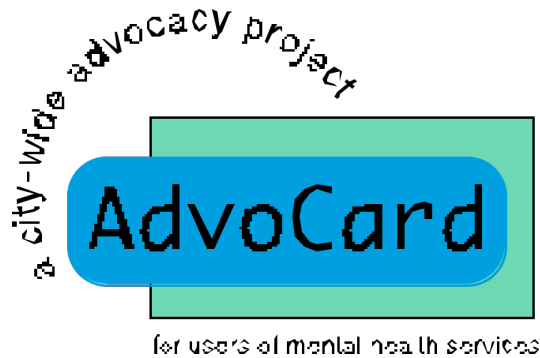


Information For Prospective Volunteer Advocacy Workers

www.timeforadvocacy.org.uk



About AdvoCard

AdvoCard is an independent advocacy scheme for users of mental health services who live in Edinburgh.

The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 gives a right to access advocacy to anyone with a “mental disorder”. Most of this Act was implemented in October 2005. It is the first time that a legal right to advocacy has been established in law. AdvoCard receives a large number of requests for volunteer advocacy support and is currently recruiting to expand and diversify its volunteer base to meet demand and ensure that all mental health service users can access the project with ease and confidence

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. Volunteers then go on to work with someone else. Some volunteers work with more than one service user, depending on their availability.

Volunteer Advocacy Workers also deliver advocacy through AdvoCard's

- **“Long-term Advocacy” service** - a one to one relationship where a service user is matched to a specific Volunteer Advocacy Worker. The pair develops 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. It is highly valued by some service users because 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.

Since you have made an inquiry about volunteering, here is some information that may answer some of your questions about our project...

What will a Volunteer do?

The volunteer will work as a **Volunteer Advocacy Worker**. This means supporting the service user to make their own informed choices when they seek help or have contact with services. These may be choices about their treatment, or about any other aspects of their lives. The most important thing for a volunteer is to help people who use mental health services to speak for themselves and to do their best to see that the views of the service user are taken seriously by the agencies and professionals they approach.

The Volunteer Advocacy Worker cannot make decisions on the service user's behalf, or assume that they know what is best. They can only repeat to others what they know to be the service user's views and opinions.

In the case of a “Long-term” relationship, the service user and their Volunteer Advocacy Worker will draw up an agreement which will state in general terms what the service user (‘cardholder’) is prepared to have done for them, and what the Volunteer Advocacy Worker is prepared to do on their behalf.

What are we looking for in a volunteer?

We are looking for someone who is interested in other people, who can listen and can respect another person's point of view and right to be heard.

Volunteers also need to be prepared to devote time and energy to the project and to work in ways that are consistent with the aims and policies of AdvoCard.

The majority of the advocacy work our volunteers are involved in 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. People with full time commitments elsewhere will find it difficult to become involved unless there is flexibility in their arrangements.

What training is provided?

We provide a Stage 1 training programme, which will cover the information and skills that you will need to become someone's Volunteer Advocacy Worker.

During the training we will cover the basics of being a Volunteer Advocacy Worker, looking at the information and skills that are important to advocacy. The methods we will use to cover the course content will be varied but will include presentations from the trainers and specialists from the field of mental health, group discussions and experiential exercises where we practice advocacy skills.

The topics we will cover include: looking at advocacy itself; mental health issues and treatments; the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003; confidence-building; assertiveness; negotiation skills and communication skills.

As we go through each session, a handbook will be built up which will contain a record of what we do in the session plus background and reference materials. By the end of the training programme, you will have a substantial handbook, which will be useful to you as a Volunteer Advocacy Worker.

Opportunities for further training will come from our ongoing training for established Volunteer Advocacy Workers and through attendance at training events delivered by other organisations.

What support do we offer?

We have regular Volunteer Advocacy Worker support meetings. These are attended by other volunteers who have completed the AdvoCard training and by a member of the support staff.

In addition to this support staff are available to meet Volunteer Advocacy Workers on an individual basis to discuss a specific difficulty or if you feel at all concerned about any aspect of your work as an Advocacy Worker.

For volunteers who are with the project more than one year, a “Volunteer Review” can be organised between the volunteer and a staff member to feedback about that person’s experience of advocacy and to plan for ways to support the further development of the volunteer as an Advocacy Worker.

What level of commitment do we expect?

After the initial training period, your level of commitment can be tailored to your availability and interest. Our aim is to match the time needed by our service users to the time that volunteers can offer.

Since advocacy often involves direct approaches to agencies and organisations, a great deal of our work takes place within “normal” working hours. It will be difficult to offer your advocacy work should you have other commitments that do not permit you to volunteer at some time during the day, Monday to Friday each week.

In the case of “Long-term” advocacy, we ask that Volunteer Advocacy Workers aim to be involved with the service user for one year.

What expenses will be paid and how are they administered?

