

What is advocacy?

'Your Voice' views Advocacy as a journey. Often people come to us who are in distress and feel they have nowhere else to turn. We will listen without judgement and give support, information and help fight for the individual's rights with the aim of working towards empowerment for the individual.

Advocacy can be described as speaking out or standing up for a person's rights. Advocacy can help you to:

- express choice
- develop the confidence to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction
- receive and understand information
- help people gain control and make the power imbalance more equal
- challenge social exclusion and discrimination

The Advocacy charter defines Advocacy as "Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice"

*Advocacy Charter – Action in Advocacy
2002*

What others have said about Your Voice

"I find it hard to trust people but I know I can trust my advocate completely."

"Before advocacy I just couldn't express myself at the MDTs. I just sat there. My advocate came to see me an hour before the meetings so that she knew what I wanted. I wanted to be more involved. Things were being done to me rather than with me. If I had to face it on my own I would have been lost and unsupported."

"I found being admitted to the Carleton Clinic very difficult, almost impossible to handle. I couldn't have coped without my advocate. She helped with discharge. I might still be in Carleton Clinic if it hadn't been for my advocate."

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Carlisle
Eden



What is advocacy?

Your Voice is an independent and confidential Advocacy Service supporting people in Cumbria

Independent Advocacy should be viewed as a partnership between the individual and the Advocate. We use the term 'Advocacy partners' as there should be no power imbalance in the relationship and both should be working together to achieve the desired outcome. The Individual's own experience and what is important to them partnered with the skills of the Advocate in identifying and communicating this information to the relevant people forms the basis of this partnership.

An Advocate will work with an individual to build trust and listen to their views. It is important to understand that an Advocate's personal preference or opinion is not shared within this relationship so that there is no influence over decision making and the views expressed are absolutely the individuals own. Regardless of the individual's choices or opinions, the advocate will help the individual to express this to the relevant people.

We believe in the following principles:

- Everyone has a right to be an individual – people should be valued for what they are not what need they have or group they belong to
- Everyone, no matter what has happened, has basic fundamental rights – people are entitled to enjoy basic rights including respect, freedom, equality and privacy
- Everyone should be able to make choices. Advocacy promotes the right to access a range of options and information and freedom to make decisions about their own life

- Everyone should be able to experience independence – people are in control of their own lives and can make choices and decisions with opportunity for support if necessary
- Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect – people should be valued and respected and treated in ways that uphold rights and uniqueness as individuals
- Everyone should have equal opportunities – everyone should have access to the same life chances and support should be provided to protect this.

What advocacy is not!

Advocacy does not replace the role of other workers such as Community Psychiatric Nurses, Social Workers or other care professionals. An Advocate will give the relevant information to an individual who will then make their own decision and choices. The Advocate can then represent the individual's view to authority figures to help the individual.

Independent Advocacy should not be confused with befriending. We will aim to aid the process of empowerment rather than assist an individual to become dependent on a service.

Advocates will not give advice to their partners. We can provide information to partners and work through possible consequences so that our partners are fully informed to make their own decisions. Advocacy partners may access advice agencies and need assistance to

understand what is being said by the professionals through their Advocate.

Advocates do not offer mediation. During disputes between parties such as a social worker and a family, the Advocate will not try to persuade either side or offer themselves to referee between the parties. We will obtain the view of the individual and ensure others involved are aware of their views.

Advocates are here for the individual they advocate only. This relationship is paramount to the Advocacy principles and loyalty to the partner is of utmost importance. However, an Advocate cannot always have the answers and do not have a magic wand. There are times when decisions are beyond their control or the requests of the partner cannot be adhered to.

In these cases the Advocate will ensure they are there to support their partner in understanding these limitations and to still retain as much control as possible.

In essence, Your Voice is an Advocacy Scheme which will work with an individual to help express their views. During this process we will aim to build an individual's confidence so that they can regain control which can lead to empowerment. We will ensure the individual is listened to and most importantly, heard, whilst providing information to help them make their own choices and challenge others' decisions.