

What is Advocacy?

Introductory Booklet



A sunset over a body of water with a dark overlay on the left side containing text.

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What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is all about listening to a person and then supporting them to take control and have their voice heard. Advocacy in its broadest sense can be undertaken by any person and is often a part of health and social care roles. Social workers for instance need to advocate for the children and families they support by listening to their needs. Parents are also good examples of advocates as they often need to 'stick up' for their children and promote their rights.

Advocacy is a way of empowering people to:

- articulate their views, wishes and feelings either themselves or through a competent and independent voice,
- safeguard their rights,
- ensure that services are accessible and appropriate, and identify gaps in service provision,
- ensure that the voice of the person is heard, and influences decisions made about him by those in a position of power.



However there are differences between the type of generic advocacy undertaken by any person and the type of specialist advocacy provided by an Independent Advocate.

Independent Advocacy is concerned with working from a person centred perspective. The person is always in control of the advocacy process, including terminating it. This means that an independent advocate:

- Will always plan from the person's definition of the problem
- Will always work towards whatever outcome the person wants
- Will provide access to information to enable the person to make their own decision
- Will help the person to explore their options - without bias
- Takes action to promote and protect the person's legal human rights
- Recognises the person as having the most specialised knowledge of their life, views, wishes and feelings

An independent advocate does not:

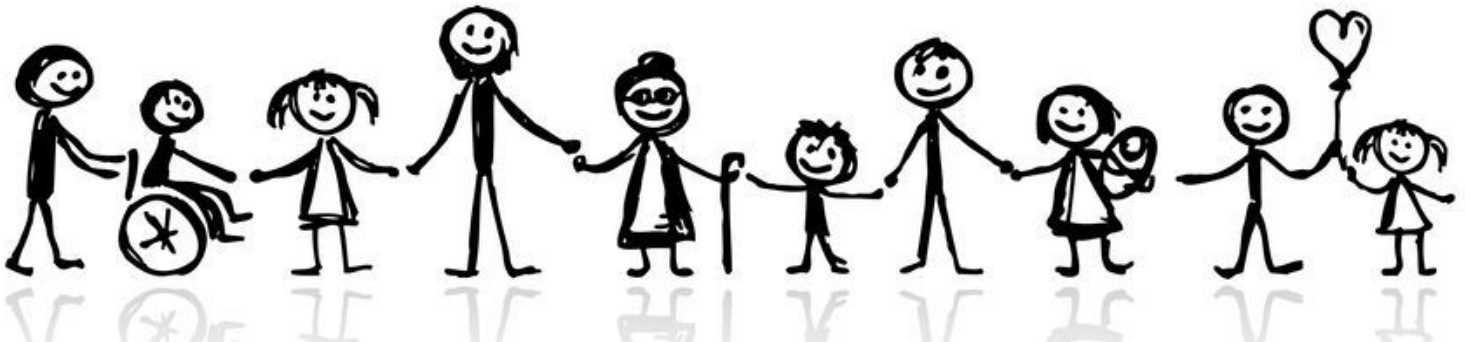
- Seek to influence the person's decisions, or persuade them to take /not take, a particular course of action
- Take a view of the best interests of the person,
- Take a view of the best interests of any third parties, (service providers, carers etc.,)
- Counsel, advise or mediate
- Withhold information from a person
- Make decisions on behalf of a person without checking out with them what they want to happen

Definitions of advocacy (taken from the Advocacy Code of Practice)

Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need. Advocates and advocacy providers work in partnership with the people they support and take their side. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice.

Definition of non-instructed advocacy

Non-instructed advocacy takes place when a person lacks the capacity to instruct an advocate. The non-instructed advocate seeks to uphold the person's rights; ensure fair and equal treatment and access to services; and make certain that decisions are taken with due consideration for all relevant factors which must include the person's unique preferences and perspectives.



Advocacy Principles

There are four key principles which underpin the work of advocacy services.

Advocates are ALWAYS:

- Independent
- person led
- Confidential
- Re-balancing power

Independence

It is important that advocacy services are independent from service providers. This allows the service to promote the wishes and feelings of the person without being restricted by conflicts of interests or partiality.

If the advocacy service is developed and managed by an organisation which provides other type of services (such as residential care, complaint investigations, health services or fostering) they may not be able to demonstrate their independence and pursue people's outcomes freely.



