

Devon Learning Disability Service and PA

Devon Learning Disability Partnership probably has the highest concentration of people who know how to use PA in the country. Over 19 people who use learning disability services and 22 staff have taken part in PA courses since 2004 and many of these are now active in initiating PA projects to engage and involve people who use Partnership services throughout the county.

PA was introduced to Devon Partnership Trust by Lisa Thorne who had used PA as part of her psychology training. She and others soon recognised its potential as a means of enabling people who use services to become more involved in making decisions about how those services are delivered.

All the Devon PA-ers have attended a five-day course which introduces the principles, process and methods of PA. The course is lively and fun, with plenty of changes of pace and activity. It is highly visual and participatory and uses language and activities which are accessible to people with a learning disability. There is plenty of opportunity for practice and the course includes a real-live PA project so that participants learn what PA is really about and come away confident to do more. All of the participants come away with a comprehensive and user-friendly PA manual and a pictorial record of the course.

Each service-user attending the course works with a learning partner from the staff team, which has proved to be an extremely successful approach. Some of the participants with learning disabilities have additional literacy, communication or "settling in" needs, which their learning partner assists with. Some of the participants who are staff members have never worked so closely with one individual on such a specific and empowering project before. Nearly all of the learning partners have continued to learn together, planning and facilitating a variety of PA projects, attending conferences and participating in the county-wide network of PA practitioners who now meet quarterly.

PA projects in Devon now include:

- Research into bullying - published as: Working together to find out about bullying of people with learning difficulties, Lisa Thorne and Caroline White. *Clinical Psychology Forum 153 - September 2005.*
- Developing new tools to evaluate services for people with severe learning disabilities including severe communication difficulties at Kingsteignton Community Resource Centre
- Exploring people's experience of eye-testing services with people from Kingsteignton CRC and Home Farm Trust who had had a test and follow up treatment.
- Checking the usefulness of a 'Flu information leaflet for people with a learning disability
- SeeDS project – participatory research into the experiences of people who have used Direct Payments to inform the introduction of Self Directed Support, and in particular to ensure that useful information is provided in an accessible way.

There is now a database of PA practitioners available to managers throughout the county and active PA groups in North Devon, West Devon, Teignbridge and South Hams. A further group of PA practitioners are due to be trained in 2007. Learning and Development officer, Mary Dart says, "the whole way in which we deliver the service has been influenced by PA"

