



**Partners in  
Policymaking U.K.  
Information booklet**

## **Why we run Partners in Policymaking courses**

Disabled children, disabled adults and their families are frequently subject to high levels of stress, often due to lack of information, changing policies, practices and a moving population of people who support them. They are at risk of social isolation and social exclusion. One of the best ways of reversing these negative experiences is to give up to date leading edge information, give them the strategies, confidence and tools to work in partnership with service providers.

Partners in Policymaking courses enable and encourage participants to become actively engaged in the development of policy affecting disabled people both at local and national level. People who come on the course join a network of disabled people and their families who can give them support.

Whilst training professionals is important, it is the people who use the services who remain the same. They have the greatest stake in investing time and energy to ensure that things will change for the better. They have direct access to all the MP's, councillors and officials who make the policies that shape systems. We now have graduates from these courses in many areas across England. Confident, competent people who are in this work for the long haul.

Our focus on developing community-based leadership has meant that we have a network of, disabled people, family carers and service providers working together. At present this is only happening in some parts of the country, we want to make sure that anyone wanting to access courses can do.

We have been successful in getting funding for the first national partners in policymaking course. There are forty five places available for relatives who have a disabled child up to the age of 19 and for disabled adults to apply for.

## **Some background information**

For many years a number of people have been working to increase social inclusion and develop communities in which disabled people and their families work together in true partnership developing policies and practices that ensure that everyone enjoys the best life possible. The work we do would be underpinned by the belief that disabled people and their families have always been the true experts on what they need and what they want in order to have positive and successful lives.

## **Some of the things people will learn about**

**History** – and perception of disabled people looking back at the way disabled people have been seen and treated, history of services, self-advocacy, parent and independent living movements.

Hearing the history connects the generations of families, usually parents only know other parents who have disabled children of the same age. And rarely come into contact with disabled adults. Teaching the history shows that we are walking on the shoulders of giants.

**Education** - quality and inclusive education. Outline strategies for including children with disabilities. Many children have moved from segregated education to mainstream education their parents able to make informed decisions

**Whole Life Planning** - looking at and thinking about what children and adults with disabilities will need as they get older. Includes person centred planning, circles of support, supported living and individual budgets

**Employment** – how people with disabilities, especially those with substantial disabilities, can be enabled to do a job with appropriate training and support

**Policy Development** – how decisions on service provision get made and how to influence them. We look at who does what locally and how policies are made nationally. Many of the participants go on to get involved in policy making by becoming councillors, Mayors, making informed choices about voting and becoming members of partnership boards.

**Assistive Technology** – how technology can help mobility, communication, self care and employment

**Supported Living** – what it takes to create a positive home environment for adults with disabilities

**Advocacy – and person centred planning** - developing a vision for the future and finding out about: relevant legislation; how to change policies; meeting officials; use of the media; developing alliances; community organising and advocacy organisations

**Who is the course for;** There will be approximately 45 participants who will be parents or relatives who support a disabled child up to the age of 19. and for disabled adults. When we say the programme is for relatives of people who need support and adults who need support and may be vulnerable, we are including:

- people with learning disabilities
- people with sensory impairments
- people with physical impairments
- people with long-term or serious health issues (physical and mental)

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## Partners Development

The original Partners course was devised in 1987 under the direction of Colleen Wieck Ph.D., Director of the Minnesota Governors Planning Council of Development Disabilities, and Ed Skarnulius Ph.D., of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The World Institute on Disability adopted the Partners in Policymaking programme in recognition of its potential as a model for leadership training for parents of disabled children and disabled adults. Lynne Elwell, Chris Gathercole and Paul Taylor adapted Partners in Policymaking for the U.K. the first course ran in the north west in 1997.

### Links to Other courses;

**Sharing the Challenge**, for families, which have disabled children over the age of sixteen and for disabled adults.

**Kindred Spirits** a course that brings together people who work in social services, education and the health authority, with family members. This course encourages partnership working and local initiatives.

**Tomorrow's Leaders**, which was commissioned by the valuing people team to inform the national self-advocacy forum. Tomorrow's leaders has run nationally and regionally.

**Sharing Knowledge**, a course for families who have children who are going through the transition process from childhood to adulthood.

### Statement from Ivan Lewis, former Minister for social care

'Partners in Policy Making' are leaders and innovators in ensuring people who use services and their carers move towards an equal relationship with service providers and commissioners.

I believe they have developed an approach, which can teach us much as we design the new National Expert Carers Programme. For years, we have struggled to genuinely empower people. 'Partners' have transformed rhetoric into reality.

Their work is an inspiration to policy makers and professionals who are committed to changing the balance of power as we create modern Health and Social Care systems.

### Making sure we are getting it right

We evaluate each session of each course, we then have an independent assessment done six months following the course to see how people are using the knowledge gained.

Hundreds of people have successfully applied for Partners in Policymaking courses, using what they learn on the course the participants are making a real difference to their own lives and to the lives of others. People are selected on the basis of their commitment to learn and take action. They are not discriminated against on the grounds of support or travel costs.

We select each participant as a person worth investing in. This, in turn, increases our commitment to them and our aspirations for them.