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The Role of the Advocate for Children and Young People who wish to make a complaint



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What is Advocacy?

Some young people need help to speak for themselves and to get other people to listen to what they say. This is particularly true when young people are defined as “service users” and are cared for by other people who are in a position of power over them. Helping young people to speak for themselves during the complaints procedure and ensuring that they are heard is known as “advocacy”.

Advocacy may lead to a challenge to the way services are provided. This challenge is essential if we are serious about listening to the views of young people who use our services and intend to act upon the things that they say.

Why do we need independent Advocates?

An independent advocate provides a necessary service as someone who is impartial and whose only role is to help an individual to express their own views through the complaint process; either supporting them to express themselves or speaking on their behalf, with their permission and at their request.

This is important where a young person receiving a service may not agree with previous decisions that have been made or may find it difficult to express a view that is different from that of their family, friends and/or staff responsible for their care.

What is the role of an independent Advocate?

An independent advocate is there to help a young person who uses child care services through the complaints process.

- The advocate helps the young person to express him/herself.
- The young person controls the work they do with the advocate.

The advocate only pursues issues of concern if agreed by the young person.

- If it is not possible to discover the young person’s views and wishes due to communication difficulties, the advocate may offer an opinion as an independent person who has no specific interest in any particular outcome or decision.
- The advocate should bear in mind any preferences that may have been expressed previously and will have an understanding of the rights and services to which the person is entitled.

The advocate should not make judgements, give advice or offer an opinion except in the circumstances outlined above.

The advocate will have received training in order to undertake the role, including training about how to use the complaints procedure within child care services.

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North East Lincolnshire Council's Directorate of Children's Services has a formal complaints procedure that should be used if a dispute arises around the way in which the advocate's role is carried out.

What should staff expect when an Advocate is involved in a complaint?

When an advocate is involved in a complaint the Information Governance and Complaints staff will:

- 1) Notify staff that an advocate is involved with a particular young person unless the young person requests otherwise.
- 2) Notify staff of attendance at any meetings with child care staff unless the young person receiving the advocacy service requests otherwise.

The Advocate will:

- 1) notify the person in charge of the residential or day service when they enter and leave the building.
- 2) ensure that advocates are accountable for their attitude and behaviour whilst carrying out their role as an advocate.

What can staff do to support the Advocate's work?

Staff who respect the need for an advocacy service are demonstrating to the young people in their care that it is acceptable to speak out and to comment upon the services they receive.

Healthy dialogue between staff and independent advocates may not be without tension. The advocacy service can only be successful where there is mutual respect and support for each other's role.

To support the role of the independent advocate, staff should:

- 1) Provide information about the advocacy service to young people who wish to make a complaint.
- 2) Respect the right of the young person requesting independent advocacy.
- 3) Welcome the advocate.
- 4) Provide a private room for the advocate and the young person to meet if they wish.
- 5) Respect the confidential nature of the relationship between the advocate and young person.

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- 6) Ensure that the advocate is aware of any risk posed by meeting the young person on their own. This should include advice about any health or medical issues which are important.

For further information about this leaflet please contact:

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If you would like to receive this information in another language or in another format such as large print, Braille or on audio tape, please contact the Information Governance and Complaints Team using the contact details above.
