

North Yorkshire Advocacy



Enabling people to speak up for themselves

“Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain the 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”

The Advocacy Charter – Action for Advocacy

What is Advocacy

Advocacy seeks to ensure that people, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, are able to:

- Have their voice heard on issues that are important to them
- Defend and safeguard their rights
- Have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives

Advocacy is a process of supporting and enabling people to:

- Express their views and concerns
- Access information and services
- Defend and promote their rights and responsibilities
- Explore choices and options

What is an Advocate

- An Advocate is someone who provides support when you need it. An advocate might help you access information you need or go with you to meetings or interviews, in a supportive role. You may want your advocate to write letters on your behalf, or speak for you in situations where you don't feel able to speak for yourself
- Our advocates will spend time with you to get to know your views and wishes.
- An advocate is someone who supports a person so that their views are heard and their rights are upheld. They can help a person to put their views and feelings across when decisions are being made about their life.
- They can give support which will enable a person to make choices and they inform people of their rights.
- An advocate will support a person to speak up for themselves or, in some situations, will speak on a person's behalf.
- Advocates are independent. They are not connected to the carers or to the services which are involved in supporting the person.
- An advocate will work one-to-one with a person to develop their confidence wherever possible and will try to ensure that the person feels as empowered as possible to take control of their own life.

An Advocate will always

- Be on your side
- Listen to what you want
- Make sure people listen to you

An advocate can work with you to:

- Speak out at meetings or to professionals
- Find information so you can make choices and sort out problems
- Change your services if you want to
- Know about your rights and make sure they are respected
- Make difficult decisions
- Make a complaint if you are not happy about something

Advocacy can be helpful in all kinds of situations where you:

- Find it difficult to make your views known.
- Need other people listen to you and take your views into account.

Client / Partner Testimonials

“In tricky situations they are an independent voice fighting the client’s corner and making sure they get the information they need to make decisions. They help people understand their right to challenge.”

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, Learning Disability Team, Clinical Psychologist

“I was able to have my own views and was listened to.”

Advocacy Client

“My advocate made it very clear what I wanted to happen. It put my mind at rest.”

