



The '*Friends*' pack – Learning about Friendships was launched in October 2008. The programme was developed by members of the Choices team in response to findings in the strategic plan. It was evident from these findings that many of our service users wanted to make more friends. It is widely known that many people with intellectual disabilities tend to spend a vast portion of their time with other people with intellectual disabilities, with their families or with people who are paid to support them. It has been shown through research that loneliness and a restricted network of friends are regular features in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. It was also highlighted through Personal Outcome Measure interviews (POM's) that service users wanted meaningful friendships but lacked the skills to form these friendships.

The programme itself is delivered over 12 weeks in a community setting. Delivering the programme in a community setting has proven to be a key element of the course as it has given the course more meaning to the service users participating. Ideally the group sessions should be delivered to a group of 8 participants of mixed gender and should be delivered by 2 facilitators.

The sessions have been designed so that participants are involved in every stage of the learning process. The facilitators tutor the group in various areas of the course which leads to discussion groups amongst the participants. The exercises and games have been designed as ice-breakers and to increase the energy levels in the sessions. All of the exercises and games promote enhancing the skills needed in developing and maintaining friendships. We have included some practical sessions as it is vitally important for participants to put into practice what they have learnt in the sessions and therefore compound the skills learnt in the group.

Reflection is a key part of the course in that looking back on previous sessions will again compound the skills learnt. Having fun is probably the most important element of the programme, making friends is fun and being with your friends is fun therefore learning about building those friendships should be too.