

Your Voice Counts Advocacy Service Standards



1.0 What are the Advocacy Service Standards?

The Advocacy Service Standards are a set of guidelines for Your Voice Counts (YVC) advocates to provide clarity, support and boundaries for their practice and give a clear description of what is and what is not expected of an advocate in their day-to-day work with the people who access the advocacy service.

This document should be read in conjunction with other relevant Your Voice Counts policies and procedures. It is the advocate's responsibility to raise any questions with their line manager.

1.1 Why have Advocacy Service Standards?

Service Standards:

- offer guidance to advocates in their role
- inform service users of what they can realistically expect from their advocate
- educate service providers, commissioners and others about the scope and support needs of advocates
- raise awareness of the need for and the benefits of independent advocacy for vulnerable people.

2.0 Defining and promoting key advocacy principles

2.1 Clarity of purpose

YVC's advocacy service has clearly stated aims and objectives and is able to demonstrate how it meets the principles contained in the Advocacy Service Standards.

The service will ensure that people they advocate for, service providers, commissioners and funding agencies have information on the scope and limitations of the advocacy service role.

- Advocates should be clear about the nature and extent of their role and understand the boundaries of advocacy roles and non-advocacy roles (such as mediation and advice giving).
- Advocates should be up to date with all of YVC's policies and procedures.
- Advocates should not act outside of these boundaries. Advocates should seek permission to refer people on to other agencies where appropriate.

- Advocates should be able to explain, in clear straightforward language, what advocacy is and isn't; why some people need advocacy; and the benefits advocacy can bring. They should be equipped to answer questions and deal with enquiries about advocacy.
- Advocates should be responsible for providing the people they advocate for with a clear explanation of their role when they start to work with them.
- Advocates should provide written information about YVC's advocacy service and provide a copy of the Advocacy Service Standards to clients, professionals, family members and carers if requested.

2.2 Independence

YVC's advocacy service is structurally independent from statutory organisations and from all service provider agencies. The advocacy service will be as free from conflict of interest as possible both in design and operation, and actively seek to reduce conflicting interests.

- Advocates should have a clear understanding of YVC's Conflict of Interest Policy. Advocates should take all appropriate steps to avoid conflicts of interest occurring in their work with people. Where conflict of interest does arise, it must be declared to a line manager and advice sought as to how to proceed.
- Advocates should be free to act according to the wishes and needs of the individual. They should not be threatened, compromised or harassed whilst carrying out their duties within the agreed boundaries set out in the Advocacy Service Standards. Where such harassment does occur, this should be reported to a line manager at the earliest opportunity.
- YVC will ensure that all contracts with commissioners or other funders contain a statement that advocacy services must be independent from statutory provision.

2.3 Confidentiality

YVC's advocacy service has a confidentiality policy stating that information known about the person using the advocacy service is confidential to the service and the reasons why confidentiality might be breached.

- Advocates should be aware of and understand YVC's Confidentiality Policy and be able to explain it in clear language.
- Advocates should at all times observe and respect the right to confidentiality of the people who use the advocacy service. This will generally mean that:
 - a) Advocates should be honest with people about the level of confidentiality they can reasonably guarantee. This means explaining any conditions under which confidentiality may be

breached (e.g. harm to self or others, abuse) and how this might happen.

- b) Advocates should be clear that they receive supervision and will be required to discuss their work regularly with their line manager.
 - c) Advocates should not share information about the person with others without the person's consent. Where the advocate is unable to get consent from the person, information should only be shared to put forward the person's views, wishes and interests.
- Advocates should keep detailed notes about their activities within the client's record in Charity Log and the record should be updated regularly and checked for accuracy. Clients should have access to this information as requested.

2.4 Person led

YVC's advocacy service will ensure that the wishes and interests of the people they advocate for instruct their work. Advocates should be non-judgemental and respectful of people's needs, views, culture and experiences.

- Advocates should ensure advocacy support is appropriate to the person's needs, views and/or expressed wishes.
- Advocates should take instruction from individuals accessing the advocacy service wherever possible.
- Advocates should base their actions on mutually agreed plans and preferred outcomes, and work in partnership with individuals to achieve this.
- Advocates may at times find themselves in opposition to other professionals. When this occurs advocates must ensure they conduct themselves professionally at all times, employing courtesy and respect.

2.5 Empowerment

YVC's advocacy service supports self-advocacy and empowerment through its work. People who use the advocacy service should have a say in the level of involvement and style of advocacy support they want. Advocates will ensure that people who want to can influence and be involved in how the advocacy services are delivered.

- Advocates should ensure that individuals are aware of when and how they can be contacted and any limitations to this contact (e.g. not at weekends).
- Advocates should inform people of their right to request a change of advocate (within the constraints of the advocacy service), or to terminate contact with the advocate at any time. If someone is unhappy with the advocate's approach to a particular issue, the advocate should consider

adapting their approach as appropriate within the terms of the Advocacy Service Standards.

