

Planning the Way Forward for AdvoCard: 2008-2011

a city-wide advocacy project

The logo for AdvoCard features the word "AdvoCard" in a bold, sans-serif font, centered within a thin black rectangular border. The text "a city-wide advocacy project" is written in a smaller, italicized font, arching over the top of the rectangle.

for users of mental health services

1 – Executive Summary

This plan sets out a strategy for AdvoCard's future through:

- improving independence through a variety of funding sources
- increasing targeting of those most isolated and vulnerable
- improving service development and achievement of aims as set out in AdvoCard's charity purposes
- developing resources and training to improve service delivery and opportunities for learning

2 – Introduction and Mission

Mission Statement

AdvoCard is an Edinburgh-wide advocacy project for adults who have experience of mental ill health. AdvoCard provides a free, independent and confidential service, which helps people to make their voices heard.

The long-term aim is to work towards a community in which each individual's needs are met and where people have greater influence over the services they use.

3 – Organisational Background

AdvoCard started offering an independent advocacy service in 1994 to people living in the Northeast sector of Edinburgh with core funding from the Scottish Government and the City of Edinburgh Council. In 2000 funding was increased to extend the service to people living in the Southeast sector of the city.

In 2001 funding was increased to extend the service to people living anywhere in the city of Edinburgh. Up until this point all advocacy was being delivered through trained volunteer advocacy workers.

In 2004 funding was again increased to develop capacity to be able to deal with the differing demands that would result from the coming into force of the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. A new service was introduced within AdvoCard, delivered through contracted advocacy workers, aimed at people who were subject to or facing compulsory treatment under the Act and at the same time offering advocacy support in connection with the safeguards in The Act.

AdvoCard has operated this dual service successfully for three years and will continue to do so for a further three years from April 2008, backed by a Service Level Agreement with the City of Edinburgh Council. However, as funding levels are to remain static for the foreseeable future, the time is now considered right to plan the future of the organisation and to look to improving and adding to the services on offer by actively seeking new funding sources to support new projects.

4 – Future Trends

Present

Advocacy is at present high on the political and social agenda and is likely to be so for some time. More and more advocacy services are being established and commissioners are committed to identifying gaps in independent advocacy provision across all client groups and filling those gaps where resources allow.

AdvoCard is part of a network of mental health advocacy services and has a unique position in Edinburgh by being the only organisation that provides independent mental health advocacy to individuals in the community.

Medium term

Demand for AdvoCard's services has grown each year. It is anticipated that there should continue to be a steady growth in the demand for advocacy as the right of access for anyone with a mental disorder becomes more established and the knowledge of services such as those that are offered by AdvoCard increases. This should lead to an increasing demand for volunteers with good availability. Changes in areas such as the benefits system are likely to lead to significant increases in demand for the service.

Ensuring the standard of advocacy training is an issue that is being debated nationally and is likely to influence the way in which AdvoCard trains its volunteers.

With a gradual move towards compulsory treatment in the community, demand for the Mental Health Act Advocacy service should continue to increase steadily as fewer people are treated in hospital.

Longer term future

Plans to develop the Royal Edinburgh Hospital include the reorganisation of services and treatment within specialist teams in the community following on from shorter periods of initial treatment within hospital.

Changes to European law and local authority funding may lead to local authority contracts going out to tender which could mean organisations such as AdvoCard having to compete for new funding, while at the same time having to fight to maintain existing sources of funding.

Contingency Planning

There will be unpredictable events, for example the potential for cutbacks in funding or indeed an increase in the allocation of funds to allow further expansion. The need for flexibility, therefore, has to be recognised.

5 – Strategic Direction

- To maintain and improve current service delivery whilst proactively seeking to become more accessible to Service Users
- To make best use of the experience, knowledge and expertise established over the last fifteen years in order to ensure that AdvoCard remains at the leading edge of independent advocacy provision in Edinburgh
- To develop the extent to which AdvoCard is meaningfully governed by being service user led

6 – Strategic Aims

(a) To continue to provide a quality independent advocacy service for mental health service users in the community in Edinburgh through contracted and volunteer advocacy workers. This will be underpinned by a commitment to being user led and will be achieved through:

- developing and implementing a strategy for continuous service user involvement, culminating in a service user led organisation
- developing mechanisms for gaining continuous service user feedback; for example, regular one to one interviews and questionnaires
- implementing a monitoring system to ensure adherence to the service level agreement
- developing a reliable and appropriate way of measuring outcomes in line with *SIAA Principles & Standards* (see glossary)
- commissioning an independent external evaluation of AdvoCard
- implementing and reviewing the *Investing in Volunteers Accreditation* (see glossary) process and continued support of staff and volunteers through use of the established supervision and appraisal model

(b) To increase AdvoCard's accessibility to all individuals and groups of service users regardless of where they live in Edinburgh. This will be achieved by:

- adhering to the Equality and Diversity strategy
- establishing meaningful contact with a diverse range of organisations offering services to all groups
- developing diversity/representation within the organisation through committee members, staff and volunteers
- researching the need for the service in the community, specifically assessing this in outlying areas and identifying ways to meet demand

(c) To raise the profile of advocacy and of AdvoCard to the wider public by developing and implementing a marketing strategy

(d) To improve AdvoCard's financial independence through the acquisition of additional funding streams by:

- setting up a fundraising working group and submitting appropriate funding applications
- exploring other appropriate means of raising revenue

(e) To investigate the possibility of developing Long Term Matched (LTM) advocacy by:

- establishing a working group to determine the future of LTM advocacy (see glossary) in AdvoCard
- establishing the current situation re LTM advocacy and consulting with interested parties
- implementing and reviewing recommendations

(f) To ensure that the training function of AdvoCard meets the needs of all AdvoCard's stakeholders including:

- researching and developing appropriate training areas with more focus on:
 - service users
 - committee members

7 – Implications

In order to meet these objectives a number of new areas of development work will be required and methods of governance introduced. These development areas will be led by the managers who will chair working groups involving staff, committee members, volunteers and service users. Changes may well be needed within the training and advocacy functions in order to free up the managers so that they are able to lead on areas of development. This might mean an increase in hours of their co-workers within the two functions or extra staff.

8 – Financial Implications

AdvoCard receives core funding to provide its independent advocacy services and it is important that this funding should not be put at risk from any new sources of funding that may emerge.

The costs of implementing the aims and objectives of the plan will be in part managed from within existing resources and in part, self-financing from revenue raising initiatives. Costs will, where appropriate, be identified by individual working groups. The Fundraising Group will have the remit to devise a funding strategy.

9 – Track Record of the Organisation

AdvoCard's positive track record suggests that the organisation should be well capable of meeting the aims and objectives laid down by this plan. A number of critical success factors can be identified:

- continuing emphasis on user involvement including service users as volunteers and on the management committee
- strong relationship with the commissioners, underscored by the fact that funding has been increased three times, reflecting satisfaction in the service provided to date
- excellence of training guarantees a continuous stream of skilled advocacy workers
- committed and active Management Committee
- successful retention and recruitment of volunteers and their commitment and expertise

- low staff turnover means there is a very experienced, committed and skilled workforce
- increase in the number of people helped year on year
- comprehensive and timely response to The Act
- excellent reputation with service users and other workers

10 – Immediate Action Plan

Prior to the launch of the plan a number of consultation events were held to seek feedback from various stakeholders. These events ranged from group events to 1:1 interviews as well as questionnaires.

Key timescales -

- November '08 launch *Planning the Way Forward* and *Equality & Diversity Strategy*
- December '08 establish working groups with membership, remits and individual action plans
- January '09 begin planning the strategies

Glossary

Accessibility: User-friendly, in terms of physical adaptations, information in different formats and reaching out to people in need

Commissioners: Usually representatives from the local authority or health board that fund advocacy

Investing in Volunteers: UK quality standard for all organisations that involve volunteers in their work.

Long Term Matched Advocacy (LTM): A long-term advocacy arrangement between an AdvoCard service user and a volunteer, which is outlined in a written agreement

Service Level Agreement: The agreement, usually between the Local Authority or Health Boards and the advocacy organisation, which outlines how much funding they receive, which geographical areas will be covered, who the advocacy is for and how long the funding is for

SIAA: *Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance* is a national organisation that promotes, supports and defends Independent Advocacy in Scotland

Stakeholders: Groups of people who have a vested interest in an organisation and the service it provides. The stakeholders of AdvoCard are service users, volunteers, Management Committee, staff, commissioners and the community of Edinburgh

Strategy: A plan to achieve a long-term aim

Working Group: A body within the structure of AdvoCard, which is set up by the Management Committee through the Project Manager to carry out specific pieces of work on behalf of the organisation. It is made up of representatives of stakeholders

A larger print version of this plan is available upon request

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