



Advocacy Action Ltd

Annual Report

2005



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# Introduction

Welcome to Advocacy Action's first annual report.

This has been a funny year. We were formally incorporated on 21 September 2005, and we set our year end date to coincide approximately\* with the end of our funding from Social Services and Health six weeks later, on 31 October. As this funding was managed through Urban Space Community, and it was mainly to enable us to legally register and establish Advocacy Action, we also had no money last year, save for £8 membership subscriptions.

On the other hand, the project has deep roots that reach throughout the local advocacy and voluntary sector. Starting as early as late 2002 when Social Services and Health commissioned research aimed at providing a map of advocacy provision across the District. Advocacy Action is the result of the vision and continued hard work and commitment of all the local advocacy projects since then.

This annual report will not focus on the six outwardly uneventful weeks where we saw our final funding efforts unsuccessful, as this was only an event in our much more positive history, and a common experience for new organisations trying to get established. What we have in Advocacy Action is a fully researched and planned project which has been lucky to have been well resourced and supported from the outset. We have consolidated that support over the years, even as we've meandered a little around the different circumstances and pressures that we've come across.

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\* This was due to end on 11 November, but we stretched it another week to 18 November 2005.

We have also consolidated as an organisation, and it has been really good that we have had time to properly think about the underlying things like our values as an organisation, our approaches to equal opportunities and involving people, and setting up robust financial management procedures. This infrastructure will enable us to be responsive to future opportunities, and able to concentrate on work that will have a more direct impact on local advocacy in the future. It will also help to ensure that we can really deliver on our social and ethical commitments to the people we work with, as we will be able to work more directly with people rather than worrying around in the back office.

Advocacy Action is currently travelling a rocky path. Current funding will again run out in a few weeks, but again this snapshot isn't a true reflection of our health, and as I say below, this spring is looking good.

If this introduction hasn't been enough for you, I have written some thoughts on the relationship between advocacy and social enterprise which I have reproduced for your pleasure below. Otherwise, enjoy the fair trade refreshments and the food, and stay a while.

Henry Fisher  
Project Coordinator  
April 2006

## Advocacy as a social enterprise

Is advocacy a social enterprise? Or even, given that it's always free at the point of contact, can it be? This is an attempt to begin to explore these questions as they relate both to Advocacy Action and to the local advocacy projects we're working with today, in April 2006. Along the way we will consider whether one of advocacy's unique selling points - its work on relationships - can be the key to opening out the phrase 'social enterprise' and creating a sustainable enterprise with social and community concerns as our main focus.



As well as its aim of making sure peoples voices are heard, and that they are able to access services, it is often said that advocacy is about relationships. The initial approach, which all other advocacy models have developed from, was based on a very informal system of volunteers forming long term relationships

(partnerships) with people in the community who needed support. The visionaries who were developing the advocacy approach paid as much attention to the unique dynamics of the relationship as they did to the focus on making sure that each individual's voice could be heard clearly and would be listened to and respected.

Advocates have had some amazing successes with some people who have had almost no form of communication with others at all. In even the most simple cases however, some time spent simply building a mutual and trusting relationship is invaluable. Often it is only after some time working with someone that their true concerns begin to emerge. Maybe it's because you've had a couple of small successes, or you've stuck with them, or you just start piecing things together through your conversations, but there's often a bigger issue lurking behind. People may not even have had an opportunity to work out what's going on for themselves, and they need a safe person to get their head clear. If you can help someone to do this you're halfway there: then just hold her hand at the next meeting, help her make sure she remembers everything she wanted to say, and talk it all over with her later over a pint in the local - and thus it continues.

I would like to say that this is a social enterprise. In today's crude economic terms some people might say that there's no money involved, and indeed advocacy is free and it is not a service in the traditional sense. But if we truly want to see a social enterprise we must focus instead at the wider social capital. A social enterprise is not just a slightly more ethical way of making money: it is a shared endeavour which gives people an opportunity to experience more than the base economic fight for survival. It must give some people, as many as possible, the financial means to lead independent lives: but it must equally value the fact that it gives people the means of expression, the voice, to be able to live independently. People who develop independent living skills are building social capital in themselves which they can then invest back into the community. They are also saving the tax

payer by being less of a burden on services, and enabling other people to be supported. New friendships are mutually beneficial, people begin to be able to put things back into their relationships. Gradually people can develop other opportunities which increasingly include employment, perhaps in one of the growing number of social enterprises.

