



Advocacy: Our Stories



Ceartas is the Gaelic word for fairness, equality and justice which is what we aim to promote as we work across East Dunbartonshire.

Our Advocacy Workers support people to put forward their points of view, find out what their rights are, help them access the information they need to make an informed choice and help them to explore their options. We do this as an independent service, free from any form of conflict.

We are often asked the question: “what difference does advocacy make?” We decided to try and answer this question by asking the people who use our service what difference it has made to them. So together we have compiled this book of short stories explaining how advocacy has helped people in a number of situations.

We wanted to take the opportunity to demonstrate the areas of work that we do, give examples of what advocacy really means and of course to highlight the difference that advocacy can make.

As an advocacy service working across East Dunbartonshire, with a range of service users facing a variety of challenges and frustrations, we can work with people at many stages of their journey such as:

- *providing simple information or support with a more complex issue*
- *providing information to carers who approach us when they are not sure of how to help the individual they are caring for*
- *working with individuals who have a clear goal in mind and want advocacy support to achieve this*
- *working with individuals who no longer have capacity to make their own decisions and therefore need someone independent to 'be on their side'*

The stories we have included give examples of both long and short term work. We have included stories from carers, people who use our services, an example of a non-instructed advocacy case and advocacy from the perspective of one of our team. The stories we have used are real stories and we hope that they allow the reader to understand why advocacy is important, the difference it can make and why it is necessary for people to be given the support to have their voice heard.

Sharon Bairden: Services Manager

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Our service is free, impartial and you can refer yourself



Lyndsey Macdonald: Advocacy Worker

Christine was referred to our service as there were concerns over her future care needs. Social Work felt Christine required 24 hour care but her family were of the view she could manage at home with support. Christine had a diagnosis of dementia and lived at home alone and there were concerns from the Social Work department that she was becoming increasingly confused and isolated.

Christine had been admitted to a care home for a period of respite when she was referred to Ceartas. I visited her there and introduced myself as an independent Advocacy Worker who had been asked to visit her by both the Social Work department and her family. I explained to Christine that I was there to listen to her views and wishes and make sure that they were communicated to others involved in her care.

I spent time getting to know Christine and visited her on several occasions. We talked about Christine's home life and the things that she liked to do. Christine told me that she had always been independent and that although she enjoyed living at home it could become quite lonely in the evenings. She told me that she liked to "take a walk round the village" to pass some time as she wasn't a fan of the television. She said she understood that Social Work had concerns about this but that she always made her way home. When Christine and I discussed her future care needs she told me that she wanted to "remain

at home for as long as possible" as she didn't feel the time had come for her to move to care. Christine told me that she managed her own personal care tasks and the home-carers who attended to her made her some light lunch and an evening meal.

Following my discussions with Christine it was clear that she wanted to remain at home. She understood the concerns of others but felt that she "deserved a chance".

I spoke to Christine's family who said they also felt she should be given a chance to stay at home and that they would be willing to offer a degree of support to manage this. I then spoke with the Social Worker involved in Christine's case and put forward Christine's views. On behalf of Christine I asked the Social Worker to consider increasing the number of homecare visits and look at other methods of keeping her safe such as an alert system.

A meeting was called which Christine did not want to attend. She asked me to put forward her views and we met beforehand to discuss exactly what they were. Various professionals attended the meeting during which it was advised that Christine now lacked capacity to make decisions around her care. I advised that in line with the Adults with Incapacity Act the least restrictive option should always be explored and that as Christine did not have a full package of care at home, and her family were willing to offer a level of support, the option of Christine returning home should be considered. Following a great deal of discussion the

decision was taken that Christine would live with her daughter and undergo a phased return home with an increased package of care. Christine was delighted with the outcome as were her family.

In this situation it was important that the Advocacy Worker was aware of local services that were available to assist Christine to stay at home. It was also important that the Advocacy Worker was aware of the relevant legislation in order to be able to challenge appropriately on Christine's behalf the decisions that were being made. Most importantly for Christine, having an Advocacy Worker meant that she had someone 'on her side' at a time when significant decisions were being made about her life. To me, that's the difference that advocacy can make.

