



# ANNUAL REPORT

## Chairperson's Report



Martin Brickley

Another year has passed by and, as a board, we continue to be heartened in the way that the organisation continues to progress with the people who use our services being increasingly involved within it. Gaining additional funding to enhance our De café work through the Life Changes Trust is but one example where we have seen a successful initiative not rest on its laurels but consider how to develop even further, ensuring that more people can benefit from being part of Ceartas by gaining the appropriate support at the right time through gaining access to advocacy, information and support from their peers.

The continued development of the service has to be built on solid foundations and we are constantly reviewing how we can improve service delivery, so the Board also has to ensure we rise to the challenges that charities face today. As such we are conducting a governance and policy review in addition to a service evaluation

that we will look to further develop how we monitor and assess the impact of independent advocacy. The need for individuals to have access to independent advocacy has not diminished and as a Board we remain determined to ensure that people throughout our community receive the support they need to have their voice heard.

## Chairperson Service User Forum

Ceartas is an organisation that I have experienced first-hand through its' group work or by receiving independent advocacy at times when I have needed it most to make sure my voice is heard. In my role of Chair of the Service User Forum I have been able to see how the organisation is increasing its commitment to involving people at the heart of local services. The creation of our Changes group is a further example of this as it has enabled people to have a voice in local issues and ensure that people who receive services are included and more importantly consulted in a way that respects individuals. As a forum we have been keen to see Ceartas do more in how it promotes itself, we were pleased to participate in the "Year in Life" photography project, examples of which will be shown at the AGM. Also our recent social media campaign #GiveMeAVoice aims to dispel some of the myths about independent advocacy. We want more people to access the services that Ceartas provide and the forum will continue to do what it can to achieve that aim.



Nicola Williamson

*Susie (from Ceartas) has been a lifeline for me..... She has taken a lot of pressure of me by investigating and researching areas for me" Angela, Service User.*

## Chief Executive Officer's Report

It has been another busy year at Ceartas, an organisation that I am proud to be part of. We try in many varied ways to ensure that independent advocacy is as accessible as possible for people in East Dunbartonshire and the groups, seminars and training are examples of how we try and engage with individuals living locally, not only to provide information and the platform to meet with people in similar circumstances to themselves, but to learn about advocacy.

This year we have had 1034 attendees at our groups with an additional 2928 contacts made in our wider activities and presentations. Ceartas provided independent advocacy directly to 671 individuals and this has been in a number of different situations somewhat different from our earlier years as opposed to admission to care we are increasingly working with people affected by welfare reform, homelessness and those subject to legislation such as the Mental Health Care and Treatment Act.

The topics may change but the need for advocacy and the value of hearing the voice of the person remains the same. The challenge for Ceartas also remains the same that is to ensure that agencies respect the right for people to have a voice and involve advocacy at the earliest possible stage. To this end we are increasing our resources to work with our current and former service users to involve them more in the promotion of the service as we believe this provides a further way of highlighting why giving people a voice is not only the right thing but a means of ensuring services are better designed and implemented.

As an organisation we would like to thank our funders East Dunbartonshire



Gordon Thomson

Council, Life Changes Trust, the Scottish Government "Supporting in the Right Direction Fund" for their financial backing to what we are trying to achieve but we would also like to thank a growing number of individuals who have made personal donations to the service. All of the support is greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank our volunteers, board and staff members for their continued commitment to Ceartas. The demands on staff have grown as casework increases in complexity but that has just emphasised how situations and circumstances can place people in extremely vulnerable situations and that the need for locally based independent advocacy grows, so individuals in East Dunbartonshire have the power to have their voice heard and exercise real choice in their lives.

*It's really nice to know that someone is listening to me and taking me seriously. Other people seem to think that my problems are trivial and aren't worth bothering about, but that is not true. My Advocacy Worker helped me" to make my point in such a way that I couldn't be ignored, and now things are starting to improve as a result. -David, Service User.*

## ADVOCACY IN PRACTICE

There is a growing understanding of the role that advocacy plays in legislation such as the Mental Health Act, Adults with Incapacity and ASPA. However, not so well known is the role that advocacy can play in supporting individual's in other areas of their life. As well as referrals under legislation, Ceartas also provide advocacy support in a number of other situations that people face.

