

advocacy

Advocacy can be defined as:

- **standing up for the rights of people who are being treated unfairly, and**
- **standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged and speaking out on their behalf in a way that represents the best interests of that person.**

There are a number of different types of advocacy, some of these include:

- ✓ *informal advocacy*
- ✓ *self advocacy*
- ✓ *legal advocacy*
- ✓ *systemic advocacy*

v **Informal advocacy**

Often a family member, friend or neighbour will have some experience in a situation or problem you are experiencing and so they will be able to clearly explain this to others, as they understand what you want and need. This is called 'informal advocacy'.

As a carer you may also take on informal advocacy for the person you care for as a natural part of your role.

v **Self advocacy**

This is standing up for yourself. This involves understanding your rights and making choices about the matters which affect your life.

Anyone can act as their own advocate. It involves knowing your rights and responsibilities and putting this knowledge, along with your other skills and experience, to use in making decisions which affect your life.

v **Legal advocacy**

'Legal advocacy' is the kind you might receive from, for example, a Community Legal Service or the Disability Discrimination Legal Centre. It often involves legal information, advice and representation by someone with legal knowledge.

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v **Systemic advocacy**

'Systemic advocacy' is the kind of advocacy that Carers NSW provides for carers in New South Wales. This advocacy is not on an individual basis but instead represents the rights and interests of a whole group with similar concerns and issues. Systemic advocacy can also be referred to as 'group advocacy' or 'corporate advocacy'.

Q. Why is advocacy needed?

Advocacy is most often associated with individuals or groups who are disadvantaged. These people frequently feel isolated, disempowered and vulnerable and when their rights are being denied, they are often unable to stand up for themselves. In a situation like this, they rely on others to represent their interests for them.

Q. How does advocacy work?

If you feel unable to make a complaint yourself, an advocate can do it for you.

An advocate can be a friend or relative, or an independent organisation.

The first step is identifying the actual problem and making a complaint to the service provider involved. All service providers should have a complaints procedure and following this can mean that many problems are resolved at this stage. You can make the complaint yourself or have an advocate do it for you.

Community services are obliged to treat all complaints equally, whether they are made by yourself or an advocate.

Q. Who do I contact to help with advocacy?

There are many sources of help which we have listed in our Fact Sheet **HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT**. There are also local advocacy groups in many areas and you can find out about these by calling the **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636** or asking other organisations, for example your local council or members of a carer support group.

TIP

Call the **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636** to

- get a copy of our Fact Sheet on **HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT**
- ask for more information on the complaints/legal/advocacy service you are interested in. We will send you a copy of their leaflet.

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REFERENCES:

NSW Council for Intellectual Disability: Fact Sheets: *Facts on Advocacy Student Information*

Information contained in this fact sheet was supplied by the relevant authorities and is believed to be accurate at the time of publication. Whilst every care has been taken in its preparation, this fact sheet contains only guidelines in relation to its subject matter.

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