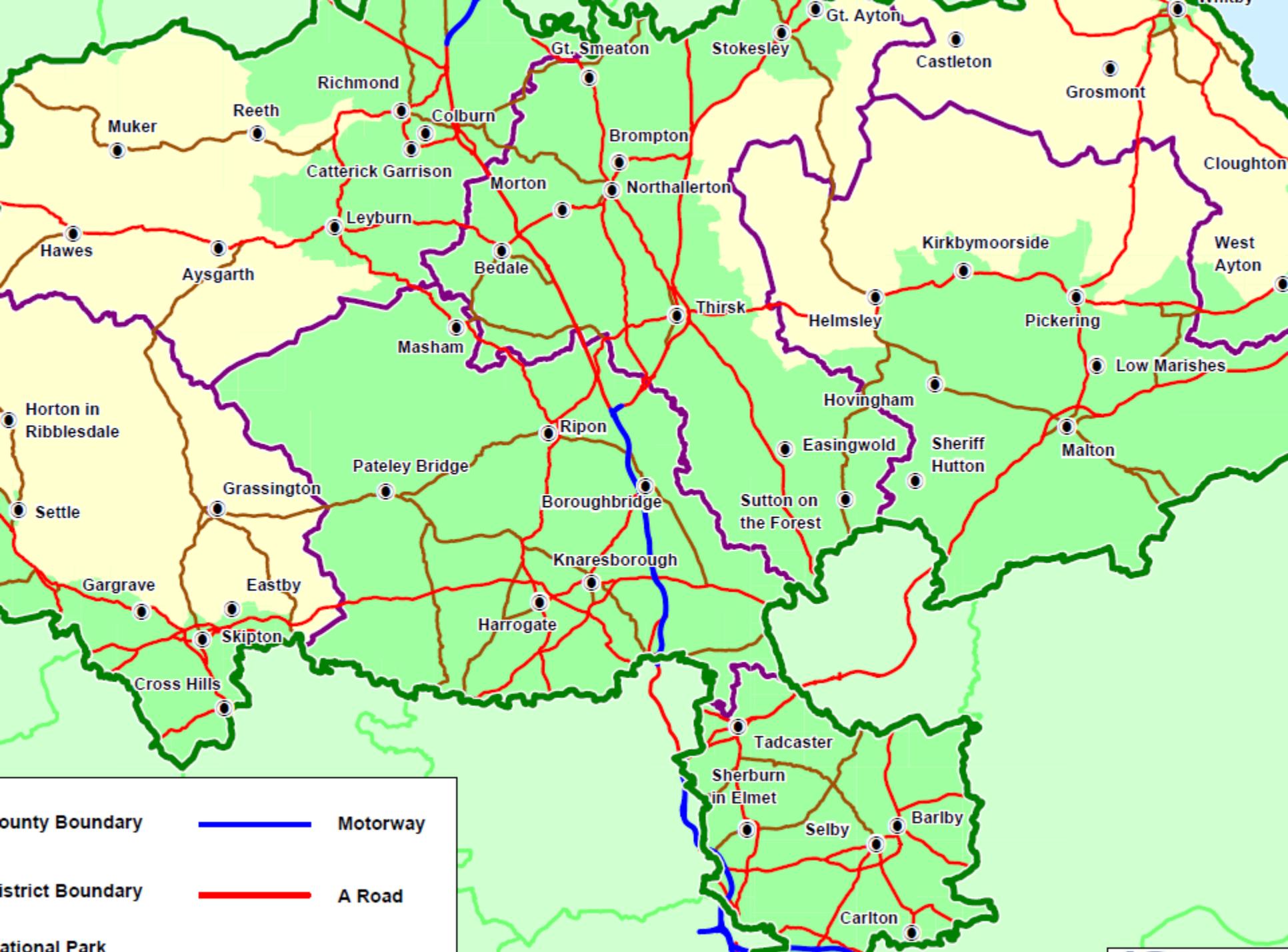
Advocacy Client

“My council flat was excessively warm and the tree outside was making it dark. Without you the council wouldn’t take notice of what I said.”

Advocacy Client

“I had total faith in my advocate’s capacity and desire to support me. Right from the beginning she listened to my story, separated the subjective from the objective and gave me the strength to state my case. When I faltered she took over and then stepped back when I regained by composure. I was under no illusion that the fight was mine, yet I knew that she would be there to guide me if I needed it.”

Advocacy Client

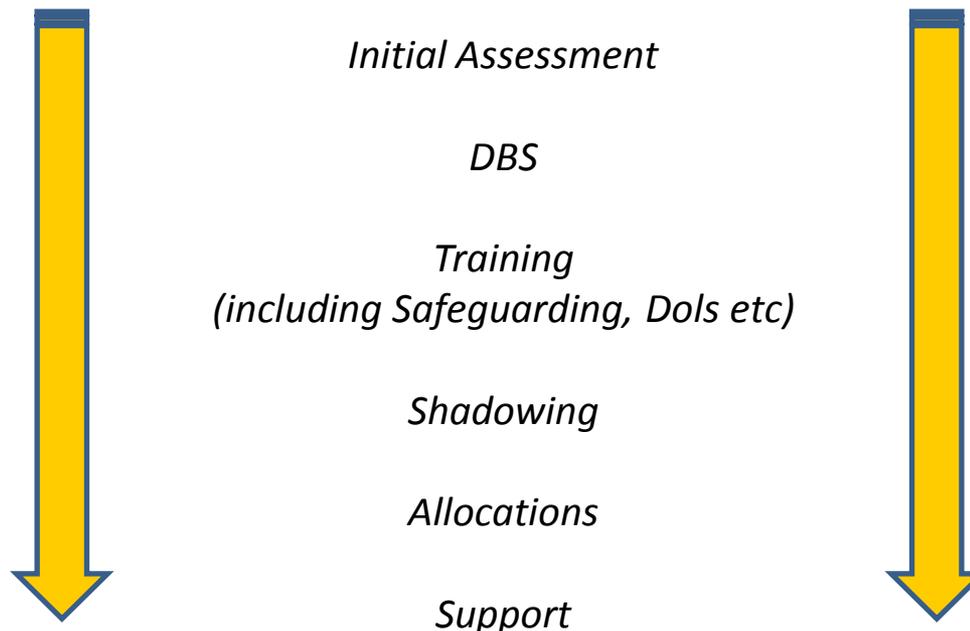


Volunteer Advocates

Being an Advocacy volunteer offers opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge. This includes skills linked to effective communication and problem solving, knowledge about the needs of vulnerable groups and community and statutory service providers.

