

ICAS

Independent Complaints
Advocacy Service



ICAS Impact Report

Putting You in the Picture

“Helpful staff.
An honest and
open approach to
complaints handling.”

NHS professional

“I would not have had the
confidence to take this complaint
forward without the help of my
advocate and **ICAS.**”

ICAS client

“**ICAS** is
independent
but it engages very
successfully with service
providers in the NHS.”

NHS professional

“Excellent communications!
I was never left wondering what
was happening at any point in
the proceedings.”

ICAS client

“We were so impressed with our
advocate’s courteous manner, her
dedication, professionalism and also
her efficiency; we felt extremely
lucky to have her on our side.”

ICAS client

“**ICAS** brings a
common sense approach
to difficult cases.”

NHS professional

Interesting facts

Anyone is entitled to contact **ICAS**
for help in making a complaint about
NHS funded treatment or care.
The service also supports people who
wish to make a complaint on behalf of
someone they know.



Welcome to Putting You in the Picture

For more than seven years the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (**ICAS**) has been supporting people who wish to complain about their National Health Service (NHS) treatment or care.

During this time, this free, confidential and independent service has helped over 30,000 people navigate their way around the NHS complaints procedure. In supporting complainants it has helped individuals understand their rights, make informed choices, and given them a voice.

But what do those who come into contact with the service have to say about it? What do they value most about the advocacy support they receive, and how far does the service act as a catalyst for positive change on a broader level within the NHS?

The three organisations that provide **ICAS** in England – Carers Federation, POhWER and South of England Advocacy Projects (SEAP) – have brought together the answers to these questions in this Impact Report.

Our report includes personal stories from **ICAS** clients, professionals within the NHS and the advocates that deliver the service. It describes what **ICAS** does and how it supports individuals through the NHS complaints process. It also features examples of positive changes that have come about as a result of complaints. It is underpinned throughout by information gathered through stakeholder research and client satisfaction surveys.

We hope that this will provide an overall picture of a truly national service, valued greatly by those that come into contact with it, and one that can, and does, make a real difference.



Julia Tabreham, chief executive,
Carers Federation



Val Harrison, chief executive, POhWER



Jill Miles, chief executive, SEAP

Interesting facts

The three providers share a common aim - that as a result of using **ICAS**, people feel more empowered, more autonomous and more in control of their lives. The providers follow these basic principles of advocacy:

- that people's voices should be heard and respected by those who make decisions about services
- that advocates make sure clients have all the information they need; they help them to explore choices and options but do not try to influence decisions that individuals make
- that advocates are independent of the NHS and provide a high level of confidentiality.

ICAS in context

The NHS works hard to treat everyone properly and promptly. Most people using health services are happy with their treatment but sometimes things can go wrong.

The Health and Social Care Act 2001 includes a legal requirement for the Secretary of State for Health to provide independent advocacy services designed to help anyone who wants to make an NHS complaint. As a result, **ICAS** was piloted in 2002 before rolling out nationally a year later. Today, three charitable organisations work closely to provide a comprehensive advocacy service to those who need it, operating from 27 offices in nine regions throughout England.

Helping people with NHS complaints

Complaining doesn't come easily to most people. We feel uncomfortable about pointing out the faults of others.

But most NHS complaints are not about simply criticising, or complaining for the sake of it; they are about finding out why things have gone wrong and wanting mistakes to be acknowledged. Some people just want to hear the word 'sorry'. Importantly, too, complainants want their experiences to be a catalyst for positive change and improvements in the NHS, so others can benefit.

What does this mean in practice?

Someone might come to **ICAS** because they simply want information about the NHS complaints process and what it involves. Others may want more from the advocacy service; they may be looking for someone informed about the process, yet impartial, to talk to about their complaint. They may seek help in putting their thoughts down on paper in a clear and unemotional way. They could want someone to advocate for them at meetings with healthcare professionals, help keep the complaint on track, and ensure they are kept informed of their options as the complaint progresses.

Most clients value the fact that, thanks to **ICAS**, they are not alone; a professional advocate is on hand to support them when they may be most vulnerable, through what can be a difficult and challenging process.

