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**The ¶
2009 ¶
ANNUAL REPORT ¶
of ¶
ROTHERHAM ¶
ADVOCACY ¶
PARTNERSHIPS ¶**
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ABOUT RAP

Rotherham Advocacy Partnerships (RAP) works with people who:

- ◆ have a learning disability
- ◆ are aged 14 and over
- ◆ live in the borough (area) of Rotherham
- ◆ need advocacy

Advocacy means making sure people's voices and views are heard. We help people to have as much choice and control in their lives as they can. We do not advise people or tell them what to do. RAP is not part of social services, health or any other government office. We are independent from everyone who funds us. Our service is free of charge.

RAP was set up in 1994 - we are a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.

COMPANY'S OBJECTS (RAP's Aims)

- To provide an advocacy service to persons with learning disabilities who are over fourteen years of age, and to persons using mental health services who are over eighteen years of age, and living in the Metropolitan Borough of Rotherham.
- To provide such a service through advocacy partnerships by linking a volunteer advocate or a member of staff on a one-to-one basis with a person with learning disabilities, or a person using mental health services.
- To enable and encourage persons with learning disabilities, and persons using mental health services, to support each other in obtaining full rights and privileges as citizens.
- To raise awareness of advocacy with carers, purchasers and providers of services to encourage service user involvement in planning services in order to promote increased choice and opportunities for people with learning disabilities, and persons using mental health services.
- To educate the general public about the capabilities and difficulties of persons with learning disabilities, and persons using mental health services, and the role of advocacy.

MEMBERS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2008 to 2009

Sughra Begum	Chair
Val Lindsay	Secretary/Director
Peter Hedley	Treasurer/Director
Peter Broxham	Director

Roy Farnsworth
Annie Ferguson
Michael Hughes
Philip Jepson
Vanessa Naylor
Alison Owen
Rose Poad

Sandra Hedley (resigned January 2009)

MEMBERS OF STAFF 2008 to 2009

Manager/Team Leader
Ed Sexton
(resigned January 2009)

Advocates
Lucy Davies
Sean Doran
Rachel Musgrave
Jan Reed

Office Administrator
Claire Blood

Maureen Bartholomew (retired December 2008)

INTRODUCING THE PATRON OF ROTHERHAM ADVOCACY PARTNERSHIPS SAGHIR ALAM, OBE



Saghir Alam is a leading expert in Human Rights and Diversity Issues especially in the area of Multiple Identities and advises a number of Central Government Departments. He was appointed to the Statutory Committee of The Equalities and Human Rights Commission in September 2007. He has interest in Human Rights and Diversity Issues especially in the area of Multiple Discrimination. He is leading on Safety and Security and Good Relations.

He is Member of Equality 2025 and Chair of Hard to Reach, Diverse Communities and Older People Working Group. He has legal and business background. He has particular experience working with Central and Local Government. He was appointed as Governor for Westminster Democracy Foundation by the Foreign Secretary. The Foundation works in 63 countries around the world his particular interest is in South Asia and Middle East.

He is Patron of Include Me Too, a National Black and Minority Ethnic Children, Families and Carers Charity. Patron of the National Centre for Diversity and the Ethnic Disabled Children Society. He is a Trustee of Action Disability and Development an International Development Charity working in Africa and Asia.

He has in the past served on a NHS Trust Board and National Probation Service. To add to the variety of his interest and experience, he is also a Trained Mediator in Business and Commercial Disputes.

He believes in a society built on fairness and respect and all people have the opportunity to fulfil their full potential.

RAP is pleased to welcome our new Patron.

REPORT FROM CHAIR - SUGHRA BEGUM

It has been 15 years since Rotherham Advocacy Partnerships was set up and the organisation has gone from strength to strength. RAP welcomes a multi agency approach to working, to both improve the lives of people with learning disabilities and to safeguard their rights. Central to RAP's ethos are the key principles of 'Valuing People', which were expanded upon and updated earlier this year with the publication of 'Valuing People Now'.

The Mental Health Act 2007, which was updated in April this year, has resulted in the government stipulating a need for advocacy for people who are deprived of their liberty. In effect, the Mental Capacity Act Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, introduced in April, applies to people aged 18 and over who lack the capacity to give informed consent to the arrangements made for their care and/or treatment. We will be working with Social Services to see how we can support our users with this and take on the role of the person's representative.

In addition to tackling Social Policy and equality issues, RAP is aiming to raise its profile and we have invited Saghir Alam, the Equality officer 2025 to be the Patron. I am very pleased that Saghir has accepted as he will bring us up to date with the equality and diversity agenda.

This year has been quite a year for change at RAP, with the Chair resigning after five dedicated years and hence my appointment. I'd like to thank Sandra Hedley for her valuable support throughout this period and wish her well for the future.

We have had several changes in Mike Hughes resigning from the committee and also Peter Hedley, RAP's treasurer. I would like to thank them both as they were influential and Peter ensured that we had smooth management of the finances.

Ed Sexton had managed RAP for just less than three years ensuring it ran effectively and successfully getting the organisation the quality mark of ISO9001. This will help the organisation to give a service with quality policies and procedures in place, which can be audited therefore ensuring that we can go for further growth and funding. Now we have appointed an equally worthy successor to Ed – Mrs Sabi Akram.

The new manager for RAP has already begun zealously to work with the team, by having a Staff Away Day at Northern College. This consultation and training day was valuable for the team. I joined the team for the afternoon session and it was good for the team morale and allowed everyone to plan for the year ahead.

Continued

RAP's growth is not only with many referrals which shows how valuable the service is to Rotherham's Community but also in recruiting and training volunteers to have a role at RAP. The volunteers have been committed and dedicated in running the many activities of the Taylor's Court Drop-In sessions. RAP's approach and support to volunteers has equipped them with useful skills to gain employment.

My warmest thanks and wishes must go to all staff team especially to Rachel Musgrave as she had a beautiful baby boy in June 2009. Now Simone Palmer is covering for Rachel and therefore the project is continuing. Claire our Admin worker left in August 2009 and we will miss her gentle manner and support.

Finally, I feel confident with an experienced and farsighted manager in post, RAP will meet the challenges head on and with continued funding from Rotherham Learning Disabilities Services and Sure Start we will maintain the advocacy service that our users deserve.

Many Thanks

SUGHRA BEGUM
Chair
Management Committee

MANAGER'S REPORT

Having come from managing a very busy advice centre for the last 9 years with all its funding constraints that came from the economic decline due to the credit crunch, and after 12 years in the same organisation, I decided it was time to slow things down and have a change of career. Hence I joined RAP at the beginning of this financial year believing I was leaving my stressful days behind. It could not be further from the truth the words 'slow things down' never left my lips.

My predecessor Ed Sexton left at the end of January 2009 and the staff were being supported by the management committee of trustees on an ad hoc basis, as and when required. This was not an ideal situation for staff with no 'day to day' support and supervision, moral was low and the advocacy referrals caseload was growing. Having been giving advice to people for the last 12 years who were socially disadvantaged and excluded, living in poverty and suffering deprivation, I was now faced with 'advocating' and not 'advising' people who have learning disabilities mild, moderate and complex needs.

This was a total new area of work for me although not alien, as advocacy shared the same ethos of my previous work, taking action to help people say what they want, securing their rights, representing their interest, promoting social inclusion, equality and social justice and if they did not have the mental capacity, act in their 'best interest'. However the law and legislation around advocacy was a total new mind field for me, Personalisation Agenda, Person Centred Planning, Valuing People Now, IMHA, IMCA, DOLs / RPR, Mental Health Act and the Human Rights Act for adults with learning disabilities, I came away feeling dizzy in my first week.

In my first three months in my new role I have found RAP has a good working relationship with "grass roots" employees in learning disabilities adult social care. RAP's service is valued by care support-homes managers and staff, in both respite and residential, also by social workers and community nurses, consultants and nursing staff at the Assessment and Training Unit (ATU). They are quick to recognise the value of an advocacy service and there is mutual respect on both sides. This has mainly been down to the experienced staff that are committed and dedicated in their work.

Commissioning is the way forward now. This opens up the tendering process to private and national organisations who will be the main competitors to local established services who have been in existence for many years delivering advocacy support along with external professionals. To continue to maintain and increase our services RAP, as an organisation, needs to be tender ready. I will be looking at securing funding to increase advocacy workers, allowing the more experienced advocates to further develop their own projects and take on a more pro-active role in managing and mentoring volunteers and take on more work placement students.

