



The right person at the right time: Advocacy for
children and young people

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Why this research?



- Commissioned by Scottish Government- follow up to UN Concluding Observations on UK Government report to UNCRC
- No Scottish research on advocacy for children and young people across services
- Professional advocacy becoming more commonplace

Methodology



- Interviews with 39 organisations
- Representatives of local authorities and voluntary organisations in Scotland
- **Limited** to adult professionals
- Explore understandings of advocacy, what is available, gaps and challenges
- To inform Scottish Government's assessment of current advocacy support

What is advocacy?



- Way of helping people express their own views and make decisions which are informed (Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance)
- Is part of everyday life...
- And provides support to those who are vulnerable or discriminated against

Advocacy for children and young people



- Childhood highly governed part of life course (Rose, 1989)
- Unique status of children and young people-seen as vulnerable and not consistently have a voice
- Variety of systems and processes when children and young people might need advocacy
- Child/professional adult relations



What is advocacy for children and young people?

- 'an evolving and dynamic way of working with children and young people'

Oliver and Dalrymple, 2008:9

- Interface with discourse on participation and agency
- The same or different to advocacy for adults?



Principle of being heard

- Acknowledgement in legislation, policy and guidance in Scotland and across the UK
- Increased awareness and commitment to children's human rights
- But right to advocacy not enshrined in law- only some exceptions (i.e. Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003)



Who provides advocacy?

- Informal: self, parents, family members, friends, peers
- Adult professionals: social workers, teachers, youth workers, care staff
- Collective advocacy: through organisations
- Professional advocacy: children's rights workers, advocacy professionals
- Legal representation: linked but separate?

When do children and young people need advocacy?



education missing out school exclusions
Additional Support for Learning child
protection being looked after residential
child care foster care secure care leaving
care health services mental health family
breakdown Children's Hearings court
housing domestic abuse discrimination
transition to adult services LGBT refugee
children unaccompanied young people
disabled children young carers

Best interests v Child and Young person's voice?



- Best interests versus the views of the child/young person
- Seen by professional advocates to be fundamentally different

What is the picture?



Advocacy:

- core service upholding rights
- can deal with obstacles to children and young people's participation
- can challenge adults' views about children's capacity
- lessen children and young people's feeling of helplessness
- promote self advocacy

What is the picture?



- Independence complex issue
- **Quality** of advocacy relationship key -trust
- Children and young people's views and experiences?

What is the picture?



- Commitment- yes! But reality...
- Inconsistent availability of services
- Services different forms of delivery
- Focus on specific issues/circumstances
- No obligation to provide services
- Children and young people missing out: age, looked after at home, young Gypsy Travellers etc.

Discussion points



- Making it real- rights and agency dominant
- Advocacy potential for being child centred
- Advocacy can respond to diversity
- Child/adult professional relationships central

Advocacy as a tool for children's rights



‘Advocacy was regarded...as being a core service in ensuring that children and young people’s rights are upheld and redressing power imbalances between adults and children’

Elsley, 2010: 13



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