

This assignment attempts to pull together resources needed by an independent professional advocate (IPA) to ensure that they support the needs of their client and hear their voice. It will define advocacy, the role of an IPA, discusses the needs of a child in advocacy services and it will identify the issues of the service user featured in the case study and seek to find and support positive solutions. It will touch upon the impacts of child neglect, the importance of maintaining sibling relationships when separated by foster placement and practice guidelines in communicating with young children. The conclusion will highlight the lack of measured evidence available to back up the performance and effectiveness of independent professional advocacy within child welfare and suggestions for how this can be achieved.

Advocacy can be defined as the supporting of a person to obtain something from persons with power (Bateman, 2000, p16). Morris (1993 quoted in Dalrymple & Hough 1995, p.19) describes advocacy as embarking on 'the slow and uncomfortable removal of the dusty robes of professionalism and power'. An independent professional advocate is employed by an independent advocacy service provider. This determines that there is no conflict of interest as the IPA is not associated with any statutory service such as local authority or health service, and therefore is not governed by their policies, budgets or procedures. The IPA will work alongside these organisations but in the interests of his client, gathering his own information and evidence. The IPA will support the wishes and feelings of a client and deliver a service that irrespective of personal beliefs and attitudes, personal experience and emotions will represent best interests and needs effectively. (National Occupational standards, 2019). Looking at advocacy from a child or young person's perspective adds developing child appropriate strategies to communicate effectively, empowering a child to express themselves effectively and encourage the acknowledgement of their human rights. (Child Law Advice, 2019). When the local authority is making decisions for a child or children they have a right to be consulted to find out what they need and how they are feeling and 'acknowledging the views and feelings of a young person helps them be involved and can help everyone make better decisions' (Barnardo's, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, a case study has been used. This generates a clear understanding of the specific needs of the child in a real life context and highlights the need for a multi service approach. Although the study has been taken from Children, Families and Learning (suffolk.gov.uk, No Date) one should assume that the child is being supported in and is placed within South Wales for the purpose of the port folio.

‘John is six years old with three older sisters. Social services have been aware of the family since the birth of the eldest child due to mum being a registered drug user and alcoholic. John’s elderly grandmother left the family home which she had maintained to live in sheltered housing and without her there an already poor record of school attendance for John worsened. Child services became increasingly concerned for the welfare of the four children and eventually after six months of trying to gain access to the home, forced entry and found a vile state of neglect and four malnourished children, dirty and infested with lice. Remains of baked beans were the only evidence of food. Mum was sectioned under the Mental Health Act (1983) and the children all fostered. John went to placement on his own and had problems adjusting and settling, his behaviour challenging. He developed language and speech problems which manifested as a severe stutter. He was aggressive, withdrawn, tearful, and would often hide himself in small spaces on school grounds. He refused contact with his mother, found it difficult to relate to his peers and was significantly bullied. He did, however, miss his sister closest to him in age and social workers were extremely slow to accommodate his wishes to see her. An advocate was chosen to support John’s voice being heard in relation to his needs’.

The very first thing an advocate needs in which to practice is a charter. Guidelines of ethical and moral rules laid out clearly and definitively, delivering a code that allows all individuals concerned an insight into the expected levels of professionalism. This can be found in appendix 1. Next is a specialised skill set and this portfolio includes in appendix 2, performance criteria and a knowledge and understanding model on which to base one's child advocacy service. The National Occupational Standards (NOS) are guidelines of employment performance and knowledge specifications that an employee must achieve in his place of work. As well as core literacy numeracy and digital skills needed for the contemporary workplace, an advocate also needs an assortment of more personable attributes.)Skills for care, No Date) outline specific skills such as communication, research skills, confidence to challenge decisions and a capability to develop and maintain positive working relationships. However, this is not all. A successful IPA needs to be able to listen. (McLeod, 2008, p.22) explains that the fundamental values of listening are respect and empowerment. Respectful and effective conversation on a micro level will support a child’s rights and allow them trust and agency. On a macro level will contribute to becoming functional participants in society. (Wright and Jaffe, 2014, p.23) contribute to this by adding ‘that an advocate must know when to speak and when to listen’ and that observation of body language with both client and other

team players will be beneficial when it comes to planning strategies and coming up against decision makers. Included in appendix 3 is a comprehensive information sheet from West Sussex County Council, on active listening skills and face to face communication.

Next in the line of essential IPA attributes is remaining client centred. (Sherman, 2015, p.50) describes how it is 'possible to unintentionally discriminate'. An IPA must keep his own bias in check, reactions neutral and display no bearing to his own experiences. An IPA needs to research and adapt to the culture of the child in order to interpret a child correctly, remain non judgemental at all times and avoid pre conceived ideas and assumptions. Independent professional advocates need to also understand, retain and adhere to the rules of confidentiality. IPA's will ensure the information they hold about their client, in this case, six year old John, is only shared if deemed a safeguarding issue. Clients must feel safe knowing that anything they tell their advocate is private and confidential

When complex and confusing decisions are being made by a statutory service on behalf of a child or young person, there is a legal obligation to inform them of their right to an IPA and if required, supplied with someone. Each local authority in Wales will approach this slightly differently dependent on service provision, advocacy for children and young people (my rights, 2017) however the legislation is laid out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This most recent act in Wales gives clear expectations of the local authorities' duty within advocacy services and another code of practice for guidance. This can be found in appendix 4. Children should be shown what an advocate can and can not do and a child friendly guide from Welsh Government (2017) is available in appendix 5 and despite only being a consultation document and the response and framework not yet published, gives a young person an idea of standards, expectations and important issues such as privacy and confidentiality. A separate document at appendix 6 is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC). This is important to both child and IPA as it reminds both that despite the convention not being law and advisory only, as a nation these guidelines are used in accordance with promoting child welfare. Many children will not be aware that they have rights and this may be one of the first experiences of empowerment a child gains. Knowing an IPA has brought their attention to this document may serve to start the foundations of trust. Appendix 7 contains guidance from the advocacy code of practice on the importance of confidentiality and safeguarding. It advises how to record, store, share information and the necessity to breach confidentiality where there are concerns for safety as discussed in the paragraphs above. An IPA needs to go over this with a client in an age

appropriate format and again will go towards the development of trust within the child /IPA relationship.

