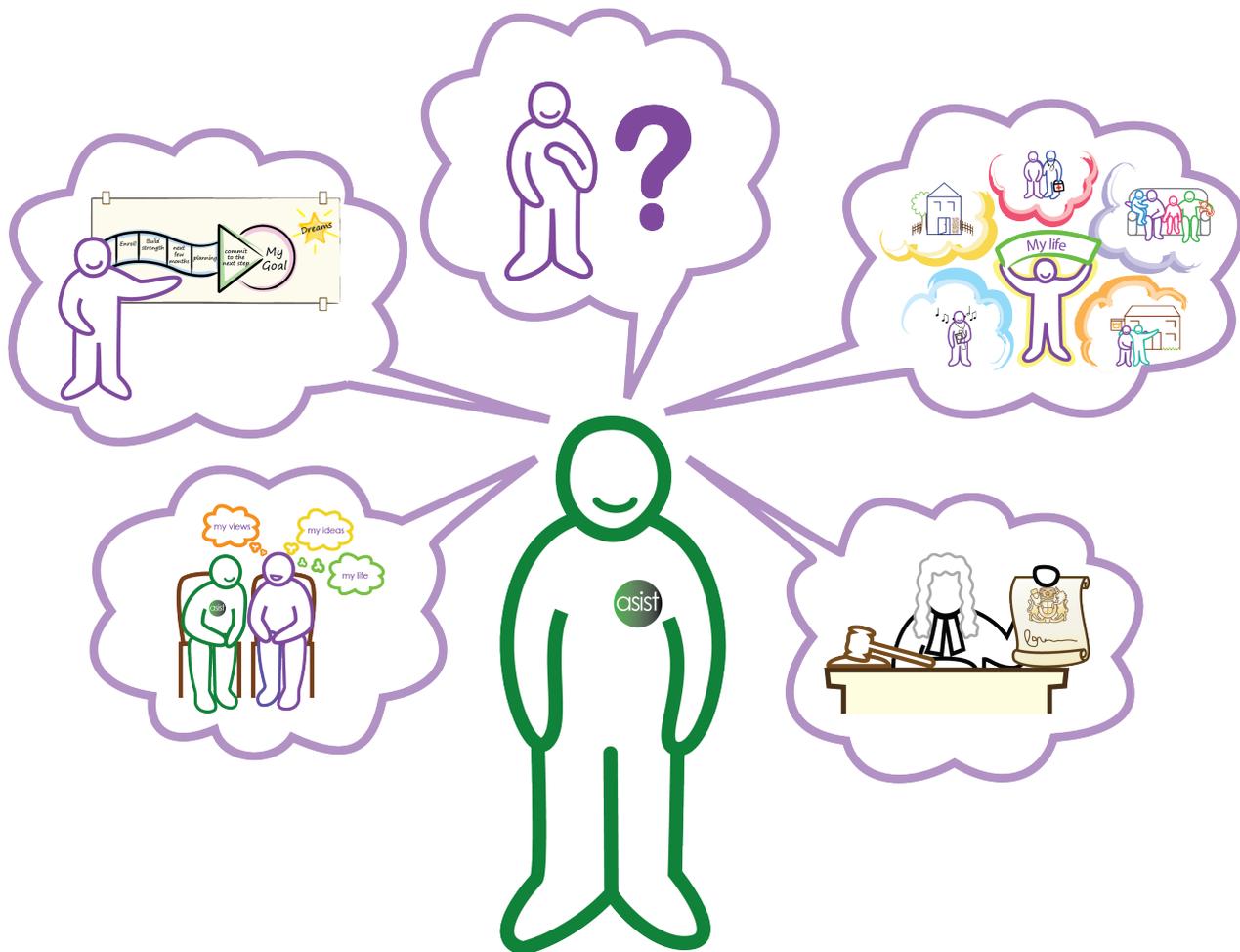


# Advocacy is...

by Stephen Seabridge



# Introduction

Asist Advocacy Services celebrates 25 years of advocacy with friends, colleagues and partners on the 4th July 2019 at Spode Museum Trust Heritage Centre. Asist has commissioned local Poet Stephen Seabridge to explore what advocacy means: *Advocacy is...*



Stephen Seabridge is the Poet Laureate of Stoke-on-Trent in the UK. He is the first to be appointed to this position. He is currently studying a PhD in Creative Writing at Keele University, specialising in contemporary poetics. His most recent publication credits include work in the Verve Eighty-Four Anthology, raising awareness for male suicide rates, and in Bonnie's Crew. Stephen can be found on Twitter at @S\_Seabridge.

