



*Pictured left: The NRAC National Committee (back row, left to right) Patrick Hargadon, Jimmy Dooner, Michael O'Brien, (middle row, left to right) Alice Jackman, Bernard McGrath, Simon Buggy, (front row, left to right) Catalina Keys and Geraldine Harrington.*

# Together Is Better

As part of a series of articles on advocacy within the Rehab Group, *Rehab News* takes a look at the National RehabCare Advocacy Council's Rules Project which will update and enhance the Council's existing rules and principles of practice.

**T**HERE IS A STRONG CULTURE OF ADVOCACY within the Rehab Group. There are representative organisations for persons using our services, such as the National RehabCare Advocacy Council (NRAC), the National Representative Council (NRC) in National Learning Network and the service user representative organisations in Momentum and in The Chaseley Trust.

Sarah-Jane Dillon is the Rehab Group's Director of Policy and Co-ordination and it is part of her job to support and develop advocacy within the Group. It is important that the representative organisations are supported in this way because it will help them to work with the service providers, while being separate.

Dillon told *Rehab News* that she is "enjoying working with others to further strengthen advocacy within all areas of Rehab". She says that her vision of advocacy is one which "gives people using our services a voice and enables them to access the supports, information and entitlements they require and in so doing increase each person's independence".

## The NRAC Rules Project

One example of the advocacy initiatives currently underway is NRAC's Rules Project. NRAC is the representative council of people who attend RehabCare services throughout Ireland and consists of elected representatives who are responsible for putting forward

the views of the people they represent in their local centre and at regional and national levels. Its work ensures that the people using RehabCare services are involved in all decisions about the service they receive.

At local level, NRAC works on issues that affect its members' local services while the National Committee co-ordinates the Council's activities, takes part in internal consultations and works with external groups on issues of mutual interest.

The Council works to support people in getting to know their rights and in inputting into RehabCare's decisions, making it very important that NRAC runs as well as possible. With an open membership of over 2,600 people and representing people with different views, it is essential that NRAC works together to ensure it is representative of its members.

As part of the strengthening of NRAC, the Council has set about updating its working rules. The Rules Project was initiated at a special NRAC seminar in February, attended by members from across Ireland. Welcoming the 100-plus delegates, Patrick Hargadon, Chairperson of the National Committee, explained that the aim of the seminar was to hear people's opinions on the theme of

"Working Together". He emphasised that everybody's input is important "so we can move forward and network together for the future".

The seminar offered an opportunity for a cross-section of NRAC members to discuss how they could work together more effectively and for the assembled members to develop a clear direction for the organisation.

There was consensus that a clear set of rules would ensure that NRAC could best achieve its objectives. Members wanted to increase awareness of how NRAC is run, improve communication between people in the Council and strengthen the regional structure.

It was agreed that draft principles for working together would be written down, so that everyone can contribute to them as they take shape. Armed with the opinions expressed at the seminar, a committee comprising National Committee and general members was established. Using all the information from the seminar, they are now tasked with producing a document containing the key principles of working together for NRAC.

The committee's work is well underway and it has already come up with suggestions to update the aims of the Council and how it can continue to be representative of all its members. In order to consult with the wider membership and gather more suggestions the draft document will be discussed at four NRAC regional meetings in the summer. The final document will then be discussed and voted on at the NRAC AGM and annual seminar in November.

The NRAC Rules Project is part of a bigger project in the Rehab advocacy network and future issues of *Rehab News* will profile other representative organisations within the Rehab Group. ■

## What NRAC means to me...

The seminar buzzed with ideas about what NRAC means to its members and what they wanted it to achieve in the future:

- 'Speaking out – getting your point across.'
- 'Have a voice.'
- 'Make sure things happen.'
- 'Give you self-confidence.'
- 'To help be an equal part of the community.'
- 'Everyone has a say.'
- 'Getting things done.'



One voice for all

### Who to contact

For further information please contact:



**Michelle Joyce**  
National Development Officer  
NRAC

00353 42 932 8766  
michelle.joyce@rehabcare.ie