



Opportunities Trust Directors Report

Annual General Meeting

30th January 2009

Chair's Report

We have had an exciting first year which has seen a huge amount of effort and hard work from a large number of individuals and organisations, culminating in the creation of the Opportunities Trust. If there were a few words that would capture the work of the last 12 months, it would have to be "enthusiasm and determination to work together". To be successful, there is no doubt we will need to find new and collaborative ways of working to ensure that we can truly achieve our mission to create equality and choice for people with disabilities.

So much has happened that we thought a recap of events and achievements would be useful. We started 2008 with only the seed of an idea. A number of workshops took place which brought together individuals and organisations to discuss ideas, share expertise and collate information in order to take forward the concept of the Opportunities Trust. Presentations took place and feedback was gained from a variety of groups including; the Learning Disability Partnership Board; the Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment Board; Valuing People groups; Departmental Management Groups of the County Council, County Councillors, the Quality for Adults Board and many organisations serving people with disabilities.

We have been very fortunate to have had the support of Cambridgeshire County Council who have also agreed to seed fund the development phase of the Trust. In September 2008, a development group was established to take forward the establishment of the Trust as an independent organisation. A full-time development worker was recruited, with additional resource also being provided by the County Council.

The focus in these initial stages has been to establish a legal constitution for the Trust and to formally launch the organisation. Working with the Social Enterprise People, it was agreed that the best operating structure would be a CO-OP, trading as a members' services and training support organisation.

A highlight of the year was definitely our launch, held on 10th November. Over 70 people attended, and there was some great interaction going on at the event.

We are now in the final stages of formally establishing the organisation and have been busy promoting the Trust to as wide an audience as possible. We have already built up a database of over 500 individuals around the County, who have all been receiving our regular newsletter. We have also made presentations to a variety of groups and now have 36 signed-up members of the Opportunities Trust, an average of 4 new members a week.

We have also started discussions with neighbouring authorities in order to develop further opportunities and potentially additional funding.

Working with the User Lead Organisation project we have incorporated some high level research questions into their recent consultation process, which is due to close this week. We are hoping the results will give us a good understanding of what type of services and opportunities individuals will wish to purchase in the future.

We have a lot of work to do over the next year but as a starting point we would like to:

- Agree with members the priorities and focus of the Opportunities Trust for the next 12 months.
- Continue to see how we can work with the ULO to find out how we can work together to best serve people with disabilities
- Map current services and opportunities across the County so that we can identify any gaps and work with members to fill them. Our priority must be to ensure that there are services and opportunities available for individuals across the whole County
- Establish an effective marketing strategy that can be used to promote the services and opportunities that members are offering for people with disabilities across the County, including the development of our newly established website
- Continue to develop our mark of quality through the establishment of quality standards that all members can commit to and deliver. This badge of quality will give reassurance to our customers that what they are purchasing is of a high and consistent quality.

We are convinced that the Opportunities Trust provides a unique opportunity for organisations to truly work together to provide better choice for people with disabilities - we have made a good start and we look forward to the year ahead.

Helena Harris Samantha Sherratt

Interim Joint Chairs of the Opportunities Trust