#### Hollomotz, A., & The Speakup Committee. (2008). “May we please have sex tonight?”. People with learning difficulties pursuing privacy in residential group settings. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *37 (2)*, 91 – 97. (PDF)

Keywords : emotional and sexual life, establishment and services, learning difficulties.

This paper is the result of British research on sexuality and privacy in people with learning difficulties living in residential care homes. The aim was to understand how sexuality and privacy are experienced in these homes by the people living in them. The originality of this paper lies in the fact that it was co-authored by a researcher and an advisory committee ; certain sections of the article were designed for easy access by the people who were the object of the research exercise. Another point of originality of this article is that it is the result of participatory research, where the committee members participated at each stage of the research.

**METHOD**

Four focus groups were conducted with 15 committee members. Very few details are given on the way these groups functioned ; how they were made up, the framework, etc.

**RESULTS**

Lack of privacy is seen as one of the main barriers to a sexual life for people living in residential care. Strong constraints (control, prevention, supervision) are present within the homes, even in situations where some staff attempt to respect the residents’ need for privacy. In general, this respect remains theoretical, and is little applied in practice ; this is seen above all in the fact that staff enter the rooms without prior warning, or in the fact that they consider residents to be unable to take decisions concerning their own privacy or relationships. The absence of double beds is also a sign of an institutional policy of not enabling sexual relations. Double beds are seen as possible only in cases where they are a security measure (the person can’t fall out of bed), without any link to sexuality. According to the authors, the lack of private space within the home leads residents to go outside to public places to conduct their sexual activity.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The article contains several recommendations : creation of private spaces within the care homes, the presence of double beds, a lowering of institutional control over friendships, respect for residents’ privacy in their own rooms.

This document stems from a project by the Resource Center Applied Research and Disability and its partners: the CeRHes (Centre Ressources Handicaps et Sexualités), CH(s)OSE (Collectif Handicap et Sexualité OSE), CCAH (Comité National Coordination Action Handicap). It was written by Aurélien Berthou (doctoral student in sociology at the CERLIS, Centre de recherches sur les liens sociaux).