Continued

In the near future, as a priority for RAP, we need to invest in gaining the advocacy qualification for all advocacy staff. The qualification will ensure that quality standards in the independent advocacy work are being met and will allow us to compete for future funding to demonstrate to funders that RAP staff/employees are adequately trained and skilled. In addition we hope to secure the Awards for all Lottery grant for some resources. RAP is lacking in IT equipment. With seven paid staff there are only two computers that can access email and both computers are constantly used by the admin staff and myself and other staff are having to request use of a computer to send and check for their own emails. New IT will allow us to invest in an up-to-date data base allowing us to collate accurate statistics.

The current advocacy workload is constantly growing with demand on our services increasing on a week by week basis. With regard to vulnerable adults who have a mild learning disability there is no statutory service provision due to the 'Fair Access to Care' criteria adopted by the Learning Disability Services. Consequently, RAP receives a high number of referrals from this group as they have nowhere else to access support. Valuing People stress "**ALL Means ALL**" whereas the "fair access to care" policy excludes people with a mild learning disability who are then clearly disadvantaged. This situation needs amending and clarifying. Advocacy should not be a second class service. There is poor clarity from central government and inconsistency by local authority funding that makes the Valuing People Now agenda meaningless. Access to independent advocacy may well be the only way many people with learning disabilities can receive their rights in life and gain independent living. Person Centred Planning, "Supporting People" and direct payment systems encourage people with learning disabilities to be independent but without more resources they will not be able to take advantage of the services offered.

RAP has the honour of inviting the government Equality Officer, Saghir Alam, to become our patron. We hope he will be able to take forward some of the social policy issues highlighted above back to his colleagues in central government and make a difference to people with learning disabilities.

I have found an amazingly dedicated, committed, over worked and under resourced team. Without their patience I would not have been able to have managed in the last four months. It leaves me to thank the board of trustees who have been very pro-active in their support in my first couple of months. I sincerely thank the individuals who have been the unfortunate ones to have picked up the telephone when I've called them having a panic attack. I thank you all for your support and belief in me.

SABI AKRAM
Manager

TREASURER'S REPORT

Income (Funding) v Expenditure

The Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) provides funding from the Learning Disability Service to enable RAP to provide an advocacy service for people with learning disabilities aged 18 and over in the Rotherham Borough.

During the financial year, further funding was received from:

Sure Start

Children in Need

Other Grants from :

- Church of England 'Vicars Relief Fund' - used to assist clients to buy essential equipment.
- BILD (British Institute of Learning Disabilities); residual balance of £422 remaining from 2006/2007. Originally secured for a 12 month project to provide advocacy support to young people in transition from school to adult life. This balance has now been spent.
- Borough Wide drop in.

2008/09 saw a decrease in available funds from £199,640 to £179,434 a decrease of circa £20,000. However, the expenditure for the year of £188,443 (a decrease of £6,412 on previous year) resulted in a Net loss of £9,009 for 2008/09; this was offset by the balance carried forward from 2007/2008 of £75,737. The net loss is a direct result of reduced funding.

Expenditure directly related to activities actually reduced (£8,701) in 2008/2009 with a marginal increase of £474 in the support costs needed to administer these activities.

Trustees Remuneration - a thank you to all the Trustees for their time, no payments were made for expenses during 2008/2009 which greatly assists an already stretched budget.

Staff Costs – decrease of £10,037, reflects the 'movement' of staff during the year e.g. cost of RAP's Manager salary whilst a replacement was recruited, maternity leave etc.

The current levels of the financial reserves will have to be constantly monitored by the Trustees as part of the overall ongoing financial review.

PETER HEDLEY
Treasurer
2008 to 2009

NEW TRUSTEE

I am a new trustee and member of the management committee, having been invited to join in May 2009.

The trustees have an important role in helping Sabi, the Manager, and her staff to carry out their duties and in taking overall responsibility for the finances of the Charity. These responsibilities are not to be taken lightly and I was immediately impressed with the serious and professional way in which the trustees carry out their duties.

However, although I enjoy being part of the management structure, it was soon apparent to me that merely attending meetings every other month would not be enough and I decided to become more involved in day-to-day activities.

