

Describe what constitutes ‘empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practices’ and relate these to the role of the advocate.

This assignment will discuss why empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practice are essential to include in practise as an advocate. Explaining each theory individually along with examples of empowerment, agency and oppression. Including why the promotion of these forms of practice are necessary for the role of an Advocate. The examples of advocacy support will focus on a health and social care context for children and young adults involved with social services or local authorities which will include looked after children, those requiring preventative services, including young carers. Coincide Laws or Acts aimed to prevent oppression and those promoting agency and empowerment.

Many children or young adults involved in social services feel powerless and are extremely vulnerable this may be due to a previous bad experience with an adult or with an external agency aimed to support the individual. As well as not understanding the severity of situations. As well as lacked opportunity's to voice their opinions. (Pona,2012). Therefore, by empowering these young individuals will prevent individuals feeling powerless. The theory of empowerment has various meanings in different contexts. It is mainly used to describe an Individual who feels powerless, then regain power back. (Spicker). Lack of empowerment may be due to an individual's social position, financial position or other factors such as age, placing the individuals in an unfavourable position in society. There is then also a further theory of an Individual sense of empowerment, which is when an individual gains confidence to make decisions for themselves. (Pinderhughes,1983). Which could include choosing options for care choices through the help of an advocate as Stated in section 182 of The Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014. Additionally, to the previous two empowerment theories, there is also a collective level of empowerment, which might get viewed as the position of disadvantage on marginalised groups placing them on a scale of social disadvantage. These different contexts of empowerment could apply to children or young people involved with social services, due to their vulnerability or caused by the individuals age or circumstances. Advocates Involving children and young people in important decisions made does empower them as well as build resilience and improve the individuals experience whilst being a looked after child or involved in social services. (Pona,2012). Participation is also strongly linked to empowerment due to individuals giving input to decisions that affect their lives which cannot be achieved without participating in advocacy services offered. (Cohen,1997). An advocate can help individuals who seem weak or vulnerable voice their views to professionals as explaining the individual their rights on care proceedings. (Advocacy West Wales). So just by a individual being pro-active and participating in decisions made, can help form individual preferences for care decisions. Children or young people are encouraged to and have legal rights to voice their views as stated in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child . Participation is equally as important as empowerment. The National Youth Advocacy Service offer peer advocacy by those whom have experienced life involved with social services as well as participation groups helping form policies. Arnstein (1969) found a theory that individuals were part of a ladder of citizen participation. The ladder states different stages where an individual has control on decisions made. The ladder then contains eight different stages. Conjointly with three levels of participation:

The first and second step of the ladder is Manipulation and therapy where individuals are classed as Non-participants. Wilcox stated that the purpose for these first two steps of Arnstein's ladder is to guide and educate Individuals on what is happening, alongside healing individuals.

The third stage is informing an individual of the participation they are needed to follow, the individual usually has little input on this step too.

The fourth stage on the Arnsteins ladder is then Consultation. The individual now has an opportunity to express their opinions, but little action on individual views is the likely outcome at the fourth stage of the ladder.

The next stage is the Placation individuals are now consulted and informed on what is required of them to be part of a decision making the process and their views have been put across. But those in charge are responsible for the outcome made on this stage.

The sixth steps of the ladder is Partnership. This step along with the final two are necessary for citizen power individuals on this step have a form of power redistributed to them,

The Seventh step is delegated power Arnstein found individuals now had several responsibilities with power to make. Individuals now have a shared responsibility on the outcome of decisions made.

The Final stage is Citizen control. Is where power is given to individuals to handle all aspects of making decisions.

For a child to reach all stages They would need to be aged eighteen or over as this is they age you are legally classed as an adult to give full input to choices and decisions.(NSPCC).It is essential to understand empowerment and Participation are two different theories. But both are required for individuals to make decisions, which are both equally essential self traits to hold, especially when giving input to care choices. Those that work within Social work which includes advocates have two main aims for individuals which is empowerment and protection of vulnerable individuals. Advocacy can be utilised to empower individuals further and protect them from discrimination or harsh treatments. (Bateman,2000). Many children lack confidence or are frightened to challenge decisions made. Therefore, requiring encouragement or support in making individual preferences through advocacy, Children and young people are involved in making big decisions which may affect them. (Pona,2012)

