

Self-Advocacy in North Yorkshire is changing

What is self advocacy?

Self-advocacy is about gaining the knowledge, learning the skills and developing the confidence to communicate what's important to you. Having the confidence to speak up about the things you care about and the decisions that affect you allows you not just to challenge those decisions but also to shape and co-design things such as the services you might use.



How self-advocacy has worked in North Yorkshire

Since 2012, a charity, Keyring, has supported people with a learning disability and/or autistic people in North Yorkshire to speak out about things that are important to them and make changes happen, with funding from North Yorkshire Council Health and Adult Services. They have done this through

facilitating groups in local areas and also supporting the North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board, which brings together self-advocates from across the county to discuss issues important to them with officers from the Council and NHS as well as other invited guests.

Over this time Keyring have supported some fantastic pieces of work from awareness raising around issues important to the self-advocates, to the development of resources, and being involved in co-producing and co-designing services, and Keyring's work has ensured that self-advocacy for people with a learning disability and/or autism is now well established across much of the county.

What is changing?

At the end of September, the contract with Keyring is coming to an end. This is an opportunity to look at how more people who access Health and Adult Services and their families and carers can be actively involved in the Directorate's work, co-design services and be supported to have the skills and confidence to challenge and hold decision makers to account, and ultimately work better together.

The North Yorkshire community accessing these services are vibrant and diverse and it is the commitment of Health and Adult Services that everyone should have the opportunity to have their voices heard, should they wish to. That is why, over the next few months the Health and Adult Services Involvement team and other colleagues from the Directorate will be going out across the county to speak to as many people who use services and their families and carers, as well as third sector organisations, care providers and health and adult services staff as possible to understand what good involvement and good self-advocacy should look like.

What about self-advocates who are already members of groups?

We appreciate, that for many of our existing self-advocates, their monthly meetings with Keyring are a lifeline, something they look forward to and a place to see friends and socialise. Therefore, wherever possible, we will be using existing meeting dates to work with self-advocates to start to think about what they would like their groups to look like moving forward, how these run and what their main areas of focus are. Where groups are less well established, we will work with individual self-advocates to hear their views and ensure that they are able to be involved in designing what the future of self-advocacy looks like, as well as accessing other local groups they may be interested in while their usual meetings are not going ahead.

We recognise that change is difficult for all of us, and long-standing and trusting relationships have been formed with Keyring staff. We therefore want to reassure all current self-advocates that they will not be left without any support and that this is an exciting opportunity to design the future of self-advocacy and involvement.



What about the North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board?

The current Learning Disability Partnership Board members will be meeting later in the year to focus some time on looking at the future of the Board and how they would like this to work moving forward. At present Board meetings will continue as normal and support will be provided by the Involvement Team to ensure everyone has what they need to attend meetings.

How can people have their say?

Between September and November, the HAS Involvement Team will be going out to speak to as many people as possible about how they want to be involved in the work of Health and Adult Services (if at all!), what self-advocacy means to them and what people need to have their voices heard.

This will include speaking to existing self-advocates, visiting some of the brilliant third sector organisations and groups across the County as well as six public events where the North Yorkshire community can come and have their say.

We would also like to hear the views of HAS Staff and Care Providers to understand some of the barriers that prevent people from having their voices heard and hear ideas on where we can improve.

If you or your team would like us to come along for a chat please email HASEngagement@northyorks.gov.uk

If you are supporting one of the current self-advocates affected by the changes who have worries or questions you can also contact the Involvement Team on the above email and we can offer support and reassurance.

We also attach an easy read guide to the changes and would encourage you to share this with anyone you support who may find this helpful.

We are looking forward to hearing the voices of the North Yorkshire community over the coming months so please do join us for a cuppa and a chat to help make positive change happen.

North Yorkshire Council Health & Adult Services Involvement Team