

Putting Advocacy in Focus

Advocacy awareness raising might not be a top priority when you have direct advocacy services to provide to people. However if done right publicity, presentations and events are not just fluffy bits of PR. They can make your project stronger, promote a better understanding of advocacy and bring about change in the community.

This pack encourages and supports advocacy organisations to raise awareness. We give hints about finding an audience and describe what you might do with ideas for publicity and awareness raising events.

Raising awareness can range from undertaking a small piece of work such as writing a letter to your MP, to organising a large event with invited speakers. Raising awareness can take time and effort and can sometimes be stressful, but it can also be extremely worthwhile and even fun!

Events can help the local community to find out about what you do and why it is important. A well known organisation is nearly always a stronger one, and one that local politicians and service providers want to be associated with.

Volunteers are more likely to be involved with an organisation they have heard of, and which gives them the chance to meet other people interested in the same thing.

If you get your local authority or business community involved or if they just read or hear about your organisation from others, they are more likely to remember you next time a request crosses their desk.

You don't have to do all the work yourself. Use an event as a celebration of the work and involvement of staff, volunteers, management committee members and service users. Get other people involved right at the start - they are far more likely to be reliable and work hard if awareness raising activities are a joint idea and if it achieves nothing else it will give people the chance to celebrate what you are all achieving together.

Some Awareness Raising Ideas

- Run a training course
- Arrange a leaflet display
- Put a story in the local paper
- Hold a network meeting with other groups
- Launch a new report or poster
- Hold your annual general meeting
- Have an office open day
- Arrange an outing/lunch for advocates and service users
- Give a presentation at a local partnership group
- Give out leaflets at the local shopping centre
- Hold an outreach session at a local day centre
- Make a video of advocacy in action
- Arrange an awareness session with trustees or funders
- Visit another advocacy scheme
- Write to your MP
- Hold a fundraising event
- Give a talk about advocacy at a local school

Plan Your Awareness Raising Strategy



Before deciding on what you are going to do to raise awareness of advocacy and the services your organization provides it is important you ask yourself a number of questions. This will help you to plan your awareness raising strategy and ultimately help you to get the right message across to the right people, achieve the outcomes you want and make your efforts worthwhile.

You will need to think about:

- who needs to know about advocacy
 - what do they think about it now
 - what you want them to think
 - how you are going to achieve this
- Use a staff or volunteer meeting to undertake a brainstorming session or send round a questionnaire to identify some answers to these questions. The more people you involve the more ideas you will come up with and your strategy will be better informed.

Who

Can you identify your audience?

How much do they know about you already?

Are they broadly supportive or not and why?

What are your main objectives for raising awareness?

Why do you need to communicate with these audiences?

Is it to increase interest about what you do, to change attitudes or behaviour, or both?

What

What is the key message you are trying to get across?

What are you trying to say to them about advocacy?

What do you want them to remember about you?

How

How will you best reach your audience?

Are you in touch with them at the moment?

Are you consistent in what you say?

How do people receive information?

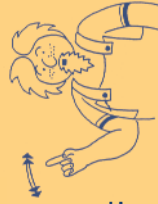
When

When is the best time to get your message across?

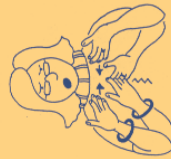
Do we communicate with people regularly or just when we need something?



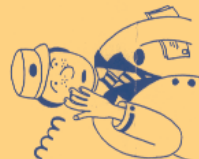
Who



What



How



When

To show how this could work, the grid below gives examples of how you might address these questions and gather ideas for work with different groups.

Who	Local Social Services Team	Local Black and Minority Ethnic Communities	General Public
	They misunderstand the advocacy role and make inappropriate referrals and have a hostile attitude.	Your monitoring shows you receive very few referrals from members of black and minority ethnic communities.	You have just obtained some funding to recruit volunteer advocates to work with disabled people.
	You want to clarify the role of the advocate, explain who you work with and why and explain differences between advocacy and other services.	You want to explain what advocacy is, find out the needs of the local community and say how advocacy can benefit and support them.	You want to show inequalities faced by disabled people and reveal the potential benefits of advocacy and the role of a volunteer.
	Approach to find out about regular meetings and training opportunities.	Use existing voluntary sector forums to network and find out about local newsletters and opportunities to deliver a workshop.	Send human interest stories to your local newspaper. Do they have a regular volunteer page? What is happening in volunteering?
	You agree to provide a bi-annual presentation at the monthly staff meeting and a long term plan is introduced to provide advocacy training to staff.	You write a piece about advocacy for the newsletter and give a short presentation at the next forum meeting to promote your advocacy open day to feature workshops and talks.	Local paper gives full page coverage of the autumn volunteer fair. Listing your opportunities and featuring an advocacy story from the perspective of a disabled person.
			