The charity equips volunteers with administration and fundraising skills and offers its trustees governance training.

Over recent months the charity has made extensive improvements to its volunteer training developing a coherent training and induction programme



Case Studies

David's Story

David's problem:

David is retired and in poor health. As a result of a legal problem in another country he lost all his savings. He had tried to tackle this problem on his own but the differences in the legal systems meant he had made little progress. He said, "I felt impotent, emasculated. They (the other side) used my illness and nationality against me and put up barriers I couldn't fight through, leaving me angry and frustrated. I wasn't even getting replies to my letters and phone calls any more". David said he was just stuck. His relationship had broken down and the situation was affecting his physical and mental health.

What Advocacy did:

Advocacy has supported David to pursue several avenues to challenge his legal problems over many months. Despite setbacks they have now succeeded in finding a way to have his complaints heard. David isn't out of the woods yet and he could still lose the final decision, though he has a fair chance of success.

And life now:

David says that Advocacy has changed his life. He is in no doubt that without them he would have continued to be silenced by the system. He says that whatever the outcome he will feel like he has been heard and a right has been put wrong. He says that Advocacy helped him find the information he needed and a route through his problem. They have helped him get access to his rights and take control of his life back. He is happier, much less stressed and has been able to reflect on the quality of life he has now, valuing the good things rather than focusing on what he has lost. He says that Advocacy helped him 'wake up from a nightmare'.

Betty's Story

Betty's problem:

Betty has very limited sight. She lives on her own and has lost touch with her family. She struggles to deal with her mail. She had drawer full of papers and was very worried there was something important in there. She said, "every time post came through the door I would get really anxious. I was becoming overwhelmed and the drawer was stuffed so full I couldn't get more in it.

What Advocacy did:

Advocacy gave her a volunteer who came to see her regularly. Together they worked through the drawer. The advocate read the letters and helped Betty destroy most of them safely. There wasn't really anything important there. He left Betty with an empty drawer.

And life now:

Betty says sorting out the mail was a weight off her shoulders. The visits helped her feel less isolated and she is a bit more confident. She has joined the University of the Third Age and is going to take part in their activities in the Autumn. The only problems is the drawer – it's full again and she is going to contact Advocacy for more help. She says they "put her mind at rest"

Case Studies

Mrs B's Story

Mrs B's problems:

Mrs B is a self-employed single parent who until recently had functioned well. However, mental health problems meant she had started taking anti-depressants and her GP and family were worried she was self-harming. She was only working a few hours a week and her income had fallen to £60pw. Mrs B found out about Advocacy from Jobcentre Plus in York where she had gone to claim benefits because of her reduced hours.

What Advocacy did:

Mrs B's reduced income had led to debts of £12,000 and she was now at risk of homelessness. She had lost contact with her family. She needed support to access the CAB for debt advice and navigate benefit and social care / health processes.

Advocacy:

- helped Mrs B to request first a six week intervention from Mental Health services and then longer term support from a CPN
- supported Mrs B to decide to stop working
- liaised with her landlord while she accessed support from Foundation Housing and helped her apply for housing benefit
- accompanied her to appointments at the CAB and Keyhouse for debt and benefit advice because she was unable to follow the advice adequately on her own
- supported her through the processes of securing a Debt Relief Order to write off her debts and claiming a wide range of benefits
- helped her apply for a Crisis Loan during the 16 weeks it took to process her benefits which left her and her son without any income
- helped her deal with her mail which she was finding daunting.

And life now:

Mrs B still struggles with her mental wellbeing but her health is improving with weekly support from Mental Health services. She recognises her progress, feels more in control and is more able to explain her needs. Her finances are better controlled. She has a regular income from Employment Support Allowance, Child Benefit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and a claim for tax credit pending. Mrs B's debts will soon be written off and a back payment of housing benefit has reduced her rent arrears by £700. Her landlord could still evict if he chose, but he is more understanding of her situation and her tenancy is more secure. She has applied for rehousing as a back up plan. Advocacy and Mrs B's CPN have supported her to be able to open her mail herself and re-build her self-esteem and confidence. Her family life is also improving. Her child is attending college more regularly and she has regained contact with her family.