



# **DFI Member's Self-Advocacy Toolkit**

**Essential resources to  
support citizen engagement**



**DISABILITY FEDERATION  
OF IRELAND**



# Summary of Resources

### Foreword

At Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), we believe self-advocacy is a fundamental right and a crucial skill in creating an inclusive society where everyone has a voice. When people with disabilities have the confidence, support, and opportunity to speak up for themselves, they can shape their own lives, influence decisions, and drive meaningful change within their communities.

This toolkit represents a significant step in ensuring people with disabilities have the tools, strategies, and real-world examples to establish, support, and sustain self-advocacy groups. It is designed to ensure that people with disabilities are not only heard but also valued as active contributors in decision-making processes that directly impact their lives.

Self-advocacy does not happen in isolation. It flourishes in environments where organisations actively remove barriers, provide meaningful support, and create spaces for people with disabilities to lead. By implementing the steps outlined in this guide, organisations can move beyond tokenistic inclusion and towards a future where self-advocates have a genuine and lasting impact.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this toolkit, from self-advocates and disability organisations to frontline workers and expert advisors. We hope this resource will support our member organisations and individuals in fostering meaningful self-advocacy and strengthening the disability movement in Ireland.



*Elaine Teague*

**Elaine Teague, CEO,**  
Disability Federation of Ireland

## Acknowledgments

The creation of this Self-Advocacy Toolkit has been a truly collaborative process, shaped by the voices and experiences of self-advocates, disability organisations, and professionals working in the field.

This resource is designed to be practical, accessible, and impactful, ensuring that individuals with disabilities can confidently advocate for their rights and make their voices heard.

I want to personally thank every person who contributed to the development of this toolkit—your insights and dedication have made this project possible. We look forward to seeing how this toolkit is used to drive change across Ireland.

In particular, DFI would like to sincerely thank Julie Helen, Cork activist and advocate for people with disabilities, who through her skills and experience supported and facilitated us through this process from the beginning of the project. We would like to thank the members of the DFI Self-Advocacy Programme Advisory Group, and Joanne Nelligan NLN and Pauline O’Shea of the Irish Heart Foundation and their respective advocacy groups who piloted the toolkit in five regions around the country. Their feedback and insights have been invaluable in contributing to the toolkit we present here.

A special thanks to Madeline McNamara of Vision Ireland, whose expertise in accessibility has been instrumental in reviewing the document’s colour contrast and fonts to ensure it is inclusive.

I would also like to thank our colleagues in DFI for their unending support.

I hope that you will now be in a position, to use this toolkit and the additional resources available to members online. I believe you will find it to be of support in your efforts to build and develop effective self-advocacy structures and groups in DFI member organisations. This toolkit should be a living resource, and DFI is always open to your insights and the experiences you have in using it. If there are changes you think we might need to make, we welcome your views and look forward to making sure this resource remains as useful and as relevant to you as possible.



**Áine O’Sullivan**, Project Lead for the Self-Advocacy Toolkit  
Community Development Officer and Project Lead, Disability  
Federation of Ireland

## The Self-Advocacy Programme Advisory Group

Our advisory group was instrumental the development of the toolkit and facilitating the co-design roadshows in four locations across the country. They are pictured below from left to right:

- PJ Cleere, DFI
- Geraldine Rooney, Blanchardstown Centre for Independent Living
- Darragh Forde, Volunteer
- Caroline Winstanley Speech and Language Therapist
- Joanne Nelligan Rehab Group (NLN)
- Gary Brennan (holding the sign) Prader Willi Syndrome Association Ireland
- Áine O’Sullivan, DFI
- Toni Gleeson, Volunteer

Also pictured are Sarah Harrington Breaking Barriers Theatre Group, advocate and activist (seated) and standing behind her is Amy Begley, researcher and activist.



Advisory group members not pictured above are:

- John Fulham (Irish Wheelchair Association) and Steve Cummins (Central Remedial Clinic)



The **DFI Self-Advocacy Toolkit**, Version 1, was developed between 2023 and 2024 as part of the Disability Federation of Ireland's (DFI) **Self-Advocacy Programme**. The aim is to provide individuals with disabilities the tools they need to speak up for themselves and take part in decisions that affect their lives. This toolkit was co-designed with input from self-advocates, frontline workers, and community workshops in Cork, Dublin, and Galway.

This overview and the first resource 'Self-Advocacy Guide for Organisations' is available for anyone to use but there are four resources in total. **Access to the full toolkit is reserved for DFI members only.** Members also get access to:

- How To Run a Self-Advocacy Group: Facilitator's Guide
- Self-Advocacy Activities, Tools and Templates
- Self-Advocacy Case Studies.

Only DFI members can access these resources.

Find out more about [becoming a DFI member here](#).



Members access the full toolkit [here](#).



### What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself about the things that are important to you. It's a skill that everyone can use, although it's often discussed in relation to disability. Whether in disability services or broader community settings, self-advocacy empowers people to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met.

