

Protecting the vulnerable

Learning from experience is essential for progression and is at the very core of Nottinghamshire's Independent Custody Visitor scheme (ICV). The Independent Custody Visiting Association's (ISVA) annual conference is an opportunity to do this nationally, bringing together the expertise, skills and insight of ICV schemes across England and Wales to learn from one another and discover how we can make our services better and I was delighted to attend back in November.

This year's event, held at Friends House in London, drew a strong turnout and included powerful personal testimonies based on the experiences of vulnerable detainees in police custody. Among these was Tony Herbert, the father of James Herbert, who died while in police custody. In a passionate speech, Tony shared the events leading up to the death of his son, which have also helped inform the IPCC report: Six Missed Chances <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2017/sep/uk-ipcc-six-missed-chances-mental-health-and-custody.pdf>. The report highlights key areas of improvement in the approach and support of those suffering with mental health issues and offers valuable learning.



Later, we heard speeches from Ben Rychwalski-Lindley and Chris Hilliard. Ben is a transgender male who spoke openly about his journey while educating our group about how best to support transgender detainees in our custody suites. We also talked about the effects of surgery and medication, menstrual needs and access to toilets and showers. We really valued this insight into the emotional, physical and social needs of transgender individuals being supported in custody.

Chris, meanwhile, suffers with autism and spoke eloquently about his arrest and time spent in police custody and how the condition increases his vulnerability. Those living with autism are likely to misunderstand social signals such as body language and facial expressions, take comments literally and find it difficult to understand sarcasm and sayings. These disadvantages can be magnified during police detention with individuals experiencing an increase in stress and anxiety. Scheme managers have agreed that on-going training and education for officers and staff would help improve the outcomes for those with autism in police custody.

Sharing lessons and experiences with our colleagues nationally is so important for future development. This conference was organised by Katie Kempden, ICVA's dynamic Chief Executive, recently been nominated for the CEO of the Year Award, and was expertly assisted by Sherry Ralph, Chief Operating Officer. Both women show immense passion and commitment to human rights, delivering the conference with determined energy, and I am very grateful that I was able to attend.

Katie helped us to understand our public sector Equality Duty (PSED) and talked us through undertaking an Equalities Impact Assessment – processes which help us to eliminate discrimination and improve equality of opportunity within our services. This is something that I have been able to share with the project management team responsible for new custody suite in Nottingham. See YouTube for more information about EIAs:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=equality+impact+assessment

We're very proud of the work we're doing to safeguard the fairness, dignity and safety of our custody system and look forward to integrating our learning from this conference into our localised scheme.

Kayt Radford, Volunteer Manager, Nottinghamshire