

## **Social Work and Direct Payments**

Glasby, J. and Littlechild, R. (2002) Bristol: Policy Press.

This book presents an interesting discussion of the social and political importance of the introduction of Direct Payments to disabled people in 1997. As such it represents a useful contribution to the literature concerning contemporary social policy and its implications for disabled people.

However, one of the explicit aims of the book appears to have been somewhat overlooked. The authors argue that they will focus on the task of 'summarising current knowledge about good practice' (p.1), whereas in the main they emphasise poor practice. Little attention is given to identifying examples of effective working by social workers, care managers and personal assistants. Indeed the authors consistently emphasise that social work practice has been poor and a hindrance to Direct Payments and that social workers are opposed to the new ways of working required by Direct Payments (p.17). Many social workers wishing to address this apparent situation may be disappointed that the book contains so little good practice guidance and may be disheartened by the consistent criticism of their effectiveness.

The first four chapters of this book detail the historical and legislative background to the introduction of Direct Payments on 1 April 1997.

Chapter Two traces the development of Direct Payments within the context of historical responses to poverty and disability from the 18<sup>th</sup> century through to the development of the Independent Living Fund in the 1990s. Attention is given to the significance of the separation of social work and social security within legislation and social work practice, particularly after 1948. The authors are keen to assert that this legislative separation was responsible for social workers failing to address issues of poverty or financial insecurity (p.7). Direct Payments are thus presented as a radical departure from this separation and a return to the situation prior to the 1948 National Assistance Act. Chapter Two also highlights the disadvantages of directly provided services and the growth of pressure to deliver greater flexibility and choice through the introduction of direct cash payments.

Chapter Three outlines the development of legislation as policy and guidance progressed from indirect to direct payments during the 1980s and 1990s. The central arguments for and against direct cash payments are presented in this section. Clearly this discussion of the social and political developments will be of more interest to social and political historians than it will be to practitioners.

Chapters Four and Five outline the current legislative context with regard to Direct Payments and highlight the keenness of contemporary government to pursue policy objectives through an increasing use of post-legislative guidance. The permissive rather than mandatory nature of the legislation is emphasised and key obstacles to progress and take up are outlined.

Chapter Six explores the Direct Payment experiences of different service user groups such as people with physical impairments and people with learning difficulties. The barriers to take up of Direct Payments and the potential benefits to each group are outlined, with much use of evidence from disabled writers themselves.

Chapters Seven and Eight set out to explore what is described as the advantages of direct payments and possible difficulties. Chapter Seven focuses on the reported benefits of Direct Payment to its recipients, such as greater choice and control over their personal care and subsequently higher levels of satisfaction with their support. Chapter Eight, by contrast, does not focus on the reported difficulties people have had when in receipt of Direct Payments but instead seeks to identify what the authors regard as the political and social disadvantages of Direct Payments. The authors therefore highlight the significance of the neo-liberal critique

of state welfare and the relevance of Direct Payments to a 'government committed to rolling back the frontiers of the welfare state' (p.123). The authors again pick out the 'ignorance of social workers' as a key barrier to the take up of Direct Payments (p.105).

Chapter Nine may be more useful to the practitioner since the discussion returns to practical issues such as employment legislation, tax and National Insurance and recruitment. Some helpful sources of support and information are included.

The final chapter of the book reiterates the potential significance of Direct Payments in improving the lives of disabled people and changing the roles of social workers. The authors conclude that the role of social workers is crucial in ensuring the success of Direct Payments and that their practice should change since they are often depriving disabled people of the opportunity to access this new system of support.

This book offers a useful insight into the historical development of Direct Payments and notes the need for considerable change in social work practice. Many practitioners will agree that their practice needs to change but may be disappointed that the discussion contained in this book appears to be more useful to someone studying social policy than for a professional responding to it.