

Statement on Support Groups and Attendance

The Advocacy Staff organise and run regular Support Group Meetings as a way of providing support to volunteers in their advocacy work. These peer support meetings are held to provide good back up in addition to the more immediate and individual support that is given to volunteer advocacy workers who request direct support around the time of their advocacy work.

The purpose of Support Group meetings is to get volunteers active in advocacy work together to discuss experience and share practice. These opportunities are particularly important because the level of confidentiality we assure our service users means that we do not discuss any information about a service user outwith the project. Often, issues do arise in which a volunteer advocacy worker will want to seek further information, to discuss the available options and to “offload” some of the feelings that come as a result of a particular advocacy experience. The main place to do this with other volunteers who are involved in similar work is in support groups.

When at a Support Group meeting, volunteer advocacy workers must avoid details that would identify a service user in favour of concentrating on the issues that the situation involves. Our purpose for talking about these experiences is for learning and drawing understanding of the best advocacy practice possible. It is a basic groundrule that things which are discussed in the meetings are kept with the people attending the meeting and not shared elsewhere.

When a new group of advocacy workers finishes their Stage 1 training, they are expected to attend a support group meeting of that group for the first six months of their advocacy work the AdvoCard. This system allows people who are new to advocacy and to the project to concentrate on issues that are common to new volunteers.

Also, having worked together as a training group, this same group of people can provide the appropriate sense of safety and support needed to discuss their advocacy work with each other.

Attending 3 support group meetings per year is a requirement placed on volunteers by the project. The meetings are run approximately every 4-6 weeks and are held on a rota of timings between mid-day, early evening and evening. They are also scheduled on different days of the week. Every third meeting is a "themed" support group meeting where people contribute to discussion about a topic of general interest to volunteer advocacy workers.

We are aware that attending support group meetings is above and beyond the time you offer to do advocacy. We have required the attendance of 3 meetings to ensure that each volunteer spends some time reflecting on their practice and sharing their experience with other volunteer advocacy workers. We see this as essential to doing good quality advocacy work.