Being person Led

Advocates take instruction and are led 100% by the person receiving advocacy – no matter what the person wants to happen or what choices they want to make. This can be challenging for some advocates particularly when the person wants to make a decision that the advocate disagrees with or thinks is risky –for instance a young person who wants to return home to live with abusive parents or a patient who wants to discontinue with their medication.

It is of paramount importance that advocates do not take a view of what they feel is in the best interests of the person they are advocating with. What the advocate's personal view about the course of action the person should take is irrelevant and must never be used to influence the person's choice. It is part of the advocate's role to help people explore their options and look at potential outcomes from any particular course of action, but advocates must do this without direct or indirect persuasion. Instead, the advocate must respect and support the person's final choice.

Your partner will have other people in their lives whose role is to make decisions based on their best interests. You are there to ensure that your partner's wishes, views and feelings – whatever others may think of them – genuinely form part of the decision-making process. Your partner has a right to have their voice heard and their views respectfully taken into account, whatever they are.



Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that advocates can provide a safe space for people to work out what they want with many advocacy services working to higher thresholds of confidentiality than other agencies. Many people who use advocacy, do so because they want confidential support.

This means that except in cases of immediate and severe risk to the person or others, advocacy organisations would not breach a person's confidentiality by reporting concerns about their welfare. Advocacy services would, however, work with the person to try to address and resolve concerns about involving other services, and explore ways of keeping them safe. This does not mean however, advocacy services do not take concerns lightly nor fail to act when they have concerns, but as an agency that seeks to empower their partners, advocacy recognises that it is important to think carefully before acting against the express wishes of a person.

When confidentiality does have to be breached without permission, wherever possible the advocate will inform the person at the earliest opportunity of the reasons for doing so, giving them opportunities to discuss other alternatives and to plan for likely outcomes. Every effort is made to ensure the person is given the maximum control possible over the process of breaching confidentiality, and to keep them informed at every stage of any action that we intend to take.



Re-balancing Power



When people receive health and care services, there is often a shift in power with the person receiving services suddenly being viewed as a 'vulnerable person in need'. Opportunities to maintain independence, make decisions, exercise control and take power are suddenly reduced.

An essential principle which underpins any advocacy work is that of re-balancing this power shift. It is concerned with supporting people to take control over their lives and decisions that are made about them. This increases their self esteem and confidence thereby giving them a sense of their own ability to resolve difficulties and challenges. This is more likely to happen if advocates are not undertaking all the work themselves, but are encouraging people to be involved in as much of the advocacy process as they are willing to.

You must see people as active participants who draw on care and support in order to live their lives as they choose.

Advocacy Values

Advocacy is underpinned and shaped by a number of values:

Believing that people should lead decisions that are made about their lives

Advocacy recognises the person as having the most specialised knowledge of their life, views, wishes and feelings and believes that people are the best experts about their lives.

Advocacy recognises the need for people to take ownership of their own life and this starts with decision making. Advocacy promotes the right for people to be heard and believes that people can suffer discrimination and be disadvantaged when they are not involved in the planning of services and in decisions affecting them.

Respecting the rights of people to have their views, wishes and feelings listened to and taken seriously, whatever they are

Advocates must accept and respect the choices their partner makes, their wishes and their views. Advocates recognise that people are diverse and have a range of experiences and values. This means that advocates may at times not understand or agree with what their partner wants or instructs them to do – but the advocate would promote that course of action or views regardless.

Listening to and learning from people

Advocacy services value having input from people who use advocacy about the running of the service. This supports the principles of re-balancing power and being client led.

Advocacy organisations must take action to ensure that people who receive the advocacy service can influence its running.

Supporting people to speak for themselves wherever possible if they wish to

Advocacy recognises the value of people speaking up for themselves. Not only can this lead to an increase in confidence and self esteem but can also mean that the person may be able to self advocate next time and not even need the support of an advocate.

Supporting people to self advocate has benefits for the advocate too: it means the person is much more likely to a) get what they want to say right and b) ensure what they say reflects any late feelings, or changes, which appear on the day.

Everyone can communicate

All people, including those with profound communication and/or learning disabilities, have the ability to make their wishes and feelings known, providing sufficient time and resources are made available to obtain them. Advocates must take action to find out preferred methods of communication and seek out opportunities to help people communicate their views.

