



Introduction from Liz

This spring saw Gail Hanrahan move on to a new role supporting families across her home county. We have worked closely over the last five years developing the Forward With Families strategy in Dimensions and I won't be the only person to miss her! My hours have increased to cover her role in supporting families and staff across the country.

We have welcomed Alicia Wood to a newly formed, small Public Affairs team to make sure the people we support, their families, and support staff can raise their voice on the issues that matter most. Dimensions is a large organisation supporting lots of people across the country. We believe that it is right for us to support all of these people to have their say and to respond to the issues that impact the lives of people we support and their families, and our ability to provide great support. We raise awareness with decision makers, including MPs, government ministers and other public services.

Our work includes:

- Campaigns – such as #ImWithSam and Love Your Vote
- Consultations – to shape national policies and funding decisions
- Political engagement – to give people the opportunity to speak about what matters to the people with the power to change it.

Most of all, the Public Affairs team is here to support people at Dimensions and the wider learning disability and autism community to influence the decisions that impact their lives.

There may be things you do locally, with a particular MP or for a particular cause that you'd like to tell us about or you would like support with. You might want to get involved in the national work we do – whether that's giving your view in a consultation or speaking to a journalist about an issue that matters to you.

Please feel free to share your thoughts, interests and ideas with us – we'd love to hear them! You can email them to me liz.wilson@dimensions-uk.org

Volunteers

We are now using volunteers across the regions to support people with all sorts of extras like making their own vegetable garden or being another pair of hands in the swimming pool. If your relative or friend needs a bit of extra support to do more of the things they love why don't you have a chat with their manager to find out more?

If you are passionate about volunteering perhaps you would like to join the steering group. It meets quarterly in Birmingham and we can pay your travel expenses. Get in touch with Grace Kay, the Head of Volunteering grace.kay@dimensions-uk.org

We never use
volunteers to
replace paid
staff.

Safeguarding

Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides the right to respect for one's established family life. This includes close family ties, although there is no pre-determined model of a family or family life. It includes any stable relationship, be it married, engaged, or de facto; between parents and children; siblings; grandparents and grandchildren.

Liberty

For the past couple of years I have been the independent chair of the Dimensions Safeguarding Panel. I am also the independent chair of two adult safeguarding boards, and the parent of a young woman with Down's Syndrome.

Anyone who has been the parent or carer of a person with a learning disability will have a horror story to tell. Not being believed, not being listened to, being ignored, being patronised. For many, a constant battle from the word go, as you negotiate the worlds of health, education and social care. At best you might be lucky enough to find one or two exceptional people who help you through a faceless, impersonal system. A system where, at times, you can't help but feel that families are seen as a bit of a nuisance, getting in the way of the "professionals" who know what is best for your child.

If, as a young person or adult, your child moves into other settings of care and support, it can feel even more difficult to be heard. It can feel that your years of experience and deep understanding are viewed as being valueless. At worst, families can be seen as pushy, difficult, over protective, unreasonable.

As the independent chair of two adult safeguarding boards I look at all of this through a slightly different lens. I have found myself working alongside people who certainly don't fit that stereotype. People who understand the importance of family. But I have also seen family members kept at arms' length, their knowledge and expertise largely ignored, whilst their loved one spirals into ever greater risk with tragic consequences. I have also seen the real discomfort, often deserved, of professionals, as the stark reality of the family experience is played back to them.

In fairness, I have seen a significant effort to change - to be more open to dialogue with families when it is most needed, not just after the event. It's difficult, and requires an effort and investment in relationship building.

This is why I have been so encouraged to witness the work of the Family and Friends Forum and the Dimensions Council. And so encouraged when, as we frequently do at safeguarding panel, I hear of the efforts made at the local level to involve and work with family members.

It's imperfect, what isn't? I'm sure that there are frustrations and disappointments. But the Forum and Council are genuine attempts to listen to the people we support, and to the voices of their families and friends.

For those with safeguarding responsibilities, listening to those voices just might be the thing which prevents a tragedy.