The other reason that advocacy is a social enterprise, as well as being about relationships, is the way that the model has adapted to fit into local circumstances. In particular the original model of advocacy described above, commonly known as citizen advocacy, has dwindled in importance significantly across the UK and in other countries. This is partly due to the development of a wide range of different approaches to delivering advocacy, and partly due to the commissioning and grant application procedures advocacy projects had to go through. Advocates and managers have been enterprising in the ways they've adapted organisationally while still being able to provide effective advocacy support. Local projects are similarly adaptable. Some are entirely maintained through the Wakefield MDC commissioning systems and have at times relied on paid advocates, but through their professional approach staff have managed to clearly maintain their independence. Other projects have a much more de-centred approach to management or use different approaches to the practice or delivery of advocacy. There is also productive crossover in every direction between these.

In today's increasingly competitive voluntary sector many advocacy projects have been forced to develop these enterprising approaches to their work, and this has been largely beneficial to advocacy as a whole. Advocates are by their nature quiet individuals however, who are happy to spend their working lives assuaging their own voices so that those of their partners can be heard more clearly. Advocacy projects also tend to be relatively small in comparison to many other parts of the voluntary sector, and the extra administrative work all staff have to manage is a

further barrier to undertaking more development work. Together these factors have led to advocacy developing patchily across the district and the country, and also to a lack of clear common standards. Advocacy in Wakefield District is doing well in the face of these challenges compared to some areas, but these are still real challenges facing us. Additionally we have the promise of more work as we try to respond to further new developments including the statutory Mental Capacity Act Advocates, potential changes to mental health act advocacy, and developing standards for advocacy practice and training.

Advocacy Action is a collaborative approach to tackling these problems. Formed out of a network that started meeting in late 2003 and aiming to represent all the existing local advocacy projects, and working from the start with the close support of Social Services and Health and other Council departments and statutory and voluntary organisations, we have made significant progress and developed valuable knowledge and experience. There is a much more friendly and collaborative feeling between the different local projects today, and many of them are trying to develop innovative extensions of their current work, including creating more volunteer positions, more self-advocacy groups, identifying new client groups, and even looking for opportunities to start up social enterprises.

At the start, Advocacy Action was seen as a specialist version of Voluntary Action, providing support and development to local advocacy organisations, and we have done some of this. The initial view was that after two to three years of grant funding this work, we would be ready to sell our services as a social enterprise. While this may still be a valid plan, it has become increasingly apparent over the last few months that circumstances are pointing towards the opposite approach. Indeed, our first independent finance has been secured through directly selling a training programme to Connexions rather than a grant or contract source. We have also had other enquiries about delivering training, and

narrowly missed a couple of other similar opportunities just after the end of our last financial year - a clear indication that there is a developing market for our services in the district.

More recently we have also seen that our initial self-imposed restriction on not offering direct advocacy so as to avoid any danger of competition with our members is no longer so necessary. There is plenty of unmet demand for advocacy in the district to sustain many more advocates, and we all now work closely together enough for any potential conflicts to be discussed and resolved before they occur. We are therefore planning to develop some peer advocacy pilot schemes for young people, based in existing community settings, and we will be further developing proposals for a generic community advocacy project.

Advocacy Action is thus properly enterprising, but we started this report by emphasising that the most important thing for us is the social capital this enterprise can develop. And when we think of social capital, we're not thinking only in terms of vulnerable or disadvantaged people becoming more able to stand up for themselves, lead more independent and healthy lives, and contribute socially and economically to their communities. Social capital is formed through any sorts of relationships, and it is important that we pay equal attention to those relationships in our wider working, cultural and political environments as we do in our advocacy partnerships.

