



Promoting Inclusion for People with Intellectual Disabilities

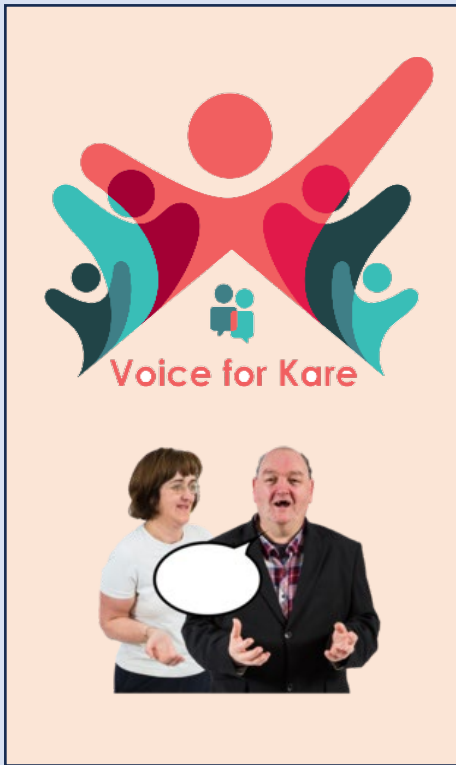


Voice for Kare Booklet



2008 to 2023

And Still Growing Strong



[About Voice for Kare \(video\)](#)

Welcome to Voice for Kare.

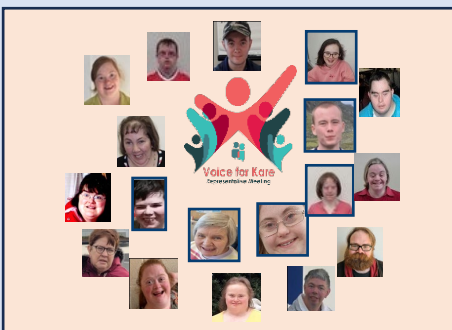
Voice for Kare is the Kare Service Users' advocacy group.

Voice for Kare helps people who use the service have a say in what goes on in Kare.



Voice for Kare consists of:

- **Voice for Kare Committee**
We meet once a month.



- **Voice for Kare Reps Group**

Each Local Area has Voice for Kare Representative. The Reps meet with the Committee once a month.



- **Local Area Voice for Kare group**

Most local groups meet once a month in their local services and houses. The local group deal with issues local to their area.



Background

Why did it start?

The Voice for Kare committee was established in 2008.



Although its seed was planted as early as 2001 when a group of Service Users from Kare took part in a European Project called 'Diversity in Dialogue'.



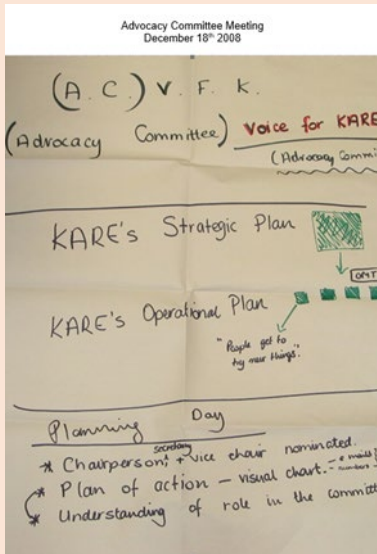
The project was about empowering people with a learning disability to get more involved with their country's politicians at the European level, and to organise Advocacy groups at a local level.



A few trips to Brussels happened over the time of the project and included meetings with each country's MEPs, and ended with a presentation to the European parliament about promoting the rights of people with learning disabilities.



Advocacy Project



How did it start?

When the Diversity in Dialogue project ended, there was no formal way for Service Users to meet with Kare management

Frieda Bent had been involved greatly with the Project and she arranged to meet up with a small group of interested service users on a monthly basis to talk about how to keep the momentum of the project going.

