

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHARITY TRUSTEE

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TRUSTEE OF NATIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THE PATIENT ADVOCACY SERVICE



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## Why did you decide to join a charity board?

I'd been wanting to give back and do some kind of volunteer work for a while. I had recently finished an MBA and felt settled in my job, so I knew I had the headspace to take on something new, but I wasn't sure how I could contribute most effectively. Then I heard about the Future Board Leaders programme and it seemed like all the pieces were falling into place! I joined one of the informational zoom calls to find out more and haven't looked back since.

## What are your typical tasks and duties on the board?

We hold regular board meetings throughout the year and I also sit on one of the sub committees, which meets about once per quarter. A lot of the work I do is prepping for these meetings - reading the board papers thoroughly ahead of time, to make sure I'm fully informed for each meeting and have prepared my thoughts in advance for items we need to discuss or approve. I'd also generally keep abreast of any news stories or policy developments in the sector, in case it has an impact on the organisation.

As a board, our duty is to ensure the overall governance and running of the organisation is being carried out correctly. We would also support the leadership team in NAS and PAS. We feed into strategic goals, to make sure we have clearly focused priorities for the next number of years and ensure we are working towards achieving them.

## What has challenged you in your trustee role?

At the start, it would have been getting up to speed with all the different strands of work and the rhythm of board meetings. I've been in my position about 18 months now and the challenge as a trustee is staying focused at a strategic level and not getting into the more operational side of things, like you would as a staff member. Being a charitable organisation, the constraints due to limited resources is also hard. When you see the work that's being done with the current resources that are in place, it's hard not to get frustrated when you think of how much more could be achieved with additional funding!

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## What has been the biggest reward or benefit in becoming a trustee?

Learning more about the fantastic work of NAS and PAS. Part of our board updates include (anonymous) case studies of people that have been helped by an advocate in the past few months and it's always very emotional reading about their situations and the way their lives have been transformed as a result of their engagement with the service. Knowing that the work I do plays a small part in this is hugely rewarding.

## What would you say to someone thinking about joining a charity board?

Do it! Apply for it and the worst they'll do is say no. You have your own unique skills and experiences to bring to the role, no matter how inexperienced you think you are. Our board is made up of people with a mix of different backgrounds, ages and professional experiences and we are the stronger for it. There are so many charities in Ireland, it shouldn't be too hard to find one that you have an affinity with. It is a big responsibility to be a charity trustee, but keep the staff and service users at the centre of your decision making process and you can't go wrong. It's hugely rewarding and the skills and confidence you'll gain from it will help you in different areas of your life.