



## **A spotlight on our Koala Community Hub for learning disability week**

Read all about our Koala Community Hub and the role it plays in supporting self-advocacy for people who are autistic, have a learning disability, or both.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board (ICB) has a mission to increase the number of people who are autistic, have a learning disability, or both, to speak up and have their voices listened to within health, social care and education environments.

However, co-production with this group is very time consuming and requires an intensity of effort and preparation to ensure everyone gets the individual support they need to be truly involved.

Using NHS funding, the ICB commissioned Koala Community Hub, a third sector organisation that specialises in autism and learning disability to deliver a self-advocacy training package that provides people who are autistic, have a learning disability, or both, with training in self-advocacy. The training is intended to support recruitment of experts by experience and people with lived experience for a growing portfolio of co-production work within the Learning Disability and Autism Programme.

Koala Community Hub is autistic led and this enhances the focus of the project. With the recruitment of seven experts by experience they collectively designed, created and produced the training package in self-advocacy, starting from a blank page. Working together they initially highlighted the diversity of needs and options for self-advocacy and agreed key themes which resulted in five self-advocacy modules being built:

- What is self-advocacy
- Understanding what I need
- Understanding my rights
- Communicating my needs
- What do I need to continue my journey

## **Project summary**

Koala Community Hub spent time at the beginning of the project building trust and generating a safe space with and for the group, which was essential for the project to succeed through supporting the group to also build bonds, connections, and trust with each other. The dedication of Koala Community Hub ensured each individual expert had their individual needs acknowledged and supported. This also quickly built the groups commitment to attend sessions and their energy, articulation, critique, and contributions to the development of the training packages. It also enabled



the group to share personal experiences, personal challenge and actively contribute to the design and development of the training package, and in doing so they have developed a deeper understanding of what self-advocacy is for them.

### **Challenges and solutions**

The ICB project manager and Koala Community Hub, along with support from our Hampshire County Council partners worked closely together generating and sharing ideas, supporting making decisions, and ensuring the project progressed. Emerging challenges were managed and resolved effectively through this partnership working well together. For example, to accommodate the needs of the group the project delivered five training sessions with a mix of online and hybrid. The hybrid delivery was certainly more challenging but with additional advocates supporting were still a success. As well as the group sessions, pre and post one-to-one session meetings ensured each member of the group understood the work being undertaken, had space and privacy to share any sensitive information, and be fully supported with their learning and contributions to the project. These one-to-ones were essential but required a lot of dedicated time.

### **The outcome**

The outcomes have been excellent. As well as the development of the self-advocacy training package, the value and impact that the project has had on the group has far surpassed expectations. All seven experts by experience have grown in confidence, developed new skills, and are using the tools, techniques and resources provided in the training package in their everyday lives. They are keen to establish a network peer group of self-advocates in which they can keep in touch, build lasting friendships, and support each other. This has been put in place by Koala Community Hub who will continue to support this group's networking activity with each other beyond the project.

The self-advocacy training package is a sustainable, available resource that will be accessible to learning disability and autism teams across the Hampshire and Isle of Wight area.

**Watch this video to learn more about the Koala Community Hub:**

<https://youtu.be/mOxbB2lrW2Y>