Accepting that empowerment for people may mean less power for others involved in their lives

Advocacy often involves re-balancing power and supporting the person to 'take back' power from others in charge. This inevitably means that people may fight against their loss or perceived loss of power.

Effective advocates often try to work to win-win situations so that people do not feel a loss of power is a bad thing – but that the increase in power by the person has positive advantages for everyone.

Advocacy Role

The advocacy role is primarily about supporting a person to be heard. In order to do this however the advocate may need to undertake a number of the following tasks depending on what the person wants to happen and how they want it to happen.

Listening

This is probably described as the most important role of the advocate. In order to be an effective listener, advocates must:

- be non judgemental
- offer high levels of confidentiality
- demonstrate their independence from other service providers
- only work for the person and only do what they want
- take as much time as is needed to form effective communication strategies – especially with people who use alternative or augmented forms of communication
- offer privacy



Practical Helper

-Writing letters

The person receiving advocacy support may decide they want to put their issues in writing. This could be done with the person writing in their own voice, (i.e. 1st person), or it could be written by the advocate on behalf of the person. If the person wants the advocate to write it on their behalf, it is essential that the advocate ensures the letter truly reflects what the person wants to say – and not what the advocate wants to say or thinks.

Letters should not normally be written on organisational letter head and when the advocate writes on behalf of the person it should still be signed by the person (not the advocate).

-Making phone calls

The person may decide that they would like an advocate to contact someone on his/her behalf by telephone. When this happens it must be understood that an advocate cannot agree on behalf of the person they are advocating with i.e. agree to a certain course of action without checking this out. Unless the advocate has instruction to agree to outcomes, they cannot possibly know with certainty what a person may want to happen.

Attending Meetings

People receiving support from health and social care services should have regular meetings to discuss their care, treatment and support packages. People have a right to have their views and wishes taken into account during any meeting and review process.

For many people however, attending meetings can be difficult and they may ask for advocacy support. The advocate should discuss with the person before the meeting, what issues they want raised at the meeting and **how** they want that information presented to the meeting, (for instance if they want the advocate to speak on their behalf; if they want to raise the issues themselves with the advocate taking a supporting role; if they want the issues circulated as a document etc).

The advocate should always 'check-out' with the person that they understand what is being proposed as the meeting progresses, e.g. clarifying timeframes etc.

After the meeting the person and the advocate will generally talk about what was discussed and what may happen next.

As a general rule, advocates should not attend meetings or hold information which is not given to their advocacy partner as this would mean the advocate held information that the person had not consented to and might not be aware of.



Providing emotional support

Whilst advocacy is definitely not counselling, it is entirely natural and appropriate for advocates to provide emotional support in the form of:

- reassurance
- permission to feel certain things or make particular choices
- consistency
- being on 'their side'
- acceptance and validation of feelings, experiences and desires

Challenging decisions

Advocates are often required to challenge decisions could be because the person is unhappy with the proposed decision or outcome, or because the advocate/person is unhappy with the decision making process itself.

Challenging decisions often start with simple questioning and checking things out however advocates are expected to escalate things where necessary using the full range of complaints, dispute and legal resolution processes.



