

Where there are barriers to accessing our human rights, one can obtain the help and support of an advocate. In this assignment, we will explore the meaning of advocacy and unpick its three underlying principles, power, oppression and agency. We will also examine ways of empowerment and the giving back of control. One of the many barriers which may make self-advocacy difficult is learning disability and this context shall be used within for the purpose of example. For clarification learning disability is described as a reduced intellectual capacity and experiencing difficulty with standard everyday tasks. For example household maintenance, forming lasting relationships with others budgeting skills which will limit that person for all of their life. (Mencap 2018)

It is necessary here, to clarify exactly what is meant by advocacy. Advocacy is an increasingly used service within social care settings and advocacy can be defined as the representation of a vulnerable adult, child or community to promote choice and provide voice. (The Social Services and Well-being Act 2014) tells us that “advocacy is a service that provides assistance (by way of representation or otherwise) to persons for purposes relating to their care and support”. The (Advocacy Charter 2018) also defines advocacy as “taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need” These explanations go a long way to defining the service and there are many more depending on the context one explores and will continue to evolve in the future. The mental health charity (Mind 2018) identifies three main models of advocacy, self, citizen and professional. There are however many more and they can vary in their service pathway. Within self-advocacy individuals are encouraged to speak for oneself, (IRISS 2018) suggests “individuals represent and speak up for themselves, with support, either individually or collectively”. This support can be in a paid or donated in a voluntary capacity. Professional advocacy is provided by an employed person on behalf of an organisation to provide support. These advocates remain independent regardless of their own opinion or views. People with learning disabilities say that “being part of a self-advocacy group or getting support from an advocate is a really important way of being able to take control of their lives”. (British Institute of learning disabilities 2017). Citizen advocacy is a “partnership between an individual who is vulnerable and not in a good position to exercise or defend their rights as a citizen”, and “a

member of the community who is independent of those providing direct services”. (VoiceAbility 2018) This emphasises the importance of advocacy within the learning disabilities community. Vulnerable adults with learning disabilities potentially need support with a wide range of services within advocacy. Family members may have advocated on their behalf but soft advocacy boundaries are blurred and a harder more professional approach may be more appropriate therefore removing any incidence of interest conflict, pre-judgement, or lack of confidentiality, all of which are a primary concern. A key presentation of learning disability is the individual may not know what their rights are or how to express them; they may not have the ability or confidence to speak up or address how choices may apply to them. One of the greatest problems is as (Gray and Jackson, 2002, p.42) describe “Socially devalued people are therefore at proportionately greater risk of harm of all kinds”.

Advocacy here can have a hugely beneficial and positive influence in reducing negative attitudes and preventing exclusion from society. (Bateman 2000 p.16) says that “whatever the type of advocacy the tasks that advocates undertake have a common theme; helping another person obtain something from someone with power” so it can be argued that an individual with reduced capacity is particularly vulnerable when it comes to the relationship to power. “The concept of power is particularly complex; power is understood in different ways, and different sorts of power are exercised in various ways by different groups” (Spicker 2008 p.32). If an individual has a limited or diminished capacity it is relatively easy to assume that levels of agency and power are low and the feeling of oppression is high and though power inequality can exist between any authority and person, one is mindful that this relationship with someone of limited capacity is particularly vulnerable. Power can be interpreted in many ways. Power to, power within and power with are positive examples from (Vanclassen and Miller 2002) whilst power over is a negative, it is where hierarchy is assumed and oppression can begin. What an advocate should try to avoid here is the latter approach and instead, identify problems, seek solutions and give the power back.

