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### Abstract

This information paper - one in a series - aims to clarify and explain that class of services defined in the Disability Services Act as Advocacy Services (Self, Citizen, Parent, Group). It provides a description of such services, an explanation of the target group, key features of each type of advocacy listed, and the expected outcomes of each. **Keyword: Advocacy**

# ADVOCACY SERVICES

## **INTRODUCTION**

This information paper clarifies and explains that class of services defined in the Disability Services Act (DSA) as Advocacy Services. In doing so, it reflects the provisions of the Act in three important areas:

- the definitions for each service type (sections 7 and 9);
- the objects of the Act (section 3); and
- the Principles and Objectives (gazetted under section 5).

The paper is intended to be descriptive, and not prescriptive, of the features and aspects that need to be considered in the development of service delivery models under each service type. As such, they build upon the descriptions of the new service types which were distributed previously by the Department.

The revised descriptions provide more detail about the key features of each class of service which are considered essential to achieving positive consumer outcomes for people with disabilities. These key features are derived from the Principles and Objectives and the objects of the Act and encourage diversity and flexibility of service provision within the legislative boundaries laid down for each service type.

This paper is one in a series which aims to explain aspects of a complex piece of legislation in a way which will be meaningful to a wide audience, including people with disabilities, their families and/or advocates, service providers and the general public. Other papers are available from your State Office of the Department of Community Services and Health on the other eligible service types provided for under the Act.

## **ADVOCACY**

### **Introduction**

In the past many people with disabilities have had little choice about the way they lived and the nature and form of the services they received. Control over the type and nature of services rested with health and welfare professionals and service managers. Therefore the transformation of the Principles and Objectives of the DSA into action requires a radical change in both behaviour and attitudes throughout the community, including service providers, persons caring for people with disabilities and even disabled consumers themselves.

A change of this magnitude cannot be expected to happen spontaneously. In drafting both the DSA and the underlying Principles and Objectives the Government

recognised the need for a range of advocacy services to assist in this process of change.

Assistance is available for eligible organisations to provide four types of advocacy services - self advocacy, citizen advocacy, parent advocacy and group advocacy services.

## **Definition**

- (a) Self advocacy services assist people with disabilities to develop and maintain the personal skills and self confidence necessary to enable them to represent their own interests in and become a recognised part of the community.
- (b) Citizen advocacy services facilitate people in the community to assist people with disabilities to represent their own interests and establish themselves in the community.
- (c) Parent advocacy services assist families of persons with disabilities to represent their interests in the community.
- (d) Group advocacy services facilitate community organisations to represent the interests of groups of people with disabilities.

Although the provision of information can be regarded as an integral part of some advocacy services, there is a clear difference between information and advocacy services. The primary purpose of advocacy services is to assist people with disabilities represent their interests and establish themselves within the community, not simply the provision of information to people with disabilities

The aims of these services are:

### **(a) Self Advocacy**

The aim of a self advocacy service is to assist people with disabilities to develop skills, knowledge and confidence so that they can advocate on issues on their own behalf and become a recognised part of the community as a whole.

### **(b) Citizen Advocacy**

The aims of a citizen advocacy service are to:

- \* arrange and support relationships between people with disabilities and non-disabled people who otherwise would not meet;
- \* ensure that the interests of the person with disabilities are represented by the advocate;
- \* assist people with disabilities to live more independently and establish themselves within the community;
- \* broaden the social network and community participation of people with disabilities; and

- \* enhance the ability of people with disabilities to speak for themselves and to ensure that their rights are exercised and safeguarded.

**(c) Parent Advocacy**

Based on the premise that parents will probably be the main advocates for their children, the aim of parent advocacy services is twofold:

- (i) to provide support to individual families to assist them to advocate on the behalf of their disabled family members; and
- (ii) to help parents identify local priorities and to see the broader aspects of disabilities and rights issues, including ensuring that the Principles and Objectives are being met by services.

**(d) Group Advocacy**

The aim of group advocacy services is to raise awareness in the non-disabled population of the needs and special difficulties faced by people with a disability and where necessary to bring about changes in existing systems and services.