The **DFI Self-Advocacy Programme** aligns with the "All-Ireland Standards for Community Work 2016," emphasising fairness, inclusion, and human rights. The goal is to facilitate people with disabilities to take part in decisions that shape their lives and communities.

#### Resources Available

##### 1. Self-Advocacy Toolkit:

- **Purpose:** A step-by-step guide for setting up and growing self-advocacy groups within organisations. It provides tips, tools, and examples for helping people with disabilities speak up and create change.
- **What's Included:** Explanations of self-advocacy, practical tips for organising groups, and tools to foster advocacy within communities.

##### 2. Facilitator's Guide:

- **Purpose:** To support group leaders and facilitators in helping others build self-advocacy skills.
- **What's Included:** Guidance on running effective group meetings, encouraging participation, and fostering a supportive environment. It also includes advice on how to work through the toolkit and ensure the group remains focused and productive.

##### 3. Activities Booklet:

- **Purpose:** Provides practical activities to develop self-advocacy skills in group settings.
- **What's Included:** Icebreakers, role-playing exercises, and real-life scenarios to help participants practice self-advocacy in a safe and supportive environment.



#### 4. Case Studies:

- Purpose: Showcasing real-life examples of successful self-advocacy efforts from individuals and groups across Ireland.
- What's Included: Stories of self-advocates who have successfully made changes in their communities, providing inspiration and practical insights for others.

### Using the Toolkit

The toolkit is designed to be easy to use, with clear language, accessible fonts, and practical guidance. It's suitable for those new to self-advocacy, as well as experienced advocates looking to grow their skills.

By working through the toolkit, facilitators and self-advocates can identify key issues, discuss solutions, and take action to improve services and community life for people with disabilities.

### How to Get Started

1. **Read the Toolkit:** Begin by exploring the Toolkit to understand the basics of self-advocacy.
2. **Use the Facilitator's Guide:** If you are leading a group, follow the guide to help support participants effectively.
3. **Try the Activities:** Engage your group in practical exercises from the Activities Booklet to build confidence and skills.
4. **Learn from Case Studies:** Use the Case Studies as inspiration and guidance for real-world applications of self-advocacy.

### Continuous Improvement

The Toolkit will continue to evolve based on feedback and ongoing input from self-advocates and support networks. DFI remains committed to updating the Toolkit to ensure it stays relevant and practical for all users.



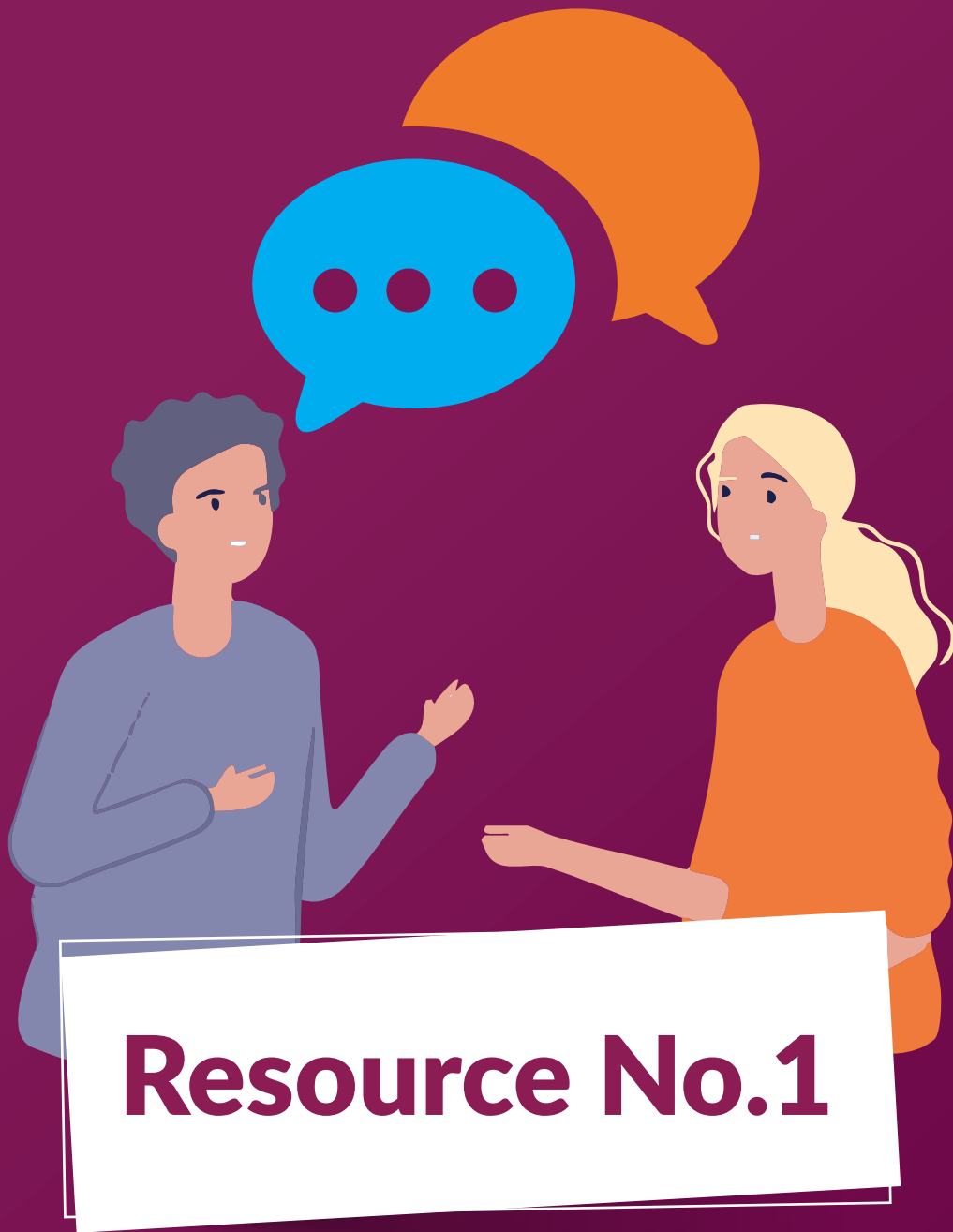
This overview and the first resource 'Self-Advocacy Guide for Organisations' is available for anyone to use, but there are five resources in total. Access to the full toolkit is reserved for DFI members only.

