



**Friendship Care and Housing is piloting a new, independent mental health advocacy service to people in Birmingham and Sandwell.**

### **Advocacy services**

Advocacy involves listening to people and making sure that their voice is heard. If someone feels ignored or misrepresented, an advocate will look after their interests and support them in making informed choices. An advocate can also explain what an individual wants so that other people are able to understand and respect the person's choices and decisions.

Advocates spend lots of time meeting community health teams and, for example, attending ward rounds with patients. They also help people to lodge tribunal appeals.

Friendship Care and Housing has provided advocacy support to communities in the heart of Birmingham since 2006. This service expanded further on a temporary basis, to include all mental health service users in Birmingham.

The association was then commissioned to pilot the Independent Mental Health Advocacy service in Birmingham and Sandwell. Changes to the Mental Health Act mean that from April 2009, people detained under certain sections are legally entitled to advocacy.

The new service is getting busier by the week as its reputation grows. Staff and volunteers at hospitals and community centres can see the benefits of high-quality advocacy – not just for service users, but also for people who work with them.