

# Advocacy & Community



Before we start reading through this information book, please take a moment to stop and think about 'community'.

What does community mean to you and your life?

"community is a group of people with similar interests"

"A community is a group of people with shared values, behaviours and artifacts"

"community is about growing with others"

"community is another word for society"

"community is a sense of belonging.  
Without it, we are not human"

# What is 'community'?

The word 'community' is often used to describe a particular area or group of people who are considered to be a unit because of their common ideas, interests, goals or circumstances.

For this training, we would like you to think about the different types of community you and your advocacy partners share, contribute to and enjoy, and how your advocacy can enhance the lives of people.

We believe the starting point for this is to begin with self advocacy and build on people's strengths.

# Community - bringing people together

As an advocate, you may want to think about community as bringing together people who have shared interests or causes.

Talk to your partner about what makes them excited and brings them joy. What interests make them happy and see if there is a way of developing this through community. Do they have any special interests they would like to pursue or use to meet new people?

# Community - bringing people together

Does the person love sport - which sport? Is it playing, watching, studying the game or knowing the statistics? Do they love arts and crafts? Acting? Gardening? Cooking? Politics? Trains? Fashion? Make up? Films? Quizzes? History? Airplanes? Photography? Dancing? Star Gazing? Bird watching? (...you get the idea!)

Find out what is available locally and see if they would like to develop this interest with other people.

As an advocate, you should leave people better connected and with more 'natural allies' in their life as a result of your involvement. Circles of friendship should be bigger.

# Story - local representatives

In 2000, Asist launched a semi-autonomous project in Stoke-on-Trent called REACH to support self advocacy amongst groups of people with a learning disability.

REACH Project Workers work with communities of people with a learning disability to elect local representatives who come together to form a REACH Parliament

REACH members:

- speak up for people with learning disabilities in Stoke on Trent as well as speaking up about their communities
- work together with Universities to make tools and resources that help people to communicate and speak up

Check out their website <https://reach-advocacy.com/>



# Where is 'Community'?

Community is often experienced as a place or space.

People link communities to where people are - for instance a college community will share a college space, a sporting community may meet at the sporting ground, a craft group may meet at the local library.

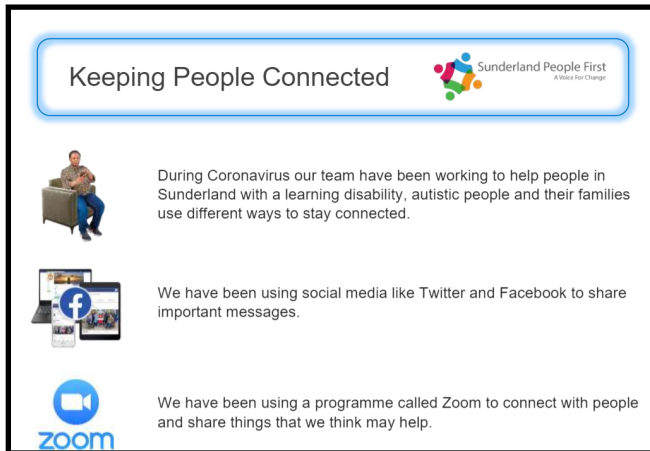
All of these are really important.

However community can also be a virtual community. Think about social media and how this can connect people from across space incredibly easily! You may want to think about how people may want to engage in online communities to connect and contribute.


# Story - during Covid


During the Covid Pandemic, the country faced locked down and traditional face to face to meetings had to stop. One self advocacy group, Sunderland People First, embraced the opportunity provided by remote meeting platforms such as zoom, and moved meetings on line. They provided training to people and support videos which meant people could continue to meet on line up to three times a week.


Community can take place on line too!




**Keeping People Connected**

 Sunderland People First  
A Voice for Change

 During Coronavirus our team have been working to help people in Sunderland with a learning disability, autistic people and their families use different ways to stay connected.

 We have been using social media like Twitter and Facebook to share important messages.

 We have been using a programme called Zoom to connect with people and share things that we think may help.

<http://sunderlandpeoplefirst.com/>

# Community through shared experiences

Having shared experiences can bring people together in community too. Groups take place every day which enable people to meet, share and draw on their shared experience(s).

Peer advocacy is a beautiful example of communities coming together to offer mutual support and advocacy. Find out about the groups that meet in your local area and make sure you are connected so you can support anyone who wishes to explore this further and get involved.

