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Assessment 1

For an Advocacy Organisation of your choice, identify and critique the professional standards in place.

The Rationale of Professional Standards – The Advocacy Charter

A working group of 75 advocacy services created the Advocacy Charter. To clarify and develop key advocacy ideas, Action for Advocacy published the Advocacy Charter in July 2002 (Advocacy Matters, n.d.; Advocacy QPM, 2014, n.p). It lays out important guidelines and defines what constitutes effective advocacy. They used this information to create a set of advocacy standards and a Code of Practice.

Advocacy programmes and other initiatives can define advocacy and create a collective understanding of what constitutes effective advocacy by using the Charter (Advocacy QPM, 2014 n.p).

The goal of the Advocacy Charter was to outline and advance important advocacy concepts (Action for Advocacy, p.2), and it has been broadly recognised throughout England and Wales. The Charter offers advocacy programmes and other initiatives a means of defining advocacy and presenting a shared understanding of what successful advocacy looks like (Action for Advocacy, 2006, p.2).

Code of Practice is based on the 10 principles of the Advocacy Charter (Action for Advocacy, 2006, p.2). It explains advocacy's function as follows (Local Government Association, 2017, p.5,):

‘Clarity of purpose, Independence, Person Centred Approach, Empowerment, Equal Opportunity, Accessibility, Supporting advocates, Accountability, Confidentiality, Complaints, Safeguarding’ (Advocacy QPM, 2014, p.5).

As Croner-i (2024a, n.p) suggests information about local advocacy programmes should be made available by advocates, who should also be involved in the creation of care plans, use

advocates to encourage participation from care recipients, assist people in locating advocacy programmes through the Internet resources and educational materials, encourage peer support based on common disabilities, heritage, or goals, foster an environment where complaints are respected and feedback is encouraged from advocates, and work with the Independent Mental Capacity Advocate who has been assigned to represent care recipients (Croner-i, 2024a, n.p).

Context of the organisation Chosen

The largest voluntary sector advice service in the UK is called Citizens Advice (Kirwan, McDermont and Evans, 2017, n.p). Citizens Advice (CitA for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and Citizens Advice Scotland, national charitable organisations, as well as the local offices known as the Bureau or the (CAB), each independently registered as charities, provide the Citizens Advice service (Kirwan, McDermont and Evans, 2017, n.p).

Services provided by Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) are one public health strategy used to address health disparities (Forster *et al.*, 2016, n.p). Each CAB oversees obtaining its money, which comes from a variety of sources such as clinical commissioning groups, non-governmental or charitable organisations, and local government. The Citizens Advice service employs more than 8,843 employees and about 16,000 volunteers, who provide the service (Citizen Advice, 2023, p.9). Everyone is welcome to receive free advice from CAB on rights and obligations, including but not limited to financial obligations, advantages, job opportunities, housing, and discrimination. It is independent, unbiased, confidential, and free of charge (University of Bath, 2014, n.p; Burrows, *et al.*, 2011, n.p; Kirwan, McDermont, and Clarke, 2016, p.3).

First founded in 1939, the Bureaux were partially a reaction to the expected disturbances and disruptions that civilians confronting war would experience (Kirwan, McDermont, and Clarke, 2016, p.3). First mentioned in the Betterton Committee on Public Assistance Administration report in 1924, along with changes to the Public Assistance programme, was the concept of a voluntary advising service (Kirwan, McDermont, and Clarke, 2016, p.3).

In 2009, there were over 3,300 places where Citizens Advice Bureaux offered in-person services, including high streets, community centres, medical facilities, courts, and prisons (Green, 2009, p.10).

Throughout the organization's existence, the Citizens Advice service has empowered its clients to speak out for themselves and advocate for others in like circumstances, in addition to providing evidence on their behalf (Green, 2009, p.10).

The agency is also making amazing progress in lobbying on behalf of the individuals it serves, bringing about changes that will have a long-lasting effect on the lives of a substantial number of people (Citizen Advice, 2020, p.6).

Report

Henderson and Pochin (2003) note that the idea of advocacy has gained ground in UK central and local government policy in recent years (Read, 2003. n.p). Furthermore, as Tufail and Lyon, (2007) states, advocacy is the act of helping others express their wishes. It assists people in obtaining their rights. It is a programme where advocates collaborate with the individuals they represent and stand by. Advocacy must also adhere to norms and regulations (Tufail and Lyon, 2007).

