

Disabled Parents Network's Family Advocacy Service

DPN's advocacy service supports disabled parents to access the services they are entitled to around a wide range of parenting issues. The Advocacy service builds upon the excellent work already provided by the support service, but is able to offer more in depth support in those cases where it is required or requested.

The aim of the advocacy service is to 'reduce the isolation and improve opportunity for involvement in the community for disabled parent families, through the provision of information, assistance and support so that they can self advocate with social, health and education services for improved access to support in their parenting role'.

The advocacy service is to be offered to all disabled parents using the following definitions;

'disabled person' to be any person with actual or perceived physical, sensory, emotional, learning impairment, long term illness, HIV, drug or alcohol dependence, or a person with a mental health issue. These impairments may be obvious, hidden, long term or short term may be congenital or acquired before or after the birth of a child.

'Parents' to mean 'prospective parents, grandparents and same sex couples, those who raise, adopt or foster children, stepparents as well as biological parents.

Our advocacy service is offered to all disabled parents throughout England. Its completely confidential and is free to all users.

It is expected that a lot of our referrals will come via the Support Service - however word of mouth will help to make this service really successful, please feel free to spread the word!

If you would like to contact the Advocacy service directly to talk about making a referral or to find a little more about what we do please call 0300 3300 639 using option 5 when prompted.</stong>

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is about:

- * giving people a voice
- * ensuring voices are heard and listened to
- * helping people to gain the right knowledge
- * empowerment and the promotion of self advocacy

Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support and take their side.

An Advocate can offer support with letter writing and making complaints, researching issues on behalf of a person, making phone calls and attending meetings.

Advocacy is about giving people a voice, an Advocate is there solely for the person they are supporting and can only take instruction from them.

Advocates work should be free from any other influences and so for it to be really effective it must be independent of statutory authorities; it must also be a free service.

The aim of advocacy is to promote empowerment and self advocacy.

What DPN advocacy is not.

- * Advocacy is not counselling.
- * Advocacy is not mediation.
- * Advocacy is not a legal service

DPN's advocacy service works towards the Advocacy Charter. This was devised in 2002 with input from over 75 advocacy providers.

Click on this link to be re directed to the charter
www.aqvx59.dsl.pipex.com/Advocacy%20Charter2004.pdf

Different types of advocacy

There are different types of advocacy, these include:

Issue based advocacy

When an advocate empowers someone to speak up about a particular issue, or speaks up for them to support them through a crisis.

At DPN we offer issue based advocacy and non instructed advocacy and at the forefront of all our work we are constantly striving to promote self advocacy.

We do this by empowering parents to speak up for themselves.

For example a lot of time can be spent with a parent before a meeting, focusing on what kind of issues will be raised for discussion and working on what good outcomes would be for the parent.

Self Advocacy

When someone speaks and acts for their self to present their case. Many self advocates have come together to form a collective voice on issues that impact on their lives, sometimes called group advocacy.

Citizen Advocacy

This is usually advocacy provided by an unpaid worker and provides advocacy on a long term basis.

Peer Advocacy

When the advocate has something in common with the person they are advocating for. For example, the advocate might be a user or a former user of the advocacy service.

Peer advocacy and citizen advocacy are not dissimilar to what DPN have been providing over the last ten years.

DPN have given the opportunity for disabled parents to form a collective voice on the current issues around disabled parent families, there are a number of ways that this has been facilitated, for example local network links and the forum.

It is hoped that as our service grows we can offer citizen advocacy on a more 'formal' basis. Perhaps by recruiting volunteer advocates to work on a long term basis with disabled parents.

If anyone is interested in speaking further about becoming a volunteer 'citizen' advocate with DPN, please do not hesitate to contact us for an informal chat.

Non-instructed advocacy

Taking affirmative action with or on behalf of someone unable to give a clear indication of their views or wishes in a specific situation. For example, this could be someone with profound learning disabilities or brain damage. The non-instructed advocate can work on a rights based approach ensuring that fair and equal treatment and access to services is available and making certain that decisions are taken with due consideration for their unique preferences and perspectives. Only in very rare circumstances will there be no means of communication; a non instructed advocate would be skilled at working with people who communicate in ways other than the spoken word.

Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA)

To support people who do not have the capacity to make their own decisions and who have no family or friends willing or able to support them.

IMCA's advocate on specific decisions that are to be made by the Local Authority or the Health Authority around medical treatment, residential care, safeguarding adult issues and care reviews.

DOLS (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards) IMCA

Advocacy for people who lack capacity to make their own decisions and who would be entitled to the services of an IMCA, where a statutory authority is proposing a person stay in a hospital or nursing home that may be deemed as against their wishes. The DOLS IMCA works with the person to ensure any proposed 'deprivation of liberty' is in their best interests.

Both IMCA and IMCA DOLS are statutory forms of advocacy where the professionals/decision makers have a legal obligation to refer to the IMCA service if the criterion for doing so is met.

Referrals for IMCA and IMCA DOLS would only come from professionals in certain circumstances. However Local Authorities and PCT's should welcome all queries regarding these forms of advocacy.

Legal Advocacy:

This is provided by lawyers and aims to assist people to exercise or defend their legal rights.

