Stolen Lives 2206 annual update

It has been another busy year for Stolen Lives. Here are some things that we have been up to…

Stolen Lives Report

In January 2026 the Stolen Lives report was published by the Stolen Lives Task and Finish Group, which is a subgroup of the Learning Disability Ministerial Advisory Group (LDMAG), which advises on improving the lives of people with learning disabilities in Wales.

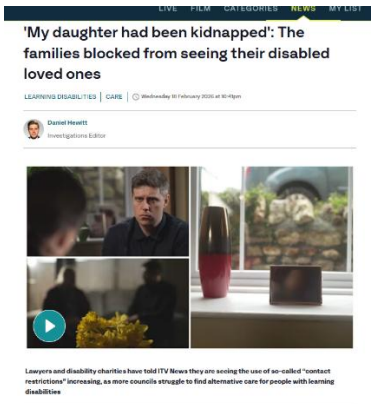
In a written statement following the report, Sarah Murphy, MS and Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, said that many of the report's recommendations align closely with work already underway or in development. Others have significantly strengthened their understanding of the systemic challenges and barriers that must be addressed.

She said that many recommendations call for major service reform and will require detailed preparatory work, resources, and investment, but, as a priority, the government will support a three-year integrated learning disability service transformation programme across health, social care, and housing from April 2026 to March 2029.

Working with ITV to expose contact restrictions

Stolen Lives worked alongside Rightful Lives to help expose contact restrictions being imposed on families of relatives with severe learning disabilities who complain about poor care. Stolen Lives families featured in the ITV investigation.

www.itv.com/news/2026-02-15/my-daughter-had-been-kidnapped-parents-blocked-from-seeing-disabled-children



Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) Wales Spring Conference 2026: Navigating uncertainty: Leadership, wellbeing and resilience in times of change.

Dawn spoke at the ADASS Wales Spring Conference on 23rd March 2026, alongside Kate Scott (Behaviour Team Leader, Hywel Dda Health Board, Carmarthen) and Rhian Jones.

HOMES NOT HOSPITALS: WHY WE MUST DO THIS - AND HOW IT IS BEING DONE

The workshop explored the concerns of the Stolen Lives' campaign and focused on what must happen next and how to achieve it, moving beyond policy statements towards collective leadership, co-production and meaningful collaboration.

First national learning disability inpatient data set release.

The first national dataset for inpatients with learning disabilities in Wales was published in April 2026, followed by another dataset in July. These datasets are also available in Easy Read.

April:

https://dhcw.nhs.wales/data/statistical-publications-data-products-and-open-data/learning-disabilities/inpatients-with-learning-disabilities-in-specialist-hospitals-april-2026-full-report/

https://dhcw.nhs.wales/data/statistical-publications-data-products-and-open-data/learning-disabilities/inpatients-with-learning-disabilities-in-specialist-hospitals-april-2026-easy-read/

July:

https://dhcw.nhs.wales/data/statistical-publications-data-products-and-open-data/learning-disabilities/inpatients-with-learning-disabilities-in-specialist-hospitals-july-2026-full-report/

https://dhcw.nhs.wales/data/statistical-publications-data-products-and-open-data/learning-disabilities/inpatients-with-learning-disabilities-in-specialist-hospitals-july-2026-easy-read/

This dataset provides insights into the inpatient census of Welsh residents with learning disabilities, including their admission and discharge patterns, hospital settings, and the lengths of stay.

The data is derived from the quarterly inpatient census undertaken by NHS Performance and Improvement and published by Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW) on behalf of the Welsh Government. The data responds to recommendations made by the Stolen Lives Wales campaign and the Learning Disability Ministerial Advisory Group Task and Finish Group report, From Hospitals to Homes, which highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability in relation to inpatient services.

Stolen Lives welcome the publication of this data. This is something we have campaigned hard for. However, the dataset is far from perfect, and we continue to campaign to improve this. A key concern is that the data does not adequately capture short stays. It does not capture patients admitted and discharged between census period dates, for example, someone who was admitted on 16th April and discharged on 2nd July would not be included in the figures.

Stolen Lives has flagged our concerns about the data to those who work at Welsh Government.

Dawn continues to monitor the data.

Life Histories in Mind: Mental Ill Health and Learning Disability in Context Conference. Manchester Metropolitan University, Wednesday 22nd July 2026.

Dawn presented at this conference which aimed to explore how life histories illuminate experiences of mental ill health and learning disability.

Professor Elizabeth Tilley, professor of Learning Disability Studies, Open University said about the conference on Linkedin: 'A paper I don't think I'll ever forget was Dr Dawn Cavanagh presenting her son Jack's story, reminding us that institutional histories are far from over. Dawn's talk made brilliant use of images to show the scale of institutional isolation, fear and wasted years that people continue to endure.'