Equality and Diversity

Thompson (2006) asserts that individual differences result in a range of outcomes. The vast diversity of both the public and social work clients is one effect. Moreover, a significant contributing element to these inequalities is unfair discrimination (Thompson, 2006, p. 170). Furthermore, as Thompson (2006) continues, broad characteristics like gender, colour, limitations, or spoken language should not be used to describe specific people. In the larger societal framework, it is crucial to view each person as a distinct individual. This understanding of how societal forces shape individual experiences is aided by this method. It is critical to recognise the variety of social forces that contribute to each person's uniqueness and not to limit them to simple social categories.

The stigma and discrimination that individuals with mental health issues and intellectual disabilities encounter in society can render them vulnerable, disadvantaged, and disempowered, according to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2012). They may experience social marginalisation, frequently have inadequate knowledge of their legal rights, and are not included in important life decisions. Their struggles are getting their opinions heard, having their rights upheld, and having their interests protected (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2012 p.8).

According to Citizen Advice annual report (2020/21b), '*We were there to help millions find a path through the uncertainty,*' they are integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion into their working methods, guaranteeing the accessibility of their services, especially for those who are more vulnerable to discrimination, disadvantage, harm, or detriment, and fostering an inclusive work environment across all services (Citizen Advice, 2021b, p. 6).

In accordance with rights and obligations, the service offers unbiased counsel to everyone (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2012, p.4). Diverseness is valued, equality is encouraged, and prejudice is opposed. The objectives, tenets, and definitions of equality within the service cover variables such socioeconomic status, Welsh language proficiency, rural isolation, and low basic skills, as well as traits that are protected by the Equality Act (2010) (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2012, p.4). Furthermore, based on user input, Citizen Advice (2021a, p. 24) has updated its content for transgender people using single-sex services. They have updated their discriminatory information to remove duplication and condensed their hate crime material to offer more precise instructions on how to handle situations (Citizen Advice, 2021a, p. 24). Users can now more easily receive discrimination guidance thanks to these modifications. Furthermore, Citizen Advice has demonstrated its capacity to act quickly in emergency situations (Citizen Advice, 2021a, p.24).

However, as Henderson and Pochin, (2001, p.14) state, the national resource for citizen advocacy programmes has long been Citizen Advice Information and Training (CAIT) (Henderson and Pochin,2001, p.14). They backed coordinators' forums where practice issues could be discussed and offered a set of guidelines and a Code of Practice that defined citizen advocacy. Henderson and Pochin (2001, p.14) acknowledge that they have made progress, but a considerable proportion of schemes do not want to adopt the citizen advocacy model (Henderson and Pochin, 2001, p.14).

Although Citizens Advice collects client data for policy submissions, it does not systematically analyse client issues and demographic data from the perspective of equality (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2015, p.11). By performing thematic reviews for BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) clients, the new Petra system will assist in addressing this. On

issues impacting BSL (British Sign Language) users and Gypsies/Travellers, as well as hate crimes, discrimination, and gender-based violence, further development is required (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2015, p.11). Bureaus are essential in promoting the need for authorities to deal with these problems and guarantee that the right answers are given. Evidence from clients has the potential to change how public agencies handle their obligations to promote equality and end prejudice (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2015, p.11).

Confidentiality

As the Government of UK (2018) states the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is implemented in the UK via the Data Protection Act (2018).

People and organisations that deal with personal data must abide by strict guidelines known as the 'data protection principles.' Fair, legal, and transparent use of information is required under these standards (Government, 2018, n.p).

The GDPR (Information Commissioners' Office, 2018, p.10) covers the following types of processing of personal data: processing carried out entirely or in part by automated methods; processing carried out in any other way that includes processing personal data that is included in, or intended to be included in a file system (ICO, 2018, p.10).

As ICO (2023) states, people have greater transparency regarding the collection and use of their data thanks to the UK GDPR (2018). When collecting data or, if data is obtained from another source, within a reasonable timescale, privacy information, including purposes, retention durations, and sharing details, must be disclosed (ICO, 2023, n.p). There are a few instances where this is not the case, including when the information is excessively difficult to obtain, or the recipient already possesses it (ICO, 2023, n.p). Using tools like dashboards and just-in-time notifications, the data should be comprehensible, transparent, and easily available. Tests by users aid in determining its efficacy. Individuals must be informed of new data uses prior to processing, and there must be regular reviews and updates. Conformity fosters confidence, whereas nonconformity exposes one to penalties and harm to one's image (ICO, 2023, n.p).

As the Marcella and Baxter (2000, p. 5) declare, services offered by CABx should be free, unbiased, independent, and confidential. They operate under these four fundamental principles.

