Advocacy Policy

Policy Name	Advocacy Policy	Policy No.	P0519
Effective Date	15/07/2024	Date of last revision	15/07/2024
Version Number	1		
Policy Owner	Chief Executive Officer	Responsible Person	Director, Quality and Practice
Applies to	Meaningful Lives employees, volunteers, labour hire, contractors and consultants		

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Disability advocacy ensures people with disabilities' human and legal rights are promoted and protected so that they are empowered to speak and can fully participate in the community.

1.2 It is vitally important that all people supported can access advocacy support so that they have someone to speak up and support their rights. This is particularly important for people with disabilities who have vulnerabilities and may not have the ability to advocate for themselves.

2. Purpose

2.1 This policy's purpose is to outline the importance of advocates and that people supported may request an advocate at any time.

2.2 For this policy's purpose, employees, volunteers, labour hire, contractors and consultants are referred to as 'team members'.

2.3 The policy outlines the steps that Meaningful Lives team members should take where an advocate is requested. The policy also outlines how to advocate for people supported and help those people supported, families and carers by accessing the services they need.

3. Policy

What is advocacy?

3.1 An advocate is a person who helps a person supported to protect and promote their rights and interests.

3.2 An advocate can, with the supported person's permission, negotiate on their behalf or support them to negotiate for themselves.

3.3 An advocate does not conciliate or arbitrate between the person supported and their service provider. An advocate 'stands beside' a person supported to help them to make their own decisions.

3.4 An advocate is a valuable resource for a person supported in situations where they feel confused, overwhelmed, intimidated or under-confident. An advocate can be a family member, friend, or an outside organisation.

3.5 The National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 defines an independent advocate, in relation to a person with disability, to mean a person who:

- is independent of the National Disability Insurance Agency, the NDIS Commission and any NDIS providers providing supports or services to the person with disability
- provides independent advocacy for the person with disability, to assist the person with disability to exercise choice and control and to have their voice heard in matters that affect them; and
- acts at the direction of the person with disability, reflecting the person with disability's expressed wishes, will, preferences and rights

3.6 Types of advocacies include:

- Self-advocacy – this encourages and promotes independence including self-representation. Through self-advocacy, people supported are provided and supported with training and development opportunities to enhance self-advocacy skills.
- Systemic advocacy – this involves advocating for change in systems within the community that may affect people supported.
- Parent/Family Advocacy – this involves assisting families of people supported to represent their interests in the community and within government.
- Citizenship Advocacy – this involves representing people supported rights to equal status in the community.
- Legal Advocacy – this involves helping the people we support to access skilled professionals to represent and defend their human and legal rights.
- Individual Advocacy – this ensures that people supported understand the role of an advocate as well as their right to use an advocate in Meaningful Lives matters. Advocacy through service provision

3.7 Meaningful Lives is committed to advocating for the rights of people supported and those with a disability to ensure they are respected and not discriminated against.

3.8 Meaningful Lives helps all people supported to make decisions based on their choices and preferences. Meaningful Lives encourages all people supported to make their own choices and provide services customised to suit the needs of everyone.

3.9 Meaningful Lives expects that all team members will treat each person with dignity and respect as an individual and value their unique contribution. Meaningful Lives believes that each person should be encouraged and supported to exercise choice and control and participate in their community to the fullest extent that they wish. To achieve this, Meaningful Lives works with the wider community to improve inclusion by raising community awareness about issues affecting people living with disabilities.

3.10 Meaningful Lives provides advocacy with and on behalf of all people supported and their families through its service provision and through inclusion in activities with other service providers where appropriate.

3.11 The person supported is the primary customer and the family/carers are the secondary customer. As such, there may be occasions where Meaningful Lives needs to advocate in the person's best interests against the family's wishes. This will be done in a way that promotes the ongoing relationship wherever possible. Team members must always seek support and supervision when there are conflicts between the individual and family's wishes.

3.12 Meaningful Lives will adopt an active leadership role to promote and/or protect supported people's rights. The organisation is proactive in representing the needs of people with a disability and their families in service planning and improved service delivery, through the participation in local and regional networks and partnerships. Access to an advocate

3.13 Meaningful Lives recognises and supports each supported person's right to use an advocate to negotiate on their behalf. This may be during assessments, reviews, incidents, complaints, or any other communication between the person supported and Meaningful Lives.

3.14 All people supported will be made aware of their right to access an advocate, the role an advocate may play and advocacy services available to them. Disability advocacy plays a key role in making sure that the rights and interests of people with a disability are respected and realised. To this end, specialist advocacy groups may be engaged to assist in advocating for and on behalf of clients. This information will be provided through the issue of a Welcome Pack before or when engaging Meaningful Lives services.

3.15 People supported and potential advocates are informed via appropriate formats (including verbally and in writing) about their right to use an advocate and the role of an advocate when:

- the person supported is assessed and re-assessed for services
- the person supported is oriented to the service or program
- the person supported is refused service
- an incident needs to be investigated
- the person supported wants to make a complaint about the service; or
- a team member believes an advocate may be beneficial to the client.

