

## Communication First

June 2018

During the first year we have worked with eighteen beneficiaries with various communication difficulties, and we are pleased with the progress being made with these individuals. In contrast the collaborative work with trainers with a learning disability has raised concerns, as all of the cohort to date have been unable to separate their opinions/ideas when using the communication software with beneficiaries. To ensure validity it is imperative for anyone working with our beneficiaries to remain neutral, so the information gathered is solely their opinions etc. We will continue working with interested trainers to hopefully overcome these difficulties, but it is apparent to ensure best practice a considerable amount of time would need to be allocated to their training, which is outside the scope of this project.

We have been pleased with the interest and support given by day service managers in settings where we are working with beneficiaries during day service time. We have been asked to deliver training to support staff and put relevant software on tablets owned by Monmouthshire day service centres. We are planning for trainers with a LD to deliver training to staff rather than to beneficiaries due to the issues previously highlighted. It is hoped this will set a precedent for best practice when working with individuals with communication difficulties, so communication is maximised, information shared and partaking individuals have their voices heard.

We were approached by a member of a women's network in Monmouthshire who wanted to be involved in volunteering opportunities within the project. To date we have undertaken some training with one of their volunteers but commitment is a concern. We will give a fuller picture relating to volunteers in our final report.

Within the project we are using a variety of software to meet individual needs. This includes Talking Mats, Grid Player and Social Stories. We are also using several apps ( mostly games) to help improve motor skills and confidence.

As some beneficiaries are experiencing enriched forms of communication it has become evident they want their voices to be heard and to be involved/consulted on matters that affect their everyday lives. At present due to lack of one to one support and transport issues, involving these individuals with available opportunities is difficult, and they want these barriers to inclusion addressed. We have met with All Wales People First who have asked us to make some short films identifying barriers from our beneficiaries, and to highlight where change is needed. AWPf acknowledge their business plan needs to include provision for individual support and transport to conferences etc if they are to be the voice of all adults with a learning disability in Wales.

As the project develops we are seeking opportunities for beneficiaries wherever possible. We have talked to the University of Wales about a working party to include beneficiaries doing access audits on one of their campuses, and are hopeful this will progress and create opportunities for better integration and inclusion.