Explaining Advocacy



Think about how you would explain the difference between your work and the role of the following people.

Social Worker
Adviser
Mentor
Befriender
Counsellor
Lawyer

Put together a list of professional's and departments that many disabled people come in to contact with. Now prepare a list of situations that a disabled person may experience. Ask people to match the scenarios and departments. It's harder than you think and people will quickly understand how advocacy can support people to navigate big bureaucracy and obtain services they need.

Explaining what advocacy is and how it differs from other services such as advice and befriending can be extremely difficult especially when people have preconceived ideas about your organisation and the role of an advocate.

If you are giving a presentation or facilitating a workshop you should prepare yourself for difficult questions and be clear about what you do and don't do. Not every advocacy project is the same but there are key principles which we share between us. These principles can be explained and are useful in highlighting your work and our main differences from other services. You could use the advocacy charter headings as a starting point and think about how your service operates to meet them.

- Independence
- Empowerment
- Accountability
- Supporting Advocates
- Complaints
- Clarity of Purpose
- Putting People First
- Equal Opportunity
- Accessibility
- Confidentiality

Explaining why advocacy is needed

Many people at some point in their lives could have benefited from the support of an advocate. A good way of raising awareness is to encourage people to see themselves in a position where advocacy is seen as relevant to them and the advocacy process is made clearer. There are many short exercises that could be prepared to support this.

ICE BREAKER! -ask people to explain a recent situation where they would have benefited from an advocate to support them.

Publicity

You probably don't want a major publicity campaign. You might only want to make sure people know about your service or about the events or leaflets that enable them to find out more about Advocacy.

Use the postcards in this pack, copies of the Advocacy Charter or get your own leaflets and posters designed for the awareness raising event you are organising. These can be distributed through a variety of sources, and probably the ones you often use to tell service users or volunteers about your project. Not all of these networks will be relevant to your audience, decide which ones are before wasting material or ending up with an audience you didn't intend!

- Contact other voluntary groups in the area and ask them to distribute information throughout their networks where applicable
- Ask social services how to reach staff most efficiently. Do they have a staff newsletter you could use? Is there a forthcoming event on the website? Can you put a poster or leaflets in all the local offices?
- Are there services where it would be useful for you to put information - a local day or drop in centre, maybe put a poster at a church hall-you know is used regularly by community groups.

If you want to reach the general public the local library is worth leafleting, but why not put leaflets at local leisure centres and evening class venues? Local shops may be willing to put up a poster and have some leaflets, as might local restaurants or pubs.

Newsletters are always a good way of making sure your target audience knows about the event. Many national and regional ones relevant to service users and people interested in projects like yours are listed in the directory. If you want to attract other people you may have to think a bit more laterally. Are there any local youth, older people's or minority ethnic groups who produce newsletters that might accept an article? Are there any major employers that you could ask to include an article or put a poster on the work notice board?

Getting Media Coverage for Events

You may be putting on an event hoping to attract the general public and new volunteers, or you may want to reach out to clients from new communities you are not currently attracting. If so then getting local media coverage is very important to your success.

There is no great mystery to using the media. If your event is of interest to the local community, then it should be of interest to local journalists. The key is giving them the information in the way they can use. A few simple rules will help you make the most of local newspapers, radio and TV in your area.

Plan media involvement early

- Make sure you do this when you are planning your event as a whole and schedule in when you want them to get involved.
- You might also want to nominate one person for dealing with press relations, and to look after any media that come along to the event.
- Don't forget to decide on your key message and what you hope to achieve with media coverage.

Writing a press release

Once you have decided what you want to say the best way to communicate with journalists is by a press release. This is a short bulletin that tells the journalist all they need to know. There are a few important things to remember:

- Keep it short. Ideally one side of A4, and definitely no more than two.
- Keep it simple – avoid jargon or “advocacy language”.
- Remember that your readers/listeners/viewers probably don't even know what advocacy is.
- Get all your important information in the first two paragraphs; make sure they grab the reader's attention. The exact words of your press release may be used in the paper. If the whole thing won't fit into the space, they will cut from the bottom upwards.
- Use a quote, from your chair, or a service user, volunteer etc. This helps to break things up and adds a personal

You will need to decide when you want coverage: before your event to attract people along, or after the event? Either should have the effect of raising awareness of advocacy, but you may find it easier to get a journalist to do post event coverage so their story has a focus and photo opportunities may be available.

Always put the date at the top of the release so the journalist knows it's a current story. Always state “for immediate release” so people know it can be used straight away.

touch.

- At the end of the press release, use the heading “Notes to editors” to give details of the venue, time and other details of your event.
- Finish with the contact name and number – day and evening.

