

Generic  
**Code of Practice**  
for Advocates practising  
in Wakefield District

-- DRAFT --

**1 People First**

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 Advocates regard the people they work with as *partners*. This reflects the equal partnership approach and is more empowering than more objective alternatives like service user or client.
- 1.3 The goal of all advocacy work is for the partner to get strong enough to effectively speak up and act for themselves and no longer need an advocate.
- 1.4 Wherever possible advocates should take the lead from their partner. This can include:
  - the partner should request advocacy support themselves if possible
  - the partner decides the issues and goals the advocacy work should address, and makes the final decision on how to work towards these goals
  - the partner should feel in control of the whole process, so they can change their mind at any time, choose to change their advocate, or stop using advocacy altogether
- 1.5 Advocacy aims to assist the most vulnerable people in society, especially those who are unable to actively seek support. Advocates should be alert during their work to other people who might need them, and be proactive in offering support where possible.
- 1.6 Advocates often need to spend a long time working with someone before they are able or willing to say what their needs and wishes are. This is why effective advocacy is usually a long process. It is important that in this time advocates are able to build empathic relationships with their partners to enable effective communication.
- 1.7 Advocates should avoid making assumptions or generalisations about the people they work with. They should avoid projecting their own feelings or beliefs onto their partners. They should not give advice to their partners or seek to influence their actions or decisions.

## **2 Communication**

- 2.1 Ensuring people's voices are heard requires effective two-way communication between service users and providers.
- 2.2 An advocate's role is mainly to support their partners to communicate clearly. Very often they also need to help ensure that service providers give clear and understandable responses.
- 2.3 Advocates are often needed to ask questions and help clarify information from service providers, take notes to help remember and reflect on meetings, and take time to ensure that their partners understand what is being communicated to them.
- 2.4 Advocates should be aware of the nuances of communication and should try to be alert to the difficulties of interpreting body-language and feelings.
- 2.5 Advocates should communicate clearly to potential partners about their role and the boundaries that shape it, as in section 3 below.
- 2.6 Advocates often need to explore with their partners information about rights, services, or choices. This information should be impartial and aim to assist and empower their partners to make the final decision. This information finding can sometimes be all that is asked of an advocate by someone.
- 2.7 Advocates should ensure that all communications and information sharing about partners conforms to their organisation's confidentiality policies and procedures.
- 2.8 It should be assumed that any information communicated from a third party to an advocate can be conveyed directly to their partner. Service providers should therefore be discouraged from sharing gossip or offering confidential or compromising information to advocates.

## **3 Boundaries**

- 3.1 Good advocacy work depends on clear boundaries.
- 3.2 As stated in §2.5, an advocacy partnership should begin with the advocate and partner negotiating the boundaries of the partnership. This might include:
  - how advocacy works
  - how boundaries will be set
  - what can be realistically be achieved
  - expected time scales (e.g. length of partnership)
  - confidentiality and complaints procedures

Advocates should avoid confusing their partners with too much information at this stage, but it is important to establish the goals of the partnership early on.

- 3.3 During the advocacy partnership there should be regular checking of the agreed and implicit boundaries that are in place. This often takes place during the checking and re-evaluation of issues, goals and targets.
- 3.4 Consideration should also be given to how the partnership is going to end, and proper planning and preparation should be made for this.
- 3.5 Advocates are often asked for support to address relatively minor issues, but will need to dig beneath the surface of some issues to find the more important goals for advocacy intervention.
- 3.6 Advocates should be aware that their view of the boundaries of a relationship may occasionally differ from those of their partners. This also may apply to the relevance and importance of the issues they are facing. This disparity can be resolved through careful communication, evaluation and checking boundaries.
- 3.7 There is a clear distinction between advocacy and other support roles. Advocates shouldn't be drawn in to other roles such as giving advice, befriending, mentoring or offering counselling.
- 3.8 Advocates should be aware of how other constraints also affect their work. These may be:
- specified in individual schemes' constitutions (e.g. work within Wakefield District);
  - in contracts with local commissioners (e.g. keep waiting list below 1 month);
  - dependent on available resources (e.g. funding or time);
  - in employment contracts (e.g. work 37hrs per week);
  - or in law (e.g. around confidentiality and disclosure).
- 3.9 It is often useful to be able to discuss boundary issues with supervisors or managers.

#### **4 Record Keeping**

- 4.1 Advocates should keep clear, accurate and up-to-date records of their work.
- 4.2 Effective recording should enable another advocate to take over work with any partner in the event of an accident, holiday, etc. Good records will also help with project monitoring.
- 4.3 There should be a clear statement of the goals of the advocacy partnership and the agreed actions to reach those goals. There should also be a record of contact, any action carried out so far, and an evaluation the outcomes of these actions.
- 4.4 In general, it should be assumed that partners will have complete access to personal information held on file about them. The files should reflect the fact that the partners are taking a lead in the advocacy process and moving towards being more empowered to be self-advocates.

- 4.5 Advocates should not record personal opinions or interpretations of their partner. There are circumstances when it is necessary to record professional opinions, for example for the safety of other advocates. If it is necessary to make notes of this kind, they should be clearly marked and explained.
- 4.6 Confidential information and/or hearsay from third parties should not be included in the records unless this information has been discussed with the partner and/or supervisor and there is a specific reason for recording the information.
- 4.7 In addition to the open attitude of advocacy schemes to people reading their files, all records come under the remit of the Data Protection Act (1998) and other relevant legislation. Partners will have the right to challenge information stored if it is not true and accurate.
- 4.8 All records should be kept securely and should not be accessed without good reason, or by any unauthorised people. Confidential records should not be left on office desks or unattended in cars or homes.

## **5 Supervision**

- 5.1 Advocacy schemes should have procedures in place for providing regular supervision for all advocates and other staff, whether paid or unpaid.
- 5.2 Advocates have a responsibility to attend supervision sessions and to use them to aid their personal and professional development, as well as to address any issues in their work.

## **6 Training**

- 6.1 There is a healthy tradition in advocacy of successful work being carried out by committed, but untrained, citizens. Advocacy is nevertheless a skill which can and should be developed by appropriate training, and advocates should take advantage of training opportunities.

## **7 Feedback, Compliments, and Complaints**

- 7.1 Feedback is a vital part of the advocacy process, and an important tool for involving people in the continuous improvement of advocacy services.
- 7.2 Advocates should be encouraged to record compliments and thanks, and be supported to be able to deal effectively and supportively with complaints.
- 7.3 Advocates should make sure their partners are aware of these opportunities, and should support anyone wanting to compliment or complain about the advocacy they have received.