I started to attend some of the weekly Drop-in Centre's coffee mornings which are run by members of staff with the assistance of a few volunteers. These mornings are tremendous fun, involving a range of activities. My first visit coincided with a general knowledge quiz and the volunteers were divided between teams of the members of the Taylors Court Group. Volunteers were advised to help with grammar and spelling, but "not to answer the questions". One member of the group approached our table and asked me "Are you any good at general knowledge?". When I confessed that I was no great shakes he turned round and sat down at the next table. Needless to say our team did not win.

I was also happy to be invited on the annual trip to Bridlington, which was great fun.

At both the Drop-in Centre and the trip, the over-riding impression is of the sheer dedication, patience and good humour of the staff and of the pleasure derived by the group from all the activities.

In addition, I have also decided to become a volunteer to enable me to deal with some cases and, to this end, I spent a day shadowing Sean Doran who works out of the Sure Start Centre in Maltby. This gave me an insight into how to deal with cases and provided me with even more motivation to become involved. I, along with other new volunteers, am attending training on the 16th and 17th September and we will then, hopefully, be given a few cases to deal with in order to alleviate the burden of the seriously over-worked staff.

I can only hope that in one or more ways I will be able to help and make a difference to the fantastic work being done by this wonderful Charity.

GLEN HOLMES
Trustee

SUPPORTING PARENTS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

By Sean Doran, SPAN Advocacy Worker

The new service level agreement (2008-2011) saw Supporting Parents with Additional Needs (SPAN) now covering 5 children's centre areas, with an objective of providing learning disability and advocacy awareness sessions to all 21 children's centres, in order to equip the workers with at least some knowledge of the complexities of working with learning disability (LD) and Additional Needs (AN) parents. SPAN accessed in excess of £4,000 from Inspire Rotherham to equip all the Children's Centres with easy accessible and pictorial information, prompts and booklets. These prompts have been used very successfully by SPAN and RAP, but haven't been previously available to other children's centres.

Since SPAN was established, I have supported 48 parents on a 1-2-1 basis; they have 46 'Sure-Start' aged children and 30 'Over Aged' children between them. Unfortunately 20 of these children have been removed to local authority care or placed on residence orders with family or friends.

However:

- A single dad in Dinnington was supported in having his daughter rehabilitated into the family home and then had the care order revoked?
- Last week, 2 families involving 6 children were removed from the At Risk register?
- A single mum with 3 young children, who was going to be served with an Interim Care Order, now looks like being on a supervision order due to her own hard work and intervention from SPAN and wider services.
- 'Rule of thumb' – says that it costs up to £30,000 a year to accommodate a child, but I'm sure you can work that sum out for yourself.

SPAN runs 3 drop-in sessions monthly and they continue to be well attended and friendships continue to flourish. I have recently accessed £700 from the Hargreaves Trust in Maltby for our drop-in activities and trips and for the Stone/Staffordshire Self Help group. Further amounts of up to £600 have been received for our parents from St Agatha's, an amount which is still increasing.

SPAN continues to work with partners from various Children's centres through Countdown which is based on 'fun' educational activities. The Countdown's are seen as the first step back into learning with a progression onto ASDAN Life Skills qualifications and then onto employability schemes, work based training or further education. This has proved to be very successful and there are currently 7 adults studying for the nationally recognised qualification for Learning Disability (LD) adults.

SPAN has supported 2 social work students and mentored 2 more throughout 2008/2009. Whilst there is a financial reward for supporting students, the real ethos is to equip newly qualified students with the experience and knowledge of Learning Disabilities. My first full time student, Simone Palmer, acquired a 1st in her degree course, which obviously had a lot to do with the excellent training she received from her work based supervisor!

ADVOCACY THAT ENABLES

Most people look forward to their holiday every year. Some have more than one holiday and if we “miss” a year, we feel hard done by. Just for a moment consider how you would feel if year in year out you NEVER had a holiday! This is not because you don't want one. You would love the opportunity! It is not because you couldn't afford a holiday. You are happy to save for your time away. It is simply because you have a learning disability and although you are able to manage on a day to day basis without support you do not feel confident to go away on a holiday. You wouldn't know how to begin!

For many years Mencap provided support to enable people with a mild to moderate learning disability to go away on holiday. They organised the holiday and provided staff support. A few years ago funding was reduced and as a consequence the holidays ceased. Without support there could be no holiday.

Or could there ???

