

# British Institute of Learning Disabilities

Campion House  
Green Street  
Kidderminster DY10 1JL  
Telephone 01562 723010



enquiries@bild.org.uk  
www.bild.org.uk

## Factsheet – advocacy

### Summary

- The Government's White Paper "Valuing People" says that advocacy is an important way for people with a learning disability to have more choice and control in their lives.
- Advocacy can take a number of forms, this factsheet talks about citizen advocacy, peer advocacy and self and group advocacy.
- The Government has made money available over a three year period to help develop advocacy schemes, as it hopes that everybody with a learning disability who wants to have access to an advocacy scheme can do so.

### Citizen Advocacy

A citizen advocate is an ordinary person who is prepared to commit to a long-term and one-to-one advocacy relationship, and speak up for and represent an advocacy partner's interests.

An advocacy partner is someone at risk of having choices, wishes and decisions ignored or not listened to, and who needs support in making these known and put into effect.

Citizen advocacy is not exclusively for people with learning disabilities, but it can be a powerful tool for giving them increased control over their own lives.

Basic principles of citizen advocacy include:

- the citizen advocate is an unpaid volunteer, who is independent of services;
- the citizen advocate's loyalty is to the advocacy partner, and the two always work together in partnership;
- the advocacy relationship is based on trust and confidentiality;
- the citizen advocate identifies the advocacy partner's choices and decisions, but does not make them.

Citizen advocate attributes include:

- a sense of right and wrong, and of fair play;
- understanding what it is like to be in someone else's shoes;
- patience, and a willingness to communicate;
- confidence to speak up for another in all circumstances.

## **PEER ADVOCACY**

Peer in this sense means one who is in some specific way the equal of another.

In learning disabilities, mental health, cared for children and other fields, the term is used to describe someone who has a similar, if not always equal disability to another person, or who has had similar experiences, or both.

Peer advocacy in learning disabilities in particular is used to describe a situation very similar to citizen advocacy, but where the advocate has learning disabilities as well as the partner.

The principles involved, and the attributes of a peer advocate are much the same as for citizen advocacy.

Informal peer advocacy relationships have been common because of the way in which people with learning disabilities have been forced into each others' company and cut off from the rest of the community. Now peer advocacy is emerging as an advocacy movement in its own right.

Peer advocacy has always had close links with self-advocacy. It increasingly works alongside citizen advocacy also. For example, with the citizen advocacy partner either having a peer advocate as well, or acting as a peer advocate for someone else.

Peer advocates are usually supported by self-advocacy groups, other forms of group advocacy, citizen advocates, or a combination of these.

## **SELF-ADVOCACY AND GROUP ADVOCACY**

Self-advocacy is speaking up for and representing your own interests. It is what most of us do most of the time.

Citizen advocacy and peer advocacy came into being because some people find it hard to advocate for themselves, either part of the time, or most of it.

For people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable people, self-advocacy is usually carried out with the support of a local self-advocacy group. Such groups are more and more being run and staffed by people with learning disabilities themselves.

Examples of such groups are People First, Taking Part, Speaking Up, and Voices Into Action. Their names alone indicate what they are about.

Group advocacy is a term sometimes used to describe what happens when a group of this kind acts collectively over an issue which affects a large number of its members, rather than just supporting individual self-advocates.

Usually, however, self-advocacy is used to describe both ways of working, and it is often hard to tell where one stops and the other begins.

#### References

Rick Henderson & Mike Pochin (2001) A Right Result? From Marston Book Services: [direct.orders@marston.co.uk](mailto:direct.orders@marston.co.uk)

Department of Health 2001 Valuing People (Chapter 4, Choice and Control) From The Stationery Office

BILD has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within its factsheets, but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on the information provided.