



Referral / Signposting Procedure Protocol
for
Community & Voluntary Sector Organisations

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Background

This Protocol was developed by the CLEAR project, which is a partnership of community and voluntary sector agencies funded by the Public Health Agency and managed by Derry Healthy Cities. The Protocol is intended as a supporting document to the “**CLEAR Standards and Quality Assessment Framework for Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations**”¹ (CLEAR Standards).

The CLEAR Standards set out the minimum quality standard to which community and voluntary organisations should work to in relation to Organisational Management and Governance; Service User Involvement; Privacy and Confidentiality; Knowledge and Skills; and Service Delivery. The standards highlight the need for sign-posting and / or referring to other services or interventions as a means of ensure increased access to appropriate services for people when they need them, where they need them.

This protocol recognises that individual organisations have different priorities and emphasis in relation to mental health and suicide awareness and as such is guided by a number of underlying principles:

- This protocol is **not** designed to make community and voluntary organisations undertake roles which are outside their expertise, competence level or target group.
- This protocol is not intended to conflict with individual organisational values, principles or ethos. Individuals should in the first instance adhere to guiding values, principles and ethos as defined by their organisations management and governing principles.
- This protocol **does not** supersede any legislative or funding requirements which your organisation is legally or contractually obliged to adhere to.

¹ www.clearproject.co.uk/standards

Introduction

The range of mental health and emotional well-being services delivered by community and voluntary organisations varies greatly from intensive personal support and counselling or psychotherapeutic treatments to self-help groups. The organisational complexity of organisations also differs – some organisations are large, regional bodies with a number of services and sites. Others are small, with a minimal number of paid staff and a reliance on volunteers and very specific services / roles. As such it is expected that a degree of signposting and or referring needs to occur to ensure that a service user receives the service that is most appropriate for their needs.

Signposting and referring relate to the way a service user can move from one agency to another and are the cornerstone of ensuring that service users access the most appropriate and relevant service to meet their needs with the organisation that is best qualified to do so.

Organisations must have in place clear and effective policies and procedures that describes for **staff and volunteers** arrangements for signposting and referring as a framework for ethical practice which will help ensure the highest quality of service possible.

As a means of supporting community and voluntary organisations achieve this, the CLEAR project have under consultation, designed this procedure protocol (known hereafter as protocol) as a framework to support early, relevant and appropriate signposting and referrals to other community, voluntary and statutory sector organisations. This protocol is relevant to community and voluntary sector organisations offering services at tiers 1, 2 and 3 (**appendix one**) and is based on the premise that early recognition of the needs of service users and having effective methods for referring / signposting them, where necessary, is crucial if we are to ensure that those in need receive appropriate services.

Purpose / aim

To increase access to appropriate services for people when they need it, where they need it.

Forge strong and sustainable links between community / voluntary and statutory sector service providers.

Objectives

- To provide a framework for staff and volunteers within the community and voluntary sectors to ensure, where relevant, early and appropriate referrals / sign-posting of service users occurs.
- Ensure efficient communication, co-ordination and collaboration between service providers within the community and voluntary sector.

- Ensure efficient communication, co-ordination and collaboration between service providers within the community / voluntary and the statutory sectors.
- Minimise the number of organisations service users come into contact with before accessing the one most appropriate to their needs.
- To ensure that both service users and service providers have a clear understanding and expectation of the service offered by individual organisations.

Tier one organisations

Although, signposting can occur among all service providers, it is likely that organisations operating at tier 1 will primarily signpost rather than refer, as the nature of their services will typically preclude in-depth work.

NOTE: Exceptions

An exception to this would be where in the first instance of meeting someone you ascertain that they may be a danger to themselves or others, therefore, where possible (i.e. with client consent and if the organisation has sufficient contact details²) a referral must be made to an appropriate source of support or help e.g. their G.P.

As such organisations operating at tier one should adhere to good practice guidelines for signposting service users as outlined below.

Tier two and tier three organisations

It is likely that organisations operating at tiers 2 & 3 will have a requirement to signpost some service users and refer others. Organisations operating at this level should in each individual instance ascertain, using definitions within this document, whether they are referring or sign-posting a service user and follow the relevant best practice guidelines.

² Important information on data protection is available from:
<http://www.information.commissioner.gov.uk>

What is sign-posting?

Broadly speaking signposting normally takes place when the service user first contacts your organisation and where you have not undertaken any significant work with them. The term signposting effectively describes the process of giving a service user the details of other services or organisations that may be able to help them, where it had been determined that the service or organisation you represent cannot help.

Signposting can occur in two ways:

- i) The service user is given details of organisation(s) to contact and they make their own arrangements to do so;
- ii) Contact with the alternative agency is made on the service users behalf.

Thus, when signposting there is relatively little information about the case available.

