

Draft

Good Practice Standards for Independent Advocacy in Wakefield District

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1. Introduction

Why these standards?

The benefits of independent advocacy are becoming increasingly recognised across the UK. This is reflected in the growth in numbers and diversity of advocacy schemes, the increasing focus on advocacy in legislation and government guidance, and the increasing general use of the term advocacy.

We have an opportunity to benefit from this growing culture of advocacy in Wakefield District, but we must aim to ensure that local developments are properly supported so that they are effective and sustainable.

One way of supporting independent advocacy is to develop a set of locally agreed standards. These standards should:

- support existing advocacy schemes;
- encourage existing and future schemes to work towards continuous improvement;
- acknowledge and maintain the uniqueness of advocacy principles and practices;
- provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating schemes;
- assist in the commissioning of local advocacy schemes;
- reassure people who use advocacy that they can get a professional and reliable service, and there are proper procedures if anything goes wrong;
- provide an open and accessible resource for understanding what advocacy is and how it works.

Who are these standards for?

The standards aim to be easy to read and relevant to a wide variety of different people. They are certainly '*for*' everyone in Wakefield District, as they will hopefully help everyone get a better service.

We had to make a decision about the final style and level of content however, and we feel that the most important people for this document are the people involved in advocacy schemes.

In the future, easy read versions of the standards will be produced.

Periodic review

These standards are not set in stone. This is a living document that will grow as people use it. Together we will find good and bad things about it, and ways of improving it as well as improving the services we offer.

The standards will be regularly reviewed, on a schedule that will be set as we reach a final draft.

2. Using these standards

The main thing is to read them, think about them, talk about them, and see how they relate to your practice. They are meant to be an aid for anyone involved with independent advocacy to work more effectively, more easily, and more happily.

These guidelines should enable each advocacy provider to set their own standards that fully cover the way they work. They try not to restrict the principled actions of advocacy partnerships trying to make their voices heard, and they try not to be too prescriptive about the details of the policies and procedures local advocacy schemes should adopt.

Different sections of these standards will be more useful at different times or for different people. Each section has a different character, as described below:

Principles and Outcomes

Short 'pictures' of the principles that make independent advocacy stand out as unique, and give it its effectiveness and value.

Indicators

As these standards are not organised as a set of rules that must be followed, how will we know if we are meeting them? This is a checklist of statements that, if true about your work or organisation, show that you are going in the right direction.

Supporting practices

These principles can support our work in many ways, and this section is about how to bring them into our work. This can be done through training, monitoring, commissioning, setting up systems, strategic planning, working in partnerships and networks, and other ways. These are just rough ideas of how to take these standards forward.

Models of advocacy

Describes some of the different approaches to advocacy that local schemes may learn from.

Related Activities

Looks at the relations between advocacy and advice, interpreting, befriending, mentoring, representation, mediation, legal advocacy.

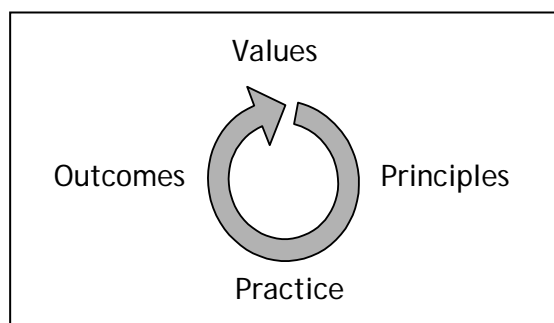
3. Principles and Outcomes

What makes advocacy so unique and effective? Different people have different answers to this question, but the principles outlined in the following pages should give a good insight for anyone looking for their own answers.

There are eight principles of advocacy considered in more detail in these standards:

- Empowerment
- Loyalty and tenacity
- Inclusion and respect
- Effective communication
- Independence
- Sustainability
- Quality
- Advocacy dilemmas

The diagram below should help to see this:



We value things like good health, freedom and independence, choice, etc.

The principles of independent advocacy offer a way of organising our practice and making it work. The actual day to day practice is so varied it couldn't be described in a standards document, but everything we do as advocates, managers or commissioners should be informed by these principles.

We can look at the goals and outcomes of our work and see how they fit with our values and the principles which guide us. This gives an opportunity to refine the whole cycle so that we can work more effectively.