The service provided may be short term advocacy on a single issue for an individual, or system advocacy where the primary input is by an agency or a system in respect of a group of service users. Both types of group advocacy may be provided by one organisation.

## **Target Group**

**(a) Self Advocacy**

Self advocacy has primarily focused on people with an intellectual disability. However they should also be appropriate for people with disabilities who, because of their disability, cannot or have not accessed generic community services.

**(b) Citizen Advocacy**

Citizen advocacy has traditionally focused on people with an intellectual disability. However consideration will be given to services targeting people with severe and/or multiple disabilities of any kind.

**(c) Parent Advocacy**

Parent advocacy services should target families with a disabled member across the whole range of disabilities. These services should generally be targeted at families of children or those adults with disabilities who have had little other support than that of their family.

**(d) Group Advocacy**

Group advocacy services should target people across the whole range of disabilities. They should not be restricted to advocacy on behalf of a specific disability group or consumers of a particular organisation.

## **Outcomes for People with Disabilities from Advocacy Services**

- (1) Greater self esteem
- (2) Improved and new skills
- (3) New relationships
- (4) Greater participation in community based non-segregated activities
- (5) Improved quality of life.

**Note:** It is recognised that these outcomes are difficult to measure, however this should become more methodical as a greater bank of knowledge becomes available.

### **Key Features**

#### **(a) Self Advocacy**

- The self-advocacy organisation should not be providing other services to people with disabilities using its service.
- The following characteristics are common to all the self-advocacy projects. They:
  - have management committees which comprise a majority of people with disabilities;
  - develop strong links with other advocacy programs, and with other community organisations;
  - work primarily with members of the organisation, but can undertake an element of outreach work in a variety of areas;
  - attempt to reduce the training and support offered over time to ensure that as the clients grow in competence so does their self-reliance;
  - prepare resource materials for distribution amongst various groups; and
  - have a particular emphasis on meetings and decision-making skills.

#### **(b) Citizen Advocacy**

- The citizen advocacy organisation should not be providing other services to people with disabilities using its services. The advocate must be unpaid.
- The control over the direction of the relationship between the advocate and the person with a disability should always remain with those two people and not the citizen advocacy organisation.
- The type of relationships that develop should fit the circumstances and the needs of the person with a disability.

(c) **Parent Advocacy**

In essence parent advocacy services involve four major strategies which are:

- Provision of information about services and rights to parents and carers.
- Advocacy training for parent/carers to develop skills to enable them to better advocate on behalf of their disabled family member.
- Networking of parents to facilitate peer support.
- Provision of seminars and workshops to discuss particular issues/topics and/or to help parents identify local priorities and to see the broader aspects of disabilities and rights issues.

(d) **Group Advocacy**

- The group advocacy organisation should not be providing other services to people with disabilities using its service.
- Group/systems advocacy services can be involved in a range of activities, most of which tend to reinforce and/or inform each other. These activities are:

**(1) Information clearing house and networking**

System advocacy services, especially if they have a broad disability target population, are ideally placed to provide a focal point or forum for the sharing of issues, passing on of information and linking of groups and individuals. This is particularly important for individuals and fringe groups who do not belong to any service organisation or readily link with other disabled people. Services can also facilitate and support the establishment of regional networks.

**(2) Some individual advocacy**

It is inevitable that systems advocacy services will be involved in a small amount of individual advocacy arising out of their information and networking role.

**(3) Systems advocacy and research**

As an organisation that is outside government and any other specific service provider organisation, a systems advocacy service can act independently to collect information on issues that adversely affect groups of people with a disability. This may be on a local level relating to a specific service or management practice or on a broader level in relation to government policy or legislation or gaps in service provision.

Taking a preventive role, the service can also monitor the results of changes in service delivery or policy or new legislation to ensure that consumers are not adversely affected.

**(4) Public education**

Systems advocacy services can play a very useful role promoting community education on the rights of people with a disability. This can be directed to people with a disability, family members, workers in disability services and the general community particularly professionals such as lawyers, doctors and teachers. It can take the form of newsletters, articles, videos, seminars, etc.

- The advocates can be paid.