# Citizenship

The official definition of citizenship is 'the state of being a member of a particular country and having rights because of this'.

Citizenship is a critical part of advocacy because advocacy is often needed - and has developed - in response to a person (or group of people) being ignored, ostracised, othered and excluded from the community they live in.

If you think about the historical experience of how people with a Disability, or mental health condition have been treated, there are too many horrific examples where people have been effectively 'removed' from society and warehoused away. People were excluded from society and put into workhouses, asylums and large institutional settings. The legacy of this still lasts even today and there is much to be done to ensure that everyone is treated as an equal and active citizen of their community.

"We are all citizens, we are all  
equal and we all have a  
contribution to make"

*<https://citizen-network.org>*

# Community advocacy

Community advocacy doesn't have a specific meaning or definition. At its simplest, community advocacy describes advocacy that takes place in the community. But as most advocacy takes place with people in 'community' spaces, then couldn't all of advocacy be described as community advocacy?

We think yep! It can be!

Mental Health Advocacy mostly takes place within the community of the hospital settings - and strong IMHA services should have strong ties with peer advocacy groups who support and enable communities of shared experience. Similarly Care Act advocacy can't effectively take place without understanding the person's community and who is important to them....

# Community advocacy

...but for the purposes of the qualification and this training pack, we are using two different phrases:

- statutory advocacy means the type of advocacy that is protected by law. This happens when a piece of legislation introduces a legal right to access an independent advocate
- community advocacy is everything else!

# Community advocacy

When thinking about community advocacy you might want to think about the following elements:

## **Increasing people's connections**

Whatever advocacy support you are offering and providing, it is worth thinking about and exploring with your partner how they feel about the relationships in their life. Where people are interested in extending these relationships, or developing new ones, then as the advocate you can support self advocacy as a way of looking into new connections.

If you are using non instructed advocacy, it is really important to consider whether the person would want increased connections. Talk to people who know them well and take action where this could lead to more happiness!



# Community advocacy

## Increasing people's contribution

Having and enjoying citizenship is not just about what you get! Citizenship includes the notion that people contribute to the society and community they live in. One of the biggest problems with 'warehousing' people who need adult care in large institutional settings is that they are hidden away from communities and people are denied opportunity to be and feel part of the local area.

As an advocate, think and explore with your partner how and where they have chance to contribute to their community. Would they like more or less of this? The opportunities are endless and not limited to volunteering in the local charity shop! What paid opportunities are there? Are they interested in being a trustee of a local service?

# Community advocacy

## Being part of democracy

Having and enjoying citizenship also extends to voting - where the person wants to! Your partner may need support in taking up their democratic right to vote - so make sure you talk to them about voting and whether this is something they would to continue to do.

Check out 'Every Vote Counts'. This organisation works with people with a learning disability and people who support them to develop easy information about politics, how to get involved and how to have a say in how the country is run.

*<https://www.everyvotecounts.org.uk/>*

"We are want to live in the place  
we call home with the people and  
things we love, in communities  
where we look out for one  
another, doing things that matter  
to us"

*#socialcarefuture*

# The future of social care?

"#socialcarefuture is a growing movement of people with a shared commitment to bring about major positive change in what is currently called 'social care'. It's for those who want to take part in imagining, communicating and creating together a future where what we currently call social care makes a major contribution to everyone's wellbeing and which, as a result, will enjoy high levels of public - and hence - political - support."

Check out Social Care Future - <https://socialcarefuture.org.uk/>

# Issues in community advocacy

People using and drawing on advocacy might want short, medium or long term support on a range of issues. These may include:

Life decisions

For example life planning (especially coming out of hospital), decisions around housing and where to live, or end of life planning

Relationships

For example making changes to relationships (seeing or stopping visits), developing new friendships or accessing groups

Keeping safe

For example disclosing abuse, going through safeguarding processes, dealing and reporting hate crime.

# Issues in community advocacy

## Financial Support

For example your partner may want support to access specialist benefits, advice, apply for allowances, understand rules around working and benefits.

## Accessing services

For example accessing universal services such as adult social care, Continuing Healthcare, mental health support, employment or specialist services

## Using services

For example making decisions about care or support planning, understanding what things are available, complaining when things don't go right

## Citizenship

For example voting, employment.

# Issues in community advocacy

The community advocate can offer support on an unlimited range of issues - so be prepared for requests for support on potentially anything!

Please return to your  
e-learning for the  
next section of  
learning