Reasons for Signposting

It is important to be clear about your reasons for signposting a service user.

In order to signpost a service user you must identify that your organisation cannot provide the service which is needed. It may be that you can help the person with some of their needs but not with all of them. This may be because their needs are outside you / your organisations expertise or knowledge. It is important not to go beyond your competence as when this occurs you can no longer support the person appropriately.

Good practice when signposting

- Give the person concerned clear reasons for signposting them;
- Give the person concerned as much detail as possible about the organisation / person you are signposting them to e.g. location, opening times etc;
- Where available offer the person options of a range services so they can choose for themselves;
- Signposting should only be made to agencies that are able to demonstrate that they have a clear commitment to equality and confidentiality, (e.g. through documented adherence to policies, procedures and quality standards);
- **Where in the first instance of meeting someone you ascertain that they may be a danger to themselves or others, where possible (i.e. with client consent if relevant, and if the organisation has sufficient contact details³) a referral must be made to an appropriate source of support or help e.g. their G.P.**
- Staff & volunteers should be facilitated to attend a range of training & development initiatives which can help them to determine when it is

³ Important information on data protection is available from:
<http://www.information.commissioner.gov.uk>

necessary to signpost as well as other services to signpost to. This should include, but is not limited to:

- Data Protection Training
- SafeTALK
- Mental Health First Aid
- ASIST
- Network events

What is a referral?

A referral relates to the transfer of the whole handling of a service users case or some part of it to another organisation (external referral) or to someone else within your own organisation who may have additional skills or competencies to best meet their needs (internal referral). A referral occurs when the referral agency has started work with the service user or when the service user asks them to do so. A person who is being referred to an alternative agency will usually have been seen by someone within your agency on more than one occasion. During this time it is likely that information will come to light which indicates that they would benefit from a different or more intense service.

With a referral it is good practice for the adviser to make contact with the alternative agency to make necessary arrangements to ensure that the transition between organisations for the service users is as smooth as possible. In this instance as work has already begun with the service user the referral agency has a greater responsibility to ensure that they receive the support needed. Therefore, the role of the referring agency does not necessarily end once the referral has been made. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the referring agency to ensure that the reasons for making the referral have been made clear to the receiving agency.

As a referral is a more detailed process than signposting it is good practice to complete a referral form [Appendix three].

Reasons for referring

In order to refer a service user you must identify that your organisation cannot provide the service which is needed. It may be that you can help the person with some of their needs but not with all of them.

Other Reasons for needing to refer a service user.

It is important to be clear about your reasons for referring a service user. These may include:

- Outside you / your organisations expertise / knowledge;
- Complex case that requires the input of more than one organisation;
- Work overload;
- Relationship breakdown between service user and provider;
- Person discloses that they are a risk to themselves or others.

Record keeping

If a referral is made to a statutory organisation due to a disclosure being made it is essential that the disclosure is documented / recorded and includes:

- Details of the person to whom the disclosure is made;
- Date of the disclosure;
- How the disclosure was made;
- Why the disclosure was made;
- What information was shared;
- Service user consent to make referral;
- If no consent was given, the reason why a disclosure was made without it.

When making records remember they should be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Structured
- Accurate
- Sufficient
- Not excessive or unnecessarily intrusive
- Respectful of the service user and 3rd parties
- Consistent across entries

Good practice when making referrals

- Have appropriate and relevant policies and documentation in place:
 - Referral Policy (**page 10**)
 - Confidentiality Policy
 - Equal opportunities Policy
 - Staff Safety Policy
 - Range of regional and local directories and contact information
 - Service charter (**page 13**)
- Give the person concerned clear reasons for referring them;
- Review possible alternative services with service user;
- Where available offer the service user options of a range of services so they can choose for themselves;
- Agree with service user the boundaries of confidentiality in the referral process;
- Gain consent to make a referral;
- Give service user as much details on the organisation / person you are referring them to as possible e.g. location, opening times, any costs that may be involved etc;
- Referrals should only be made to agencies that are able to demonstrate that they have a clear commitment to equality and confidentiality, (e.g. through documented adherence to policies, procedures and quality standards);
- Complete referral form;

- **Where in the first instance of meeting someone you ascertain that they may be a danger to themselves or others, where possible (i.e. with client consent if relevant, and if the organisation has sufficient contact details⁴) a referral must be made to an appropriate source of support or help e.g. their G.P.**
- Staff & volunteers should be facilitated to attend a range of training & development initiatives which can help them to determine when it is necessary to signpost as well as other services to signpost to. This should include, but is not limited to:
 - Data Protection Training
 - SafeTALK
 - Mental Health First Aid
 - ASIST
 - Referral Procedures
 - Network events

Good practice in receiving referrals

- Have appropriate and relevant policies and documentation in place:
 - Referral Policy (**page 10**)
 - Confidentiality Policy
 - Equal opportunities Policy
 - Staff Safety Policy
 - Range of regional and local directories and contact information
 - Service charter
- Ensure that a referral form is completed containing sufficient information from the referral source to determine appropriateness of the referral;
- Check the service users understanding and expectations of the referral
- Clarify / discuss the role of the service
- Ensure that data protection and confidentiality requirements are adhered to⁵;
- Agree timings, conditions and follow – up arrangements with the referring organisation. This may, with service user consent, and within the provisions of data protection and confidentiality legislation include, sharing information.
- Monitor referrals received to ensure that all eligible service users are accepted.

