enabling older owner occupiers with moderate learning disabilities to live independently

A growing number of older people with a moderate or mild learning disability are living in homes which they own. Many receive little or no practical and financial support. And some are literally ‘living on the edge’ of a housing crisis as their home falls into a state of disrepair and neglect.
Why is there a problem?

The population is ageing and more people are now home owners:

- **Ageing:** It is estimated that from 2001 to 2021 the number of older people with a learning disability will rise by between 37% – 59% (compared with as little as a 2% rise for people aged 20 – 59 yrs)

- **Revolution in housing:** Today 70% of people live in owner occupied housing compared with half in 1970. Low income home owners now outnumber low income tenants.

- **Invisible and neglected:** It is estimated that only around 15% of older people with a learning disability are known to statutory services, far less than for younger age groups.

Adult Social Services are charged with enabling independent living and moving provision towards prevention and away from crisis intervention.

But all too often older people with a (usually undiagnosed) moderate learning disability only come to the attention of statutory services when a significant problem occurs, such as admission to hospital or if their home is cleared out by Environmental Health.

Who also needs help?

**Vulnerable adults**

Much of the emphasis on protecting vulnerable adults has centred on abuse of those who are in receipt of care, very often in institutional settings. But there are many older adults living in the wider community whose vulnerability only becomes evident in the event of a health or housing crisis.

**Older carers of people with a learning disability**

Older family carers of people with a learning disability need advice and information in order to plan for the future supported living of their relative.

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**CASE STUDY**

Miss Jones is 76 and lives in what was previously her parent’s home. She has a moderate learning disability.

Her house was filling up with dirty clothing and starting to smell. The neighbour complained to Environmental Health. It turned out that Miss Jones’ washing machine had broken down and, as she felt unable to organise a repair or replacement machine, she coped by buying more and more clothes from charity shops.
What can be done?

Housing related support services for independent living have tended to be concentrated on social rented housing. The learning disability sector has, on the whole, focused more on younger people than the older population. The older people’s sector has not done a great deal to address ageing and learning disability. And service commissioning has been focused on those with severe learning disabilities.

All sectors – housing, learning disability and older people – need to take action.

Who are the main potential providers?

**Home improvement agencies** specialise in helping low income people, particularly older and disabled home owners, to carry out repairs and adaptations to their homes.

*Home improvement agencies could develop specialist crisis support services, and/or work more closely with learning disability organisations in order to provide practical, ongoing housing help for older people with a moderate learning disability.*

**Advice, information and advocacy services for older people,** including those operated by Age Concern, Help the Aged or local independent providers, are an important source of financial and practical help for older people.

*Older people’s advice services need to develop their skills, expertise and partnerships with learning disability organisations in order to provide more inclusive services.*

**Learning disability organisations** may offer a range of housing related help, including specialist accommodation and ‘floating’ support for people who are living in mainstream housing.

*There is significant scope for the expansion of housing skills and knowledge in this sector in order to meet the needs of older people with a learning disability who are living in private sector homes.*

Damage to the floor boards had resulted from a long standing leak from the washing machine. The local home improvement agency’s Crisis Support worker raised charitable funds to meet the cost of floor repairs and a new washing machine. This was installed by their handyman, who also carried out a number of other small repairs.

Miss Jones now trusts the handyman and is able to contact him without fear if odd jobs need to be done. This is both preventing deterioration of the property and has reduced the conflict with neighbours.
Support for change

‘In Our Own Homes’ is a national project being undertaken by Care & Repair England. It aims to encourage and support the provision of better local services for older people with moderate learning disabilities, particularly for those who need a relatively low level of help to be able to live independently in their own homes.

A range of freely downloadable resource materials is available including:

- **Living on the Edge** – this report sets out the key population and policy trends, analyses current provision and sets out possible future solutions
- **Self Training Kit** – for advisers and support workers
- **Start up Toolkit** – for service providers interested in developing this area of provision
- **Easy read / graphic brochures** – for older people who have a moderate learning disability

All can be accessed at: [www.careandrepair-england.org.uk/learning/index.htm](http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk/learning/index.htm)

Email [info@careandrepair-england.org.uk](mailto:info@careandrepair-england.org.uk) if you are interested in local training or advice on service development.

Care & Repair England is a national charity established in 1986 to improve the housing and living conditions of older and disabled people. Its aim is to innovate, develop, promote and support housing policies and initiatives which enable older and disabled people to live independently in their homes for as long as they wish.

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