

Your Service, Your Rights

Setting up an Advisory Group in your Service.

Promoting good quality and safe services.



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Introduction

An Advisory Group is a group of people who meet regularly to discuss issues and ideas related to the service and support they receive. They represent the views of people using the service and provide advice to their service about how it does its work.



Principles

An Advisory Group is based on the human rights principles of participation and inclusion; the right to freedom of opinion and the right to be safe under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It is one way participants can be involved in making decisions and speaking up about services and support they receive. It requires commitment from all stakeholders; participants, staff, management and Board.



Purpose

An Advisory Group provides a way for people to have a say about their service in a safe and supported way.

It also gives people with an opportunity to build self-advocacy skills and confidence to make choices and speak up.

This may lead to other opportunities within the organisation or in Supporting the development of an Advisory Group is one way an organisation can promote inclusion and human rights, and work to make sure services are of good quality and safe.

Getting Started



1. Provide Information

Have conversations with participants at your service about rights, speaking up, and what an Advisory Group is. Give people information in Easy Read and other accessible formats to read and discuss with their supporters, including family and others.

2. Provide Training – Your Service, Your Rights

Run training session with participants to increase understanding of rights and speaking up. This includes the Your Service, Your Rights workshops.

Make sure staff understand their role in supporting people to be part of the group. It may be helpful to include staff who attended the Your Service, Your Rights workshops to provide support.

3. Recruit Members

- Call for expressions of interest to join the group – ask people why they are interested and what they can bring to the group.
- Make sure you have good representation from people of different ages and genders, from different cultural backgrounds, and people who use different service types.
- Numbers; minimum of 5 and maximum of 10 people to start.
- Agree on a date, time and place for the first meeting. Consider what else is on at the time, support needed, transport etc.
- Make sure people know the first meeting will be about setting up the group. It is a chance for people to chat and find out more about what is involved.
- Make sure people know they can leave the group at any time.
- Make people with high support needs and people who communicate in different ways feel welcome and have the opportunity to be involved.

Support

It takes practice and support for people to learn meeting skills and understand how to run or be part of an Advisory Group.

Think about what support is needed for group members before, during and after meetings.

Some people may need individual support. This may decrease over time.

Advisory Group Supporters may need to:

- provide practical support to run the group.
- provide support to people to prepare for meetings (e.g. reading the agenda and any papers, preparing what to say)
- support the group to keep the meeting on track and on time
- explain things but not tell people what to think
- encourage people speak up but not speak for them.

Supporters might need specific training to support the group. They should be open to and ask for feedback from group members about how best to support them.



Before the meeting

Meeting Papers

- Papers like agenda, minutes or information on an issue must be in Easy Read or Plain English.
- Send them to all group members at least a week before each meeting so they have time to prepare with their supporters.

Where to meet

- Make sure the place you meet is private and there is space to move around.
- Make the space comfortable and inviting.
- You can use a whiteboard or flipchart and markers.

Online Meetings

- Make sure everyone has access to equipment and online platforms.
- Support people to learn how to use online platforms.

Terms of Reference – The Way We Will Work Together

Group members need to understand the purpose, structure and rules of the group. Terms of Reference are used to clarify details like the roles people have, governance and reporting process. This can be developed in consultation with important stakeholders before, during and after the first meeting.



During the meeting

Make sure everyone knows what the meeting is about and what the plan is.

Set an agenda, print it out for everyone and stick to it.

Always do a warm up activity or icebreaker, something that people are comfortable with.

For examples ask people to share your name, where you live and 1 good thing in your life.

Create or go over group agreement or rules at the start of each meeting.

Let people know what agenda item is being talked about as you go. Check in at the end of each topic to make sure everyone has a chance to have a say.



Have regular breaks during the meeting.

Mix it up

Add variety to meeting; sitting and talking or listening for hours does not work.

Keep checking in with the group and make changes as you go - there are lots of ways to run meetings that can work for everyone.