If you are a member, you can access the full toolkit [here](#) or scan the QR code.



Find out more about becoming a [DFI member here](#) or scan the QR code.





**Resource No.1**

**Self-Advocacy  
Guide for Organisations**

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# 1. Introduction

The **Self-Advocacy Guide for Organisations** is a comprehensive resource designed to support organisations in supporting and empowering self-advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities. Its purpose is to provide a clear, step-by-step approach to setting up, growing, and sustaining self-advocacy initiatives within an organisational setting. Through practical tips, tools, and real-world examples, the guide helps organisations create an environment where individuals with disabilities can confidently speak up for their rights, participate in decision-making, and advocate for change within their communities.

The guide serves as a valuable tool for both new and established organisations looking to promote inclusion and ensure that people with disabilities have a platform to express their needs and influence policies and services that impact their lives. It encourages collaboration, builds leadership skills, and empowers self-advocates to take an active role in shaping their futures.

## Purpose of the Guide:

The guide is structured to help organisations:

- **Establish Self-Advocacy Groups:** It outlines the essential steps for setting up a self-advocacy group, including how to identify potential members, develop group goals, and create a supportive environment for effective communication.
- **Support Growth and Sustainability:** The guide offers strategies for nurturing these groups over time, ensuring they continue to grow, develop, and sustain their advocacy efforts.
- **Promote Meaningful Change:** By equipping people with disabilities with the tools to advocate for themselves, the guide helps organisations support positive changes within their communities, enabling self-advocates to have a lasting impact.

### What's Included:

The **Self-Advocacy Guide for Organisations** includes the following key components:

#### 1. Explanations of Self-Advocacy:

- a. A clear overview of what self-advocacy means and its importance in empowering individuals with disabilities to have their voices heard.
- b. Insight into the role of organisations in supporting self-advocates and facilitating an inclusive environment.

#### 2. Practical Tips for Organising Groups:

- a. Step-by-step instructions on how to form a self-advocacy group, recruit members, establish group dynamics, and maintain engagement.
- b. Guidance on structuring meetings, setting goals, and ensuring that the group remains focused and productive.

#### 3. Tools to support Advocacy within Communities:

- a. A collection of templates, checklists, and exercises that can be used to guide group discussions, set advocacy agendas, and track progress.
- b. Ideas for connecting self-advocacy groups with local resources, services, and networks to amplify their impact.

#### 4. Real-World Examples and Case Studies:

- a. Examples of successful self-advocacy efforts from organisations and individuals across various settings, providing inspiration and practical insights into what works.

By following the steps outlined in the **Self-Advocacy Guide for Organisations**, organisations can ensure that they are providing the right support to enable self-advocates to confidently express their needs, challenge barriers, and create lasting change in their communities. This guide serves as a roadmap for building effective self-advocacy structures that empower individuals to take control of their lives and contribute to the decision-making processes that affect them.



## 2. What is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself, making your own decisions, and taking control of your life. It's about knowing your rights, expressing your needs and preferences, and standing up for what's important to you. For people with disabilities, self-advocacy empowers you to have a say in decisions that affect your life—whether it's about the services you receive, your personal goals, or your community.

This toolkit will help you build the skills and confidence to advocate for yourself, ensuring your voice is heard and respected.



## 3. Different Types of Advocacy

There are a few types of advocacies that can help you or others speak up and be heard:

### 1. Self-Advocacy

This is when **you speak up for yourself**. You explain what you want, need, or how you feel, and make decisions about your own life.

### 2. Peer Advocacy

This is when **someone like you** (a peer) helps you speak up. They understand what you're going through and can support you in sharing your voice.

