ihc
IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Information Sheet #2

Advocacy

Advocacy

Advocacy means different things to different people. The main goal of advocacy is to ensure that a person's 'voice' is heard. Advocacy has a lot to do with rights. An advocate speaks up for the rights of another as if those rights were his or her own. Advocacy is about establishing and maintaining those rights.

The two main types of advocacy are individual and systemic.

Individual advocacy is - representing another person on issues that relate directly to that individual.
Systemic advocacy is - working to change attitudes, policies, systems or laws that impact negatively on the lives of individuals.

Skills for good advocacy

- Listen carefully – this means finding out what the individual or group is actually saying, not what you think they should be saying.
- Communicate clearly and often.
- Be creative and try different approaches – don't give up if your first idea doesn't bring a solution.
- Be assertive – take a firm stand and stick to it without getting angry or going on the attack.
- Be persistent – some issues take a long time to resolve. A good advocate must be willing to 'hang in there' until the issue is resolved, not to back off if it becomes difficult or time-consuming.

Advocacy processes

A strategic approach to advocacy delivers the best results. As an advocate you need to identify the 'bit' that is broken and fix that; not try to fix everything.

- Define the issue – the presenting problem is not always the real one.
- Identify the individual or group you are advocating for. Sometimes the issue affects more than one person.
- Find out what the timeframes are, when the problem started and how long it has been happening.
- If you can, identify the cause.
- Decide on the desired outcome.
- Develop a plan of action.

Developing a plan of action

A plan of action is about designing the approach you want to take. A plan also helps to minimise risks and identify allies who might be able to help.

1. Gather as much information as possible from a variety of sources.
2. See if you can identify similar cases and the solutions used in those cases.
3. Identify all people currently involved, who could or should be involved and any possible allies.
4. Identify who the 'target' is. If it is an organisation, identify who within that organisation has the authority to make changes.
5. Look at possible solutions or outcomes and any possible drawbacks to the plan of action. Work with the individual or group to decide what is wanted, not wanted, and any possible compromises.
6. Identify and assess any risks for the individual or group you are supporting and ways to address these risks.
7. Identify any processes, such as complaints processes, that could be used to gain a resolution.
8. Consider the resources that might be needed.
9. Decide who is going to do what; work out timeframes.
10. Think about possible arguments, questions and responses from the people you will target and how you will respond. Practice those answers.
11. Make sure everyone involved knows what is to happen and who is responsible for each part and then put the agreed plan into action.
12. Make sure you have a contingency plan.

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Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest is a situation in which someone in a position of trust, such as an advocate, has competing professional or personal interests in the case they have been asked to work on. Such competing interests can make it difficult for the advocate to be impartial. A conflict of interest exists even if no unethical or improper act results from it. If at any time you think you may have a conflict of interest, you need to declare it, and discuss whether you are still the best person to act as the advocate.

Consent

You always need to get a person's permission to be their advocate. For informal situations such as supporting someone at a meeting, verbal permission is fine. If, however, you are requesting personal information from organisations or acting on a person's behalf, it is advisable to get written consent.
For advice call IHC Advocacy on 0800 442 442

Advocacy services in New Zealand

Ideally everyone has a person in their life who is able to advocate on their behalf. The following organisations can offer friendship-based relationships that expand people's social networks.

IHC Volunteer Programme 0800 442 442
IHC volunteers help people with disabilities to be part of their communities, to learn new things, be out and about and form friendships. IHC's Volunteer Programme is based on the individual needs of people with disabilities, in line with IHC's philosophy of supporting people to live, learn, work and enjoy life in the community.

Citizen Advocacy
Citizen Advocacy matches people who have intellectual disability with an advocate.

- Citizen Advocacy, Auckland, **Ph (09) 366 4545**
- Advocacy, Manawatu - Palmerston North, **Ph (06) 354 9459**
- Friendlink, Dunedin, **Ph (03) 474 1335**
- Friendship Links, Nelson **Ph (03) 548 3653**

For other citizen advocacy groups check with your local Citizens Advice Bureau

The Personal Advocacy Trust 04 385 9175
Provides people with an intellectual disability a personal advocate after their parents die. Families join by paying an enrolment fee on behalf of their son or daughter.

Sometimes you may find it is useful to link in to a specialist Advocacy service to get advice, information and support

Parent to Parent New Zealand 0508 236 236
Parent to Parent have advocates in some areas who are parents of children with special needs or impairments. Advocates have undergone advocacy training.

People First 0800 20 60 70
A self advocacy organisation for people with a learning (intellectual) disability.

Health and Disability Commissioner 0800 11 22 33
Enforces Health & Disability Consumers Code of Rights. Provides an independent health and disability advocacy service throughout New Zealand. The service is free, confidential, and independent of service providers. To contact the Nationwide Health & Disability Advocacy service directly call 0800 555 050.

Benefit Advocacy Services
For situations specifically concerning benefit issues.
See detailed list in the IHC Advocacy Toolkit.

Human Rights Commission 0800 496 877
Facilitates resolution of disputes about discrimination.

Office of the Children's Commissioner 0800 22 44 53
Makes inquiries and reports on any matter that relates to the rights, welfare or interests of children (except where the matter is before any court or tribunal). Investigates and monitors the Department of Child, Youth and Family.

The Banking Ombudsman 0800 805 950
Free, external and independent process to help people sort out their unresolved problems with banks.

The Privacy Commissioner 0800 803 909
Investigates complaints about breaches of privacy under the Privacy Act 1993.

The Office of the Ombudsmen 0800 802 602
Free service that investigates complaints about central and local government agencies.

Community Law Centres
Provide a range of community legal services including free legal advice. See www.communitylaw.org.nz for your local centre.