- Advocates should be open and transparent about their methods of advocating with individuals. Advocates should recognise the existing skills of people and support them to develop new skills and confidence to speak for themselves.
- Advocates should provide people with information about how they can give feedback to the advocacy service about its work and how to get involved in the wider activities of the advocacy service if they wish.

2.6 Equality and diversity

YVC has a written equality and diversity policy that recognises the need to be proactive in tackling all forms of inequality, discrimination and social exclusion. YVC's advocacy service also has a prioritisation policy for the fair and equal allocation of advocates' time.

- Advocates should follow YVC's Equality and Diversity Policy and be able to explain it to others in clear language.
- Advocates will make reasonable adjustments to ensure people have appropriate opportunity to engage, direct and benefit from advocacy support.
- Advocates should be clear that YVC's advocacy service welcomes people regardless of race, cultural background, disabilities, sexual orientation, age, gender or religious background. Where a client expresses a preference for advocates with particular skills, knowledge or qualities, this should be referred to the line manager.

2.7 Accessibility

The advocacy service aims to ensure that its premises, policies, procedures and publicity materials promote access for the whole community.

- Advocates should not make a charge for their services.
- Advocates should respond positively to requests from clients to meet in places and at times which are mutually convenient. Where necessary, the advocate should make arrangements for accessible meeting places that are acceptable to the individual.
- Advocates should follow YVC's Risk Management Policy.
- Advocates should make every effort to ensure that information they have gathered on behalf of their client is accessible and understandable to them.

2.8 Accountability

YVC's advocacy service has a system in place for monitoring and evaluating our work. Advocates should operate within the law at all times (e.g. not giving false information to the Benefits Agency), and ensure they adhere to the Advocacy Service Standards.

- Advocates should keep an accurate and up to date record in Charity Log of actions taken and progress made within their work. Individuals should be kept informed of and involved in all aspects of the advocacy process.
- Advocates should follow YVC's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Policy.
- Advocates should not hold money or possessions belonging to a client. In the exceptional circumstances where there is no alternative but for the advocate to do so, proper records and receipts should be kept and their line manager notified about the arrangement at the earliest opportunity.
- Advocates should not accept gifts other than one-off, inexpensive items, which can be shared with the team (e.g. box of chocolates, biscuits), and should be declared to their line manager. Future gifts should be declined and an explanation given.
- Advocates should not make promises to people or make claims they cannot prove.
- Advocates should act in a professional and responsible manner when working with clients and others. Disputes should be referred to their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

2.9 Safeguarding

YVC's advocacy service is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the people who use our services and the wider community. People have the right to be safe from harm and should be able to live free from fear of abuse, neglect and exploitation. The advocacy service will have clear, up to date, safeguarding policies and procedures in place to ensure issues are identified and acted upon.

- Advocates will have a thorough understanding of safeguarding responsibilities and processes as set out in law and best practice guidance.
- Advocates will support people to have their rights upheld and will be supported to understand and recognise different forms of abuse and neglect, issues relating to confidentiality and what to do if they suspect an individual is at risk.

3.0 Supporting advocates

YVC's advocacy service will ensure advocates are prepared, trained and supported in their role and provided with opportunities to develop their skills and experience.

- Advocates should make full use of and contribute to:
 - ongoing training and personal development opportunities
 - one to one supervision with a line manager

- an annual appraisal against agreed targets
- group support and networking opportunities with other advocates
- opportunities for reflection and analysis of their own practice
- specialist support such as external supervision, coaching or counselling as required and available.
- Advocates should ensure they have access to, and know how to use, a wide range of information resources such as books, journals and the internet which are accurate and up to date.
- Advocates should be aware of YVC's Whistle-blowing Policy and be supported to make use of this where appropriate.

3.1 Complaints

YVC has a written policy describing how to make complaints or give feedback about the service or about individual advocates. Where necessary, the advocacy service will help people to access external independent support to make a complaint.

- Advocates should follow YVC's complaints procedure and be able to explain it in clear language.
- Advocates should ensure that people are made aware of their right to make a complaint about the advocate or the advocacy service. This may involve giving a copy of the complaints policy or Easy Read version, explaining the various stages of the complaints process to them at the start and during the advocacy process and being open to criticisms and suggestions without being defensive.
- YVC will take all complaints seriously.
- Where the complaint is from another service worker (e.g. a GP, social worker) or a relative of the person, the same high standards of professional behaviour should apply.
- All complaints received by the advocate should be passed on to their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

4.0 More information

For any queries about the Your Voice Counts Advocacy Service Standards, contact Sharon de Jesús, Head of Advocacy at Your Voice Counts at sharon.dejesus@yvc.org.uk.

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