



Consumer Advocacy Course

NSW Institute of Psychiatry

Background

The Institute of Psychiatry has over a number of years co-ordinated and conducted an important course for consumers of mental health services, (people living with a mental illness), providing essential training in advocacy, representation, and related topics.

The Consumer Advocacy Course is held 3 times a year, and consists of 3 consecutive days of training. In 2002 the Course was held at the Institute and was conducted in May, August and November. An average of 12 consumers attended each course in 2002 with people coming from all over NSW from a range of services including NGO's, while some came independently of any service. On all three occasions the course was evaluated and given positive feedback, consumers reporting an increase in their confidence, and a sense that they had a much better understanding of advocacy and other topics such as committee skills.

The course is suitable for beginners interested in starting out doing advocacy, representation or engaging in participatory activities such as joining consumer networks, and for those already active in these roles but who need to improve their knowledge or 'fill in the gaps' as one participant put it.

The Course is supported by a committee consisting of consumers and service providers and functions to provide advice about consumer training needs and course design. This enables the Institute to consult about the development of its consumer program. The Co-ordinator of the course is Sandy Watson, who organised each of the courses in 2002, and has extensive experience as an advocate and trainer.

2003

The existing Consumer Advocacy Course will run 3 times in 2003, in addition to a new program of one day courses, to be conducted 4 times across the year, for mental health consumers offering training on important topics not covered in the Advocacy Course.

The dates for the Consumer Advocacy Course in 2003 are:

9 - 11	April	9:30 – 3:30 pm
6 - 8	August	9:30 – 3:30 pm

29 - 31 October 9:30 – 3:30 pm

Fees for the courses are \$145:00, (\$125:00 early bird payment).

The one day program is yet to be finalised - details can be obtained by contacting Sandy at the Institute, in 2003.

Course Content

The 3 day course contains the following general topics:

- Advocacy and Social Justice Principles
- Consumer advocacy, representation and the consumer movement
- Committee Skills
- Mental Health Services – Structures, policy and legislation
- Consumer networks
- Essential knowledge and skills for advocacy
- Looking after yourself

The course is challenging and interesting with a range of presenters and presentation styles. Consumers learn about ethics, roles and responsibilities of advocates and representatives, citizenship and social justice, rights approaches (minority v. universalist), boundaries, duty of care, mental health policy, relevant legislations, resources, consumer networks, types of advocacy, committee terms, committee dilemmas, advocacy organizations etc.

Each participant receives a folder containing a range of resources about committees, participation, advocacy, consumer websites etc. On each day of the course, the room is laid out differently so that consumers are able to look through many resources, consumer books, games, postcards, mental health reports and policy documents etc. This provides an opportunity to understand what is available, whilst people are trained in how to obtain mental health resources.

On the last day, consumers are assisted to deliver a short presentation about a topic they are given - where they have to seek out information in the room, or gather it over the phone during the session. This gives people a live opportunity to quickly get resources in a mock up consumer office, do research, consult others, gather information, and present it back to the group as if they were responding to a consumer request for information and only had one hour to get back to them. Two consumer mentors are available to assist.

Further information

If you would like to obtain the consumer training program for 2003 or require further information, please contact the Institute of Psychiatry on 9840 -3833 and ask for Sandy Watson or Jane Marks.

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