Our vision is of a dynamic and vibrant community of advocates who feel that they can address the needs of the people of Wakefield District, and they can be happy and effective in their work. Advocacy Action has only been a fully independent and incorporated body for a short time, and there is some way to go before we secure our financial stability, but the mood is positive, the future is looking green and sunny, and we are ready.

## Acknowledgements and thanks

Many people have been involved in one way or another in Advocacy Action's development over the years, and we are very grateful for all of the help and all the challenges that have come about as a result.

Many more people are mentioned in the various documents in the History section of the website than we can mention here, but we will list some of them again anyway:

**Paul Wright**, who has been a guiding force from the outset and has been our inaugural Co-Chair

**Carol McGrath**, our other Co-Chair and provider of inspiration and support

**Ben Brown**, our Treasurer, who also kindly acted as Henry's line manager during the later stages of Council funding

**Maggie Clarke**, for realism and hope (at the same time!)

**Mark Stanworth**, who did fine work developing the basis of our website

Thanks to everyone at **Your Voice Wakefield**: Roberta, Steven, Victoria and Dawn. Everyone at **Cloverleaf Advocacy**, especially Bev, Roger, Nic and Jackie, but also Alan, Jamie, Lynn, David,

Eilis, Suzie, and others. Jody, Maureen, and all the members of **Lift Up Self Advocacy**. Masoud and Shabnam and all the people at **RASA Advocacy Project**. Bev and Steph (and Sylvia) (and the friendly and the grumpy volunteers) at **DIAL Wakefield**. To Di, Claire, Tracey, Chris and Kevin at **Carers Wakefield District**. To Ru, Mel and others at **Urban Space Community** for sewing, cooking, energy and showing it can all be done on a shoestring. Ian and Barbara at **Age Concern**. Chris and Mary at the **Children's Advocacy Service**. And Liz and Terry at Together for sharing a kitchen with Henry and keeping his plants alive.

From the Health Trusts, thanks to **Glynis Stirling** at SWYMHT, who has offered herself and her numerous talents to our committee. Also to Phil Walters and the other SWYMHT PALS staff. Thanks to Sue Perry, Helen Monks, Gill Best and Lyn Daniel for support from the EWPCT, Margaret Saunders from the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust, and Chris Dean from WWPCT - for at least all listening and being supportive.

From the **Council**, thanks to John Farrar who pushed the projects for its first couple of years before retiring from Social Services, and to everyone else who has supported us including Ian Smith, Tim Breedon, Michelle Brunyee, Cheryl Hobson, Elaine McHale, Rob Hurren, Nicci Pearce, Brian Walsh, David Critchlow, Kathy Allen, Isabel Pender, Rosemary Evans, Dennis Appleyard, and Peter Loosemore.

Outside the District we'd like to acknowledge Martin Coyle of the Advocacy Network - Leeds, Paul Seccombe of Leeds Advocacy, the entire committee of the National Advocacy Network, everyone at Action 4 Advocacy, George Clarke at GAIN, Kim and Trudi at Doncaster Advocacy, Joe Monaghan at the CA Coalition, and several others.

Apologies to everyone we've missed off this list.

## Members

The Committee has not yet made a decision about membership of Advocacy Action. As such we have not developed a membership policy and we have not actively sought members.

In the short 2005 year we had eight members:

Ben Brown, Urban Space Community	(Treasurer)
Maggie Clarke, Children's Advocacy Service	
Jody Gabriel, Lift Up Self Advocacy	
Bev Land, DIAL Wakefield	
Carol McGrath, Carers Wakefield District	(Co-Chair)
Fatemeh Shabram, RASA Advocacy Project	
Ian Wilson, Age Concern Wakefield District	
Paul Wright, Cloverleaf Advocacy	(Co-Chair)

## Finance

In our first financial year we generated a total income of £8 made up entirely from subscriptions. We have thus elected to apply the audit exemption for Societies with low income (as per our Rules, para. 52 (b)).

We did make certain expenditures last year from grant funding that was administered on our behalf, pending our registration, by Urban Space Community. We will publish a note of this expenditure when their accounts are finalised.



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