



Healthwatch Essex Learning Disability Ambassadors

Overview

In partnership with Learning Disability organisations, Healthwatch Essex has created an LD focused ambassador volunteer role. Healthwatch Essex has provided training and ongoing support to these Ambassadors, who are ‘eyes and ears’ within the community and liaise with organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to promote health messages within the learning disability communities and to bring the ‘lived experience’ of people with learning disabilities to commissioners and service providers.

Healthwatch Essex has recruited, trained and support sixteen Ambassadors who have Learning Disabilities. These Ambassadors with Learning Disabilities play a key role in promoting and increasing the volume of Learning Disability Health Checks across Essex.

Healthwatch Essex gathers evidence of what it means to be a user of health and social care in Essex by collecting people’s ‘Lived Experience’ and use this insight to help improve services so people who use health and social care services, and their experience, are at the heart of NHS and social care services.

Together with NHS England, the project develops partnership working with people with Learning Disabilities to improve health provision for Learning Disabled communities. The project aims to increase the uptake of Learning Disability Health Checks and promote wellbeing within this community.

The CIPOLD report and the recently announced National review of deaths of people with learning disabilities found that people with a learning disability generally have poorer health and a shorter lifespan than the general population. In Essex, we know that a large proportion of people are not taking up their annual health checks.

This project supports Principle 5 of the national Compact as activity is designed to understand the needs of a commonly disadvantaged group by actively seeking the views of service users and clients. Taking these views into account, including assessing impact, when designing and implementing policies, programmes and services, and uses the Essex Compact as a measure of quality – for example ensuring that its volunteering policy is Compact Compliant.

Impact

Ambassadors with Learning Disabilities are now playing a key role in promoting and increasing the volume of Learning Disability Health Checks across Essex with an ambition of increasing from current levels to 70% by 2018. Work this year has increased uptake by around 20%.

Sixteen Ambassadors are now trained in how to begin conversations with their friends and peers about their lives and how they should take health care seriously, including getting their free annual health check.

With Ambassadors, Healthwatch Essex also created a film, showing the experiences of health and social care of people with Learning Disabilities, designed to raise awareness of the difficulties people with learning disabilities face when accessing services with NHS and Social Care personnel.

As a result of Ambassadors work in raising awareness, Healthwatch Essex sponsored the first Essex Learning Disability Health Day on 12th June. The programme was designed to ensure as many partners get to talk and promote their work. It was designed to be a fun and informative event – voluntary sector organisations such as Essex Coalition of Disabled People and Mencap attended to share information about how to stay healthy when you have a Learning Disability, and delegates had the chance to try out activities like boccia and curling provided by Active Essex.

Ambassadors are now a recognised part of a new Essex-wide multi-agency Learning Disabilities Health Checks Working Group - to increase and maintain the uptake of the Learning Disability Health Checks working directly with commissioners to influence service design.

