

The idea of advocacy has grown considerably since Dorset Advocacy started in 1993. However it is still not always understood. We have written this leaflet to explain how advocacy works, and how you as a carer can contact us if you require further information.

Here are some of the questions that relatives and carers ask about advocacy ... And our answers.

What is Dorset Advocacy?

Dorset Advocacy exists to create and support one to one partnerships between people who have a learning disability and volunteer advocates. Through these partnerships, people who have a learning disability can speak up, promote their interests, and play a fuller part in the life of their community.

What do advocates do?

Advocates have a range of roles which vary according to the needs of the person they help. They may attend ISP meetings and case conferences, making sure that their 'partner's' needs and wishes are clearly stated. They may help people try out new interests and opportunities. An advocate **never** imposes their own ideas on the person they help; rather, they support that person in making their own choices. Where an individual cannot make their wishes known, an advocate may speak up for what they perceive that person needs.

How do you decide who needs an advocate?

As co-ordinators we spend a lot of time talking to people who have a learning disability. If we think someone needs help in making their needs and wishes known, we ask if they would like an advocate.

How long does it take to find an advocate?

Advocates are volunteers, so we cannot guarantee a specific waiting time. We may find a suitable volunteer quite quickly, or it may take some months. We will keep in contact with the person who needs an advocate during this time.

How are advocates chosen?

The co-ordinators interview advocates and get to know their interests and background, two references are obtained and a Criminal Record Bureau disclosure is carried out. This knowledge is used as part of the matching process. The partnership does not go ahead if either person is not happy after initial meetings.

Will I be introduced to a new advocate?

Once an advocate has been found for the person you care for, we normally arrange for you to meet them at an early stage, so that you can get to know each other and exchange addresses etc. The only exception to this would be where the person you care for asked us not to make such an introduction.

You may initially feel hesitant about the new advocate and their role. But it will greatly help the person you care for if you give them the space to get to know their advocate, and perhaps share new interests with them.

What if there are problems?

We hope you will establish a good rapport with the advocate. If difficulties arise, please contact one of the co-ordinators so that we can help sort things out.

If you wish to complain about something an advocate or one of the co-ordinators has done, our separate leaflet, 'Comments and Complaints' will tell you how to go about this.

**We respect the roles of carers and relatives
Of people who have a learning disability.
Advocates do not replace relatives or carers;
rather, they try to help individuals promote
their wishes and interests . We hope to share
this aim with you.**

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