Power and oppression are closely linked. Oppression, one of the greatest challenges, is the exploitation of difference of either an individual or a community who share social or privileged categories. It is the imbalance of power and an ideology that one person or group is more important than another. It is not just individual but societal and marginalizing, pushing minority groups to the very edge of humanity, depriving the most deprived of their humanity. (David and Derthick 2017 p.2) argue that “oppression has been so omnipresent and widespread in our world that it is very likely that all of us will have witnessed

oppression, inflicted oppression, felt the negative consequences of oppression or all of the above”. Oppression can be categorized into personal, cultural and structural or systemic, all three working together at once. Personal oppression is about self-belief and how we perceive others. Cultural being our expected social norms and what one is influenced by and structural being big institutions, governments, education boards, monarchy to name a few. What an advocate must seek to accomplish here is to support their client to alleviate feelings and experiences of oppression and encourage a heightened sense of agency.

Agency is change. Agency is very much about identity, confidence and self-esteem. Feeling empowered when fight or flight kicks in. It is fostering resilience, empowering and enabling and having the tools for change. (Jeffery 2011 p.43) claims that “a sense of agency is believing that change is possible, if a person chooses to they can move from the sense of being an object to experiencing himself as the subject or author of his own life and can experience a sense of control”. Haggard and Eitam 2015 suggest that agency is also “deeply related to motivation” and that “the sense of agency itself may play an important role in motivating and guiding human behaviour”.

Empowerment is very much at the heart of agency and socially citizenship is at the heart of empowerment. (Thompson 2006 p.27) tells us in his PCS theory that personal, cultural and structural influences are all interconnected and stigmatisation and discrimination come from all areas. Choosing to live a more generous and tolerant way of life can be empowering in itself, rising above the negativity and becoming more altruistic. (Lena Dominelli 2002 p.121) believes that “without clients, there would be no professionals” and suggests that client and professionals work together reciprocally to find solutions. Of course, this is dependent on the level of learning disability and the level of communication skills but a coproduced way of working together can ensure at least a power balance and hopefully feelings of empowerment.

To conclude, no two individuals are the same and where there is difference to be had there is always an opportunity for stigmatization and discriminatory attitudes. By practising in an anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive way we are seeking to reduce the negativity felt in society. The role of an advocate should be to address the client holistically, every case being as individual as the person. Encouraging them to confidently take part in their communities

be that geographical or chosen groups, fostering a belief of capability and self-worth and above all letting their human rights be upheld. Advocacy in its best format potentially removes its own need. If done sensitively and efficiently, at the end of the client/advocate partnership, the client will hopefully feel capable and motivated enough to seek positive change. Empowerment, helping to create a sense of agency and anti-oppressive practice should underpin every advocates work.

Reference list

Advocacy Charter (2018) Available at <https://www.qualityadvocacy.org.uk/resources/advocacy-charter> (Accessed on 24th October 2018).

Bateman, N. (2002) *Advocacy Skills for Health and Social Care Professionals*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

British Institute of Learning Disabilities (2017) Available at <https://http://www.bild.org.uk/about-bild/aboutbild> (Accessed on 24th October 2018).

David E.J.R. and Derthick, A.O. (2017) *The psychology of Oppression*. Springer Publishing Company

Dominelli, L. (2002) *Anti Oppressive Social Work Theory and Practice*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Gray, B. And Jackson, R. (2002) *Advocacy and Learning Disability*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Haggard, P.and Eitam, B. (2015) *The Sense of Agency*. Oxford University Press.

IRISS (2018) Advocacy: models and effectiveness. Available at <https://www.iriss.org.uk> (Accessed on 21st October 2018).

Jeffery, L.(*Understanding Agency Social Welfare and Change*. Policy Press.

Mencap (2018) What is Learning Disability? Available at <https://www.mencap.org.uk> (Accessed on 24th October 2018).

Mind (2018) Advocacy in mental health. Available at <https://mind.org.uk> (Accessed on 23rd October 2018).

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk> (Accessed on 6th November 2018).

Spiker, P. (2008) *Social Policy Themes and Approaches*. 2nd Ed. Policy Press

Thompson, N. (2006) *Anti-discriminatory practice*. Palgrave macmillan.

VoiceAbility (2018) Citizen_Advocacy_Info_Sheet.pdf Available at <https://www.voiceability.org/> (Accessed on 26th October 2018).

.