



Consumer Representation Training Workbook

Presented by the
ACT Mental
Health Consumer
Network



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This workshop was developed in consultation with consumers, and information from the following resources:

The following material has been reproduced with kind permission of the ACT Government:

ACT Charter of Rights for People Who Experience Mental Health Issues (2011)

A Framework for Action (2007)

The following material has been reproduced with kind permission of Anglicare Tasmania Inc.:

Experts by Experience (2009)

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Course Contents

Throughout this course you will notice speech bubbles similar to this one.

They contain comments from Network members and others about Self-Advocacy and Consumer Representation related issues.



Welcome to the Network's Consumer Representation Training!

Being a consumer representative isn't just about attending meetings—it's about making your voice count.

By the end of this training, you'll have the confidence and skills to influence decisions that affect mental health services.

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Group Agreements

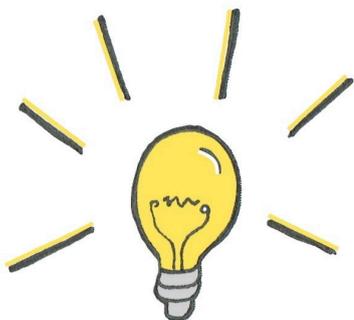
These group agreements (or shared values) help create a space that feels safe, respectful, and supportive for everyone.

Because we may be sharing personal stories and experiences, it's important that we all feel comfortable and know what to expect. Together, we'll decide on some simple guidelines to help us listen, share, and support each other in a way that works for the whole group.

All values made by the group need to be agreed to by the group and these can be referred to throughout training as required. Group values may also be altered throughout the training as agreed to by the group.

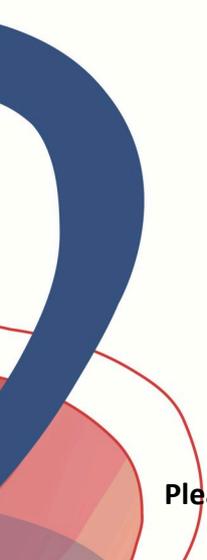
How is developing our group values a way of exercising self-advocacy?

Our Group Values



Week 1: Introduction to Advocacy





Introduction to Advocacy

Overview:

To explore different types of Advocacy—What is it and why is it important?

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References and Further Reading:

<https://www.wellnessrecoveryactionplan.com/how-to-self-advocate/>
Being an Effective Self-Advocate, M. A. Copeland, MS, MA,
<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/being-an-effective-self-advocate/>

Types of Advocacy



My voice, my choice, my life, my rights, my empowerment.

Advocacy is about speaking up—for yourself or others—to make sure voices are heard, rights are respected, and systems improve. There are different types of advocacy, and each plays an important role in mental health and community life.

Individual Advocacy

Individual advocacy is when someone supports you to speak up—or speaks up on your behalf—if you're being treated unfairly or something isn't right. This kind of advocacy helps you feel heard and supported when dealing with services or systems.

Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself. It's about sharing your views, asking questions, and making decisions that are right for you. It's a skill that grows over time and helps you feel more confident and in control.

Systemic Advocacy

Systemic advocacy is about creating change for a whole group of people—not just one person. It focuses on improving services, policies, laws, and community attitudes.

It is "... the process of advocating for change in the systems that guide the delivery of mental health services in the ACT. Consumer Representatives can use their understanding of these systems, their own lived experience and the lived experience of others to inform their approach in advocating for change."

ACT Mental Health Consumer Network, <https://www.actmhcn.org.au/consumer-representative-program/>



Consumer Advocacy

Consumer advocacy supports people who use health services—also known as health consumers. It helps protect their rights, improve services, and ensure that their voices are part of decision-making.

<http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/> <https://www.hcnsw.org.au/consumers-toolkit/the-role-of-health-consumer-representatives/>

What is....?

My expressed wishes are important and should be respected.



I choose to take responsibility for asserting my rights and in the rights of others.

What is...

...a Mental Health Consumer?

A person who has a lived experience of mental illness.

Consumer Representation is not just about advocating for me and my needs, it's about advocating for things that affect lots of different people. And it's important because we can change things that are hurting us, we can change things that aren't happening for us that we need to have happen. And we can have our voice heard as policy happens, as legislation is developed and to make sure that the systems that are around us actually support us.

...Consumer Representation?

A consumer representative is a member of a government, professional body, industry or non-governmental organisation committee who voices consumer perspectives and takes part in the decision-making process on behalf of consumers. This person is nominated by, and is accountable to, an organisation of consumers.

Consumer Health Forum of Australia

A Consumer Representative of the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network is supported to represent the broader consumer voice through participation on committees of government and other non-government organisations.