The group called themselves **S.U.R.E.** (Standing Up For Rights and Entitlements) Unfortunately, S.U.R.E. ended after a year as they had nowhere to bring their ideas.



One of the 1st Voice for Kare meetings



In 2006, Kare started an Advocacy Project and Frieda became the lead of the project. The group consisted of people who use the service and staff.

They looked at other organisations, for their existing models of Advocacy. The result of the Advocacy Project was the establishment of Voice For Kare in 2008 and the Committee was formed with Support from Frieda Bent and Sarah Kelly.

[Voice for Kare Committee \(video\)](#)

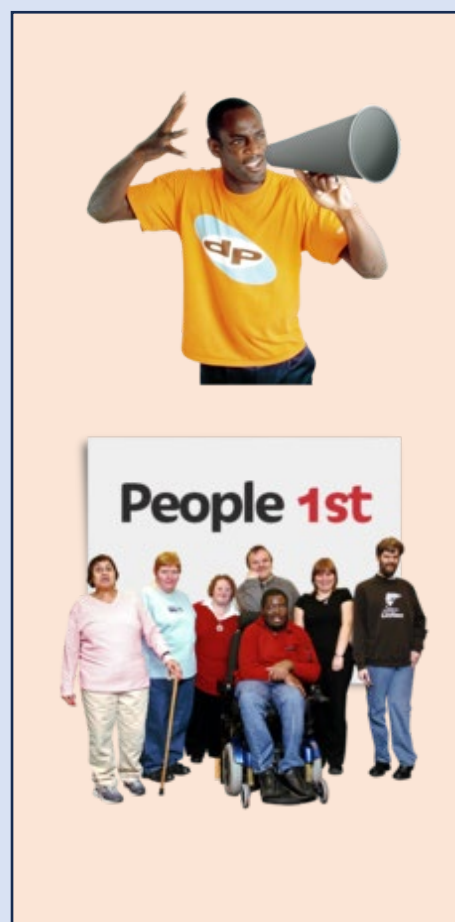
The VFK committee currently consists of seven people from different Kare services and locations. They are:

- David Leigh
- Declan Dowdall
- Eoin O'Malley
- Lisa McNabb
- Mags McGarvey
- Michael Connolly
- Seamus Doyle

The committee meets once a month, and we get involved in things to do with the organisation.

Some of our main roles are:

- To be a voice for Kare Service Users.
- To ensure we have a say on policy and issues affecting the lives of all Service Users in Kare.
- To work together with Service Users, management and board of management so that we have our voice heard and more of a say in how things are done in Kare
- Help with Organisational Policies.
- Help Kare do better.
- Link with the VFK Reps to pass on and receive Information at a Local level.





We also meet with the VFK Reps once a month to give advice and support on Kare's plans, policies and key activities for them to bring back to their local groups.

We bring their issues to management and give feedback to the Reps.

Since 2022, Voice for Kare is now supported by the Kare's Quality department Team.

Minutes of Committee meetings are put up online in the VFK team site on Kare Connect and also on the Kare Leap platform.

Deirdre Murphy, Kare CEO, is also sent a copy for her attention.



In 2023 we have started to provide a short written update to the board subcommittee on Quality, Risk and Safety about updates from VFK committee and Reps meetings.

They are given info on what the groups have been working on and any issues that may have been identified.

We update on a quarterly basis.



Key activities the committee have been involved in over the years:

Policies

We help Kare make policies that will support us to have the lives we want.

We give feedback on draft policies before they are finished so that our ideas are heard.



Easy to Read

We help Kare make information easy to read and accessible for everyone.

We have worked on many easy to read policies.

Last year we created an Easy Read Policy development sign off steps and checklist.

All Kare Easy Read Policies now must be signed off by VFK before they are launched.



Research

Committee members have participated in projects and consultation groups over the years.

David Leigh joined the disability participation and consultation network and has provided us with updates throughout the year.



