



Introduction

In this issue of the Family newsletter we're talking support for brothers and sisters, our national hate crime campaign #ImWithSam and what we can do to support our family members with learning disabilities and autism to have meaningful relationships and friendships.

Support for brothers and sisters

Growing up with a brother or sister with learning disabilities or autism means that life is a bit different from your peers. Whatever stage of life you are at, the highs, the lows and the everyday can leave you wondering if anyone else shares these experiences.

As we travel around the country meeting people we see an increasing number of brothers and sisters and cousins too who are very much involved in the lives of people we support. They don't always have the same depth of knowledge about the health and social care system that parents commonly have but they have a strong desire to learn and make sure life continues to be good for their relative as parents age and die.

Sibs – For Brothers and Sisters is the only UK charity representing the needs of siblings of disabled people and it aims to enhance the lives of siblings by providing them with information and support.

Contact them on **01535 645453** or by visiting www.sibs.org.uk

Greetings from Gail and Liz, Family Consultants



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In October I travelled down to London for the launch of the #ImWithSam campaign to end hate crime against people with learning disabilities and autism in the House of Commons. People with learning disabilities and family carers spoke passionately about their experiences. The incidents people spoke of ranged from name calling to life threatening attacks. Nobody should live with the daily fear of attack and the response from politicians to these stories was encouraging. I'm certainly looking forward to a time when I can relax when my daughter pops out to the shops.

- Liz Wilson



Gail Hanrahan (South and Wales)

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In November I visited India. The trip was part of a joint project, with Dimensions, Helen Sanderson Associates and The Institute for Person Centred Approaches in India (IPCAI) to promote person centred practices. We visited many projects, colleges, schools and institutions and the week culminated in a conference about person centred practice and families. Although the trip was overwhelming and emotional for many reasons what I took away was how much Indian culture is rooted in family and community. The thought of not involving families wouldn't enter their heads...but then why would it?

- Gail Hanrahan



We know that this issue is close to the hearts of family and friends, we all want to see a day when people with learning disabilities and autism are able to live without the fear of attack.

In October we launched the #ImWithSam campaign to help us tackle autism and learning disability hate crime. You might have seen our CEO Steve Scown and Quality Auditor Mark Brookes on the BBC Breakfast sofa.

The campaign is based on our own research which included a survey of members of the learning disability and autism community. Among other things, the survey found that 73 % had experienced hate crime – 53 % in the last year alone. 93 % said that stronger legislation was needed to protect vulnerable people from hate crime.

We're working with partner organisations, government services, people we support and other individuals to share the message that learning disability and autism hate crime is unacceptable – and that something can be done. #ImWithSam is based around eight outcomes we want to see as a result of our campaigning. These objectives include resources and support for schools, families

and support workers, stronger laws for online disability hate crime, improved processes for investigating and prosecuting disability hate crime and wider representation of people with learning disabilities and autism.

CEO Steve Scown said, "Hate crime robs people of their confidence, their independence and, sometimes, their lives. Everyone has a part to play in changing this – politicians and civil servants, mums and dads, teachers, police and care professionals have critical roles, but everyone can help give this campaign momentum."

More information, including an animation, is available on our campaign webpage: <https://www.dimensions-uk.org/join-imwithsam-disability-hate-crime-campaign>, and we're asking you to join the campaign here: <https://www.dimensions-uk.org/campaign/imwithsam>. Please encourage people you know to sign up to this campaign.

Are YOU with Sam?

A message from Housing

During my time at Dimensions I have on numerous occasions responded to requests for help on many housing issues. Ranging from the need for suitable housing, maintenance, health and safety issues and sometimes staff and tenants being taken advantage of. This includes poor maintenance by other housing providers, to overcharging tenants or making unreasonable demands. I have also intervened when some of our tenants are threatened with eviction, I've been able to cease such actions and ensure people we support retain their homes. There have also been issues of rental payments, queries on tenancies and licences.

I will be more than happy to meet with families and respond to any questions relating to housing, tenancies, contracts between Dimensions, other housing providers agreements, management issues, maintenance issues, new housing, renting privately and shared ownership.

Often families can really help staff resolve issues and I can provide examples where we have resolved important matters to the people we support and their families.

Eric Hardman
Head of Housing & Asset Management

At Dimensions, we welcome complaints as an opportunity to improve the way we support people and work in partnership with their family and friends. Making a complaint should never make a situation worse.

When to make a complaint

Always make a complaint as early as possible as problems are easier to fix before they have become established.