Two ladies came regularly to RAP Drop In, M and K. M previously went on holiday with Mencap support, K had gone on holiday with her mum once in her life when she was in her early twenties. These ladies were both well over forty now and were extremely able. M lived in her own home, went to college and helped out in a charity shop - while K lived with her parents.

M was saying how much she missed not being able to go on holiday and we talked about how she would feel if she had someone to go on holiday with her. She was excited at the prospect but daunted as to how to go about it. I assured her we would help and after discussion she said that she would like to have a holiday if she had someone to go with. We chatted about options as to who she would enjoy going with and then talked to K.

K was both excited and apprehensive at the prospect. Could she achieve it? What if things went wrong? I suggested that we get a few holiday brochures and just look at options to help them decide what they wanted to do. After much reassurance that they were both more than capable of going on holiday without additional support, they settled on “Skeggy!”.

The preparation to make the holiday a success included the ladies first choosing the holiday package and hotel which met their needs. Nice hotel, sea front, bed `n` breakfast and dinner which included entertainment each evening. The choice was made and the holiday costed.

Continued

The ladies then came with me to book their holiday. They felt that the idea of a coach holiday where they would be picked up at Rotherham and taken to the hotel was a good one, plus they then opted for additional trips facilitated by the company. They had now decided that if they were going on holiday - they were going to make sure it was a good one!

New clothes were bought and the excitement mounted. We talked about things which they were unsure of and may be causing them concern and as a result were able to overcome any fears by planning ahead. This involved both ladies getting a mobile phone and being shown how to use it, so that if they became separated from each other they could use the phone to find each other again. We discussed calling emergency services and of seeking help from the hotel receptionist. We made sure that their bedrooms were next to each other. We had a trial run at ordering a `2 for 1` pub meal where I explained how it worked, then sat while they jointly ordered and paid for a meal and a drink. This was a real achievement for the ladies as neither felt that they would have had the confidence to go into a pub and order a meal.

The great day came. Sunday morning at 9am sharp they boarded the coach. I explained that the driver was there to help them if they had any problems and after hugs all around off they set like giddy schoolgirls!

The holiday was a huge success. They had a “ball” and couldn’t wait to plan where they would go for their next holiday.

We take so much for granted; we can holiday where we want if finances permit BUT with a little help, practical support and lots of encouragement so can a lot of people who have a learning disability.

It was not the “achievement of the year” in advocacy terms but for these two ladies it meant a great deal giving them the confidence to know they can go on holiday again. And, as they say “You cannot put a price on memories”.

JAN REED
Advocate

RETURNING TO WORK

In February 2008 I had my son Huw, and so spent most of 08/09 away from RAP on maternity leave. I returned in December to work a 25 hour week (previously I worked full time). Very quickly my caseload built up to working with around 20 individuals providing one to one advocacy; in addition to this I resumed my responsibilities facilitating and supporting the Taylors Court Support and Friendship Group.

One of the cases I picked up on my return was a young woman, K, who had been wanting to leave home for a number of years due to a very unhappy and abusive relationship with family members. A reluctance from social services to support this move and allocate appropriate services had made this impossible, but with persistence from RAP the Safeguarding Team became involved; wheels were set in motion for her to get the support she needed to move on. Sadly a crisis led to an unplanned, emergency move and she is currently in a temporary placement waiting to get her own property.

However, social services are now fully on board, and she is working towards a new life away from her family – a big decision and a major move, but one she is still sure was right for her. Having an advocate gave K the support, confidence and resources she needed to make some very difficult choices, and bring about major change in her life.

LUCY DAVIES
Advocate

THE CHILDREN IN NEED PROJECT

My introduction to RAP was acquired as a result of being placed within the SPAN project, run by Sean Doran, during the final year of my Social Work degree.

I took up my current post as Children and Families Advocate, covering the maternity leave of Rachel Musgrave, a long-standing and valued member of the team at RAP. I had qualified as a Social Worker in May 2009 where I had the responsibility of managing the Children in Need project.

This is a 3-year project funded by BBC's Children in Need which directly aims to enhance the experience of young people aged 14-19 by providing an advocacy service that assists them to take control of their lives and make independent choices in a time of transition.

The second strand of the project is aimed at supporting families where the parents have a degree of learning disability. This will directly benefit children of all ages by helping parents to provide the best possible environment for their children.