Dawn's son, Jack, met with the Welsh Government and was awarded for his self-advocacy.

The Welsh Government said they wanted to visit Jack and where he was living.

Jack planned what he wanted to say via widget symbols, his staff supported him with buying new clothes, Jack chose food for the day, and it was agreed he would show Welsh Government around his new home.

All the time, it was made clear to Jack that he could change his mind and cancel.

Anyway, the day came and Jack owned it! He gave his widget symbol sheet to a civil servant. One bit said that he wanted all seclusion rooms turned into broom cupboards.

Jack was awarded the All Wales People First Chief Executive Mirror Award for his bravery and self-advocacy.



Mencap Cymru and St. Fagans – Oral History Project

Stolen Lives have been working with Mencap Cymru and St Fagans National Museum of History to record the story of the Stolen Lives campaign so far.

Recording and transcription (now complete) will go into the museum ‘s archives collection, which explores the everyday experiences of Welsh people over the last few hundred years.

Just think, in 70 years someone might be reading about us in a dusty room somewhere.



Mothering ATR-X in the shadow of the secure hospital. Manchester Metropolitan University. Wednesday, September 9th 12.00 online (Free)

This online seminar, which Dawn organised, brought together three mothers to share their experience of caring for sons with Alpha-Thalassemia X-linked Intellectual Disability (ATR-X) syndrome, a rare genetic syndrome that affects boys. The syndrome can cause severe learning disabilities and medical issues.

For families supporting a loved one with ATR-X syndrome experiencing or facing secure hospital admission/long-term detention is deeply traumatic. Individuals with ATR-X commonly suffer from painful underlying physical conditions such as severe gastrointestinal reflux, chronic constipation, skeletal abnormalities, and seizures. In secure psychiatric settings, behaviours driven by physical pain are frequently viewed through a strictly mental health lens. Rather than these behaviours being treated as unmet medical needs, individuals are often chemically or physically restrained, rather than treated as unmet medical needs.

This is a major human rights issue that mirrors the wider, systemic scandal of locking up neurodivergent and disabled youth in the UK.

North Wales Partnership work

Dawn has been supporting the work of the North Wales Together project which aims to prevent and support people with learning disabilities in crisis.

Meeting with the Delyth Jewel, Minister for Social Care, Mental Health and Women's Health in the Welsh Government-November

Stolen Lives had a really positive meeting with Delyth Jewel, Minister for Social Care, Mental Health and Women's Health in the Welsh Government.

The meeting focused on the three-year Learning Disability Transformation Programme and its four work streams, and how the eight Stolen Lives recommendations are being incorporated into planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

The meeting also focused on the Court of Protection and the misuse of transparency orders and contact restrictions against families raising complaints about poor care.



Good Life Alliance Event – November

Stolen Lives attended the Good Life Alliance event at the Future Inn Hotel, Cardiff. Stolen Lives were made to feel very welcome and we were well supported. The event brought together the third sector, providers, civil servants, people with learning disabilities and families to discuss ways in which we prevent people with learning disabilities and/or autism from being detained in hospitals because the services and support they need is not there. Findings will be shared with the Welsh Government as part of their knowledge exchange programme.



Court of Protection work

Stolen Lives wrote to the new Welsh Government on 12th July regarding our concerns about the misuse of contact restrictions and transparency orders. These are increasingly being used by local authorities, health boards and care providers to silence families who complain about the negligent care of loved ones with learning disabilities.

We also addressed the matter with the Minister, Delyth Jewell, at a face-to-face meeting in November.

We have been working to try to address this issue with Adrian Roper and Oliver Townsend from the Goodlife Alliance, as well as Amanda Hill and Daniel Clark from the Open Justice Court of Protection Project.

Stolen Lives have been observing court hearings, and have been working on a Freedom of Information Data Request, which we hope to publish soon.

Building new collaborations

Evidence shows that people with learning disabilities—especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds—face unequal treatment, restrictive practices, and under-representation in healthcare systems. We have been connecting with families from ethnic minorities in Wales via journalist Saba Salman to try to help address this.

Working with the BBC

Dawn has been working with the BBC as an adviser on an exciting project which we are having to keep secret for now.

And finally...

Croeso cynnes i'r Dr Gareth Thomas!



Stolen Lives is delighted to announce that Dr Gareth Thomas has joined our team. Dr Gareth Thomas is a Reader in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. His research is focused on disability, health and illness, care, reproduction, and stigma. You can read more about Dr Gareth Thomas here: https://profiles.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/thomasg23

***Please note Stolen Lives is a voluntary led campaign. The Stolen Lives team carry out this work outside of their paid work, and other commitments.**