



GUIDELINES FOR ADVOCATES

Who can be an advocate?

Advocacy is the process of standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged, and speaking out on their behalf in a way that represents the best interests of that person. If a service user of our agency has asked you to be their advocate, this means they would like you to act on their behalf. You may be a family member or friend of the person, or a member of an advocacy service. Service users and prospective advocates should be aware that interpreters cannot be used as advocates, as they have a distinct role to play in interpreting communication between two or more parties.

Responsibilities as a service user advocate

Being an advocate may mean your attendance or involvement could be required during assessments and reviews of the service user's personalised plan, or should the service user want a representative to communicate or negotiate with us on his/her behalf regarding access to their personal information; lodging a complaint; or any issue related to our service performance. We ask our service users to complete a "Notification of Support Person/Advocate Form" when they wish to appoint or change their advocate. Service users are free to change their advocates whenever they wish, however, whenever a change occurs another nomination form is to be completed.

Definitions

- Advocate** An advocate is a person who, with explicit authority, represents another person's interests.
- Informal Advocate** A friend or family member who is nominated by a service user as their personal advocate.
- Systems Advocate** An organisation or professional advocate who can act for a disadvantaged individual or group of individuals in an institutional setting.
- Legal Advocate** A nominated advocate whose role has legal status, for example holding an Enduring Power of Attorney.

The role of an advocate explained

Advocacy may involve speaking, acting or writing on behalf of an individual (or group) who has limited ability to exercise his/her rights. Advocacy is a mechanism to facilitate service user rights, and you may be requested to support the service user in exercising his/her rights, for example the right:

- to privacy and confidentiality
- to respect and dignity
- to quality services
- to information to inform decision making
- to choice and control
- to resolution of complaints
- to non-discrimination, and to protection of legal and human rights and freedom from abuse and neglect.

Advocacy differs from mediation and negotiation. Mediation and negotiation processes aim to reach a mutually acceptable outcome between the parties. The role of the advocate is not impartial, as he or she has an obligation to operate entirely from the perspective of the service user in negotiating an outcome. Advocacy is concerned with genuine major needs, and aims to protect the interests and promote the welfare of the service user.

The advocacy perspective is specialised and quite distinct from the service provider perspective. As advocates and advocacy organisations often stand in contradiction to the system in terms of attitudes towards people in need and beliefs regarding how best to serve them, effective advocates strive for independence and minimise conflict of interest. It is therefore inappropriate that interpreters accept the advocacy role, as their interpreting responsibility does not permit the necessary independence required of an advocate. Advocacy may involve a degree of conflict with service providers and other authorities and therefore may be costly in terms of emotional stress and other demands.

Checklist for advocates

As an advocate of a service user we ask you to be aware of the following and to ensure that:

- ❖ the service user has given written authority for you to act on his/her behalf
- ❖ you inform us that you are acting as the service user's advocate
- ❖ you always act in the best interests of the service user
- ❖ the service user is aware of any issues and developments in relation to. services they receive and which you, as their advocate, may be involved in
- ❖ the service user is kept informed of any developments in relation to the issue/s where you are representing their interests, and that any decisions will be made by the service user
- ❖ you encourage the service user to provide feedback to you about the services they are receiving
- ❖ you advise the service about any changes in service user circumstances and any concerns about changing service user needs
- ❖ you are prepared to relinquish the role of advocate should the service user wish this
- ❖ you avoid representing them in circumstances where there may be a conflict of interest, and
- ❖ You do not act as an interpreter for the service user while acting in an advocacy role.

Thank you for acting as an advocate for our service user.