



Choices for people with learning disabilities

## News Release

Immediate

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### **Rise in Down's pregnancies raises questions about how society treats people with learning disabilities**

A leading national charity hopes news of a steep rise in Down's syndrome pregnancies will prompt a debate about how Britain treats people with learning disabilities.

The number of such pregnancies has risen by more than 70% in the last 20 years but nine out of ten are terminated.

Self Unlimited – the charity for people with learning disabilities – says people with Down's Syndrome now live longer, healthier and happier lives. It says this is partly thanks to medical science but in large part due to the work of organisations such as Self Unlimited. The charity provides and is developing a further range of services so that people with learning disabilities can live within local communities, rather than in specific, isolated communities.

Self Unlimited says too few people understand that people with learning disabilities, such as Down's syndrome, are able to live happy, safe and fulfilled lives and be part of society. It hopes the news that Down's syndrome pregnancies have risen from 1,075 diagnoses in 1990 to 1,843 in 2008 will highlight the issue of social care for people with learning disabilities and prompt a debate.

The charity says it has huge concerns that constraints on funding from national and local government is making it increasingly difficult for it to meet the demands of today's people with learning disabilities and in the future.

The rise in Down's pregnancies is mainly due to increasing maternal age, but the number of Down's syndrome babies fell by one per cent, due to improved antenatal screening with nine out of ten families opting to terminate Down's pregnancies.

Campaigners say families undergoing screening during pregnancy should be given non-directive counselling and accurate, up-to-date information about Downs' syndrome.

Patrick Wallace, Self Unlimited's chief executive, said: "This is a sensitive issue, and I think it raises the wider question about how we treat people with learning disabilities in our society today. That's something that certainly would benefit from being debated. Our charity works to provide people with learning disabilities with whatever level of support they need, from a full-time care worker to helping them to find work. I think this latest news about Down's syndrome pregnancies raises questions about whether or not our society yet believes people with learning disabilities can live worthwhile lives in Britain today. We certainly know and believe that to be absolutely true, and we are very concerned that national and local government should invest sufficiently in this area so that everyone with learning disabilities can have the services they need to live happy, safe and fulfilled lives as part of our society.

The Leicestershire based charity provides services to people with learning disabilities across England.

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