

LARG response to
Have you made a complaint?
HSCB consultation, February 2013

About Us

LARG is a group of disabled people who meet on a weekly basis in Willowbank Resource Centre, Dungannon to engage directly with decisions which impact upon our member's lives. We respond to consultations, meet with councillors, MLA's and Executive Ministers to highlight issues and the impacts of decisions on disabled peoples everyday lives. We also actively engage with trainee social workers to help them understand the impact their work has on the lives of the clients they work with. We work within a strong human rights and community development ethos.

Have You Made a complaint – were you happy with the outcome?

We welcome the opportunity to share out experiences around the area of complaints giving our own examples and how we felt about the process at the time. We have a genuine interest in the Health Service as many of us are reliant on the services it provides. We don't have another service to go to if we are let down by the Health Service so we need to know that if we raise our heads up to identify that something went wrong that it will be fully addressed. This is one of the main reasons that we believe its important to encourage people to speak up when they are unhappy to ensure that the service can be the best it can be for everyone. If its difficult for us as service users who actively engage in consultations and responses to government at various levels how much more difficult is it going to be for someone who cannot verbalise their concerns. It is for this reason that its so important that complaints are handled sensitively and given due consideration so that people feel they have been listened to.

We met on 23rd January and our meeting was attended by 8 disabled people who attend/work within Willowbank Community Resource Centre as well as taking one example from someone outside of the meeting who had followed the complaints procedure.

Examples of complaints, which were brought forward during the discussion

1. There was an accusation made against me from a care worker who said I touched her inappropriately and a meeting was called where everyone attended with the exception of the person who made the accusation against me. I was presumed guilty (even by my social worker). The seating in the room was myself & my mother on one side of the table and the trust staff (including my social worker) on the opposite side of the table. The Complaint was against me and the accusation hangs there but my version wasn't believed.
2. I made a complaint against a surgeon and the reply, which came back basically, said that the surgeon didn't mean to be rude and that was it. I didn't get the opportunity to meet with him to make him aware of how he made me feel.
3. For another individual who made a complaint he expressed concern about the 20 days turn around for a reply from the Trust reference a complaint. He made a complaint one week after an incident in his home and this resulted in correspondence going to and fro for 11 months. Alongside Trust staff not attending a meeting to resolve the issues they failed to speak to a student staff member who was present at the time. When the client finally became exasperated with the replies, which didn't address the issues, he took the complaint to The Ombudsman only to be told that he hadn't exhausted the complaints procedure adequately. How can it be that in following the complaints procedures for 11 months you can then be told that you haven't done enough? This individual had grave concerns over the Trust investigating themselves and now strongly queries the impartiality of The Ombudsman's office in dealing with the complaint.
4. A nurse in the nursing home treated me very roughly and I didn't say anything about it because of the paperwork I would have had to fill in.
5. No one told me my Social Worker had changed and I reckon its only good manners to let people know this basic piece of

information. I don't feel I could complain about something like this.

6. I did make a complaint to my Social Worker as I was left without any personal care one weekend because someone had forgotten to pass on my details onto the caring agency. My complaint was resolved.

The issue of making a complaint was initially discussed with people identifying some of the reasons against making a complaint in the first case being given as;

- I didn't want to rock the boat
- The paperwork involved would put me off – I couldn't go through with it if I didn't have someone to help me through the process and help me keep the required paperwork and I probably won't win anyway.
- It feels like a "them" & "us" situation whereby one individual is taking on an entire organisation that will "rally around their own staff"

- It's my word against that of the staff member – who are they going to believe? If the complaint is about a surgeon there is a strong feeling that the surgeon's version is going to be believed.

- Even when I did make a complaint – I never got to tell the individual how their actions made me feel therefore I don't believe there will be any learning from it in the future.
- There is a feeling by anyone who is thinking about making a complaint – "sure it won't go anywhere" and I believe the organisations use this knowing full well that most people don't like to complain.
- It will be perceived as "sure it's those disabled people complaining again".
- If you complain about your carers you may be treated differently

These comments were also balanced around the guilt that one person had when he didn't make a complaint about something he now feels he should have. I let others & myself down by not saying anything and I wish I had said something. People around the table were well aware of the reasons to make a complaint and

how, in theory, any complaint should result in an improvement to service, learning from the process or indeed a clear explanation as to why things should and do happen the way in which they do.

Suggestions for the Future

The naming of the Complaints department should be looked at. If it were called the “learning department” it may encourage more people to tell about their experiences in the hope that things will improve for them and others in the future.

If I were making a complaint I would like to know how my complaint has resulted in learning for the individual or organisation or both.

We felt more could be done by the Health Service to deal with complaints at an early stage (arbitration) as it was felt the culture of official letters only serves to further alienate people and if there was a genuine attempt to speak honestly to people as soon as possible when a complaint is highlighted they could be dealt with more quickly.

Alongside this feedback directly to a complainant on what has changed/or not as a result of the complaint as well as anonymous case studies highlighting how complaints have resulted in changes or not and the reasons behind this may serve to reassure people that its important to raise concerns etc.

If the Trusts were to highlight case study examples as part of their quarterly or annual reports highlighting the types of complaints and what has happened as a result of them people might be encouraged to engage with the process.

We hope that our experiences are beneficial in this piece of work and would welcome concrete examples on how things could be improved from where they are today. There is a strong feeling that when you do put yourself forward you are ‘palmed off’ and all you can ever expect is a general letter without any real feeling that things will improve and feel that this must improve if people are to genuinely feel that its worth the bother making a complaint.