The assumption agency is another vital self-trait for individuals to hold. Agency is classed as a realist theory. (Forbes-Pitt). Agency or human agency as a whole can then be defined as 'the act we act on our own accord and have free will in doing so '.(McCormack et al., p57). With independent advocates promoting Agency and voices of children. The child has capacity as well as agency to influence decisions made about them. These decisions can then be voiced by an independent advocated representing the child or young person. Alongside advocates making individuals aware of options available to them. In current legislation and policies, children have input to local authorities' decisions, as well as access to an independent advocate. (Oliver et al.). Further encouraging agency of children and young people. Like empowerment and its connection to participation. Agency relates to another theory being Structure. Structure is similar to agency due to the way society has constraints and restrictions also shaping the way decisions and actions are carried out. Sociologist Anthony Giddens(1984) Found that how people act is often due to social structure. These individuals' views, behaviours or opinions. As well as how these views behaviours, views and opinions can then also reform the social structure of society. As well as formations of Laws and Policies. Due to behaviour changes. Such as how standards on Childrens rights has improved in comparison to fifty years ago. Advocacy agencies as well as empowering change in care and support provided for children on a individual level. Many advocacy services have helped improve and maintain Childrens rights. Helping improve the way advocacy services are delivered to children within England and Wales. (National Youth Advocacy Service). Agency of children can then not be defined at the same level as Agency of adults, due to the construction of laws and Acts, protecting children from having to make adults decisions. Adults such as social workers or judges do have the final say on decisions made due to a hierarchy structure. It is vital Children who are looked after or those who are not but maybe need intervention services, as well as child carers are included in decisions made. Including having the opportunity to do so. Once again to improve the child or young person's experience but give the child confidence in local authorities and services. These decisions can be vast such as care decisions of themselves, as well as family member if a young carer, family contact or complaints procedure. Their capacity and agency are assessed by professionals ensuring situations and scenarios are fully understood and that choices are available to the child or young person before Local Authorities make decisions on a child's life. Complaints with services or placement are usually brought to light by the individuals own voice, advocacy support is then offered through the Social Services and well-being Act 2014 as well as the Childrens Act 1989, as part of the complaints procedure on these legislations attempts to understand why the individual is dissatisfied eventually aiming to improve current arrangement or move placement if necessary. The advocate will meet with the individual regarding complaints and explain completes procedure appropriate to complaint.

As well as ensuring agency and empowerment of individuals are met through advocacy services. Advocates must ensure these vulnerable children and young adults are not facing oppressive treatment not only professionals and foster placements but by their own practice. Paulo Freire discussed oppression and oppressors, finding that those who are oppressed either do not realise oppression is happening. Are already oppressed, or it has become normalised behaviour. And that the oppressors are usually those with the power they then cause oppression by dehumanizing individuals. This power imbalance of oppression and oppressors, Freiere found can

only be prevented by conscientization. Of the oppressor and the oppressed, by becoming self-aware of their situation regardless of their position through action and reflection. Which could be realising the treatment caused is wrong and harmful.

Therefore, according to Freieres theory looked after children and young people are likely to face oppressive treatment due to mistreatment already being normalised by parents or guardians, their age making the individual not fully understand what is happening, As well as their vulnerability of circumstances. There are many safeguards in place to help prevent oppressive practice with codes of conduct for social workers and advocates being client focussed, meaning not suggesting what is easier for the advocate or local authority but by providing client focussed practise for client wishes and views. As well as advocates actively seeking to improve life for looked after children through empowerment. Advocates can then further protect children or young people by ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place to protect children, as well as educating children on their rights available. Children can use advocacy services to make a complaint about professionals or care providers of mistreatment. (Social Services and Well-Being Act Wales,2014). Raising safeguard concerns if needed.

Furthermore, Acts and Policies to promote empowerment and agency of children and young people, whilst working with an advocate on care decisions or when dealing with social services. There are many Laws and Acts aiming to improve life for children of all circumstances to be treated as equals and have opportunities to be empowered and thrive. In the Un Convention Rights of The Child this is stated through various articles such as rights to education, rights to live freely, freedom of expression. As well as an article to make children aware of access to knowledge of rights available.

Concluding empowerment, agency and anti-oppressive practice within advocacy. Empowerment and agency are essential self traits for an advocate to teach a child or young person in care or involved with preventative services. To improve standards of care at home or in placement. By improving, standards for the child or young person will also boost the individuals' resilience for the future by individuals having a positive experience working with advocates. By ensuring the advocacy support offered is anti-oppressive and client-focused also. It also seems empowerment is strongly linked to participation by individuals participating in services as well as decisions made this leads on to individual empowerment and fulfilment. Agency was described as acting out freely, and not constrained but the agency of a child is different to adults as adults do make the final decisions on care choices. Due to the structure of care standards at current, but there is more acts and policies ensuring children's voices are getting listened. Such as the social services and well-being act Wales 2014, Childrens Act 1989 and United Nations Convention Right Of The Child. Protecting not just looked after children and young adults but promoting freedom of expression to all childre. Oppressive practices or oppression was found to be usually partook on vulnerable individuals or those individuals lacking knowledge on acceptable behaviours, as well as lacking capacity as a whole possibly due to age. The oppressor is often those in power and may not realise they are dehumanising an individual. Prevention of this type of malpractice can be prevented through individuals being aware of rights available to them as well as modelling professional behaviour and ensuring the advocate is following the advocacy code of conduct. Ensuring all decisions made are clients wishes not the personal preference of the advocate.

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