Giving people control over their personal data and empowering them is one of the goals of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), (2018) European Data Protection

Supervisor (2019, n.p) states. Information sharing policies are frequently justified by using the Data Protection Act of (1998) (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2011, p.30).

According to Citizens Advice (2011, p.30), personal information should only be disclosed when it is appropriate, pertinent, and required to address the needs of the client. Strict measures must also be taken to ensure that personal information is secure and that legal obligations are met (Citizen Advice, 2011, p.30). Within those limitations, there are several instances where service providers merely request consent from users to share information; this benefits the user and saves the providers from having to duplicate effort (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2011, p.30).

The Data Protection Act (2018) and the General Data Protection Regulation (2018), among other laws, are followed, for example by Citizen Advice Cardiff and Vale (n.d.) when handling and storing personal data.

The organisation may ask someone to sign a consent form on paper, tick a box online, or give an agreement over the phone to get their permission (Citizen Advice Cardiff and Vale, n.d). CA will always give a detailed explanation of how they use information before obtaining consent.

The organisation makes sure that access to personal information is restricted to circumstances that have a legitimate purpose when capturing and using it. Information is only disclosed when absolutely required and is never sold to outside parties (Citizen Advice, 2024a, n.p). If there is a legitimate reason to do so, information may occasionally be used or shared without receiving express consent. This include carrying out legal duties, safeguarding life, pursuing justifiable charitable goals, performing duties for the public good, honouring agreements made in contracts, and defending legal rights (Citizen Advice Cardiff and Vale, n.d).

Furthermore, an organisation gathers data on the experiences of the victims and witnesses it represents (Citizen Advice, 2024b, n.p). To protect privacy, the data is anonymised. Through blogs, reports, social media posts, and press releases, these figures are disseminated to government agencies, donors, regulators, and the public. These figures also have an impact on the organization's campaigns, policy research, and media efforts (Citizen Advice, 2024b, n.p).

According to Citizen Advice (2024b), those who are dissatisfied with how an organisation has used their personal information may file a complaint with the Information Commissioners' Office. However, Citizen Advice (2015) argue that there has been a rise in the complexity and availability of personal data in recent times. To empower consumers, a new vision is needed that addresses concerns like discontent with the permission mechanisms that are in place now and the prevalent data collection and sales business model (CA, 2015,

n.p). Organisations must investigate the possible advantages of data for customers and create a stable ecosystem for personal data that puts justice first and strikes a balance between innovation, safety, and satisfying customers' changing requirements in the twenty-first century (CA, 2015).

To guarantee the security of individuals' personal information and adherence to data protection rules, the nonprofit organisation National Citizens Advice and local Citizens Advice collaborate as joint data controllers (Citizen Advice, 2024a, n.p). Personal information is stored on a nationwide computer system by each local Citizens Advice, which is a member of the national organisation and operates independently as a charity. Employees from other local Citizens Advice branches are only permitted access to this information for valid purposes, such offering advice or using the national phone line. Strict guidelines and procedures are in place to guard against misuse or illegal access to individuals' personal data (Citizen Advice, 2024a, n.p).

Sadly, Citizens' Advice frequently fails to deliver accurate information regularly as Jones, (2011.p.32) argue. It would be contrary to the ideals of a company whose relationships with clients are primarily built on trust and confidentiality to publicly promote the social features of its clientele (Jones, 2011, p.11). Advisory services, however, are starting to require proof that they are engaging with the most vulnerable groups as they recognise the value of offering independent opinions, and now, there is not much of that in Wales (Jones, 2011, p.11).

Empowerment

Empowerment, originating in the 1980s, has evolved as a transformative paradigm in social methodologies (Adams, 1996). Despite its formal policy papers and guidelines, the practical implementation of empowerment remains elusive. Hirschman's (1970) triadic framework, encompassing exit, voice, and rights, provides a nuanced understanding of the varying degrees of empowerment (Kucuk, 2008).

Exit refers to the ability of service users to switch providers freely in the presence of multiple service options. Voice entails active participation and input from service users in identifying areas for improvement, often involving structured meetings. Rights, as outlined by legislation and service standards (Morris, 1997), delineate entitlements, offering individuals a powerful means to exercise their agency. Utilising legislative rights is particularly potent in fostering a sense of empowerment (Dalrymple and Burke, 2006).