Interesting facts

- The Carers Federation charity was established in 1992. It provides services aimed at supporting vulnerable groups. 102 staff help deliver **ICAS** in four regions.
- Advocacy charity POhWER was established in 1996. Today POhWER provides a range of advocacy and empowerment services throughout London, the East of England and the West Midlands with 94 of its 170 staff working for the **ICAS** service.
- Building on a number of successful local projects, South of England Advocacy Projects (SEAP) was formed in 2000 to deliver specialist advocacy services. Operating from offices across the South of England, SEAP is a registered charity with 146 staff, over half of whom work for **ICAS**.

What does the complaints process involve?

In April 2009 the NHS complaints process was simplified to focus on resolving complaints as quickly and effectively as possible.

The aim of the new system is to tackle complaints about NHS organisations through a process known as local resolution. Generally, this should begin within 12 months of the problem arising and is usually concluded successfully. If someone remains dissatisfied when local resolution has ended, an application can be made to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) for further investigation.

The PHSO will normally only take on a case where all efforts have been made to resolve the complaint at local level; the Ombudsman will not necessarily investigate a case simply because the complainant does not agree with a decision.

A catalyst for service improvements

As a result of one complaint, senior managers at an NHS Trust thanked **ICAS** for assisting the complainant, confirming that several improvements had been made including:

- new training for specialist nurses
- introduction of new protocols for laboratory staff to gain out-of-hours advice from consultants
- improvements in specimen tracking arrangements.

Interesting facts

- 269 people work for **ICAS** as advocates, managers and administrators.
- **ICAS** operates from 27 offices in nine regions, making the service as accessible as possible to those who need it.

“Since its inception **ICAS** has been successful in lots of ways. It is a good service that helps almost one in ten of our customers with their cases,” says James Johnstone, PHSO director of customer service and assessment.

“As an independent organisation ourselves we also value the independence of **ICAS**. The service plays an important role in helping those less able to make a complaint themselves, and we find it is both professional and valued by those that come into contact with it.”

“I most value the way **ICAS** can help someone to focus their complaint and highlight the issues which they really want answered.”
NHS professional

The next few pages feature stories about people who decided to make a complaint about NHS services. Here they share their experiences of how **ICAS** helped them through the process, what this support meant and what impact their complaint had on the local health service.

Michael's Story helped benefit others

"**ICAS** is a very wonderful, efficient service. I would urge anyone with a complaint about their healthcare to use **ICAS** as their first port of call."

Ivy Penny first contacted **ICAS** after becoming increasingly worried and frustrated over the standard of hospital care being given to her son, Michael, who has severe learning difficulties.

"Things were going wrong and mistakes were being made over my son's medication," explains Ivy. She also had concerns over the ability of staff to deal with Michael's complex needs, and when she did speak up she felt that staff were not always open to listening.

She found out about **ICAS** from the chief executive at the hospital Trust, a referral that gave her the confidence to use the service. What was she looking for from **ICAS**?

"I wanted someone to listen and understand, to give me practical help and support. But I also wanted someone to be there if things didn't go well."

Mrs Penny's experience of working with her advocate as he helped her through each stage of the complaint was a very positive one.



"My advocate was brilliant! Chris always responded when I got in touch and was there for me when I needed him. But what I valued most was the support and reassurance I received."

She adds, "**ICAS** people are truly caring; they are prepared to listen. Advocates help others that are in distress because they can't get the care for themselves or their loved ones."

Effect on the NHS

What has happened as a result of the complaint?

"The biggest thing by far was the realisation that not all doctors and consultants have a full understanding of the Mental Capacity Act," says Ivy.

The Trust acted on this and has since appointed someone to deliver mandatory training under the heading of Michael's Story. Nursing teams have also received training in this area, which will eventually be extended to all NHS staff at the Trust.

Complaint highlighted dispensing problem

“I just wanted to achieve some kind of resolution - for my partner to get the right medication in the correct dosage, and on time.”

Carol Peters contacted **ICAS** for help after her partner Paul was unable to access the medication he needed while in prison, owing to problems over the way in which it was dispensed.

“My partner suffers from post traumatic stress disorder and clinical depression; he requires medication to help manage both conditions. The prison dispensary was not able to keep up with demand because of the number of prisoners requiring medication and this meant Paul was being turned away from the dispensary regularly.”

