

**“IF PEOPLE CAN’T SPEAK UP FOR
THEMSELVES, SOCIETY IGNORES THEM.
WE’RE ABOUT GIVING PEOPLE A VOICE.”**

Eleanor Gibson, Director, Advocacy for Older People in Greenwich

**Advocacy for Older
People in Greenwich
offers...**

**Support for vulnerable
older men and women
in Greenwich.**

Background

- There are 12 million pensioners in the UK, making up almost 1 in 5 of the country's total population (*Office for National Statistics mid 2007 Population Estimates 2008*).
- According to estimates by the Department for Work and Pensions, £3.5 - 5 billion worth of means tested benefits that should rightfully have gone to older people went unclaimed in 2006-2007.
- Half of all people aged 75 and over live alone (*General Household Survey 2006*).
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Giving older people a voice

Growing old is a prospect we all face but most of us will live an active, healthy retirement. However, for the estimated 15% of older people who are simultaneously poor, isolated and excluded, the reality can very different. As well as social isolation and financial hardship they are often increasingly vulnerable to physical or mental health problems. By recruiting volunteer advocates within the community, Advocacy for Older People in Greenwich (AFOP) can offer locally based support for people aged 55 and over, ensuring that their voices are heard and that they can access essential services.

Following the sudden death of her husband, Mrs A, in severe emotional distress, found herself in financial difficulties. Her husband had been the main provider throughout their relationship and now, alone, vulnerable and facing new challenges, she struggled to cope. In arrears with her rent and with bills mounting, Mrs A was receiving no assistance or benefits to which she was entitled. An advocate from AFOP was able to help her by making calls, writing letters, accompanying her to benefits meetings and setting up direct debits to ensure that bills were paid on time.

In addition to practical support and advice, advocacy partnerships also provide vital emotional support for older people, who all too often find themselves isolated and may feel cut off from society: For Mrs D, the help she received was a lifesaver. *“My advocate comes to see me most weeks and phones me up,” she explains. “She helped me sort out lots of things after my husband died. I can still turn to her when I need to.”*

Key Achievements

- Since 1996, Advocacy for Older People has worked with over 1,000 older people in Greenwich and over 100 volunteers.
- They offer both crisis and citizen advocacy – the former helping older people find solutions to pressing or short term problems; the latter offering ad hoc support to an individual over a longer period, in some cases up to 10 years.
- In 2007-2008 referrals to their services increased by 30%.