

# **The National Learning Disability & Ethnicity Network Annual Conference**

**21<sup>st</sup> November 2005 - The Resource Centre, London**

## **Speech to conference from Liam Byrne MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Care Services**

I am very glad that technology has allowed me to talk to you today because although I can't be with you at your conference there are a few things that I wanted to share with you.

First and I suppose most important, I just wanted to say congratulations for the work that you have done over many years. You're an organisation that understands double discrimination. You're an organisation that has done enormous amounts to campaign to change it and as we go forward you are an essential partner for us in the work that we want to do together.

A lot of the work around discrimination that people with learning disabilities and people from black and minority and ethnic groups face came home very clearly to me when I went to a project in Sheffield a month or two ago. The project was called Apniawaaz which means 'Our Voices' in Urdu and it was a very good example of how a group of people had decided that they wanted to change the services that were available to their community. It started off with just one translator, now it has grown into a big organisation that is delivering services to about 25 people with disabilities. It provides essential links back into mainstream services and for the people that it helped it is beginning to change their lives. One of those people, Nazmin Akhtar, was somebody who stayed at home when they left school, but actually now, thanks to the support that she got, she is able to work in both as a translator and in a local surgery. Quite simply her life has been completely changed because of the work of that local organisation. The truth is though, that there are not enough stories up and down the country like Nazmin's.

Last year we asked ARC to do some work with us. We wanted to make sure that Partnership Boards up and down the country were using the best practice guidance that we had put out and we wanted to make sure that people were giving an important priority to planning their work with BME communities. The results of that work were very mixed – some people are making excellent progress but the fact is, that the results were very varied. Some people are not giving sufficient priority to planning work for BME communities, although we attach great importance to it.

This has got to change. Next year the Valuing People Support Team will be taking a number of steps to make sure that much better support is available for local Partnership Boards as they are planning their work in BME communities.

We now have a National Leadership Group. We are now in the process of developing Regional Support Networks, and it is important next year, that Partnership Boards up and down the country draw upon the resources.

The work that we are trying to do together is actually very simple; it is about how we deliver the quiet miracle of a normal life to a vitally important section of our community. That is an agenda that ARC understands well. It is an agenda that ARC has done an enormous amount to shape over the years that have gone by. It is an important project for us to carry on working through over the years to come.

Thank you.