In an attempt to resolve the problem internally, he wrote a letter of complaint to the prison governor but received no reply; it turned out later that the letter was never received. Desperate to get something done, Paul went on hunger strike.

Carol heard about **ICAS** from the prison governing body and got in touch to see if the service could help.

“**ICAS** sent my partner the forms he needed to sign to allow me to make the complaint on his behalf. My advocate then drafted a letter to the local NHS Trust highlighting the concerns over the dispensing process and they began looking into it. I really liked the fact that my advocate got in touch regularly to make sure I was kept up to date with progress.”

As a result of the complaint, Carol's partner, Paul, was given access to the medication he needed without further delay.

According to Carol, contacting **ICAS** made a real difference. “I found the service very professional. The help in putting together the letter was really useful. I am just so pleased I got in touch.”

Interesting facts

- The majority of NHS stakeholders and voluntary sector bodies (89%) find the service provided by **ICAS** professional.
- 82% of stakeholders say that **ICAS** enables clients to engage effectively with the complaints process.
- Nearly three quarters (72%) of stakeholders say they believe that **ICAS** brings more objectivity to the complaints process.

“**ICAS** gave us the confidence to start the complaints procedure. Knowing they were just a phone call away was a comfort, and the support was invaluable. Thank you.”
ICAS client

A listening ear during a difficult time

“I was grieving and vulnerable; my thinking was clouded. I needed support from someone who was detached from the situation and could help me formulate my complaint in a reasoned and unemotional way.”

These are the words of John Day who contacted **ICAS** after the unexpected death of his wife, Ellen.

“My wife entered hospital as a lively, healthy 59 year-old who needed to have a simple problem sorted out. It should have been straightforward; instead she died six days later from multiple organ failure and blood poisoning.”

He describes how, during this emotional and difficult time, his advocate helped to share the weight of the complaints process. At the same time, pursuing a complaint with the help of **ICAS** gave him the breathing space he needed.

“I still wasn’t clear as to whether or not to go down the route of legal action, so decided to use **ICAS** as my first step and take stock later.”

John explains how important it was that he could work with someone who was ‘human’ and down to earth, yet professional. Most of the time he contacted his advocate by telephone and letter but, importantly, he found face-to-face meetings invaluable.

“My advocate did a lot of things to help. She provided a listening ear and sympathetic approach at a difficult time. Because of her understanding of the process she was able to manage my expectations well and at the same time provide me with practical help.”



The fact that the service was both independent and free was also important to Mr Day. He adds that at no time did his advocate try to persuade or influence him in any direction. John was in charge of all decision making. He valued the fact that her ‘level-headed and honest approach’, as he calls it, meant that he always received a balanced and reasoned response to his questions.

“If all the advocates provided by **ICAS** are like Jane, I’d say that the service is extremely well equipped. She provided everything that I required at the time and helped me to move forward.”

Effect on the NHS

The complaint investigation highlighted individual failings in information management and recording. The Trust has stated its commitment to re-examine practices in response to concerns and feedback. John decided he would not pursue his complaint further or proceed with legal action.

An empowering experience

When asked what she was looking for from **ICAS**, Mavis Smith explains quite simply that she wanted someone to listen. “I had felt invisible for years, but **ICAS** listened. My advocate didn’t think I was a nuisance or that I was repeating myself.”

Mavis first contacted **ICAS** for support because she had experienced what she describes as ‘negative attitudes’ from health professionals.

“I felt bullied and harassed by consultants and other healthcare professionals. They did not explain things to me properly, nor did they seem to believe me when I said that I was in a lot of pain; I just wasn’t being treated with respect.”

After getting in touch with **ICAS**, Mrs Smith describes how her advocate came to the house to discuss her complaint, how she helped with writing letters, and talked through the various options. She explains how the **ICAS** team treated her with respect throughout the process.

“I sometimes slur my words because of my condition, and in the past people have hung up on me when I’ve tried to get help because they think I have been drinking. But the **ICAS** team never minded me calling. They always had time for me.”

Aside from practical help, Mavis explains that the support she received from **ICAS** helped her to feel empowered.

“My advocate is great! She has made me realise I can change things. She has also given me confidence to speak up for myself, question things and write my own letters.”

