

Specialist advocacy for parents with a learning disability / autism

The Elfrida Society has a strong reputation, not just in Islington, but across all London boroughs and parts of the UK, in providing a unique and specialised advocacy service for parents with a learning disability, learning difficulty or autism.

We have several highly skilled and experienced advocates who can support parents from the initial step of care proceedings through to case closure. They can ensure individual clients not only attend and participate in meetings and hearings, but also fully understand what is being discussed and feel that the experience has given them a fair and just opportunity to have their voice heard.

Our advocates will support parents in the following circumstances:

- Child In Need meetings
- Looked After Children reviews
- Child protection hearings
- Parental assessments

We ensure we follow the Advocacy Charter set out by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NdTi), which sets out the principles of advocacy, including clarity of purpose, independence, confidentiality, accessibility and empowerment. The charter can be downloaded here -

<https://www.ndti.org.uk/assets/files/Advocacy-Charter-A3.pdf>

Any individuals working with our advocates are also invited to join our weekly support group where parents are encouraged to build their social network and engage in learning sessions on different facets of safe and healthy parenting eg. safeguarding, communication and managing money. This process helps to reinforce the work completed together during their advocacy process.

Our clients are usually referred from Children's Services but we would gladly discuss any case with professionals where they believe our intervention may be beneficial. We would also be happy to come and talk about the work the advocates do with Social Care teams if this could be helpful.

The advocacy project offers the following support;

- Reinforcing and explaining information from the statutory sector eg. formal reports and legal documents. This may mean meeting with the parents on several separate occasions to discuss a large document sent by professionals. Also support to fully understand comments from professionals in formal documents to ensure parents have clarity on what is written and its meaning.
- Understanding the role of Social Care in the protection of young people and why they become involved. In turn, helping to develop a positive working relationship with the social worker.
- Planning and managing appointments, reminder messages and attending appointments where appropriate.
- Producing accessible information about the statutory process. For example, mind maps of the professional roles and responsibilities involved in their case. This supports parents to know who to contact and when.
- Support to engage with legal representation and aid communication between both sides. For example, paraphrasing legal terminology.
- Ongoing moral support and guidance to boost confidence during the process, including providing positive feedback
- Identifying gaps in support needs and make community referrals on parents' behalf eg. support groups and counselling services.
- Planning and preparing for statutory meetings and Court Hearings. For example, discussing the process, the importance of self-presentation and time keeping. Also, facilitating planning meetings before all statutory engagement to map out the key points they wish to address and how to approach difficult conversations without causing conflict.
- An opportunity for the parent to attend a weekly (term time only) peer support group with other parents.

When requesting advocacy on behalf of a parent, please be aware of the following points:

- Invoices for completed work are issued a month in lieu to ensure evidence is collated accurately.
- A spot purchase agreement must be signed and returned before any work can commence, along with clear guidance on the main contact in your organisation responsible for Finance.
- Hours claimed by advocates can change from month to month depending on the quantity of upcoming meetings and legal instructions. Cases can become dormant in between meetings so advocates would only claim for contact made with the client to maintain their working relationship in the meantime.
- Where the communication needs of an individual are complex, helping them to fully understand information can occasionally take longer than expected. Preparation and de-brief meetings are crucial for the advocate to explain procedures in detail.
- To provide the client with specialist wraparound support, signposting and community engagement with external partners may be necessary. Advocates may need to make onward referrals throughout the process which will be evident on their claimed hours.
- Our advocates work with clients across London and their travelling time must be factored into the work they do. Invoicing will include the time they require to get to and from any meetings as evidenced from their travel documents.
- Travel expenses are not included within the £45p/h fee.

To avoid any confusion, advocates will inform you as soon as possible if there are any issues arising which may affect the duration of their work or may require actions in addition to what may be anticipated.