



Partners in Policymaking

C/o Merseyside Partners in Policymaking
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Dear Colleague

National Partners in Policymaking™

I am writing to you about the next Partners in Policymaking course which we plan to start in September 2008.

For many years Citizen leadership courses have been working to increase social inclusion and develop family leadership to enable disabled adults, their families, and the people who support them, make informed decisions in order to get the best life possible.

Over the past twelve years we have done this in the northwest by running an annual programme of Partners in Policymaking, which is an innovative leadership development course for families who have disabled children and for disabled adults. The course takes two days a month over eight months. It describes state of the art practice. Assignments between sessions give participants opportunities to practice skills of finding information, making contact with policymakers and people who work in services, presenting their views, learning how decisions get made and how to influence them. They are provided with packs of books, articles from journals and other documentation at each session, to form the basis of their own libraries.

Partners is recognised nationally as an initiative that has helped bring about change in the way that disabled people and their families are supported.

Partners in Policymaking graduates work in partnership with service providers and have the opportunity for further training on relevant issues and offer training on a variety of topics such as person centred planning, direct payments, InControl, working in consultation, at both local and national levels.

During the last ten years Lynne Elwell the national coordinator has developed other leadership development programmes, including Sharing the Challenge, which is aimed at families who have disabled children over the age of 14 and for disabled adults, and also Kindred Spirits, a course that brings together people who work in social services, education and the health authority, with family members. Sharing Knowledge, a leadership course designed for disabled adults and their families to run locally. Family leadership is one of the top five priorities of the Valuing People White Paper. We have built a great national reputation, leading past and the current minister for social care to request meetings with course graduates.



"A way to make a difference"



Our decision to invest in self advocates and families has more than exceeded our expectations, creating a strong network and good working partnerships between people who use services and those who provide them, leading to innovative programmes such as In Control. Partners in Policymaking gives families the information and confidence to make Direct Payments, In Control and Person Centred Planning work well. it enables people to plan and develop solutions to getting good support.

We have held three national academies, sharing with people from across the UK what we have learned from investing in family leadership. The academies focussed on our family leadership courses; person centred planning and direct payments. Many course graduates serve on their local Partnership Boards, bringing latest leading edge information, confidence and using the strategies learned on the course to work in partnership with service workers.

Facts and Rationale

Disabled people are now increasingly being supported in ordinary houses, securing real jobs, attending college courses while children are having opportunities to attend mainstream school.

It is now a requirement of local authorities and health authorities that those people who use services should be not only consulted, but much more closely and actively involved in policymaking. Disabled people and their families need preparation for this role. They need to think about what good practice is and also how they can contribute to policymaking.

Course Aims

The course aims to provide information and skills training so that people with disabilities and family members can speak for themselves. The course is intended to enable participants to:

- be aware of options and possibilities in different areas of peoples lives so that they are as knowledgeable and gain expertise on state of the art thinking and practice
- contribute to policymaking and implementation in wider service development, locally and nationally
- become real partners with people who provide services and the policymakers
- have the confidence and competence to influence decisions about services and negotiate much more successfully when decisions are made about what is needed
- make informed decisions on what help, services and resources they need for themselves or their children
- support and guide other service users and families
- contribute to the training of service commissioners, providers, planners and policymakers.

Course Content

Topic areas of the course include:

History - Of the ways disabled people have been treated, history of services, self advocacy, parent and independent living movements.

Education - Quality and inclusive education. Outlines strategies for including children with disabilities.

Whole Life Planning - Looking at and thinking about what children and adults with disabilities will need as they get older. Includes person centred planning, circles of support, supported living, community building and exploring community resources.

Employment - How people with disabilities, especially those with substantial disabilities, can be enabled to do a job with appropriate training and support.

Policy Development - How decisions on service provision get made and how to influence them.

Assistive Technology - How technology can help mobility, communication, self care and employment.

Supported Living - What it takes to create a positive home environment for adults with disabilities.

Advocacy - Developing a vision for the future and finding out about: relevant legislation; how to change policies; meeting officials; use of the media; developing alliances; community organising and advocacy organisations.

Partners Development

The original Partners course was devised in 1987 under the direction of Colleen Wieck Ph.D., Director of the Minnesota Governors Planning Council of Development Disabilities, and Ed Skarnulius Ph.D., of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The World Institute on Disability adopted the Partners in Policymaking programme in recognition of its potential as a model for leadership training for parents of disabled children and disabled adults.

The first Partners course in the UK was held in the North West in 1996 directed by Lynne Elwell and Chris Gathercole, from North West Training & Development Team. Partners graduates are involved in many activities. They have become members of Partnership Boards, local councillors and Mayors, they have set up support groups, made presentations, deliver training to service staff and working with social services, health authorities and education on numerous groups and committees, at local, regional and national levels. A number have also gone on to further and higher education and employment.

Some direct quotes from commissioners:

"It bridged the divide between families and professionals"

"I now view parents and people with learning disabilities as colleagues"

"We have set ourselves a target to buy at least four places each year"

"The Partners graduates now form the base of a formal strong support network"

"It's really useful to have people who have taken the time to understand the constraints and agendas we have to work with. Other carers are constantly destructive"

"As a commissioner and practitioner in learning disability services for over 25 years, it has always surprised me that services assume parents are given some innate ability to understand the needs of their disabled child and to understand how all the different services operate.

We spend millions of pounds on training staff, who then of course get promotion, leave or retire; yet the one constant in most people's lives are their parents/families. Empowering families (and brother, sisters, aunts and neighbours etc) seems too obvious and I suppose why it has only happened since someone had the bright idea to invent Partners.

Over the past 10 years I have now seen family after family transformed, following their involvement with Partners. Families who once fought bitterly with services learn how to be effectively assertive, families taking control of their own lives and developing innovative services, people gaining confidence and skills (or recognising the skills they already had) to best use the professionals and services to get the best for the disabled person.

I have seen people take control and have moved into new opportunities because of the confidence that Partners develops in people. Family members who have got new jobs, developed their own businesses and people who now feel confident about working with professionals, Partnership Boards and other bureaucracies to achieve change.

To me I feel it is the greatest investment and in the long run the most cost effective investment society can make in providing good care for a disabled person, but also to truly empower and engage families and the disabled person in managing their own lives.

With a developing use of Direct payments and the opportunities that individualised budgets could make, will require families to be offered this educational opportunity for it to be a success, the graduates of Partners are nearly always the first to take the opportunity to manage their own lives, it should be an opportunity to be offered to all families, for them to do the course at a time when they are ready."

Rob Greig, National lead on learning disability

On Partners in Policymaking © and Sharing the Challenge ©

"If services really are to change in ways that mean they reflect the genuine wishes and aspirations of people with learning disabilities and their families, then it is crucial that those people are enabled to become full and active partners in policymaking, planning and development processes.

Programmes such as "partners in policymaking and sharing the challenge" are important and creative ways of helping this to happen. As I hear of innovative and creative service change across the country, I am struck by how often this is associated with the presence of someone who is a partner in policymaking graduate. We need more of them".

There are 45 places available on this, the first national partners in policymaking course, for an application pack please contact either Lynne Elwell or Julia Erskine.

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Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Elwell

Julia Erskine