Understanding this cycle is the key to understanding the threat which some approaches to developing standards and quality systems can pose to advocacy work. An example of this is the flattening effect of the Best Value framework's concentration on the practice/outcomes half of the cycle and on efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

If we are going to find some way of measuring the apparently unmeasurable outcomes of advocacy, like preventing problems from arising (how can you record something that doesn't happen as an outcome?) we need to try to find a different approach.

A. Empowerment

When someone becomes empowered, they are more able to speak out, they can do more things, and they can take more control of their lives.

It is important to always reflect on **what** you are empowering someone to **do**. The experience of working with an advocate can empower someone (or a group) to:

- be able to speak out clearly and confidently and persuade other people to listen to them;
- live more independently by getting more appropriate care, accessing more appropriate accommodation, or becoming more financially independent either through accessing benefits or employment;
- be less easily influenced by people with conflicting interests;
- access the information they need to make decisions;
- think through their choices more clearly;
- learn strategies to deal with problems or conflicts;
- develop their social relationships;
- expand their hopes and ambitions (especially where there is a risk that these will be, or have been, heavily influenced by those with conflicting interests);
- or do many other things, depending on their personal situation.

When people have been empowered to take more control of their lives, they usually feel more self confident, have a greater feeling of self-worth, and they can feel generally more healthy and happy.

The principle of empowerment helps to **plan and prioritise advocacy work**:

- i) thinking about how to empower people to do things can help advocates, managers and commissioners to decide on how advocacy work can be practised, supported and developed;
- ii) focusing on the people or groups who have the least power, that is the people who are most at risk of neglect or abuse, is a good way of prioritising advocacy work within scarce resources.

Giving priority to people who are most at risk of neglect or abuse means that advocates and advocacy projects need to **proactively** go out and look for people who need their support. There are many people across Wakefield District who would benefit from working with an advocate, but often they don't know this is available, or they may be unable to come and ask directly for support.

Examples of a proactive approach to advocacy include:

- an advocate on a hospital ward speaking to someone who looks isolated or vulnerable and offering support if appropriate;
- remaining attentive to unspoken issues that may come up during advocacy work;
- schemes encouraging a variety of referral routes, including self referrals and referrals by former users, carers, friend and relatives;
- advocates and schemes take action to find out about the services that people receive.

B. Loyalty and tenacity

An advocate must be loyal to their partner and must work tenaciously to achieve their partner's wishes.

The principle of **loyalty** sets advocacy apart from many other support services. Often professionals are expected to be impartial and objective, but an advocate's loyalty to their partner means they are partial, or on their partner's side.

Tenacity means determination and persistence. This is linked with loyalty because being loyal often requires determination and persistence. If an advocate agrees a certain course of action, then to be loyal means following through as fully as reasonably possible - tenaciously.

This principle is important because the people that advocates focus on supporting are those who are disempowered, who have few, if any, people on their side, and who are involved with services that might possibly mistreat, ignore, or abuse them.

This loyalty must be put in the context of the model of advocacy followed: a citizen advocate is loyal to their partner above even their manager, professional advocates may sometimes have to balance other requirements against this loyalty. Advocates, managers and commissioners should always aim to create an environment where advocates can be properly loyal to their partners however.

C. Inclusion and respect

As advocates it is important that we respect our partner's wishes and choices, even if they conflict with our own.

Advocates work with some of the most excluded and disrespected people in society. If we aim to empower these people to assert themselves and gain more respect from other people, then it is vital that we begin by treating them with respect.

If we don't respect the people we inter-act with then they are unlikely to respect us, and we are unlikely to be able to work successfully together.

It is also important that advocates and advocacy projects work to be as inclusive as possible, and combat exclusion whenever they can. This is linked with respect because we cannot make people feel included if we don't make them feel respected.

People who have personal experience of being disempowered, harmed, or socially excluded through the services they have received have invaluable knowledge and a unique view. Their input can contribute in many positive ways to service development and individual learning.

Advocacy organisations, to achieve their aims and generate trust in their work amongst potential beneficiaries, must demonstrate that the opinions and knowledge of the people they work with are valued.

If the organisation does not maintain this focus, they will not reach this group. Instead, the things that decide who they support will be firstly the abilities of the people who will more easily ask for help themselves, and secondly the priorities of the staff of service providers who refer people to the organisation.