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Worker meant that
she had someone 'on
her side'**



Nicola Williamson

My name is Nicola Williamson and I have been involved with Ceartas for about four years now. Due to extremely difficult circumstances I had to move very suddenly from my home in Kirkintilloch where I had lived for 17 years. This meant a lot of involvement with various agencies, who I sometimes struggled to deal with, such as the Housing Department and the Social Work Department. The circumstances which triggered my having to move also led to deterioration in my mental health and I found myself spending a long period in hospital at this time.

I had been working with my Advocacy Worker, Andy, for a long time so I had come to know him well. While I was in hospital, he attended meetings on my behalf and put forward my views at a time when I was unable to do this for myself.

I have never been a fan of meetings so having Andy there to prepare me for them was excellent. Andy worked with me before each

meeting and helped me to organise paperwork as well as have questions planned in advance. This helped to build my confidence and attend future meetings on my own; putting my point of view across myself.

The location of the temporary accommodation I had moved to left me feeling very isolated and I missed the familiar environment of Kirkintilloch as well as the normality of living there. My life had been turned upside down over night and I felt trapped and frightened.

Andy spoke with the Housing Department on my behalf and with his help I was able to successfully move back into the Kirkintilloch area of East Dunbartonshire. However, it was not a straight forward move as I was initially offered unsuitable housing on two occasions. Fortunately, with support from Andy, I was able to explain why these offers were unsuitable and eventually I was offered somewhere appropriate.

I love my house now! It was a very successful move and I feel that I have come back to where I belong. It was a difficult and complicated process I had to go through but Andy, and several of the Ceartas staff, were at the heart of helping me through this and my being able to express myself. Andy listened to me at a time when I needed support and he took the time to find out what it was I really wanted. I feel that Ceartas Advocacy is a lifeline to people in the East Dunbartonshire Area. When you are feeling low, Ceartas is a voice on your behalf.

**Nicola is now involved in Ceartas' Still Game service user group and attended a Ceartas board meeting as a representative of that group. Nicola is also instrumental in other projects locally.*



The help of my Advocacy Worker is extremely valuable as she prepares me as well as supports me to get my point across



John McLaren

My name is John McLaren and I was referred to Ceartas back in 2008 by my Advocacy Worker from another project. At that time I had been living in respite for a year with a clear idea of what my goals and ambitions for the future were but lacked the right support to help me address them.

I got a call from Andy at Ceartas who introduced himself as the Advocacy Worker who would now be working with me. Right from the start Andy supported me to prepare for and attend meetings – we talked things through and we wrote things down. Andy offered me a

voice when I found it difficult to get my points across on my own.

The support I received from Andy enabled me to get onto the Housing Register and into Local Authority Housing.

Andy also provided me with information on the benefits that I may have been entitled to and arranged for me to go along to the Citizens Advice Bureau for more information on these benefits which I now receive.

Over a period of time Andy and his continued support have given me self-esteem and confidence to become my own advocate in situations. Andy's help has had a

positive effect on my life which I felt was chaos; he has been a constant support and a good listener and I am happy that he has been on this journey with me.

I am now involved with Ceartas' Still Game group and help with planning and presentations which I really enjoy.



My Advocacy Worker offered me a voice when I found it difficult to get my points across on my own.



George Camps

My name is George and I became aware of Ceartas following an admission to hospital. I was in hospital having a knee operation and suffered a stroke whilst in recovery.

I was feeling very frustrated and felt nobody was listening to me. My neighbour spoke to my wife about a local organisation called Ceartas. Ceartas was a new name to me and I wasn't sure how they would be able to help me.

While I was in hospital Lyndsey visited me and introduced herself as an Advocacy Worker. She told me that she could help make my voice heard by supporting me to tell others what I wanted. This sounded good to me because when you are in a situation you have never been in before it can be difficult to know the right things to ask and who you should be talking to. Having someone there who can help you make sense of things and ask the difficult questions really makes a difference and I feel Lyndsey's input made a big difference to my situation.

There was talk of me having

to move in to a care home but I didn't feel I was ready for this; I still felt there was hope for me to live at home. Lyndsey helped me make sense of the treatment I was receiving and made me aware of local services that were able to help. A meeting was being arranged in the hospital for the professionals to talk about my future which I didn't feel able to attend. Lyndsey said she could go to this meeting on my behalf and put forward my views. I spoke with Lyndsey a few times before the meeting and she wrote down the things I told her. Lyndsey took my views to the meeting and spoke on my behalf.