If she had to sum up her experience in a sentence, what would she say?

“**ICAS** is fantastic...out of this world. If you have a complaint, I’d say 110% you should contact the service!”

Effect on the NHS

According to Mavis, since her complaint, NHS staff providing her treatments have changed their attitudes towards her. She now feels as though she is listened to, and treated with kindness and respect.

Interesting facts

Stakeholders most value:

- the good working relationship with **ICAS**
- the independence of the **ICAS** service
- the helpful, friendly and professional nature of **ICAS** staff
- the knowledge and support given to clients to better understand the complaints process and help in managing their expectations.

“The service I received was the best it could ever have been. Your advocate was a credit to **ICAS**.”

ICAS client

ICAS's help meant not having to face the complaint alone

“In an ideal world you wouldn't need an **ICAS**. But there is a desperate need for a means to flag up shortcomings and I believe that only independent services like **ICAS** can make real change happen.”

Elizabeth McCreadie's complaint relates to the standard of care her mother received while in hospital shortly before she died. “Medically the treatment was OK but I thought the care she received was appalling,” she says.

Still raw from the loss of her mother, she decided to make a complaint but found it extremely difficult because the experience had been so harrowing. This, she explains, is where **ICAS** helped by supporting her through both the emotional and practical aspects of the process.

“My advocate was someone who could cope with the tears and the upset without making me feel foolish. There was also the practical help like getting the next letter off, keeping within the necessary timescales and ensuring I knew what to expect next. It was all done in such a way that I was supported without feeling disempowered,” she says.

But what did she value most about the service?

“For me it was the fact that it is there and available to anyone that needs it. I think of myself as a skillful and able person but everybody at some point needs someone to support them. In situations like these, approaching **ICAS** is the best thing that you can do; it means you're not facing these challenges on your own.”

Moved by the experience, and impressed by the role **ICAS** played in the complaints process, Mrs McCreadie is now a Board member for the organisation that helped her.

“The contact I had with the service was so worthwhile that I wanted to put something back.

“Coming in contact with **ICAS** helped me to move forward and has now opened up a new chapter in my life,” she adds.



Human aspect to advocacy support made a real difference

Kate and Ivor Browning's son, John, suffers from schizophrenia. They were able to manage his condition well for many years with external support from the mental health team. It was only when John began living independently that things started to go wrong.

"He stopped taking his medication; his treatment wasn't being reviewed regularly and without the right level of support his condition deteriorated," explains Mrs Browning.

She and her husband spoke to a number of mental health professionals about their concerns, without effect.

"We felt sidelined and ignored. No-one seemed to be co-ordinating John's care. Things came to a head when this lack of support led to a serious incident and John being removed to a secure unit," she adds.

Anxious to secure the right level of care and treatment for their son, and at the same time try to prevent other families from going through a similar experience, she and Mr Browning approached **ICAS**.

"We wanted to make a formal complaint but were reluctant to pursue this on our own; that's why we thought an advocate might help. We also liked the idea that the support would be completely objective."

She explains that, aside from the practical help they received in terms of writing letters and attending meetings, it was the 'human' aspect of the service that meant so much.

"Our advocate was like a friend in a time of need," she says. "We didn't know who to turn to or what to do next. Involving **ICAS** was like having someone hold your hand through the entire experience."

Effect on the NHS

As a result of this complaint the Trust conducted an investigation. Amongst its recommendations were that parents should be more closely involved in care planning and risk assessments, and that better communication channels needed to be employed between health professionals.

Interesting facts

- 85% of NHS stakeholders feel that **ICAS** has a good understanding of the complaints procedure.
- 83% value the input of **ICAS** in helping the client to clarify their complaint.
- The majority (81%) of stakeholders agree that they have been able to build a constructive working relationship with **ICAS**.

"We would like to thank **ICAS** for assisting our patient with this matter. We have found your service to be very efficient and would certainly signpost patients to your service in the future."

NHS professional

Improved access made complaint worthwhile

“If anyone has a complaint about an NHS service, I’d say ‘go ahead and use **ICAS**’. I found it so much easier to talk to my advocate than an NHS professional. I would highly recommend it.”

