

Limerick Advocacy Service



Your Guide to the Service

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Introduction

What is the Limerick Advocacy Service (LAS)

The Limerick Advocacy Service (LAS) is an independent professional representative advocacy Service. That means that the service employs a trained person, the advocate, to work with an individual providing them with support on a specific issue until it has been resolved. LAS is funded by Citizens Information Board and is managed by the West Limerick Independent Living.

This booklet is intended to help you find out more about what Advocacy is and what the Limerick Advocacy Service has to offer. The booklet includes details of what the advocate can and can't do and the policies and safeguards that are in place to ensure you receive a quality, safe and accountable service.

LAS is an open organisation; you can have full details of our policies and procedures by asking your advocate.

Who can use the Limerick Advocacy Service?

The service will be provided to people with a physical and/or sensory disability living in the West Limerick or Limerick City who are aged between 18 and 65.

How much will the service cost me?

The Service is **free** for people who are in the target group.

What is Advocacy

"Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want; secure their rights, represent their interests, and obtain services they need. Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support and take their side. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality, and social justice" *Irish Association of Advocates*

Advocacy can support you to make sure that your views and wishes are heard.

The Advocate's role is to

- listen to you to find out what you want
- help you find out information so that you can make an informed decision about your life choices
- support you in making decisions
- help you to tell other people what you want – this could be a family member, your PA, staff members, social workers, health workers or relatives.

Your advocate will always respect your views, help and support you wherever necessary and never collude with other agencies.

The Advocacy Process

1. Your advocate will have received a referral form and will have checked that you are eligible to use this service.
2. The advocate will then arrange to meet with you and go through this **Users Guide**.
3. If you wish to use the service your advocate will then interview you to find out the details of your concerns, what level of advocacy you require and draw up a plan of action (Your Advocacy Plan).
4. You will be asked to sign:
 - a. A Consent to Act Form, so that the advocate can represent you and access information on your behalf,
 - and**
 - b. A Service Agreement Form, which states that you accept the conditions under which the service will be delivered to you
5. Your advocate will then work to the agreed advocacy plan, keeping you informed at all times about any progress. If required the plan can be changed at any time but only on agreement between you and your advocate. The plan will outline the case closure process.

Advocacy is...

- ✓ About standing up for and sticking with a person or group and taking their side.
- ✓ A process of working towards natural justice.
- ✓ Listening to someone and trying to understand their point of view.
- ✓ Understanding their situation and what may be stopping them from getting what they want.
- ✓ Offering the person support to tell other people what they want or introducing them to others who may be able to help.
- ✓ Helping someone to know what choices they have and what the consequences of these choices might be.
- ✓ Enabling a person to have control over their life but taking up issues on their behalf if they want you to.

What an Advocate can do

Can help you find information

Your advocate may know the information you need or they may need to go and find out the information for you. They will try to find out as much as possible so that you can make the most informed decisions.

Can support you while you decide what you want to do

Your advocate will listen to you, help you to think through your options, give you time to think about what you want to do and let you decide what you want to do next

Can enable you to take part in meetings

Your advocate will go to meetings with you or on behalf of you. The advocate will ensure you take part within the meeting as much as you want to.

Will explain to others what you want

When you do not feel that you are able to speak up for yourself, your advocate will do that for you.

Advocacy is not...

- ✗ Making decisions for someone.
- ✗ Mediation.
- ✗ Counselling.
- ✗ Befriending.
- ✗ Care and support work.
- ✗ Consultation.
- ✗ Telling or advising someone what you think they should do.
- ✗ Solving all someone's problems for them.
- ✗ Speaking for people when they are able to express a view.
- ✗ Filling all the gaps in someone's life.
- ✗ Acting in a way which benefits other people more than the person you are advocating for.
- ✗ Agreeing with everything a person says and doing anything a person asks you to do.

