The Commodity of Care by Dick Leaman

This is a document by Dick Leaman.

Dick Leaman was part of a group of disabled people called The Union of the Physically Segregated Against Segregation.

He wrote this document in September 1990.

In this document, Dick Leaman is writing about the Government’s new plans called “**Community Care.**”

**Community Care** is the idea that small charities and businesses should provide social services rather than the local council.

Lots of different charities and companies would offer services, and local councils could pick the one that they liked best.

The government thought this plan of Community Care would give disabled people more choices in the services they use and would be cheaper for the government.

The government passed a law saying this was how things should happen in 1990, but they waited three years before doing anything about it.

There weren’t enough small charities and companies to make the plan work at the time, which is why it took so long.

Dick Leaman thinks that the government got it wrong and that disabled people should be talking about **Independent Living** instead of Community Care.

**Independent Living** is the idea that disabled people should have support to live whatever kind of lives they want.

This involves them being able to choose what support they get, when they get it, and how they get it.

This means that disabled people, not care companies or the government, decide everything that happens when they are supported.

**“Caring for People: Community Care in the next decade and beyond”**

The government has released a **policy white paper** called “Caring for People: Community Care in the next decade and beyond”

A **policy** is a rule to help make decisions about a topic.

A **White Paper** is a booklet the government publishes telling you the kind of things they want to make new laws about.

Usually, a white paper will be published a few months before the government tries to make a new law.

So this was the government telling everyone what new rules and laws they wanted to make for how disabled people get support.

Dick Leaman says that language the government is using in the White Paper is not very clear.

The words “Community” and “Care” sound positive to a lot of people, but can mean a lot of different things to different people.

Dick Leaman thinks the government are using these words to seem like they are doing something positive, but then do not explain how their plans should work.

Not explaining things like this clearly means disabled people will get left out of discussions about the help they get.

Dick Leaman thinks that the white paper policy ignores what disabled people in the UK were saying when he was writing.

He thinks that the government are not listening to what disabled people say about the problems they are going through and instead are being unclear about what it means to ‘care for people’.

Dick says that the white paper policy doesn’t even explain what the plan “Community Care” means.

The government can't explain what it would mean for something to be community care, because it hasn't looked at the real problems facing disabled people in their communities.

Dick Leaman talks about a different paper called “Breaking Down the Barriers to Integration” written by people from a group called **Lambeth Sheltered Housing Action for Disabled People (SHAD)**

**SHAD** were an organisation led by disabled people that organised shared flats for disabled people and non-disabled students in South London.

In SHAD flats, the students would get free rent and a little money to act as PAs to their disabled housemates.

The Lambeth SHAD paper looked at problems with how the government was spending money on disabled people.

SHAD said that the way that the government pays for support for disabled people doesn't pay attention to what disabled people say they really need.

This means that the government ends up paying for bad services, or services nobody wants like staying in an institution or a hospital long term.

Dick Leaman agrees with this.

He says that the government have been supporting the **care industry** to grow by spending lots of money, rather than giving disabled people more control over their lives.

A **care industry** is when businesses and charities sort out care for people, but a lot of their time is focused on making money rather than providing the support people want.

The government now agree that they are spending too much money on care.

In 1979, 10 million pounds were spent on care.

In 1989, 1,000 million pounds were spent.

Dick thinks that the way the government is spending money is all wrong and they are wasting money that could help people if spent properly.

The SHAD paper was interested in how to give disabled people more choice, but it looked at this very differently to how the government does.

The SHAD paper did look at the problems disabled people face every day, which the government’s white paper policy did not.

The SHAD paper has listened to what Disabled People’s Groups want in their area, while the government has only put forward its own ideas and does not listen to disabled people.

SHAD started with the idea that disabled people wanted to live independently and choose how they lived their lives.

SHAD said things should be arranged to help them do this.

The Government started from a very different idea, that non-disabled people needed to be helped to care for disabled people more.

Dick Leaman says SHAD did not use words or ideas like ‘care’ when talking about services for disabled people.

The word ‘care’ talks about the person giving support. It’s about what they do and feel.