Letters to the editor

This can also be a useful way of telling people about your event and service and can be a more personal approach, inviting readers to get involved.

Distribution

Make sure you send the release to the right people at the right time.

- You will find details of local media contacts in the directory with this pack. If you can't find the details you need, write to the News Editor for your local paper and Forward Planning for TV or radio.
- Ring round news papers to find out when their deadline is for news – on weeklies this will probably be a couple of days before the paper appears.
- Journalists need time to work on the story; send out your release 7-10 days before you would like to see a story in the paper.
- Always follow up with a phone call to check that the journalist has received the release. Tell them more about the event and why it is important.

Interviews

You may be asked to do an interview. This may be a 20 second sound bite or taking part in a five minute discussion – it may be live or pre recorded. It can be very daunting but remember the interviewer will want you to do your best, not catch you out. However these are the most important things to remember:

- Prepare in advance. Ask the interviewer what kind of questions they will be asking you, and what the first question will be. This will help you to get off to a confident start.
- Keep things simple. Don't try and pack too much in, don't waffle and don't use jargon and acronyms.
- Try not to interrupt as it can make you sound aggressive.

Think about anything controversial that may be asked and what your response may be. If you are talking about the need for more funding for your service, an interviewer may try and get you to condemn your local funders. Although you want to get your point across strongly think about the effect this might have on your future funding negotiations.

Organising events



Here is a useful checklist to assist you with your planning.

Administration

- Form a small working group (even if it is only 2 or 3 people) to help spread the tasks and make sure that one person doesn't end up doing all the work!
- Decide if you want to invite other local organisations to work with you to hold a joint event.
- Draw up a time plan of what needs to happen when and who will take responsibility for what.

Venue

- Cost - is it within your budget?
- Size - How many people are you expecting, are many of them likely to be wheelchair users? Do you want to have room to put up display boards?
- Accessibility - Is the venue accessible, including the toilets? Is there an induction loop?
- Facilities - Are there power points for microphones? Is there an induction loop? Do you need a roving microphone if people are going to have the opportunity to ask questions?
- Do you need catering facilities?
- Is there a room suitable for a crèche if you need one?

Date

- What day of the week and time of day will be best for you and the people you want to come along?
- If it is aimed at health trusts and social services, it might be easiest to get people along as part of their working day, but if you want to attract potential volunteers then an early evening event that people can drop into on their way home from work might be most suitable.

What will happen at the event

- Decide if you want to have speakers at your event and who you want to approach?
- Do you want to provide a timeslot for people to have the opportunity to ask questions?
- Do you want most of the event to be an opportunity for people to meet others who use, support or volunteer for the service?

Booking speakers

Whether your speaker is your chairperson, or a volunteer, or a local politician or celebrity there are a few things that are important to remember.

- Confirm any acceptances to speak in writing.
- Make sure they know who their audience is (numbers, level of knowledge and interest.
- Make sure they know who else is speaking and what about so you don't get two similar speeches.
- Make sure they know how long you expect them to talk!
- Do they need any equipment? (overhead projector, TV and video)

Marketing your event

- Produce a leaflet that you can send to people who might be interested in coming along.
- Put leaflets in places where the people you want to come might go: council offices, religious centres, libraries.
- Contact other local organisations and ask them to include the leaflet in a mailing or put a piece in their newsletter.
- Contact national organisations to see if they will cover the event in a publication or put details on their website.
- Contact you local newspapers, maybe radio and TV too to see if they are interested in covering the event.

On the day

- Get to the venue early and make sure everything is ready
- Is parking clearly signposted?
- Do you need to put up signs to direct people to the event, toilets etc?
- Do you want a registration table and somewhere for people to sign up to get more information?
- Check equipment is there and working!
- Make sure there are people to greet arrivals and chat to those who may have come on their own.
- Make sure you have plenty of packs prepared if you want to have information to give to people.
- Enjoy yourselves. Enthusiasm is infectious and yours is likely to rub off on your guests and create a good atmosphere.



On the day try and make sure that someone has responsibility for looking after any outside speakers. Even if they are your local celebrity or MP they are likely to be a bit nervous and a friendly face may make them less nervous and speak better!

Introduce them to other speakers and important people from your organisation, show them where they will be speaking and make sure they have some water handy. Make sure you thank them when they finish and if you are keen to maintain good relations, follow this up with a letter.

Experience has shown that people don't just arrive. Be prepared for some legwork, talking and persuasion.

Paying for your event



You may have some money put aside that you can use to fund your event but these are some ideas of getting money and cutting costs that might be useful.

Many of the things you will need to put on an event can be provided through gifts in kind rather than cash. This can often be easier to come by than hard cash and so might be a more fruitful approach. However if it is possible for you to raise funding for the event this will probably make the organising simpler.

