

Personal Advocacy Trust Board Chair Report 2017

Over the past several years we, as a board, had become concerned about our ability to meet the commitments to families we have made over many years to advocate for their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Our financial state and our service model did not seem adequate for going forward very far into the future. The Personal Advocacy Trust has made significant changes to try to honour those commitments. The board of PAT has made some tough calls over this time to better ensure we are around in the long term for our all our members.

As a Board, we remain focused and committed to seeing the Personal Advocacy Trust into a financially secure and robust organisation that can continue to provide ongoing support to its current members and for future new members.

As you will all be aware, two year ago, after a full review and report from Jan Dowland, into PAT's business, the board made one of those tough calls, we undertook to remove our commitment to those pre-support members under 40, and return any paid fees to families. We took this step because we were unsure that we would be around to provide them with any Advocacy when it might be needed in the future. We did offer a waiting list for when and if we could sort out our services to those families.

This wasn't an easy decision to make but we knew to be able to provide advocacy support to any of our members going forward that we didn't really have a choice. We understand for some members this seemed unreasonable and unfair and we did lose some members through this time we hope that they may return in the future as they see how PAT is now performing for its members.

PAT owes great thanks to IHC whom we contracted for one year to review and organise our records, systems and policies to bring them into line with current best practises. We also took to review the services and model of delivery of Advocacy to our members during that time.

To this end we changed from over 100 volunteers and many District Advisors to ten part-time paid Regional Advocates with a National Manager and part time administrator.

The Regional Advocates are a mixture of the old District Advisors and new employees in these roles. The National Manager was appointed in February last year but as he was traveling from Palmerston North each day, late last year he opted to get a job closer to home. This again allowed us to review at the role and responsibilities the organisation needed.

The part time administrator "Acted" in an interim management role for several months while we did this. Early this year we appointed Erika Butters into a part time National Director role and promoted one of the Regional Advocates into a Team Leader role for a few hours a week to support Erika at the "National Office". We have also gone "office-less" and the National Director and Team Leader work from home the same as the RA's.

The Office was in a small space leased from the Greater Knowledge Company (GKC). Even though we have left the building, they continue to let us use the board room for meetings and do some photocopying for free. Their support to PAT is greatly appreciated.

None of this work over the past two years would have been possible without the support from the IHC Foundation funding. We made an application to them in the early stages of this change to fund us through 4 years at a reducing rate. This is to assist us to get our house in order and to stand on our own two feet. We were successful with this application and we are very grateful for this financial support which is allowing us to get through this time of change and will allow us to go forward in a much more secure financial position.

Having clear measurable parameters for each full member and pre-support member and the systems to record and measure this, helps us to better ensure our sustainability going forward. We have introduced the two rates as a starting point (under and over 45 years) with an annual fee to cover the re-support costs each year. We may also consider other options in the future. If you have ideas about what else PAT might provide or other ways it might provide Professional Advocacy to its members we are always willing to look at new ideas.

At Board meetings, we hear about the many varied and sometimes concerning issues, some members are faced with and we discuss possible solutions or things we can do to help with the work the Regional Advocate's and others are doing, to seek the outcome the member wants. This is the reminder we all need about why we exist and why it is important that we remain a viable organisation going forward.

As a board, we manage many discretionary trusts for members and it is always interesting to see the variety of positive things the members use their money for and it's always great to see members using their money for what it was intended, to enhance their lives.

The board from two years ago made a commitment at the start of this process to see it through. From withdrawing membership to the under 40s to the reopening of new membership for all, which happened in June this year. I would just like to thank them all for their energy and commitment during these many changes.

I am sure the change hasn't finished but the bulk of the "new" way of working is in place and we think we are on track to the place where we do stand on our own feet. Members are getting regular visits and professional support. Staff have the resources and support they need to do their jobs.

Looking at this Trust deed this year has also highlighted that we turn 50 years old in December which seems like a major achievement to have reached, considering where we were at a few years ago.

As a board, we also looked at our systems and processes as well and have had time to look at our own roles and responsibilities. There are two places for contributors on their board and we see these as being the members voices at the table and it pleases me greatly that Don Bagnall (a parent) is staying on and that his voice and contribution is being added to by Catherine Cooke (a sibling) who has just joined us.

Doug Langford thank you for your work in keeping a good eye on the finances. Thank you to Ross Steele for your financial input and oversight into our financial investments and Gerard Letts for your legal knowledge which always allows us to consider things from many angles. Your input is also very much appreciated.

The input from Annette Brown and Janine Stewart who's their sector knowledge, connections and support is also hugely appreciated by me.

Finally, to Erika Butters, who came to PAT last year as a part-time Administrator but who has stepped up to the plate for us in so many ways. As I have already said Erika is now the National Director and her high standard of work, organisational skills and professionalism is hugely appreciated by myself and the rest of the board. Erika makes all our lives a bit easier. Thank you, Erika.

Barney Cooper
Board Chair
Personal Advocacy Trust.