

# iDIRECT CITIZENSHIP REVIEW 2019

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It was a real pleasure to come down from Sheffield to spend time meeting people, families and staff working with iDirect in November 2019. We had two evening meetings where everyone thought together about what was working and not working and what they could do differently. I also met with some support staff and managers during the day. I took away lots of notes and I have tried to offer some food for thought and action as iDirect moves forward into 2020.

## **Some background**

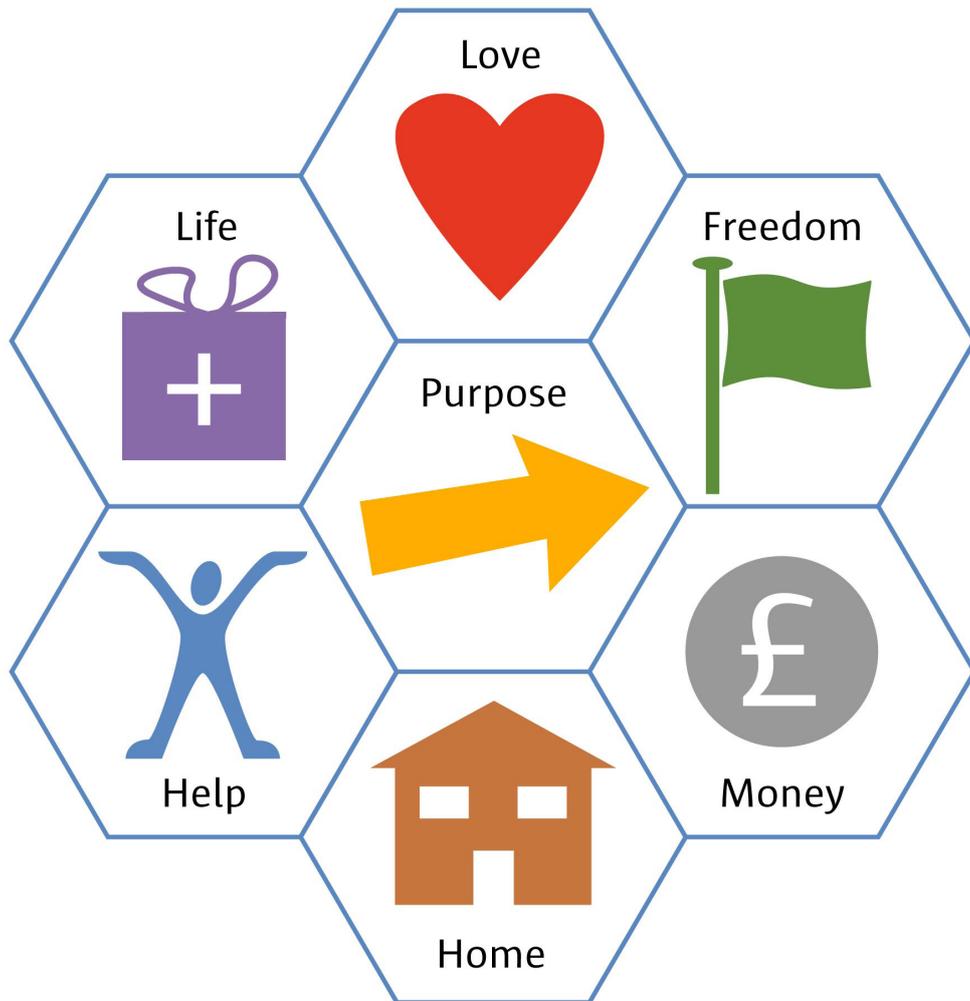
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In 2011 Vinesh Kumar and his wife watch the TV programme Panorama when it uncovered the dreadful abuse of disabled people at Winterbourne View. They decided to try to do something to help people to move out of institutions, care homes and long stay hospitals. they wanted to help people live in their own homes, with their own support and their own lives of full citizenship. So together they took enormous risks by taking loans and spending up to £0.5 million over the first few years since setting up iDirect on 7th October 2014.

After a lot of hard work the organisation has grown and now operates from two office locations: Poundbury, covering people living in West Dorset and Ferndown, covering people living in East Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole and Hampshire areas. In 2017 iDirect began to break even.

iDirect is very unusual in the way that it works. There are only a handful of organisations in England that provide the kind of truly personalised support that iDirect provides. Most services slot people into pre-existing beds or services - but not iDirect. Instead iDirect focuses on helping to have their own home, their own support and their own support budget. Staff work only with 2-3 people at anytime, management costs are kept as low as possible and the goal is to employ support staff on the best salary possible.

Now as iDirect has moved on to a solid footing it is time for everyone to work together to keep making things better, to learn from any mistakes and to help everyone get a life of full citizenship.