These are the words of John Easton. Registered blind for over 30 years, he relies on his guide dog, Donny, to get about. So when he encountered several problems over accessibility at his local GP surgery, Mr Easton decided to try to get something done about it.

Referred to the **ICAS** service by the complaints manager at the local NHS Trust, initially he was not sure what to expect of the service.

“I thought **ICAS** might be a group where people discussed their experiences, or for those with a disability. But I was then told exactly what the service was about and how it could help me.”

After getting in touch with **ICAS**, an advocate arranged to visit Mr Easton in his own home to gather the information about his complaint. She telephoned regularly to update him at each stage, then, once a response from the Trust was received, visited him again to go through the details in person.

What does Mr Easton have to say about his advocate and the support he received?

“My advocate was friendly and helpful; she explained everything to me clearly. I liked the fact that she spoke in everyday terms rather than in medical jargon. Without **ICAS** I would not have known how to complain or what the possible outcomes might be.”

Effect on the NHS

It turns out that there were already plans to improve the facilities at the GP practice. But, following Mr Easton’s complaint, further investigations were carried out by the local Trust; as a result of this substantially more funding was set aside to improve the practice. Plans were also revised to take into account some of the issues he raised.

“I am really glad to know that my complaint has led to changes that will benefit other people that visit this surgery,” says John.



One individual makes a difference

Chris Mighall has spent most of his life battling with a condition that was not properly diagnosed until he was in his early 50s. It was only after suffering years of difficulties and inappropriate referrals that he finally sought a private consultation with a specialist who confirmed he had Asperger's Syndrome.

Disillusioned with the way in which his case had previously been handled by healthcare professionals, he decided to complain.

"This had a huge effect on me. I felt overwhelmed by the experience, particularly as the process itself was so difficult to manage due to my condition," explains Chris.

With the support of an advocate, Chris attended a meeting with all health agencies concerned in an attempt to resolve the complaint.

"I achieved the best possible outcome – an apology and acknowledgement that I had not been treated appropriately," he says.

Mr Mighall is full of praise for the support he received from his **ICAS** advocate.

"If I had to sum up my experience of **ICAS** in a word I'd say it was 'brilliant'!

"The fact that I wasn't battling on my own anymore made a big difference. There was someone else fighting my corner. I don't feel I can thank my advocate enough; everything she did was spot on."

The GP perspective

Gayle Sykes works as a GP practice manager for a surgery in Gloucestershire. She first came across **ICAS** when Chris Mighall brought his advocate to a meeting to discuss his complaint.

She describes the advocate as 'very supportive and understanding', helping Chris to put across his views effectively whilst also taking on an impartial role in the proceedings.

"The complaint was complex and involved other health providers but the outcome we all achieved was magical for our patient. Not only has he managed to move on considerably as a result of this process, we also learned a great deal from the experience."

She adds, "I would have no hesitation in referring any patients to **ICAS** in future. With **ICAS** involved we have found that meaningful discussions can be held, helping to resolve the complaint more quickly. Independent support of this kind can also give valuable reassurance to patients and help them move on."

Effect on the NHS

Since the complaint was resolved Chris has continued to work with his local GP and others to develop a directory of services and support materials.

These are designed to help GPs to understand Asperger's Syndrome and to work with patients more effectively. In addition, a psychiatrist and colleague in the local area have sought specialist training to help them diagnose Asperger's Syndrome in adults.

Making a difference in the NHS: three perspectives

Fair and constructive input in complaints process

“I’d describe our working relationship with **ICAS** as ‘very successful’. In fact, we prefer to have advocates involved in complaints because this often helps in their resolution.”

Russell Smith works as complaints manager at the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust and has fairly regular contact with **ICAS**. What does he value most about the service?

“The advocates take on an important role in liaising with both the complainant and the Trust,” explains Russell.

“Sometimes this is about managing complainant expectations, perhaps in explaining the reasons why the Trust might not be able to offer any more information about a particular complaint. **ICAS** also helps complainants to put together well structured letters which ask specific questions and clarify exactly what the individual wants to achieve.”

Russell finds **ICAS**’s role in the process both fair and constructive, something that benefits both the complainant and the NHS organisation.

“The advocates are approachable and friendly. They are also professional in their dealings with us and knowledgeable about the NHS complaints procedure, all of which helps to assist the Trust in its attempts to resolve complaints.”