### 3. Group Advocacy

This happens when a **group of people** come together to speak up about something that affects them all. Working as a team makes your voice stronger.

### 4. Citizen Advocacy

This is when a **volunteer** (citizen advocate) helps you stand up for your rights and needs. They are not paid and work with you to make sure your voice is heard.

### 5. Professional Advocacy

A **trained professional** (like a social worker or advocate) helps you. They know the system and can support you in making sure your rights are respected.

Each type of advocacy is about making sure your voice is heard and your rights are respected.



## 4. Being a Self-Advocate in your Community

Being a self-advocate in your community means speaking up about what is important to you and making sure your voice is heard. You can tell others about your needs, ideas, and opinions. This could be about things like better services, more accessibility, or activities you would like to see in your area.

As a self-advocate, you can work with others to make changes that improve your community for people with disabilities. You can join groups, attend meetings, and talk to leaders in your community to help make it a better place for everyone.

Remember, your voice matters!

### Case study:

#### Sarah's Story

Sarah is a young woman with a physical disability who lives in a small town. She loves being part of her community but noticed that many public places, like the local library and park, were not accessible for people with disabilities.

Instead of staying quiet, Sarah decided to speak up. She contacted her local council and explained the problems she faced. She shared her personal experiences and how difficult it was for her to access these spaces. Sarah also suggested simple changes, like adding ramps and accessible seating, to make the town more inclusive.

The council listened to Sarah and, over time, made the changes she suggested. Because of Sarah's self-advocacy, the town is now more accessible, and other people with disabilities can enjoy the public spaces too.

### What We Can Learn:

- Sarah used her voice to make her community better.
- Self-advocacy is about speaking up for what you need.
- By sharing her story, Sarah helped bring about real change in her town.

Self-advocacy can make a big difference in your community, just like it did for Sarah.

## 5. The Importance of Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is important because it helps you take control of your life. When you speak up for yourself, you can:

- **Make your own choices** about what you want and need.
- **Stand up for your rights** and make sure they are respected.
- **Be heard** by others, like your family, carers, or service providers.
- **Get the support** you need to live the life you want.
- **Build confidence** by sharing your thoughts and opinions.

Self-advocacy gives you the power to make decisions that affect your life and to make sure your voice is valued.

Incorporating self-advocacy into services is vital for aligning with key Irish policies like those from HIQA, New Directions, and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy. These policies emphasise the need for person-centred, inclusive services that respect the voices and choices of people with disabilities. Self-advocacy empowers individuals to actively shape the services they receive, ensuring these services meet their needs.

Self-advocacy also supports the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in Ireland, particularly in helping people make their own decisions and participate fully in community life. It aligns with the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act, teaching both individuals and staff how to support decision-making.

Additionally, self-advocacy promotes equality and human rights, helping organisations adopt a rights-based approach to their services, in line with Ireland's Public Sector Duty. Overall, self-advocacy is essential for ensuring that people with disabilities have the independence, choice, and participation they deserve.

## 6. Key Information for Self-Advocacy to Work Well in your service and Community

For self-advocacy to be successful, there are some important things to remember:

- **Human Rights:** Understanding fundamental rights is the foundation for advocacy.
- **Respect:** Essential for fostering positive interactions and being heard.
- **Independence:** Promotes self-reliance and personal empowerment.
- **Values:** help guide individuals and groups in advocating effectively for their rights and needs.
- **Responsibility:** Emphasise accountability in advocacy efforts.
- **Confidentiality:** Ensures trust and privacy in advocacy activities.
- **Clear Communication:** Crucial for effectively expressing needs and desires.
- **Goal Setting:** Provides direction and focus for advocacy efforts.
- **Problem Solving:** Recognising challenges and obstacles.
- **Support Networks:** Builds a system of allies and resources for assistance.
- **Staff and Self-Advocacy:** Collaboration with staff to enhance advocacy initiatives.
- **Persistence:** Maintains motivation and effort in the face of challenges.
- **Feedback and Reflection:** Encourages growth and adaptation through evaluation.

These tips will help you succeed as a self-advocate and ensure your voice is heard!

# 7. Getting Started

## Understanding Self-Advocacy

- Self-advocacy is a journey that begins with understanding your rights and knowing how to express your needs and opinions effectively. It's about taking control of your life and making decisions that are right for you.

## Benefits of Self-Advocacy

- Self-advocacy can lead to greater independence, improved services, and better quality of life. It also creates a sense of empowerment and confidence.

## Identifying Your Goals

- Before starting a self-advocacy group, it's important to identify what you want to achieve. This could be improving services, raising awareness of disability rights, or simply gaining confidence in speaking up for yourself.

## Training Needs

- Do group members need additional training in communication, advocacy skills, or leadership?

## Resources:

- Does the group have the resources it needs, such as meeting space, funding, or educational materials?

## Current Challenges

- What are the challenges or barriers the group faces, and how can they be addressed?

By answering these questions and using the checklist, you can lay a strong foundation for your self-advocacy group and ensure it starts on the right path.

