**Advocacy Guidance**

**Provider**

Advocacy Services in Newcastle are provided by the National Youth Advocacy Service known as NYAS. The contractual arrangement with NYAS is overseen by the Service Manager for the Children’s Safeguarding Standards Unit.

Details on how to make referrals or contact NYAS are available in this section.

**Eligibility**

Newcastle Children’s Social Care recognises the value and importance of advocacy for children and young people. Advocacy services are available to all children open to Children’s Social Care. They are typically accessed by children aged 8 and over but the decision to refer a child for advocacy must be based on the child’s individual circumstances, wishes and feelings and understanding.

NYAS provide advocacy support to children with a wide range of needs and issues and factors such as a child’s disability or communication needs must not prevent referral. Indeed, where children have additional needs the value of advocacy support may be increased. This can be particularly important when a child is deemed to be at risk of harm.

**Information**

Information on advocacy services must be shared with all children active to Children’s Social Care. This is subject to their age and understanding. However, as stated above factors such as disability and communication needs should not prevent information or support being provided.

The allocated Social Worker should provide information at the earliest possible point and ideally at the time they first contact a child. Copies of information leaflets are available in this section.

It is important to remember that whilst advocacy service must be provided to children in care, for children living at home parental agreement will be required before a referral is made, unless the child is of sufficient age and understanding to make their own decision.

Other professionals that work with children also have responsibility to ensure children know how to access advocacy support. Independent Reviewing Officers / Conference Chairpersons have a particular responsibility to ensure the child’s voice is heard with in care planning and review processes and this includes access to advocacy. This must be considered by the Independent Reviewing Officer / Conference Chairperson at every review meeting and at other times should they have contact with the child.

**Referrals**

Information on how to contact and make referrals to NYAS can be found within this section.

Children can refer themselves to NYAS. Referrals can also be made by the child’s parents, social worker, carer, teacher and other professionals involved with them. Referrals should always be discussed with the child in advance. Parental agreement should be secured where this is in line with the child’s age, understanding and best interests.

When a referral is made NYAS will contact the Service Manager for the Children’s Safeguarding Standards Unit to seek approval. This is part of the quality assurance and contract management process.

The initial agreement allows for 8 hours of advocacy support. This can be extended in blocks of 8 hours where the issues have not been resolved within the initial 8 hours. The request to seek additional time is made by NYAS and would be sent to the Service Manager CSSU for approval.

NYAS also complete pre and post service questionnaires with young people to evidence the impact of the service. These are monitored by the Service Manager for CSSU and colleagues in Commissioning.

**Complaints**

Any complaints regarding NYAS should be sent to the Service Manager for CSSU.