



HEAR US
Croydon's Mental Health Service Users Group
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QUALITY MANUAL



SECTION A: Access to Service

A.2.1 Signposting and Referral Policy and Procedure

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A) Initial Contact, Signposting, and Referrals Procedure

On receipt of a request for advice by self-referral, an external agency or a Hear Us staff member or volunteer, either by phone (020 8681 6888), email (surgery@hear-us.org), through our website, or in person, the following process will be used:-

- Log enquiry on the Referrals and Contact Database including details of
 - Request/query
 - Client information
 - Where referral is from
 - Action to be taken
 - Monitoring information (equal ops).
- Identify whether request is appropriate for:
 - case working by the service (a)
 - information and/or advice from the service (b)
 - Referrals or signposting to another agency/organisation (when an enquiry or case falls outside the remit or geographical area of our service) (c).
- If there is a potential conflict of interest, the case should be discussed with the manager in the first instance. If a decision is made that the conflict would adversely affect the quality of advice then signposting to an alternative agency can be made. If a decision is made that the conflict of interest will not bias service delivery then the case can be taken on but closely monitored by the manager of the service, with fortnightly updates on the progress of the case. We will bear in mind the conflict of interest policy when considering this point.
- **ALL** enquiries to Hear Us are to be logged on the Referrals and Contact Database and a note made of the advice/information given. Any further client casework must be recorded separately in the Welfare Surgeries Casework Management Database (**in addition** to the initial referral input into the Referrals and Contact Database).
- As a minimum, we will signpost any individual whom we are unable to help.



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- If (a) then the procedure identified in allocation of enquiries will be followed as per SECTION E: E.1 Case Management Policy, Client information and Case Files (Combined).
- If advisers' workloads are too heavy and no appointment can be made then signposting to another welfare benefits service can be made, making it clear that we are only advising and not recommending.
- If (b)
 - Give appropriate advice and log this on the Referrals and Contact Database.
- If (b) and (c)
 - Information given can be confirmed by email, relayed by telephone, or by post.
- If (c)

If all or part of the client's enquiry does not fall within the range of subjects Hear Us can advise on/support with **OR** work has already been undertaken with the individual and our service is found to be no longer appropriate, we will inform the client and follow these next steps:

 - Records of any referrals or signposting to another agency must be recorded on the appropriate database (this includes instances where no suitable service provider could be found),
 - Using information available to us from other organisations or the internet, confirm the appropriate agency for signposting or referring to,
 - All staff have access to a number of directories of alternative service providers, which are kept up to date and used to support effective signposting and referral (<http://www.guide-hear-us.org/> and <http://directory.mindincroydon.org.uk/> and <https://asauk.org.uk/need-advice/>),
 - Staff should take into consideration the following criteria:
 - Whether the organisation holds Advice Quality Mark or other quality standard (<https://asauk.org.uk/advice-quality-standard/find-aqs-centres/>),
 - Language needs,
 - Disability access needs,
 - Location and the client's ability to travel,
 - Cost to the client,
 - Past experience of the organisation.



Referrals

- Consent should be obtained from the service user if a referral is made.
- Relevant details including any deadlines or other significant issues should be provided to the receiving agency bearing in mind confidentiality and service user consent procedures.
- Service user should be told what role Hear Us will take and what service they can expect from the other service provider.
- Some support from Hear Us may be given to the service user during any transition period.
- Any cost implications of being referred elsewhere is clearly noted on the service user's records.

Signposting

- Up to date contact details of all alternative agencies and services should be maintained.
- Details should be easily accessible and in an appropriate format.
- Any cost implications of being signposted is clearly noted on the service user's records.

B) Signposting and Referral - Additional Guidance: Key steps to effective signposting and referral

Signposting and referral is a cornerstone of an effective advice network where a client can move from one agency to another receiving the service that best meets their needs and the most appropriate service for their needs.

In practice, effective referrals and signposting create many challenges. Having an effective way of referring on clients is crucial to us providing good advice and effective information. Without an effective signposting and referral system there is a danger that we will work beyond our competence and therefore be more likely to give incorrect advice.

