

CHARTER FOR CHALLENGE

In Derbyshire we have recently launched The Choice and Control Charter: *Be in Control*. The development of this exciting and dynamic new approach has been spearheaded in services to people with learning difficulties. But its implications are much wider than care services and it is relevant not only to one group of people but to practically anyone.

However, starting at the beginning (which you will remember that Julie Andrews tell us is a very good place to start) it was at a sub group of the Derbyshire Learning Disability Partnership Board that ideas for this first started to be generated.

The County Choice and Control Focus Group/Sub Group of Derbyshire Learning Disability Partnership Board (snappy title eh) have been meeting for three or four years. Our membership is about a dozen. That is; a couple of people from Health Services (both as it happens LD nurses) with special interests in Health Promotion and Person Centered Planning respectively, two Parent/Carers who are very involved in developing Person-Centered Approaches and Direct Payments, two experienced and confident people (and their support worker) from the Self Advocacy Movement, locally, two Social Services Training and Development colleagues, a Carers Organisation Co-ordinator, a Partnership Participation Project worker, a Senior Social Services Manager and a representative from Independent Advocacy (me)! So a fair mix of people. And one which I suggest could be an interesting template for any sub group for real partnership work.

Of course it is not just about the organisations or perspectives that people come from but about gathering together a group of people who have ideas, access to networks, and though singing in different keys are all prepared to sing from the same song sheet.



It was from such a ragged band as this that the idea for a Choice and Control Charter sprang roughly 12 months ago. We had already established a yearly conference on related issues, created a Task Force for promoting and supporting good practice, started to publish a quarterly(ish) Choice and Control

Newsletter and initiated (and joined) local Choice and Control Groups around the county. But for real Choice and Control to be working practice we needed a springboard. Initially it was almost a case of ideas scribbled on the back of

an envelope and after more thought, lots of talk and wide consultation those ideas flowered into a comprehensive list of statements. After the usual bureaucratic procrastination so beloved (and seemingly unavoidable) of large organisations the day arrived in March of this year when our Charter was launched from the high turrets of our County Offices (so to speak) on an only semi-suspecting world.

It might seem that I am making light of it but actually it was an exciting and important event and the culmination of months of consultation, revision, liaison and coercion that had gone on behind the scenes.

By the time of the launch the County Council had given complete backing to the Charter. Their Chief Executive opened proceedings in the Members Lounge to an invited audience of over 100 guests. These guests included a substantial number of people with learning difficulties from around the county and were people who had helped to shape the Charter. There were also Parents and Carers and Heads of Departments from the County Council as well as Elected Members and folk from different levels within Service Planning and Delivery.

The programme for the Launch consisted of three short presentations by people who use services, describing how important their freedoms are to them personally and a variety of short talks by the Usual Suspects/Senior Managers and Local Politicians. There was also a mini-workshop in which Department Heads of the County Council had to identify what they could do to help people gain the objectives on the Charter. Could have all been a lot of hot air but the 'buzz' at the event gave an indication that in fact having something as official sounding as a Charter might just be just what is needed.

In fact that is proving to be the case (so far). There has continued to be interest and commitment from all sorts of quarters to the charter. And even talk about having it emblazoned on the sides of buses in the County.

To me, from an Advocacy point-of-view, to have a locally endorsed list of statements which describe what service-users can/should expect is potentially extremely helpful.



THE CHOICE AND CONTROL CHARTER – “BE IN CONTROL”

- **You should have a person-centered plan and have control of it**
- **You should have the offer of Direct Payments**

- **You should be involved in choosing staff**

- **You should have the choice of being at meetings that are about you and that make decisions that affect you**

- **You should help to run the services you get**
- **You should be supported to do the things you want to do**

- **You should be supported with your friendships and relationships**

- **You should be listened to when you are worried and upset and know that something is being done about it**

- **You should be able to live in a way that suits you**

- **You should have help to understand things and to tell people what *you* want them to know**

- **You should have help to stay healthy**
- **You should have a choice of where you live and who you live with**

This charter has been produced in an attractive A5 sized leaflet and has some illustrations with it as well as useful phone numbers to call for further information and/or help.

Observant readers amongst you will notice several things:

Our “Charter” is not really saying anything that shouldn’t already be happening and literally reflects what people *should* be getting help with (if they don’t already get that help).

The Charter is in line with suggested good practice as outlined in Valuing People, Valuing People Know and Person Centered Approaches generally.

There are other things that could have been put in it – but where do you stop?

Each one of these statements has immense, and exciting, implications for service providers.

This Charter gives us all a clear mandate within the County to support people to develop and obtain the sorts of services that will give them more choice and greater freedom. It is not perfect but it is a new start!

Peter Dawson – Manager Peaks and Dales Advocacy