⁴ Important information on data protection is available from:
<http://www.information.commissioner.gov.uk>

⁵ *ibid*

Sample Referral Policy

Policy for Referral

This organisation believes that it is of paramount importance that all service users are entitled to access the most appropriate and relevant service that meets their express needs. With this in mind, we commit to adhere to the following procedures:

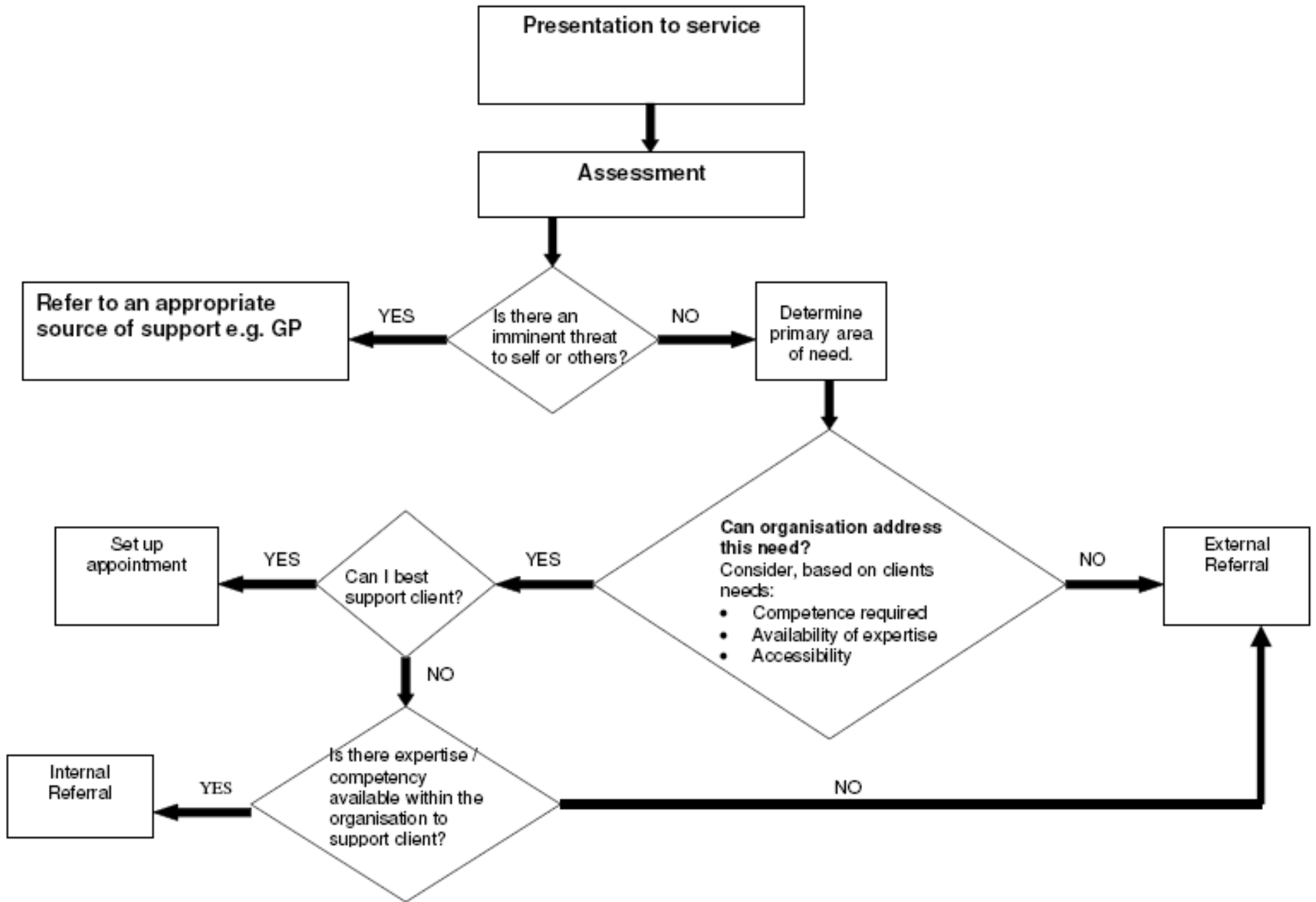
Making and receiving referrals:

1. All routine referrals to colleagues and other services will be discussed with the service user in advance and the service user's consent obtained both to making the referral and also to disclosing information to accompany the referral. Reasonable care will be taken to ensure that:
 - the recipient of the referral is able to provide the required service;
 - any confidential information disclosed during the referral process will be adequately protected;
 - the referral is likely to be of benefit to the service user.

