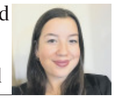
FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Danger that new law could lead to a greater uptake in assisted suicide

Society may start to view ill and disabled people as having less worth, who may themselves then feel that they are a burden on society, writes **Louisa Ward**



In September 2021 Liam McArthur MSP initiated a bill in the Scottish Parliament which would enable "competent adults who are terminally ill to be provided at their request with assistance to end their life".

After a huge response to the public consultation, this bill is now being further considered and is expected to be proposed to the Scottish Parliament. Similar legislation has been passed in other parts of the world including Switzerland, Belgium, and Canada.

In Canada, "medical assistance in dying" (MAID) was introduced in June 2016 as an option for people with chronic illnesses or disabilities. This legislation was then amended in 2021 to remove the requirement that the individual's death must be reasonably foreseeable in order to be eligible for assisted suicide. Since 2016, almost 14,000 people have accessed this service which enables them to end their lives.

However, some groups may be more drawn to assisted suicide than others. Indeed, a young woman in Toronto is soon to get final approval for her request to access medically assisted death. Denise, 31, suffered a spinal cord injury six years ago and consequently uses a wheelchair. In addition, she has been diagnosed with a condition which can trigger "rashes and breathing difficulties", as well as potentially causing full paralysis on one side of the body and difficulty in speaking and breathing.

After being unsuccessful in her search for an affordable apartment which would meet her needs, Denise submitted a request for "medically assisted death", which was described as "surprisingly easier". However, such an outcome is very concerning as it implies that access to assisted suicide is much more available, and more easily accessed, than affordable housing for people with disabilities.

This highlights the additional barriers faced by people on low incomes, which may make them more likely to resort to assisted suicide. Even when one of Denise's doctors got involved, explaining that Denise needed an "immediate move for her safety", they were still unable to find appropriate accommodation. It would appear that Denise felt her only option was to apply for medically assisted death.

But this is deeply concerning because it suggests apathy on behalf of the government towards its disabled citizens as it is more accommodating to those who want to end their lives than those who do not.

The debates in Canada are becoming ever more relevant in Scottish society due to the proposed bill to allow assisted suicide. Many in Scotland are concerned about the introduction of this bill for a number of reasons. This is because, as discussed, some very sick and disabled people who are on low incomes may face additional barriers with regards to accessing medical care. As a result, they may be more likely to turn to assisted suicide as an escape. This could lead to a greater uptake in assisted suicide among people with low incomes, which may increase the divide among the socio-economic classes.

In addition, many are concerned that with the introduction of assisted suicide a danger may exist if society begins to view ill and disabled people as having less value and worth, who may themselves then feel that they are a burden on society. With the legalisation of assisted suicide, these feelings can quickly be turned into drastic and lasting actions.

Therefore, the question to be asked is whether Scotland should follow Canada and become a society where ill and disabled people, especially those living close to the poverty line, are encouraged to turn to assisted suicide due to the way they and others perceive their quality of life.

Louisa Ward, Research Associate, Scottish Council on Human Bioethics

Scottish Council on Human Bioethics

Bridging the gap in community funds

Bridging loans help overcome tricky situations where invoices are due but grants are yet to be received, says **Eileen Gardiner**

Grant funding has always been crucial to the success and growth of charities, community groups and social enterprises. However, while grant funding remains accessible, there is undoubtedly more competition, placing a strain on already stretched resources of these organisations.

Grant application processes can be complex, with different criteria to meet depending on the funding body. Research has shown that organisations of all sizes spend a significant amount of their time and resources applying for grants. A common challenge is that some of the funds are delivered retrospectively. While such delays may be temporary, they can cause significant headaches in terms of cash flow for organisations that may not always have the required level of reserves.

That's where lesser-known financial products such as bridging loans can help. The investment is designed to be a short-term solution to help organisations overcome those tricky situations where invoices are due to be paid, but grant funding is yet to be received. A bridging loan allows projects to progress without delays and can assist charities and social enterprises to make key purchases during that interval period. As the name suggests, it bridges the gap between the two.

For Social Investment Scotland (SIS), these loans are one of our more straightforward types of investment, yet they can also be one of the most impactful. Organisations can apply for anywhere between £10,000 and £250,000, with a quick turnaround and set-up process. The bridging loan is then repaid in full following the organisation receiving the grant funding.

Smaller community groups, in particular, can access smaller amounts of finance that would perhaps be overlooked by many high street finance providers. We understand the impact that these smaller projects can have on local people and places.

We saw that first-hand very recently through our work with Lochaber Environmental Group (LEG). The organisation is on a mission to help community members to reduce carbon emissions. One of its main aims is to encourage active travel and earlier this year the group launched an electric bike share scheme in Fort William.

