

Citizen

Advocacy Service

If you have an interest in social justice and agree that people with a disability should be a valued and equal part of our society, then you might like to join us in making a difference.

The Citizen Advocacy Service was set up in 2007. It is hosted by Cheshire Ireland and funded by the Citizen's Information Board

Cheshire Ireland is a leading provider of accommodation, support, and respite services to people with disabilities. The Cheshire ethos is one of supporting people in their individual choices as to how they lead their lives. Cheshire Ireland listens to people with disabilities and responds to their wishes and needs in ways that respect individuality and maximise opportunities for choice.

The **Citizens Information Board** is the national agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice, and advocacy on social services to ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive, and clear information relating to social services.

The Citizen Advocacy Service

The Citizen Advocacy Service provides independent advocacy support for adults with disabilities who live in group homes in Dublin.

The Citizen Advocacy Service recruits volunteers as citizen advocates and provides a comprehensive training and orientation process for each candidate. The process of becoming a citizen advocate involves initial meetings with the Service Co-ordinator, completion of the application form, Garda vetting, induction training, partner matching, initial meetings with partner, and regular support and supervision from the Co-ordinator as the relationship progresses.

The office of the Citizen Advocacy Service is located at Cheshire Ireland Central Office in Sandyford, Dublin 18.

The office is an excellent source of support. We maintain frequent contact in the initial stages of advocacy relationships. Citizen advocates are encouraged to contact us any time for information,

advice or just to share experiences. The office can assist citizen advocates to understand the individual needs of their partner and can provide significant support if there are any difficulties in the relationship. It is always useful to talk over issues and problems with other people and usually together it is easier to work out a resolution. The office has information about many of the services and options available to people, and if we cannot help in providing information directly, we will find out for you or put you in contact with people who can.

Citizen advocates are not expected to know everything and there is plenty of support available.

The Citizen Advocacy Service upholds the principles of equal opportunity. Citizen advocates will work to a written equal opportunities policy that recognises the need to be proactive in tackling all forms of inequality, discrimination and social exclusion. All individuals regardless of their race, gender, socio-economic status, sexuality, religion, age, or disability, will have access to this service.

Every effort will be made to recruit suitable citizen advocates to assist people with specific needs and advocates will be chosen based on their competence and genuine concern for marginalized people, regardless of their race, gender, socio-economic status, sexuality, religion, age, or disability.

Becoming a Citizen Advocate

The Citizen Advocacy Service believes that it cannot achieve its mission without the active involvement of the wider community and is recruiting volunteers to make a positive difference to the lives of people with a disability.

We match citizen advocates with people of all ages who have physical and sensory disabilities, so before choosing to volunteer we would like you to give careful consideration to whether you are comfortable with this type of work and whether you will bring a non-judgmental approach that is based on equality and empowerment.

We are looking for flexible people who can commit to long-term relationships, but we recognize that this just is not always possible. However we would ask you to consider a minimum commitment of 2 years as you will need this time to develop your relationship with your partner and provide continuity of support.

What we can offer you?

- A full induction programme, ongoing support and supervision
- New experiences
- Community involvement
- Ongoing training and support
- An opportunity to meet people from all walks of life
- A chance to develop new skills
- A chance to make a real difference to your life and the lives of others

The Role of a Citizen Advocate

Citizen advocates are ordinary people. They come from all walks of life, are of all ages, and bring with them a unique range of experiences and skills.

Citizen Advocates do not replace paid professionals.

Citizen advocates are people who have made a voluntary commitment to make a difference in one person's life, to be a loyal supporter of a person with a disability.

Some of the things citizen advocates can do:

- support people who have no friends or family
- believe in a person's capacity to understand and communicate when no-one else will
- notice things that no one else notices
- take action when no one else will
- make time to be with someone who has very little in their life
- support people to express their views and concerns
- support people to access information and services
- defend and promote rights
- explore choices and options

Citizen advocates might meet with their partner for a coffee or at a football match; they might call in to one another for a chat, speak on the phone or arrange to go to the theatre. Every relationship is unique and a citizen advocacy relationship is no different, it depends on the individual needs of the person. Advocacy is at its core an empowering process which puts the individual at the heart of the decision-making process.

Put simply, citizen advocates are individuals who care about and value other people in the community, who believe that it is wrong that people who have a disability are treated badly or valued less than others.

The Citizen Advocacy Service focuses on people who need support to speak up or someone to speak up for them and represent their interests.