Learning Disability Partnership Board Meeting

‘Benefits’

15\textsuperscript{th} February 2018

at Chichester College

Introduction, information for the meeting
Co-Chairs Liz Munnion and Ashvin Patel

Liz welcomed everyone and went through the meeting rules. Ashvin said the aim of the meeting. People presenting and guests were introduced.

Self Advocate presentation

‘Cuts, Impact Action Now and benefit issues’

David and Andrew are self-advocates from Worthing Speakabout. Andrew said that he will be the new co-chair for the Partnership Board.

Speakabout wants to do research on how disability cuts have changed people’s lives. Speakabout has joined up with People First to do the research.

The research will include:

- Looking things up on the computer.
- Questionnaires.
- Focus Groups.
- Collecting people’s stories.
- Getting information from libraries.

Disability cuts can mean less money and less hours of support or no support at all for some people.
People with learning disabilities have difficulty in getting a paid job because there are not many jobs available.

Andrew said that changes in benefits will lead to people with learning disability having less money. People may not be able to afford to live a good life.

Andrew has talked at meetings to tell people what it is like to be someone with a learning disability who needs support services. Andrew was television on Channel 4 and spoke to a government minister. Andrew told him the cuts were wrong.

Self Advocates asked for people to volunteer to share their story.

What Self-Advocates think should be different:

- For it to be easier to change Appointee. An Appointee is someone who manages someone’s benefits for them because they cannot do this themselves.

- Job Centres to be helpful, welcoming and not scary.

- Benefit assessments to be made easy and fair. Appeals should only be needed in a few cases.

- Paying towards your care and support should also look at cuts and increased costs in other areas of your money.

- People doing assessments should be skilled and trained in good customer service.

- Making an Appeal should be made easy.
What the Partnership Board said:

Jo Delaney said decisions about Appointeeship is made when person is a child and then not changed in adulthood. As an adult you may want to take back control or have someone different.

Parent Carer said that PIP assessments and the introduction of Universal Credit are causing a high level of stress. People also worried about mobility vehicles and being able to go to social activities because of cuts.

Suzanne from Workaid said they knew of many people with learning disabilities that have been affected by cuts and this includes people coming to Workaid. Workaid are trying to help people with their appeals.

Lu Dash from My Network Bognor says that My Network have seen big increase in people coming in for help with benefit assessments and appeals. They have helped people at ‘Benefit Tribunals’ and have managed to get the Benefit back again. One person was assessed with 0 points and after the appeal had 30+ points.

Chris, self advocate, said that benefits are going down because the government are cutting budgets for the DWP and councils. The government is getting richer.

Wendy, self advocate, has had half of her support taken away plus her benefits have been cut by £100. She has been asked to pay £80 for petrol and she does not know how she will pay for her bills and mobility scooter. Wendy says you can’t blame people from DWP its politicians from central Government cutting our money.

Lucy and Susan, from DWP, said that they are interested in finding out about people’s experiences and getting feedback.
Support at the Job Centre

Lucy Ovington and Susan Holtom work for the DWP.

Susan explained that she is a Community Partner and helps the DWP work with people with learning disabilities and autism.

The DWP is trying not to label people but just look at their abilities and skills. They understand that there are not enough jobs, there are a lot of cutbacks and that some with learning disabilities have had bad experiences.

The DWP want to give better support for people with learning disabilities to get a job.

Lucy is a Disability Adviser in Redhill Job Centre. Lucy said that Job Centres can support people with learning disabilities who want to work to:

- Find a job.
- Change benefit.

Getting ready to contact the Job Centre:

If you contact the Job Centre they will want to make sure you are the person you say you are so will ask to see your ID this could be a passport, a document with a photo on it, or a birth certificate.

Job Centres can be busy places so visits can be made at quieter times of the day. There are different places in the job centre to meet if you need a quieter space. The Job Centres have been made more welcoming places.

A Work Coach can give personal support to help you get a job.
Work Coaches help you think about what type of work you want to do and what hours you can manage. If you are not ready to work they will look at how they can help you move closer to working, perhaps by doing some training or work experience.

Disability Employment Adviser work closely with the Work Coaches to help people with learning disabilities. People can call the Disability Employment Advisers in each Job Centre.

**Universal Credit and who can claim?**

Universal Credit will be available to people who make a new benefits claim. It will replace the following benefits:

- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income based Employment Support Allowance
- Income based Job Seekers Allowance.

What’s different about Universal Credit?

- Paid monthly
- Covers housing benefit
- Covers any extra money if you have a health condition, or carers’ allowance.
- You do not have to limit the hours you get paid. You will be better off in work.

Work capability assessments will still continue.

Universal credit will come to West Sussex this summer:

- Horsham, Crawley and Haywards Heath on **6 June**
- Coastal West Sussex on **4 July**.

**What the Partnership Board said:**

Are there Disability Employment Advisers in every Job Centre? Answer = Yes
John, from My Network Worthing, said some people who get Employment Support Allowance have been moved into the wrong group or have been moved onto Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) by mistake. They are not ready for paid work.

Susan said she understood why people found this difficult. However it is important to check where people are in relation to getting work. Some people have been on Employment Support Allowance for a long time and are socially isolated. Thinking about what work they could manage could help them.

The Job Centre can help you to do an Appeal as it can be difficult. My Network and Aldingbourne Trust can also help with an Appeal.

Self Advocates said that some employers will not accept people with learning disabilities. It is the law that employers make the workplace accessible for people with learning disabilities.

John, My Network Worthing, said that he has seen big changes taking place in Worthing Job Centre. He said it’s a much friendlier and helpful place and he has had good experiences with the people that My Network Worthing support.