My intervention mainly comprises direct casework on issues identified by the service user within a support plan. A major theme of my work is helping young people plan for the future, whether that be a transition from children's to adult disability services, higher education or independent living. Additionally, it involves identifying where an individual needs a service and seeking out appropriate provision that caters to their needs and wishes and challenging decisions made by statutory services on behalf of the service user.

Often, there are issues within the family or young person's environment that need the involvement of an advocate help put across the views of the young person, especially where there is resistance to these wishes, and help the young person to weigh information, consider problems and explore solutions. This can range from high-end child protection work, domestic violence, sexual health and family planning, relationships, behaviour etc to choosing after-school activities.

Our work with families and parenting includes enabling parents to understand and engage with children's services and other agencies where there are concerns over the welfare of their children. However, as an advocacy service, RAP is committed to promoting intervention with a preventative remit which is less invasive for the families and will avoid the eruption of future crisis. Our holistic approach to the provision of family support advocates that by taking into account the parents specific needs as well as the child's, you are likely to produce better outcomes for the child.

Continued

In addition to direct casework, an advocate will also liaise closely with support services and other professionals to share good practice and act as an information point through the use of information days and advocacy drop-ins. As a professional, it is an exciting opportunity to influence decision making and inform current practice but also evidence emerging issues at a grass-roots level from the perspective of those experiencing it and in this capacity an advocate is well-placed to identify a large number of unmet needs within the population that does not always come to the attention of statutory services. The presence of an advocate therefore gives a voice to families and young people who fall through the gaps and cannot always access statutory services because of eligibility criteria. This includes parents not receiving a service from the adult learning disability team where children's services are already involved and young people with ADHD, Asperger's and mild autism who are not eligible to receive services once they have made the transition from children's services.

The Children in Need project is intended to target 200 children and young people over the 3-year funding period. We are now at the start of our 3rd year in operation and have so far provided 1:1 casework on 46 service users and provided information/brief intervention services to over 60 individuals.

Our vision at RAP is of these young people exercising their rights and enjoying freedoms to achieve as fully included and equal members of society and help children remain safe, healthy and cared for at home by their families.

SIMONE PALMER
Children and Families Advocacy Worker

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

I started at RAP in April 2009 as a part time administrator at the beginning of the new financial year 2009/2010.

My previous career background spans a total of 38 years, most of which were spent in the private sector.

3 years as a junior in an insurance company.

23 years working and managing the finance and payroll departments of a national tool distribution company.

3 years as a payroll implementation consultant.

6 years as an assistant payroll manager in the health/care sector.

And for the last 3 years working within the Voluntary sector with groups and organisations in the Rotherham area.

My main role since 2006 has been working with the groups within the community, many of whom have managed to secure funding for paid workers. These organisations don't have the ability or capacity to pay their staff and therefore approach VAR for the monthly payroll bureau service. In this role I have spent hours listening to these organisations, hearing about their successes, their dreams, but also their failures, which in most cases are really heartbreaking, as these groups truly believe in the benefits they are creating, the people, the work and the support they are providing in the community.

My personal break through came earlier this year, when my hours were reduced and I was given the opportunity to join one of these organisations and see things 'from the other side.'

My original respect for this group has grown immensely in now knowing the work and support that the staff and volunteers at RAP give to each service user. Even though time is always tight, they give everyone the time to listen and be heard, support them emotionally and even make some dreams come true.

All this is achieved by hard work, loads of energy and really believing in their roles in improving the lives of people with learning disability within the community.

My life since April has changed and been touched by my work colleagues, volunteers and service users at RAP, I know I've a long learning curve to complete, but it will all be worth it.

I thank you all for giving me this opportunity.

LIZ O'HARA
Administrator

A STUDENT'S VIEW

My practice learning placement at RAP was of immeasurable value to me, as a student social worker on their first placement.

I was initially very anxious and concerned that I would be totally out of my depth, this was soon diminished by the warm welcome I received from the staff at RAP, they immediately made me feel part of the team, and included in all aspects of the organisation; they were extremely approachable and were always available to give advice, suggestions and support, signposting me to useful literature, websites, training programmes etc.

