

## Meeting 1 – 25<sup>th</sup> August 2021

### Group members

The first Independent Senior Advocate (ISA) Co-Production Group meeting started with members of the group introducing themselves. The membership collectively reflects a rich spectrum of experiences and perspectives which will enhance our work. Some members have been personally affected by maternity services and have experienced physical, mental and emotional, impacts. Some are working within maternity services and have a strong interest in improving maternity services from a professional perspective as well as a user service perspective. There is geographical representation from across England and a diversity of experience in the group.

The professional background of members includes experience of working in midwifery, bereavement, neonatal, obstetrics, and patient safety. Some members of the group also have experience of previous work in related areas including working with the NHS and/or campaign groups.

### Issues the group want to consider

Although the members bring a range of experiences to the group, there were three common themes that came through from their introductions.

1. A passion for everyone's voices to be heard, including those from different communities.
2. A powerful desire for change; for positivity to come out of the negative experiences discussed.
3. Helping to promote change so to minimise risk and improve service, with service user voices at the heart of the change process.

These themes will be explored further in upcoming meetings, to help the group agree on their core purpose.

### Terms of reference

Members were given the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss the Terms of Reference. In particular, the notion of confidentiality was discussed in more depth. It was agreed that the sharing of personal experiences within the group will always remain confidential and private. What is more, topics and ideas that are discussed during meetings will be attributed to the group as a whole and not as one individual's input.

It was also noted that members are present as individuals rather than as representatives of any organisation.

Finally, it was agreed that Traverse will capture the key themes and points of meetings and create summaries that will be uploaded to their website for the public to gain a sense of what the group is discussing.



There was not an expectation for members to sign the Terms of Reference as they were written, but instead members were given the chance to discuss and consider their position.

## **The role of NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) and Traverse**

Three representatives from NHSEI attended the meeting and will be attending future meetings. The intention is that these three representatives will work collaboratively as part of the group and provide relevant information to the group throughout the meetings.

Traverse's role is to provide independent facilitation of the group meetings and ensure everyone's voices are heard.

Traverse will manage the administration of the group: taking minutes of meetings; sharing these and agendas with the group; and managing thank you payments for the group.

## **Clarifying the importance of independence, seniority and advocacy**

In our opening meeting, we asked group members to engage in a brief discussion to clarify the importance of independence, seniority and advocacy.

### **Independence**

It is vital that whatever responsibilities the role has, that the ISA has a level of autonomy that allows them to act on behalf of those that need the ISA role the most. There were contrasting ideas on how this can be achieved and where the ISA role should be placed to have the most impact.

Some suggested that the ISA should be completely separate from Trusts, to prevent the ISA being absorbed into existing hierarchies and to remove subconscious bias. However, there was some who felt that separating the role completely from Trusts may result in a lack of accountability for the ISA and that the role will require a familiarity with Trust processes in order to influence decision making.

There were also discussions surrounding the professional background of the ISA role, there were benefits of bringing medical experience to role as practitioners will be able to identify risks and issues faster, whilst being able to communicate them to other medical professionals clearly. On the other hand, group members were worried of 'white-coat syndrome', where patients automatically defer to medical practitioners over their own feelings or concerns. There was, therefore, a feeling that someone with a non-medical background would be easier to open up to.

### **Seniority**

Group members seemed to be clear that for the ISA role to be effective, it needed to 'have the right teeth'. This means that the role must have a level of seniority that will allow concerns to be heard and be able to influence decision making at the highest level.

Some worried that the more senior the ISA role is the less accessible they become. Many group members believed that the ISA should be able to offer direct support for service users. Someone with Board-level responsibilities would struggle to commit to this.



## Advocacy

Many felt that defining what advocacy work the ISA role would undertake would allow the other aspects of the role to be more easily defined. Group members emphasised that the ISA should not just be accessible when pregnancies are going wrong. Instead, all women should be entitled to receive support. Given that circumstances can change rapidly during a pregnancy, the ISA may not be able to act quick enough if not being involved and introduced early on.

However, it was particularly unclear how the process of advocacy would work. Group members were unsure at which level the ISA would first try to enact change, what powers they would have, and at what stage they would stop being involved.

### Next Session – Group Meeting 2 08/09/21

In the next meeting, the group will discuss in more detail what type of person would be suitable to become an ISA, and what the role itself would include. The purpose of next meeting is to create a:

- role descriptor, including draft job description, for the ISA; and
- person specification including training and experience required.