



# Cornwall Mental Health Project

## Community Independent Visitor Guidelines

Your name:.....

Your Co-ordinator is:.....

Your Co-ordinator's contact no(s).....

.....

Your Co-ordinator's email:.....

If your Co-ordinator is on leave or off sick and you have any queries or concerns, please call the Mental Health Project office to speak to another member of staff.

Our telephone number is: 01872 243532

Our address is: 2 Princes Street, Truro TR1 2ES

Email: [mentalhealth@cornwallrcc.org.uk](mailto:mentalhealth@cornwallrcc.org.uk)

Website: [www.cornwallrcc.org.uk/services/mental-health/](http://www.cornwallrcc.org.uk/services/mental-health/)

Project Manager: Marita Ward

Project Deputy Manager: Nicki Sweeney

Project Administrator: Jane Morgan

Project Co-ordinator (East): Alison Sheward

Project Co-ordinator (West): Nicky Cope

## **Community Visiting – what we ask of you**

### **Following your application**

Prospective Independent Visitors will be informally interviewed by a member of the Project's staff to ensure you are clear on what the role involves and to arrange suitable visits. You might want to consider whether it is appropriate for you to visit an area where you may receive care as a service user yourself. Your CMHP Co-ordinator will discuss this with you.

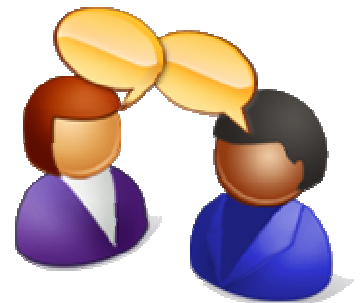
All Visitors will be required to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check. We will arrange this with you before you start visiting. You may begin visiting before your CRB check comes through, however you will not be able to visit unsupervised. If you have any concerns about the CRB process, you can discuss this with your Co-ordinator in confidence.

### **The role**

The role of the Independent Visitor is to act as a confidential and independent listening ear and to support service users in having a collective say about their care, treatment and quality of life whilst receiving support from mental health services. Visitors are not there to problem solve but to give people time, support, help raise issues, and to signpost people to helpful and supportive organizations.

Independent Visiting is a commitment and visits to venues may need to be regular. If, for any reason, Visitors are unable to attend or need to swap visiting days they should let a Project Co-ordinator know as soon as possible.

If you have any queries or concerns about your visits, please speak to your Co-ordinator about them as soon as possible.



## **What we offer you**

### **Supervision**

One-to-one supervision will take place with your Co-ordinator on a regular basis but how this takes place and how often this happens will be for you and your Co-ordinator to agree between you. Supervision sessions are a good opportunity for you to review your progress and highlight any concerns. If there is anything troubling you after a visit, please contact your Co-ordinator or another member of the Project's staff as soon as possible – please do not go home worrying about something on your own. The monthly CIVS meetings are also an opportunity to raise any queries or concerns you have with visiting.

It is expected that you will have a formal supervision session (i.e. a written record of the session will be produced) at least once a quarter with your Co-ordinator. This formal session should highlight any issues you may have around your visits and/or your role and also any issues that your Co-ordinator may have. The purpose of formal supervision

is to ensure that you are adequately supported, have the opportunity to review how things are going for you and any concerns are addressed.

## **Training**

Community visitors will be offered regular training as required and be expected to attend some compulsory sessions, e.g. Signposting, Human Rights Human Lives. Induction training tends to be on-the-job and your Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring this takes place. If you have any particular training requirements, please tell your Co-ordinator.



When you start your role as a Visitor, you will shadow your Co-ordinator for a number of weeks until both of you feel that you are confident and comfortable with how visiting takes place and what is expected of you. You may then be paired with another volunteer, or it may be necessary for you to visit on your own but this should only happen with the full agreement of both the volunteer and the

relevant Co-ordinator.

You should receive a **Mental Health Directory**, which lists all mental health services in Cornwall, including some national help lines. If you have not been given one or have lost your copy, please ask a member of the Project's staff for another copy. Other useful information leaflets are also available.