This additional information will explore good practice when referring or signposting a client. It will cover:

1. The definitions of signposting and referrals,
2. Reasons to refer a client.

Signposting and referral take place when it becomes clear that another member of staff, another provider or another agency can offer more



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appropriate help or support than we can. Someone may be signposted or referred for:

- Further or specialist information, advice or guidance,
- Other forms of welfare support,
- Social inclusion services,
- Counselling,
- Debt and other financial support,
- Employment and work opportunities and experience,
- Support, and so on.

In these procedures, “external” signposting and referral means signposting and referral to a person or agency outside of Hear Us.



Defining signposting and referral

In order to signpost or refer a client you need to have identified that our service cannot deal with the client's case. There are many different reasons for this, which are included below.

Often you will be able to help a client with some of their problems but not all of them. For example, you may be able to help them to sign up with a GP but not with questions about their immigration case. In these situations, you should signpost or refer the client in relation to the aspect of the case that you cannot address.

There has been much confusion about the differences between signposting and referral. There is however a broad difference which can help to clarify the two activities. When signposting a client, you are likely not to have undertaken any significant work on the specific query you are signposting, whereas with referral it is likely that you will have started to work with the client on the query but, for some reason, can no longer continue.

What is signposting?

Signposting often takes place before we have started in depth work with a client about a query. It normally takes place when the client first contacts us with a request for help.

It describes the process of giving a client the details of other organisations that will be able to help them.

An office volunteer or member of staff who may be working on other Hear Us projects may deal with initial queries from clients and is expected to undertake a lot of signposting. WSP workers also undertake signposting and discuss alternative sources of help with clients when they have identified, during an initial advice session, that the centre cannot assist any further.

We may make suggestions about which agency to go to but it is normally left to the clients themselves to make arrangements for an appointment there.

However, in some cases, we may assist clients to access the services of the alternative agency, particularly where the client has specific needs, for example, they do not speak English or they have a hearing impairment. Good practice suggests this be done, when necessary, rather than simply telling a client to "try the CAB"!



What is referral?

There are two key differences with referral: firstly, with referral, an agency is more likely to have started work on a client's case. Secondly, the agency will make contact with the referral agency directly on behalf of the client.

When signposting, the adviser has relatively little information about the case. If an adviser has seen the client for a second or third time about the same issue, but can no longer deal with the client's queries, it is good practice to refer them as some work has begun with the client.

Referral describes the process of contacting an alternative agency to work with the client when an adviser has reached the limit of their competence in a particular area of advice. A client is referred on to an advice provider that can take the case forward, for example, a solicitor or other specialist legal advice service that can better deal with the advice sought.

With a referral it is good practice for the adviser to make contact with the alternative agency and make any necessary arrangements with them in order to ensure that the case is continued smoothly - this often includes arranging an appointment.

If work has been undertaken with the client, Hear Us has a greater responsibility to ensure that the client continues to get the advice they need. Within an advice context, this is particularly important as there may be deadlines or other significant issues in the case that the new agency needs to know about. It is the responsibility of the adviser to ensure these are clearly given to the new agency with the client's consent.

If a referral form to another agency or service needs to be completed, a copy should be given to the client and one kept in our electronic records.

Usually advice centres will signpost some cases (e.g. where they do not handle that type of enquiry at any level), and refer others (e.g. where they have undertaken some initial work on the case but it is now time to pass it on to a more specialist organisation).

The Hear Us procedure at the top of this document A) (Initial Contact, Signposting, and Referrals Procedure) is in place to explain clearly how to signpost and refer a client.



Reasons to refer

While a client will be signposted or referred on for many different reasons most of these fit within the categories listed below. It is important to be clear about these reasons so that we can clearly identify when we need to signpost or refer. Being clear also helps to ensure that we can clearly explain issues to the client and anyone else, such as a manager or trustee who may want to discuss the way a case has been dealt with.

Outside your subject area:

No one can be expected to know everything. All advisers have the skills, training and resources to give advice in certain categories. Advice workers or solicitors providing specialist advice generally only work in one or two subject areas (for example, welfare benefits or housing) because they need to know each area in depth. Generalist and community-based providers may offer advice in a wider range of areas, but not to such a specialist level in each area of law.