Accessing information

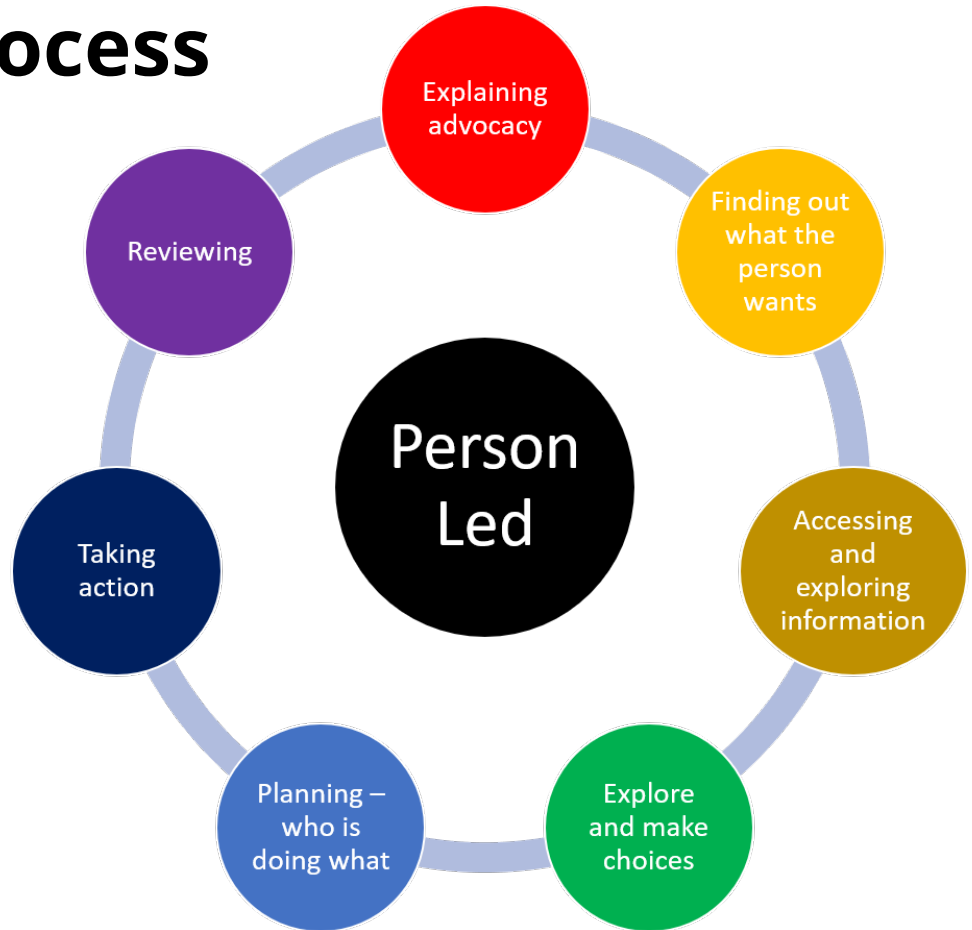
The advocate may need to access information and provide it in a format which is easily understood. This is particularly important when supporting people who have learning disabilities, lack capacity or have particular health needs (such as dementia).

Be careful when accessing information! Lots of people will be able to access information for themselves - but with some support from the advocate. Try to avoid doing things for a person (like finding out answers to specific questions) that they are able and may want to do for themselves. Try to always promote self advocacy as a tool when accessing information, wherever you can.

Advocacy Process

Every advocacy relationship will be unique - and will develop according to the pace, style, preferences and needs of the person.

Most relationships will however go through the following steps (but do bear in mind these are cyclic and can often be interchangeable).



Step 1 Explaining advocacy

At the first contact the advocate will talk about their role and what an advocate will, and won't do. They will explain that advocates do not have a magic wand – some things may not change as a result of working with a advocate – all an advocate can promise is that they will work to ensure that the person's views are 'heard' by the people that are making important decisions about their lives.

By taking time during the first meeting to explain the advocacy role and discuss how advocacy can help, the advocate can empower the person to take control in deciding whether advocacy is the right type of support. When this is done correctly, the person is able to have clear expectations of how an advocate can help.

The first meeting is also the time to explain boundaries, in particular explaining confidentiality. Only by explaining the limits and thresholds to confidentiality and outlining in which circumstances confidentiality could not be maintained is the person empowered to decide which information they will share.

However it is important that the initial meeting does not turn into a meeting where the advocate does all the communication and takes over! Good advocacy means you are listening to the person and going at their pace.

Step 2 Establishing what the person wants

Many people come to the advocacy service with a specific outcome or goal in mind and ask the advocate to help them to achieve this. This leads to many people describing advocacy as helping a person get what they want. Whilst this can be a bit crude, it accurately recognises that advocacy is not just about listening and talking about what should happen but also involves working towards a specific goal or outcome.

The goal can be anything from being heard to getting an apology. To some extent it matters less what the goal is and more that both advocate and partner understand what they are working towards.

It is very important that advocates do not filter out the issues or outcomes that people want – even when they may appear difficult, risky or impractical. If a person asks for their advocate to help them return home to live, even though they clearly cannot cope on their own, or returning home is dangerous because an abuser still lives there, the advocate would still support this person to achieve their desired outcome.

