

Plymouth Citizen Advocacy



Volunteer Information Pack

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About the Highbury Trust



Formerly Plymouth Mencap Society, Plymouth Highbury Trust was founded in 1956.

The society was initially a self help and support group striving to improve the services available for people with a learning disability living in Plymouth.

Plymouth Highbury trust now employs over 40 members of staff and provides the following services and support for approximately 400 people:

Day provision - enabling people with a learning disability to develop their skills with the emphasis on social inclusion.

Enabling service - a community based service supporting people to access their chosen activity.

Housing and support - We have two homes providing accommodation for a total of twelve people.

The lodge offers a homely and holistic environment and Highbury House offers a quality home life whilst promoting independence and choice.

Highbury Social club - Entertainment is provided twice a week, providing an evening out with friends in a supportive environment.

The Orbit Club - A daytime social club providing a meeting place for friends and a varied programme of activities

Friday Drop-in

Cafe, internet and games. Open to everyone

Shop and coffee bar - run by a dedicated team of volunteers in Plymstock

Appointee Service

Overseeing peoples benefits and assistance in managing finances.

Advocacy

Citizen Advocacy

This is a service which recruits, trains and supports ordinary people to become Volunteer advocates for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

Representational Advocacy

Supporting and enabling people in the short term to have a voice in issues concerning their lives

Plymouth People First

A self advocacy group managed and run by people with a learning disability and enables people to speak up for themselves

Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy Service (IMCA)

Provides advocacy for people who lack the capacity to make a particular decision in their life.

Independent Mental Health Advocacy Service (IMHA)

Advocacy for people who are detained or under guardianship

*For more information about The Highbury Trust please go to our website:
www.plymouthhighburytrust.org.uk*



What is Citizen Advocacy?

"Advocacy" is about enabling people to speak up for what they want and get their views heard. It describes a situation where one person sticks up for another.

"Citizen" means a member of society, which includes all of us.

Citizen Advocacy is a way for ordinary citizens to become involved in the life of someone in our community who's vulnerable. It involves the creation of long-term partnerships between two individuals.

*Citizen Advocacy makes people feel included and **POWERFUL**.*

Why do some people need an advocate?



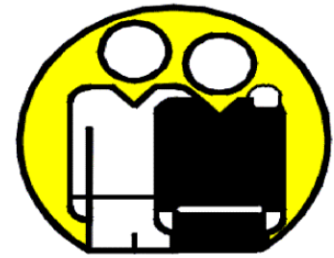
At some point in our lives, most of us will have had to speak up for something we believe in or something we want. Some people find this harder than others.

Some people don't have anyone to ask, because they've led very isolated lives and not had the chance to get to know many other people. The people that they turn to for help might be paid to be there and have other people's needs to take into account. Others may not be able to ask, because they have problems with communication.

Some people aren't used to expressing their opinions or aren't confident about doing it. Other people may have all their decisions made for them. Because of this, they don't get the chance to make the most of the services available. They may not know what their rights are. They feel left out and powerless.

Sometimes what they need is someone independent to come in and stand by them.

What is Citizen Advocacy?



Citizen Advocacy is a one to one partnership between someone with a learning disability and an ordinary person from the community. Citizen advocates give their time freely and are there because they want to be there, not because they are a paid member of staff. A person receiving advocacy is referred to as an 'advocacy partner'.

Citizen Advocacy is a means to promote, protect and defend the welfare and interests of, and justice for, people who are unable to make their views heard or are seriously physically or socially isolated. Citizen advocacy offers close personal support to individuals who would otherwise have no other means of connecting to their local community and fighting for their rights.

Citizen Advocacy offers protection to people who are unable to express their own views but may need someone to speak or act on their behalf in order to protect them from harm, abuse or sometimes even a life-threatening situation.

Citizen Advocacy works preventively before crises occur, taking action to help a vulnerable person 'say' what they want, secure their rights, obtain services they need and ensure their interests are represented. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice.

Citizen Advocates are independent, striving to represent the interests of their partner as if they were their own and therefore they do not experience the conflict of interest that many paid workers and professionals can experience.

A Citizen Advocates role can be hard to describe because an Advocate can decide on many different ways to represent, support or take action. Citizen Advocate partnerships are designed to be as flexible and helpful to a particular person's situation as possible.