What an Advocate cannot do

Your advocate cannot tell you what to do

Advocacy is all about you making the decisions. Your advocate can get you advice and help from other agencies, but they will never tell you what they think is the right choice. It is your decision.

Your advocate is not a Solicitor

Your advocate will help you to come to your own decisions, they will not try to influence you. They cannot act as a solicitor but they can help you find one or get legal advice.

Your advocate cannot offer an emergency service

Your advocate will respond as quickly as they can to you but they will have other Clients and you may need to wait. An advocate will need to be informed as soon as possible about meetings that you wish them to attend so that they can try to be available.

Your advocate cannot offer a permanent service

We cannot continue to offer a service once the issue has been addressed as far as is possible. There will be other people waiting to use the service. You can contact the service again should another issue arise.

Making Decisions

Your advocate will presume that you are capable of making your own decisions.

On **rare** occasions a Client's wishes may be in conflict with their best interests (particularly if these wishes may cause harm).

This may apply when a Client makes a decision when they are not fully able to understand the consequences and responsibilities that come with that decision.

In such cases the advocate will need to refer the case to management to discuss what actions should be taken.

HOWEVER, LAS recognises your right to be mistaken, take risks and seek outcomes that are not in your best interest.

The Role of the Client

Now that you understand the role of the advocate it is equally important that you understand your role in the advocacy process.

You should give your advocate as much information as possible; if you hold back information your advocate may not be as effective as they do not have the full picture of your circumstances.

Any information you give the Advocate is confidential so you do not need to be afraid that the information you give may be used against you in some way

Your advocate can not use any information you give him/her without your permission.

It is important that you take an active role in your advocacy case. Your advocate is there to empower you; if your advocate does things for you that you are able to do for yourself then your advocate is disempowering you.

You should keep your advocate up to date. If you get a letter or a phone call with information your advocate might need let your advocate know as soon as possible.

Policies and Guidelines

Everyone working for the LAS must work within the policies and guidelines. These guide the work of the advocates and help to protect you. The following pages are a brief outline of the standards you can expect from LAS.

Quality Standards ~ What does this mean?

In order to provide a good quality service, LAS believes that their advocates should adhere to a clear set of guidelines. This will ensure that every person who uses this service will receive the same quality service.

These standards let you know what to expect from your advocate, the way in which your advocate will work with you and how they will work with other agencies.

LAS policies and procedures include guidance on Complaints & Appeals, Confidentiality, Data Protection, Personal Safety, Equal Opportunities, Code of Practice & Quality Standards.

If you would like a full copy of any of these documents just ask your advocate.

Data Protection

LAS will keep records about the work you and your Advocate do.

It is important that information is not lost if your advocate is sick, on leave or moves on to a new project.

For these reasons we need to keep records to ensure we can offer a high level of service to you

Your records will be kept secure on a computer and a copy of this will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office, and is protected within the Data Protection Acts.

LAS will keep a copy of your records on file for 6 years and then they will be destroyed.

You have the right to see the records we keep about you

Just ask your advocate.

Confidentiality

This policy ensures that the information you share with your advocate will be kept private unless you give them permission to tell someone else.

This information will be shared within the advocacy service staff team on a **Need to Know** basis only.

This policy maybe breached only in the following three circumstances;

- Your advocate believes you to be in imminent danger of harm,
- Your advocate believes that you are a threat of harm to others,
- A court of Law demands that this information is given.

Your advocate will try to inform you if they are going to have to breach this policy and attempmt to get your permission.

The advocate will be keeping a record of their work with you.

These records are kept secure on the computer and in a locked filing cabinet. You can see your records at any time and are entitled to a copy – just ask your advocate.

Case Work Review

In order to ensure that the advocate is providing a high quality service to his or her clients the advocate's manager carries out a review of his/her files.

The Manager of the LAS carries out this review in the following way.

The manager will request 3 files at random every quarter (4 times a year)

The manager will then reads the file and examines how the advocate has delt with the case and will give feedback to the advocate.