In practical terms, maximising inclusion and combating exclusion requires the following actions:

- (advocates?) making sure the people they support are as fully involved and in control as they can be (an advocate only acts on instructions, except in rare circumstances);
- always aiming for people to act for or represent themselves and only speaking on their behalf if they specifically request this or there is no other option (this still applies even if the argument won't be made as effectively);
- users and potential users should be encouraged to participate at all levels of any advocacy organization - as advocates (paid or voluntary), support staff, and particularly as management committee members;
- focusing on the people who are most at risk;
- taking account of things such as a person's ethnic background, sex, sexuality, age and religion when considering the risks they face;
- always using positive images of the people we work with and not allowing our actions, design or publications to contribute to people being devalued;

D. Effective communication

People use many different ways of communicating, including verbally; through letters or emails; using sign language; with an interpreter; subconsciously, by body language; and in many other ways.

If advocacy is about ensuring people's voices are heard, then more generally it is about **supporting effective communication**.

In order for communication to be fully effective for vulnerable people, it is important that they are able to take a lead.

It is more empowering for a person to express themselves directly than it is to rely on someone else to speak for them. It is also likely that statements made by an individual (with support) will carry more weight than when these are expressed by someone else on their behalf.

People are the best judges of their own needs, and every effort should be made to take proper account of what they have to say. This will help everyone involved, as people will be happier with the services they receive, and staff will get more positive feedback and less trouble from dissatisfied customers.

Effective communication includes, but not limited to, the following:

- people being able to say what they want;
- people listening properly to each other and respecting each other's views;
- taking as much time as necessary to ensure everyone has understood each other;
- people being able to work out what they want to say in advance;
- speaking to the right people, or using the best approach, for example writing a letter;
- only sharing information where necessary, and where everyone has given their consent;
- ensuring that confidential information is kept confidential unless the law requires otherwise;
- making sure that information is available in a clear and accessible format to those who need it;
- meeting the requirements of the data protection act.

E. Independence

Independence in this case means freedom from conflicts of interest.

Many people, including nurses, social workers, teachers, parents, friends and neighbours, act as advocates on a daily basis. Most of these people see an individual in need and do what they can to help, but they are each confined by their roles. For example a teacher can support a child in school, but engaging with issues from outside school can be more difficult. Other people, particularly friends and relations, may have other conflicting relationships, or many have become habituated to certain behaviours or attitudes that are no longer shared with a person needing advocacy support.

A properly independent advocate is free from any conflict of interest with the person they are supporting. It is only in these circumstances that an advocate can be completely **loyal** to their partner.

Individuals and organisations involved in advocacy should aim for both **psychological and structural independence**. They should work to ensure that everyone understands that advocacy is separate from any of the other services or support that people receive, and that they act accordingly. They should also try to be **legally and financially independent**.

Independent advocates and advocacy organisations are limited in their action by these principles, resources, and the law, but do not have other limits on their action.

Everyone involved in advocacy should try to be clear and open about any conflicting interests that do arise, and actively work towards reducing them. This includes every advocate or volunteer, support staff and management committee members, and the funders and commissioners of advocacy schemes.

F. Sustainability

Advocacy is sustainable if it will continue into the future.

This means different things in different contexts. Some examples are given below:

For the people supported by advocates sustainability means:

- they can continue working with their advocate for the natural life of the partnership, or have a suitable replacement advocate provided;
- the benefits they gain from working with an advocate are still felt after their work has finished;
- learning skills and strategies that can be adapted to other situations in the future.

For Advocates sustainability means:

- the benefits or outcomes they achieve with their partner can continue without their involvement;
- their partners feel their support is valuable and want to continue to an agreed conclusion;
- they feel they have the time and energy to do their work effectively;
- they can keep a reasonable work-life balance.

For Advocacy Projects sustainability means:

- they make a lasting difference for the people they work with;
- they will be able to continue their work into the future;
- there are enough people who know about their work and want their support;
- they have enough advocates and time to meet the demand;

- they have the necessary systems in place to manage their work effectively;
- there will be funding available to continue working as long as these other requirements are met.

For commissioners of advocacy schemes sustainability means:

- they can commission reliable and effective advocacy schemes;
- advocacy maintaining a positive profile locally and nationally, and remaining a funding priority;
- maintaining positive relationships with projects they support;
- getting positive feedback from a range of sources about the projects they support.