*7 Keys to Citizenship*



## What does citizenship mean?

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iDirect is a member of Citizen Network, which is a global movement for a world where everyone, every single person, matters. Citizenship means treating everyone as an equal, treating everyone as if they belong and working together so everyone can have the best life possible. When we asked people within iDirect what citizenship meant to them they said:

- ◆ Being part of the community
- ◆ Being free to make your own decisions
- ◆ Celebrating differences
- ◆ Dignity
- ◆ Privacy
- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Independence
- ◆ Choice and control over your own life
- ◆ Mutual respect
- ◆ Contribution to society
- ◆ Inclusion
- ◆ Equal opportunities
- ◆ Having a role within your home
- ◆ Choosing who supports me
- ◆ Supporting others - being helpful and kind
- ◆ Having goals
- ◆ Having a purpose in life
- ◆ Sharing

**“It's simple, but...”**

*Citizenship seems a funny word to use sometimes. But it is good to remind ourselves that a good life means mixing together different ingredients. We need freedom; but we also need to be part of a community. We need to have a place of our own; but we also need to get stuck into community life. We need to get good support and assistance; but we also need the chance to love and help other people.*

## How do we cooperate?

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Citizens work by working together: cooperation. When we cooperate we all contribute, in our own unique way and we can all have some control over what we do and how we do it. We asked people to think about what cooperation meant:

- ◆ Good communication
- ◆ Tolerance
- ◆ Understanding
- ◆ Patience
- ◆ Listening
- ◆ Teamwork
- ◆ Accountability
- ◆ Morale
- ◆ Clear working policies and rules

**“Be kind to each other and your self.”**

**“iDirect has always been there whenever I have needed them - any time of day or night.”**

*One of the most important things to work on when supporting people who may not understand things in the same way as others or who may not communicate like most people is how to make decisions that respect what the person really wants. This is not just about communication with the person, it is communication between everyone who cares about that person. It means respecting the wisdom of families; but it also means making sure supporters can try new things out. Cooperation is based on trust - and trust must never be taken for granted - we must build it together.*

**“iDirect is brilliant the way  
they support my friend  
and let me stay at my  
friend's house.”**

## What's working well at iDirect

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We asked everybody to think about what was working well. Here are some of the things people said:

- ◆ Communication between teams
- ◆ Good communication
- ◆ There are regular team meetings
- ◆ People can go on holiday together
- ◆ Training is good - very interactive
- ◆ Internal review process is good
- ◆ The person-centred recruitment process is good
- ◆ Sleep-in rate is good
- ◆ Pay incentive is good - although its only temporary
- ◆ iDirect is a genuine organisation
- ◆ There is easy contact with iDirect's management

**"iDirect is brilliant the way they support my friend and let me stay at my friend's house."**

**"People help me to get a holiday - staff stretch their hours."**

**"Staff loving my dog Cassie."**

**"Staff helping us maintain friendships with each other."**

## What's not working so well

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We also asked people to think about things that were not working so well:

- ◆ Person-centred recruitment takes longer than old-style recruitment
- ◆ Team meetings are often poorly attended, it's not easy to get the whole team together (East team)
- ◆ Basic pay rate is low - current hourly rate is not competitive (West team)
- ◆ It is hard to help people feel like they can have a career
- ◆ People can feel isolated - the distances are often quite large (East team)
- ◆ It is not clear how we finance people's holidays
- ◆ Differences in pay between East and West (West team)
- ◆ Sometimes professionals working for the system have different ideas
- ◆ Sometimes families can get cut out by professionals

**“How do we finance rents when people are not ready to move to their own home?”**

**“Why don't we know other people?”**

**“What's the future? What about Brexit?”**

**“Couldn't people get some qualifications...”**

**“It's simple but...”**

## What we could do differently

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There was not a lot of time for detailed planning, but we did ask everybody to think about ideas for making things better. Here are the ideas people came up with:

- ◆ Create a regular blog
- ◆ Create a Customer Forum
- ◆ Create a Staff Forum
- ◆ Pay staff more

**“We are a community.”**

**“Let’s do things together - events - sports - breaks - bowling - Christmas parties...”**

## Some reflections

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The spirit of the two events was very encouraging. Everyone mixed together well and there was a positive energy. People, families and staff seemed to communicate well together and everyone was optimistic about iDirect's future. Here are some thoughts for the future based on my observations:

### 1. Citizenship is for everyone

When we talk about citizenship we are talking about something that applies to every single one of us. Everyone can be a citizen - and everyone can also be excluded from citizenship or fail to act like a citizen. It is clear that iDirect is trying to create a community of citizens - people, families and staff. This is a journey - we live at a time when many people are used to being told what to do and being booted around. People will need clear rules and structures that help them be citizens. It is good to talk about these things and change things step by step.