Before you begin to set up or reestablish a Self-Advocacy Group Answers these questions to help you: Please see printable version in the Activities Booklet.

## Checklist: Questions to Answer Before Setting Up or Re-establishing a Self-Advocacy Group

This checklist will help guide the planning process for starting or re-establishing a self-advocacy group. Below is an easy-to-read format, with an example filled out for a new group.

### 1. Who is the group for?

- **Question:** Who do you want to be part of this group?
- **Example:** This group is for adults within our service who want to learn how to speak up for themselves.

### 2. What is the purpose of the group?

- **Question:** What do you want the group to achieve (e.g. to promote independence, to raise awareness of disability rights)?
- **Example:** The purpose of this group is to help members learn self-advocacy skills and raise awareness about the rights of people with disabilities.

### 3. What are the group's goals?

- **Question:** are the specific goals for the group (e.g. to improve communication skills, to organise an event)?
- **Example:**
  - Help members improve their communication skills.
  - Organise a public event to raise awareness about disability rights in the community like DFI Make Way Day.

### 4. Where will the group meet?

- **Question:** Where will the group meet to ensure accessibility (e.g. community centre, disability service office, online via Zoom)?
- **Example:** The group will meet at the local community centre, which is wheelchair accessible and has accessible bathrooms.

### 5. How often will the group meet?

- **Question:** How frequently will the group meet (e.g. weekly, bi-weekly, monthly)?
- **Example:** The group will meet every two weeks on Wednesdays from 3 PM to 5 PM.

### 6. How will you support communication needs?

- **Question:** What communication supports are needed (e.g. sign language interpreters, plain language, visual aids)?
- **Example:** The meetings will use plain language and visual aids. We will have a support person available to assist with communication as needed.

### 7. What activities will the group do?

- **Question:** What types of activities will help the group achieve its goals (e.g. training sessions, guest speakers, discussions)?
- **Example:**
  - Practice speaking up in group discussions.
  - Invite a guest speaker to talk about disability rights.

### 8. Who will facilitate the group?

- **Question:** Who will lead and support the group (e.g. a staff member, peer facilitator, rotating leadership)?
- **Example:** The group will be facilitated by a disability service staff member, but members will take turns leading parts of the meeting.

### 9. How will members participate?

- **Question:** How will group members contribute to decision-making and activities (e.g. voting, open discussions, rotating leadership)?
- **Example:** Members will participate by voting on group decisions and taking turns leading discussions.



## 10. How will you promote the group?

- **Question:** How will you let others know about the group (e.g. flyers, social media, through disability services)?
- **Example:** We will promote the group by putting up flyers in the community centre and sharing the information on social media.

## 11. What resources or support does the group need?

- **Question:** What resources do you need to start the group (e.g. funding, meeting space, materials)?
- **Example:** The group will need a meeting space, funding for transportation, and materials like paper and markers for activities.

## 12. How will you measure success?

- **Question:** How will you know if the group is successful (e.g. attendance, feedback, goals achieved)?
- **Example:** We will measure success by seeing if members feel more confident speaking up and if we can successfully organise a public event.

This checklist provides a simple way to prepare before launching or re-establishing a self-advocacy group, helping ensure the group is organised, inclusive, and effective.



## Where are we now questionnaire

### Important Considerations:

- **For Ongoing Groups:** This questionnaire is designed for groups that have been active for some time and need to assess their current stage of development.
- **New Members:** It's particularly useful when new members join the group, helping everyone understand the group's current status and objectives.
- **Staff Changes:** If there has been a change in the support staff for self-advocacy within your service, this tool will help the group realign and plan the next steps.
- **No Right or Wrong Answers:** This questionnaire is meant to guide reflection and discussion. There are no correct or incorrect responses.
- **Response Options:** You can indicate "yes," "no," or "unsure" for each question. If you are unsure of an answer, it may prompt further research or discussion.
- **Taking Action:** If you're unsure about something, consider taking proactive steps to address the issue. There is space provided to note down actions.
- **Collaborative Effort:** Ensure that the questionnaire is completed as a group activity, fostering discussion and collective decision-making.



You will see an example of how the questions are laid out below

Date of doing this questionnaire

Who is here (list everyone)

Where are you having this meeting

**Question 1:** Have we had a self-advocacy group in our service before?



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 2:** Does everybody in the group know what self-advocacy is?



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 3:** Have we done research about who should be in this group?



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 4:** Does everybody know about: Human Rights

- Respect
- Confidentiality
- Responsibility
- Independence
- Staff and self-advocacy
- Funding

If anybody says no refer back to page



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 5:** Are we happy with our ground rules?

If anyone says no or you don't have any, we can make some



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 6:** Are we happy with the assigned roles e.g. Chairperson, secretary?



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 7:** Are we happy with where, when and how often we meet?



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 8:** Are we happy with the support we have in self-advocacy meetings?



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 9:** Are we happy we know what issues we want to work on?

