

## SIAA Briefing

### Independent Advocacy

February 2015

#### Jack's story

*Jack is on the autistic spectrum. He had coped with mainstream education throughout Primary School but since transferring to High School he had found things very difficult. He consistently stated that he wished to attend a specialist school, he was consistent in his view that he could not cope in the mainstream school and that he felt increasingly socially isolated and left out. This situation had been continuing for two years with Jack having to be persuaded and cajoled by his parents to engage with his education. He found out about his local advocacy organisation from a teacher. When he contacted the advocacy organisation he was at the point of feeling resigned to his fate, he told the advocate 'what's the point, no one cares what I think.' The situation had had an adverse effect on his self-esteem, wellbeing and family relationships. The advocacy organisation supported him to make his wishes clear and to explain the reason for his clearly stated desire to attend a specialist school. Eventually he was placed in a specialist school. He told his advocate 'For the first time in my life I feel the same as everyone else.' His confidence has increased and his family relationships have improved.*

Many of those who contact advocacy organisations are isolated and lack informal social support networks. In their work advocates will aim to support individuals to make connections with others and to be included in their community.

#### Anna's story

*Anna's advocate supported her through the transition from children's into adult services and Anna went from not knowing anything about advocacy and not feeling included in her own life or in social situations, to advocating for advocacy and making many new friends. She described how getting involved in the advocacy movement as a representative for Learning Disability Alliance Scotland, a board member and a member of the young person's group, helped her to feel part of the community. She explained that it made her feel "more experienced and confident as well".*

#### Roger and Denise

*Roger who is visually impaired is the main carer for his wife, Denise who suffers from dementia. They had severed their ties with family members as they felt the family were taking control over their lives and were going against their wishes. Roger said that his family had wanted them to move out of their home and into a care home which they did not wish to do, he felt that the Social Worker involved at the time was listening only to his family and not to his or Denise's views, at one point he reported that he became very depressed and had attempted suicide. Following that he was referred to his local advocacy organisation. He told us that he felt that the advocate listened to him and made sure that his views were heard; he and Denise felt that they had someone on their side. "Our family didn't help us but she's [the advocate] been there for us ....". Roger*

## What is independent advocacy?

Independent Advocacy is about ensuring that people are as fully involved as possible on decisions made about them and their lives. It is about making sure their voice is heard, it is about ensuring that people's rights are upheld.

Independent advocacy aims to help people by supporting them to express their own wishes and needs and make their own informed decisions. Independent advocates support people to gain access to information and explore and understand options. They speak on behalf of people who are unable to speak for themselves, or who choose not to do so. They safeguard people who are vulnerable or discriminated against or whom services find difficult to support.

Independent Advocacy includes:

- Safeguarding people who are vulnerable, discriminated against or whom services find difficult to serve
- Enabling people to get information, explore and understand their options, and to make their views and wishes known
- Empowering people to express their own needs and make their own decisions
- Helping ensure that individuals' rights are recognised and upheld
- Speaking on behalf of people who are unable to do so for themselves.

## Types of advocacy

One to one or individual advocacy which includes professional or issue based advocacy, citizen advocacy and peer advocacy. It can be provided by both paid and unpaid advocates. They provide support on specific issues and provide information but not advice. This support can be short or long term.

Group or Collective advocacy enables a peer group of people, as well as a wider community with shared interests, to represent their views, preferences and experiences. A collective voice can help reduce an individual's sense of isolation when raising a difficult issue. A collective voice can be stronger than that of individuals when campaigning and can help policy makers, strategic planners and service providers know what is working well, where gaps are and how best to target resources.

The aim of all models of advocacy is to help individuals gain increased confidence and assertiveness so that, where possible, they will feel able to self-advocate when the need arises.

To see how independent advocacy works in practice watch A Voice to Trust, [part 1](#) advocacy for older people and [part 2](#) advocacy for children and young people.

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The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) is Scotland's national membership body for advocacy organisations. The SIAA promotes, supports and defends independent advocacy in Scotland. It aims to ensure that independent advocacy is available to any person who needs it in Scotland.

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