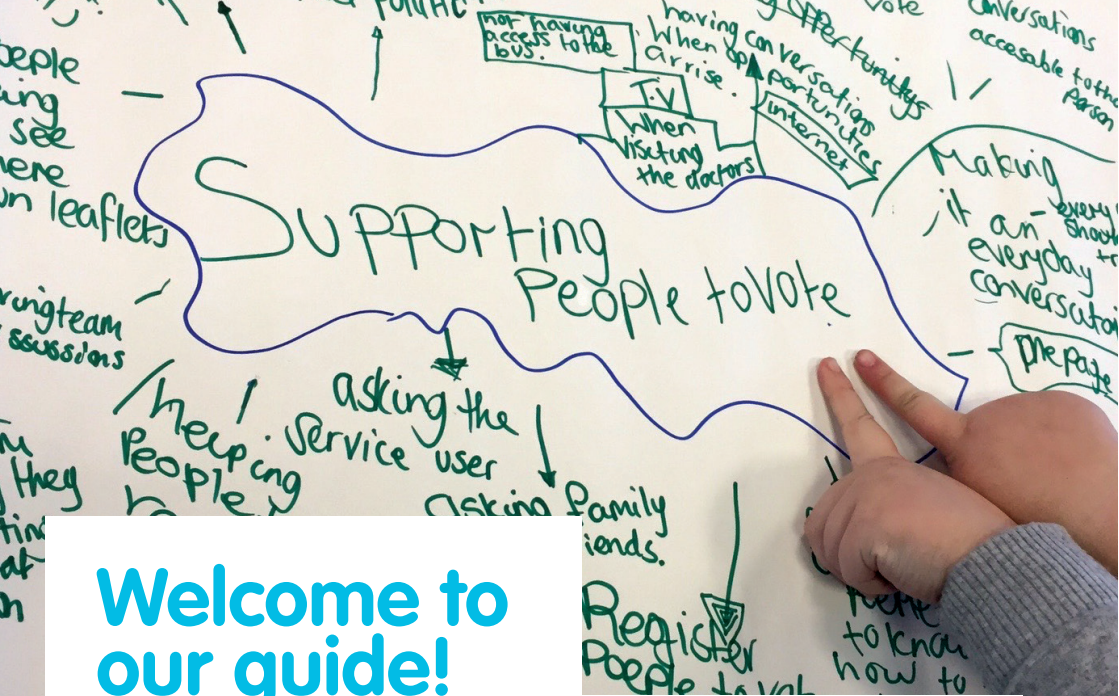


Promoting Our Voting A guide to supporting people to vote

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People Passion Potential

Community
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Welcome to our guide!

Community Integrated Care wants the people it supports to live ordinary lives, where they enjoy the same rights as every other citizen. That's why we are encouraging all our colleagues to assist the people we support to make an informed decision about whether or not they want to vote.

To help us explain more about this campaign, we asked some of our Peer Reviewers from Leicester, Jamie Potts, Sushma Majithia and Heidi Neville, to work with us to develop this important guide. Peer Reviewers are people who are supported by our charity, who are also our paid employees too - with the important job of assessing the quality of our services.

They created this publication in a fun and creative workshop where they considered how politics affects their lives and how people can be supported to vote. We hope it inspires lots of people to take part in the election.



Can everyone vote?

Supporting people who access care and support to vote can be complex. Voting requires people to make an independent choice about which party they think should be in government. This means that they will need to understand what voting means, what the different parties stand for and the effects of casting their vote.

Voting is a more complex choice than other day-to-day decisions, and some

people might not have the capacity to make this type of decision independently.

Other people we support can make independent choices and have the capacity to understand the election, if they are given support, advice and encouragement. This publication focusses on supporting people who are able to take part, and offers some tips on how they can be encouraged and enabled to vote.

Why does politics matter?

Politics really does matter! During the workshop we came up with a really long list of political issues that are important to us and other people in the country. It covered everything from funding for care and support to affordable housing; public transport to benefits; training and education to NHS waiting times.

We all had different views on which issues were most important. This reminded us that we all have our own perspectives on how our country should be run and why it is important to vote.

In many ways, we felt that the lives of people who access care and support are more influenced by political decisions, because we often use public services.



“We started our day thinking about whether there is anything in our lives that politics doesn’t affect. We couldn’t! Politics influences everything – from how much things cost, to how our hospitals and public transport services are run.” **Heidi**



Why do people have the right to vote?

We think that voting is a very important right, because:

- The views and experiences of people who live with disabilities matter.
- It is an important part of contributing to our local and national community.
- As individuals, we all have issues that we think are important. Voting allows us to pick the political party that we think will best address them.
- It is exciting and means that we are joining with millions of other people in a national event.

