

# Client Handbook

LIVEfree Project

[www.livefreeproject.org.au](http://www.livefreeproject.org.au)

**WHAT IS THIS HANDBOOK ALL ABOUT?** To give clients some basic information about LIVEfree Project and the rules that govern its operation. If you would like our detailed policies simply ask and we will send them to you or they are on our webpage [www.livefreeproject.org.au](http://www.livefreeproject.org.au) (you will be provided with the password for this at this first meeting).

**WHO IS THE SERVICE FOR?** People in need of an advocacy service.

**HOW MUCH DOES THE SERVICE COST?** Nothing, it's free.

**WHAT DOES ADVOCACY MEAN (WHAT DO WE DO)?** Advocacy means 'standing by' someone, or 'speaking out' for someone's rights, or 'going into bat' for another person - 'being on their side', when they are treated unfairly. We believe that all people in our community have the same legal and civil rights and that advocacy has a role in safeguarding people against abuse.

## **WHAT ARE THINGS ADVOCATES CANNOT DO?**

- Provide legal advice (but where appropriate Advocates may help you get legal advice from a lawyer).
- Provide casework services (e.g. finding housing or jobs, applying for services, managing services, etc.)
- Provide advocacy services when a support worker/caseworker can reasonably provide advocacy support (without a conflict of interest).
- Provide advocacy for a person when a more appropriate service is available to advocate and assist (e.g. debt matters where a financial counsellor is available, representation at a tenancy tribunal when a tenant's advocacy service is available, provide court support when a suitable court support program is available).
- Provide advocacy for a person who wishes to take out an apprehended personal violence order against a neighbour or workmate if appropriate mediation has not been attempted to resolve the dispute

**WHAT PART CAN I PLAY WHEN THE ADVOCATE HELPS?** The first two things that an advocate will ask you is 'What result do you want?' and 'What do you want to see changed?' It is very important that you tell us what you want to happen, as we are guided by your wishes.

**SELF ADVOCACY:** When you can, it is also important that you help out in getting the result you want. So, the advocate will also ask you what part you can play in getting your requested result.

**HOW INDEPENDENT IS THE SERVICE?** We endeavor to be as independent from service providers and government as possible. For instance, we do a check with each case to ensure that an advocate's interests will not interfere with his/her advocacy work. If there are any possible conflicts of interest with advocates, other clients, or management we have procedures to deal with this in an open and transparent way. For example; we cannot advocate for two clients in the same matter if they have different points of view about the best outcome. We also ask our advocates not to accept gifts or to have financial transactions with clients.

**WHO WILL THE SERVICE ASSIST FIRST WHEN LOTS OF PEOPLE ARE ASKING FOR ADVOCACY HELP?** We will try to help the people who need it the most first and give people an idea of how long it will be before we can assist. For instance; the first people we try to help have the most serious issues and the least alternatives for assistance.

**WHAT IF THE SERVICE CAN'T HELP?** We will tell you why, and we will assist you to try other services if this is possible.

**WHAT IF THE SERVICE TRIES TO HELP BUT HAS TO STOP?** We hope this won't happen. But the service may discontinue advocacy if this will cause harm to you or the service; or if there is a service that will better meet your needs. Also, if a client threatens or scares staff we can no longer advocate for that client. There service has limited resources and we must ensure the safety of staff while providing the best service for clients.

**WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM NOT HAPPY WITH THE SERVICE I GET?** If you are not happy with any part of our service, you have the right to tell us. We welcome any complaints or suggestions, because it helps us provide a better service.

Remember you can complain or give feedback at any time by writing email: [info@livefreeproject.org.au](mailto:info@livefreeproject.org.au) or by talking: phone M: 0412 429193. Everything you say will be private and will only be discussed by the people who are involved. If you would like someone to be with you or speak for you, you may ask someone you trust to help you.

Whether you have a big problem or a small problem you have the right to talk to someone and have your problem seen to.

## **IF YOU WANT TO COMPLAIN ABOUT LIVEfree Project OR AN ADVOCATE HERE ARE SOME STEPS YOU CAN FOLLOW:**

**STEP 1** Talk to the Advocate or person you have the problem with. When you do this, you can bring a friend, family member, carer, or someone you trust.

**STEP 2** If things don't work out, you can talk to \_\_\_\_\_

**STEP 3** If you want to take your issue further you can ask to contact the LIVEfree Project Board

**STEP 4** It is important to try to go through the above steps first but if you are not happy with the decision made by LIVEfree Project, you can contact the NSW Ombudsman 1800 451 524 or the Complaints Resolution & Referral Service 1800 880 052.

**WHY DO WE KEEP INFORMATION ABOUT CLIENTS?** LIVEfree Project collects information about the people who use our service. We do this to make sure that we record the work we do for you and to keep track of how we are going in getting the result you want. A file is made up for every person who uses the service.

**WHAT INFORMATION IS KEPT? HOW IS IT USED?** We keep basic personal information, along with other information about your situation. We record the results you are hoping for and take notes on what we have been doing. We also put reports together from this information to show that we are doing our job. For instance, we may report on how many clients we had and what was the most common problem of people who came to us for help. These reports **will not** identify any individuals.

**WHO HAS ACCESS TO PERSONAL INFORMATION?** The only people who can look at your file are the people who work for LIVEfree Project and who are assisting with your case. We will ask your permission before talking to other people about your case. The exceptions to this are:

1. That in some cases a law court may order us to provide information in a client's file;
2. A law says we must report any information we know about a child whose safety is at risk;
3. We may have to release information in an emergency situation where there is a serious risk to a person's life, health or safety or threat to public health or safety;
4. Independent people (standards auditors) who have signed an agreement not to tell anyone about information on your file - these people may look at some files to make sure we are providing you with good quality advocacy (**you can sign a note to say you do not want your file to be included in the audit if you wish**).

**CAN I SEE MY OWN FILE?** Yes. If you want to see your file, all you have to do is ask. You can take a copy, but the file belongs to LIVEfree Project.

**HOW SECURE IS MY FILE?** When not in use, your file is kept in a secure cabinet and computer system. Our computers have strong security passwords.

## **A SUMMARY OF YOUR RIGHTS (AND RESPONSIBILITIES):**

### **As a client you have the following rights:**

1. To be treated with fairness and respect (freedom from abuse).
2. To make your own decisions about your advocacy support.
3. To be fully informed in a way that you can understand.
4. To have your information treated privately and not shared without your permission.
5. To feel safe about complaining if you are not satisfied with your advocate.
6. To have an advocate who is independent from other service providers.

### **As a client you have the following responsibilities:**

1. To treat your advocate with respect.
2. To understand that advocates try to do what you ask for but cannot do things that are illegal or may cause harm to you or others
3. To let your advocate, know everything you know about your issue.
4. To give at least 24 hours' notice if you need to change an appointment.
5. To make sure your home is safe if your advocate is visiting.
6. To understand that due to limited resources that advocates must help clients who have the greatest need first.
7. To undertake reasonable self-advocacy tasks to assist to resolve the advocacy issue