## **Grievances**

Should you have any reason to be unhappy with Cornwall Mental Health Project or its staff, please try to discuss your concerns with your Co-ordinator first. If you do not feel able to do this or you are unhappy with their response, then please contact Nicki Sweeney, Project Deputy Manager. If you are not satisfied with her response, then please contact Marita Ward, Project Manager. You can contact us by telephone, email or in writing; contact details are on the front page of this document.

## **What we ask of you**

### **Feedback and monitoring**

Visitors should complete feedback sheets after every visit. You are also asked to complete monitoring data, which collect statistics on age ranges, ethnicity and gender of the people you speak to during your visit. Please be aware that asking for this information from service users may cause concern so please use your discretion as to how you obtain this information. If you are unsure, please discuss with your Co-ordinator.

### **Monthly meetings**

Visitors will be required to attend a monthly meeting held in Truro. These meetings are a useful time for discussing any issues that have arisen during your visits and for highlighting any areas of concern. If it's not possible for you to attend, please can you

ensure your feedback sheets and monitoring forms are completed and sent in prior to each meeting.

### **What happens if you become unwell**

If a Visitor needs to have a stay on an inpatient unit as a patient, it is not advised that they return to community visiting for at least 2 months after discharge. However, they should discuss this with their CMHP Co-ordinator and their Care Co-ordinator (e.g. CPN or Psychiatrist). Visitors are welcome to attend the monthly Independent Visitor meeting in Truro during this period if they so wish. It is advisable that a supported return to visiting is arranged, i.e. visiting with another volunteer or CMHP Co-ordinator, until it is agreed that the person is well enough to visit alone (if applicable). If a Visitor has any concerns about returning to visiting at all, this should be discussed with the relevant Co-ordinator.

### **Expenses**

Visitors will receive transport/mileage costs and out of pocket expenses. Please agree any expenses with your Co-ordinator before starting visiting. We ask that any unusual expenses be authorised by your Co-ordinator first. Mileage costs are currently 40p per mile). Mileage can only be paid wholly and exclusively for the voluntary work you undertake as an Independent Visitor.



These expenses can only be claimed using a Mental Health Project CIVS expenses form which is sent to our office at 2 Princes Street, Truro or handed in to Project staff. Payment is usually made by cheque. Cash payments are usually only paid for any claims under £10; if you need cash for any amount greater than £10, please give Project staff at least 48 hours notice.

### **If you receive benefits / have other, paid work**

It is important to remember that if you are in receipt of social security benefits, housing benefit or council tax benefit you are obliged to notify these departments of any voluntary work you undertake or payments you receive (including travel expenses). Cornwall Rural Community Council/Mental Health Project have no responsibility for contacting any social security benefits departments. You will be asked to sign a Declaration Form to say that you will notify the benefits department. If you have other work where you are paid, you should notify the Inland Revenue of any expenses you receive.

### **Equal Opportunities and Health & Safety Policies**

At Cornwall Rural Community Council and Cornwall Mental Health Project we are committed to the principles of equal opportunity and welcomes diversity. Accordingly we will not discriminate against any individual, on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, disability, trade union membership or non-membership, gender, sexual orientation or identity, marital status, age, or being a paid worker or volunteer. We ask workers and volunteers to apply the same policy.

CRCC & CMHP will do all in its power to ensure your well being and safety whilst volunteering. If you become aware of any potential hazard or unsafe working conditions, you should have no hesitation raising them with your Co-ordinator. You are required to take all reasonable steps to safeguard your health and safety, and that of any other person who may be affected by your actions, and to observe at all times published safety and fire rules and procedures.

### **Professional conduct**

When undertaking any activity in the name of CMHP's Community Visiting Scheme, volunteers should conduct themselves in a manner that reflects well on CMHP. This means:

- Being courteous & polite to everyone
- Listening to what others have to say
- Make it clear when expressing opinions of your own that these are yours and not representative of the opinions of CMHP
- Being committed and reliable
- Not seek to gain material (money or gifts) reward for volunteering; volunteering to help others should be reward enough
- Be open and honest
- Respect others even when they hold views that are different from your own
- **Dress appropriately: smart casual and no vest tops.**

This list is not exhaustive. Volunteers who are not good ambassadors for CMHP will be asked to leave the scheme.

