

Help and Tips for being an Effective Advocate

SELF REFLECTION AND SELF EVALUATION

During people's daily lives they are constantly undertaking evaluation. People evaluate whether the coffee is too hot, whether it is safe to cross the road, the benefits of taking a bus or walking. More complex evaluation is merely an extension of what people do naturally however in this Resource, we are talking about self-evaluation.

Evaluation takes what we do naturally and builds on it. It moves beyond our intuitive sense of what is good or bad, better or worse. The results of evaluation enable us to have increased confidence to pursue a particular course of action.

The key skill used in basic self-evaluation is self-reflection. Evaluation is a means for learning by experience. With most activities you evaluate the situation and come to a decision often without realising you have done it. You may scald yourself with coffee before realising it is too hot, but are unlikely to take another sip until it cools. How often though do people put such experiences behind them without a further thought and go on to make the same mistake again? They usually become quickly aware of the need to avoid hot coffee, but the learning to be drawn out of more subtle events in life can easily be overlooked.

Self-reflection on your actions is a growth experience. It provides for improvement in skills and knowledge when things do not go so well. It creates self-worth when things do go well. Self-reflection does not need to be about deep soul-searching. It is certainly not about self-blame. Self-reflection is far more a self-affirming activity. It enables the elements of an activity to be broken down and seen for what they are. Every advocacy activity will be successful. You may not have achieved exactly what you wanted but your contribution to altering an attitude or introducing a new idea will be setting seeds for longer term change.

Reflection is something worth practising; taking the time out to consider your own actions and even those of others. You may want to do this on your own or with other people such as as a 'buddy' who could be a fellow consumer, carer or a member of the organisation you are involved in. You might expect those you are reflecting with to be supportive and positive and to contribute fresh ways of viewing the situation.

Consider the currency of your experience or information you want to provide. How relevant is it to the discussion, how recent were your experiences.

Why evaluate?

Basic processes of evaluation – planning, delivering, reflecting and modifying – are useful to keep your advocacy activities on track. However, there is also a compelling political motive for undertaking evaluation. Advocacy activity involves putting a position in the expectation of creating some change in a climate where the balance of power is not necessarily equal. Power is often experienced and accepted in relation to knowledge and information. Those that are seen as knowledgeable are more likely to have their values 'accepted'. For those in less powerful positions, demonstration of the value of things is a fundamental requirement for change.

Engaging in self-evaluation

Consider what it is you want to know. The process of finding out is time-consuming and sometimes difficult. It is unnecessary to evaluate everything. Decide which are the most important things and concentrate your effort on them. Ask yourself: 'What is it I really want to know about/understand better?'

Be clear about why you want to know. Every piece of information you collect will require some sort of self-reflection or analysis.

ONLINE TIP SHEET 4

Find out what is already known. What can you draw from your own experiences? Is there something written that you are not aware of? Has someone had a similar experience? Is the issue being dealt with in some other way?

Decide how you will proceed. It's best to keep it simple. This is all that is required for most advocacy activities. Remember, there is no perfect way.

Sort out your results. Go back to your purpose of self-reflection and self-evaluation. It always takes longer than you first anticipate, so be prepared. Accept that things get in the way. Follow your plan as much as possible but be open to new opportunities. You may discover things in your self-reflection that encourage you to move down a new track.

When is the time to leave. This can often be a difficult challenge. As a general rule, people know when the time is right. If you feel stressed or unsafe, then it is important to make the decision quickly. However if you think your work has been accomplished, you have achieved the best outcome you could possibly achieve, then this might be the time to finish.

Make a judgement about any new things you have found in. How does it contribute to your understanding now?

Acknowledgement

We wish to thank the Network's Victorian State Advisory Forum for suggesting this resource.

Disclaimer

The Network acknowledges the source of material for this resource as *The Kit, the advocacy we choose to do. A resource kit for consumers of mental health services and family carers* published by the Australian Government in June 1998. While the Network has taken care in the development of the content, it is not responsible for any action taken in response to it. Consumers of the resource are advised to seek help from their GP, mental health support worker or Lifeline if they are distressed by the contents.

Developed: March 2015