I am now at home and doing well after my stroke. I really appreciate the support I received from Lyndsey as I feel this made a big difference.

I now attend a monthly meeting for 'Still Game' at Ceartas which I thoroughly enjoy. I like being in contact with other service users whose abilities are similar to mine and I also like being kept up to date with what is going on locally as well as at Ceartas.



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Anne Camps

My name is Anne Camps and I first became aware of Ceartas when my husband was in hospital. He was in for knee surgery but suffered a stroke while there. This was a very difficult and frustrating time for both George and I as we were told he may need long-term care.

I was given the details of Ceartas from a neighbour who arranged for one of the Advocacy Workers to come to the house and speak to me. Lyndsey from Ceartas visited me at home and I explained George's situation to her. She said she would need to meet with George and explain the service to him so we arranged for her to go to the hospital and meet him.

George was happy for Lyndsey to work with him and we both found support from Lyndsey in helping us to understand the treatment George was receiving. There are so many things you don't know and I didn't feel able to ask the professionals any questions but the support George received

from Lyndsey also helped me to understand what was going on. Lyndsey was able to ask the questions that we felt we couldn't.

I was very strong in the view that George should come home and George was also of this view. Lyndsey attended a meeting with me on George's behalf which I felt made a big difference. On your own you are a voice in the wilderness but when advocacy gets involved it makes a huge difference.

George is now at home and has carers who come in daily to help. We received a lot of support from Lyndsey over this time and I knew I could pick up the phone at any time. George has come a long way since his stroke and he is now actively involved in Still Game which he thoroughly enjoys.

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Catherine Grimes

My name is Catherine Grimes. I was referred to Ceartas by my Support Worker from EDAMH (East Dunbartonshire Association for Mental Health) as I was experiencing difficulties accessing housing within the East Dunbartonshire area.

I received a call from my advocacy worker who introduced herself and who would be working with me on my housing issue. My advocacy worker met with me and explained that she could help me to liaise with the Homeless Team as this is something that I found great difficulty in doing myself. My advocacy worker helped me explore my options around my housing situation and worked with me to speak with the appropriate people.

My advocacy worker helped me initially by making phone calls on my behalf to explain to the relevant people she was working with me and that she was the main point of contact. I felt this took some of the

pressure off me from dealing with these professionals on my own all the time.

The situation became extremely difficult for me and I felt increasingly isolated; and at times powerless with little sense of hope.

Ceartas supported me to attend a meeting with my local MP and a member of the Homeless Team. This is an area I lacked confidence in so before the meeting I spoke a lot with my advocacy worker about what I wanted her to say and the points I wanted her to raise. During the meeting my advocacy worker supported me and asked questions on my behalf as well as challenging the situation.

Following the meeting my advocacy worker also wrote a letter on my behalf to the housing officer dealing with my case. She asked for other professionals involved in my care to write letters of support which she sent alongside this letter.

Shortly after this letter was sent appropriate and suitable temporary accommodation was offered to me that met all my needs. I feel this is due to the work of my advocacy worker in attending the meeting with me and writing a letter on my behalf as well as the numerous calls she made to housing for me.

Over the time I have worked with my advocacy worker I have built up a good relationship with her and where I felt I was struggling on my own with nothing looking as though it would change, I now have hope for the future. My advocacy worker always phones when she says she will and has emphasised my needs to the appropriate people whereas on my own I felt as though I was hitting a brick wall.

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Peter Prior

My name is Peter and I first became aware of Ceartas when my late wife, Cathy, was diagnosed with vascular dementia. I was advised by the GP to contact Ceartas as they would be able to help Cathy and I plan ahead and provide information on the practical issues related to a diagnosis.

I visited Ceartas and met with Susie, one of the Advocacy Workers. With Susie's support and the information she provided I was able to set up Power of Attorney for Cathy. Susie also made me aware of the services of the Citizens Advice Bureau who provided me with financial advice and information.

Cathy and I also attended the dementia group that Ceartas and the Woodlands Centre run. I found this group extremely helpful and from

these meetings we then started to attend the monthly De Cafe meetings that Ceartas run in Kirkintilloch Baptist Church. I found these meetings very beneficial as I learned more about Dementia from other people who attended the café.