Grants

Grant applications nearly always have to be made months in advance of an event taking place. However you may find there are local funders who make small grants in a shorter timescale.

Local authority

Some Local Authorities make small grants to local one off projects. Ask your contacts in social services or the council information service for details

Local Business Sponsorship

You may already have good relationships with some of the companies local to your project. You could approach them to see if they are prepared to donate any money to help you put on the event. If you decide to do this there are a few important things to remember:

- Try to find out the name of the person you need to approach, probably the Managing Director. People don't respond well if they think they are one address in a mass mail out.
- Tell the company what you need the money for and why this will help the people you work with. Remember the people you are writing to probably have no idea what advocacy means (so it's also a chance to raise awareness).
- Tell the company what's in it for them - a company logo on all publicity, a mention in any local media coverage, a speaker at the event?
- Remember to thank any sponsors publicly - at the event and maybe in your annual report too. Follow up with a letter of thanks for their help, you might want to approach them again in the future!

Gifts in kind

Venue

- Your local authority will have a variety of venues that they hire out and use themselves. Why not ask them if there are any they could lend you for the event to show their support for your service? If you can, start by asking someone you know in your Local Authority if they know of anywhere and who the best person would be to approach.

- Again your local health trust is likely to have large meeting rooms that might be suitable. If the venue is inside a hospital or medical establishment consider if this might make the people you want to reach less likely to come along.

- Are there any hotels, theatres or conference centres that might sponsor your event with a free venue? Think about what publicity you can offer in return. Make sure you find out if you will be expected to purchase 'in-house' catering as this could make such a gift very expensive.

Catering

- If you have managed to get a free or cheap venue see if you can further charm someone into giving you the same deal for catering.

- Is there a local bakery, deli, grocer etc who you can approach with your request in return for local publicity.

Publicity

- You will probably want to produce a publicity leaflet for your event. Is there a local printer who would do this for free or at a greatly reduced rate?

- Is there a local company you could ask to photocopy your leaflet for you? Maybe your local social services department would do this.

Transport

For many people it might be difficult to get to the event and you might want to help people out with transport costs.

- Do you or other local voluntary groups have a vehicle that could be used to help people get to and from the event?
- Would social services be willing to help out through their transport services?
- Is there a local taxi firm that you use a lot? Could they be persuaded to offer a free or reduced rate for the event.

Often it is easier to get people to provide services or goods than hard cash! Think about the things you need to put on events and who can provide them.



Do any businesses have their headquarters in your area or large offices that might have a suitable venue? Can you persuade them to let you use one and credit them as a supporter of your organization?

Would any of the local supermarkets or chain restaurants be prepared to provide you with free food and drink for your event - both Marks and Spencers and MacDonalds have done this for London groups in the past.

Organising events that are accessible to all

Printed Information

To produce printed information in an accessible form it should be:

- **Bold and eye-catching design - it does not have to be boring!**
- **In an accessible font with few italics**
- **Without jargon**
- **No printing over pictures, diagrams or illustrations**
- **Do not justify text or stretch or squeeze lines to fit**
- **Use capital letters and abbreviations only when necessary**
- **Avoid hyphenation where possible**
- **Colours where used should be of high contrast – black on white, cream,**
- **Beige or yellow, dark colours against a light background, or light colours**
- **On a dark background - light yellow against dark blue**

The recommended size of font, which suits most partially sighted people and those who use a low vision aid, is 14. The best font is Arial.

Access should be an integral part of the planning process of every meeting and all events, not just those specifically inviting disabled people and not just as an 'add on' or 'after thought'. Providing access benefits all, not just disabled people and is not just about removing physical barriers

Here are some things you could do to promote access (the directory gives contact details of organisations that could assist you).

- When inviting people to a meeting/ event, provide an opportunity for them to communicate their access requirements within the response form
- Ensure that disabled participants can claim travel expenses at the event. Many disabled people have to make different arrangements to travel to a meeting or event and this often results in extra expense
- Consider having personal assistants available at the meeting or event to provide help and support - taking notes, helping disabled participants, providing drinks, way-finding and so on
- Check availability of a working Induction Loop system at the venue. Most people who use a hearing aid can benefit from using an Induction Loop. If one has not been installed, arrange the hire or loan of a portable system. Make sure that someone attending the meeting knows how to install, test and operate the loop system on the day.
- Sign Language Interpreters (SLI) should be booked at least 6 weeks in advance and should only work for about 20 minutes at a time. This is regardless of the size of the event/ meeting or the number of Deaf people who may attend. If you do not wish the Interpreter to take a 10-minute break every 20 minutes, then you should book 2 SLI.