

Types of Advocacy

A number of different types of advocacy exist. The strength of each advocacy type depends on how well the individual, group or organisation's advocacy efforts meet the key elements expressed in the definition of advocacy. The types of advocacy have been categorised in different ways. Here we will refer to five types of advocacy:

- Individual Advocacy
- Citizen Advocacy
- Systems Advocacy
- Parent Advocacy
- Self-Advocacy

Sometimes only two types of advocacy are talked about, individual and systems. Self advocacy and citizen advocacy are often regarded as individual advocacy. Parent advocacy is often regarded as either individual or systems.

1. Individual Advocacy

Here the advocate concentrates their efforts on one or two people only. There are two common forms of individual advocacy:

Informal Advocacy

Parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends who take on advocacy roles are all examples of informal individual advocacy.

Many different people, with a range of relationships to people with disability, have spoken out and persistently advocated for those who are vulnerable. What often goes unrecognised and unseen, are the efforts of individual people who may struggle with the injustices with little or no support. Such individual efforts have been termed informal advocacy. These individual advocacy efforts can and do last many years, often in significant isolation.

These solo efforts can isolate individual advocates from their communities by the very nature of their efforts, particularly where the issue is controversial or perceived as detrimental to the wider system/environment in which the issue is placed. For example, a parent's efforts to seek enrolment of a child with disability in a regular school in a local community may stir enmities, conflicting interests and test established friendships.

These advocacy efforts by individual people for valued lives need to be supported, nurtured and protected. Individual people may want to be connected to others doing advocacy; to share the effort, to seek support, or to develop a collective response.

Individual advocates are encouraged to link with advocacy groups for information resources and further contacts.

Voluntary community based organisations

Another form of individual advocacy is voluntary community based organisations that pay staff to advocate for individuals. In Queensland organisations that operate in this way are Speaking Up for You (SUFY), Gold Coast Advocacy Group and Independent Advocacy in the Tropics (IAT).

2. Citizen Advocacy

Citizen advocacy is a community based movement that aims to recognise, promote and defend the rights, well being and interests of people with intellectual and/or multiple disabilities. It does so by finding and supporting caring, responsible citizens who make long-term voluntary commitment to make a positive difference in the life of a person who may be lonely, face difficult challenges, or be in “at risk” situations.

Each Citizen Advocacy relationship is unique. The citizen advocate may for example, offer his or her protégé friendship, new experiences and opportunities, spokespersonship and protection from abuse.

The Citizen Advocacy office carefully matches protégés and citizen advocates to ensure there is a good match between the interests and needs of the protégé and the abilities, resources and commitment of the citizen advocate. Citizen advocates are orientated, assisted to gain further knowledge and resources, supported and recruited by the Citizen Advocacy office.

Organisations that operate using Citizen Advocacy are Capricorn Citizen Advocacy, South West Brisbane Citizen Advocacy and Sunshine Coast Citizen Advocacy.

3. Systems Advocacy

This form of advocacy is primarily concerned with influencing and changing the system (legislation, policy and practices) in ways that will benefit people with a disability as a group within society. Systems advocates will encourage changes to the law, government and service policies and community attitudes. Usually systems advocacy do not do individual advocacy. To do so can cause conflict around the use of resources, focus and purpose. Organisations that operate on a systemic level are Queensland Advocacy Inc (QAI) and Queensland Parents for People with Disability (QPPD).

4. Parent Advocacy

Parent advocacy is concerned with advocating on issues that affect the person with a disability and their family. The focus is on the needs of the person with a disability, not the parents or family.

However, some parent advocacy focuses on the needs of parents first. Whilst parents have substantial needs for support and resources, when we talk about parent advocacy we mean advocacy by parent groups for people with a disability.

5. Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is undertaken by person or group who share the same characteristics or interests on behalf of the same person or group. The difficulty with this form of advocacy is that sometimes those undertaking advocacy and speaking up for themselves are likely to be further exposed and be more vulnerable to abuse, discrimination and ridicule as a result of speaking up for themselves.