During my time at RAP I was allocated some very interesting cases; one such case was working with a young girl with both physical and learning disabilities I assisted her by completing housing application forms and by being tenacious in my approach, in order that the Adult Learning Disability Services were aware of the Safeguarding issues involved here. This eventually enabled her to move from home and her tyrannical father to find independent living accommodation.

Other cases included a client who was creating a nuisance to her neighbour, this involved working with a number of agencies and individuals, to ensure her needs and views were heard and included before any decision about moving her was made

I particularly enjoyed working with the Taylors Court Group on Thursday, I was involved in organising activities and a fundraising event, carol singing; we successfully raised £142 for Age Concern, this event also raised an awareness of other members of society who were also vulnerable and in need of support .

I will always remember my time at RAP; it opened my eyes to the discrimination in society towards people with learning disabilities.

The staff has a very strong sense of ethics and social justice, they use their imagination, humour and caring nature in their dealings with people. The workers do not shy away from challenges but keep searching for new methods of communicating, and achieving their objectives. They view people by looking at the individuals' strengths, rather than an acceptance of their weaknesses as determining outcomes.

PAM ROBINSON
Student Social Worker

TAYLORS COURT SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Our group meets every Thursday morning at RAP. We receive a lot of help from RAP as they help us get funding and to organise activities.

The group has its own committee including a Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. Anyone who comes to the drop in can stand for the committee.

Our group is five years old now and has become very popular. About 30 people come every week. This year we had to make a difficult decision and say that nobody new could come to the group because the room is too full. We would like to set up another session so that more people could join us.

During the year from April 2008 to March 2009 the group was given £900 by the Police. This was so that we could learn about community safety. Although a lot of our activities were about this, we did do other things as well.

April: A talk about Key Choices and how to get a council property.



May : Rotherham Wardens came to talk about anti-social behaviour and what we can do about it.



June : We learnt about Health Living



July : We had a talk on keeping safe when we are out and about.



August : We did a sponsored walk at Thrybergh Country Park and raised £145.



Continued

September :

We went Cleethorpes on a day trip.



November :

We went on a day trip to Lifewise at Magna.



December :

We went to Asda and did carol singing raising £142 for Age Concern. We also sang at the Cranworth Care Home and at Laureate Court old people's home.



February :

We did pampering and relaxation. This included head massage and reflexology.



March :

Speakup came to talk to us about the government's plan for people with learning disabilities. This is called "Valuing People Now".



PHIL JEPSON
Chair of Group

VOLUNTEERING AT RAP

On Thursday mornings RAP is a place where people can meet up with friends and with new people in a safe and relaxed environment and express their opinions, open up and share their experiences. Independence, participation and self-expression are all encouraged.

It is a very welcoming place where no-one is judged and everyone is treated as an individual. People enjoy the different activities, presentations, courses and outings very much and at the same time life skills and socialising skills can be developed as a result of many of these. The confidence of many people who attend the group can be seen to grow as a result.

At the group, because of its friendly environment, people are more likely to ask for help if it is needed, whether this be from staff, volunteers or friends, often the people must likely to understand.

JO SPEIGHT Volunteer

I've been a volunteer at RAP for about 18 months. I help out at the support group and also work on a one-to-one basis with clients.

Having never worked with people with learning disabilities before, I was delighted to learn how rewarding it is. I have also learned how many problems that some adults with learning disability can experience on a daily basis - which is where RAP comes into its own. Working for RAP has enabled me to experience at first hand how many people benefit from the service it offers.

I recently supported a client who desperately wanted to move into her own flat and achieve some degree of independence. With RAP's help and support, which included lots of discussions, liaising with other agencies, looking at flats, helping to sort out benefits, form filling and furnishing the new flat, she achieved this and in her words "changed her life for the better".

This is just one example of the many ways in which RAP can support people and work alongside other agencies to enable people to achieve the life that they want for themselves.

I have seen the many benefits gained by our service users from their involvement with RAP and am pleased to have the opportunity to be part of it.

DEBBIE GIBSON Volunteer Advocate

FOR INFORMATION

If you or someone you know would be interested in becoming a volunteer with Rotherham Advocacy Partnerships, you can get in touch by either:



Writing to us at

Rotherham Advocacy Partnerships
Unit C15
Taylors Court
Parkgate
ROTHERHAM S62 6NU



Telephone:

01709 529890



E-mail:

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www.rap-rotherham.co.uk

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