Unfortunately, Cathy deteriorated to a point where she needed long-term care. This situation was completely new to me and seemed like an absolute minefield. As I was already involved with Ceartas I spoke to staff about what was happening and a referral was taken for Cathy.

Gemma, one of the Advocacy Workers with Ceartas, called to say that she would be working with Cathy and she met with us both at home to discuss her role for Cathy. Unfortunately, Cathy's communication was very limited by her dementia so Gemma attended review

meetings on Cathy's behalf which also acted as a support for me.

I feel having an Advocacy Worker was invaluable for Cathy and I also took a great deal of support from the service. Gemma was always there for Cathy and I knew if there was something I didn't understand Gemma or someone at Ceartas would always be there to help. It made a huge difference when Ceartas became involved because I felt more comfortable going through this process with someone more knowledgeable than myself. The information, support and knowledge that Ceartas provided helped immensely.



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Helen Moran

My name is Helen Moran and I first became aware of Ceartas because I was a committee member and volunteer with Headway. We hosted a workshop for Ceartas a number of years ago into the reality of the side effects of acquired brain injury - I have an acquired brain injury resulting from an accident I had several years ago

I hadn't heard of Ceartas before and I thought how brilliant a service it was and that staff wanted to learn more about my condition on a personal level. I was seen as an individual and not generalised which, believe me, is a real positive for an individual like me.

I was invited to attend a Ceartas AGM and while I was there I found out more about the services Ceartas offer and felt they may be able to help me.

When I first moved to East

Dunbartonshire I found myself involved with the Social Work Department. I self-referred to Ceartas as I was looking for support to attend Social Work meetings and I also wanted to find out more about local services that were available to me and my family.

Susie from Ceartas became my Advocacy Worker and supported me to work with the Social Work Department. Susie has helped me to prepare for meetings with the Social Work Department by talking to me beforehand to get a clear understanding of my views. I am able to speak for myself at meetings but there are times when this becomes too much for me. This is where I feel the help of Susie is extremely valuable as she prepares me as well as supports me to get my point across at these times. Susie is also familiar with the East Dunbartonshire area and so has

been able to provide me with information on the services that are available to me and my family.

I have found the support from Susie very helpful and am now able to share my experience with others in similar situations. Susie has made a positive difference in my life as it was just chaos before; it now has order.

* Helen is now actively involved with Ceartas and Headway's ABI Café which she attends on a regular basis.

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Karen Faull: Volunteer

Due to the success of the De Café: Our Stories booklet, I was delighted to be involved in producing this 'Advocacy Stories' booklet. I worked alongside Lyndsey in collating stories by interviewing service users. Listening to each story was an enlightening experience.

I was aware of the role an Advocacy Worker plays but was amazed at the never ending support and assistance the

Advocacy Worker gave to each person. Everyone's story is unique and individual to them but the common thread throughout is the role the Advocacy Worker plays in each case.

Throughout my time working on this booklet I have gained a greater knowledge and understanding of the difference advocacy can make but most of all I have enjoyed listening to the stories of each service user, knowing there was a successful ending in each case.



Non Instructed Advocacy

MB was referred to our service by her care providers who were concerned that she was not appropriately placed. MB was not able to communicate due to her learning disability and her Advocacy Worker, Gemma, spent time with MB and her carers getting to know her and the situation she faced. When providing non-instructed advocacy it is important to speak to those who know the individual well. It took a couple of months to build up an understanding of MB's situation as she was not able to tell Gemma what her wishes were.

Non-instructed advocacy requires the time and dedication of a worker in order to represent a view which is in the best interest

of the individual and their needs. Gemma made contact with MB's Social Worker, Psychiatrist and Health Workers to find out what they were going to do about the situation that she faced. Gemma put questions to the professionals involved in making decisions about MB's wellbeing and best interests in line with the non-instructed advocacy guidelines. Gemma also attended various statutory meetings as a representative for MB and consistently reminded others to have her interests in mind with any decisions that were made. As advocacy is independent we are able to focus solely on the service user we are working with.

Gemma was also there to ensure that MB's rights were met if any legal measures were to be put in place and always reminded the

Social Worker that MB should be protected by legal measures and not constrained by them.

Although MB was not able to comment on her advocacy experience, we feel that she benefited from the service. When a life changing decision is being made for a person it is vital that they have an independent voice to represent them whether or not they can communicate their wishes.





Get in Touch...

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