My Network presentation

John Hulme, from My Network Plus, talked about My Network experiences of supporting people with their benefits.

My Network Plus is a preventative service. It supports people with mild or moderate learning disability who are not eligible for a personal budget for care and support but still need a little help to remain independent.
The benefits My Network supports people with are:

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit (UC)
- Job Seeker Allowance - John says this benefit is not a suitable for people that My Network work with.

**What helps John in his role?**

Claiming PIP because:

- It is very simple to claim
- Great customer service
- Good assessment form
- Good training for adviser
- Good face to face assessments with helpful Assessors.

PIP is time consuming to collect and organise paperwork for a claim.

**What does not help John in his role?**

Claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) because:

- Starting a claim on the phone is too complicated.
- Assessors do not understand learning disability how this might affect someone’s ability to do paid work.
- Helpline is difficult because of the option and voice recognition system.
- Some GPs do not want to give a medical certificate for someone with learning disability as they are not ill.
- The assessment form where you have to say how your disability affects is poorly written.
- Face to face assessment is very poor way of assessing if someone can work.
- Have to wait up to a year for a Work Capability
assessment.

- ESA claims feel like a battle and this is stressful for the person claiming and takes up a lot of support hours.

**Thinking ahead to Universal Credit**

One claim for most benefits.

Really helpful DWP staff on help line and customer service.

Easy for people to move from benefits into work. People can just work a few hours and keep benefit. There is a safety net if things go wrong with the job.

Very focused on moving people from benefits to work.

But John is worried about these things with Universal Credit:

- Whether the assessment will have the same problems as ESA.

- There will be less money for people with learning disability.

- There will be a long delay for first payment – could be 6 weeks if all goes well.

- Monthly payment will be difficult for people with learning disability to manage and budget.

- People will have more pressure to work without enough work support.
**Presentation by Citizens Advice**

**What is the role of Citizen Advice in supporting people with benefits claims by Luca Badioli**

Luca said he is not a benefit adviser but he is the Chief Executive Officer of Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice.

Citizens Advice supports people who face problems in immigration, employment, debt, legal, family and benefits.

Citizen Advice help people to understand what benefits are best for them and how to claim. This includes helping people with letters and with appeals against benefits assessment.

Citizens Advice also campaigns to improve the benefits system. Citizen Advice wrote to all the MP’s told them about the difficulties people were having where Universal Credit had been introduced. This lead to some improvements.

Citizens Advice is now campaigning for people with disability about Motability schemes so that people with disabilities can keep their cars.

**Can people who have learning disability use the Citizen Advice services?**

Citizens Advice is funded by both West Sussex County Council and also the District and Borough Councils. It is funded to provide advice for all residents in West Sussex.

You can get in touch with Citizen Advice in a few different ways:
- Through the website
• Telephone
• Call into office and book appointment or go to drop-in.

The first thing that happens is that an adviser will talk to you about the issue and work out what help you need.

Citizens Advice is not funded to do the form filling but they will still help with this.

People will need to bring all the paperwork to their appointment. This will help save time and delays.

Some of the information you may be asked for:

• Evidence from your GP about your disability and information about any medicines you take.
• Information about the money you have coming in.
• Information about your Appointee if you have one.

Citizens Advice is not funded to do casework but they use volunteers to do this work. A specially trained volunteer can help people go to tribunal if they cannot afford to pay for legal assistance.

**What the Partnership Board said**

*What help can Citizens Advice give you for an interview or assessment?*
Citizens Advice will assess what help you need and whether they can help you.

*What happens if someone cannot get to a Citizens Advice office?*
Citizens Advice can offer limited assessment by email and can phone you at home. Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice will do a home visit if someone is unable to travel to their offices and is over 60.
Impact Advocacy Service asked what about people who find it stressful waiting for a Citizens Advice appointment?
Luca said if you phone the helpline and explain then the assessment can be done over the phone or you can make a special appointment to avoid the waiting period.

John, My Network Worthing, asked about Universal Credit and whether there are enough volunteers to cover demands?
Luca said that there was an increase of 15% a month month in Hastings when Universal Credit started. This could lead to more delays and time in the waiting room. Citizens Advice is receiving some funding from DWP for budgeting support/digital support.

**Discussion - what needs to happen to improve support with benefits?**

The slides here record what was put on the flipcharts under the headings:

- What needs to happen?
- Who can help?
- What advice can you give?
- How can I help?

This is Liz’s last meeting as co-chair of the Learning Disability Partnership Board.

Mike thanked Liz for the 21 meeting she has chaired with skill, fun, and kindness.

The new co-chair is Andrew Walker

**Date of next meeting:** 19th April 2018 at Field Place, Durrington
People who came to the meeting:

Ashvin Patel          Bryony Grindley
Liz Munnion           Simon Brown
Claire Fussell        Chris Button
Mike S Smith          Daniel Aundel
Cathy Burnard         Liz Holmes
James Grubb           Lesley Durbin
John Hulme            Lu dash
Jo Delaney            Andrew Walker
Lisa Loveman          Wendy Byrne
Luca Badioli          Nikki Carter
Lucy Ovington         Dee Walkden
Ron Little            Madeline Denny
Steven Bensley        Sue Bensley
Andrew Boughton-Lee   Simon Livesley
Susan Holtom          Evelynn Peacock
Michelle McNally      Maria Liza Lim
Janice Kirkley (note-taker)

Apologies from:
Derek Deedman
Michelle Olden
Harriet Wilson
Rachel Smither
Corinne Nikolova
Paula Rooke