

Cut the cuts, oy! Parliament, are you listening?

March 16, 2017

Here at Total Communication we have just returned from the fantastic 'Building confidence and citizenship in uncertain times' conference in not so sunny Blackpool. This was the 15th year the conference has run by self-advocates, Pathways Associates and North West Training and Development. There were various workshops as well as the ever popular gala dinner and disco.

Over 200 people attended, most of these were people with learning disabilities who are themselves self-advocates.

We were invited to help run a workshop on the 'BIG Issues'. The workshop was to consult with people with learning disabilities and to find out what issues were most important to them. These would then be taken forward by the self-advocates, supported by Pathways Associates, Community Living magazine, ourselves and many others as campaign issues for this next year.

We ran the workshop jointly with Gary Hart who works for Parliamentary Outreach and Rosemary Trustam who is editor of Community Living magazine, to find out what the issues are for people in the North West. We held discussions in small groups about the issues that were important

to people, such as 'the NHS, transport, opportunities to make friends and social care amongst others.

Attendees were invited to use a Talking Mat to think about which issues were most important to them. Some people had their picture taken with their views on the Talking Mat. For those who wanted more direct action, with the help of Rosemary, we directly emailed and tweeted our local councillor/ MP to help them raise their concerns and have their voice heard.





All of the issues raised were then put up in the main hall and every attendee of the conference was given two votes so they could vote on the issues that were most important to them.

At the end of conference all the votes were counted and the results

The **BIG** issues for people with learning disabilities who attended this year were concerns about cuts to:

- The NHS
- Social care
- Cuts to advocacy

These will now become the topic for campaigning this year. In a follow up workshops, participants discussed campaign methods, such as writing to MPs and Cabinet Members, using petitions on social media and even marching to parliament and hand delivering a petition. One group discussed their feelings about the cuts saying "I feel pathetic, bad and sad". People felt that the cuts simply weren't fair.

They felt "awkward" and "upset, watching people lose services". Some people gave examples of how the cuts to the NHS were having a direct impact on the care their family members received,, describing how they were "concerned as we are having to travel for treatment because local departments are being shut".

"We are worried there aren't enough beds in hospitals to look after people".

Self-advocates questioned their future wondering "Where will we go?"

One person stated quite simply, "I feel scared, what are they going to do?"

... Something we would all like to know!