

Outline Job Description for Volunteer Advocacy Workers

Background

AdvoCard is an independent advocacy scheme for mental health service users living in Edinburgh. **Volunteer Advocacy Workers** support individuals to get their voices heard and their views across on issues that affect their day-to-day lives in the community.

Volunteer Advocacy Workers are volunteers who have completed our Volunteer Advocacy Workers' Stage 1 Training Programme and have been accepted as volunteers with AdvoCard. People from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences join our project as volunteers including those who have direct experience of using mental health services.

AdvoCard reserves the right, at all times, to have the final decision on who works as a Volunteer Advocacy Worker with AdvoCard.

Their advocacy work is organised and supported by the Advocacy Manager Karen Anderson and the Advocacy Assistant Jackie McGinty. Volunteers can also access support from other staff members: Bryan Davies, the Project Manager; Jane Rubens, the Training Manager; Jane Cairns, the Assistant Trainer; Janette McDougall, the Finance Worker; Jean Crombie, the Receptionist/Administrator and Marion Hadland, the Clerical Worker. The Management Committee oversees their work and the work of the project.

The project is funded by the Scottish Executive and the City of Edinburgh Council through Mental Health Specific Grant and Section 10.

Most Volunteer Advocacy Workers work with service users through AdvoCard's:

- **Short-term Advocacy Service** - where a service user approaches the project for advocacy support for a specific issue. One of the Volunteer Advocacy Workers is linked to that service user for an issue-led advocacy arrangement. Often the service

user and volunteer will meet once or twice and then when the advocacy is completed their work together is ended. Sometimes the issues raised are complex and inter-related. Advocacy in this case may involve meetings over several months, with the relationship ending when the advocacy has reached a point of resolution.

Volunteer Advocacy Workers also deliver advocacy through AdvoCard's:

- **Long-Term matched Advocacy Service** – a relationship where a service user is matched to a specific Volunteer Advocacy Worker. The pair develop a written agreement that anticipates their future advocacy work based on the experience of the service user. This is a smaller part of our service but one that we are keen to build up as it is highly valued by some long-term service users. They know that if they hit a difficult time or some kind of a crisis, they have an established relationship with a Volunteer Advocacy Worker who can support them. We ask that long term volunteers commit as far as possible to being available for one year's volunteering.

Main Tasks of an AdvoCard Volunteer Advocacy Worker:

- To meet with a mental health service user and to develop a rapport for the purpose of providing advocacy support.
- To determine the nature of the issue that the mental health service user is experiencing by means of active listening.
- To outline and explore the options available to that service user to deal with the defined problem or issue.
- To help to develop a plan or strategy with the service user to achieve their desired outcome.
- To provide any practical means possible to help that service user achieve their desired outcome. Such support may take the form of:

- researching relevant information
 - accompanying the service user to appointments and then providing appropriate assistance to the service user to ensure that their views are taken into account by the professionals from whom they are seeking a service. Examples are taking notes of the meeting or speaking on behalf of the service user when requested to do so by the service user
 - helping to write letters or fill in forms
 - supplying other forms of practical support which help to ensure that the service user's views about their care and treatment are noted.
- Debrief with the service user about their advocacy experience.
 - Attend advocacy support group meetings as agreed with the Advocacy Manager.
 - Record their advocacy work in line with AdvoCard's procedures.

The principle underlying any advocacy work that the Volunteer Advocacy Worker carries out on behalf of the service user, is that the Volunteer Advocacy Worker acts under the direction of the service user rather than that of any other party. The Volunteer Advocacy Worker may have to put their personal view to one side in order to ensure that the expressed wishes of the service user are taken in to account.

Selection Criteria

To carry out such work, AdvoCard Volunteer Advocacy Workers are people who are deemed to have particular qualities and understanding of mental health and related issues.

For selection for our Stage 1 Training for Volunteer Advocacy Workers, we look for potential volunteers to demonstrate:

- A positive attitude to people who use the mental health services and an understanding of why advocacy is necessary.

- A commitment to the principles of advocacy ascribed to by AdvoCard.
- Ability and commitment to complete the AdvoCard training.
- Ability and commitment to carry out the responsibilities agreed between AdvoCard, the service user and the Volunteer Advocacy Worker.
- A willingness to learn and a willingness to examine personal attitudes and to be open minded.
- Good communication skills, particularly listening skills.
- A commitment to AdvoCard's Policy of Equal Opportunities and a positive attitude to people who may have experiences of discrimination

To be successful in going ahead as a Volunteer Advocacy Worker, participants will also be expected to demonstrate throughout the Stage 1 training:

- The ability to put personal opinions to one side and support the service user to get their own ideas across.
- Realism about what can be achieved and the ability to respond objectively as a Volunteer Advocacy Worker.
- Awareness of the need for confidentiality.
- Patience and the ability to work at the pace of the service user.

AdvoCard reserves the right, at all times, to have the final decision on who attends Advocard training programmes and who goes ahead as a volunteer.