- Housing
- Transition to adult services for young people aged 16+
- Welfare Reform (ESA and PIP assessments; Job Centre Plus Interviews)

### ADVOCACY AIMS TO ENSURE THAT:

More people feel listened to by agencies.

More people feel better informed about available options.

More people feel better prepared for the assessment processes.

More people feel involved in decisions that affect them.

Advocacy can have a significant impact on an individual's circumstances in the above situations as the following case studies will demonstrate.



*here (at Ceartas) they take time to explain things..... and what they can do" Douglas, Service User*

## HOUSING:

### THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY

If you have a housing problem, such as problem neighbours, rent arrears, potential eviction or threat of homelessness you may feel you need help managing it. An advocacy worker could help you understand your rights around housing and help you talk with local authorities and access specialist services to assist you. The advocacy worker can accompany you to appointments with other agencies.

### CASE STUDY

*Mr "B" is a 40 year old man, as a result of an accident in which he suffered a brain injury and other physical injuries he is unable to work. Mr B lived with his mother, who recently died the Housing Association are refusing to give him a tenancy agreement to allow him to remain in the home, as his mother had never disclosed that he was living there. Ceartas have been advocating on his behalf with the housing association and had involved CAB to ascertain what the client's rights were. Client was also unclear on which benefits he was receiving and how to go about remaining in the tenancy. Joint home visit, established which benefits client was on and advised on the need to change utilities to his name. Noted details of tenancy to pass on to CAB housing worker.*

### OUTCOME

Client offered tenancy more suitable for his needs, which he accepted; benefits were maximised and Housing Benefit and Council Tax reduction in place.



## TRANSITION:

### THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY

People with additional support needs can find transitions difficult and a large number end up in negative situations - such as token employment and inappropriate education opportunities, limited support services and unable to fulfill their ambitions.

If the person finds the transitions process over whelming or they feel they need someone to be able to represent them who isn't tied into any professional teams then advocacy is one route they can follow. Independent Advocacy is a way to help people have a stronger voice and to have as much control as possible over their own lives.



### CASE STUDY

*A young man was referred to our service by his Mum. She was concerned that his support needs and diagnosis were not been taken on board by Education and Social Work. The advocacy worker began to build up a relationship with the young person to gain an insight in to their views and wishes and how they wanted to be supported. The advocacy worker attended reviews and requested that further assessments were done in preparation for the transition from High School to College. Although it took some time for the young person's needs to be re-assessed and accommodated, this did ultimately happen. The young person was able to participate in the process and feel that he had his own views heard, alongside his Mum's. There is now a package of support in place to meet his needs and so far the transition into further education has been a positive one for the young man.*



*"after initial contact with Ceartas, they helped me get involved in other activities within the community. That made a big difference to my confidence" Douglas, Service User*

## WELFARE REFORM:

The Role of independent advocacy: Benefit application processes and assessments can be distressing and confusing for those with poor mental health and other conditions and because of the difficulty that many people have in explaining how their condition affects them, there is a risk that they will be wrongly assessed.

Advocacy can provide assistance to understand, prepare and take part in meetings and assessments regarding PIP and ESA; Support in attending meetings, assessments etc.; Support to engage with specialist welfare agencies for appropriate advice. This can include supporting people to attend this appointment with these agencies if necessary.



### CASE STUDY

*Advocacy supported C (who has Asperger's) to attend an ESA Assessment, following a self-referral.*

*C was afraid he would have to sign on for Jobseekers Allowance rather than ESA as he felt unable to manage to hold down a job at that time.*

*C was accompanied to the assessment following preparation meetings with the advocacy worker. C remained calm and answered the questions asked. C felt that this had gone reasonably well and that he had managed to answer the questions appropriately.*

*The award of zero points following this shocked him and he reported a dip in mood and greater than his normally high level of anxiety. I advised C that he could appeal the decision.*

*A DWP operative called C and asked for more information, and he referred her to me as his advocacy worker, as he felt I would be able to explain his difficulties more clearly.*

*I fully described C's difficulties within the workplace, most of which are hidden issues some of which related to very high levels of anxiety, lack of ability to engage with others appropriately as he took everything literally and could not understand humour, difficulties in absorbing a set of instructions, very poor memory and lack of confidence in himself.*