Plymouth Citizen Advocacy is a way of introducing people who probably would not otherwise meet. Citizen Advocacy allows ordinary members living in the community to get to know a person with a learning disability, to understand their situation in life and to 'stand' with them, one to one.

A Citizen Advocate is:

- An ordinary person. They do not replace paid professionals.
- Independent of services
- A good listener who may use several ways to understand, respond to and represent their partners interests as if they were their own

A Partner is:

- An adult who has been labeled by society as having a learning disability.
- Someone who may be at risk of social exclusion.
- Someone who may have had their decisions made for them and finds it difficult to make their voice heard.
- Someone who may not be aware of their rights or opportunities available.



Citizen Advocates can:

- Support people to express their views and concerns
- Support someone who has no friends or family
- Believe in someone when no one else will
- Be a mentor, monitor, friend, ally or fill another role dependent on the needs of the person
- Notice things that no one else notices
- Take action when no one else will
- Support people to access information and services
- Defend someone's rights
- Make time to be with someone who needs support

Plymouth Citizen Advocacy:

- Recruits, trains and supports volunteers to advocate for people with learning disabilities
- Provides a dedicated Co-ordinator to support volunteers in their role.

Who might I be matched up with?

The World Health Organisation defines learning disability as 'a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind'. Someone with a learning disability is also said to have 'significant impairment of intellectual functioning' and significant impairment of social/adaptive functioning'.

This means that the person will have difficulties understanding and learning and remembering new things. Because of these difficulties they may have problems with communication, self care, awareness and health and safety.

Someone with a learning disability can be described as having a mild, moderate, severe or profound learning disability. Plymouth Citizen Advocacy works with people from all these groups.

People with mild or moderate learning disabilities will probably live in the community and may struggle to manage financially, become a victim of 'hate crime' or may need support to access services that they need.

People with severe or profound learning disabilities will probably live in a residential home or 'supported living' and may be subject to institutional abuse, lack of choice and control or simply have no one to visit them or represent their interests at all.

We work very hard to ensure that you are matched up with the correct person. We take many things into account when it comes to the matching process including your location, preferences, age, gender, time restrictions and interests. All possible matches will be discussed with you and you will have the opportunity to meet potential advocacy partners.



The Role of the Citizen Advocate is to:-



1. To use their best efforts to ascertain the wishes of their partner, using their partners preferred method of communication and finding alternative means of communication when necessary.
2. Liaise with others who support their partner to seek information to help them advocate
3. Enable their partner's views, feelings and preferences to be heard
4. Always act in the best interests of their partner
5. Ensure their partners fundamental human rights are respected and upheld at all times
6. Monitor the quality of their partner's lifestyle and help them lead a valued lifestyle in their community
7. When appropriate, raise any issue they and their partner are concerned about, and question and challenge those involved
8. Promote a person centred approach
9. Avoid any conflict of interest by remaining independent
10. Operate within Plymouth Citizen Advocacy's 'Equal Opportunity' , 'Confidentiality' and 'Protection of Vulnerable Adults' policies
11. Use the support systems provided.



If they could, a partner might ask a Citizen Advocate to.....

Help me represent myself
in meetings, reviews,
conferences...

Be sensitive to
My moods and
Feelings

Understand me

Help me plan my future

Help me sort my
money out

Help me find
valuable ways to
spend my day

Its my life put
me in the centre

Help me keep in touch
with family, friends...

Help me link in with my
community - transport,
centres, people...

Help me get some fun in
my life

Help me make sure I have
the best possible home

Work with me to
make sure my
rights are respected



Citizen Advocate Profile

These qualities would be helpful

Committed to enhancing rights and quality of life of an individual

A belief in justice, fairness and equality

Able to listen and communicate clearly with people at all levels

A thorough understanding of confidentiality

These would be even more helpful!

Knowledge and understanding of issues related to disability and disadvantage

A broad experience of services in the area

Independent of statutory bodies

Car driver with access to own transport

Skilled at negotiating

Frequently Asked Questions



What kind of person makes a good advocate?

Anyone who cares, wants to make a difference and can respect the rights and wishes of another individual can become a good advocate. Everyone is different and we seek to recruit volunteers from as many walks of life as possible, because everyone's experience adds to the quality of service provided.

Do I have enough knowledge and experience to do this?

Yes. You do not need technical knowledge, just life experience. We will train you and support you in finding out any information you need to help your partner.

What will I get out of being an advocate?

