



## THE NEED FOR LADY DANE HOUSE

### – Background to its development

Based on government policy and independent research, the Fynvola Foundation identified a significant gap in current provision for older people with learning difficulties and health related needs. Old age for such people can begin at 50, or earlier for those with Downs, and their numbers are forecast to increase dramatically. In general, learning disabled people are 2.5 times more likely to have significant health risks and problems, particularly major or long term, than others. People with such multiple needs require special facilities and greater attention, giving rise to considerable complications for staff and carers, other residents and families. In particular the long term impact on family carers and cared can be enormous (a third of learning disabled live with carers aged 70 or over).

The effect on the individual of a move to a generic older persons' home may be traumatic. Staff can lack the knowledge, expertise and supports required to manage his or her physical, medical, social and psychological needs, in the context of an understanding of personality and intellectual disabilities. Mental health problems, which affect 60% of residents in generic homes, may easily be confused with these disabilities. Such problems are also a major feature of older people with learning difficulties; for example, Alzheimer's disease can develop in those with Downs in their 40s or 50s, leading to a profound deterioration in quality of life and often requiring constant nursing. Similarly hospice and other palliative care are not generally geared to their needs. Some are more mentally alert despite their multiple needs, with aspirations typical of younger people, and they tend to be under-stimulated in generic homes.

Government has called for new approaches to ensure people with learning difficulties get the healthcare they need, particularly for long term and life limiting conditions. It seeks to address health inequalities and social inclusion for what it recognises as one of the most excluded and vulnerable groups in society, with some of the greatest health needs. As at May 2008 CSCI data for England indicated that there were no "care homes with nursing, over 65s" exclusively dedicated to people with learning difficulties. For under 65s such homes existed but they covered a wide disability spectrum and were often aimed at a younger age group. (Expert comment indicates there are also no such specialist homes in Scotland). The apparent uniqueness, timeliness and significance of Lady Dane House have enabled us to drive the project forward.