

## Factsheet B40: An introduction to our Advocacy Support

It is important for us to be clear about what kind of advocacy support you can expect from us. As advocates, we do not make false promises about what you may be able to achieve with our support. What we do promise is that we will work very hard to:

- Understand how you feel about the issues
- Make sure you have a say in our level of involvement and the kind of advocacy support we offer
- Be non-judgmental and respectful about your views, needs, circumstances and experiences
- Agree a plan of action with you
- Help you put forward your views
- Ensure that officials take your views into account as far as possible.

Advocates are independent so we will act upon your instructions and represent only your views and wishes, whether or not these are shared by family members or other professionals. We want to make sure that you do not suffer from any inequality or discrimination, and that you have a voice that other people listen to. Often decisions are made that affect you in ways that can make you feel powerless, so we want to make sure you have some of that power back.

At the start of our advocacy relationship with you, we will listen to what you have to say and what outcomes you are looking for. We will explain what the



options are so that you can make the best possible decision. We want you to feel that your views and wishes have been genuinely considered when decisions are made about your life. If there are choices to be made, and you are able to make an informed decision, the choices are always yours and we will always accept your decisions.

Where possible, we will help you to take action and speak up for yourself. We will do this by providing you with the information you need and support you to develop your skills. This is called 'self-advocacy'. It is important that we do this so that the next time a problem occurs you will feel much more confident and able to deal with it yourself. We want you to feel in control of your life.

If you are in a crisis situation where you are in serious or urgent need, we will make sure that a member of the team offers you one-to-one support as quickly as possible to resolve that particular issue. This is called 'crisis advocacy' and can include signposting or referring you to other agencies if we feel they are better placed to meet your needs. When you first make contact with us we will aim to respond to you that day. If we can't support you immediately, we will try to let you know how long it will be before an advocate is able to pick up your case. We are a very busy service, but we realise that some situations are urgent and need a quick response in order to prevent things getting much worse.

Where we can, we will make sure that you have a named advocate who will work with you to resolve a particular issue so that you can develop trust and understanding. However we often 'co-work' cases, which means that you will have two named advocates supporting you. We do this because many members of the team are part time and this helps us to make sure there is



always someone around to support you. Once your case has been closed, if you contact us for support again in the future we cannot guarantee that the same advocate will be asked to work with you again.

Our advocates include volunteers who have experience of the same kind of problems you might be having, and are trained and supported in their role by Equal Lives. This is called 'peer advocacy' because you are both of equal standing, and they know what it is like to be in your shoes. Peer advocates will also support you to have a voice and to develop your self-advocacy skills. We encourage people who have used our service to become peer advocates because we believe this is really important and something that they, and we as a service, both benefit from.

There is another kind of advocacy we offer, which is called 'non-instructed advocacy'. This is where we act on behalf of someone who cannot actually tell us what their views or wishes are. This can include people with dementia, learning disabilities or brain damage. We are contracted by Norfolk County Council to provide this service, and people who receive it are usually referred to us by professionals or family members.

We may also help you speak up about your medical treatment or problems when you are living in residential or nursing care.

Advocates often support people in legal matters, although we are not legal advocates or lawyers. We can support you by advising you about Court or other legal processes, and making sure that you understand everything that is happening and that your legal rights are protected (although you may also be receiving or wish to get advice from a solicitor).



If you require further information or would like this factsheet in an alternative format you can contact us by calling: 01508 491210, by emailing: [info@equallives.org.uk](mailto:info@equallives.org.uk), or by writing to: Equal Lives, 15 Manor Farm Barns, Fox Road, Framingham Pigot, Norfolk, NR14 7PZ.

