



Scottish
**Independent
Advocacy**
Alliance

Evaluation report for The Advocacy Project Executive Summary

2015

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Acknowledgements

We were privileged to have had this opportunity to spend time at The Advocacy Project and to learn more about the valuable generic advocacy service they offer to adults (16-65) in North Lanarkshire. We appreciated hearing about the work of the advocates and the support they receive from the management team and from the organisation as a whole. We were also pleased to experience some of the work the Engagement and Involvement Team are undertaking in this specific location.

We acknowledge the considerable time and effort that was involved in the preparation for this evaluation both before and during the evaluation. The Advocacy Project generously put aside the training room in their office for our use along with the Director's office when necessary and various "hot desk" spots as required. All of the staff, whether involved in the evaluation or not, were really helpful and welcoming. This helped the team settle into the office and concentrate on the evaluation tasks.

The Service Lead for North Lanarkshire took on the administration. The team wish to express our thanks for her support and for the comprehensive timetable which met all of our requirements.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the evaluation for taking the time to meet with us, take part in a telephone interview or complete a questionnaire.



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Executive Summary

1.1 Background

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) was funded by the Scottish Government to develop and pilot a quality assurance process for independent advocacy organisations. The SIAA Quality Assurance Team is very grateful to The Advocacy Project for volunteering to take part in this pilot project.

The model of evaluation used during this pilot project is based on 'Independent Advocacy: An Evaluation Framework' A copy of this document can be found at: <http://www.siaa.org.uk/resources/publications-list/page/6/>

The process involved a team of 3 evaluators conducting an extensive review of organisational documents before visiting The Advocacy Project to gather information from a range of stakeholders about the advocacy being provided in North Lanarkshire and its impact.

Advocacy Partners and referrers were selected for interview by the Quality Assurance Co-ordinator rather than The Advocacy Project. This is a standard part of the evaluation process which ensures that the selection is made in a fair and objective way.

See below for information about the areas covered by this evaluation along with a summary of the key findings and recommendations.

Please Note - This summary does not include the full list of recommendations made or always quote the content of each recommendation in full.

1.2 The Advocacy Relationship and Impact

All advocacy partners interviewed said that The Advocacy Project North Lanarkshire Service had made a difference to their lives, in most cases a very significant difference.

The majority of advocacy partners and collective advocacy group members had a good understanding of what independent advocacy is and what it is not and the boundaries of the advocacy role. All were clear about their respective responsibilities and spoke about accessing and referring to other relevant agencies for specialist and/or additional support. Independent advocacy is clearly the sole purpose of the North Lanarkshire service. Due to the significant demands on the North Lanarkshire service a priority access system is in operation, with those subject to compulsion under legislative interventions given top priority.

The majority of the one to one advocacy partners interviewed had a legislative right to access independent advocacy. All the advocacy partners interviewed had pressing

advocacy needs, often involving support with more than one issue, with adult or child protection and interventions under mental health or incapacity legislation figuring high on the list of referrals. The work is intense. All of the advocates were held in high regard by their advocacy partners and referring agencies.

The collective advocacy work, supported by The Advocacy Project's Involvement and Engagement team and advocates from the North Lanarkshire team, was also highly regarded for its positive impact for individuals and for its wider influence on social care practice.

The North Lanarkshire advocacy service supports individuals, wherever possible, to grow in confidence and skill through the advocacy process. Gaining skills in self advocacy was recognised by advocacy partners as an important practical benefit.

1.3 Types of Advocacy Offered

The North Lanarkshire service is currently delivered by paid professional advocates. The Advocacy Project currently has no volunteer advocates supporting either individual or collective advocacy.

The North Lanarkshire service provides:

One to one professional or issue based advocacy – where an advocate supports an individual to represent their own interests or represents the views of an individual if the person is unable to do this for themselves.

Non –instructed Advocacy – where the advocate is acting with or on behalf of a person who is unable to give a clear indication of their views or wishes in a specific situation.