Lambeth SHAD were interested in giving control and power to the disabled people using the services instead.

Dick says that disabled people have demanded to be included in their community and at have control over their lives.

The Disabled People’s Movement has been demanding disabled people’s right to choose how they are supported, and to live independently for a long time

Dick Leaman says that the Government’s white paper uses a lot of the same words as disabled people do, but doesn’t talk about how they will give disabled people what they are asking for.

Even though the government’s new plans are called ‘Community Care’, its white paper does not talk about what the community is for disabled people.

Dick Leaman says that the white paper doesn’t ask questions about disabled people’s relationship to the community or what a community is.

Disabled people would like to become part of communities, but find themselves left out.

Dick Leaman says that the white paper policy doesn’t offer anything new to solve the issues disabled people are having in Britian.

He says that it does not look at how disabled people are stopped from making choices about their lives or how they get left out from mainstream life.

Dick Leaman thinks that the white paper is more bothered about the rich and those with lots of power.

These people pay lots of tax, which pays for social care services.

They’d like less money to spent on these services, so they can pay less tax in future.

Dick Leaman says that disabled people should not leave it up to professionals to write up policy papers about what disabled people should get.

Especially when they do not mention any of the problems disabled people are dealing with.

This is because they rush them and do not include disabled people when writing it.

Dick mentions again that the white paper policy is very unclear in its plans or ideas.

He says it worries him as it could mean that local areas will not get enough money to fund the services set out by the plans because it is so unclear.

This will leave disabled people missing out on services and support.

Dick Leaman says that the white paper policy wants to turn ‘Care’ into something called a **commodity**.

**A commodity** is a product or an object that can be bought or sold, like an apple.

He says the government hasn’t really thought about what it is to make something a commodity and says this could cause problems later.

To be a commodity, something has to be two things:

**First**, it has to be something that somebody has worked on.

If someone has worked on something, they get paid for their work.

The amount of work someone does, and the amount they get paid, tell you how much the commodity should cost.

If care is turned into a commodity, then it doesn’t matter how good the support is for disabled people, but how cheaply it can be done.

**Second**, it has to be useful, or else no one would want to buy it.

But who decides whether something is useful or not?

With most commodities, the person who buys something is also the person who uses it.

This means that the person who uses it decides if the commodity is useful or not.

For example, think about buying an apple from a shop. If the apple is sour, or has a worm in it, you can decide not to buy apples from the same shop again.

You have decided that apples from that shop are useless, while apples from a different shop might be more useful to you.

In the government’s plan, this is not what happens.

It is local councils who buy the services, not the people who use them.

Dick thinks that disabled people will **not** be allowed to make decisions about which services are good and which are bad.

He thinks that the local councils will make that decision and will decide whether something is useful for very different reasons than a disabled person would.

A disabled person might decide one service is more useful than another because it helps them have more control over their life, or because it lets them spend more time with their friends or get a job they want.

Local councils are likely to decide a service is useful simply because it is cheaper to use than a different one.

Dick Leaman says this shows that the government’s plans are not really about disabled people.

It’s not interested in what’s useful for disabled people, it’s only interested in how much things cost.

Dick Leaman says that the government's white paper is not all bad news, though.

He thinks that some of the cash that used to go to charities and private companies, might end up with services run by disabled people for disabled people.

In a strange way, it’s quite helpful that the government hasn’t bothered to think about the problems disabled people face.

This means that people can understand what the government is telling them to do in different ways.

The government clearly wants its policy to save lots of money.

But it might be possible for disabled people to argue for the money left over to be spent on things that they actually want.

This would be a big change, before disabled people had to put up with whatever governments or charities decided to give them.

Dick Leaman thinks that disabled people should talk to the local councils about this issue, as they decide what support is bought with their money.

Whatever the main government does, it is the local council that ends up deciding what help disabled people get.

Dick says that some local councils are trying to think of ways to make things fairer for other groups like black people and women.

Dick says that disabled people need to make sure that the local council also try and think of ways to make things fairer for disabled people.

Dick says that disabled people have to get local councils to understand their problems and issues, no matter what the central government says or does.