LEG secured funding from the Low Carbon Travel and Transport Challenge Fund as well as support from European Regional Development Funds, Transport Scotland, and Highland Council to set up a scheme with 40 electric bikes, five charging hubs and three virtual hubs. Three further charging hubs will be installed over the coming months with 20 more bikes to be delivered. Of course, in order to get the scheme up and running, there was a significant capital investment required for the purchase of the bikes. But given that funding would come retrospectively, Lochaber Environmental Group turned to SIS for support to help bridge the gap.

We provided the organisation with two bridging loans, which meant that plans could continue with the grant monies reclaimed afterwards. The scheme is now well established, with electric bikes available for use at affordable rates in order to encourage active travel in the community. Using the scheme is beneficial for health and wellbeing while reducing the environmental impact associated with other forms of transportation and helping to ease traffic congestion in the town.

Even very profitable businesses experience shortfalls in cash flow from time to time, but for social enterprises and charities, we understand how crucial access to bridging loan finance can be for unlocking grant funding. Our customers often tell us that the projects they deliver simply wouldn't be possible without a bridging loan, and others have gone on to secure grants for even bigger projects as a result.

The current economic landscape is undoubtedly challenging, and particularly worrying for the types of organisations we work with, so the affordability of any kind of loan finance needs to be considered. Bridging loans require a degree of planning and admin to make sure that finance is available when needed, but the long-term results often speak for themselves.

Eileen Gardiner, investment manager, Social Investment Scotland

↑ Lochaber Environmental Group launched an electric bike share scheme in Fort William.

SIS Social Investment Scotland

Schools art competition encourages pupils to look again at natural world

Young people may find an interest and possibly even a career protecting our rural areas, says **Iona Laing**

We need to be creative in how we engage with youngsters. That's why as pupils return to school for the beginning of a new school year we have once again launched our GWCT Schools Art Competition across Perth and Kinross, Angus and Aberdeenshire.

Youngsters are invited to submit a piece of artwork showing their favourite species of British game or wildlife in its natural habitat.

The aim of the competition is to encourage pupils to do a little research into some of our native species of game and wildlife and, in the process, learn more about these animals and birds, their preferred habitat and what they eat. The more youngsters can be encouraged to engage in these topics and find out information then the more they will learn about the countryside and hopefully go on to find a passion and interest, and possibly even a career that involves working in and protecting our rural environment.

One exciting aspect of this year's art competition is the new format for the prizegiving. This will be staged at Fingask Castle, Perthshire and pupils, parents and teachers will all be invited to come and enjoy a day of activities including falconry displays, seeing gun dogs at work, art workshops in the castle, game cookery and tasting and estate activities organised by Scotland's regional moorland groups.

Of course, our regular prizes of farm visits and art workshops will also be awarded, as well as art materials, books, vouchers and certificates.

The GWCT Schools Art Competition which has steadily expanded over the years is only possible with the support of other organisations including the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) and Scotland's regional moorland groups. It would also not be possible without the help of the artists who both judge the entries and offer prizes.

Julian Jardine of Jardine Gallery, Perth has supported the competition for over 15 years offering clay workshops as prizes. Mel Shand, the Finzean-based wildlife artist welcomes winners to her home where they can enjoy private art lessons, and this year we also welcome Emily Crookshank, whose studio is in Glenshee, to the competition team. Emily was one of our Artists in Action at the 2022 GWCT Scottish Game Fair, and her art is inspired by the wilds of the Cairngorms. So, this year is particularly exciting. In addition, we have opened up the competition to cover the whole of Aberdeenshire offering the opportunity for many more pupils to get involved. I can't wait to see the talent that comes in from all regions.

Engaging our youngsters in the countryside and some of the valuable conservation work the Trust is involved in is a part of GWCT's mission and, whilst playing just a small part, we hope to inspire long term interest in protecting game and wildlife and their habitats for generations to come.

Information packs are being sent out to all schools and will also be available on the GWCT website www.gwct.org.uk/schoolarthttp://www.gwct.org.uk/schoolart

Iona Laing, Education and Events Scotland, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

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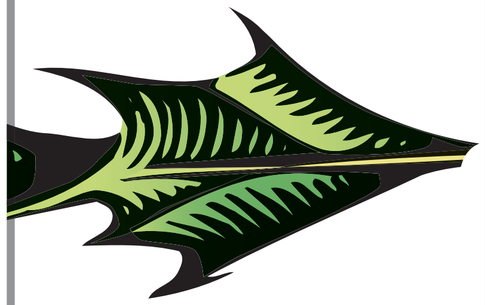

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