Collective Advocacy – where an advocate supports a peer group or wider community of interests, to represent their views, preferences and experiences. This allows people to raise issues through collective action they might not wish to voice on an individual basis.

Detailed information and free resources explaining the different approaches to independent advocacy can be found on the SIAA website: <http://www.siaa.org.uk/>

Recommendation 2

That the Advocacy Project takes the opportunity of the imminent IT review to redesign the advocacy case recording process with attention to: a case recording template with accompanying guidance and training for staff and maintaining regular review of the case files as part of the supervision process.

Recommendation 3

In addition to the funding activities already underway, we recommend that the Advocacy Project looks at possibilities for developing the successful collective work, especially with regard to residential care settings.

Recommendation 4

- The Advocacy Project explores possible roles for volunteer advocates working alongside paid staff supporting collective advocacy groups.
- The Advocacy project looks to building on their successful work with The Commonwealth Graduate Scheme through opening discussions on whether a modern apprenticeship could be offered to young people interested in a career in independent advocacy.

1.4 Equality and accessibility

The waiting list is the biggest issue affecting the accessibility of the North Lanarkshire advocacy service. Individuals are treated equitably with the criteria applied rigorously to each new referral.

The waiting list has steadily increased since the outset of the contract in 2011 and for the past 18 months has averaged at 90 people. The list is not static; advocacy partnerships close appropriately and timeously. Time limited advocacy support is offered to those on the waiting list and the Service Lead keeps in touch by phone on a regular basis.

74% of those currently on the waiting list have the right to access independent advocacy under The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. The Act gives people with learning disabilities and people with a mental illness a right to independent advocacy, whether they are under any compulsion or not and irrespective of whether they are in or out of hospital. The North Lanarkshire advocacy service is therefore currently unable to fully respond to the requirements of the Act.

Recommendation 5

As a matter of urgency, the evaluation team recommend that North Lanarkshire Council, NHS Lanarkshire and The Advocacy Project conduct, or commission an enquiry into whether there are specific circumstances that lead to the high level of demand in this geographic location; are there for example recent long stay hospital closures, population growth, or significant activity that would place pressure on all advice services (welfare benefit changes for example). Whatever the cause the evaluation team is of the opinion that the commissioners and the North Lanarkshire Advocacy Service have done all they can to address this difficult situation and an increase in funding will be necessary.

Recommendation 6

The evaluation team would encourage all stakeholders to explore situations and circumstances where people would find it difficult to contact the advocacy service themselves. This could usefully form part of the planning process for the next Advocacy Plan. The gaps that have been identified in the SIAA Map of Advocacy across Scotland 2013–2014 would be a good starting point for discussion:

- Carers
- Addictions
- People in prison (an advocacy service is in place in Shotts prison but ongoing funding is not secured)

1.5 Recruitment, Training and Support of Advocates and other Staff (paid and unpaid)

The evaluation team were impressed by the open culture of the organisation and the desire of the Senior Management Team to keep a firm focus on supporting and managing staff as circumstances change.

The Advocacy Project has been recognised at the Bronze Award level in Investors in People and has achieved the Bronze Award in the Healthy Working Lives initiative.

The Advocacy Project is the first advocacy organisation in Scotland to take forward a formal qualification in independent advocacy, working in partnership with Napier University and The Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF).

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Advocacy Project share their learning (on formal qualification) with the wider advocacy movement.

Staff reported a high level of satisfaction with the organisation as a whole and for the support they get from the Operations Manager, Service Lead and the Director who is held in high esteem by all.

Training is appropriate and responds to the needs of individuals and the organisation. The supervision process follows good practice for all staff. The Advocacy Project's Induction Programme has been referenced in other evaluation reports as an example of excellence.

Recommendation 8

The evaluation team recommend that the North Lanarkshire advocates hold Peer Group Supervision Sessions which are placed in the diary for every 3 months with time for both open space and agenda items.

