

# Networking Guide for Advocates

## Introduction

Networking is an important role for advocates to both establish key links within their community as well as keeping up to date with local resources, services and activities. In addition, advocates need to be proactive in identifying opportunities for setting up new networks for the benefit of local consumers. Networks and key contacts provide advocates with helpful information about the community they work in as well as opportunities for sharing information of mutual benefit.

Networking also involves meeting people who can be of help to you and being of help to them. This includes making and maintaining contact and connections with individuals, groups, or institutions with shared interests for the purpose of exchanging and sharing information, resources or services, as well as identifying opportunities for working together on particular issues that will be of benefit to consumers.

The aim of visits and contacts under the umbrella of network development is to maintain networks and contacts and to identify where new networks are needed and additional contacts can be made.

The potential for networking is vast so advocates are expected to find a balance within their workload where they can both prioritise opportunities to establish new networks, particularly amongst vulnerable populations, as well as being responsive to networking opportunities that arise through avenues such as community invitations and requests.

## Responsive Networking

This includes:

1. Attending meetings of local community groups
  - to improve understanding of their issues and focus
  - to identify local contact people who may be able to assist consumers with ongoing support issues and/or matters that are outside jurisdiction
  - to share information about each others services
2. Attending local community network meetings
  - to keep up to date with local issues
  - to make new contacts
3. Network encounters
  - to increase the profile of the advocate and the advocacy service
  - involve systematically attending community events such as information days, seminars, hui, fono, workshops and expos to let people know about the service as well as increasing knowledge and understanding about consumer rights and provider responsibilities
  - to act on informal or spontaneous opportunities that arise, for example, during a Hui where information about rights and advocacy can be shared
  - to generate opportunities for promoting education sessions

- to be available to consumers who may wish to discuss concerns and how to make a complaint
- 4.. Network development
- is planned and strategic and includes follow up or regular visits to consumer groups as an opportunity for ongoing discussion about health and disability consumer rights, issues and advocacy. Contacts can be via letter, email or telephone in order to keep in touch and stay connected with consumer groups..

## **Proactive Networking**

This includes

1. Assertive Networking
  - involves taking a more active role using both existing networks and developing new networks where necessary, to get support for consumers or to assist in promoting the Code to consumers and or providers. This type of networking is about building community capability and capacity to assist advocates in their work. It is likely to be in relation to systemic issues that impact on consumers being able to raise their concerns or providers who repeatedly fail to comply with the Code. Promotion of 'Speaking Up' and other self advocacy programmes can be achieved through this approach.
2. Strategic Networking
  - involves taking a systematic approach to facilitating networking as a deliberate opportunity to meet people in specific situations and at specific events including new events to build network contacts, a personal profile and reputation.
3. Targeted Assertive Networking
  - Identifying opportunities for setting up new networks for the benefit of local consumers
  - Bringing together key people and groups with a shared interest in quality initiatives at a grass roots level.

## **Characteristics of an Effective Networker**

- Acts respectfully and professionally
- Has a good reputation in the community
- Keeps up to date and is well linked to the community
- Is knowledgeable and well regarded for this
- Empowers others, instilling confidence in their efforts
- Is clear about HDC jurisdiction and knows where people with OJ matters can go to be assisted
- Is well prepared and presents information clearly
- Understands reciprocity and acts accordingly
- Is prepared to be bold and take action where this is indicated