This is a big question- you might need to come back to this for a whole meeting



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

**Question 10:** Are we linking in enough with other groups?



YES



NO



UNSURE

Things we need to say about this:

What we will do next and when:

## Tips for the Facilitator:

### Use Simple Language:

Speak in plain language so everyone can understand. Avoid using complicated terms.

### Create a Safe Space:

Make sure everyone feels comfortable and respected in the group. Ensure it's a judgment-free environment.

### Encourage Participation:

Invite everyone to share their thoughts and ideas. No one should feel left out.

### Start Small:

Begin with small, achievable goals. This helps build confidence.

### Provide Support:

Offer help with communication or assistive tools (e.g., visual aids or interpreters) if needed.

### Use Fun Activities:

Make learning enjoyable with interactive activities and games.

### Be Patient:

Give people time to express themselves. Don't rush conversations.

### Celebrate Successes:

Recognise and celebrate even small victories. This keeps the group motivated.

### Empower Leadership:

Encourage members to take on leadership roles and guide parts of the discussion.

# 8. Setting Up a Self-Advocacy Group

## Step 1: How to Plan for setting up a Self-Advocacy Group:

### 1. Who Do We Need in Our Group?

- **Self-Advocates:** People with disabilities who are passionate about speaking up for themselves and others.
- **Organisational Representatives:** Staff members from disability organisations or service providers who can help the group connect to resources, share information, and support group activities.
- **Peer Mentors:** Self-advocates who have experience in similar groups or leadership roles. They can inspire and help newer members develop confidence and skills.

### 2. How Do We Get the Right People Involved in Our Group?

- **Outreach:** Use flyers, social media, and word of mouth to inform potential members and supporters about the group. Reach out to local disability organisations, service providers, and community centres.
- **Information Sessions:** Host an open meeting or virtual event to explain the group's goals and invite interested people to join.
- **Inclusion:** Ensure the group is diverse and represents different abilities, ages, and backgrounds. This will create a more effective and inclusive group dynamic.
- **Collaboration:** Partner with local organisations to get recommendations for individuals who may benefit from and contribute to the group.

### 3. Planning Your First Meeting

- **Setting Objectives:** Define what you want to achieve in your first meetings.
- **Choosing a Meeting Space:** Select a location that is accessible and welcoming.
- **Creating an Agenda:** Prepare an agenda that includes introductions, discussions on the group's purpose, and planning next steps.



#### 4: Establishing Group Guidelines

- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Assign roles like chairperson, note-taker.
- **Setting Ground Rules:** Establish how the group will operate, including decision-making processes and conflict resolution.
- **Ensuring Inclusivity:** Make sure everyone feels valued and included.

#### 5: Training and Resources

- **Providing Self-Advocacy Skills Training:** Offer training in communication, leadership, and rights awareness.
- **Sharing Resources:** Distribute materials from the activity's booklet
- **Offering Ongoing Support:** Ensure continuous learning and access to mentors.

#### 6. Launching the Group

- **Holding Your First Meeting:** Start with introductions, explain the group's purpose, and discuss immediate goals.
- **Setting Short-Term Goals:** Identify achievable goals to build momentum.
- **Celebrating Successes:** Acknowledge the group's achievements to maintain motivation.

#### 7. Evaluating and Growing the Group

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Periodically assess the group's progress.
- **Gathering Feedback:** Encourage open feedback to improve the group's effectiveness.
- **Expanding Influence:** Consider expanding advocacy efforts to the community or policy level.

### 8: Sustaining the Group

- **Recruiting New Members:** Continuously invite new members to keep the group dynamic.
- **Building Partnerships:** Collaborate with other advocacy groups and organisations.
- **Planning for the Future:** Set long-term goals and a vision for the group's evolution



## When setting up a Self-Advocacy Group Answer these questions to help you:

Please see printable version in the Activities Booklet:

### 1. Group Name:

- What will the group be called?
- Example: Our Voice Matters

### 2. Mission Statement:

- What is the purpose of the group?
- Example: To empower individuals with disabilities to advocate for their rights, make informed decisions, and raise awareness in the community.

### 3. Target Group:

- Who is this group for?
- Example: Adults with disabilities who want to improve their self-advocacy skills.

### 4. Group Goals:

- What are the specific objectives of the group?
- Example:
  - Help members develop public speaking skills.
  - Advocate for improved accessibility in local public spaces.

### 5. Meeting Location:

- Where will the group meet to ensure accessibility for all members?
- Example: The local community center, which is wheelchair accessible with accessible parking and bathrooms.

### 6. Meeting Frequency:

- How often will the group meet?
- Example: Every second Tuesday of the month from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

### 7. Communication Support:

- **What supports are needed to ensure all members can participate effectively?**
- Example:
  - Plain language materials.
  - Sign language interpreter.
  - Visual aids for key points during discussions.

### 8. Leadership Structure:

- **Who will facilitate and lead the group?**
- Example: The group will have a rotating leadership system where members take turns leading discussions. A facilitator will provide guidance as needed.