Recommendation 9

The evaluation team recommend that the policy on first contacts is adhered to. This is in response to advocates reporting that referrers have not always told them about the person's current health, or whether there are circumstances they should be aware of. This is very unusual but it has happened so better to apply the policy equitably.

Recommendation 10

The organisation as a whole looks at the recording procedures around potential risk as part of the review of case recording and developing the new IT systems. This would be a useful space to debate the balance the organisation wishes to strike around client and staff safety, risks and modelling a non-labelling culture.

1.6 Managing the Organisation

1.6.1 Policies

The Advocacy Project has a comprehensive range of policies in place. The policy and practice is clearly geared towards supporting the governance and direct work of a professional independent advocacy organisation.

1.6.2 Governance of the organisation, including the roles and responsibilities

The Board is currently reviewing its own structure. There are identified gaps in the skills and experience which will be addressed as the review progresses. Service user influence at Board level is an identified gap.

The Board are well aware of the key role they play in setting the vision and strategy for the organisation and their role in striving to maintain the sustainability of the organisation in the current financial climate.

Operational responsibilities are clearly placed with the Director and the management team. There are clear lines of delineation between responsibilities which are reflected in the job descriptions for both Board and staff members.

Staff have opportunities to inform the work of the Board and be involved in future planning.

Recommendation 11

The Advocacy Project continue to use Team Talk as an information forum and looks to develop other strategies for airing issues that are pertinent to the whole organisation.

1.6.3 Service user involvement and influence

Advocacy partners have the opportunity to feedback comments on the service, both formally and informally, through questionnaires, telephone interviews and face to face discussion. The Engagement and Involvement team provide some independence as a route for gathering views on the individual advocacy. Feedback is very positive.

The organisation is experiencing difficulty in finding effective ways of nurturing service user influence at strategic level. Advocacy partners are asked if they would like to be involved in a variety of roles with the organisation. Co-training and opportunities to share individual advocacy stories have been successful; interest in working with the Board however is minimal.

Recommendation 12

The Chairperson and/or representatives of the Board, the Director and the Senior Management Team talk with Ceartas, an independent advocacy organisation working in East Dunbartonshire.

Ceartas recently won a mental health good practice award for service user influence and involvement.

Influence is also about helping to develop practice and focus in the organisation. Service user influence, especially around developing accessible communication and keeping the organisation focussed on the realities of social and health care, comes through strongly in the overall work of The Advocacy Project.

Recommendation 13

The Advocacy Project maps the influence of the work of the Involvement and Engagement Team across the whole organisation, taking note of where and how service users are involved in developing tools and influencing future work streams. Opportunities for co-training would sit well with awareness raising about this work.

1.6.4 Process of monitoring, evaluation, review and development

The Advocacy Project Director has the overall task of monitoring the outcomes achieved across the organisation. Responsibility for monitoring for the North Lanarkshire service lies with the Service Lead. Statistical records are anonymised and efficiently maintained and provide comprehensive feedback to the funders. Qualitative information on the advocacy issues and outcomes and results from service user feedback questionnaires is included.

In line with good practice, the North Lanarkshire Council commissioner and the Advocacy service Operations Manager have regular face to face meetings every 3 months as part of the overall monitoring process. It is encouraging to see this contact occurring on a formalised regular basis.

Recommendation 14

It will be important for The Advocacy Project to have a full grasp of all of the funders' requirements to inform the IT review and the design of the new data system. We therefore recommend that North Lanarkshire Council ensures the authorities' monitoring and evaluation requirements are discussed with the appropriate members of the Advocacy Project Senior Management Team and likewise that The Advocacy Project are clear with North Lanarkshire Council about what they envisage for the new system.

1.7 External Relationships, Independence and Conflicts of Interest

External relationships

The North Lanarkshire advocacy service enjoys good and appropriate relationships with external agencies, being recognised overall for providing a vital and professional independent advocacy service.

It was clear that referrers understand and value the independence of the advocates role and recognised why this independence is vital to the people they refer. The benefits to professionals and other support agencies were also highlighted.

Independence and Conflicts of interest

The Board is clear on its independent status as the governing body of the Advocacy Project and all its encompassing contracts. There are policies in place to highlight and deal with potential individual and organisational conflicts of interest. Staff members are clear on conflicts of interest and both Board and individual staff members have used the policies and procedures appropriately.

The evaluation team have recommended that North Lanarkshire Council look at potential conflicts of interest in the advocacy planning and commissioning process.

The evaluation team were pleased to note that North Lanarkshire Council are reviewing the ways service users and partner agencies are included in the advocacy planning processes.

Recommendation 15

We recommend that North Lanarkshire Council, Lanarkshire Health Board and all other stakeholders review the advocacy planning, monitoring and commissioning process to include agreed measures for dealing with conflicts of interest.

1.8 Funding and Commissioning

The North Lanarkshire Advocacy Service contract is currently under review with a view to extending it for a further two years.

The advocacy commissioner raised the issue of the waiting list and the joint measures that had been put in place to manage this.

The implications of Health and Social Care Integration were discussed. The advocacy commissioner identified that they felt that services were already well integrated in North Lanarkshire.

The Advocacy Project estimates that the 16-20% contribution from NHS Lanarkshire & GG&C benefits from close to 50% of the service activity.

Recommendation 16

NHS Lanarkshire reviews their future funding contribution to independent advocacy in North Lanarkshire with particular attention to The Advocacy Project North Lanarkshire Service and to securing the future of Prison Advocacy at HMP Shotts. Funding proportionate to health related advocacy could be usefully considered.

Recommendation 17

We recommend The Advocacy Project continues to seek funding from non-statutory sources for developing advocacy activity in North Lanarkshire.

Areas of advocacy activity that might attract non-statutory funding include:

- *Volunteer advocacy to support new and established collective advocacy groups; developing the work of Listen Up Lanarkshire for example and extending the work based in care homes.*
- *Peer advocacy development for people with learning disabilities and/or mental health issues, parents of children with disabilities*
- *Attracting young people into advocacy, possibly through an apprenticeship approach.*
- *Researching and strengthening user involvement - possibly through an internship*

1.9 Looking to the Future and Conclusions

Challenges for the North Lanarkshire Advocacy Service:

The biggest challenge to the North Lanarkshire service is the pressing level of demand for the service and the resulting high numbers on the waiting list. Given the health and social challenges facing current and prospective service users, funding would be viewed as a statutory responsibility and applications to other bodies for the core advocacy activity would not be successful.

We would urge NHS Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire Council to seriously consider an increase in core statutory funding to this service.

Opportunities:

It is important to seek diversity in funding to maintain the independence of the advocacy organisation and add to the diversity and flexibility of the advocacy provision. We would therefore urge the Advocacy Project to continue in their efforts to secure funding for further development in group and specific volunteer advocacy activity.

The gaps in advocacy provision brought to our attention generally match with the gaps identified by the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance in their recent Advocacy Map; advocacy for carers of children with complex needs where the parent cannot access advocacy through their own health condition

- advocacy for people with addictions
- advocacy for prisoners (particularly those in transition)
- advocacy for family members of people in prison
- advocacy for parents involved in child protection and/or access issues

The Advocacy Project and specifically the North Lanarkshire Service, provides, in our view, sound independent advocacy underpinned by solid governance arrangements and a clear understanding of the principles and ethos of professional independent advocacy. We would be pleased to see the service develop in meeting the locally identified gaps in advocacy provision.

We wish to thank everyone who made this evaluation possible. We wish the staff, service users and commissioners of the North Lanarkshire service well and hope that in the future more people can benefit from such excellent advocacy.



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