*I explained that C had been able to hold down a job, for a short while only, by being driven to and from work, always being on shift with a close friend and with a particular supervisor who understood his difficulties and was more patient as a result.*

*She agreed to feed back this information and agreed it would be very difficult for C to be placed in a normal work situation.*

*The decision maker then awarded C extra points and he was placed on a work programme resulting in him returning eventually to the workplace.*

### THE DIFFERENCE ADVOCACY MADE –

- C was helped by advocacy to think about and have recorded the difficulties he has experienced and to prepare himself for the assessment interview.
- Support to remain calm during the long wait for his appointment in the assessment centre, which he found very stressful due to sensory overload.
- Support to explain his difficulties to the assessor and giving specific examples of how these would impact on his ability to hold down a job, which he struggled to understand himself.
- C felt included and involved, and that his views were listened to.
- C gained confidence from the experience, and in seeing how following the process through, with support, could result in a positive outcome for him.
- He also was given a place on a work programme which prepared him for the workplace and resulted in him gaining employment

## MINI HIGHLIGHTS

Music Afternoon: "Our annual Music for a Summer's Afternoon" took place in June of this year and we welcomed members of all of Ceartas groups and friends of Ceartas to join us in an afternoon of music and conversation backed by the sounds of Helen and The Blue Jays. This was a great chance for folk to meet up with friends old and new and meet the staff and board of Ceartas.

ABI Seminar: 2016 saw our 5th annual Acquired Brain Injury Seminar and the theme this year was "Epilepsy after Brain Injury". Keynote speakers included Lorraine Jackson from The William Quarrier Scottish Epilepsy Centre; Dr. Ian Swann, retired A&E Consultant and Helen Reeves who spoke compellingly about her own personal experience of living with Epilepsy. Once again members of ABI Café, in conjunction with Headway Glasgow, planned and orchestrated the entire event which once again was a resounding success.

We were successful in a funding application to Life Changes Trust this year to deliver real change for people affected by dementia in East Dunbartonshire. We are developing existing services as well as implementing new initiatives based around a peer support model which will see people with dementia and their carers play a more active role in our service delivery.

Get Onside – as part of the Shine Partnership, Ceartas continues to work alongside Heartfelt Ltd and Clyde FC Community Foundation to deliver a number of Get Onside courses. The aim of this programme is to help increase participant's confidence and to encourage them to become actively involved in determining the services they require to support them in their lives using Self Directed Support.

Still Game – our group for individuals who have used the services of Ceartas and wish to remain connected to the organisation continues to have an active schedule which has included talks on participating in elections, welfare reform and wellbeing assessments. Members of the group play an active role in the running of the group assisting in welcoming and setting up as well as determining the programme for the following year.

Get Set and Go: Taking inspiration from the success of our Get Onside programme, Ceartas, in partnership with Clyde Community foundation, developed the Get Set and Go course which piloted in Merkland School for senior pupils. The course covered health and wellbeing, advocacy support and decision making and of course finished off each session with a training session on the football pitch!

## Staffing

Gordon Thomson -  
CEO

Sharon Bairden -  
Services Manager

Patricia Ovens -  
Finance and Admin Manager

Gemma Graham -  
Senior Advocacy Worker

Susie Martin -  
Advocacy Worker

Alex Doherty -  
Advocacy Worker

Katherine Moir -  
Advocacy Worker

Aileen Wright -  
Advocacy Worker

Karen Heath -  
Dementia Services Worker

Cheryl Murray -  
Group Support Worker

Linda McGavin -  
Involvement Worker

Chris Waite -  
Advocacy Worker

Ronnie Whiteside -  
Marketing Assistant

Roy Hunter -  
Information Worker



## Who are Ceartas?

Ceartas is a free, independent advocacy and information service available to adults in East Dunbartonshire. We support people to have the ability and confidence to speak up for themselves and make their voice heard.

We have service users at our heart, shaping the way the service is run.

## What is Independent Advocacy?

Independent Advocacy is a way to make a person's voice stronger and to give them as much control over their lives as possible. Advocacy workers do not make decisions for a person. Independent advocacy will help a person get the information they need to make good choices, and support them to express themselves clearly. We are independent of any other service provider like Social Work or NHS.

**Get in Touch...**  
By Letter  
Ceartas Advocacy  
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**Connect Online**

  

@CeartasAdvocacy

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