The assertion of empowering clients can be viewed as paradoxical, potentially undermining the notion of client control. Divergent perspectives on empowerment exist within service user groups, further complicating its conceptualization (Beresford and Trevillion, 1995). Dalrymple

and Burke (1995) posit empowerment as a dynamic process requiring robust support for those undergoing transformative change (Travillion, 2007).

Rappoport (1984) characterises empowerment as a variable action, adapting to the unique needs of individuals. Zimmerman (1988) contends that prescribing a singular definition for empowerment is implausible. Bailey's (1992) assertion underscores the context-dependent nature of empowerment perceptions, varying among individuals and situations (Page and Czuba, 1999).

The People Empowering People (PEP) program, rooted in Freire's (1970) theory of critical education, exemplifies empowerment in practice. By providing resources, opportunities, and experiential learning, PEP facilitates individuals in navigating and enhancing their life trajectories (Horton, 1989).

Advicelink Cymru, an initiative founded by the Welsh Government in collaboration with Citizens Advice services, serves as a crucial resource for individuals in need of professional advice, particularly those who may not actively seek assistance (Citizen Advice, 2024). In the year 2020 alone, Advicelink Cymru successfully assisted over 62,000 individuals, with a notable satisfaction rate as 9 out of 10 clients acknowledged the efficacy of the service and expressed their inclination to recommend it to others (Citizen Advice, 2024).

Offering guidance on welfare benefits, employment, education, discrimination, and various other facets, Advicelink Cymru is dedicated to facilitating accessible and pertinent advice for all. The Citizen Advice service, a government-funded entity, serves a multifaceted role by providing advice, advocacy, and education. The mission extends to ensuring comprehensive representation for service users and empowering them to address issues of personal significance. Aligning with established policies and practices, Citizen Advice in Wales annually aids thousands of individuals through diverse channels, including online platforms, in-person consultations, and telephone assistance (Citizen Advice, 2024).

A noteworthy commitment is evident in the emphasis on human interaction over automated responses when seeking advice from Citizen Advice in Wales. This dedication remained steadfast even during the challenges posed by the pandemic, wherein face-to-face interactions were limited. The surge in the utilisation of online services reflects an adaptive response to changing regulations during lockdowns in both Wales and England. Timely updates are consistently provided to apprise users of any evolving changes (Citizen Advice, 2021, n.p).

Furthermore, Citizen Advice in Wales takes pride in its proactive approach to issue resolution and collaborative efforts with the government and other organisations. Guided by three primary missions, the organisation aims to deliver future-oriented advice that leaves a lasting impact,

address disparities in access among marginalised groups, and promptly tackle issues to prevent crises from escalating (Welsh Government, 2013 p. 99-109).

Citizens Advice endeavours to ensure its services are universally accessible, recognizing that certain inequalities may render individuals disadvantaged and in immediate need of assistance, a priority the organisation is committed to addressing. Through fostering confidence in clients and encouraging self-help, Citizens Advice contributes to the flourishing of communities. The organisation offers confidential consultations and advice, serving as an advocate for positive systemic changes (Welsh Government, 2013 p. 99-109).

Roles in social care and other professions hold a pivotal responsibility as advocates for individual's incapable of making independent decisions, necessitating additional support. Potential conflicts of interest may arise, posing a risk to the decision-making process. Professionals are obligated to maintain objectivity in decision-making, prioritising the well-being of the client (Social Care Wales, 2023, n.p). The legal framework governing empowerment in Wales is outlined in The Code of Practice on Advocacy, a component of the Social Services and Well-being Act of (2014), as articulated in Section 145. This legislation empowers individuals to engage an Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) to facilitate their involvement in diverse circumstances. Section 6 of the Act mandates that individuals executing functions under the Act must duly consider people's views and feelings without passing judgement (Social Care Wales, 2023, n.p). While these organisations play a crucial role in providing advice and support, there might be concerns regarding bureaucracy, resource allocation, and the agility to respond promptly to evolving needs. Striking a balance between government support and independent innovation is paramount for ensuring the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives (Kruk, 2018).

Marginalised groups often encounter substandard care, underscoring the significance of the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to attain Universal Health Coverage, ensuring comprehensive healthcare services for all individuals (Kruk, 2018). The legal framework and healthcare system play pivotal roles in the empowerment paradigm (Freedman, 2005).

During the fiscal year 2013-2014, the Citizen Advice Service in Wales rendered assistance to over 134,000 individuals through 337,000 inquiries, with 13,000 of those seeking support being Welsh speakers (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2014 p.n. 1-7). The advice dispensed not only alleviates stress and anxiety but also fosters employment opportunities, empowering individuals to effect positive changes. An impact analysis reveals that two out of three clients experience complete resolution of their issues (Citizen Advice Bureau, 2014 p.n. 1-7).