3.14 Information will be provided to people supported and families/carers who have a particular need for advocacy about:

- their right to an advocate
- what an advocacy service does; and
- contact details for local advocacy services.

3.16 Information about advocacy services will also be provided on Meaningful Lives' website.

3.17 Where a person supported, their guardian, nominee, or someone the person identifies as supporting them with decision-making (such as next of kin or support person) requests an advocate, Meaningful Lives will identify and facilitate access to an appropriate advocate, including a family member, friend, or independent advocacy service.

3.18 Meaningful Lives acknowledges each supported person's right to change their nominated advocate and their right to request an advocate of their choice at any time. Meaningful Lives will ensure that people supported are aware of their rights to use an advocate, including having their advocate present for all assessments, meetings and communication between themselves and the organisation.

3.19 If the person supported is unsure whether they may want to nominate a person as an advocate, they must be provided with information (in an appropriate format) on various specialist advocacy organisations that may be able to assist them.

3.20 If they would like to contact any of these organisations Meaningful Lives must organise assistance to make contact and ensure that the advocate knows they have been nominated and agrees to this.

3.21 If a person supported has an advocate, the advocate's name and contact details must be included in the supported person's personal record.

3.22 Meaningful Lives will work co-operatively with any advocate nominated by a client and treat them with respect.

3.23 In line with Meaningful Lives' Information Management Policy, the organisation will not disclose any information about the person supported to an advocate, when the person supported is not present, unless the person supported has given permission.

Procedures

1. Responsibilities

1.1 Executive

1.1.1 The Executive is responsible for ensuring:

- that all team members are aware of and adhere to this policy; and
- training is provided in supporting team members to identify when advocacy supports should be offered and facilitated.

1.2 Team Members

1.2.1 Team members are responsible for:

- understanding and implementing this policy
- advocating for the people Meaningful Lives supports as part of their day-to-day practice
- identifying when independent advocacy is needed, facilitating access to an advocate, and working collaboratively with that advocate; and
- participating in training on advocacy for people supported.

2. Process

2.1 Provide each person supported a Welcome Pack at the beginning of their service. This Welcome Pack contains information about advocacy and specialist advocacy services that are available.

2.2 Spend time talking the person supported through the advocacy materials, help them understand what advocacy is, why it is important, how Meaningful Lives advocates and that they can request an independent advocate (including a family member, friend, or an outside organisation). Ensure that they are provided with information about specialist advocacy organisations.

3.24 If the person already has an advocate, record their information (name and contact details) in the supported persons personal record on the Client Management System (CMS). Ensure that you keep any advocate's details up to date throughout service delivery.

3.25 Repeat the steps above each time a person:

- is assessed or re-assessed for services
- the person supported is oriented to the service or program
- the person supported is refused service
- the person supported wants to make a complaint about the service
- an incident involving the person supported needs to be investigated; or
- you believe an advocate may be beneficial to the person supported.

2.3 Talk to your direct line manager and collaborate with them to identify and facilitate access to an advocate when you identify that an independent advocate is needed because:

- the person supported, their guardian, nominee, or someone the person identifies as supporting them with decision-making (such as next of kin or support person) requests an advocate
- you believe an advocate may be beneficial to the person supported; or
- the person supported, their guardian, nominee, or someone the person identifies as supporting them with decision-making (such as next of kin or support person) asks to change their advocate.

2.3.1 You must treat all advocates with respect, and you must work collaboratively with any advocate appointed and keep the supported persons best interests at the centre of any decisions or recommendations. It is also important that you seek support from your direct line manager when the supported persons wish conflict with the family's.

2.3.2 Do not disclose any information about the person supported to an advocate, when the person supported is not present, unless the person supported has given permission.

3. NDIS Practice Standards

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Outcome: Each participant accesses supports free from violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation or
discrimination.
1.4.3 Each participant is provided with          Advocate offered at the time a complaints or
        information about the use of an          incident is lodged and managed. Zero
        advocate (including and independent      Tolerance Policy and Procedure. Complaints
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	advocate) and access to an advocate is facilitated where allegations of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation or discrimination have been made.	Handling Policy. Incident Management Policy.	
Outcome: Each participant is supported by the provider to make informed choices, exercise control and maximise their independence relating to the supports provided.			
1.3.5	Each person's right to access an advocate (including and independent advocate) of their choosing is supported, as is their right to have the advocate present.	The offer of an advocate or and independent advocate is provided.	

4. Related Documents

- Charter of Rights and Responsibilities – People Supported
- Complaint Management Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Information Management Policy

Authorisation

Drafted By	Meaningful Lives Executive		
Approved By	Chief Executive Officer		
Approved Date	15/07/2024	Review Date	15/07/2026