

## A Safe Place for people with learning disabilities

### Social Inclusion Unit



#### What was the issue to be addressed?

Over the past few years, there has been an increased emphasis on promoting community participation by people with learning disabilities. One of the keys to making this beneficial is to make sure people with learning disabilities feel safe when they were out and about.

Sadly in recent years, there had been a number of high profile disablist “hate” crimes nationally and one much closer to home in 2007 when Steven Hoskin died after being tortured and forced to plunge from a viaduct in St Austell.

In Plymouth we still do not know how many people are subject to bullying and harassment because of their disability. This is because many incidents go unreported and people suffer in silence. The longer it remains invisible, the easier it is to deny both its existence and frequently.

We have a system for reporting disablist incidents and we take all reports very seriously. For more information go to [http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/disablist\\_incident\\_form.pdf](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/disablist_incident_form.pdf)

In 2007 Mencap’s Bullying Survey found that nearly nine out of ten respondents said that they had been ‘bullied’ in the past year. 73% reported being bullied in public. Mencap’s survey concluded that: “People reported that they had to cope with bullying for so long that they saw it as a distressing, but inevitable part of everyday life for a person with a learning disability.”

#### What did we do?

Our Learning Disability Partnership looked at what was happening in other places to keep people safe. They found out that the South

Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership had started a Safe Place Scheme. Their project aimed to stop bullying and abuse of adults

with learning disabilities. We wanted to create something similar in Plymouth.

With the support of Devon and Cornwall Police’s Diversity Team we contacted shops and businesses across Plymouth. We told them about our Safe Place Scheme. A total of 88 shops and businesses agreed to provide a temporary safe haven if people with learning disabilities told them there were being are bullied or abused or even just frightened. They agreed to stay with the person until other help and support could be found. The scheme works by a person with learning disabilities carrying a card containing their name and personal contact details. When they show this to the business or shop proprietors they then know who to contact. Every premises signed up to the scheme displays the Safe Place sticker. Our main customer receptions in the Civic centre, Midland House and Ballard House have signed up to the scheme.



We worked with the Learning Disability Partnership and Plymouth People First to raise the awareness of the scheme to people with learning disabilities across the City. We are now planning to send out a

questionnaire to all the businesses who have signed up to the scheme to find out how well it is working.

For more information go to <http://www.keepingsafe.org.uk/index.htm>