

a city-wide advocacy project

**AdvoCard**

for users of mental health services

## **Information for trainees**



### **AdvoCard Mission Statement**

AdvoCard is a service user-led, independent advocacy organisation. Our services are primarily for people with experience of mental ill-health in Edinburgh. We aim to provide opportunities for people to participate more effectively in decisions that affect all aspects of their lives.

#### **AdvoCard has three individual advocacy services:**

- **Volunteer delivered advocacy service** – which focuses on advocating for individuals living in the community in Edinburgh around a wide range of issues that effect their lives. This service is delivered through volunteer advocacy workers
- **Mental Health Act advocacy service** – an advocacy service which focuses on advocating for people living in their community in Edinburgh, who either face compulsory treatment under the Mental Health Act 2003 and/or want to use the safeguards (advance statements, named persons etc) within the Act. This service is delivered through employed advocacy workers.
- **Hospital advocacy service** – which focuses on providing individual advocacy to anyone using the following services at the Royal Edinburgh hospital: acute admission wards (including Intensive Psychiatric Care Unit), rehabilitation services, forensic services, older people's services and Young People's services and associated services.

## **Volunteer Advocacy in AdvoCard**

At AdvoCard, our highly valued team of Volunteer Advocacy Workers deliver a vital advocacy service to mental health service users in Edinburgh.

Our volunteers come with a wide range of backgrounds, skills and experience. What they all share is a commitment to advocacy and a belief that mental health service users should have their voices heard and their rights respected.

Advocacy can involve: listening and helping service users identify and explore their options; going to meetings or appointments with service users; helping to draft letters; accessing information and offering moral support

**The majority of advocacy work occurs during the general 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. working week. Therefore if you are interested in becoming involved, you will need to have daytime availability during the general working week to volunteer for the project.**

## **Volunteer Training in AdvoCard**

Maintaining training as a high priority in advocacy has been central to AdvoCard's development. We aim to keep all our advocacy workers informed and skilled at delivering high quality advocacy to our service users. Training is also viewed as a major bonus to volunteers who seek to update and extend the knowledge and skills they bring to the project. Personal development is core.

The training workers provide training to all AdvoCard staff, volunteers and committee members on a range of topics necessary to provide a good quality service.

**Volunteer Advocacy Worker Training** - is our initial training for our new volunteers who want to deliver advocacy through the project. It is a 10 session training programme designed to develop the knowledge and skills that are necessary to carry out mental health advocacy.

The training is participative and builds on skills that most people use in daily life. The course covers advocacy as a concept, AdvoCard's

approach, the concept of mental health / mental ill health, aspects of the mental health system and practice of the skills involved in advocacy, among other topics.

The content of this training has been thoroughly updated and extended to make sure it is up to date with the concepts of advocacy and the legislation we work with.

**AdvoCard Follow On Training** - is aimed at active advocacy workers who want to update and further develop their knowledge and skills for advocacy.

We organise events and training in relation to legislation, services, Scottish Mental Health First Aid, as well as sessions such as 'Ethical Advocacy?' and 'Letter writing for advocacy' at which more experienced workers can reflect on and further develop their advocacy skills.

**External Training** - we have a limited budget for external training opportunities and can support the attendance of some Volunteer Advocacy Workers at seminars, conferences and training sessions run by other organisations and providers. There are also a lot of free training events that we keep you up to date with.

### **Support & Development Groups for Volunteers:**

Volunteer Advocacy Workers meet 6 times a year to:

- **review advocacy work**
- **increase their skills and knowledge**
- **share experiences**
- **learn from one another**
- **draw support from other people involved in similar work**
- **encourage ideas for best practice**

Direct 1:1 support is also provided to individual volunteers by support staff in relation to each advocacy request and also more formally on request.

Out of pocket expenses will be covered in line with our Expenses Policy. Please ask staff or visit [advocard.org.uk](http://advocard.org.uk) to see the policy.



## **Volunteer Advocacy Workers - Outline Job Description**

### **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' Initial 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.

The Board of Directors oversees the work of the project.

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 occasionally 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 maintain 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 volunteers in a long-term advocacy relationship 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 his/her 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 his/her 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.

## Contact us

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The office is open for appointments Monday - Friday 10.00 - 4.00

These Lothian Buses stop close to this office: 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 22, 25, 49

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