David is also a member of an Inclusion Ireland steering committee, which is looking at the Irish Governments progress report on how Ireland is making changes to improve the rights of people with disabilities.

The VFK committee members keep an eye out for any conferences that might be beneficial to go to.

Along with some members of the Reps committee we have attended the National Advocacy conferences and we try to attend the Inclusion Ireland conferences.

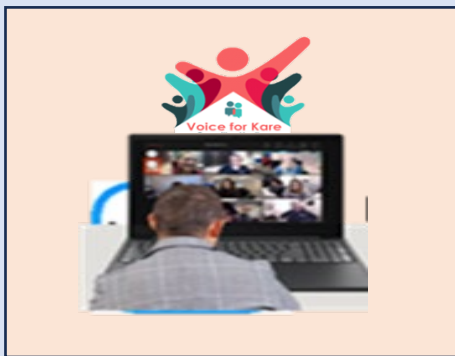


We have taken part in workshops about New Directions and Assisted Decision Making. We have also helped out with Digi Academy research in Trinity College.



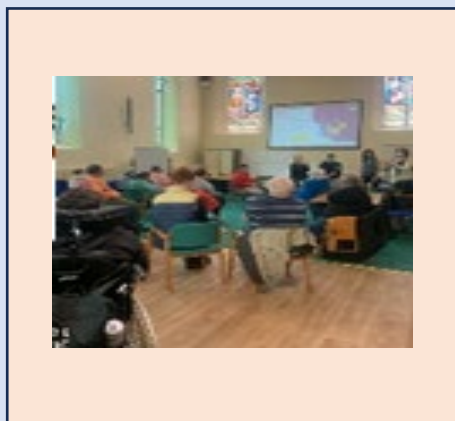
Information for Service Users

Another thing that the VFK Committee talked about was making a will. We think it is important that people should know about making a will. So, we were part of a group that put together a workshop for service users about making a will.



Reps and local groups.

One of the first activities we participated in was the setup of VFK Representatives and Local area VFK meetings.



During Covid we were very active in restarting the Reps meeting, which we started back online through Teams meetings in March 2021.

Teams meetings continued until March 2022 when we were then able to get back to in person meetings.



Advocating re Covid Restrictions.

Covid-19 restrictions had a major impact on Kare Service users, and we wrote to the HSE about reducing the restrictions on Kare and other disability organisations.



Kare Strategic Plan

In 2021, the VFK group presented the findings of the 'Find a Better Way' project to the SPG group. The project's remaining actions were formally handed over to the Strategic Plan project related to 'Communications'.

In 2022 there were several opportunities to meet with project teams for the strategic plan.



Annual Report

VFK committee write an article for the Kare annual report each year, sharing the work that the VFK have done over the year.

The annual reports are distributed across all Kare locations and are also available online.

Voice for Kare Reps (video)

The VFK Reps group consists of a Service User representative from the different Kare local area locations.

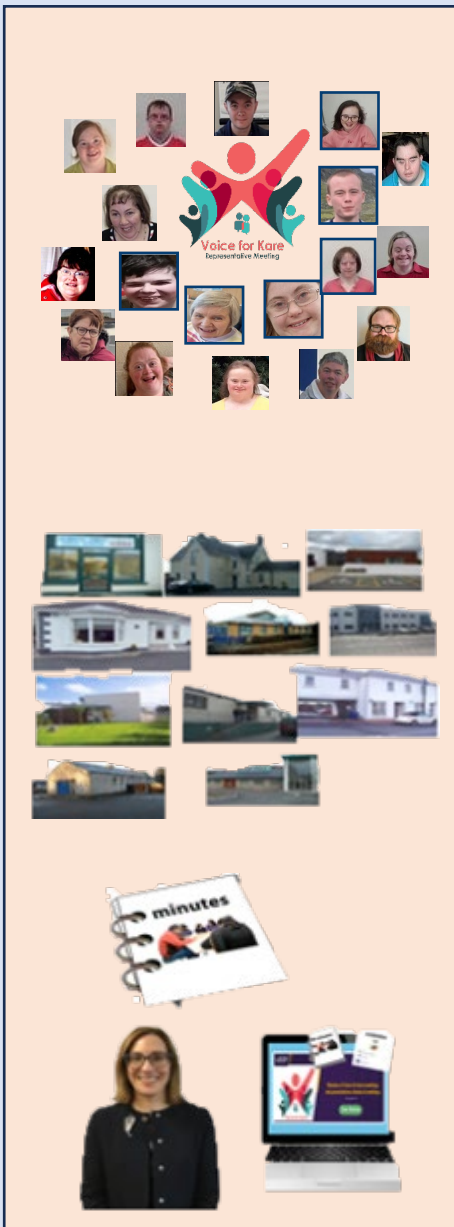
The VFK Reps are elected by their local area groups.

