

# Your Voice



**Talkback**

DEVELOPING A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES



## Your Voice

**Since our inception in 1998, we have developed a world of possibilities for people with learning disabilities or autism. We fundamentally believe that it's not these individuals' impairments that restrict their personal development, but the barriers they encounter in society. So, we continuously challenge mainstream thinking, acting as the voice of those who, all too often, remain unheard or ignored.**

People with a learning disability or autism often have low self-esteem and self-confidence; a consequence of how they have been dealt with by people in their lives. They may have had their capabilities consistently underestimated, been denied opportunities to work, or they may have been bullied or the victim of a hate crime. This can mean that they simply feel unable to speak up for themselves. This is at the very heart of why we exist and why we are driven to create real change.

We have supported those we work with to gain employment, try new activities, take on volunteer placements, complete training courses and form positive relationships within a social environment. We have prevented homelessness by supporting people to find a new home, offered wellbeing courses and developed initiatives like the health passport. We also work in some sensitive areas, including bereavement, end of life, and domestic abuse, advocating for meaningful change wherever we can.

We want Councils, Statutory Authorities, and other commercial and not-for-profit organisations who provide services, to make their decisions based on a wealth of knowledge of what is required from the people affected. Because the people we engage with do not want special treatment. They just want the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

## The importance of engagement

Frequently, those who make decisions on support and services for people with a learning disability or autism do so without consulting the very people that their decisions impact. This is detrimental to the successful development of services, evidenced by the lack of progress over the last 20 years. It's the very definition of a vicious cycle.

Through our range of services and work with community groups, we gather views and experiences and feed them back to Councils, Statutory Authorities, and other organisations. Our aim is to improve services for those that they support, whilst promoting respect, choice, and opportunity.

## The importance of self-advocacy

Developing self-advocacy skills allows individuals to speak up and provides the opportunity to make fundamental choices in their lives. It enables people to share their ideas and opinions and provides a powerful voice to those who oversee services about changes they feel need to be made.

Self-advocacy skills lead to personal development, growth in confidence, independence, and citizenship. They also improve personal wellbeing. Over the years our self-advocacy groups have developed and co-produced health incentives, training packages, as well as contributing to many consultations. Self-advocacy is a central element of our work.

## Why commissioners use us

Because of our unique perspective, organisations use us to help create positive change, implementing the best long-term outcomes. Our expertise in engagement with people of all abilities, using a variety of flexible and adaptive techniques, ensures people are truly heard. And always understood.

We appreciate that organisations' budgets are increasingly stretched. Yet this does not mean that people with learning disabilities and autistic people have to be left behind. We are a charity, but one with a sharp commercial acumen. We're flexible, agile, innovative, and forever explore ways to work in a cost-effective manner. Whilst still creating meaningful change.

# Our Services

## Co-production and engagement

Designed by people with learning disabilities or autism, our service is rooted in the core principles of co-production laid out by the Social Care Institute for Excellence - equality, diversity, accessibility, reciprocity.

Recent work includes consultations on the High Speed 2 Railway; a collaboration with Health Watch on barriers to health and accessibility in GP surgeries; and working with the NHS in Buckinghamshire and Berkshire on their annual health check initiative. Here we set up consultations with over 400 people in Buckinghamshire on key life areas such as travel, employment, healthy living and relationships.

## Experts by experience

This service is provided by a professionally trained team of people with learning disabilities and autistic people, who use their lived experiences to educate others.

## Training

We use the lived experiences of our members and team to educate people on the challenges faced by those people who have learning disabilities and autism, and the practical changes they can make to eradicate barriers to inclusion.

## One-off projects

We very much welcome spot-purchase agreements for a wide range of specific consultancy provision, including referrals by Local Authorities for Care Act Advocacy and Community Advocacy. We also fulfil the Experts by Experience role at Care and Treatment Reviews (CTR).

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**I have always been hugely impressed by Talkback's creativity and ability to gather feedback from service users, whose voices we're in danger of missing within statutory services. Talkback's staff are committed, person-centred and definitely a force for positive change.**

Preventative Services Development Manager,  
Reading Borough Council.

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**Talkback is focused on reducing inequalities through a team that is committed and dedicated to achieving positive outcomes for people with learning disabilities and autism.**

Head of Commissioning, Adult Learning Disability and  
Autism Commissioning Berkshire West CCG

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**Talkback supported our recent conference on loss and bereavement here at the Open University. Their knowledge and commitment to people with learning disabilities was clearly evident, as is their passion and experience. Talkback is a great partner, strong advocate and a value-based organisation.**

Open University  
Social Work Tutor

## A world of possibilities

I consider it a great privilege to lead Talkback; an organisation with a clear and unwavering mission to make the world a better place for people with learning disabilities and autistic individuals. From ensuring they have the very best opportunities in day-to-day life, to tackling the bigger and more fundamental issues, we are determined to bring about change.

There is a need to promote respect for people with learning disabilities and autistic people, ending the social exclusion that ruins so many lives. Brent Martin, Steven Hoskin, Francesca Pilkington, Rikki Judkins - just a few of the people abused and killed in the UK as a result of hate crime against people with a learning disability. A sickening reminder of the hostility and hatred that blights the lives of so many disabled people.

People are often excluded and socially ignored as they don't fit our definition of 'normal'. Nothing is suddenly going to stop this, but lessons must be learned from Winterbourne, Walton Hall, and Longcare Care Homes, where people have been abused and subsequently failed by statutory authorities.

In 2001, Tony Blair's government produced a white paper called Valuing People. That was 20 years ago and, of all its commitments, less than 10% have been achieved.

The current Care Minister Ms Dinenage condemned a recent abuse case and told the House of Commons: "On behalf of the health and care system, I am deeply sorry that this has happened. One thing we can all be clear on is that what was shown last night was not care, nor was it in any way caring. We know the problems that exist in this system and we are utterly determined to address them."

This is the same as said by the minister in post after Winterbourne and all the other scandals, almost to the word. Sadly, very little has changed.

We want to work with organisations to ensure people are heard and that the provision of services reflects their needs, both in the short and long-term. People just want the chance to be part of their communities and lead fulfilling and rich lives. Something every one of us has a right to expect.

We are developing a world of possibilities and we want to join with you to make this happen. My door is always open, so please do not hesitate to call me directly to discuss anything in more detail should you wish to.

**Jeremy Hay, CEO**

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**FIND OUT MORE**

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