

Some people are much more likely than others to be unheard or not treated equally, either because of other people's prejudices, or their vulnerability, or both. Some people have to rely on 'services' to perform everyday tasks that other people take for granted; some people lack supportive family or friends; for some people their family is part of the problem.

The word advocacy comes from the Latin word *advocatus*, which means 'legal adviser', but it can also mean 'speaking up for people'.

Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain the services they need.

Advocates work in partnership with the people they support, and take their side.

The concept of advocacy has special relevance for people who are disadvantaged or disempowered in some way and, as a consequence, are less able to speak for themselves.

Advocacy has the potential to allow those whose voices might not otherwise be heard to make their views and preferences known.

HOW CAN ADVOCACY HELP?

Advocacy helps when...

- others appear to have more say about your life than you do
- people are making decisions for you
- you cannot get what you want
- you don't feel listened to
- your life feels out of control
- you have difficulty speaking up for yourself
- you have a specific issue that you need some help solving, for example making a complaint, accessing housing, social services or welfare benefits

Advocacy supports you to...

- make decisions and solve problems
 - have more choices and think about all the choices you could make
 - say what you want
 - get the rights you are entitled to
 - get the services that you need
 - be treated fairly and equally
 - help yourself
- get information

WHAT MAKES A GOOD ADVOCATE?

An effective advocate will be someone who is:

- a good listener and able to understand
- a good communicator and easy to understand
- polite and easy to get on with
- neutral and independent

and who is able to:

- take the time to listen
- remain neutral
- have a friendly, informal approach
- be good at working with people and give information in a way that suits the individual
- takes time to get to know the needs of the individual
- not talk down to people or be patronising
- only share information with others when it has been agreed as OK and consent has been given
- consult the individual on all things

Advocacy helps people to express their own views and opinions, to defend their rights and promote their interests.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- If you feel our advocacy service may be able to help you with a specific issue or difficulties you are experiencing and would like a referral, the first thing to do is to contact the **Ataxia UK Helpline – 0845 644 0606**, and one of our dedicated and experienced Helpline advisors will talk through your concerns with you and decide with you whether an Advocacy referral would be appropriate. It may be that a call to the Helpline is all that you need.
- The Helpline staff will forward your contact details, with a brief description of your concerns, to the Advocacy Officer who will aim to contact you within three working days. Sometimes, it may be necessary to put you on a waiting list for an advocacy referral, but the Helpline advisor will let you know if this is the case.
- Once the Advocacy Officer has made contact with you and established how best advocacy may be able to help you, the process to follow will be agreed between you. The Advocacy Officer will not offer personal opinions or advise you what to do, but will give you information and offer you options, and guidance on what action could be taken and possible outcomes, depending on which options you choose. You will be in control of the process at all times, and the Advocacy Officer will not take any action without your express permission at every stage of the process.
- The Advocacy Officer will let you know, at each contact, when you can expect to be contacted again, so that you are not left wondering what is happening, or when you will be contacted next.
- In the event that the Advocacy Officer has attempted to make contact with you, following a referral or during the course of the advocacy process, and has been unable to get hold of you, a letter will be sent asking you to make contact. If you do not reply after two weeks, a further letter will be sent; if there is still no reply after the second letter has been sent your file will be closed. Should you need further advocacy help after this, you will have to begin the process again by calling the Ataxia UK Helpline.
- It is our policy at Ataxia UK to strive continuously to improve the services that we provide. At the end of your work together – and hopefully you will have achieved a successful outcome – you will receive a short questionnaire. It would be very much appreciated if you would take a few moments to fill it in and return it to our Head Office in the freepost envelope provided.

Disclaimer

This leaflet is for guidance purposes only and, while every care is taken to ensure its accuracy, no guarantee of accuracy can be given. Individual professional advice should be sought before taking or refraining from taking any action based on the information contained in this leaflet and nothing should be construed as professional advice given by Ataxia UK or any of its officers, trustees or employees. No person shall have any claim of any nature whatsoever arising out of or in connection with the contents of this leaflet against Ataxia UK or any of its officers, Trustees or employees.