

Independent Advocacy – Supporting Scotland

Advocacy helps to safeguard peoples' rights, give individuals and groups a voice and supports people to have control and choice in their lives.

High quality independent advocacy support for people in vulnerable situations can help them understand and identify options, make informed choices and ensure that their voice is heard. Successful, lasting outcomes for individuals in vulnerable situations are more likely to be achieved if those most affected are as fully involved as possible in the decision making process.

At any one time around **1.2 million people** (21% of the total population) have a right of access to independent advocacy in Scotland under the Mental Health Act. However the most recent figures show that only **27,000** people accessed advocacy in one year.

SIAA research carried out into the impact of independent advocacy has shown the difference that access to advocacy has made for individuals.

“Advocacy changed my life...” was a quote from one of the research participants who had accessed advocacy support after a long period of ill health and resultant unemployment. He spoke about the major difference that advocacy had made for him, that he ***“... gained in confidence, it gave me the drive, the determination.”***

Other quotes from across all the groups –

“Before my advocate got involved no one listened... Life has changed, I can smile again. I don't think I'd be alive without advocacy.”

“Discovering that what I have to say is valid, that it has value means that I also have value.”

“Advocacy helps to support me at meetings – instead of feeling paranoid and anxious ..., I am able to concisely and fairly put my point across.”

‘Advocacy is for the people, is to help people like myself ... and it really does’

“I can speak up more; my advocate is helping me learn how to stand up and do things for myself.”

Research reveals that there are significant gaps in advocacy service provision across different Local Authorities, including; children and young people, prisoners with mental disorders, people with Asperger's syndrome and Dementia. This means that many people with a statutory right to advocacy are not getting the support that they need.

The right to access independent advocacy, free from conflicts of interest, is enshrined in the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. Despite this we found when we surveyed advocacy organisations that;

- **65%** of respondents said that their funding had either **remained static or decreased** in recent years.
- As a result of **limited resources** and **increased demand**, many advocacy organisations report that they have introduced **waiting lists** and that people now have to wait for, in some cases, considerable periods before they can access advocacy.
- Almost **50%** of advocacy organisations have a Service Level Agreement or Contract that requires them to **prioritise people facing compulsory measures**. This means that people facing other crises have to wait sometimes weeks and even months to see an advocate.

“Three quarters of the people on our waiting list have a mental disorder and the waiting time can be anything between a few weeks and up to 3 months” An advocacy manager

The SIAA believes that, in order to create a Scotland that is equal and fair, we need to uphold the rights of all marginalised people and ensure access to independent advocacy to all who need it.

SIAA would like to see;

1. Those with a statutory right to independent advocacy having access to it when they need it.
2. Needs assessments carried out and strategic plans for advocacy put in place in all LA and NHS Board areas.
3. Groups and individuals being involved in planning both locally and nationally.
4. All advocacy organisations having a minimum 3 years funding cycle.
5. People having access to different types of advocacy; collective and individual to meet their needs.
6. Advocacy being available to more people without a statutory right when they need it.

We would like to see a Scotland where people are valued and respected and can lead productive, fulfilling lives. Independent advocacy plays an important role in making that a reality for thousands of people each year.

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance is the national membership body for advocacy organisations across Scotland. Our remit is to promote, support and defend the principles and practice of independent advocacy in Scotland. Our aim is to ensure that independent advocacy is available to anyone who needs it in Scotland. SIAA is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation Charity number SC033576 London House, 20-22 East London Street, Edinburgh EH7 4BQ 0131 556 6443 | enquiry@siaa.org.uk www.siaa.org.uk