It is ok to resolve issues informally and most day-to-day concerns are dealt with in this way. However, if an informal approach doesn't work the structure of the complaints process is helpful. Unresolved 'small' problems can build up if they are not dealt with, so even if it seems trivial at the time, let us know. That way, we can put it right before it builds into something more.

If you have immediate concerns for the health and safety of your relative phone our head office on 0300 303 9001.

How long will it take to resolve a complaint?

- we will try to sort out the problem within five working days of you making a complaint
- if the problem still needs sorting out after one week, we will ask an internal investigator to help sort it out
- when this happens you will get a letter to say who the investigator is and how long it should take to resolve the problem
- the investigator will talk to you, your relative and all of the staff involved
- if the investigator cannot sort out the problem within 20 working days they will ask one of their bosses to get involved
- we will keep you informed of progress throughout the complaints process.

We continually learn from feedback provided by families. At the end of the complaints process you will be invited to complete a short questionnaire about the way we handled your complaint. Please help us by completing this.

Why complain?

You may want to make a complaint for any number of reasons. For example, you might think:

- that an individual member of staff did something wrong
- that the team are not supporting your relative to do the things they most enjoy
- that important decisions were made without involving you.
- that your relative has been treated unfairly or discriminated against because of their demographics, i.e. age, gender, disability etc.

A problem is unlikely to get better if nobody knows about it.

How to make a complaint

You can make a complaint in person, over the phone, online or in writing.

You need to tell us:

- What the problem is.
- When it happened or if it is ongoing.
- Who was involved.
- What you would like to be done about it.

If you complain verbally, the member of staff who takes the complaint must record it.

You can make a complaint to your Locality Manager or Operations Director. If you prefer, you could raise your concerns with the central complaints service on **0300 303 9024** or email: complaints@dimensions-uk.org

Alternatively you can visit: <https://www.dimensions-uk.org/contact/making-complaint/> and fill out our online form.

Or you can post your complaint to:

Dimensions, Complaints Department, Building 1430, Arlington Business Park, Theale, Reading RG7 4SA



Relationships

The desire to have more friends and a special relationship is one of the most common themes raised by people we support in Dimensions. Learning Disability England held a workshop on this topic in autumn and Liz went along to find out more. The event was attended by a good mix of people with learning disabilities, families and staff.

It was very obvious from the discussions that sex is the big scary headline that shuts down a lot of debate. There are so many other things needed before people get to the point of intimate relationships (if indeed that is what they want). It was clear how important it is for people to have the support of family and staff to create the opportunities to have a social life. People value the chance to talk about what makes a good friendship or relationship in the real world as opposed to the soaps or Disney films. No matter how complex a person's needs are there is always room for friendship which can take many forms.

Supporting people with friends and relationships is something we prioritise. We would love to know what you think.

If you want to find out more about Learning Disability England and attend events near you go to:

www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk

Family and Friends Forum

It really is good, in these dark and dismal winter days, to have something to look back on which gave us a glow inside! One such event for me was the 20 Top Performing Managers presentations. It was humbling to see the managers being genuinely surprised that they had been chosen for such an award when they just thought they were doing their job! Sharing their experiences made it clear that they all go "the extra mile" for the people they support and that hopefully, through their examples, more managers will be enabled to be one of the Top 20 managers in the future.

The Listening events were also inspirational for different reasons. The nature of the event- what's working, what's not working- meant that there were some complaints from Family and Friends, but it was reassuring to note the responses from the Executive team who were genuinely distressed by some of the complaints made and have

acted quickly to resolve the problems raised. The attendance at the meetings was not immense so maybe many of us are happy with the support our families and friends are receiving. Certainly the afternoon session showed that the people who are supported are delighted with their support and anything they were concerned about was expressed with confidence, which was a delight to witness.

If anyone would like to join the National Family and Friends Forum please do contact me on **susan.kirkman@dimensions-uk.org**, or Gail or Liz. We see the many positives of Dimensions but also are not afraid to discuss concerns with the Executive Team.

Susan Kirkman

Chair of Family and Friends Forum



From the Forum

Fran joined the Family and Friends Forum last year. Here she shares her thoughts on what makes a good service.

- reliable open communication including about mistakes (and being prepared to learn from them), and avoiding professional defensiveness
- always striving to improve practice and quality of life of the people they support
- delivering on what has been agreed
- consistency

All these contribute to the trust which ideally should develop in the relative in the service which is being provided - not expecting it to be perfect but as good as it realistically can be.

- Fran

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