

# Working with Families Policy

Issued: 6/12/2019      Stage: Issued

## Objective:

To promote the importance of family connections, natural support networks and continuity & security in the lives of the people **focus** supports.

## Scope:

All **focus** staff and stakeholders

## Policy Statement:

People with disabilities need support networks composed of many individuals who provide many different types of support. These networks can only be nurtured as they grow and evolve over time. Time, age and distance can affect how well people stay connected. **focus** has a vital role to play in facilitating continuity in peoples existing relationships and building the capacity of potential support networks. **focus** can play a further role in supporting people to reconnect with family members, past friends and acquaintances.

**focus** also values and promotes positive open relationships between families/carers and the organisation.

**focus** recognises, values and promotes the significant role that families/carers, (including significant others) play within the lives of the people we support. **focus** is committed to providing services that work in partnership with families/carers that are respectful and take into account the diversity and different relationships within each family unit. **focus** is committed to ensuring that the relationships between their family/carers or significant others are supported throughout a person's life.

Natural support networks are groups of people whose commitment to support each other is usually lifelong. Families provide lifelong support and a safety net for many people. Quality of life is improved for people who choose the extent and frequency of contact with their support network.

Ultimately the person with a disability has control of their own life however, **focus** supports and encourages family/carers to contribute to the decision making process with their family member.

**focus** formally commits to ensuring that continuity of significant relationships, stability of services & supports and planned outcomes for people with disabilities are maximised.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- staff will work in a manner that promotes mutual respect and trust with families
- staff must always remember that maintaining a positive relationship with family is of paramount importance
- staff must to be courteous, respectful and professional in all dealings with family members and friends
- staff need to ensure that they do not place their own judgments or values on the relationships that individuals may have with members of their family or their support network
- staff must ensure they respond to any query made by families in a timely manner
- staff will at all times be open to suggestions, or ideas that families/carers put forward
- For the purpose of this document any reference to families/carers may include significant others i.e. advocates, natural/informal supports, friends etc

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## Responsibilities:

### Who is a Carer?

The Carers Recognition Act 2012 defines a carer as anyone who provides care to another person in a 'care relationship', including carers aged under 18 years.

A care relationship exists where the person being cared for is an older person, or a person with a disability, a mental illness or has an ongoing medical condition.

The Act also includes situations where someone is being cared for under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, in a foster, kinship or permanent care arrangement.

If someone is a spouse, partner, parent, child or other relative, and they do not meet any of the above criteria, they are not in a 'care relationship' for the purposes of the Act.

The Act also does not apply to people employed to provide care services, or people who provide care as part of professional training or as a volunteer for an organisation.

### Principles Relating to Families and Carers

Families/carers will:

Be respected and recognised

- as an individual with their own needs
- as a carer
- as someone with special knowledge of the person in their care.

Be supported as an individual and as a carer, including during changes to the care relationship.

Be recognised for their efforts and dedication as a carer and for the social and economic contribution to the community arising from their role as a carer

If appropriate, have their views and cultural identity taken into account, together with the views, cultural identity, needs and best interests of the person for whom they care, in matters relating to the care relationship, including when decisions are made that impact on the carer and the care relationship

Have their social wellbeing and health recognised in matters relating to the care relationship

Have considered in decision making the effect of being a carer on their participation in employment and education.

### Partnership with Families

**focus** believes strongly that a partnership relationship between the organisation, the family/friends/advocate and the individual is paramount in providing a quality service to the clients.

**focus** is committed to ensuring that all planning processes within the organisation, provide opportunities for input from families and that all contributions are embraced and respected in a professional manner.

Staff will respect the input of families into the planning process. Family members are often the best people to help understand a person with complex communication and to determine out what a person likes and dislikes.

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## Families and Decision Making

**focus** promotes choice and control and will always ensure that the people in receipt of services have control of their life and the supports they receive. To achieve this, **focus** supports and encourages family/carers to contribute to the decision making processes with their family member/s.

All people with a disability aged 18 years or over are entitled to make their own decisions. This includes deciding how to involve their families in the decision making process. Staff will seek consent from people we support to involve their families in making decisions for (or alongside) the person.

Where a person is unable to make an informed decision **focus** will involve the important people in that person's life in the decision making.

**focus** values and respects families and expects families to be involved in, and consulted about key choices and decisions affecting the lives of the people we support.

- **focus** will strongly advocate for the rights of each person supported to have maximum input into decisions about their own lives
- In doing so, staff should respect and have clarity about what is personal and what is family business and should on every occasion, seek permission of the person involved to share information
- Mutual respect, openness and trust should characterise all dealings with family members and friends, who hold valuable information and knowledge about the person and their circumstances.