If you are not happy for your file to be used in such a review just let your advocate know and if your file is requested he/she will let her manager know that you do not want it used for review purposes.

Equal Opportunities

This policy means that everyone from the advocacy service should treat people fairly and NOT discriminate unfairly against ANYONE else.

You and your advocate have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

As well as ensuring that you have the right to be protected from discriminative behaviour, the advocacy service believes that others have the same right to protection. Therefore the advocacy service will not collude with Clients or service providers in promoting discrimination in any form.

Quality Standards ~ The role of the Advocate

Your advocate will:

- Represent your views and wishes, never giving their own opinion
- Remain loyal to your views and wishes and respect your individual rights
- will seek and provide as much information as possible to help you make your own empowered choice
- never be judgemental about the decisions you make
- support you to speak for yourself if you so wish,
- ensure that you are kept informed about what is happening with regard to your advocacy plan
- always work to the guidelines laid out in the LAS policies and procedures
- act independently from all other services
- ensure you have access to the LAS complaints procedure

Quality Standards ~ Showing respect for Clients

Your Advocate will:

- be loyal, honest and trustworthy
- listen carefully to your views and wishes
- arrive on time for all meetings or give apologies if unavoidably late or absent
- allow enough time for appointments and not rush you into making decisions
- respond to your wishes within a reasonable timeframe
- address you directly (not your PA or others)
- keep you informed at all times
- adhere to the policies and procedures as set out within the advocacy service to ensure you receive a quality, safe and accountable service
- always use language and positive images that are acceptable to people with disabilities.

Quality Standards ~ Working with other agencies

Your Advocate will:

- ensure that all other agencies are informed of the role
- adhere to the LAS referral policy at all times
- arrive on time for all meetings
- give apologies if unavoidably late or absent
- inform other agencies that any information about you that they tell the advocate will be automatically passed onto you by your advocate
- keep other agencies appropriately informed of any developments
- never collude with other agencies or represent anybody other than you
- treat other agencies and staff with respect

Complaints

The advocacy service has a complaints procedure to help you sort out any problems you may have about the way we work.

The complaints procedure has several stages, starting with an informal stage. If you are not happy with the outcome of the informal stage then you have the right to take your complaint on to the next stage, and then right up to tribunal.

LAS will try to ensure that you have access to an independent advocate from another organisation to support you through this process if you wish.

If you have a complaint you can contact either:

Gerard O'Connor:

Manager LAS on 06977320

Or

Noel O'Meara:

Chair of the LAS Steering Committee on 061 440199

Or

Fill in the complaint form on the following page



Record of Complaint

LAS takes any complaint against staff or anybody in association with LAS very seriously. In order to ensure that complaints are dealt with efficiently we need to keep a record of the complaint. If you wish to pursue a complaint please could you fill in this form and return it as soon as possible. If you are unsure of anything to do with the complaints procedure of LAS please ask and we will help in any way we can.

Your Name:
Who are you complaining against?
What is your complaint?
Do you wish to have help in pursuing this complaint? (LAS will try to get an independent advocate for you) Yes I need help <input type="checkbox"/> No I don't need help <input type="checkbox"/>
In any proceedings that take place would you like someone else besides an advocate with you?
Signed:
Date:

Please return this form to either:

Gerard O'Connor,
Manager,
West Limerick Independent Living,
Newcastle West Enterprise Centre
Sheehan's Road,
Newcastle West
Co. Limerick

Noel O'Meara,
Chair of LAS Steering Committee,
Citizens Information Board,
Rivercourt Business Centre,
Cornmarket Square,
Limerick

Limerick Advocacy Service Contact Details:

Grace Moore

Advocate

**West Limerick Independent Living,
Newcastle West Enterprise Centre,
Sheehan's Road,
Newcastle West,
Co. Limerick**

069 77320

087 6122538

Email: grace@limerickcil.com

<http://www.limerickcil.com/advocacy.htm>