



Advocacy Forum Winter Newsletter

What is Advocacy?

What is the Advocacy Forum?

What is Fife's Advocacy Strategy?

If you lie in bed awake at night worrying about these three questions, then this Newsletter is just for you!

And, if you haven't previously heard of the Advocacy Forum or Fife's Advocacy Strategy, then this Newsletter is also just for you!

We think it is important that as many people as possible know about Advocacy, and we would like as many people as possible to get involved in the Advocacy Forum.

Therefore this Newsletter will give you the answer to the above three questions, AND we also include a personal account of his involvement in the Advocacy Forum from Michael.

Please read on.....

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is something that one person provides in support of another. It is about

- Safeguarding people who are vulnerable and discriminated against or whom services find difficult to serve.
- Empowering people who need a stronger voice by enabling them to express their own needs and make their own decisions.
- Enabling people to gain access to information, explore and understand their options, and to make their views and wishes known.
- Speaking on behalf of people who are unable to do so for themselves

Independent advocacy is carried out by individuals and organisations who are separate from the organisations who provide services. It comes in different forms:

- **Professional Advocacy** – paid professional staff with expert knowledge (legal, health or social care) act as advocates, tending to work with people on a shorter-term basis, supporting the person with a particular issue or issues
- **Citizen Advocacy** – a one-to-one partnership between trained unpaid volunteer (or paid member of staff) and a vulnerable person. This tends to be a long-term relationship
- **Collective (or Group) Advocacy** – support is offered to allow vulnerable people to come together and gain strength from a collective voice- including those groups often less heard than others

What is the Advocacy Forum?

In March 2011 Fife Council and NHS Fife held an event at the Rothes Hall in Glenrothes, called a 'stakeholder consultation'. Over a hundred people who receive advocacy support or help provide an advocacy service attended. They were asked about their views on advocacy and how they thought advocacy services should be organised so that they meet the needs of the people in Fife.

One of the actions agreed at this consultation event was that a Forum should be set up so that those who use advocacy services and those who provide them could get together and discuss what is needed in the future.

In September 2011 a further meeting was held and this meeting confirmed the need for an Advocacy Forum. We discussed who would be chairperson, how it would be funded, and we agreed that as many people as possible who have a need for advocacy or who provide advocacy should be encouraged to attend. One of the main purposes of the Forum was to discuss Fife's Advocacy Strategy.

The Advocacy Forum has met monthly since then. Its members have discussed a wide range of issues that have contributed to Fife's Advocacy Strategy. We looked at questions such as:

What is advocacy?

Why is independent advocacy so important?

Which people in Fife are able to access advocacy support?

Which people in Fife are unable to access advocacy support, even though they need it?

Another important task for the Advocacy Forum was to choose three representatives from the Forum who would attend the Joint Strategic Advocacy Planning Group. (The Joint Strategic Advocacy Planning Group is made up of senior staff from Social Work and NHS Fife including managers of services for Children, Adults, and the Elderly. They are responsible for putting Fife's Advocacy Strategy into place). This has helped make sure the views of the Forum members are put forward at the Planning Group, and it has allowed the representatives to give feedback to the Forum about what the Planning Group has discussed.

To summarise, the aims of the Advocacy Forum are:

- To support the development of Advocacy across Fife
- To be a place to share good practice along with information about the latest developments in Advocacy Practice
- To enable Advocacy Providers and Users of Services to feed into the Joint Strategic Advocacy Planning Group and other relevant statutory bodies/groups

The Advocacy Forum works best when it is representing the widest range of views from those in Fife who have a need for advocacy. Therefore we would welcome extra members to reflect the diversity of those who need advocacy.

Please think about whether you or someone within your service could come to the Advocacy Forum. Individuals who are accompanied by carers or supporters are very welcome. For more information please contact one of the people listed below.

Fife's Advocacy Strategy

In 2011 the Scottish Government prompted all the Local Authorities (e.g. Fife Council) and NHS Boards to produce an Advocacy Strategy that would look at what kind of advocacy is provided in their area, and whether it meets the needs of the people who actually need advocacy. It said that by April 2013 there would need to be a new Advocacy Strategy in place. The Joint Strategic Advocacy Planning Group was set up to make this happen.

We are now at the point where discussions are taking place with advocacy provider services about what shape the services will look like from April 2013 onwards. New service level agreements and contract tenders are being prepared. It has been agreed that current service providers will have a 'transitional' period up to April 2014 to make sure they have time to make any adjustments to the way they work.

Once the Strategy proposals have been agreed by all the partners, there will be a publicity drive to let as many people as possible know about them

My name is Michael.

I am a member of People First (Scotland) which is an independent self-advocacy organisation.

We tell adults with learning difficulties about self-advocacy: how it can change lives and the way people feel about themselves.

Independent advocacy is really important for everyone who is affected by disability whether you are an adult or a child.

Lots of people need help to speak up and have their views heard.

I was nominated by my local People First Group to be a representative on the Fife Advocacy Forum.

The Advocacy Forum is open to anyone with an interest in advocacy and especially to people who use services. It gives people an opportunity to help shape the advocacy provided in Fife.

We would like more people who use services: e.g. mental health users and others to come on board and give their views.

I also sit on the Joint Strategic Advocacy Planning Group which is headed up by Fife Council and includes others from NHS, Children's services, Older People, Advocacy, and voluntary organisations etc.

This is an important group that looks at the Advocacy provided in Fife to ensure people who need independent advocacy get that support.

I get support to prepare before and during meetings. Some of the words used at meetings can be quite hard to understand so we always make sure that minutes are put in easy read.

I feedback to the Advocacy Forum and the People First Fife Wide Group so that everyone knows what is happening about advocacy in Fife.

It can be hard work and a challenge but it is about working together, treating each other with respect and changing attitudes for the better. Most of all it is about having a voice.

Any Questions?

If you want to know more about the Advocacy Forum please contact:

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