### **Visiting protocol**

The Community Independent Visiting Scheme covers a range of community-based venues across the county, e.g. Community Mental Health Team bases or Day Services Centres. We do not visit people in their home.



The venue that you visit will be agreed with your Co-ordinator.

If you have been, or still are, a service user at a particular venue and do not feel comfortable going in as a Visitor, please discuss this with your Co-ordinator. We will try to arrange visits for you elsewhere.

### **First visit – where to seek help**

During your first visit, you should make sure that you know where the manager's office is in case you need to seek help quickly and you should make sure you know what the fire safety procedures are. Please make yourself known to relevant venue staff as you go about your visit. Your Co-ordinator should ensure that these issues are dealt with as part of your initial Induction training.

## Arriving at the venue

You must sign in on arrival and ensure a senior person knows of your presence and your role. Where visiting a mental health-related venue, ask staff to let you know if there are any service users it is advisable not to approach for any reason during your visit or for information on anything you might need to know prior to your visit relating to issues of health and safety. It is important that you are made aware of any possible risks before every visit begins.

## Visitor badge

You should always wear your Independent Visitor badge (we will supply this for you) or collect a Visitor badge from Reception or manager's office as appropriate. It can be confusing and difficult for service users to know who everyone is that comes in to a venue and wearing your badge helps people to understand who you are and what your role is.

## Lone working

If there is a need to meet with an individual away from a pre-arranged venue, Visitors are expected to meet that person in a public area, e.g. a cafe or another organisation's meeting room. This arrangement must be agreed with your Co-ordinator first. If you need to use an organisation's meeting room, please discuss with your Co-ordinator about booking a room and any costs involved prior to meeting with the service user.

### *At a pre-arranged venue*



For your safety, if you are meeting someone in a closed room at a pre-arranged venue (e.g. CMHT or day centre), please agree this with the venue manager or appointed supervisor first. Ensure that the manager knows who you are meeting and when. Let them know when the meeting has finished and you are safe. If you and/or the venue manager have any concerns about your safety prior to meeting the service user, **DO NOT** meet with them in a closed room. If you become concerned for your safety during the meeting, *leave immediately*.

### *At a community venue not pre-arranged*

Ensure that someone (ideally your Co-ordinator) knows what time the meeting is, where the meeting is taking place, who you are meeting and when you expect the meeting to finish. You should agree with your Co-ordinator to ring them immediately prior to the meeting and then immediately after so that we know you are safe. If you have any concerns about your safety prior to meeting the service user, **DO NOT** meet with them in a closed room. If you become concerned for your safety after the meeting has begun, *leave immediately*.

## Where to meet with service users

For the safety of service users and Visitors any one-to-one time should be in the quietest part of an open area (e.g. corner of dining area, a quiet lounge, table in garden

area) not in closed rooms (except by agreement with venue management – please see the section on above on **lone working**).

### **How to deal with service users' queries**

During each visit you may pick up on queries and concerns from service users about the mental health services they receive. You can do the following:

- Ask the person if they feel able to discuss their query or concern with their Care Co-ordinator or the person/organisation they have concerns about.
- They may feel able to do this but would like some support to do so. You can help them with this as moral support during your visit, e.g. making a telephone call.
- If they do not feel able to do this at all, you can ask the person for permission to speak on their behalf, providing it is not an official complaint. If they do not give it, you must respect their right to confidentiality unless what the person tells you poses a risk to themselves or others, in which case you must tell the person that you have to report what they've said to a senior member of staff.
- If you think the person requires more support than you are able to give during your visit, or the issue is more complex than you feel trained to deal with, you should signpost them to a Mental Health Advocate. If the person wishes to make a complaint, you can signpost them to a number of services for this purpose.
- If you are not sure of how to deal with a query or concern, please contact your Co-ordinator as soon as possible. Do not leave it until the next visit or meeting as it may be important to deal with the issue quickly.
- You should also record the issue on your feedback sheet and discuss at the next Independent Visitor meeting.
- If a service user has a complaint about their care and treatment you can signpost them to: the manager of the relevant service (e.g. CMHT Team Leader); A Mental Health Advocate; Cornwall Foundation Trust's Customer Support Team. Your Co-ordinator should give you these contact details. You can help them to make contact with any of these people but you must get their permission first.