### 9. Decision-Making Process:

- **How will decisions be made within the group?**
- Example: Decisions will be made by group voting. Members will vote on topics, activities, and projects during each meeting.

### 10. Group Activities:

- **What kinds of activities will the group engage in to meet its goals?**
- Example:
  - Advocacy training sessions.
  - Organise events for Disability Awareness Month.
  - Guest speakers on topics like legal rights and self-advocacy.

### 11. Community Engagement:

- **How will the group connect with the broader community?**
- Example: The group will collaborate with local disability organisations and host awareness campaigns in schools and community centres.

## 12. Group Promotion:

- How will the group be promoted to reach new members?
- Example: Flyers will be distributed in disability service centers and local businesses. The group will also be promoted on social media.

## 13. Resources Needed:

- What resources does the group need to operate?
- Example:
  - Meeting space.
  - Funding for transportation.
  - Advocacy materials (pamphlets, posters).
  - Snacks and refreshments for meetings.

## 14. Budget:

- What funding or budget is required?
- Example:
  - Meeting supplies: €50
  - Transportation costs: €30
  - Refreshments: €20

## 15. Success Measurement:

- How will you measure the success of the group?
- Example: Success will be measured by member feedback, meeting attendance, and successful completion of advocacy projects (e.g. organising an awareness event).

### 16. Long-Term Sustainability:

- How will the group continue operating in the long term?
- Example: The group will set up a leadership committee and apply for grants to cover ongoing costs.

### 17. Potential Challenges:

- What are the challenges the group might face and how can they be addressed?
- Example:
  - Challenge: Limited transportation options for members.
  - Solution: Partner with local transport services to provide affordable travel.

This template covers the essential elements of starting a new self-advocacy group. Adjust and expand sections as necessary to suit your specific group and community.

## This is a Sample Agenda for your first meeting and can be adapted for other meetings.

Please see Activates Booklet for printable version.

### Self-Advocacy Group: First Meeting Agenda (1 Hour)

#### 1. Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)

- Greet everyone warmly.
- Quick introduction by each member (name, one fun fact, why they are interested in self-advocacy).

#### 2. Icebreaker Activity (10 minutes)

- Simple and fun game to get people comfortable.
- Example: “Two Truths and a Lie” – Each person shares two true things and one false thing about themselves, and others guess the lie.

#### 3. Group Purpose and Goals (10 minutes)

- Briefly explain the purpose of the group (e.g. learning to speak up, gaining confidence, advocating for rights).
- Ask the group what they hope to achieve together.
- Write down 2-3 goals that everyone agrees on.

#### 4. How the Group Will Work (10 minutes)

- Discuss meeting times and how often you'll meet.
- Explain the fun activities planned for future meetings (guest speakers, workshops).
- Make sure everyone feels comfortable speaking up during meetings.



### 5. Quick Group Activity (15 minutes)

- Fun and interactive advocacy exercise.
- Example: Create a “group poster” with everyone adding their name and drawing a picture of something they are passionate about or want to change.

### 6. Wrap-Up and Next Steps (5 minutes)

- Remind everyone of the next meeting date and time.
- Ask for ideas or topics members want to talk about next time.
- Thank everyone for coming and encourage them to keep thinking about their goals!





## Top tips for Facilitator

### Know the Group's Purpose:

Make sure everyone understands the goal of the group is to help people speak up for themselves and make decisions.

### Involve the Group in Planning:

Let the members help decide what the group will do and how it will work.

### Choose Accessible Meeting Spaces:

Make sure the place where you meet is easy to get to and accessible for everyone.

### Use Visuals and Plain Language:

Keep your instructions clear and use pictures or diagrams if it helps explain things better.

### Set Clear Rules Together:

Work with the group to create simple rules, like listening to others and taking turns to speak.

### Encourage Leadership:

Let members take turns leading parts of the meeting to build confidence.

### Stay Organised:

Have a simple agenda for each meeting so everyone knows what to expect.

### Focus on What's Important to Members:

Listen to what the group cares about and build activities around their interests and goals.

## 9. Developing Your Self-Advocacy Skills in the Community: Aligned with UNCRPD Articles

### 1. Understanding Your Rights (Article 1-4):

Learn about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Knowing your rights is the first step in advocating for yourself and others. Understand the general principles and obligations that ensure your voice is heard in your community.

### 2. Effective Communication (Article 21):

Develop your communication skills to express your needs, desires, and opinions clearly. This includes learning how to speak up in meetings, talk to community leaders, and use different communication methods that work best for you.

### 3. Accessing Information (Article 9):

Ensure you have access to the information you need to make informed decisions. This includes understanding how to find resources, knowing where to go for help, and using accessible formats that meet your needs.

### 4. Participation in Public Life (Article 29):

Get involved in your community by participating in local decision-making processes. This might include joining committees, attending public meetings, or working with local councils to influence change.

### 5. Forming and Joining Self-Advocacy Groups (Article 29):

Work with others to form or join a self-advocacy group. These groups can be a powerful way to share experiences, support each other, and work together to advocate for change in your community.