It is important to be clear about which areas of advice we are competent in and to what level. This is outlined in our client charter. If a client presents a query outside our subject areas, we need to direct them to someone internally who has expertise in this area or signpost them to another organisation. It is illegal to give immigration advice, even if you are competent to, unless exempted by the Office for the Immigration Services Commissioner. In this situation, we will signpost to a recognised provider and explain the situation clearly to the client.

In your subject area but too complex:

Sometimes a query is in one of your subject areas but is too complex for you to deal with. Going beyond your competence as an adviser could have serious consequences – a client could lose their house or not receive benefits they were entitled to and we could be sued for negligence.

It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of your individual level of competence. Once you go beyond this you can no longer advise a client well. If there is someone else within Hear Us with expertise in the particular area you may transfer the case to them. However, if you identify that Hear Us can no longer advise a client competently you will need to refer them on. If it is clear when you first meet a client that you are not able to advise them, signposting may be appropriate.



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Work overload:

As with most advice providers, Hear Us are extremely busy, with demand for services greater than our capacity. Many advice agencies feel that they have to see everyone who comes through their door and feel guilty about turning clients away.

However, how can you meet deadlines, do follow-up work, keep up to date with rapid changes in law and provide good quality advice if you go beyond your capacity? Every advice worker needs to know when to say no in order that they can provide an effective service in the longer term. Signposting or referring some cases can help to manage workload better.

In order to ensure a good service is given to clients, a system to identify urgent cases (for example, where there is an imminent court case) needs to be developed. Urgent cases can either be prioritised within Hear Us or referred on.

The client falls outside our target group:

Having a clear target group for Hear Us helps to define who we can best help. If a client falls outside our target group we can assist them to access appropriate help and this will often be by signposting them to another service. There is sometimes a tendency for centres to try and help everybody. This can put centres in a position whereby they cannot cope, which results in a loss of their identity and in the quality of their advice, and a decline in their reputation.

It is important to ensure that Hear Us are serving the client group that we have been set up to serve. We have most expertise in dealing with these clients and understanding their specific needs. Our funders also require us to serve this specific client group. We need to ensure we do not jeopardise Hear Us's future by working outside of our stated remit. Furthermore, trying to do everything for everybody does not assist a centre when approaching funders. Funders do not want advice agencies to duplicate each other: funders generally want to be sure they are funding services that meet specific needs, are appropriate to particular clients and generally understand the need to signpost and refer clients when appropriate.

There is a breakdown in trust between the adviser and the client:

A trusting relationship between adviser and client is central to providing advice. Unfortunately, sometimes there is a breakdown in this relationship and the client needs to be referred on. This could be because the client clearly does not trust the adviser, and despite efforts to resolve this situation, it is decided that working together on an ongoing basis is untenable. It may also



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be that the adviser does not trust that the client is giving them accurate information about their situation with which to progress the case. Again, this can be discussed, and if possible resolved. However, if this is not possible a referral may be appropriate.

Conflict of interest:

If there is a conflict of interest identified in the case, a referral is often the best way to deal with this.

Conflicts of interest can include when a centre is acting for both sides in a dispute (for example, husband and wife or dealing with a case in which a staff member or management committee member is involved). If we refer a client on they should be informed of the reasons for this. In some situations, this will mean breaching the confidentiality of the other client and this client will need to be informed why this is justified and necessary.

If the adviser believes that the client is trying to seek advice with false information, which could lead to fraudulent activity (for example, asking for assistance with their Job Seekers Allowance when the client works), it is not necessary to refer the client on. The client should be informed that Hear Us cannot advise them and the reasons for this. Our client charter sets out what we expect from service users when working on a case.

Read this policy in conjunction with

- SECTION A: Access to Service A.2.2: Case Management System - Monitoring Referrals Process
- SECTION E: E.1 Case Management Policy, Client information and Case Files (Combined)
- SECTION F.3 Confidentiality Policy,
- SECTION E.1.8 Data Protection Policy,
- SECTION A.3.1 Equality and Diversity Policy
- SECTION C.1.1 Conflict of Interest Policy