

Code of Practice for Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers

1. Role

1.1 Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should act ethically at all times. This means treating all who come into contact with the project (including service users, workers, other volunteers and carers) with respect, courtesy and honesty. Advocates should act at all times in such a way as to respect the dignity of others and maintain confidentiality and privacy.

1.2 Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should not impose their own views. They are there to help others to express their views and wishes. Advocacy is about finding out what someone wants and helping him or her to express that opinion, not imposing what the advocate thinks is best.

1.3 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker must give as much information as possible about the choices available to the service user. If asked they can advise on the likely outcomes of choices or actions, but the decision must always be the service users.

1.4 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker is not a neutral mediator or part of the service provision team. The role of the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker is only to support the service user to express their wishes and not to persuade or influence the service user. This should be made clear to any relative, worker or service provider who attempts to use the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker in this way.

1.5 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should ensure that at

any meeting at which others are present, all parties speak directly to the service user and not through the Flying advocate.

1.6 Sometimes the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker may not need to do any more than offer back up information or moral support. If the service user is able and prepared to speak on their own behalf they should be supported to do this. Self-advocacy is more empowering than having some one else speak for you.

1.7 Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers do not do things that the service user has not asked them to do. The service user has a responsibility to decide the pace of the work, how much they want you to do and when the relationship should end.

1.8 Sometimes people may find it hard to express what their concerns and needs are. The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should be prepared to take as much time as is necessary to ensure that they have fully understood what the person wants.

1.9 A Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should not promise more than they can achieve. The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker must be open and honest about their own limitations and about the limitations of the AdvoCard project. If there is something that can't be done, then the service user should be made aware of it.

1.10 A Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker must be aware of the importance of keeping promises and appointments as service users may have felt betrayed and let down in the past.

1.11 Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers must avoid personal attacks on service providers, service users or other workers.

1.12 Service users should be encouraged to compose and sign their own letters.

2. Confidentiality within the advocacy relationship.

2.1 A Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker must protect and maintain the confidentiality of all those who are a part of the AdvoCard project.

2.2 No outside contact should be made concerning the service user or steps taken regarding their situation without their knowledge and consent.

2.3 In extreme circumstances, where the safety and well-being of the service user or that of a third person is involved, it may be necessary to break this confidentiality. If this situation arises it should be discussed first with the service user and with an AdvoCard project worker.

2.4 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should never hold information about the service user's situation, circumstances or treatment that is not available to the service user. Any information that the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker gains in meetings or conversations at which the service user is not present should be passed on to them as soon as possible.

3. Boundaries

3.1 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should not receive any information from a third party that cannot be passed on to the service user. The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should not ask for information about the service user that they don't need.

3.2 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker is not a mental health service professional, and should not offer professional judgment on methods of treatment.

3.3 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should not accept money or gifts from service users.

3.4 The Volunteer Advocacy Worker should take all complaints and opinions expressed by the service user seriously, even if others see these opinions, thoughts and feelings as being caused by the service user's distress or state of mind at the time.

3.5 While dealing with a complaint or issue, the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should consult the service user continually on developments.

3.6 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should not give her or his home address or telephone number to a service user. All contact should be made through the AdvoCard office or telephone provided by AdvoCard.

3.7 Whilst it is possible that an advocate and service user may develop a relationship, the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should be aware of the way in which their role will alter if this occurs and guard against the relationship becoming potentially abusive on either side.

4. Safety

4.1 Safety should be the main priority in all decisions taken during advocacy work. If a situation causes concern to the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker regarding the safety of themselves, the service user or a third party, the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should act in a way that is consistent with this principle. The circumstances should be discussed with AdvoCard workers at the earliest opportunity. Should a situation arise outwith office hours, the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker should take necessary action and the office should be informed through a message on the answering machine. AdvoCard workers will follow this up as a matter of urgency and will uphold decisions made by the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy

Worker based on safety concerns.