“I appreciate that there is an advocacy service with a thorough knowledge of the NHS complaints procedure, yet independent from the NHS organisations.”

NHS professional

A catalyst for service improvements

As a result of one complaint a Trust’s chief executive reassured the client that lessons had been learned.

He invited the client back to visit the ward to observe changes and discuss any issues with the teams. These changes included:

- the implementation of an ‘end of life’ pathway
- training for all ward staff to ensure they dealt appropriately with patients who were coming to the end of their lives.

The value of the 'outside' view

“In a word, ‘satisfying’.” This is how Solihull Care Trust complaints manager, Vivien Harris, describes her experience of working with **ICAS**.

“I think that the support **ICAS** offers to patients, plus the clarity the advocates bring to the complaints process, is often invaluable.”

Vivien has worked with **ICAS** since the inception of the service. During that time she has found that complaints involving **ICAS** are generally resolved in a more satisfactory way for the patient, “which means a case rarely has to proceed further”.

Vivien says that involving **ICAS** in the process often has a positive effect on the individual raising the complaint.

“You cannot underestimate the value to the complainant of the unbiased but supportive approach. Such an ‘outside’ view can only be a good thing.”

In turn, says Vivien, this supports NHS bodies in managing their own complaints services effectively.

She adds, “I come across lots of organisations in my job and I can honestly say that I don’t have anything negative to say about **ICAS**!”

A catalyst for service improvements

One Trust recently put in place positive changes following a complaint made by a client supported by **ICAS**:

- the hospital’s discharge policy was revised
- guidance to support this change was communicated to staff
- the client’s experience was used as a case study to highlight the emotional distress caused by failure of the discharge process, and to help staff learn from the experience.

Using complaints to help improve standards

“I find that an informed complainant means the process is less difficult. It may not make the issue itself any easier, but expectations about what can be achieved are managed better, and the complainant definitely gains from that. This is certainly something **ICAS** can take the credit for.”

Glenn Douglas is chief executive at the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. Shortly after he came into post in 2007 the Trust became the subject of a well publicised investigation by the Healthcare Commission (HCC). As a result, public confidence in the area’s healthcare services hit an all time low.

“My task was huge; it was clear that a deep-seated culture change was needed,” explains Glenn.

He immediately put energy into improving service delivery at each of the Trust’s three hospitals. He also re-examined the complaints process, meeting with **ICAS** advocates and looking more closely at how **ICAS** could support clients as part of the resolution process.

“There was a real need for complaints to be regarded as something to learn from, and working closely with **ICAS** helped create a shift in attitudes. It feels like we are trying to do the same thing, which means communication between parties is better and there are gains for everybody.”

These pages explain more about the advocates themselves, their motivations and what they enjoy most about their jobs.

A network of advocate support

At the core of **ICAS** are the advocates themselves, supporting clients, carers and their families through the NHS complaints process.

ICAS advocates are professionally trained and have specialist skills to help ensure that the service is accessible to a wide range of people. As well as using their expertise, advocates are able to draw on a range of **ICAS** resources designed to aid communication such as interpreting services and information supplied in Braille formats. In addition, the **ICAS** Self Help Information Pack (SHIP) is available as a DVD as well as in printed format.

Interesting facts

An advocate will never give advice, express a personal opinion, make judgements or attempt to persuade an individual to take a particular course of action. Whilst an advocate can provide a sympathetic ear it is not his or her job to provide counselling. An advocate's role is not to mediate on a client's behalf but to support him or her through the NHS complaints process.

Advocacy works well for both parties

Advocate Jacqueline O'Brien of Carers Federation **ICAS** tells of how an NHS complaints manager recently referred to **ICAS** as the patients' friend.

"But our team agreed that we are, in fact, a 'critical friend' as we are not afraid to encourage clients to be realistic about their expectations," she says.

It was Jacqueline's previous work in patient and public involvement that gave her a taste for engaging with others to help bring about change in the NHS. It is also what largely attracted her to the role of **ICAS** advocate with the Carers Federation. She is in no doubt that it was the right career move for her.

"I can honestly say that I love my job. It is very gratifying helping people to achieve some level of satisfaction from the complaints process, especially those who may have been through a difficult experience."

