



The Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS)

The Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) is a statutory service, commissioned by the Department of Health, to act as an independent advocate to support people through the NHS complaints procedure. ICAS aims to firstly ensure people who find it difficult to voice their concerns are empowered to take their complaint forward and secondly, to ensure that wider concerns regarding poor practice within the NHS are raised and rectified. The values of social inclusion, equality, and human rights underpin our services.

ICAS Advocates offer a person centred service and support people at any stage during the complaints process. The Advocates are able to offer; information on the complaints process, assistance in writing a complaint letter, support at complaints resolution meetings and facilitation in communicating with the NHS Complaints Team. ICAS works in partnership and if a client already has an Advocate, ICAS will work with both parties and thus strengthen the person's overall support structure.

Three organisations provide ICAS nationally: POhWER, The Carers Federation and SEAP (South of England Advocacy Projects).

In 2006 SEAP/ICAS set up an Outreach Team and the aims of this team are to:

- Raise the profile of ICAS to seldom heard people that may not be aware of the service.
- Ensure practice is informed and shaped by seldom heard people.
- Develop best practice models of working, ensuring that seldom heard people trust, have confidence in and can fully access the service.

Since the team was formed, we have focused our work on the following client groups:

- In 2006/7 - Prisoners and people in forensic mental health units.
- In 2007/8 - People with learning disabilities.
- In 2008/9 - People from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups including Gypsies and Travellers.

The vision of the Outreach Team when working with People with Learning Disabilities was to ensure that ICAS was fully accessible to people with Learning Disabilities and their family, friends and carers. In order to achieve this we:



- Listened to the key concerns from people with learning disabilities, carers and supporters and asked how they wanted to be supported during the NHS complaints process.
- Talked with national and regional stakeholders and learned about the key initiatives to support and empower people with learning disabilities. From this we created a centralised database in order to facilitate further local partnership working.
- Empowered people with learning disabilities and advocates by producing:
 1. Easy read posters, leaflets and an ICAS Self Help Information Pack (SHIP) using the Change Picture Bank resource. This work was trialled with people with learning disabilities, the My Choice Advocacy Service and the Home Farm Trust.
 2. Best Practice Guidelines and Resource Information for SEAP/ICAS advocates - importantly the content was completely shaped by people with learning disabilities and Advocates.

The leaflets, posters and SHIP are all currently in use by people with learning disabilities and we are hoping that guidelines will be available on SEAP's intranet and internet sites by the end of July 2009.

SEAP/ICAS Outreach Team
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