4.2 If a Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker arranges to meet a service user outwith the project premises a third party should be informed of the details of the arrangement. If necessary a message can be left on the AdvoCard answering machine.

4.3 Whenever possible arrangements should be made to meet in a public place e.g. a cafe or a convenient office. If this is impossible and a visit to the service user's home is essential, then this visit should not be made alone. A second party, either another Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker or a project worker must accompany the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker on the visit.

4.4 Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers should not provide lifts to those using the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker service. If it is necessary to accompany someone to an appointment or meeting then public transport or a taxi should be used. Travel costs incurred will be refunded on production of a ticket or receipt.

4.5 If making visits at night the Volunteer Advocacy Worker should take a taxi from door to door. AdvoCard provides the number of a contract taxi service for use on these occasions.

5. Equal Opportunities

5.1 AdvoCard has an equal opportunities policy. Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers should make themselves familiar with this document and adhere to the guidelines stated in it at all times.

6. Support

6.1 After each Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker contact or

meeting, a project worker will be available, if needed, for debriefing and for reflecting on practice. This support will be made available as soon as is possible after the meeting.

6.2 There is an expectation that Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers will participate in any support meetings arranged by AdvoCard workers.

7. Information held by the project.

7.1 Information given to the project workers by service users, volunteer advocates and Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers will be treated as confidential in all cases.

7.2 No information will be shared as a matter of course with Management Committee members or with other people connected with the project. There will be occasions however, when it will be necessary for information to be shared by AdvoCard support staff and with their supervisor or line manager.

7.3 If a situation arises where project workers feel that it is necessary to share information with Management Committee members or others connected with the project, (apart from supervisors) then the project workers will inform the person to whom this information pertains, and will inform them of their reasons for sharing this information.

8. Health and Safety

8.1 AdvoCard works towards protecting and promoting the health and safety of all volunteers whilst they are engaged in the work of the project.

8.2 It is expected that all volunteers will follow the health and safety guidelines which AdvoCard provides.

9. Supervision/support

9.1 Regular meetings are arranged by AdvoCard workers for the purpose of group support.

9.2 The workers will endeavour to provide individual support for each Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker if requested to do so by the Flying Advocate. If an issue is identified by the workers, which it is felt necessary to discuss with a Volunteer Advocacy Worker, one of the workers will call a meeting. These meetings will be held as quickly as possible.

10. Absence/resignation

10.1 If at any time a Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers unable to attend a meeting or appointment which has been arranged with a service user, they should inform the AdvoCard workers so that alternative arrangements can be made.

10.2 When a Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker wishes to resign from the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker service, they should give the AdvoCard workers reasonable notice of their intention.

11. Expenses

11.1 All reasonable expenses will be refunded to Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers on production of an appropriate receipt.

11.2 Expenses can include reasonable costs incurred through travel, purchase of tea, coffee and snacks, child care or carers' costs and telephone calls.

12. Legal liability

12.1 AdvoCard undertakes to provide insurance for all Short-Term

Volunteer Advocacy Workers and representatives whilst they are engaged in voluntary work for the project.

13. Record Keeping

13.1 AdvoCard has a system for recording all uses of the Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Worker service for monitoring and statistical purposes. Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers must become familiar with this system and should endeavour to keep records up to date at all times.

13.2 AdvoCard has an open access system of record keeping and Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers should ensure that any notes which are made during an interview as an aid to memory or for future reference are shared with the service user as they are made or immediately after.

13.3 These notes should be filed in the AdvoCard office and should not be removed from the office unless under special circumstances.

13.4 If it is felt necessary to take notes out of the office, e.g. in order to refer to figures or for information during a meeting with a third party, then the service user should be informed and their permission to use these notes requested.

14. Complaints

14.1 AdvoCard has a complaints procedure. Copies of this procedure will be made available to all Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers, service users and any others who come into contact with the project.

15. Access to office

15.1 The Short-Term Volunteer Advocacy Workers will not have access to the AdvoCard office with out the presence of one of the project workers or management committee members.