The Reps attend a monthly VFK Reps meeting which is chaired by the committee.

Staff support the Committee and Reps to help the meeting run well.

Minutes of Reps meetings are put up online in the VFK team site on Kare Connect and also on the Kare Leap platform.

Deirdre Murphy CEO is also sent a copy for her attention.





Some of the Reps' roles are:

1. Get updates from the VFK Committee on policies and other important things.
2. Tell the Reps Group what is going on in their area.
3. Bring information back from Rep's meeting to their local meeting.
4. Talk about problems in their local area and ask for help from the VFK committee if they cannot be resolved locally.
5. Get information on Kare's policies and plans.
6. Give their views and opinion about issues that might be affecting them.
7. Facilitate their local area meeting.
8. Volunteer to go to meetings and conferences, and policy updates.

The VFK meetings have been a great way for getting information to Kare Service users.

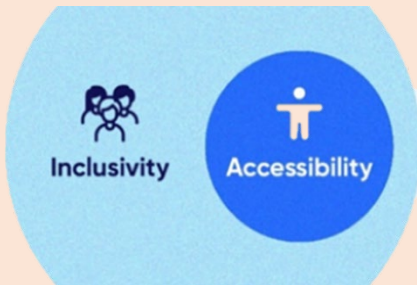
The Reps play an important role in supporting the committee by getting involved in working groups and projects and by keeping the committee up to date with issues on the ground.

They are also responsible for bringing back important information to their local area group meetings.





Changing Places Toilet



Key activities Reps have been involved in over the years:

Changing Places

VFK Reps group got involved in the Changing Places campaign which highlights the need for more and better wheelchair toilet facilities for people who need to use hoists and changing tables.

Accessibility and Inclusion are vital. To be able to access a bathroom suitable for your individual needs is a basic human right.

VFK Reps engaged in contacting many local politicians, facilities, shopping centres, cinemas and businesses to highlight this campaign.



Conferences and Research

VFK Reps have attended conferences and Breda Cross attended a conference organised by the Inclusive Research Network about people being supported to live where and with whom they want.

Other conferences that Reps have attended over the years have been:

- National Advocacy conferences
- Inclusion Ireland conferences
- Workshops on New Directions



Workshops

We ran many workshops at our Reps meetings, including ones on:

- The National Disability Strategy Inclusion Plan.
- Health information days for men and women.
- General elections and how important it is for people to use your vote.
- Roles of a Rep and facilitating meetings.
- Unlocking Freedom, The role of adult education in supporting people with disabilities in the community.
- New legislation that will affect us, such as the Assisted Decision Making Act, HIQA, New Directions.



Policies and organisational issues

Having a say in the Easy Read policy development process.

We have also had many policy holders come to our meetings to discuss various policies over the years.

Heads of departments come to meetings with us to discuss service users' issues, such as transport, recreation, respite and local service facilities.

Local Area Voice for Kare Groups (video)

Most local groups meet once a month in their local services and houses. The local group deal with issues local to their area.

