SPRED also offers its

members with a learning disability the experience of being valued for the rich contribution that they bring to the community. In SPRED, all participate as equals and the contribution of each one is welcomed.

A difficulty can arise later in life, when people are no longer living with family but in individual or shared tenancies or in group homes, especially when their closest family members have died or are no longer able to advocate on their behalf. In such circumstances it can be more difficult of people to maintain contact with their parish community or to establish contact with a new parish community if they have moved from the area in which they were brought up. In those circumstances the person is often dependent on practitioner undertaking their social work assessment and preparing their support plan to help them to express the importance that they attach to belonging to a church or faith community and to be supported to express their faith. If the practitioner has little personal understanding of or experience of the importance of faith in his or her own life there is a danger that this dimension of life is overlooked and that support plans do not include the person's wishes with respect to their faith. If this aspect of life is not documented in the plan then it is less likely that the person will be supported to continue with or to establish links with his or her church, this includes attendance at church services or participation in groups such as SPRED. We believe that specific inclusion in the new strategy of the rights of people with a learning disability to experience and express themselves spiritually would make it more likely that people affected by a learning disability are supported in this important area of life.

We wish also to draw the attention of Scottish Government to the difficulty caused by data protection legislation. A justifiable concern to protect an individual's right to privacy and to safeguard them from harm can make it difficult for churches to identify and make contact with their members living in group homes and individual or shared tenancies. This difficulty can be alleviated if support plans properly document people's wishes with respect to church membership.