



Advocacy Action

Developing Advocacy in Wakefield District

Other forms of support

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, going with 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, and working through any cultural or other misunderstandings.

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.

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.