- A rewarding, satisfying, empowering relationship and the knowledge that you are making a real difference to the life of someone with a learning disability
- Development of your ability to solve problems and think laterally and creatively
- An improved ability to effectively work with people and to build long lasting, sustainable relationships

You may have become interested in advocacy for many different reasons. These could include:

- To get experience for work
- To meet some new people
- To put something back into society
- To get to know someone with a learning disability
- To help to fight against injustice
- To help someone make a change in their life
- To do something useful in your spare time
- To expand your knowledge of disability
- To positively use your skills/knowledge
- To make you feel good about yourself
- To feel valued as part of a team



Whatever your reason, the important thing to remember is that you will hopefully gain from the partnership just like the person you are advocating for will. It is OK for you to expect something out of it for yourself.

What kind of training will I be offered?

We offer a full training course before you start your volunteer work. The course will include information on the principles of advocacy, issues facing people with profound learning disabilities, communication and listening skills, advocacy skills, basic human rights and the responsibilities of a Volunteer Advocate. Additional, external training courses may also be available.

What sort of support and supervision can I expect?

The Citizen Advocacy Co-ordinator will meet you on a regular basis to ensure that you are happy in your role. You will also have the opportunity to discuss the development of your role and whether you would benefit from further training. If you have a problem or need some advice you can call the Co-ordinator during office hours. A voice mail service operates at other times.



Do I have to volunteer for a specific amount of time each week or month?

The time you contribute, however much or little will be greatly valued by us and by your partner. We will take into consideration the amount of time you have to give before we match you up with someone and we also understand that circumstances can change and the amount of time you have to offer can change too. We aim to be flexible and to offer you as much flexibility as possible.

Because it can take a long time to get to know someone with profound learning disabilities, Citizen Advocacy is a **long term commitment**. We also ask that you meet your partner at least once every two weeks. Apart from this, the time you commit to the advocacy partnership really depends on the needs of your partner and what you are able to offer. The Co-ordinator is always able to offer additional support when needed.

Will I get paid?

Citizen Advocates do not get paid. Many of our clients only ever come into contact with people who are paid to be there. Your biggest strength as a volunteer is that you are supporting someone because you want to and not because you are being paid to do so. Out of pocket expenses however, are available.

Will I have the opportunity to meet any other volunteers?

We plan to hold regular social events and volunteer support meetings to which all the volunteers will be invited. Also, it is possible that you may be advocating for someone living in a residential home where other advocates are also working, in which case you will be able to support each other.

What if I don't get on with the other person?

Before a match is made, the Volunteer Co-ordinator will find out about the background, experience and interests of both the potential advocacy partner and the advocate. You will then have a chance to meet the person before you make a commitment. Should you decide that you would like to advocate for a particular person then the Co-ordinator will accompany you on visits until you are happy to visit on your own.

We make every effort to ensure compatibility when matching volunteers and partners but occasionally things do not work out. If you are unhappy with what you are doing then please let us know. We try to solve problems at the earliest possible stage.

Any advocate who feels that a match is not working for any reason has a right to end the relationship. If this happens the Citizen Advocacy Co-ordinator will try to match you with a more suitable advocacy partner as soon as possible. Failed matches are the responsibility of the scheme and not of the advocate or their partner.



What if I want to leave?

We understand that your circumstances might change and that you may not want to volunteer with us forever. You just need to tell us if you need to stop volunteering. If you want to take some time off or you need a change then please come and see us. We may be able to offer you a new challenge or the opportunity to come back at a later date.

I am currently receiving Job Seekers allowance. Will this be affected?

Your JSA will not usually be affected as long as:

- You are still looking for work as agreed with the Job Centre
- You can be contacted quickly if the chance of a job comes up, and you are willing and able to start work or go for an interview within 48 hours.
- You do not receive any other pay other than expenses such as petrol or fares.



Our Training Course

Our training course (currently two full days) is designed to equip our Volunteer Advocates with the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for them to become effective advocates. The course is revised on a regular basis but the objectives will include:

- To introduce volunteers to a range of basic issues related to advocacy
- To develop a range of communication techniques
- To raise the awareness of volunteers of the individual, social and community lives of people with learning disabilities and the issues which may arise for them
- To develop negotiation and assertiveness skills
- To raise the awareness of the role of advocates in relation to their partner and others involved in their partners life

There are also a number of additional, external training courses which will be available to the volunteer Advocate.

Certificates will be presented after successful completion of the course if requested.

