

Advocacy in Lewisham - helping you be heard



This is a summary of advocacy in Lewisham. For full details please contact the organisations direct or Community Connections Lewisham on 0330 058 3464 (open Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm).

What is advocacy?

Dealing with professionals in the care or health system can sometimes feel intimidating and you may find it difficult to express your views.

If you need support, an independent advocate can help you say what you want, get the information you need and make sure your rights are protected.

Advocacy services help people – especially the most vulnerable – to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

All the advocacy services here are free.

An advocate can:

- help you express your opinions
- provide information
- help you understand and explore your choices
- offer practical help, such as writing letters and attending meetings
- make sure the correct procedures are followed.

An independent advocate may be helpful if there is any disagreement between you, your health or social care professionals or even family members about a decision that needs to be made. An independent advocate should represent your wishes without judging or giving a personal opinion.

When you might need an advocate

You might want to have an advocate with you or to speak on your behalf in the following situations:

- during assessments, such as hospital discharge or needs assessments
- when planning or reviewing your care and support
- if there are changes to your services
- if there is an investigation into possible abuse
- when making complaints

Your rights to advocacy

Local councils – Lewisham included - must involve people in decisions about their care and support. No matter how complex your needs, they are required by law to help you:

- express your feelings and wishes
- weigh up your options
- make your own decisions.

Types of advocacy

There are different types of advocacy, ranging from self-advocacy - where you receive training to help you put your own views across - to professional advocacy. Some independent advocates are trained specifically to communicate and work with people with dementia and other mental health problems. An advocacy service may be run by volunteers. An advocacy service should be separate from the NHS or social services.

You are legally entitled to an advocate in 3 situations.

- Independent Mental Health Advocates (IMHAs) - if you are being assessed or receiving treatment for a mental health condition under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCAs) - if you lack capacity to make certain decisions and there is no-one else (such as a family member or friend) who can support or represent you
- Care and Support Advocates (Care Act) - if you have 'substantial difficulty' in being involved in assessments and decisions about your care and don't have an 'appropriate adult' to support you.

Mental capacity means having the ability to understand, retain and use information in order to make and express decisions about your life. Mental capacity can fluctuate and it must never be assumed that someone lacks mental capacity because that could mean depriving them of their rights.

In Lewisham POHWER, a national charity, are funded to provide advocacy for all three of these groups:

Tel: 0300 456 2370

Email: pohwer@pohwer.net

Web: <https://www.pohwer.net/lewisham>

Learning disabilities

Lewisham Speaking Up (LSUP) help people with learning disabilities to speak up and get their voices heard.

We do this through our 1-2-1 advocacy service, citizen advocacy, financial inclusion, crime, hate crime, self-advocacy service and training.

All our projects aim to give people with learning disabilities a strong voice. We work together to bring about the changes people want and need.

We strive to get better and fairer treatment for all people with learning disabilities.

Tel: 020 8692 1862

Email info@lsup.org.uk

Web: www.lsup.org.uk

Mental health

As well as your legal rights above, POHWER also provide advocacy when dealing with a range of issues. If you have a diagnosed mental health issue or are known to Lewisham NHS, or Lewisham Community Mental Health Teams.

You can self-refer or be referred (contact details on page 2).

Complaints about health services

Healthwatch Lewisham Independent NHS Complaints Advocacy Service can:

- Support you to make your complaint
- Provide you with self-help tools to help you make your complaint
- Listen to your concerns
- Explain the NHS complaints procedure and provide you with information about how best to make your complaint
- Provide an advocate to support you through the complaint should you feel that you are unable to make the complaint yourself
- Signpost you to other services if we are unable to give you the help that you need.

Healthwatch is a national charity with a Lewisham branch

Tel: 020 3886 0196

www.healthwatch.co.uk

Email: advocacy@healthwatchlewisham.co.uk