Step 3. Providing and exploring information

People often need information in order to make their choices - this could be help to access written information, time to read through information, help to understand it, opportunity to experience choices etc. By providing unbiased support, an advocate can really help a person work out how they feel about information and choices available.

Many people also report not having a great understanding of their rights, much less knowing how to act on them. By giving people information advocates are providing tools which help them to access rights, choices and options, which may otherwise have been denied them.

When providing information consider:

- which information to provide
 - the source and how reliable it is
 - the best way to present the information
- the need to review the information

Step 4. Helping the person explore choices

When faced with a range of information, the advocate will help the person to explore their choices and establish their preferred goal .

Advocates must remember that everyone is different and has a different idea of good' and 'bad' choices. Some people for instance would be quite scared of living alone, whereas others would find it very overwhelming to live with strangers in a home. You must demonstrate a non-judgemental approach and see there are no bad or good choices, just choices.

If an advocate finds the person wants to make a choice which is potentially very risky or improbable, it is useful to say "I hear what you are saying. You want to .. and this is what we are going to aim for. If this cannot happen what would be your second choice?... if this cannot happen what would be your third option?" and so on. With this approach you avoid gate-keeping what choices are preferred, but have worked out a list of outcomes the person would be happy with.

Step 5. Planning

Once the person accessed information, explored their choices and options and made a decision on what they want to happen, the advocate and partner will next look at what steps should be taken to get there.

It is essential that within all planning, the person retains control and is supported to decide how to proceed. This includes deciding who is undertaking which roles and tasks and if the person feels able to complete any of the tasks themselves.



Step 6. Taking action

In order to support people to be heard, advocates must take action - especially in promoting self advocacy as a way for the individual to achieve their goal.

Advocates during this stage should avoid being put off from supporting a person to achieve options that may be unrealistic or improbable. Advocates have in the past been surprised by either having a 'no' response to the seemingly simple and a 'yes' response to a request which they thought would be difficult.



Step 7. Review and end

Once all actions have been taken the advocate will review what has happened with the person. This allows the following to take place:

- to check if the original objective(s) has been achieved (and if not can anything else be done)
- to see if things have changed (like personal experiences or opportunities).
- to see if the person wants support from a different type of service.
- to see if the person was satisfied with the work of the advocate and learn what worked well
- to identify what skills the person has developed

Depending on the outcome of the evaluation the advocacy support is either ended (particularly when the person is happy with the outcome – which may or may not be their original outcome) or the advocate returns to the information giving, planning etc stages

Advocacy Models

There are different *types* of advocacy which have developed which are traditionally called advocacy models.

Citizen Advocacy

Citizen advocacy is seen as a long term partnership between two people: the person receiving the advocacy support and the advocate. The advocate will be part of the person's 'circle of support' - this is a circle of natural allies who can be called on to support the person to make decisions or express their views and preferences on issues that affect their lives.

Self Advocacy

Self advocacy describes when a person is already able, or is supported, to advocate for themselves. An advocate's role might be to support a person to develop the skills and confidence they need to learn to speak up for themselves. Self advocacy can be a model in its own right or can be used as part of another model – such as issue based or citizen advocacy.

Peer Advocacy

Peer advocacy is a partnership between two or more people who have shared experiences - for instance people who have a learning disability, have mental health problems or are care leavers.

Through having direct experience of issues their partner faces, the peer advocate is able to support them to make decisions and achieve their goal(s).

Advocacy Models

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Indirect Advocacy

There are many forms of indirect or informal advocacy:

- Campaigning groups can foster a greater awareness of individual rights and entitlements of various groups
- People or organisations working alongside service providers (statutory, voluntary or private sector) to ensure there is involvement in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services of people with lived experience
- Advocacy as a key aspect of other roles such as social work, nursing or fostering

Residential Visiting Advocacy

Visiting advocacy involves advocates being linked with residential establishments, care homes, day centres, youth centres etc., to provide an independent person for people to raise issues with. Advocates visit regularly, usually monthly, to build up relationships with people and pick up issues as they are raised.

This form of advocacy often involves a considerable amount of low level conflict resolution-type work, together with more involved advocacy work such as supporting people in making formal complaints about services. If there are complex issues, or a conflict of interests between people in an establishment, another independent advocate may be called in to provide support.

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