For the people we support and their families, it is a human right.

Richard Crompton



Information contacts

Liz Wilson
07908 669 040
liz.wilson@dimensions-uk.org

Liz is available on weekdays to talk to families about your involvement with us.



Family event in Fareham and Gosport

Last year we encouraged our managers to hold family events to create lovely life books for the people we support. This is just one of the many stories about the events.

We provided scrap books, pens, glue, decorations etc. Families and people we support brought their photos, which we copied so people could keep the originals. And support staff put a lot of effort into ensuring people could come.

Some of the people we support used to live together and had photos of each other so they made two copies so each could have one in their memory book. We had some great conversations about hairstyles through the ages and recognised a lot of people who are sadly no longer with us. Some of the staff who have been working in the services for many, many years also appeared in a few.

One of the ladies had pictures of her walking as a little girl. She has recently been going to the local gym and working with a personal trainer to increase her mobility and she has now started to walk again with support. Her parents were so pleased to see her regaining her independence and were comparing the photos.

Three of the people we support all used to live together before moving into their own supported living services. It was great to see them and their parents all together again, talking about old times. They hadn't seen each other for years.

Another gentleman with autism was sat with his mum and she was showing him photos of family members he hadn't seen for many years, he was really good at remembering all their names and things he used to do with them.

The whole event was really well received so it is definitely something we will be doing again.

Jen Lake

Locality Manager



Reminders



Remember you can nominate a staff team or individual for an award. It's an easy way to show your appreciation to people.



If you use email please make sure we have your email address



Don't forget there is a very wide range of 'family factsheets' available on the Dimensions website covering most topics you might be interested in. You can find them here:
<https://www.dimensions-uk.org/families/>



The Mental Capacity Act is a law which provides a legal framework for the care, treatment and support of people who lack capacity to make some, or all, decisions for themselves and/or

are unable to manage their own affairs. The law applies to everyone over the age of 16 in England and Wales. The Act is clear that all adults have the right to make their own decisions wherever possible (including unwise decisions). If they are unable to make their own decisions then others are able to act for them. However, any decision must ensure that the person remains at the centre of any decision made on their behalf and must always be in their best interests. Please ask your manager if you want more information about how we support your relative and work with you to make sure decisions are well made.



Chair report

Would you like to be in a position to help Dimensions progress further working with Family and Friends? The Family and Friends Forum want to involve you and will be working with the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI) to look at how best to do that. The NDTI are an independent not-for-profit organisation with many years' experience in leading change.



In late autumn there will be an opportunity for you to attend a conference to discuss just that. At the conference, we will also talk about other issues of interest to family and friends, for example "How can I get reassurance that my family member/ friend will be well looked after when I am no longer around" - something that has been raised by a number of families. If you have a topic you think it would be useful to discuss, could you let me know of it. My email is susan.kirkman@dimensions-uk.org. I can't promise we will discuss your topic but we will find ones that are common and see what we can do. Hope to see you in October!

Susan Kirkman

Family Survey

Every two years we survey family and friends to find out your views. In the last survey we saw a significant increase in the number of family and friends involved in support planning, we are hoping to find that these numbers have increased as we have worked with our managers to make this happen. You also told us that over 60 % of you didn't have some basic information about the organisation so we introduced a new Information Pack. Our Quality Checking team tell us that families now have this information. We really value your views and act on our findings.

If your relative receives 30 hours or more support from Dimensions each week, you will find the survey included here. Please help us by returning the survey promptly. Everyone else will be asked to complete a more localised survey in due course as the range of support we offer is so varied and we want to ask you more relevant questions.

Activate

Activate is a new model of support that we have developed that brings together all of our very best practice in one place. In trials staff report that they love the easy recording system and sense of achievement it brings to their work. After a lot of hard work and preparation, Dimensions will begin to roll out our new approach to delivering support from late summer. The roll-out will be staggered so not all services will see changes straight away.

Your relative's manager will be able to tell you more in due course, but to find out more now just visit dimensions-uk.org/activate.

There for you

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