falkirk & clackmannanshire carerscentre

Meeting Minutes

Consultations for carers to share their views with external organisations

FOR FALKIRK CARERS

Consultation about Central Advocacy Partner's Services with Bob Thomson Advocacy Worker and Angela Reid Advocacy Manager from Central Advocacy Partners.

Held on Friday the 13th of November 2026

At the Carers Centre, Falkirk

Chaired by Sharlene Ramage
Online option facilitated by Sharlene Ramage (technical difficulties on the day)
Notes by Dana Horsburgh Carer Representative and Zoom Assistant.

Quick recap

The meeting focused on updates and challenges for carers and the role of independent advocacy for people with learning disabilities and autism who are ages 16+. Sharlene discussed the Grangemouth Community Action Plan. The group talked about the COVID-19 vaccine, noting that eligibility had changed and that some vulnerable young people were no longer eligible. Representatives from Central Advocacy Partners (CAP) explained their relationship-based services, their various projects, and the importance of early intervention to prevent crises. They described how advocacy helps people have their voices heard in health, housing, and social work settings. The conversation also covered the challenges of funding, staffing, and the need for more inclusive employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Finally, the group discussed the value of peer support groups and the role of advocacy in upholding human rights.

Grangemouth Community Action Plan Consultation

Sharlene discussed the upcoming Grangemouth Community Action Plan consultation, which starts next week with several sessions scheduled from November to January. She noted that better advertising and longer notice periods are needed for community engagement. Sharlene also mentioned upcoming sessions that she will host in the centre, including a dementia and delirium session with Yvonne Cairns and Emma Douglas from NHS, scheduled for November the19th from 10am to 12noon.

Vaccine Eligibility and Care Consultations

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Sharlene informed carers about ways in which they can access vaccinations, a carer mentioned that carers can also attend their local pharmacies for this. Carers in the room discussed vaccine information and eligibility changes, expressing concern that COVID vaccine criteria have been significantly reduced while flu vaccine eligibility has been expanded to include more people. Sharlene also announced upcoming community consultation sessions about care reviews and respite care, urging carers to attend these sessions. A carer representative expressed frustration that carers' feedback about timing constraints was not being adequately addressed.

Advocacy Services

Bob, Angela and Shirleyann presented their organisation's 30-year history of providing independent advocacy services to autistic and learning disabled individuals. They described their current projects including general advocacy, criminal justice support, a survivor's project for gender-based violence, group and peer-based supports and a housing support initiative for people living in residential settings. The discussion highlighted how they work with individuals regardless of official diagnosis status and address common issues such as accessing health services, support, and housing.

GP Diagnosis Access Challenges

Angela discussed challenges with obtaining diagnoses, particularly for learning disabilities, autism,ADHD,etc. She shared her experience helping people to navigate the process and highlighted the difficulties people face when trying to access appropriate healthcare support.

Angela mentioned challenges with health checks for people with learning disabilities, noting that complex wording and reminder systems can prevent individuals from accessing necessary services.

The discussion also touched on historical changes in healthcare services following hospital closures and the transition to community-based care, including the challenges faced by individuals previously institutionalised.

Advocacy for Learning Disabilities Support

Bob discussed the role of advocacy workers in supporting individuals with learning disabilities and autism in exercising their rights and making informed choices. Bob explained that advocacy involves helping people understand information, find

solutions, and have their voices heard, while emphasising the importance of building trust through relationship-based advocacy. Angela highlighted issues around bias, unconscious bias, and the challenges faced by people with learning disabilities, particularly in healthcare settings and during pregnancy.

Disability Advocacy and Employment Support

Bob discussed the importance of advocacy in supporting individuals with learning disabilities, emphasising the need for an equal relationship between advocates and those being referred. Bob highlighted how early intervention can prevent crises and discussed challenges in employment for people with disabilities, noting the need for reasonable adjustments and better support from employers. Sharlene touched on the financial and systemic barriers faced by individuals and carers, suggesting that changes are needed to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. There is currently an 8-12 week waiting list for advocacy support, but people are prioritised according to their needs.

