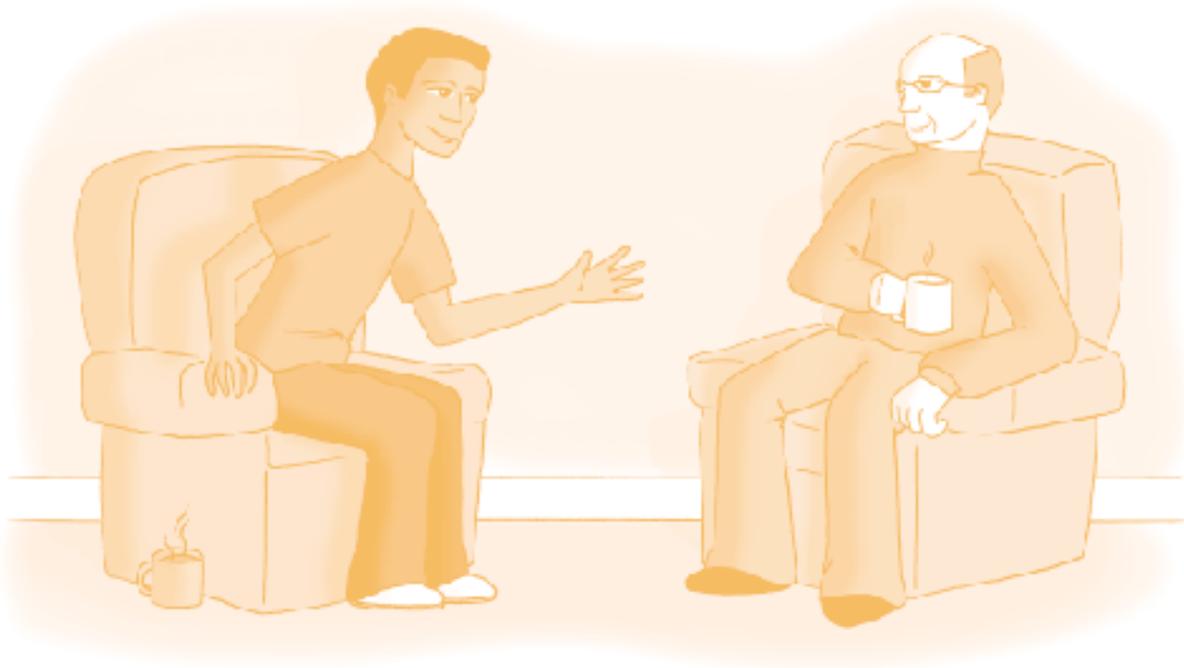


Accessible summary



Introduction

This report is about the way that people with learning disabilities understand spirituality. It tells their stories and helps us to understand what they think is most important in their lives.

What is spirituality?

The people with learning disabilities we spoke to talked about spirituality in different ways. Some people said it was about God. They felt that God loved them and cared for them and that this was the most important thing in their lives. Other people thought that spirituality was about having friends and this gave meaning to their lives. People felt that it was important they belonged to a group or a community. Some people liked to go into the countryside. Some liked music and art.

Spirituality and friendship



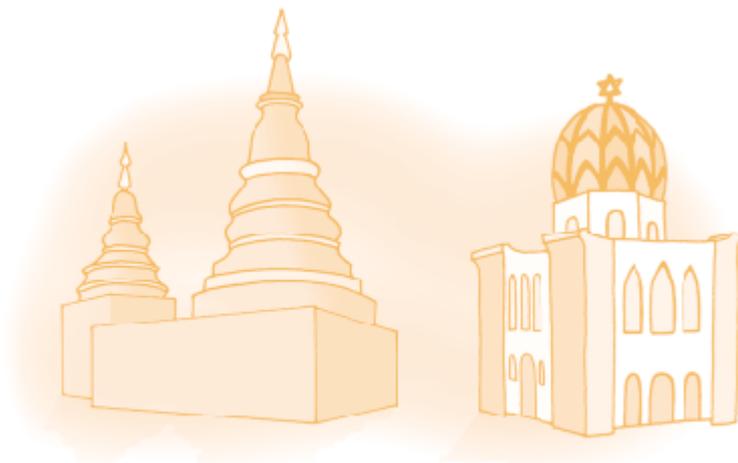
People felt that friendship was the most important thing in their lives. Sometimes their friendship was with God and sometimes it was with people they liked. Friends look after one another and care for one another. Friends help people when they are in trouble and make people feel special and loved. Friends accept you just the way you are. You can trust your friends. They can help you feel safe. They can help you plan your life. All the people we spoke to felt that having friends was an important part of their spirituality.

People valued the work of carers and support workers. But, they wanted friends who chose to be their friends rather than people who were paid to look after them. This was very important for people.

Some people found it difficult to meet people and make friends. They were very lonely.



Some people said that religious communities were good places to find friends. Some people had made friends by going along to services of worship and meeting people. Some religious communities were very good at making people with learning disabilities feel welcome. But in others, people found the services difficult to understand because there were lots of words they did not understand. Some people found that religious people were friendly towards them but never invited them back to their houses. The people with learning disabilities we spoke with wanted people to become real friends who would stay their friends for a long time.



Sadness and grief

Some people's family members or friends had died. People found different ways to cope with their sadness. Some people accepted that the person had gone and would not be coming back. They had happy memories and did not feel as sad as they had done in the past. Other people felt they were still in touch with the dead person. Some people still spoke to the person and felt close to them.



Some people with learning disability felt that when a person died they were with God. They felt comforted that God was looking after the dead person. This helped people to feel better about losing someone they loved.

Some people were still very sad even though the person had died a long time ago. They liked to look at photos and other things that reminded them of the person. They would have found it very helpful to talk to someone about their sadness. Many people never got the chance to speak to anyone about how they were feeling.

Some carers and support workers felt a bit awkward about speaking about these things. People with learning disabilities felt that carers and support workers should try and get to know how sad people were and help them talk about the person who had died. This would help people to feel less sad.

Having time and space for yourself



Some people felt that their lives were so busy they hardly ever got the opportunity to have any quiet time to themselves. They wanted a place to think or to pray. Some people used church buildings to do this. Others found a quiet place at work or at home. It was not always easy to find a quiet place. Many people wanted the chance to find time for these things.

Some people found music helpful. It made them feel happy and helped them remember good times. Some people used paintings and drawings to show others what was important for them, what made them happy and what made them sad.





Being in the countryside or looking at the sky at night made them think about how lovely the world is. Some people began to think about God and how God made them feel good about themselves.



Some problems

Some carers and support workers did not feel comfortable talking about God, friendships, sadness and other things that people with learning disabilities thought were important. Carers and support workers also felt they didn't have time to speak with people about a lot of important things. They were too busy. People felt that managers should listen to what is important to people with learning disabilities and make sure that staff have time to talk to people about spiritual things.

Many people with learning disabilities feel that religion is very important. But some carers and support workers do not understand this. Even if staff don't believe what they believe it is still important to allow people to express their feelings about God in their own way.



How can we change things?

Once we had listened to the opinions of people with learning disabilities we felt there were ways services should be changed. We suggest that these things should happen for people with learning disabilities:

1. People must listen to their opinions and take their views seriously.
2. People with learning disabilities should be allowed to express through words, music, pictures, drama, gestures and actions how important spirituality is and what it means for their lives.
3. They should have the opportunity to make real friends who care for them just as they are.
4. When someone close to a person dies other people must take seriously how sad they are feeling and give them support.
5. Religious communities need to listen to people with learning disabilities. They need to make sure that what they teach and the way they teach things can be understood.
6. Carers and support workers should be trained to understand how important the things in this report are for people with learning disabilities.
7. Carers and support workers need more time to help people with things that are important to them, like spirituality.
8. Managers of services need to make sure this happens.
9. People in the government need to realise that carers and support workers must get more time to spend with people with learning disabilities. They may need more funding.