For all individuals sustainability means:

- being able to communicate effectively;
- emotional and physical stability;
- financial security;
- adaptability to change and challenge.

For independent advocacy in Wakefield District to become properly sustainable, many different stakeholders need to work together to:

- ensure that the benefits of independent advocacy are recognised and agreed;
- create an environment in which advocacy can thrive;
- seek to create financial sustainability;
- avoid placing unsustainable or inappropriate demands on schemes.

G. Quality

Quality is about learning what you are doing well - and doing it better.

There is no clear dividing line between good quality and poor quality: every organisation should work towards continuous improvement, and advocacy partners and commissioners should be supportive of this process.

Spending some time thinking about quality can help to ensure that advocacy work is consistently and effectively practiced and managed.

Advocacy schemes may wish to implement a recognised quality assurance system like PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations), the Charter Mark, Investors in People, or the Community Legal Service Quality Mark, but in any case some thought should be given to the meaning of quality and its relevance to each organisation.

Issues which are covered under the principle of quality include:

- managing people effectively - including relevant support, supervision and appraisal systems for staff, volunteers, project users, etc.;
- developing advocates' capacity to effectively meet their partners' needs, including providing them with the necessary organisational support;
- having clear policies and procedures where necessary;
- ensuring effective and transparent financial management procedures are in place;
- information management - record-keeping, filing, confidentiality, etc.;
- strategic planning and dealing with organisational challenges;
- providing training and support where necessary to ensure that everyone understands and can meet the quality standards of the organisation

H. Advocacy dilemmas

Advocacy involves issues and problems which are not easily resolved, and which may not have a 'right' answer. People working in advocacy need to be aware of this and have strategies to deal with such problems.

Examples of dilemmas advocacy projects might face:

- A small Citizen Advocacy project operates very informally as a local community venture, but is extremely effective. They have few written policies and have never kept files on the people they work with. The local Health Board owns their premises. It wants the project to tighten up its written policies and recording. The project is afraid this will make it more formal and look like part of the "service system." How far should they compromise?
- An advocacy project has sometimes found access to the local hospital blocked by the staff there. Gradually the project gains the trust of the hospital staff. Then they come across some important issues which need to be addressed - but which will probably destroy that trust. Should they raise the issues?
- An advocate is working with someone who is not able to express their views in detail, but who clearly needs advocacy. The advocate can clearly work from a basis of the person's rights and any standards of care that should be complied with. How can the advocate recognise the point at which this work becomes more about their own beliefs?
- An advocate works with a person wanting to be rehoused because they object to the ethnic origin of their neighbours. How can the advocate support this view without comprising the inclusive principles of advocacy?
- An advocate finds themselves in the position of supporting a parent wanting access to their child. She is dealing with child care professionals who should take a decision in the child's best interests. The advocate finds these particular professionals are being swayed by her arguments due to their inexperience or incompetence and not because of the substance of the argument, which she believes privately is weak. How can the advocate remain loyal to the parent while also recognising the greater vulnerability of the child?

Outcomes:

The outcomes advocacy work achieves are closely connected to the principles that underlie advocacy practice. Keeping the following broad outcomes in mind can help focus advocacy work, help managers to plan their work and make a business case for their project, and help commissioners to work advocacy into their strategies. Also importantly they can help beneficiaries of advocacy to extend their horizons.

Advocacy outcomes are difficult to quantify, so examples are simply given under each heading to get thoughts going. It is up to each partnership and scheme to find ways of describing the outcomes they achieve in practice.

People have more choices:

- Choices that were denied to someone are now available.
- People become aware of different choices.
- Someone is more likely to be offered a choice.

There is better access to services:

- People have better knowledge of services available.
- Services become more flexible and responsive.
- Services and staff have a better understanding of people's needs and rights.
- More creative partnership opportunities are explored to support sustainable access to services

People are treated justly:

- People suffer less discrimination as a result of their age, appearance, disability, educational attainment, gender, health conditions, language, race, sexuality, etc.

- They can assert their rights.
- They do not find their rights obstructed by others around them.

Problems and conflicts are resolved:

- The issue that led to someone's work with an advocate is dealt with fully and effectively.
- Additional issues that come up during the work are also dealt with.
- People feel more confident about dealing with problems and conflicts that may arise in the future.

People are empowered to help themselves:

- They feel more confident.
- They have more ways of expressing their interests.
- They are better at negotiating, and getting support to achieve their wishes.

