

# Capricorn Citizen Advocacy

## REFERRALS POLICY

<b>Policy number:</b>	<b>2.4.0</b>	<b>Approved by Management Committee:</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> April 2017
<b>Version:</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>Signed off by Executive:</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> April 2017
<b>Responsible person:</b>	<b>Coordinator</b>	<b>Scheduled Review Date:</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> April 2020

### Purpose

Capricorn Citizen Advocacy does not, as a matter of course, accept referrals for people with disabilities to be matched with citizen advocates. Instead, it is the role of the Citizen Advocacy office to actively and independently identify and recruit people who are in need of advocacy; protégés.

Whilst this stance shall be the primary response to attempted referrals, Capricorn Citizen Advocacy shall retain the discretion to respond to information provided about a prospective protégé, regardless of the source of such information.

### Policy

- The attempted referral of any person with a disability for acceptance as a protégé to the program shall be responded to in line with this policy. The response should be courteous yet firm, whilst also acknowledging the usually sincerely held belief that citizen advocacy is exactly what would make the most significant positive difference in the person's life. However, it should always be related to the referring person that Capricorn Citizen Advocacy has a policy of not accepting referrals, although in some circumstances the Coordinator will bring the matter to the attention of the Management Committee (or Key Office Activities subcommittee) for further consideration.
- This policy of not habitually taking referrals, when explained to the referring person, can often elicit a response of incredulity and incomprehension – particularly from disability service providers (such as staff of accommodation services) who might find it difficult to conceive of the efficacy and viability of a non-referral organisation.

- Whilst people of a particular mind-set are not expected to appreciate the validity of pro-active protégé recruitment, it is nonetheless important to clearly state the rationales for our policy, to obviate misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Accordingly, listed below are some coherent and considered reasons as to why Capricorn Citizen Advocacy does not mechanically “take names.”

### Implications of Passive Acceptance of Referrals

#### **1. Number of people with disabilities (protégés) who can realistically be matched with Citizen Advocates.**

Citizen Advocacy is a small-scale response, which cannot be expected to meet the advocacy needs of a vast number of people with disabilities. If the policy of the Citizen Advocacy program is to simply accept referrals, it will rapidly yield the outcome of an ever-growing waiting list of people with disabilities. Given the discrepancy between the level of demand for advocates and the capacity of the Citizen Advocacy office to respond, a commitment to match people based on referrals will invariably result in some people having to wait inordinately long periods of time for that to happen – or worse still, they may never be given the opportunity.

Consequently, when the expectation of being introduced to an advocate ultimately leads to disappointment, the actions of the Citizen Advocacy office can be regarded as exacerbating, rather than positively addressing, the pre-existing wound of rejection suffered by so many people with disabilities.

#### **2. Identity and Needs of People who Require Advocacy.**

In order to effectively respond to the real and important advocacy needs of people with disabilities, the Citizen Advocacy office must be absolutely clear in determining (a) who it will recruit as a protégé, and (b) why the person needs an advocate. Reliance on passive referrals relinquishes the decision-making away from the Citizen Advocacy office to the person making the referral. In effect, it is the referring person who will be calling the tune of protégé recruitment. In terms of the identity and needs of protégés thus “recruited”, there are a number of implications for the Citizen Advocacy office.

- a) Firstly, in bringing the situation of an individual with a disability to the attention of the Citizen Advocacy office, the referring person will be offering his/her reasons as to why it is necessary or important for that individual to be matched with an advocate. However, the reasons outlined may not necessarily define (a) the relevant advocacy needs of the person, or (b) the most pressing or serious needs of that person. Consequently, in responding to the referral, Citizen Advocacy office staff who are unquestioning or unsophisticated may end up recruiting an advocate for unnecessary, inappropriate, or peripheral reasons.
- b) Secondly, if protégé recruitment is solely dependent on acceptance of referrals, some of the people most in need of an advocate may not be referred to, and will therefore escape the notice of, the Citizen Advocacy program. For example, disability service providers may decide that it is not necessary or desirable for any of their clients to be provided with spokespersonship by independent advocates; or they may feel that at least some individuals do not need, are unsuitable for, or are “unworthy” of advocates.

### **3. *Other Protégé Characteristics and Corresponding Advocate Roles.***

The Citizen Advocacy office should seek out as protégés, people with disabilities who have a wide range of needs and characteristics (e.g. in terms of age, level of impairment, ability to reciprocate, and so on). Correspondingly, office staff should recruit citizens who can assume a variety of advocacy roles which are responsive to diverse protégé needs.

If the Citizen Advocacy program is obliged to respond to referrals, it will narrow the potential range of protégé needs and advocacy roles in the composition of relationships it arranges, with the likelihood that some types of matches will predominate while others are under-represented or even ignored. This pattern of relationships, in turn, can (re)-define the character of the Citizen Advocacy program. For example, if Citizen Advocacy office staff consistently respond to requests for “friends” for people with disabilities, the facilitation of matches of this nature will transform its identity to that of a “buddy” program.

### **4. *Perception and practice of program and Advocate independence.***

In order to recruit and support citizens who can provide independent advocacy for people with disabilities, the Citizen Advocacy program itself must be separate from, and independent of, service providing agencies whose clients may be matched with advocates. Even the perception that the Citizen Advocacy office is compromised in its independence can be sufficiently damaging to its credibility and those of individual Advocates associated with the office.

If a Citizen Advocacy office primarily responds to referrals from service providing agencies, not only is it likely to overlook the needs of people with disabilities who are not service recipients, the practice may invite the perception that the advocacy office is merely an adjunct to, or extension of, such services (e.g., the “advocacy-providing” arm of the service). Furthermore, because service agency staff have made the referral, the staff may feel that they have some stake in, “ownership” of, or influence over, the ensuing match which has the potential to threaten the independent nature of the Protégé/Advocate relationship.

### **5. *Does Capricorn Citizen Advocacy Take Referrals?***

In providing the above arguments against the acceptance of referrals, one important qualification should be noted: we have not stated that Capricorn Citizen Advocacy would never respond to a referral. Rather than adopt a doctrinaire position which reflexively dismisses all referrals regardless of their seeming validity, we may choose to respond to some which, in our opinion, concern people who have significant and/or urgent needs.

Therefore, by not routinely taking referrals (but nonetheless tempering our policy to make some exceptions), the Citizen Advocacy office can firmly remain in the driving seat of recruitment and matching practices. ‘Opening the floodgates’ of referrals, on the other hand, will ultimately imperil the Citizen Advocacy office’s modus operandi, efficacy, and identity.

### **Related Documents**

Not Applicable

**References**

Grateful acknowledgement is extended to Mitchel Peters for his paper on this subject, which forms the greater part of this policy.

**Ratification**

This statement was adopted by Capricorn Citizen Advocacy's Management Committee at its meeting held on: 04 / 04 / 2017.

SIGNED:

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President

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(Date)

SIGNED:

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Secretary

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