### **6. Building Confidence (Article 3):**

Develop your confidence to advocate for your rights and the rights of others. Believe in your ability to make a difference and take action when necessary.

### **7. Continuous Learning (Article 24):**

Stay informed about your rights and how to advocate for them. This includes attending workshops, reading up on the latest developments, and always looking for new ways to improve your advocacy skills.

### **8. Challenging Discrimination (Article 5):**

Learn how to recognise and challenge discrimination when you see it. This involves understanding what discrimination looks like and knowing the steps to take to address it effectively.

By aligning your self-advocacy efforts with the UNCRPD articles, you ensure that your actions are grounded in a recognised international framework that supports the rights of people with disabilities. This approach not only strengthens your advocacy but also contributes to broader efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable community.

## Developing Your Self-Advocacy Skills in the Community (1-Hour Session Agenda)

### Aligned with UNCRPD Articles

#### 1. Welcome and Warm-Up (10 minutes)

- Quick hello and welcome to everyone!
- **Fun Activity:** “What does advocacy mean to you?” – Ask each person to share one word or short phrase that comes to mind when they think of advocacy.
- Briefly introduce the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

#### 2. UNCRPD Overview: Know Your Rights! (10 minutes)

- Simple explanation of what the UNCRPD is and how it protects the rights of people with disabilities.
- Highlight key articles that relate to self-advocacy:
  - **Article 12:** Equal recognition before the law.
  - **Article 19:** Living independently and being included in the community.
  - **Article 21:** Freedom of expression and opinion, access to information.
- **Fun Fact:** The UNCRPD is like a “rulebook” that countries agree to follow to make sure people with disabilities are treated fairly!

#### 3. Group Discussion: How Can We Advocate in the Community? (15 minutes)

- Ask: “What do you want to change or improve in your community?”
- Write down ideas on a flipchart or board (e.g. better access to public spaces, more inclusive schools, more job opportunities).
- Connect these ideas to UNCRPD articles to show how their rights are linked to their advocacy goals.

#### 4. Advocacy Role Play (15 minutes)

- Split into pairs or small groups.
- Activity: Practice speaking up about an issue in the community (e.g. asking for a ramp at a store or more accessible public transport).
- One person plays the “advocate,” and the other plays the “listener” (like a community leader or business owner).
- Switch roles after a few minutes to give everyone a chance.

#### 5. Wrap-Up: Advocacy Action Plan (10 minutes)

- Ask: “What’s one thing you’ll do this week to practice your advocacy skills?”
- Encourage everyone to share their action plan (it can be something simple like telling a friend about their rights or sending a letter to a local representative).
- Remind the group: **Your voice matters!** You have the right to speak up and make a difference in your community.

#### End on a Fun Note!

- Quick group photo or fun “high five” activity to celebrate completing the session

This fun and easy-to-follow agenda keeps the session interactive and focuses on connect-ing self-advocacy skills with real-life community issues, all while reinforcing the principles of the UNCRPD

## Top Tips for Facilitators:

### Know the Key Rights:

Focus on important UNCRPD rights, like equality, accessibility, and freedom to make choices.

### Use Simple Language:

Explain the UNCRPD and advocacy using plain, easy-to-understand words.

### Encourage Real-Life Examples:

Ask participants to share personal stories about advocating for their rights in the community.

### Connect to the Community:

Show how advocating for their rights can improve their daily lives (e.g. accessibility, inclusion).

### Make It Interactive:

Use role-play and group activities to practice self-advocacy skills in real situations.

### Highlight Confidence:

Boost confidence by reminding participants they have the right to speak up for themselves.

### Provide esources:

Give tools and information about how to access their rights under the UNCRPD.

# References

## United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Accessible at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>
- Important articles for self-advocacy include Articles 12, 19, 21, and 29.

## HIQA – Health Information and Quality Authority

- HIQA standards on services for people with disabilities in Ireland emphasise person-centered services that respect individual voices and choices. Link: <https://www.hiqa.ie>
- Important for understanding the regulatory framework supporting self-advocacy.

## New Directions – Personal Support Services for Adults with Disabilities

- This framework underpins advocacy for people with disabilities, focusing on personal support services and inclusion. Link: <https://www.hse.ie>

## National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS)

- This strategy outlines the Irish government’s plan to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities and how self-advocacy can help ensure their voices are heard in decisions that affect their lives. Link: <https://www.justice.ie>

## All-Ireland Standards for Community Work 2016

- This document guides community work, emphasising equality, social inclusion, and human rights, which are key principles in self-advocacy. Available at: <https://www.communityworkireland.ie>













## DFI's vision

An Ireland where people with disabilities are participating fully in all aspects of society.



## DFI's mission

DFI is a federation of member organisations working with people with disabilities to implement the UN CRPD and ensure their equal participation in society.



## Four-year goal

Member organisations are actively involved in DFI, working to implement the UN CRPD and to achieve the equal participation of people with disabilities in society.

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