

After October 2010 the Independent Employment Advocacy Centre will not continue in its current form. This booklet gives some options for alternative sources of support for disabled people who would otherwise have requested an employment advocate.

As there is no one service available does all the different things that an employment advocate would do, you may well have to contact more than one organisation. We have grouped our suggestions under the following headings. This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide because we would not have the capacity to keep it up to date once the project closes. Instead it gives suggestions of the main umbrella organisations you could contact and some things to consider.

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Alternative Advocacy Providers

We have compiled a list of advocacy services across Greater Manchester. Most of these provide advocacy around mental health and/or independent living. There are a handful of services which have a broader remit, and there are some which are run by organisations of disabled people. We will make this list available to reception staff at Breakthrough who will signpost you to services in your area (call 0161 273 5412 or email t.holmes@breakthrough-uk.co.uk). Action for Advocacy lists some independent advocacy providers on their website www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk. Please note though that none of them specifically provide advocacy with employment issues. However if you want support to deal with a barrier related to another aspect of your life that is having an impact on your work, then it is worth considering

Legal Assistance

We have produced a detailed factsheet giving details of different sources of legal advice for employment issues, whether one-off or ongoing representation. This was recently updated and is available on our website at:

<http://www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk/Resources/factsheets>

Other factsheets that we have produced are available on the same page of our website.

Peer Support

Local organisations of disabled people often have peer support or self advocacy groups where you can connect with other disabled people to share experiences and advice. They may meet specifically for this purpose, or arrange meetings for members to discuss a particular topic or an area of concern to campaign around. For example a large membership organisation of disabled people in the area is the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDP). They can be contacted on tel: 0161 273 5154. Website: www.gmcdp.com. People First is a self advocacy group of learning disabled people in Manchester, tel 0161 839 3700, website: www.manpf.org. Other organisations of disabled people are listed in the links section of the Breakthrough website: www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk.

If you work for a larger organisation they may have a disabled worker's group that you could join. Such groups may also be able to offer you guidance and support on an individual level too if you are experiencing difficulties at work.

Some trades unions have disabled members groups so this is worth checking if you are a union member. See our factsheet on peer support for more ideas.

There are more informal sources of support in many local areas such as WellBeing Centres, and local voluntary groups. Your local voluntary action group will know about local voluntary and community organisations. A national list of voluntary action groups can be found at www.navca.org.uk. Some of these also offer free or low cost counselling, but there may be a long waiting list. You can also ask your GP to refer you for counselling, but this will appear on your medical records.

Accessing Advice

For employment specific advice you can contact Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Rights Service, tel 0161 839 3888, website: www.gmemploymentrights.org.uk/, and/or ACAS tel: 08457 47 47 47, website www.acas.org.uk.

For welfare rights advice please see our factsheet "Getting Benefits Advice in Greater Manchester". Many of the services mentioned in this resource also offer debt advice.

Local Citizen's Advice Bureaux provide a range of advice on legal, money and other issues. Many will offer home visits if required. You can find your nearest CAB online at the link below or alternatively contact Breakthrough and we will do a search for you: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice.htm#txt_getadvice_header-Anchor-search

Community Legal Advice can provide free advice about benefits, tax credits, housing, employment, education or debt problems if you qualify for legal aid.

Helpline: 0845 345 4345

Website: www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

Accessing Local Services

Local councils have developed their own resources for formal and informal sources of support around independent living. This is part of the move towards personalisation and it will shortly be a requirement that all local authorities make this information available. For example, in Manchester there is a website called My Manchester Services: <http://mymanchesterservices.manchester.gov.uk>

Other local boroughs within Greater Manchester have done a similar thing. Contact your local council for advice. Their websites are listed on the AGMA website at: www.agma.gov.uk/

Housing

Shelter provides advice on housing issues, as do many local authorities, law centres and independent advice centres. Shelter's free housing advice helpline can be contacted on 0808 800 4444, website: www.shelter.org.uk.

For an excellent guide to housing related issues for disabled people, have a look at Trafford Disability Information Service's Independent Living Guide on housing. Although all the local contacts are in Trafford, the general information provided is relevant to other areas too:

www.trafforddisability.org/independent_living_guides/housing

Employer Liaison

For most people, the main source of support if you would like to have someone with you to talk to your employer would be your union representative. If you are unhappy with your union you could consider changing to a different one – you don't have to stick to the one that is recognised by your employer. But bear in mind that there will often be a minimum membership of 6 months before they will be able to offer you legal support. If you are not in a union, or feel this is inappropriate, it is always worth negotiating with your employer to see if a friend or professional you are working with can attend meetings as an informal advocate. You may be able to argue that this is a reasonable adjustment for you, for example to assist you to fully participate in meetings. Work colleagues are allowed by law to attend formal meetings with you, such as grievance or disciplinary hearings. You may find our factsheets on negotiation and on dealing with issues at work helpful here.

If you are under threat of losing your job, your local Disability Employment Advisor has a retention role and may be able to work with you and your employer to find a workable solution. They can be contacted via your local Jobcentre Plus office. You do not have to be out of work to ask for the support of a Disability Employment Advisor.

There are specific support services to assist you if you are being bullied. These are listed in our booklet on bullying and harassment.

Some impairment specific organisations will provide support or guidance to disabled people having problems in the workplace which is similar to an advocacy role. It is worth checking this if you do not fall within the remit of any local advocacy services. For example Action for Blind People www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk provides advisory and employment support services to visually impaired people.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission champions equality and human rights for all. They offer information on your rights to equal treatment and dealing with discrimination on the grounds of disability, age, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation or race.

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline

Tel: 0845 604 6610

Textphone: 0845 604 6620

Fax: 0845 604 6630

Mon - Fri 8am to 6pm (last call taken at 5:45pm)

Freepost RRL- GHUX-CTR, Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester M4 3EQ

Email: englandhelpline@equalityhumanrights.com

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

This factsheet was prepared by the Independent Employment Advocacy Centre.

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Please contact us if you require this information in different format or have any comments.

4 Further good practice information is available online at www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk