

# A short guide to advocacy

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- What is advocacy?
- Gateshead Advocacy Information Network (GAIN)
- What does an advocate do?
- How to make a referral
- Advocacy stories

# What is advocacy?

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Advocacy involves working in partnership with an individual to:

- Help them find the information they need to make informed choices
- Support them in making choices
- Whenever possible, support them to speak up for themselves
- Make sure that their wishes and views are heard

# What people say about advocacy

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## Advocates can make a difference because:

- They are independent
- They have time to listen
- They tell us where we can find things out
- They help us think through what to do
- They support us at difficult meetings
- They remind us of what we wanted to say

# Gateshead Advocacy and Information Network (GAIN)

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- Supports and promotes advocacy services in Gateshead
- Raises awareness of advocacy among service providers and potential service users
- Identifies unmet advocacy need
- Promotes good practice through the Gateshead Code of Practice
- Keeps projects updated on national, regional and local policy

# What a nurse thinks about advocacy

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As a nurse I am subject to particular policies and procedures – for example the Mental Health Act. Working on a secure unit, I think it is important to have access to an advocate who is essentially independent and outside the organisation. For the patients it is really important to see someone come onto the ward who isn't a member of the care team – who “isn't one of us”. I realise it is not the most positive way to describe the relationship between staff and patients but it is difficult to describe it in any other way. I will try to develop a positive relationship with the patient but when someone is detained under the Mental Health Act there is no doubt that it does change the dynamics of the relationship – I am part of a system that is restricting that person's liberty – so the patient is not always going to engage with me in a positive way. An independent advocate doesn't come with that same baggage so has a different starting point when he meets with the detained patient.

(from the Good Advocacy Practice project 2008)

# What does an advocate do?

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- Finds out what the person wants
- Supports them in their wishes and views
- Makes sure they have all the information needed to make informed choices
- Support them in assessments, meetings, etc.
- Take on the person's views as if they were their own
- Listens carefully to what the person says and puts the point across without alteration or embellishment

# An independent advocate can...

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- Support people to explore options
- Support people to make better-informed decisions and actively engage with decisions that are being made
- Support people to access information and better understand what is happening to them
- Support people to articulate their own views
- Speak on the person's behalf and represent them

# When do I make a referral?

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- When someone needs independent support to represent their views
- When someone is facing a difficult decision and needs to support to make an informed choice (for example, moving into a care home)
- When there is conflict or difference of opinion between a person or their main carer
- When different service providers have different views about the care of the person
- When there is disagreement between professionals and other people about the person's assessed needs

# Advocacy stories

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Abigail was regularly told she would never be able to live outside the confines of a hospital. The advocate worked with Abigail over a number of years and gradually Abigail did move out of the hospital into the community.

Abigail was able to speak at a conference about her experiences.

(Working with advocates 2006)

# Advocacy stories

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Manuk wanted adaptations done to her home. The council did very little to make things happen. An advocate got involved and brought in a crisis solicitor.

The council started to come to the meetings and took the family's requests seriously. Prior to the advocate's involvement the family had felt worthless.

(Working with advocates 2006)

# Advocacy stories

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I am 16 years old and I was sectioned for the first time and admitted to a secure unit. I was so afraid on the unit I couldn't bring myself to speak to staff. I would start to tell them what was troubling me but immediately I would panic and freeze – I couldn't find the words. I decided to write a letter to staff and explained to them what I needed. Staff didn't respond to my letters and that made me feel angry. One of the other patients suggested I speak with her advocate, Michelle. I was very shy to start with but Michelle was patient and listened to my concerns. I gave her permission to arrange to meet with my key worker to discuss my concerns. We met for half an hour just before the multi-disciplinary team meeting. My advocate attended the multi-disciplinary team meetings with me – staff did listen and I got to the stage where I could self advocate.

(Working with advocates 2006)

# Advocacy stories

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My visits to my child were restricted. I spoke to the advocate about this. The restrictions weren't lifted. I felt supported and I appreciated the advocate taking time to listen to me and putting my views to the professional.

(Working with advocates in 2006)

## Advocacy helps to improve service provision for everyone

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I turned up at Cynthia's home and she was trying to get up on a ladder to change the battery of her smoke alarm. As an advocate it is hardly my job to help with such a task – but I felt it was better for me to do it than Cynthia who was very frail.

In the course of my advocacy work I logged a range of similar incidents. We used our independent local knowledge to work with local commissioners to develop a flexible dementia home care service and outreach service for people with dementia.