Social bonds and contacts are developed:

- People have more social contacts and more opportunities to develop contacts.
- Social contacts are more positive and sustainable.

Services are improved to prevent recurrence of problems:

- Action is taken at a procedural level to ensure service staff are able to deal with similar problems in the future.
- Action is taken at a strategic or policy level to ensure problems don't recur in the future.

People have a better quality of life:

- They feel happier, healthier, and more positive about their lives and the future.

4. Supporting practices

Training

In its original form, citizen advocacy, there was no need for training - all a citizen advocate needed was loyalty and self-confidence because they simply supported their partner to assert themselves.

It is still important to remember that most advocacy work does not require specialist training. For example you do not need to be an expert in welfare benefits because there are other people who can provide this expertise - as an advocate you could help your partner to access proper advice when necessary.

However it is also important today that we utilise the training opportunities that are available. There are a variety of reasons for this:

- **Advocates** benefit from training that can
 - Develop their personal practice and competencies
 - Widen choices & opportunities
 - Help consolidate knowledge
 - Challenge assumptions and fixed ideas
- **Partners** benefit from training (for themselves or their advocates)
 - They will have more accurate expectations of their advocate
 - They get a reliable service
- **Managers and supervisors** benefit from training that can
- **Service providers and commissioners** can benefit from training in the nature, practices, and benefits of advocacy so they can be more understanding and welcoming of advocacy interventions.

Supervision and appraisal

Supervision and appraisal forms a vital part of everyone's work, whatever their relationship to advocacy, and whether they are paid or a volunteer.

Like anything in life, being an advocate is not always easy. Trying to remain loyal to your partner can cause particular strains and difficulties, as can securing funding to sustain your project, for example. Supervision provides support with these sorts of situations, helping people manage stress and workloads in their lives, and helping projects provide consistent services.

It is also important to acknowledge individuals' personal plans and aspirations. Advocacy is a holistic discipline, and it treats everyone equally. Supervisors are then like advocates in a way, aiming to empower the people they supervise, extend their choices, develop their capacity to deal with problems and conflicts, and achieve other outcomes related to the advocacy outcomes stated above.

Supervision thus offers opportunities for a sort of dynamic training as well as the sort of emotional support mentioned above, but it also importantly offers opportunities for an individual to identify additional training needs, employment or career aspirations, and other issues. Supervision also needs to be responsive and supportive of these needs, and should strive to ensure the conditions exist to enable them to respond.

Monitoring and evaluation

As we drive a car we are constantly monitoring what is going on - our speed, other people around us, road signs. We never think for a moment of stopping this monitoring as it is an integral part of driving. At its best, monitoring our work as advocates should feel the same way.

The key is to monitor the right things - if we concentrate too much on what's happening in the back seat, we may end up crashing. We also sometimes need to slow down a little to accommodate the monitoring necessary for a safe journey.

People involved in advocacy should actively monitor the work they do in order to:

- provide a consistent and effective service;
-

Strategic planning

Quality systems

Partnerships and networks

Appendix A - Indicators

Currently in separate document for ease of editing...

Appendix B - What is Independent Advocacy?

When important decisions are being made about someone's life it can help them to have support. Most people need someone to help them speak up for themselves at some point in their life.

Advocacy is about speaking up, or being helped to speak up. It is about making sure that people have the skills, confidence and support to stand up for themselves.

Independent Advocacy is FREE and CONFIDENTIAL

Advocacy is particularly useful when:

- Others have more say in your life than you.
- Others are making decisions for you.
- You cannot get what you want.
- Things seem out of control.
- You are not able to speak for yourself for any reason.

Often there are situations where, because there is disagreement or conflict, it is even harder to speak up and be heard.

Disagreement and conflict can occur between:

- A service user(s) and a service provider.
- Someone (or a group) and their carer(s).
- An individual (or a group) and members of the public.
- An individual (or a group) and the authorities.

Advocates can:

- Talk to you about your situation and help you plan what you want to say and do.
- Support you in speaking up for yourself, or say what you want to say.
- Go with you to important meetings.
- Help make sure that people listen to what you say.
- Help you make a complaint and follow it through.
- Help you to access other agencies, such as housing or legal services.