She believes that independent advocacy works well for both parties because **ICAS** is emotionally removed from the situation.

"This means we can help patients express their concerns and outcomes in a clear way, keep the focus on these and liaise with the NHS to help bring about a conclusion to the complaint."

"I enjoy the variety; no two cases are the same," she adds.



An opportunity that lives up to expectations

“When clients thank me for my help I used to say ‘I am just doing my job’, but I now realise that for many of those that we help it is more than a job; you are supporting someone through what can be one of the most emotional processes they will ever experience.”

Abdul Raheem became an **ICAS** advocate for POhWER in 2006 after a background in community education. He describes how he felt on first seeing the job advert and realising that it was not only a good skills fit but that he felt a strong connection with the nature of the service itself.

“I immediately realised this opening represented an exciting and valuable opportunity,” he says. Three years on his enthusiasm hasn’t waned.

He describes being an advocate as a challenging role, “but one that has huge and real rewards. Advocacy is about building relationships with people; it’s about listening, speaking, supporting and asking questions. It’s about getting people’s voices heard, building trust and making sure that the client is in a ‘safe place’.”



Abdul also gets involved in reviewing cases, supporting colleagues and ensuring the service is engaging effectively with local people. His job brings him into contact with clients from all areas of the community, from those whose first language may not be English to others with a range of challenges and difficult health issues.

“I know how important it is for people to be able to access an advocacy service that is professional, impartial and free. It is this, along with the satisfying mix of responsibilities and challenges, that makes me as keen and motivated as ever!”

Finally, Abdul adds, “I have learned that the impact of an **ICAS** advocate can be huge. This is why I feel very privileged to do the job I do.”

Challenges and rewards make a good balance

“I enjoy my work because it allows me to make a difference, however small, and I truly believe that the complaints procedure can help improve the NHS.”

Cherie Gallin began working for SEAP in 2003, becoming an advocate for the organisation three years later. She started out in office management and administration, providing support services to advocates in her team. This helped provide a solid foundation to her work when she applied to become a trained advocate in 2006.

“I find my job at **ICAS** satisfying and challenging,” she says. “But it is the nature of the work that I enjoy the most; it is both diverse and interesting, plus there’s always an opportunity to learn.”

“I’m also very involved in promoting the **ICAS** service in my local area,” says Cherie. She has a strong interest in local community work and spends a proportion of her time visiting local groups for people with learning disabilities, for example, and day care centres for older people. She also works with local NHS teams to raise awareness of the role of advocacy support in resolving complaints.

“We’ve extended our work to support people using healthcare services in prisons and other secure settings, and this area of work can be particularly complex, but we can reach some of the most vulnerable people which is very rewarding,” she adds.



Cherie is currently working towards the National Qualification in Independent Advocacy which will help build her skills further and at the same time add external validation to the work she does.

It's obvious that Cherie enjoys being an advocate but what does she value most about the role?

“This job is challenging and rewarding, which I really like. Of course it can be stressful, and at times it is upsetting to hear the stories clients tell you. But there is so much to be gained by knowing that you are helping someone in what could otherwise be a debilitating experience, and one that is hard for them to manage alone,” says Cherie.

“My advocate was exceptional. She did a brilliant job. I really felt supported by her in the meeting; I could not have asked for more from her.”

ICAS client

Contact us

If you are interested in finding out more about **ICAS** and how it can help you, please contact the local service provider in your region. Alternatively, visit the website of the provider that operates in your area (or see the Department of Health information about **ICAS** at www.dh.gov.uk).

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Thank you

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This report can be downloaded as a PDF from the websites of each of the service providers. To request additional copies of this publication or any other information about the service please contact your nearest **ICAS** office.

Sources

The client quotations featured in this report were gathered through **ICAS** feedback forms. Quotations attributed to NHS professionals were sourced from a satisfaction survey conducted in April and May 2009; the same survey was also the source of many of the statistics quoted. The survey was conducted by an independent organisation on behalf of the **ICAS** service providers; 1025 individuals were contacted and 270 participated.

Disclaimer: Please note that some names have been changed. Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure accuracy, the **ICAS** providers cannot take responsibility for errors or omissions that may occur within this publication.

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