

Advocacy Code of Practice

- The Code of Practice provides a set of guidelines and a framework for the advocacy service to work within. It aims to provide clarity, support and boundaries for our day to day practice. We have adapted the Action for Advocacy Code of Practice (2002) and the revised version of this carried out by The National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) in 2014. The code is divided into the following chapters:

1. CLARITY OF PURPOSE

- Advocates will be clear about the nature and extent of their role and should be able to explain, in straight forward language, what advocacy is and isn't. This includes providing clients with a clear explanation of their role at the start of any new relationship. They will be able to explain why some people need advocacy; when people have a statutory right to access advocacy and what other advocacy services are available in the area and the benefits that advocacy can bring.
- Advocates should understand the boundaries of their role. They will not take the role of a counsellor, therapist, advice worker or befriender or any other role that is not advocacy.
- Advocates do not work in "best interests" and will only act with the consent of the client and will use a non-instructed approach if the client has been assessed as lacking capacity.
- If another organization is better placed to carry out the work we will refer/signpost to other agencies with the clients consent and will refer people if they lack the capacity to consent to the referral.
- Advocates will not make a commitment that they know they cannot uphold or deliver.
- Advocates will be able to provide written information about the service, including a copy of the Code of Practice to clients, carers or other professionals if requested.

2. INDEPENDENCE

- The Advocacy service is structurally and psychologically independent from all statutory organizations and from all service providers.
- The service operates in a contract culture. Where funding is received from the CCG or the Local Authority we will ensure that our independence is explicitly stated in our contracts. Our independence is fundamental and integral to our work.
- Advocates will be able to describe how they are independent of other service providers.
- We will arrange for another advocacy organization to provide advocacy if there is ever a conflict of interest between the advocacy service and Rochdale & District Mind's other services. The service user will be given the choice.
- Advocates are free to act according to the wishes and needs of clients. They should not be compromised through pressure from other providers including funders to act in any way that is

not in line with advocacy principles and the Advocacy Code of Practice or other relevant guidance.

- Advocates and clients should be treated with courtesy & respect by all parties. If other professionals depart from this, consideration will be given to raising the issue through a complaint to their manager. If a service user departs from this, we will look to resolve the issue, but may have to close the case if it can't be resolved.

3. PERSON-CENTRED

- Advocates will ensure, as far as possible, that the advocacy support is appropriate to the client's needs and/or expressed wishes.
- The Advocate will only act with the client's explicit consent where they have the capacity to instruct. We do not give advice or an opinion and we will only support the client to express their view and their view only.
- To support this process we will listen and discuss choices and options, we will provide accurate and up to date information to help the client make informed choices if requested to do so and we will agree a plan of action based on agreed advocacy issues and we will work in partnership to achieve them.
- We will use a non-instructed advocacy approach to ensure, as far as possible, that the client remains at the centre of the decision making process, where the client is unable to instruct, due to a lack of capacity around a particular issue or issues.

4. EMPOWERMENT

- The service recognizes that users of mental health services can be disadvantaged by the nature of their distress, by the social stigma and by the controlling nature of some psychiatric interventions.
- We aim to empower people by supporting them to explore their choices and options, to access information and services, to defend their rights and to express their views and concerns. We aim to promote self-advocacy through all of our work.
- We will work in partnership with the people we support and will take their side.
- The promotion of self-advocacy will be central to this approach.
- The promotion of supported decision making to ensure that the client is at the centre of the decision making process.

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Advocacy providers should ensure, as far as possible, that they are able to meet the needs of the population that they serve and where this is compromised (due to a lack of resources) that it is raised with relevant stakeholders/funders.
- Advocates will be fully conversant with Rochdale & District Mind's equal opportunities policy and will adhere to this policy at all times.
- Advocacy providers will work within the framework of human rights and equality legislation and other relevant legislation.
- Advocates should be respectful of client's religious, cultural and spiritual needs and be proactive in ensuring that these are met, as far as possible.

6. ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICE

- The Advocacy scheme recognizes the need to be proactive in tackling all forms of oppression, discrimination and bad practice both internal and external to the service.

- Advocacy providers should ensure there are systems in place that enable advocates to whistle blow, make complaints, make a safeguarding alert or seek legal advice where appropriate.
- This involves reflecting on their own practice and appropriately challenging the practice of others. This is essential if services are to improve.

7. SAFEGUARDING

- Advocacy providers should have suitable adult and child safeguarding policies and procedures in place that enable the advocate to make a safeguarding alert or represent the client through the process.
- Advocates should be trained in and knowledgeable about the different forms in which abuse and neglect can take place, including but not limited to, physical, emotional and financial abuse.
- Advocates should be aware of the appropriate action to take if safeguarding issues are identified.
- Advocates should be aware of the organisation's whistleblowing policy and procedures and be supported to make use of these where appropriate.
- The organisation should have a clear policy, which is understood by all advocates, detailing in what circumstances client confidentiality can be breached.
- The organisation should have strong links with the local safeguarding agencies if alerts need to be raised.
- Advocates and providers should ensure that any alerts are followed up and outcomes recorded.

8. ACCESSABILITY

- The advocacy service is free. This is a fundamental principle of advocacy.
- Advocates will meet clients in places and at times which are mutually convenient and in line with our risk procedures.
- Advocates should make every effort to ensure that any information or publicity provided is accessible and as easy to understand as possible.
- Advocacy providers will ensure that there is clear referral process.
- Advocates will ensure that clients are aware of how to contact them and when.
- Advocates will make every effort to ensure that information they have gathered on behalf of the client is accessible and understandable to them.

9. ACCOUNTABILITY

- Advocates will operate within the law at all times and will ensure that they adhere to their organisations employment and funding contracts.
- Advocates will treat clients with respect and dignity at all times.
- Advocates will conduct themselves in a professional and responsible manner in all dealings with service users, carers, professionals and colleagues. Where disputes arise the Line Manager must be contacted at the earliest opportunity.
- Advocates are accountable to service users, to the organisation and to the Commissioners of the service.
- Accurate and up to date written records must be kept of action taken and progress made and these should be shared as is appropriate.
- Service users must be kept informed of the progress made around the agreed issues and must be consulted at regular intervals as is appropriate.
- Advocates must comply with the organisations Data Protection policy.
- At the end of each case service users must be given the opportunity to give feedback about their experience of the service through the offer of an evaluation form both in person when appropriate and by post.

- The Advocate will provide information to service users on how to complain about the advocacy service.

10. CONFIDENTIALITY

- Advocates will at all times observe and respect the service user's right to confidentiality and will not share information about them without their explicit consent. There are exceptions to this rule – see confidentiality procedure for further guidance.
- The service is confidential except in situations where it is felt there is an issue of risk or abuse. Where possible this must be discussed with your line manager and the client where appropriate before confidentiality is breached.
- It is important that Advocates explain confidentiality clearly at the first contact or meeting with the client as this sets one of the boundaries for the advocacy partnership.

11. SUPPORTING ADVOCATES

- Advocacy providers should ensure the following is available, and that advocates make full use of and contribute to:
 1. A supportive and open team culture.
 2. On-going relevant training and personal development opportunities.
 3. One to one case work supervision with the line manager or other identified person who is suitably skilled and knowledgeable about the role of advocacy.
 4. Annual appraisal against agreed targets.
 5. Group support and networking opportunities with other advocates.
 6. Opportunities for reflection and analysis of their own practice.
 7. Access to counselling.
 8. Well Being policy.
- Advocacy providers should ensure that advocates are supported to carry out their roles safely and competently through having the right knowledge and skills.
- Advocates should ensure they have access to, and know how to use, a wide range of information resources such as books, journals and the internet, which are accurate and up to date.
- Advocacy providers should consider putting in place processes for mentoring or shadowing advocates where this may enhance or support development of their practice.