The role of families in decision making may also be subject to the law. There are some family members legally appointed as substitute decision makers for people we support.

- Managers and Customer Relationship Leaders/Activities Facilitators will, if relevant, find out if there is a person legally appointed to make decisions on behalf of a person we support e.g. enduring power of attorney; guardian; or administrator.
- Managers and Customer Relationship Leaders/Activities Facilitators will follow the instructions of any person legally appointed to make decisions on behalf of a person we support according to the terms of the appointment.

If conflict of interest arises between the individual and their family, **focus** encourages the use of an independent third party to assist in mediation.

## Communication with Families

**focus** will communicate with families through email, phone calls, minuted meeting records, service information books, verbally through pre-arranged meetings, newsletters, flyers and letters.

Communication must be at the level and frequency requested by the family. This should be clearly documented in the service agreement.

Day to day communication to families should generally be through Active Support Workers or the Customer Relationship Leaders/Activities Facilitators. These staff provide families with a reference point for any concerns they may have and are responsible for keeping families up to date with the information they require. These roles are responsible for coordinating the communication between families and the organisation. This can be done in the form of communication diaries, phone calls or direct contact.

The Customer Relationship Leaders/Activities Facilitator role is responsible for the everyday interactions between the person supported and families to keep families up to date about participation, incidents and

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current events. If there are any issues or concerns, it is the responsibility of the Active Support Worker to document and report these issues to their line manager, who in return would follow up with families.

**focus** also recognises the right for families/carers to have independent 3rd parties involved in issues or complaints that cannot be resolved at a service level. Where required, the relevant Manager and Chief Operating Officer would endeavour to work with external organisations in a professional manner, in the best interest of the individuals involved.

The **focus** Board of Directors see the role and contribution of families/carers as key members and contributors on the Board and in the Membership of the organisation.

## Boundaries for Communication

One of the hardest things to do as an Active Support Worker, Customer Relationship Leaders/Activities Facilitators is to be able to recognise when we may be crossing the line which separates client, family and worker. Clients living and working at **focus** have a right to privacy, families do need to be given important information but they do not need to be told everything.

Confidentiality means that any information obtained or received by staff must be kept absolutely confidential except with the written or verbal consent of the individual. Staff must not disclose or discuss confidential information with anyone, including family members.

Staff also have a right to privacy and these boundaries will often need to be set with clients and family members who may seek professional and personal information.

Staff should not give any personal information to clients or families such as:

- Personal phone numbers, including mobiles
- Personal Addresses
- Personal Email Addresses
- Personal contact details of other staff
- Personal contact details of other clients families

The role of an Active Support Worker, Customer Relationship Leaders/Activities Facilitators is to build, support and strengthen existing social, family and community networks of a person with a disability. The role of a friend is very different and can constitute a conflict of interest.

## Support to Visit Families

**focus** recognises that people with disabilities need support networks in place to support them appropriately through out their life. For many people, their families don't live close by and this can affect how well people stay connected. **focus** will support people to sustain relationships and to build capacity around potential support networks. **focus** can play a further role in supporting people to reconnect with family members, past friends and acquaintances if people wish to do so.

**focus** staff will provide, or assist people to access, the supports that will enable them to maintain connections to people within their support network.

**focus** will promote contact between the person and their family and/or significant others, through the exchange of information in the form of letters, cards and photographs, face-to-face meetings and Skype.

## Family and Carer Contact and Visits

All family members/carers and friends are welcome to visit/phone the people we support while they are accessing **focus** services and activities. Where possible visits and family/carers contact should be made at a scheduled time that has been organised between the family and **focus** prior to the visit/phone call, especially over the weekend when people may be out and about in the community.

Contact with family/carers, or significant others should be discussed during the planning process to ensure the wishes and wants of the client are met and included in their personal plan.

## Services to Families

**focus** will provide a range of services and supports to families to meet the differing needs of each family.

These services will include, but not be limited to:

- Information, advice & referral
- Family Support
- Assistance with family contact
- Family Reconnection
- Advocacy

**focus** will ensure that all systems developed are family friendly and transparent.

## Good Practice Principles

Continuity will be achieved for each person by the adoption of the following good practice principles:

- Diligent search efforts to find absent parents and siblings.
- Diligent searches for relatives who might have an interest in establishing contact with the person
- Hold family days from time to time.
- Producing a Newsletter quarterly to keep families informed of the activities at **focus**
- Contact with Support network members includes exchange of information in the form of letters, cards, photographs, emails and telephone calls, as well as various outings involving the person with their family and significant others in leisure activities, celebrations, significant cultural and religious events, etc.
- Contact with family or friends should be a part of individualised plans. **focus** has a role to play in ensuring clients have access to family friends, whether that be directly or indirectly.