Each local group has a VFK Rep who gets elected by the service users in their area

The local group meetings are a great opportunity for people to discuss what is happening in their centres and houses.

It is also an opportunity for them to be kept informed on what is happening in Kare.

The VFK Rep for each area will bring back information from VFK meetings for the local group to give feedback.

The local Rep will go through the VFK Reps meeting minutes, which also will include news from the other local areas.

It is a good time for planning activities and events in their local areas, as everyone is together for the meeting.





The meetings give everyone a chance to say what they think and hear what other people think. It gives people a chance to have a say in what happens in their centre or house.



Each local area meeting has an agenda and minutes are also kept.



The agenda will cover topics such as minutes of previous meeting, news from Kare, Local news, easy read policy reviews, health and safety, and any other business.



The local area VFK Rep is usually supported by a staff member to facilitate the meetings and prepare minutes and agenda.

Minutes of local area meetings are put up online in their area team site on Kare Connect.



Where do issues go:

Voice for Kare group is also a support for service users who need help in getting local issues resolved.

Reps can bring local issues to the VFK Reps meetings that they are having a difficulty with getting resolved.



The Reps and Committee groups will discuss these issues at their meetings and offer advice and support in getting things resolved.



Some of the issues VFK have supported Service Users with over the years have included:

- Staffing levels in local areas leading to reduced support for service users to attend activities, events, training classes etc.



- Transport problems like lack of buses or problems with the buses, like poor heating or inadequate steps on to the buses.



- Problems with respite facilities such as poor heating, wheelchair accessibility etc.



- Staff changes. VFK members were involved in the development of the Staff Changes Policy where service users had to be given 2 weeks' notice when a staff member in their local area was transferring to another location.



[Next actions planned for 2024 onwards \(video\)](#)

Services and life are now getting back to normal after a hard few years with Covid.

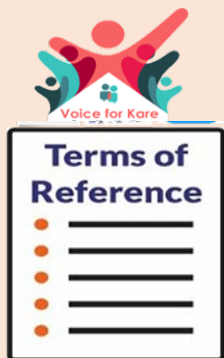
Voice For Kare has big plans for 2024 and the years ahead.



With the introduction of New Directions into adult day services, we believe the voice of Service Users should be strengthened.



We want to work to ensure that we have meaningful participation and direct involvement in the ongoing planning, evaluation and transformation of disability services in Ireland and Kare.



Our plans for 2024 are:

- Easy read policy development
- Update The VFK Terms of Reference for the 3 different VFK groups.



- Support Kare project for National Safeguarding week November 2023.
- Look at ways of strengthening VFK at a local area level.



- Meet with the Kare Board annually and continue to provide VFK quarterly reports to the Board of Kare on what we have been working on and any issues we may have identified.



- Attendance at Conferences nationally.
- Research involvement.



How can you get involved?

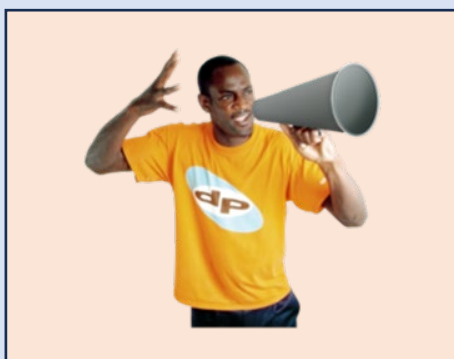
Support your Local area VFK Rep with the local area meetings.

Look up the VFK minutes from the Reps and committee meetings and see if they are items/actions on the agendas you would like to get involved in.



If your local area does not have a VFK Rep, then consider putting yourself forward to be the Rep or deputy Rep.

Volunteer to work on Kare projects.
Help review easy read policies.



Voice For Kare is about supporting Service Users to understand your rights.

Speaking up for yourself and others if they cannot speak for themselves.

Taking action and taking control of your life.



We hope you enjoyed this Information Booklet, and if you would like more information about Voice for Kare, our committee members are always available to talk to.