

Under Lock and Key - Dispatches Channel 4, 1 March 2017, 10-11pm

Noëlle Blackman, CEO of Respond says 'It is frankly shocking that six years after Winterbourne View, appalling abuses continue to be perpetrated against people with learning disabilities in Assessment and Treatment Units. ATUs have singularly failed people with learning disabilities and their families: these institutions do not meet the complex care needs of the people sent there, frequently causing serious harm to people in incredibly vulnerable situations that in too many instances has led to their preventable deaths.'

There are still thousands of people with learning disabilities and/or autism locked up in ATUs, despite repeated promises made by the government. These hospitals often rely on over medication, physical restraint, seclusion and separation from families. It is often hard to enable current legislation such as the Mental Health Act, Mental Capacity Act and Human Rights Act that exist to protect the rights of learning disabled people because these settings seem to operate within their own bubble.

Placing people in ATUs costs thousands of pounds per week; if this money was spent on enhancing support in the community there would be no need to send people away to these institutions at a point of crisis. Crises usually occur because the person is distressed, anxious, angry or sad and/or has experienced trauma of some sort these are then expressed as behaviour that challenges others. Many of these hospitals are private and make enormous amounts of profits for their shareholders.

There are many ways to support people more positively, working with them and those who know them well to work out what has led to the crisis. A range of housing options already exist, there are plenty of good ways to build the right support, and attend to the emotions that are being expressed, it seems that the only thing lacking is the will.

Respond calls on those Responsible Commissioners within all Clinical Commissioning Groups to stop spending public money on these hospitals and start investing in good local community-based services. People with learning disabilities should be able to have the right support to make their lives meaningful.