We will reimburse any out of pocket expenses that you incur during the course of your duties as a Volunteer Advocacy Worker. These would include travel expenses, child care/carer's expenses and phone calls relating to your advocacy work. These expenses would be paid as long as you can provide a receipt for any costs.

What will a volunteer gain from being a Volunteer Advocacy Worker?

While there will be no immediate financial gain through your work at AdvoCard, there are things that AdvoCard can offer you. These

include training opportunities, direct experience of advocacy work, the back up and resources of the AdvoCard project as well as the support of the project workers and the other Volunteer Advocacy Workers. AdvoCard has developed a system of internally certifying training received within the project. The Stage 1 certificate is given on successful completion of the basic training programme.

How can I find out more?

Firstly, fill in the Application Form and send it back to us.

Then come along to our Introduction Meeting. This will be an opportunity for us to tell you more about the project and how it works, and to answer any questions that you may have about AdvoCard. You will also have a short interview with a member of AdvoCard staff, a Committee Member or a Volunteer Advocacy Worker.

If you have any queries, or would like any points clarified, please contact the AdvoCard office and speak to Jane R or Jane C:

Telephone: 0131 554 5307

Fax: 0131 555 0692

Email: advocacy@advocard.org.uk

AdvoCard
332 Leith Walk
Edinburgh
EH6 5BR.

Tel: 0131 554 5307



Our office is situated about halfway down Leith Walk, on the left hand side, about 100 yards down from Pilrig Church. Please ring the buzzer on arrival.

Buses stopping on Leith Walk near our office are:

Lothian: 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22, 25, and 49.

Parking is available on nearby streets, although roadworks for the new tram system are making the availability of this unpredictable at the moment!

Advocard's Investing in Volunteers Award 2009



AdvoCard's commitment to good practice in volunteer support & management has been recognised by an Investing In Volunteers award.

AdvoCard was assessed across 4 main areas:

- * Planning for volunteer involvement
- * Recruiting volunteers
- * Selecting and matching volunteers
- * Supporting and retaining volunteers

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. The Standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management, and also publicly demonstrates their commitment to volunteering.

The award is valid for 3 years and we will continue to review and develop our practice over this time and beyond.

If you would like to see a copy of the final assessment, ask the office or download it at www.timeforadvocacy.org.uk.



Criminal Record Declaration

Important information for applicants

'The Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme (PVG Scheme) is a Scottish Government membership scheme for people who work with vulnerable groups. It helps to ensure that those who have regular contact with children and protected adults through paid and unpaid work do not have a known history of harmful behaviour.

People who work, on a regular basis, with vulnerable groups will join the PVG Scheme and, from then on, their membership records will be automatically updated if any new vetting information arises. Vetting information is conviction information retrieved from criminal justice systems and non-conviction information held by the police that is considered relevant.

Continuing to collect vetting information, after a person becomes a PVG Scheme member, will help to ensure that new information indicating that they might pose a risk to vulnerable groups can be acted upon promptly. In the vast majority of cases, there will be no new vetting information that is relevant to work with vulnerable groups.

In instances when vetting or referral information indicates that a person may pose a risk to vulnerable groups, Disclosure Scotland will consider all the information available before deciding whether a person should be placed under consideration for listing on one or both of the barred lists.'

(Taken from: Disclosure Scotland's PVG Information Booklet
http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/pvg/pvg_index.html)

People on the barred lists would not be members of the PVG Scheme and then not able to be considered for work with Advocard. Volunteers and paid workers have to obtain up to date certification that they are members of the PVG scheme before they can start work.

Where individuals have criminal convictions but are approved members of the PVG scheme, AdvoCard will rely upon information obtained from the PVG scheme (as well as through personal declarations) to determine who can join AdvoCard either as a volunteer or for paid work. AdvoCard staff will review all information received through a PVG certificate and will determine whether we will consider the person as suitable to work through our project. Others will be considered in light of factors such as how long ago the activity occurred or whether any other considerations should be taken in to account.

Where AdvoCard has concerns about the information recorded, these will be discussed directly with the individual and then a decision will be made about whether we will agree to accept this person as a volunteer (or paid worker). In certain circumstances we may agree to special arrangements being made for the new worker which would help the person to start advocacy work and give us more confidence in the person's suitability to work with vulnerable adults.

All PVG information will be treated in the strictest confidence in line with our policy on "The secure handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosure Information".

Please also refer to our Recruitment of Ex-offenders Policy.

These are available through the office or at:
www.advocard.org.uk/publications

Also further information on the PVG Scheme is available at
www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/pvg

Apex Scotland can offer guidance on disclosure of convictions and filling in application forms, writing disclosure letters, non-conviction information, etc. Contact them on **Tel:** 0131 467 8300

Fax: 0131 467 7914 **Email:** lothian@apexscotland.org.uk