Advocates don't give advice, but may help people to think about all the choices they could make. Advocates can also help people to get information, but **at all times in the advocacy relationship it is the partner who makes the decisions (not the advocate).**

Many of us act as **informal advocates** for our children, our parents, our friends, or our clients (depending on our work). Helping people to speak up for themselves is a simple and natural thing to do.

Independent advocacy is provided by advocates and organisations that have specifically agreed to work to these standards.

Appendix C - Models of Advocacy

A range of advocacy models have developed over the past couple of decades. These models vary in how they provide advocacy and who the advocate is (e.g. whether paid worker or volunteer). All the models share the same basic principles, although a different approach is needed for user-led group advocacy schemes.

- **Citizen Advocacy** - This is based on the idea of an 'ordinary' member of the community (the advocate) working with a person who is discriminated against (the partner). The partnership may develop into friendship, but it should certainly build mutual trust, respect and loyalty. Citizen advocacy partnerships, although often developing out of a particular need, usually continue over several months or years so if other problems come up they can be addressed easily.
- **Peer Advocacy** - People who have experienced similar problems or used similar services can be very effective in helping others to speak up for themselves. A peer advocate is likely to have a very good understanding of what other service users are going through.
- **Volunteer Advocacy** - As the name suggests, this model has developed to fit in with common practices in the UK voluntary sector. Volunteer advocates are often flexible in their approach, working to a variety of advocacy models depending on their partner or the situation. Volunteers gain useful skills and experience which can develop into full time work or other opportunities.
- **Crisis Advocacy** - This is where an advocate is found to help with a one-off difficult situation or crisis. The advocate may be a volunteer or a paid worker. Also known as short-term or casework advocacy.
- **Professional Advocacy** - People who are paid solely as advocates, and usually work with the casework model. Professional advocacy can also be provided by experts in a professional field, such as solicitors or barristers, being commissioned to speak up on behalf of an individual service user or group. These experts may or may not receive payment for acting as an advocate.
- **Self Advocacy** - Where most advocacy is aiming - for people to be able to stand up for, and speak out for, themselves.
- **Group Advocacy** - This is where a group of people, usually from a similar background, work together to deal with issues that affect them. This may be by speaking together as a single voice, or by speaking to and learning from each other so each individual gets stronger.

Personal Advocacy

Technical Advocacy

Appendix D - Related Forms of Support

What is it that relates advocacy, interpreting, representation, mediation, advice and befriending? It is useful to compare advocacy with its cousins, and hopefully the short descriptions below will give another insight into what advocacy is too.

The following descriptions do not intend to be complete, as every individual organisation will have slightly different approaches to what they do.

Advice - this is different from advocacy in that an advisor will suggest options for the person based on personal knowledge or judgement, whereas the advocate's role is to be non-judgemental and follow the person's wishes as much as possible. However, referring the service user to an advice service can be a useful advocacy role in itself.

Interpreting - is closely related to advocacy as the interpreter is an intermediary who helps someone's voice to be heard. It is different from advocacy because the interpreter should be objective, and not take sides. *Bilingual advocates* sometimes perform an interpreting role, but they clearly work on the side of their partner, and spend extra time ensuring that their partner fully understands what is going on.

Befriending - is mainly about helping people to access social opportunities. It is similar to advocacy because it is usually based on a partnership between two people, and it is usually arranged by a befriending 'scheme'. Befrienders can do informal advocacy if they are asked to help their partner by attending a review meeting for example, and advocates often build up friendships with their partners. Difficulties can arise if the boundaries are too blurred however - befrienders may find themselves out of their depth, and advocates could find their friendship compromises their responsibilities as an advocate.

Professional support - sometimes what professional staff do as part of their job looks a lot like advocacy. It is simply good practice to listen to what the service user has to say and help them to take responsibility for their own situation and make informed choices. This approach should be part of every staff member's role and staff should not feel discouraged from using their advocacy skills to the benefit of the service user. There are limits to how far any professional can take this of course. A social worker, for example, can be an advocate without compromising their own position in relation to a health or housing issue, but they risk a conflict of interest when they attempt to act as an advocate within their own organisation. It may put both the staff member and the service user in a difficult position.

Mentoring - A mentor

Mediation - in disputes between two parties (e.g. a service user and the local authority) an impartial mediator can help by negotiating a solution that is acceptable to both sides. However, the advocate's role is to *take the side* of their partner, and therefore cannot be said to be impartial.

Representation -