2. Prior to accepting a referral we will give careful consideration to:
 - the appropriateness of the referral;
 - the likelihood that the referral will be beneficial to the service user;
 - the adequacy of the service user's consent for the referral.

If the referrer is professionally required to retain overall responsibility for the work with the service user, it is considered, in certain circumstances, to be professionally appropriate to provide the referrer with brief progress reports. Such reports would be made in consultation with service users and not normally against their explicit wishes.

Referral Procedure



Appendix One

Levels of intervention

The levels of intervention referred to within this document are:

Tier 1 – Promotion, Prevention and Education

Services are aimed at the population as a whole and include health promotion, awareness raising and brief interventions.

Tier 2 - Early intervention

Services are aimed at people experiencing mild or moderate mental health problems and/or emotional distress. Services within this tier may include mentoring, befriending, listening ear support, counselling, access to diversionary activities or support in life-style changes.

Tier 3 – Specialised intervention

Services are aimed at people needing more specialised support and include services such as counselling and psychotherapy.

Appendix Two

Sample Service Charter

- Our aim is to create an environment in which everyone feels safe, valued and respected.
- To deliver the highest standards of care to service users who will be treated with courtesy and respect.
- Our expectation is that service users will treat staff, volunteers and other persons within this organisation with courtesy and respect.

Confidentiality and respect

You have the right to:

- privacy and confidentiality
- respect for your values, culture and beliefs
- receive our services in a caring and courteous manner
- be treated with dignity
- respectful attitude and behaviour
- know what information will be stored about you and how it will be stored.
- access information stored about you (in compliance with the 1998 Data Protection Act)⁶
- receive an explanation about the nature and limits of confidentiality related to your personal information held by the service.

Service user focus

You have the right to:

- treatment as a unique person
- receive services tailored to you needs
- be treated in a professional, caring and approachable manner
- receive a non-judgemental, discrimination-free and prejudice –free service.
- receive a clear explanation of the service you are offered and for your informed consent to be obtained prior to any service commencing. Where possible this will be available in a format to meet your needs.
- leave at any time

Health & Safety

You have the right to:

- welcoming, clean & accessible rooms and offices that comply with professional safety standards
- ease of access for people with disabilities and special needs
- clear signage within the organisations premises

⁶ Organisations should make service users aware of their policy for accessing information. This must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 which states that a request must be made in writing including email, provide enough information to carry out a search and be complied with within 40 days.

Openness and fairness

You have the right to:

- fair and transparent treatment
- give feedback on your experiences of our services
- complain when you are unhappy or feel treated unfairly

Quality assurance

We undertake to ensure that all staff & volunteers:

- achieve and work to the highest professional standards
- adhere to quality standards⁷
- provide services which are continuously monitored and evaluated
- provide ongoing supervision and line-management
- receive up – to – date adequate training & development
- work within the guidance of our quality assurance

Complaints⁸

- It is your right to make a complaint if you are unhappy with a service or the way you have been treated by a representative of this organisation.
- All service users will be entitled to give feedback on the service they have received.
- We will actively and regularly seek your feedback on our performance and deal promptly, impartially and sensitively with any issues that arise.

Referrals

- We will endeavour to provide you with the necessary service, however where this is not possible we will work with you to find an appropriate service. We will enable you to make informed choices without pressure or prejudice, communicating and explaining every stage of our service to you.

What we expect from you.

Staff and volunteers within this organisation also have the right to:

- be treated with dignity and respect
- receive both positive and negative feedback regarding the service they provide
- to feel safe and secure while carrying out their organisational duties

⁷ This will include the standards devised by CLEAR but not only pertain to these.

⁸ The organisations complaints procedure should be accessible & visible to all service users

Appendix Three

Sample Referral Form

Referred by: _____ Taken by: _____ Date: _____

Person Referred	Referral Agency Details
Name:	Name:
Address:	Address
Postcode:	Postcode:
Telephone:	Telephone:
Mobile:	Email:
	Name of contact person _____
G.P. Details (name, address, phone number): _____ _____ _____	
Reason for referral: _____ _____ _____	
Details / name of any other agencies involved: _____ _____ _____	
Referers Signature:	Date:
Consent: <input type="checkbox"/> I agree that the information provided above can be shared with agency / person specified above. <input type="checkbox"/> I understand that I can withdraw my consent to share information at any time.	
Signed: _____	Date: _____