*This is a sectioned poem essay on what advocacy is, might be, or might become. Because of the limitless potentials of description that the poem and essay forms (poem essay being an often bizarre and surprising combination of the two) offer, a piece of writing like this focussing on something so variant and immeasurable as 'advocacy' could go on forever. This poem essay – perhaps pomessay, poessay? – was a good exercise in trying to partially pin down this term. Still, as with most poetries, it is foolish to imagine that this written form can fully map it. When writing this, I imagined how advocacy as a term and thing could be translated into art, music, literature etc. and it was not long until I realised that the thing we have come to know as advocacy is all of the way through those things, especially now when it is more 'normal' than ever to pursue and fight for issues and justices to make the world better. The piece below is a try, a long try, a try that collects images and sound and attempts to convey, attempts to head toward the idea of advocacy as hope.*

*Hope in the darkness.*

*Hope in the shadows.*

*Hope in the yellow light of day when the clouds seem dark with thunder  
but the flowers are up and beaming.*

Stephen Seabridge

## Advocacy is...

1.

It is the net that catches the person, the child, the family, the wanderer lonely in rooms crowded, in rooms empty. It is the net that scoops them before they land too hard. Imagine them falling, falling, imagine the cascade of their mind, their body as their life buckles like folding paper, when the news over the phone comes, when their money disappears to ash – if it was ever there in the first place – when they slip from the movement of life we all know onto some kind of hidden track we might not see for looking, that track we might ignore with the pain of it hot on our skin like wood still red with ember. It is the net, the webbing, the interlocking, the mesh of voices and creeds and colours holding together a message, a net of hands and minds lucid with the future. It is the net ready, poised to wrap around in soft embrace, take you up into its tender catch.

2.

It is the hand, the hand clasped around another, the hand reaching up, down, across the void of silent voices, the hand rough and worked but soft with intentions, the hand you do not see in the dark full of its own lightness, the hand around the wood of the sign holding it, holding it for hours on the march, the hand plunged into still-wet soil, the hand absent of seeds planted, the hand raised to a shocked O of a mouth, the hand about to swipe and stopped, the hand gripping and holding and pulling and not letting go.

3.

It is the voice of the woman who works at the corner shop, or of the man at the cobbled corner calling out to the blue sky. It is the voice of the boy fresh from school with the memory of red, tarmac beatings, or the driver of the bus holding his sign no racism here, or the mother holding her friend's daughter as it starts to rain outside, or those with the signs brave in the face of a line of rolling diggers. It is the voice of pride, of rainbow flags, or the voice of the prayer sung out of speakers to congregations, or the voice of the man in the city centre stood on his black box saying love, love, love until he sleeps.

4.

It is glass. It is a magnifying glass. It is a lens. It is the lens through which we might see. It is the glass that reveals what we have missed. It is the glass that shows what we have turned away from, what we dare not gaze upon.

5.

It is the difference. It can be the difference. It could be the difference. The difference between. Think of how many have said if this particular thing was in this particular place it might have made the difference. It could be that, the hairs-breadth chance, the knock on the nail, the drip of water rolling and rolling until it becomes a wave, a sea, an ocean, a world-force outward and back again, boiling with chances.

6.

It is the refusal. It has always been the refusal. To back down. To go home and wait for the doors to crash in. Think of those fighting for the vote. Think of the Suffragettes. Think of the Charters. Think of Stonewall. Think of the Miner's striking outside their own pits. Think of hunger strikes. Think of the Arab Spring. Think of Roe V. Wade. Think of Occupy. Think of the Berlin Wall crashing into cinder. Think of the marches at the dawn of the Iraq War. Think of all those marching and talking and spreading and loving and hoping and fighting and refusing to yield.

7.

It is the memories. The small acts, the everyday. Grandad's teaching a little bit of goodness, throwing the fish back, stroking the neighbour's cat. Grandma's taking the stray dog in. Your mother painting peace signs on black card. Your dad showing you his hidden talents, calligraphy, hushed up loves for literature, for music, for Freddie Mercury at Live Aid. Trevor or Dave or Alan a few doors down telling you of a loving Jesus, of a loving God. All of your good teachers, those few held up like gods as they lit your desire for something, knowledge, or knowing you belonged somewhere.

8.

It is the potential. The potential for change. Like a wind, wave, storm, fire, burst, avalanche. It is the world to come, the hope of better, the hope like the pink band of light as the sun draws in, hope for the morning where we wake, smile to silky dawn and do not mind the rain.

