



**No: 046**

**Date: 20 November 2013**

## **One Minute Guide:**

### **Advocacy support for looked after children and care leavers**

#### **What is it?**

Redbridge Children's Trust employs a Children's Rights Advocate (C.R.A.) to support Redbridge looked after children and care leavers who are seeking help to address things that worry them or make them unhappy; or where there has been a possible breach of their rights, or when they wish to make a complaint.

The C.R.A. does this by giving children/ young people age appropriate information, so that they can achieve understanding and form opinions. The C.R.A. speaks up for children/young people and empowers them to speak up for themselves, so that their voices are heard and their wishes & views are fully understood, in order that they can participate & influence decisions that affect their lives.

The C.R.A. works exclusively with and for children / young people and they always lead the advocacy process. The C.R.A. only acts upon the child/young person's expressed permission & instructions.

Advocacy is independent & confidential. This means that nothing will be disclosed outside the advocacy service, without the child/young person's agreement. Only in exceptional circumstances would confidentiality be broken, namely where there is a risk of significant harm to them or to someone else, or if disclosure is required by a court order.

#### **Why are we doing it?**

Section 26A of the Children Act 1989 imposes a statutory duty on local authorities to inform all looked after children and care leavers of their entitlement to independent advocacy support and how they can access it.

"This entitlement is not just for when a looked after child or care leaver wishes to complain, it includes situations where young people need to make representations about the quality of the care and support provided by their responsible authority."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the statutory obligation, Redbridge sees advocacy as a fundamental part of the corporate parenting role.

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<sup>1</sup> The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. (Volume 3) Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care leavers (page 12)

## **Eligibility criteria**

Any Redbridge child or young person who is:

- looked after or is a care leaver;
- aged from birth to 21 (25 if in full time education or disabled); and/or
- living in or out of the Borough.

## **How well are we doing at listening to children and young people?**

Whatever the reason for seeking advocacy support, the response children and young people receive is an important measure of how well an organisation is listening to young people and giving 'due weight' to their wishes and feeling.

Findings from the analysis of the Redbridge advocacy provision over recent years indicate that advocacy is understood and supported by front line staff, middle and senior managers. As a result this has helped to promote an ethos of valuing the views of young people and a willingness to work collaboratively with them.

As part of our commitment to children/young people, Redbridge Children's Trust approved an Advocacy Escalation Protocol in 2011. The aim of the protocol is to ensure that professionals are clear about their responsibility to respond promptly to requests made to them on behalf of children /young people by the C.R.A.

The protocol states that if professionals do not respond to requests made on behalf of a child/young person in a timely manner or if the issue remains unresolved the C.R.A. has the authority to escalate an issue to more senior managers.

To the best of our knowledge, we are the only Local Authority in the country who has taken this extra step to ensure children and young people receive prompt replies to issues they raise.

## **Why advocates do not necessarily act in the 'best interest' of young people.**

Unlike other professionals, advocates do not necessarily act in the 'best interest' of the young person seeking support.

The National Advocacy Standards require that advocacy is led by the young person and that the advocate works exclusively for the young person, representing their wishes, which in some instances may not be in their best interest.

The advocates' role is to give age appropriate information to help the child/young person to understand any regulatory, legal or good parenting restrictions that may prevent their request being acted upon. Young people will often accept this information from an advocate, as they recognise that they are 'on their side.' However, if they still wish to pursue an issue, the advocate will work with the social worker to clearly explain to the child/young person why something cannot happen.

## **You have a role in informing children and young people of their right to advocacy support.**

We need your help to inform Redbridge looked after children and care leavers of their right to advocacy support. Download a copy of the young people's advocacy leaflet [here](#).

### **When is it happening?**

Now! Advocacy for looked after children and care leavers is well established in Redbridge, having been in place since 2006.

### **How can the service be accessed?**

Children and young people can make direct contact with the C.R.A. by telephone, e-mail or text (contact details below). Similarly any adult can make contact on their behalf; if doing so then please ensure they are in agreement with the request.

No application form is needed; just e-mail the child/young person's date of birth, contact details and a few lines outlining the young person's concern to the C.R.A.

If you are working with a child / young person who is not able to request advocacy support (due to their young age or cognitive ability) and you feel an Advocate is required to protect their rights, the C.R.A. may be able to undertake non- instructed advocacy. Please telephone the C.R.A. to discuss the request.

### **Contact details.**

Janet Edwards, Children's Rights Advocate  
E-mail: [Childrens.rights@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:Childrens.rights@redbridge.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 020 8708 5811