Advocacy for Vulnerable Populations

Angela explained how the Survivors Project feeds information through gender-based violence partnerships and Violence Against Women and Girls networks to government officials and shared an example of highlighting issues with welfare guardianship where people had substantial savings but were struggling financially.

Learning Disabilities Conference Planning

Angela discussed a conference aimed at educating GPs about support for learning disabilities and autism in Forth Valley, highlighting the powerful impact of hearing directly from there volunteer who kindly shared their experiences as someone who is living with has a disability.

Independent Advocacy.

Angela discussed the importance of independent advocacy for vulnerable individuals, explaining how it helps people navigate various challenges including housing, healthcare, and employment issues. Angela highlighted the need for trauma-responsive approaches and briefly explained how past trauma affects current situation. Angela explained that their organisation takes a holistic approach rather than focusing on

single issues, allowing them to address multiple interconnected problems that affect their clients' lives.

Relationship-Based Advocacy Approaches

Bob discussed the importance of relationship-based advocacy work, explaining how it differs from issue-based approaches by considering a person's whole life situation rather than just one issue. Angela described her organisation's current staffing challenges, with only eight staff members including six advocacy workers, and discussed their approach to supporting clients while avoiding creating dependency through upskilling rather than taking over tasks.
The session ended with a wonderful volunteer sharing their experience of being supported, becoming confident to self-advocate and now providing peer support through their volunteering role at CAP. It was empowering to hear how this volunteer has also been involved in co-creating an easy read version of Own My Life with the gender-based violence group.

<u>Some key points about Central Advocacy Partners</u>

Where possible the staff member remains the same throughout the person's journey.
The service can support people who are nonverbal/have communication support needs.
Advocacy is better before crisis happens; however, the service often supports those in crisis.
The staff focus is on the individual and makes sure their needs and wants are voiced.
CAP can support with employment to make sure reasonable adaptations are in place to support people in their workplace.
CAP is relationship based and not issue based; they look at the full picture when working with someone, they discuss all possible outcomes and don't provide any advice.
CAP receive no statutory funding and none of their services are funded by the health and social care partnership. They have a few volunteers who help and encourage peer support from people who attend the various groups that they facilitate.

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Although there is not a planned drop-in service, many people pop into the office and are welcomed in to have a chat, it is easier if you can book an appointment as the staff in the office might be with someone if you pop in unexpectedly.
There is an autistic and awesome group which runs on Wednesday evenings for a maximum of 10 people aged between 16-25, the group often do fun things like bowling etc.

Carers views/comments and suggestions

- Escalate the issue regarding the lack of notice for community action plan consultations.
- Message Calum from the vaccination team to raise concerns about COVID vaccination eligibility for vulnerable young people and carers.
- Many carers in the room feel that the covid vaccine should be available for more people particularly those in caring roles.
- A carer shared their views that all carers should have the option to be vaccinated and suggested that vulnerable young people should be eligible for COVID vaccines due to their risk of exposure in educational settings.
- A carer shared their experience of their grandchild needing specific supports and how changes such as moving home are massive stressors for them, which has a ripple effect on the whole family.
- A carer spoke about the importance of feeling listened to.
- A carer spoke about the need for vulnerable people to have support to be heard in meetings where decisions are being made about them.
- Many carers in the room were not aware of the services/supports that CAP provide.
- A carer shared their concerns about the closed facilities and day centres, which used to provide work opportunities for people living with learning disabilities.
- A carer shared their view that changes in professionals' appearances create additional barriers for those living with learning disabilities.
- A carer asked if CAP provide support for people who "develop a learning disability". Angela explained that a learning disability is acquired at birth someone cannot gain a learning disability later in life.
- A carer asked how to access CAP's supports, you can complete a short form on their webpage, you can pop into their office or phone them.

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Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership · Falkirk Council · NHS Forth Valley · Carers Trust · Shared Care Scotland · Short Breaks Fund · The Robertson Trust · youngstart · Delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund