

**Main/Registered Office: Signposts, 58 Regent Road, Morecambe, LA3 1TE**

**Telephone : (01524) 419021**

**Fax : (01524) 411541**

*Community  
Legal Service*



E-mail: [signpostsmarc@signposts.org.uk](mailto:signpostsmarc@signposts.org.uk)

Website: [www.signposts.org.uk](http://www.signposts.org.uk)

**“Working to Empower the Community”  
in Lancashire and Cumbria**

**Pamela Beswick – Chief Executive**



*Help Point*

**Also:-**

Preston Office: (01772) 759413    Carnforth Office: (01524) 732807

## Signposts Information and Advice Policy

### Introduction

1. The purpose of this document is to ensure that everyone using the Signposts Project has a clear understanding of the nature of the services offered in regard to information and advice.
- 1.2 It is hoped that it will clarify the position for users of the service, staff, volunteers and, where appropriate, workers from other organisations. Above all, Signposts seeks to ensure that enquirers can access its services and receive a satisfactory response to any enquiry made, We need to be clear about the Minimum and Maximum standards of information provided.
- 1.3 This policy is in line with Signposts’ other basic principles of Equal Opportunities, Empowerment and Staff Development, For further details about these please refer to the Project Director or the Induction Pack for the relevant documents.
- 1.4 In reading this policy document, you should refer to Signposts’ Confidentiality Policy (with Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection), which sets out clearly the structure within which Information and Advice is provided.

Signposts consists of a team of paid staff, and volunteers. The staff list can be found on the Signposts website [www.signposts.org.uk](http://www.signposts.org.uk)

There are also substantive workers from other agencies who are not regarded as part of the team.

- 1.5 Through its role as an Information and Advice service, Signposts must:-
  - Ensure that no information provided is more than a year old (dated on arrival)
  - Ensure that information provided by members of the Signposts team is monitored through supervision sessions.
  - Provide relevant and correct information that is accessible to all members of society.
  - Ensure that the necessary training opportunities are made available to the team, at an appropriate level.

Charity Registration Number: 1117645

Member of AdviceUK (previously FIAC)

Company Limited by Guarantee: 5990592

Registered in England and Wales



North Lancashire  
Teaching Primary Care Trust



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Additional major funding from Preston City Council, the FC Scott Charitable Trust and Tudor Trust

- Ensure that the necessary resources are available to achieve the provision of the service that it offers.
- Ensure that constant evaluation and monitoring takes place to ensure that the above are achieved and that specific organisations are targeted to meet any needs which become obvious i.e. Benefit Agency assessments of entitlement.

### **Level of Information and Advice**

2.1 The following levels of information exist within the service that Signposts provides, and the Project Director is responsible for ensuring that the staff team are clear about what roles they are expected to take through the training and supervision process.

### **Information Giving**

2.2 This is where a question asked by an enquirer can be dealt with by a straight piece of information giving and will include Signposting i.e. "Can you tell me when the C.A.B. is open and where it has moved to?"

For this purpose Signposts strives to collect, display and develop national, regional and local information. Where this information has been collated and produced by Signposts it will include a statement that what Signposts provides it for reference only.

### **Advice Giving**

2.3 Where the range of information available can be presented to an enquirer to provide a range of options and/or ideas and their consequences. These can then lead to the individual making a decision which may change or enable them to cope with a practical situation. It recognises that the choices offered are limited by knowledge and availability of information sources, but seeks to avoid bias.

Advice giving is not about a worker using their own values and judgements or giving their own opinion to an enquirer i.e. "Well if I was you, I would....."

### **Advocacy within the building**

2.4 This involves a worker supporting an enquirer through any negotiations with other organisations or individuals. The worker needs to be aware of how easy it is to disempower an individual in this situation and must not take over any negotiation, checking out any details or options with the person that they are being an advocate for. Wherever possible the advocate should support the enquirer to make contact/enquiry themselves even to the point of role playing a situation.

### **Counselling**

2.5 The British Association for Counselling defines counselling as;

*"An explicit agreement between counsellor and an individual with the aim of providing to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and towards greater well-being".*

Counselling is about enabling individuals to come to terms with their lives, reach a growing understanding of themselves, make decisions, set realistic goals and take any relevant action.

Counselling is not about trying to influence, persuade or argue with an individual.

Workers must be clear where general conversations and support of an enquirer begins and ends and where counselling is needed.

Any counselling must be through a worker trained in this area who has been identified and cleared to do such work by the Project Director of Signposts.

## **Referral**

2.5 Making referrals at Signposts can occur in two different ways.

- (i) Firstly where we contact another agency for specific information.
- (ii) Where a worker feels that an enquiry cannot be answered in any of the methods above and that it is not appropriate for Signposts to pursue the enquiry any further.

It is important for Signposts to examine at what point a referral is made and whether this is made too soon in an enquiry, or too late.

If there is any doubt about whether referral in either of these ways should be made the worker should refer to the Project Director for advice. Together those involved can look at how to access a more specialised service from another organisation.

This may be by setting up a meeting with the referral agency at Signposts because the individual is more comfortable in the surroundings or the referral agency is already using the building to meet its own referrals. Alternatively, it may be by making an appointment for the enquirer to visit referral agency directly.

If available, use the referral form supplied by the relevant agency.

Please note that due to the Citizens Advice Bureau confidentiality policy, enquirers must self refer. When making a CVS referral the appropriate 'active signposting' referral form must be used.

Paragraphs 2.7 Social Policy and 2.8 Direct Service Delivery have been deleted.

## **Training and Supervision**

- 3.1 Signposts acknowledges that Information and Advice work requires special training, including: communication and listening skills: information retrieval skills: basic administration skills/time for this: and structured and unstructured time to do the above.
- 3.2 The basic induction process by which a person wishing to work at Signposts will go through can be seen at Appendix A in line with the projects' Staff Development Policy and the NACVS Charter.
- 3.3 Discussion about information given will be an integral part of the supervision of workers at Signposts.

## **Monitoring**

- 4.1 The monitoring of enquiries at Signposts exists for the following purposes:
  - a. To ensure that the information and advice provided by Signposts is correct and unbiased.
  - b. To assess the needs of the local community and to attempt to develop services for the benefit of that community.
  - c. To assist in the application for grants and funding
  - d. To be accountable to the local community and funding bodies.
  - e. to influence social policy
- 4.2 The monitoring of enquires is covered by Signposts Confidentially (including Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection) Policy.
- 4.3 The monitoring of enquires enables Signposts to set short medium and long term targets by assessing any gaps in the service provided.

## **Access of Information**

- 5.1 Signposts is committed to providing relevant local information and undertakes to collect, update and produce such information.
- 5.2 In doing this, Signposts is committed to produce accessible, attractive, relevant, and easy to read information, within an equal opportunities framework.
- 5.3 The overall atmosphere at Signposts will not be affected by the provision of this static information i.e. leaflets displays will be discreet and not detract volunteers from meeting and talking with users of the project.
- 5.4 Part of Signposts' role as an Information and Advice service is to promote easy access to information by all members of society.

**Signposts June 1995**

Updated **June 1997**

**August 2001**

**August 2002**

**May 2004**

**September 2007**

Project Director  
April 2005 \_\_\_\_\_

**Implications of Offering an Information and Advice Service**

**Staff Needs**

Special Training

Information retrieval skills

Time (Structured and unstructured)

Administration skills and time

Support and supervision

**Practical Needs**

Resources (books, leaflets, telephones)

Appropriate space including: space for enquirer to wait while you find out

Offer and publicise confidentiality

Up-to-date and logical systems

Childcare

**Practice**

Listen to users

Workable policies

Support and supervision

Constant evaluation

Constant modification (where necessary)

Accessibility

Effective

**Training Programme**

Initial Enquiry from Volunteer

Application by Volunteer

Interview with relevant manager (criteria to be met)

Confidentiality Policy Understood

Induction

Shadowing A Worker

Training (ongoing)

Initial Enquiries and monitoring of information provided

Supervision, Team Meetings and Events

*Information Giving Setting*

Welcome

Enquiry

Issue

Appropriate level of Information/Advice

Agencies/Organisations

Ensure a return visit if enquiry not satisfied

Within overall atmosphere of  
accessible and friendliness  
Implications for Signposts' practice  
and social policy change

Confidentiality

**Checklist for Workers**

- Remember Signposts' Confidentiality Policy and refer to Do's and Don'ts document at Appendix E.
- What is the enquiry?
- What does the person want me to do?
- What is the issue and what needs resolving?
- Is there anything that needs dealing with urgently, if the enquiry can be dealt with within the weekly timetable, can the person afford to wait?
- Is the issue presented the real issue and do I need to go into any further detail?
- What other information do I need and how am I going to ask for it?
- Am I the right person to deal with the enquiry? (Remember the Confidentiality Policy)
- Do I need to ask permission to contact somebody else?
- What are the options and consequences for the person?
- What are the personal/professional/legal implications for me?
- Do I need to take notes? And what is going to happen to them?
- What next: What level of information/Advice? (see 2.1.-2.9)
- How do I know that the information that I'm giving is correct? Check date stamp of library copy of leaflet or form. If you check with an organisation that the information is up to date, and it is re date stamped. If it is not get up to date information sent. Also check with the organisation that Signposts is still on their mailing list.
- Do I need to tell anybody else?
- Have I found out information that needs to be circulated to other members of the staff team through the message book or a staff meeting.

## INFORMATION GIVING – QUICK REFERENCE DOS AND DON'TS

All workers at Signposts need to be aware of certain basic principles that underpin the work here. These are designed to protect both staff and enquirers and to enable a consistent approach to be made.

### Do

- **Make people feel welcome and give people time to relax**
- **Remember to work within Signposts Confidentiality Policy including making the interview process private by using the back rooms**
- **Challenge information that people are giving – ask gentle questions to check factual information – use reflecting-back techniques**
- **Allow sufficient time to address actual issues rather than initial presenting problems – often people will ask a question to check out the service and then ask a more pressing one**
- **Ask for help if there is anything you do not know. Do not be tempted to give quick answers that may not be correct. Give yourself time to research issues – ask the enquirer to call back so that you can do this.**
- **Remember that there are few emergencies – most things can wait a little while. Do acknowledge the enquirer anxiety but do not collude or exacerbate a situation by reacting in a panic led way yourself.**
- **Do check with the Project Director or Information & Advice Worker if you are unsure how far to go with an enquiry.**

### DO NOT

- **Give anyone money or gifts in kind i.e. cigarettes, cosmetics – hot or cold drinks is fine**
- **Give staff telephone numbers or addresses to anyone – always place the onus on the member of staff to contact the person enquiring – i.e. say you will pass the request on to them.**
- **Handle any clients' money or do any financial transactions for them.**
- **Administer, or take responsibility for, medication.**
- **Give anyone lifts in your car. You are not covered by Signposts outside the building when giving information and advice. Also there is the question of motor insurance and petrol costs.**
- **Do not recommend an individual to anyone - do not make value judgements i.e. oh yes he or she will be fine.**
- **Do not contact another agency on behalf of an enquirer without their permission**

Some of you may find these issues difficult particularly where it would seem to restrict help that we offer. However when considering the don'ts please remember that we are offering a service to the community and that an individual must be seen in the context of the community i.e. it may be ok to give 50p to someone but what about the next person who asks, and the next, and the next.

**Pamela Beswick, Project Director**

8<sup>th</sup> December 1994 (updated August 2001)