Operating from 50 offices and 154 secondary advice outlets, including health centres and home visit services, the Citizen Advice Bureaux in Wales provides widespread assistance. A study

conducted by the Legal Services Research Centre highlights a notable challenge wherein individuals, particularly when utilising telephone contact, struggle to navigate the access points of advice services (Galvin et al., 2000).

Furthermore, participant feedback in an analysis gauging sentiment toward the CAB and comprehension of provided advice includes statements such as '*Changed my life, much more in control of my life*' (Jones, 2011, pp. 259- 260) Some respondents found it challenging to articulate their gratitude fully, expressing sentiments like, '*I would advise CAB to anyone - I can't explain fully enough what the help has done for me*' (Jones, 2011, pp. 259- 260).

Accessibility

The concept of accessibility defines by Action for Advocacy (2006, p.5) involves free advocacy to those who qualify. The advocacy programme aims to ensure all guidelines, rules, practices, and promotional materials encourage community access (Advocacy QPM, 2014 p.5).

Three pieces of law address accessibility: The Equality Act (2010), Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations (2018) and Public Sector Equality Duty (2011) (Government, 2022, n.p).

The care service is built on person-centred ideals and principles, which place an emphasis on the freedom of users to voice their opinions to receive the appropriate calibre and level of care Croner- i (2024b, n.p) states. The service recognises that some people might find it difficult to express their opinions and feelings clearly. As a result, the service supports and makes it easier for individuals to contact advocates or advocacy services when needed to help them express their desires, thoughts, worries, and grievances to the care provider (Croner- i, 2024b, n.p). By providing advocacy support, this dedication to accessibility guarantees that users can interact with the care provider in an efficient manner and communicate their wants and preferences (Croner- i, 2024b, n.p).

In a similar spirit, Citizens Advice (2021a, p. 21) acknowledges the value of accessibility, especially when it comes to reaching younger generations who might not be as familiar with their offerings. TikTok is a video-driven social media platform that enables organisations to provide youth with guidance in a format that suits them (Citizen Advice, 2021a, n.p.). For instance, videos during the energy crisis told millions of viewers what to do if their supplier failed, where to find assistance and why and how to submit a metre reading prior to price cap adjustments (Citizen Advice, 2021a, p. 21). Furthermore, through a pilot programme, Citizens Advice (2021a, p. 22) has made its website more accessible to deaf BSL users. By connecting

consumers to an interpreter via video call and a Help to Claim adviser thereafter, they provide interpretation services through the Universal Credit contact website (Citizen Advice, 2021a, p. 22). Advisors' understanding of access needs was raised by the programme, which may eventually extend to other services. Removing obstacles to accessibility for deaf people using BSL, Citizens Advice is dedicated to inclusivity (Citizen Advice, 2021a, p. 22). Moreover, everyone has the right to full participation in society, which includes having access to facilities, activities, events, and services Holder (2017, n.p) states. However, obstacles like inaccessible buildings or a lack of accommodations are common for people with impairments.

The Equality Act of (2010) mandates that public entities and groups who offer goods and services take reasonable measures to remove physical barriers that individuals with disabilities may encounter when attempting to access those services (Disability Justice Project, n.p), however as Citizen Advice (n.d) states, the group places a high priority on meeting the needs of those who are marginalised and actively seeks to eliminate gaps and injustices in the delivery of services and advocacy initiatives. This entails encouraging people of colour and those with disabilities to have more inclusive access and incorporating their lived experiences into their work. To solve both new and old problems—such as how to better support young people—Citizen Advice routinely examines data and insights (Citizen Advice, n.d).

Summary of findings

According to the Citizen Advice Bureau (2011, p.32), public-facing organisations have strong ethical, legal, and commercial reasons to provide inclusive services. To achieve inclusivity, comprehensive staff training is essential, and it should be integrated into service design. The Bureau identifies proactive attitudes, co-location of services, and multi-channel access as best practices that can enhance customer satisfaction and generate cost savings for service providers (citizen Advice Bureau, 2011, p. 32).

The Citizen Advice Bureau is widely recognised as a reliable and trustworthy brand, primarily due to its free access and universal reach, as noted by the University of Bath (2014, n.p). Serving as a crucial advocate, the Bureau strives to prevent harm. Feedback from many clients indicates high satisfaction with the guidance received, and they often recommend the Bureau to their friends and family (University of Bath, 2014, n.p).

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