



Title: Advocacy in Community Services

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Related procedures:

Related forms:

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1. Purpose

1.1 Ensure that Council staff, particularly those working within the Community Services area, have a clear understanding of their role in relation to advocacy for clients and organisations where appropriate.

1.2 Ensure that where possible structures and processes are established that enable people and organisations to effectively advocate on their own behalf or have access to an appropriate advocate in relation to their needs and the services that they receive.

Rationale

Some residents may experience difficulty in identifying and articulating their needs and accessing information, services and opportunities which are provided by Council, other government agencies and community organisations.

Some residents may experience additional disadvantages in situations that necessitate self-advocacy due to a number of social factors such as gender, age, language, culture, religion, disability or sexuality.

Government and community service providers have a responsibility to ensure that all their clients, and especially vulnerable and disadvantaged clients, have access to information about appropriate opportunities for self-advocacy or support from an appropriate, independent advocate.

It is also a function of Council to offer information to residents about external advocacy mechanisms that may be available to them if they are experiencing difficulties advocating on their own behalf in relation to a third party service provider.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are that:

- A range of advocacy options that clients can access are identified.
- Residents are aware of the advocacy options that are available to them.
- The specific needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in relation to advocacy and service delivery are identified and addressed.
- Residents have access to appropriate support when making decisions that affect their lives.
- Relevant Council staff have access to professional development to support their capacity to provide or access advocacy for residents.
- Council staff who work in the Community Services area are able to promote and support the advocacy needs of vulnerable people, groups and not-for-profit organisations where appropriate
- That Council staff within the Capacity Development Team have a clear understanding of their responsibilities with respect to advocating for people, families, groups and not-for-profit organisations where appropriate.
- The rights of residents to access to appropriate advocacy is promoted to the wider community.

3. Scope

This policy applies to the advocacy needs of all residents but is especially relevant to vulnerable and disadvantaged residents. This policy outlines responsibilities for all Council staff, in relation to the provision of community services.

4. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy the following definitions apply:

Advocacy

The process of standing by a disadvantaged individual or group and speaking out on their behalf in a way that represents their best interests.

Advocate

A person who works with a resident who may need support and encouragement to exercise their rights. The advocate acts to ensure that the resident's rights are upheld in relation to the delivery of community services to them.

Community services

Programs offered by Council, other government agencies or community organisations which address important social needs or issues of disadvantaged or vulnerable residents or provide other essential services. Council staff may work in relation to the provision of community services through either direct service provision, capacity development within the community services sector or the provision of information about, and referral to, community services.

Formal advocacy

A situation in which a legally appointed advocate undertakes advocacy for a resident within a formal and documented framework.

Informal advocacy

A situation in which an advocate has no legal power to undertake advocacy for a resident but is invited to do so with the resident's expressed permission.

Self-advocacy

The process of understanding and expressing one's needs and asserting one's rights in relation to the delivery of community services.

5. Principles

This policy is applied in the context of the following guiding principles:

Access and equity

Community services are provided in ways which maximise their accessibility to all residents who use them and especially those residents who face additional barriers to identifying and accessing services. Community services are prioritized for those residents who are most disadvantaged and have the greatest need for them.

Diversity

Each individual has unique advocacy requirements which apply differently to various contexts. Factors such as gender, age, language, culture, religion, disability or sexuality can affect a person's advocacy needs. Some residents may be impacted by multiple factors. No single advocacy strategy addresses the needs of all individuals.

Informed choice

Residents have the right to know about all the options that are available to them in relation to both advocacy and community service delivery. Some clients may require additional assistance in order to access and use this information.

Self-determination

Community service providers have an obligation to promote the rights of residents using those services to make decisions on their own behalf to their full capacity. Where a resident's capacity to make decisions is impaired they be given access to appropriate support to participate as fully as possible in decision-making processes about matters that affect them.

Child protection/Freedom from abuse

Council staff with a role that involves working with children will take action to prevent or stop abusive, negligent or discriminatory treatment of children and residents.

6. Responsibilities

Staff from Community and Recreation are responsible for implementing this policy.

7. Procedures

Where a resident requests assistance to negotiate with Council, another government agency or a community organisation in relation to a decision regarding service provision which is likely to have a significant impact on them, the following actions will be undertaken:

- 7.1** Identify any specific barriers to self-advocacy that the resident might face such as language or disability and suggest strategies to address those barriers.
- 7.2** Work with the resident to identify the possible impacts of the decision.
- 7.3** Inform the resident of this policy and make a copy available if requested.
- 7.4** Inform the resident of the range of available advocacy options including self-advocacy or the use of a formal or informal advocate.
- 7.5** Ensure that the resident has appropriate support to ensure that they understand and can exercise their advocacy options. This may include referral to an appropriate independent advocacy organization.
- 7.6** Where a resident choses to invite a formal advocate, ensure that the advocate has a legitimate right to act in that capacity.
- 7.7** Refer to a supervisor any instances where a resident is unable to access appropriate advocacy despite the application of these procedures.
- 7.8** Ensure that all actions taken by Council staff are in accordance with the City of Canterbury Code of Conduct (23-032).