### **Abusive patients**

Sometimes when people are unwell they are not always aware of who people are or have full control over what they are saying. Sometimes this means they may say unwelcome things to people that they would never say when well. It is important to understand that this person is experiencing a high level of distress but this doesn't mean that it's ok for them to speak to people in this way. If a service user says anything abusive towards you, please let a member of staff know immediately. Similarly, if you feel in any way threatened by a patient, speak to staff immediately. Your safety and wellbeing are paramount. Even if you feel uncomfortable being around a particular patient, you should remove yourself from the area they are in and ensure that you know where staff are should you need to alert them.

### Some safety tips:

- *Never shout at or be abusive towards a service user, even if they have done this to you.*
- *If someone appears to be getting angry, remove yourself from their area; never confront them or get angry back.*
- *Always know where your exits are.*
- *Always wear an alarm and ensure staff know where you are.*
- *Always see people in open, communal areas where you can be seen by others where possible.*
- *Check with a person first to see if they are happy to chat with you.*
- *Avoid touching people but always check first if you think touching someone is appropriate in that situation. Be aware that touching someone can be misconstrued or be distressing to some people.*

### Being non-judgemental

Sometimes when service users discuss their experiences of mental health services they may tell you that they have been treated poorly by staff or other service users. It is important that Visitors do not make judgements about right or wrong, or whether the person is telling the truth or not. You are simply a listening ear. You may signpost the person to someone else who may be able to help with their complaint if they wish you to do so.

### Relationship with venue staff

Visitors should make every effort to build good working relationships with staff and colleagues at the venues being visited. Although you are there to represent the service user view, a good relationship with staff ensures that they are willing to listen to any concerns you may raise on service users' behalf. You should treat everyone with courtesy and respect.

### Listening to difficult experiences

Sometimes the things you may hear from service users may trigger unpleasant memories of experiences that you have had or just simply be difficult to listen to. If you feel uncomfortable with anything you've heard during a visit, please contact your Co-ordinator as soon as possible to discuss how you feel. It may be that these feelings pass and you are able to continue visiting. However, if at any point you feel that visiting is becoming in any way difficult for you, please let your Co-ordinator know. It is important that you benefit from volunteering and we will respect your decision to withdraw from the Scheme if you feel it no longer works for you.



### Confidentiality and Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

All personal info given by service users is confidential unless the individual concerned is a risk to themselves or others, in which case the information must be passed on to the relevant manager immediately. You must let the patient know, ideally in advance, that information of this nature cannot be kept in confidence. Training for you on

Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults (Human Rights Human Lives workshop) is compulsory.

Similarly, it is not a good idea to disclose personal information about yourself, e.g. where you live, telephone numbers, etc. By observing boundaries, you keep yourself and your family safe.

### **When chatting to patients**

Personal experiences can be disclosed by Independent Visitors if relevant to the discussion but please bear in mind that you are visiting very vulnerable people and they may not cope well with hearing about any difficult experiences you have had.

Be aware that body language can be misunderstood. If, however, it feels that some form of physical contact (e.g. a hug) might be helpful check this out with the person first.

### **Personal contact**

You may be asked or want to meet up with a service user separately from the Community Visiting Scheme. Cornwall Mental Health Project is unable to support such requests. If, therefore, you choose to meet up with a person outside of the Scheme, we ask that you do this as an individual in your own right not as an Independent Visitor. Please be mindful of your safety in these situations.

***Please tick to indicate that you have read and understood these procedures***

I have read, understood and agree to abide by the above procedures and protocols. I understand who to contact should I have any concerns or queries.

**COMMUNITY INDEPENDENT VISITOR AGREEMENTS**

I understand that in my role as an Independent Visitor I may be given information that is confidential. This may be in a variety of ways, i.e. personal information from another service user or information given at any meetings I attend. I agree not to disclose such information to a third party unless there is a risk to the individual or others.

Signed (Visitor):.....

Signed (Co-ordinator):.....

Date: .....

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For office use only

Co-ordinator: please ensure that the procedures are read through with the prospective Visitor before they begin visiting and ensure that this agreement is signed and dated. The Visitor MUST have a copy returned to them ASAP and the original put in their file.