...Consumer and Carer participation?

“participation by consumers and carers in formal or informal planning, delivery, implementation, and evaluation of all activities associated with mental health services (voluntary or paid), as well as in all processes which effect[sic] the lives of consumers and carers, through sharing of information, opinions, and decision making power.”

National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum

For more information:

The consumer and carer movement: <https://mymentalhealth.org.au/consumers-and-carers/further-information-about-the-consumer-movement>

What is Self-Advocacy?



Think about the following questions throughout this module, note down what has meaning for you:

What is self-advocacy?

.....
.....
.....

Why is self-advocacy important?

.....
.....
.....

Where are some places where **YOU** could self-advocate?

.....
.....
.....

When would you self-advocate?

.....
.....
.....

When might you choose **not** to self-advocate?

.....
.....
.....



What people think about Self-Advocacy

Advocating for yourself, it's like going to the doctor, you don't want your co-worker to tell the doctor your story because they're going to put their bent on it.

Being able to advocate for yourself means that you get to have a say in your own life and what happens in your recovery journey.

Influencing your future about where you go, when you go, and how you go.

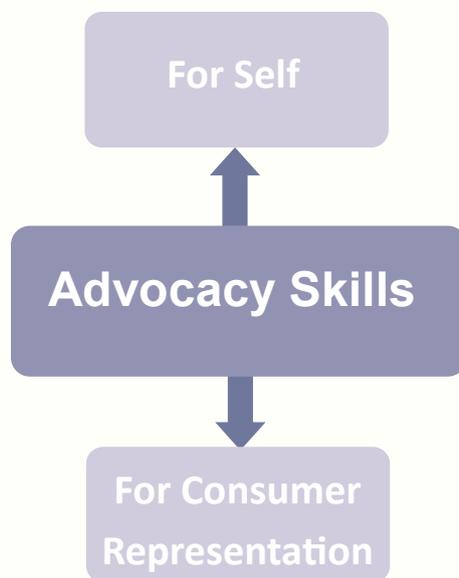
My voice, my choice, my life, my rights, my empowerment.

What I think:

Self-advocacy means speaking up for ourselves and making our own decisions and choices.

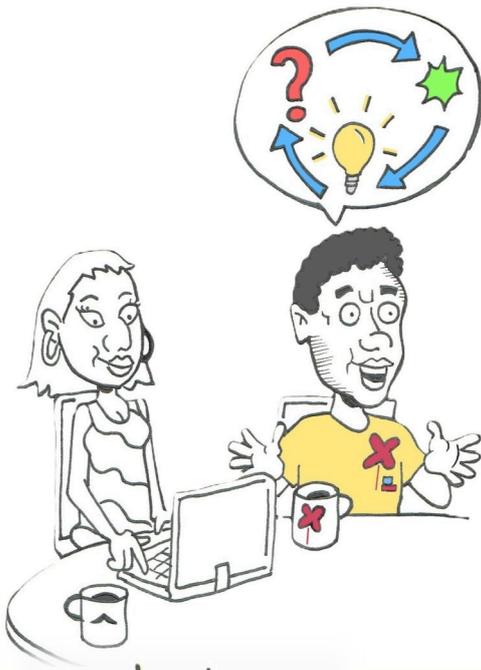
Advocacy is about giving a voice to people who have no voice.

Advocacy Skills



Powers of Strong Self-Advocacy

These powers have been identified by consumers as helping them be strong advocates (VALID Vic.). Each of these powers can strengthen your ability to advocate for yourself and others. As you build your skills, you can use them in systemic advocacy as a consumer representative. These are:



- **Self-Confidence**
- **Self-Esteem**
- **Self-Determination**
- **Self-Reliance**
- **Self-Expression**
- **Self-Development**

What do these concepts or 'powers' mean to you?

How can you develop them further to support your advocacy and consumer representation skills?



Being a self-advocate helps you identify concerns and problems and be confident enough to speak up. Self-advocacy involves awareness of **rights**, **assertiveness** skills, ability to **speak** up in appropriate ways, **confidence** and **decision-making** skills, (and) a sense of **responsibility**.

On the next page, you'll find information on how you can use each power in both **self-advocacy** and **consumer representation** work.



Reflection : How do you use these powers in your own advocacy work? What steps can you take to develop and use them more effectively? Which power would you like to start using more often?

