

Advocacy

This factsheet explains what advocacy is, how it can help you and where to access it in West Lothian.

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What is advocacy?

Advocacy is a way to help you have more influence and control over your own life. It means support from another person to help you express your views and needs, and stand up for your rights. Someone who helps you in this way is called an 'advocate' or an 'advocacy worker'.

An advocate will work with you on a one-to-one basis. They will listen and discuss options on how they may be able to help. An advocate will not advise you on what to do, but will ensure that you have the information you need to know your rights to make an informed decision. An advocate/advocacy worker is never judgemental and will only act on your behalf if you have given them permission to do so.

Advocacy is not a befriending, mediation or counselling service. Advocates do not provide practical support. Everyone will be treated with respect and with full confidentiality (exceptions to this policy are allowed if the advocates feel that the individual or any other person is at risk of serious harm). Whilst it cannot always guarantee the outcome, it will ensure people are listened to.

Advocates provide support with:

- attending medical appointments or reviews
- speaking to people involved in people's care and treatment
- help to find information about and help to access services
- financial matters
- attending appointments for housing
- helping people know your rights, for example, if you are detained in hospital

Independent advocacy

'Independent advocacy' is "independent" when the organisations only provide advocacy. Independent advocates and advocacy groups do not work for hospitals, social work services or any voluntary organisations that provide social care or support services; this ensures that there is no conflict of interests.

The four main principles of independent advocacy are that it:

- puts the people who use it first
- is accountable
- is as free as it can be from conflicts of interest
- is accessible

Collective advocacy

'Collective advocacy' is about people with similar experiences getting together to try to change things for the better. For example, it can enable people to have an influence on what kinds of services are available. By making use of their shared experiences, they can have a much stronger voice and be more influential than they can alone.

The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2015

The Act gives people who experience mental health difficulties the right to access independent advocacy services. This applies to both individual and collective advocacy.

How to get advocacy

There are different organisations that can help you find statutory and non-

statutory advocacy services in your local area. At the end of this factsheet, you will find a list of organisations that can help get the right type of advocacy to suit your situation and needs.

Related information

This section highlights several services advocacy services in West Lothian. For more information on what is available in West Lothian, please go to www.westspace.org.uk.

Mental Health Advocacy Project (MHAP) provides a mental health advocacy service for people in hospital, for those living in the community and for residents in HMP Addiewell.

www.westspace.org.uk/provider/mental-health-advocacy-project

Advice Shop Bathgate provides a free, confidential service open to anyone who lives in West Lothian.

www.westspace.org.uk/service/west-lothian-council-advice-shop

EARS Advocacy provides trained, independent, professional advocacy workers to those in need.

www.westspace.org.uk/provider/ears-advocacy-2

Kindred provides advocacy and information on services available to children with complex needs and their carers.

www.westspace.org.uk/service/kindred

West Lothian Domestic and Sexual Assault Team (DASAT) offers advocacy, and confidential and friendly support to people who have experienced abuse.

www.westspace.org.uk/service/domestic-and-sexual-assault-team-dasat