Within the practice of advocacy, much attention needs to be concentrated on research. The goal is not just so much as to inform a decision maker but to persuade him. This research will need to be focussed towards the needs of the client but also completely accurate and informed. Facts need to be communicated without being over emphasized or manipulated and combining dedication and authentic evidence will create an authentic IPA. Primary research will be conducted with your client during meetings and engagements and secondary research can be done privately to source agencies, policies and services dependent on demography, geography and client group. (Wright and Jaffe, 2014, p.81-83). (Bateman, 2000, p.138) speaks of the necessity of legal research, knowing how to best find the correct policy or legislation to strengthen a client's case. Appendix 8 is an informative piece on effective research taken from The Community Toolbox (2018). Being misinformed can be detrimental to a case, the future well-being of your client and the advocate/advocacy service. Much research also needs to be done on the background of the client and in this case, John's reasons for being in care. The children were severely neglected physically and almost certainly emotionally. The impact of such neglect at the age of six is significant. Despite child abuse not being clearly defined in any UK legislation (Corby, Shemmings & Wilkins, 2012, p.86) much research is conducted into its theories and its impact and awareness of the impacts are fundamental to sourcing appropriate models of support to meet need. What is clear from the research is that any form of abuse in childhood is detrimental. (Hobart & Frankel, 2005, p.113) describe some of the characteristics of a neglected child as a lack of concentration, have low self esteem and appear withdrawn. Behavioural symptoms including bedwetting, compulsive outbursts and defiance. An IPA must be vigilant in researching the history of the specific case as well as the wider picture of the cause of vulnerability. IPA's need to design and create ways to engage and encourage children to express themselves. Thomas (2009, quoted in Schofield & Simmonds, 2009) describes several approaches to child centred practice and suggests imaginative play, turn taking games and using creative materials to help a child feel at ease and to promote expression of feeling and emotion. Appendix 9 gives an example of a young person's workbook created by Cafcass (2018). The environment in which to attempt this work should be well thought out and where available a comfortable, calm space needs is best.

In relation to John's specific needs and wishes, the following quote lends itself well 'children who need love will ask for it in the most unloving of ways' (Barkley, 2013) and John is displaying aggression and negative behaviours. His obvious stress is causing a significant speech impediment and his behaviour is impacting on him socially at school. Carmarthenshire Youth & Children's Services (CYCA) is a registered children's charity which serves to improve the lives of the county's children and young people. Providing emotional and well-being support via one of their many programmes to John may be the infrastructure needed to aid his confidence, self esteem and social behaviours while he continues to settle in his placement. The information for CYCA can be found in appendix 10. The need for speech and language intervention is also highlighted within the case study and on investigation into the local health board, it is easy to find the county's provision. Schools and health visitors would normally refer a child however self referrals are also accepted. Waiting times can be long but again an intervention of this type could go on to improve John's confidence. This information can be found in appendix 11. The last need for intervention in John's case is the lack of contact with his sister. In March 2018, of 195 children being looked after by Local Authority in Carmarthenshire 155 of them were in foster care and 35 of them under the age of ten, (Stats Wales 2019) and (Barnardo's, 2017) inform us that as many as 1 in 3 children are separated from their siblings when placed in foster care. There are many arguments for and against placing siblings together. (Pathway Care, No date) suggest that keeping brothers and sisters together results in better school attainment and a generally better experience of well-being. However, a carer may not be able to accommodate a whole family or the risk of further abuse is apparent. Appendix 12 provides a fact sheet from The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to children (NSPCC) on legal requirements in the U.K. regarding accommodation for siblings. Appearing that John misses his sister the IPA can appeal to the decision makers on John's behalf and convey his feelings without further distress to John. John might like to choose where they meet and have an idea of how often.

The final piece of effective advocacy practice is evaluation and reflection. An advocacy service provider will have ways in which they support their staff, and supervision will be one such way of sustaining a practitioner's well being and professional development. It involves a commitment to talk through the impact a case has had personally and any areas that require change. Similarly, self reflection is of huge importance both for the IPA and the future client. It is a "careful consideration" of your practice according to The Open University (2018)

and requires a questioning approach to your work by reflecting on what is done well and what could be improved in the next case. An example of reflective practice guidance from Coventry University is included in appendix 13.

To conclude it would seem there is an ever changing landscape within child advocacy, the portfolio, therefore, needing to be a living document and regularly updated. There also appears to be a lack of evidence and measurement in the outcomes of providing children and young people with an independent professional advocate. This may well be in part due to the confidentiality that advocates and advocacy providers are bound by and that formal child IPA's are a relatively new concept. One such way would be for an IPA to produce an age appropriate attitudinal survey, using emojis and stickers. It will be interesting to follow the Welsh Governments statistics and developments within child advocacy and its provision within Wales and the U.K. as advocacy becomes an increasingly essential platform from which to support our most vulnerable in society and have their voices heard.

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