What it is:	How to build it:	How to use it:
<p>Self Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believing in your ability to contribute and make a difference. • Confidence helps you contribute meaningfully in committee discussions and challenge systemic issues without fear of judgment. 	<p>Start by speaking up in safe spaces, like small groups or with trusted peers. Notice and celebrate your progress—every step counts.</p>	<p>In meetings, share your views clearly and assertively. Remember: your perspective matters and can make a difference.</p>
<p>Self-Esteem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing yourself and your experiences. • Recognising that your lived experience is expertise. This mindset ensures you advocate for collective consumer interests with pride. 	<p>Reflect on your strengths and achievements. Ask for positive feedback from peers or mentors—it helps reinforce your value.</p>	<p>Advocate with pride. Make sure your voice and the voices of other consumers are respected in decision-making.</p>
<p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking control of your advocacy journey and making informed choices. • Enables you to set priorities for what matters most to consumers and push for those outcomes in policy and program decisions. 	<p>Set personal goals for your advocacy work. Learn about the systems and processes that affect mental health services.</p>	<p>Be active in committees. Make decisions that align with your values and the needs of consumers.</p>
<p>Self-Reliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusting in your ability to manage tasks and challenges independently. • Helps you prepare for meetings, research issues, and represent consumers effectively without overdependence on others. 	<p>Develop knowledge and skills for consumer representation. Practice problem-solving and decision-making.</p>	<p>Take initiative in meetings. Offer solutions and take on responsibilities with confidence.</p>
<p>Self-Expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating clearly and assertively. • Essential for articulating consumer perspectives in a way that is respectful, persuasive, and impactful in systemic advocacy settings. 	<p>Practice speaking in ways that are clear and concise. Engage in activities that help you express your views confidently.</p>	<p>Share your lived experience in a way that supports advocacy and helps others understand the consumer perspective..</p>
<p>Self-Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to learn and grow in your advocacy role. • Staying informed about mental health policy, legislation, and committee processes so you can influence change effectively. 	<p>Seek out training, mentorship, and opportunities to expand your knowledge.</p>	<p>Stay informed and adaptable. Bring fresh ideas and insights to your role as a consumer representative.</p>

Reflection Activity: Speaking Up



Think about two different times in your life:

1. A time when you spoke up and people listened

- What was the issue?
- What did you say?
- Who did you speak to?
- How did you behave?
- What did the other person (or people) say?
- How did they behave?
- Who helped you speak up?
- What happened in the end?
- How did you feel?

2. A time when you tried to speak up and people didn't listen (or you wanted to speak up but didn't)

Think about:

- What was the issue?
- What did you say?
- Who did you speak to?
- How did you behave?
- What did the other person (or people) say?
- How did they behave?
- Who helped you speak up?
- What happened in the end?
- How did you feel?

Now reflect:

- What made the difference between these two situations?
- How much was in your control to change?
- What areas would you like to improve through this course?



Self-Reflection Notes:

(Adapted from Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre resources)

<http://www.edac.org.au/letmespeak/html/selfadvocacy.html>

Tips for Advocating

Have a clear idea about what you want to achieve and why. Then keep pushing until you achieve it. Reference to rights, legislation or other documentary evidence of your entitlements to back up your claim helps.

It's a process that takes time. Small steps are important and the mindset of keep going. Each day is a new day

Your first and most important job in life is to believe in yourself. Become a good friend to yourself and acknowledge your skills and success and be constructive and not destructive about set-backs and disappointments. There will only be one you in all of time - you have something unique to offer others.

Volunteering in any form could help as helping others may make you realise that you can make a difference and therefore building your self-confidence and self-esteem.

...be unapologetic about taking up space. I often unconsciously apologise for the inconvenience caused before seeking care I deserve. While self advocacy should be done with grace and professionalism, shifting towards not apologising for the care we deserve goes a long way in reinforcing our self-confidence and self-esteem.

I think being on committees and being in advocacy settings has helped me to learn to speak up for myself over the years. Knowing that I have human rights and that I have a right to be heard has helped me develop in recent years.

Activity: My Vision of Advocacy

What advocacy means to me, and my vision for expressing it in my life.

This is what self-advocacy means to me:

This is what is important to me and helps me identify when I want to take a stand —these are my VALUES:

These are my STRENGTHS that will help me when I advocate:

These are skills that I want to further DEVELOP to help me effectively advocate:

This is an AREA where I would like to self-advocate:

This is a GOAL that I want to work towards to get me started with my advocacy:

Use the 'Personal Advocacy Goals' worksheet to begin to plan your advocacy activity.

Introduction to Advocacy

Give it a go!

Think about Advocacy concepts and strategies discussed in this module.

What did you enjoy the most? Find most useful? Practical?

In what area of your life would you want to be more effective in self-advocating?

Something I want to take away from this module:

**For more information
check out handouts:**

*ACT Health MH Charter or
Rights*

*MH Statement of Rights
and Responsibilities*

