

Recording Advocacy Work

Recordkeeping within AdvoCard is governed by our policy on Data Protection (also contained in this manual)).

In general, we work to keep records to a minimum amount of information about individuals and view anything written as belonging to that person. Because of the experience of many mental health service users who have large files of information kept about them elsewhere, we are striving to reduce the amount of personal information on file and in computer with a view to reducing the likelihood of information (particularly out of date information) passing on which is not in the interest of that service user.

However, in order to function as an efficient service, a certain amount of information is kept to carry out advocacy arrangements. This information is overseen by the Advocacy Staff.

We also keep a certain amount of information to monitor the use of our service. This information is essential for the world outside of AdvoCard to justify the way we use our funding and to make clear what we do.

It is the responsibility of each volunteer who has completed an advocacy request to fill in our record sheet each time piece of work is completed.

This information is then collated on a project wide basis to tell us how many advocacy appointments were filled, how many hours volunteers gave their time to work for the project, what types of issues were dealt with, what type of advocacy work was done, etc. Once the monthly and yearly collation takes place, this information becomes the public information we use to promote and sustain the project.

Monitoring information is also used to track the work that each volunteer gives to the project. A volunteer's record is collated and entered in their portfolio. It is then possible to examine the type of work a volunteer has been doing. This may show, for example, where a volunteer is developing a particular expertise in an area of mental health advocacy or it may be used to identify that there are areas of advocacy work that a volunteer has yet to experience. In the later case, Advocacy staff could then try to steer that type of work towards the volunteer as it comes in to the project.

When a volunteer fills in a recording sheet, only brief and necessary details are given. The information should be written in a way that the service user can understand and also in a way that would be fair and non-judgemental. Volunteers are asked to write as neatly as possible.

The volunteer also records the time taken to meet that advocacy request which will include any preparation and follow up time in addition to travelling time. To make monitoring simple and to aid the collation process, a coding system for the issues covered and workload categories has been devised. The system will be explained to new volunteers who are completing records.

Staff working with the volunteers should remind and support volunteers to complete their monitoring records after each advocacy experience. However, it is helpful if volunteers take responsibility for ensuring that their recording work is completed and up to date. Otherwise, the volunteer will be pursued!