

## WA speaker profile:

# Simon Duffy

**Founder and  
Director  
Centre for  
Welfare Reform, UK**

Recently he spoke at ASID WA



### What led you to work in this area?

I was working for the NHS when I visited an institution for people with intellectual disability. I was shocked by the regime, and also by the realisation that I'd reached the age of 23 without meeting anyone with a disability. I really liked the people I met and felt strongly that we needed a world without these institutional walls.

In 1990 I started work for an organisation that was bringing people back to London from long-stay institutions. I discovered a rich array of ideas inspiring positive change (social role valorisation, inclusion and person-centredness). But I started to question how deinstitutionalisation was working: Group homes and day centres did not reflect the true meaning of our best ideas.

### What have been your highlights?

My work has gone through a series of phases. At first my work focused on breaking people out of the new 'community institutions' that had been developed as old institutions closed. I discovered that focusing on people's strengths and the wider resources of the community unlocked much better solutions than relying on fixed models.

In 1996 I developed a new support provider, Inclusion Glasgow, which provided personalised support, where every detail of housing, assistance, decision-making and community life was developed in partnership with people and families. I discovered that people had great potential to reshape their own lives, but that the system often unintentionally deprived them of this opportunity.

From 2000 my work focused on reforming the social work system in Scotland and England. I led a change organisation called In Control and started to publish my ideas as open source technology: Allowing people to change or develop them to suit their own context. I discovered that many people working in system wanted to see meaningful change, but were trapped by bureaucratic and ideological assumptions.

In 2009 I established the Centre for Welfare Reform as an alternative think-tank. I wanted to accelerate positive change in the welfare state, encourage the social innovators and strengthen the intellectual foundations for radical change. In my view many of the barriers facing people with intellectual disability arise, not from services, but from wider social structures: Benefits, housing, education and democratic systems.

In 2016, with friends from around the world, we launched Citizen Network, a cooperative that aims to build a social movement to create a world where everyone matters, where human diversity is welcomed and where we work together, as fellow citizens, to create welcoming communities.

### How has your work changed practice and what needs to change?

It has hard to measure the impact of your own work. Certainly I had some impact on the progress of self-

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directed support in the UK, although there were many other factors at work and, to my eyes, the current implementation of the ideas I'm associated with looks rather flawed. Also my ideas are simply the result of other people's work. I have been very influenced by the work of John O'Brien and Judith Snow and I feel like I am just trying to operationalise their vision.

### **What could ASID do to implement the findings of your work?**

At the core of my work is an old idea, which is that we need to live in a society citizens - where everyone is equal and where everyone works together to create the kind of community we all need. Citizenship is not just a goal for our work and our lives, it's also the spirit in which we work - a spirit of true equality. I hope ASID might join Citizen Network in developing a global network for inclusion and citizenship. ●