We all felt strongly that if people aren't supported to know about the election and how they can take part in it, they are being deprived of an important right.



"We began our workshop by asking ourselves what we would change if we were Prime Minister for the day. I said that I would want more accessible transport, because there often isn't space on buses for me in my wheelchair. We realised that there are lots of things that we would like to see change in our country and that's why it matters that we vote." **Jamie**



"We learned that people who access care and support are much less likely to vote than the rest of the country. We think that this might mean that their views aren't represented and that politicians won't respond to the things that matter to them." **Sushma**

How can people be supported to vote?

We spent a lot of time thinking about how best to support people to vote. The training that we have had as Peer Reviewers helps us to think about ways that people can be supported to have a voice and make choices – which is what voting is all about!

Here are our top ten tips:

Informing...



Let the person know that they can vote

The first step is an obvious but important one! Many people will feel excluded from the election, or perhaps not even know it's happening, so this first step is really key.

Communicate this in a way that is most accessible and interesting to the person (their Communication's Passport might help you plan this). Let them know that they don't need to decide straight away if they want to take part, so they don't feel under pressure.



Make politics an everyday conversation


It takes time for everyone to understand politics and what the different political parties stand for. Find ways to make the election relevant and interesting, perhaps when issues are talked about in the media or they use a public service – like taking a bus or visiting a GP.

There are lots of online resources to help you plan this (just search Google with terms like 'supporting people to vote'). Some parties have also produced easy read manifestos, which simply describe their key policies – these can help you have informed conversations.



Involve loved ones

Often the people who know and love a person the most, their family and friends, know what is important to them and how best to communicate with them. Think about how you can involve them in discussions and planning about voting.



Supporting...



Use One-Page Profiles and their favourite colleagues

One-Page Profiles can really help you find the best ways to involve people in the election. They tell us what is important to a person, which may help you identify the issues that matter to them most. They also describe how a person likes to be supported, so can offer really clear guidance on ways to make voting accessible to them.

The One Page-Profiles of colleagues may also help you to identify which staff colleagues have an interest in politics or know a lot about the local community – their interests might be helpful in supporting the person to consider the election.

Also think about which colleagues have the closest relationships with people you support – they'll likely know which issues and public services are important to them, and have the skills to assist the person to decide if they want to get involved in the election.



Get to know the local candidates

Before the election, many candidates contact local people – perhaps by posting leaflets explaining their policies or by knocking door-to-door and meeting them (this is sometimes called canvassing).

If a leaflet arrives from a local party, don't just throw it in the bin – share it like you would do any other piece of mail for that person! If required, spend some time explaining the content of that leaflet in a way that is most understandable to the individual.

People who access support should always be included in meetings that are about them – a visit from a local candidate is no different! If a candidate visits the home of someone you support when canvassing local people, enable the person you support to meet them, if they wish to.

There are other ways to meet local MPs too – like at local surgeries or public meetings they might hold in the build up to the election. Local newspapers and the websites of candidates can also give you a good sense of what they plan to offer to your local community.



Stay neutral

Person-centred support is about helping people to make their own informed choices – this is naturally the same when it comes voting too!

It can be really difficult to talk about politics, especially issues we are very passionate about, without sharing our own opinions. Try to give people a balanced sense of what the different parties stand for, rather than sharing your own personal views.

In our workshop, we decided that discussing politics in groups might be a good way to ensure that the people we support receive balanced advice and understand different perspectives.



Don't put people off

It might be the case that you or people in your team aren't interested in politics – that's fine! However, we think that it's really important that if our colleagues don't find politics interesting, they don't let their own views dissuade the people we support. Voting is a right and it is important that the people we support make up their own minds about whether they want to take part.

Voting...



Plan rotas

The people we support should plan their own rotas around the things they want to do. If a person you support wants to vote, work with them to consider how this can be planned into their rota.



Decide the best way to vote

There are different ways that people can cast their ballot: in person, by post, or through a nominated person (known as a 'proxy'). Consider with the person which method is best for them.

Some people will enjoy the excitement of visiting a polling station, meeting people and putting their 'X' next to the name of the person they want to vote for. Others will enjoy the convenience and simplicity of voting by post. For some people a proxy vote might be best, for instance if they aren't being supported on May 7th (the day of the election!) – if they choose this method, make sure that someone they really trust has this responsibility.



Thank You!

Voting is a fundamental part of being a citizen in Britain, so it's important that we take every step to enable the people we support to have their say in the general election. Of course, like all of us, the people we support can choose not to vote – and that's their right too! What's most important is that they can make an informed choice about whether they want to take part.

Please give this your full support.
Thank you for Promoting Our Voting!

Remember, the General Election takes place on
7th May 2015. You must be registered to vote to take part.

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