

Thursday, 6 February 2014

[A new autism agenda in Herefordshire](#)

One of the exciting but sometimes frustrating elements of local campaigning is that you are never entirely sure how far things will get when you start pushing. When I started looking at the picture in Herefordshire it did not seem hopeful. There was no Autism Partnership Board, an unclear picture over who the Autism Lead was and hardly any action since the Autism Strategy was published in 2010.

Nine months down the line we are looking at a very different picture. In a week's time the first meeting of the Autism Partnership Board will be held in Herefordshire to develop and deliver an implementation plan. There is a local strategy signed off by the Council and a clear Autism Lead who is pushing things through on a priority basis. A senior County Councillor has taken on the role of advocating for autism to ensure the issue is given the support it needs at the higher levels of the Council. A short survey of adults with autism and their parents/carers has underlined the urgency of the need for change.

What has been most effective in moving things along in this way has been connections. When I first started to engage with the county there was very little in the way of a local autism network. I was lucky enough to come into contact with [Herefordshire Disability United](#), an excellent pan-disability organisation, who decided to devote some time and money to autism. An event was held bringing together people with autism, parents, providers and other professionals to try and map what support was available and report from the day, with a set of recommendations, will now go towards guiding the work of the Partnership Board. The NAS has also now opened a branch operating across Herefordshire and Worcestershire and I have made contact with a user-led group called Aspie Link who are now seeking to get involved.

These connections and networks are essential to successfully push forward progress at a local level, especially rural counties like Herefordshire. For anyone who wants to Push for Action where they live and start seeing the Autism Strategy make a difference, build a network, find out who else is active in your area and speak to us about how we can help you make an impact.

Tom Purser

The NAS' Campaigns Team