### 2. Citizens communicate

It is clear that people want to be part of the iDirect community and there was a lot of focus on the value of communication, meetings and forums. It is important to remember that iDirect is a community and inclusion within that community will matter to everyone. Everyone wants to have their voice heard, everyone wants to feel like they can make a difference. The challenge is to develop good and simple habits that make sure communication is fun and not a chore: meeting over food - drawing pictures - being in nice places all help.

### 3. Citizens take responsibility

We are living in difficult times. Funding for care and support has been cut and salaries are very low everywhere. Creating a new organisation is not easy and iDirect faces many responsibilities to funders and regulators. One of the biggest challenge for any group of citizens is to figure out what you can fix and what you can't fix - this famous prayer says it well:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.

Vinny and his wife began this journey; but now many more people are on the journey with them. It was great to see people having honest conversations about money, what was possible and what wasn't possible. Being able to challenge each other from time to time - but also being able to make a decision and live for it for a while will be vital to working together in a spirit of fairness.

It is clear that there was a desire to increase the basic salary rate. But delayed decisions by central Government meant that Vinny was not clear how much he would be able to afford. On the other hand iDirect had paid a more generous overnight salary rate than was demanded by the law but when this decision was finally made by the Government iDirect protected those higher payments. These kinds of ups and downs will continue and it's important that people know what is going on. It is easy for misunderstandings to develop.

#### **4. Citizens make a difference**

iDirect is a community where everyone can play a role in looking after each other. Vinny and his wife began this journey because they wanted to stop bad things happening to people. Money is needed to keep people safe, to ensure people get a fair income. Everyone can support each other in different ways.

But sometimes we underestimate what people with learning difficulties can do to support each other and contribute to the community. It is good to ask:

- ◆ What positive part can I play in my community?
- ◆ What gifts do I have that I can share?
- ◆ How can I meet my needs in a way that helps others?

The iDirect community can be a place where we can share gifts. But we need to step outside and work in the wider community. What do people on your street need? What does your town or village need? How can you make a difference? We build community by serving the community.

#### **5. Citizens grow and develop**

If you want to be in an organisation where you can climb up a career ladder with a growing salary and growing managerial responsibilities then I suspect iDirect may not be the right place. In order to keep the basic salary as high as possible it's important to keep management costs as low as possible and to have as small a number of managers as possible. But this doesn't mean that everyone shouldn't be able to grow in their work and in their lives.

Talking together and being honest about how you are feeling is important and when there are problems or opportunities for change you should be able to work with others to try something new. It is particularly important that staff can bring their whole self to work - their passions, interests and connections - this can not only enrich work it can also create new opportunities for others. In the same way families are an amazing source of wisdom, experience and community - if they are respected and involved. And - most of all - the people iDirect supports are full and evolving human beings who must be supported to continually discover their own gifts and talents.

**“We need to step outside  
and work in the wider  
community.”**

**“We build community by  
serving community.”**

## Next Steps

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This report is the first outcome from the new Governance arrangement that iDirect is developing.

I was commissioned to facilitate the evening discussions and produce this report. The idea is that we can build on this and create a regular process by which everyone involved in iDirect can get a chance to have their voice heard.

In 2020 there will be a next step in this process of thinking together. As a facilitator I would recommend that in 2020:

- ◆ We plan a long way ahead for the next events
- ◆ We involve a few more people in the planning
- ◆ Try and create a little more time for people to be together
- ◆ Find good places where people can move around, talk and be comfortable

A big thank you from me to everyone who I met. I was made to feel very welcome and thank you for your honesty and enthusiasm - it was a joy being with you.

# iDirect

iDirect helps people with a learning disability and/or mental health conditions to be able to live with support in their own homes. Technically speaking this involves supporting people with mild, moderate, severe and profound learning disability and various mental health conditions. Most of iDirect's work is in and around West Hampshire and Dorset, including Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Find out more: [www.idil.co.uk](http://www.idil.co.uk)

# Centre for Welfare Reform

The Centre for Welfare Reform is an independent research and development network. Its aim is to transform the current welfare state so that it supports citizenship, family and community. It works by developing and sharing social innovations and influencing government and society to achieve necessary reforms.

Find out more: [www.centreforwelfarereform.org](http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org)

# Citizen Network

Both iDirect and the Centre for Welfare Reform are members of Citizen Network a global cooperative that brings together individuals and groups to create a world where everyone matters.

You can join Citizen Network too, find out more: [www.citizen-network.org](http://www.citizen-network.org)

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**“iDirect has always  
been there whenever  
I have needed them  
any time of day.”**