



Introducing the Families Matter Advocacy Service

A Guide for Strengthening Families Programme Link Personnel



CONTEXT

The Families Matter Advocacy Service, like the evidence based, interagency provision of Strengthening Families Programme (SFP), will serve families with identified need who are currently attending or who have previously attended SFP.

ADVOCACY FOR THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAMME (SFP)

- The process for establishing an advocacy service was lengthy and considered. The Families Matter team researched both national and international best practice; this research document is housed in Families Matter.
- A practical and informative toolkit was developed for advocates. This toolkit is essentially a step by step guide to the advocacy process and contains all necessary paperwork for advocates.
- Various accredited advocacy training courses were researched and following a review, Families Matter chose to work with Carlow IT to develop a bespoke Certificate in Advocacy, accredited at HETAC Level 6.

THE ADVOCACY CHARTER

The Families Matter Advocacy Service is guided by the following principles, which are based on best practice;

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|------------------------|----------------------|
| • Accessibility | Clarity of Purpose |
| • Accountability | Empowerment |
| • Supporting Advocates | Equal Opportunities |
| • Confidentiality | Independence |
| • Complaints | Putting People First |

(Adapted from Action for Advocacy, Quality Standards for Advocacy Schemes, 2008)

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE FAMILIES MATTER ADVOCACY SERVICE

'To provide a comprehensive family advocacy service for the Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) in partnership with service providers. To adopt a person-centred approach to service provision; and to enable families on the SFP to live their lives to the fullest'.

WHAT THE FAMILIES MATTER ADVOCACY SERVICE CAN DO:

- Help families understand what to do if their rights have been ignored.
- Help connect families with the services, programmes and supports they need.
- Help families advocate for themselves.
- Help families to engage in discussions about the care they receive and if necessary challenge decisions made about them.
- Support families to express their opinions if they are afraid.
- If there is no one else who can help them to be heard, be their advocate.

WHAT THE FAMILIES MATTER ADVOCACY SERVICE CANNOT DO:

- Override decisions made by state agencies.
- Represent families in custody or access matters.
- Provide Child Welfare & Protection services.
- Speak for families in a court of law or influence a legal decision.
- Provide any character or professional references.
- Provide Family Mediation
- Provide a service if the Advocate is threatened or abused verbally and physically

(Adapted from Representative for Children and Youth, British Columbia)

WHAT IS AN ADVOCATE IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILIES MATTER?

An advocate is an independent, trained professional who will support families to have their voice heard.

An advocate ensures that the family is at the centre of the advocacy process by supporting and guiding them to address their issue and ultimately assisting them to self advocate.

WHO ARE THE FAMILIES MATTER ADVOCATES?

Advocates have been drawn from the cohort of trained Strengthening Families Programme Group Leaders. Similar to SFP, advocates come from a range of multidisciplinary backgrounds including social work, family support, education, youth work, addiction services, mental health services and Gardai.

All Families Matter advocates have worked on a 14 week SFP as either a group leader or link person (referrer of families) and have completed HETAC Level 6 Certificate in Advocacy.

THE ADVOCACY JOURNEY

Who can access?

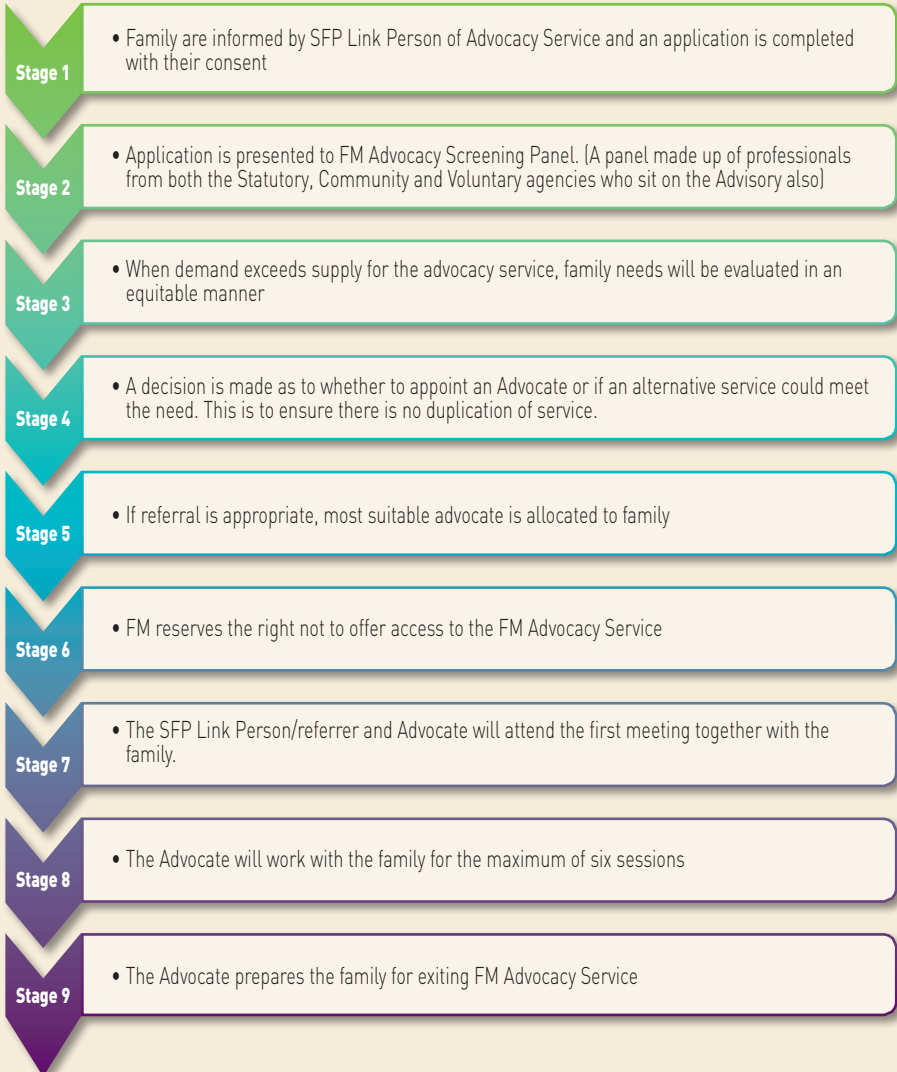
The advocacy service is a targeted service that will be offered to families who participate or who have previously participated on the Strengthening Families Programme.

Families Matter ensures that the families who are most in need are not overlooked in favour of those most capable of asking for help. Families will also engage when there is emerging need that has been identified from their participation in SFP.

REFERRAL PROCESS

Referrals for the Families Matter Advocacy Service will be identified initially through the Strengthening Families Programme.

Potential reasons for referral to the Families Matter Advocacy Service are; education, health, housing and identification of and sign posting of families to match need. The referral process is as follows;



POTENTIAL REASONS FOR REFERRAL

The following list is not exhaustive but could include;

EDUCATION & LITERACY:

Support attendance at educational facilities by liaising with school / principal / teachers

HEALTH:

Support family by providing information about relevant services both Voluntary and Statutory

HOUSING:

Support family who wish to seek suitable accommodation
Assist family to deal with a crisis- lack of heat / light etc

SOCIAL ISSUES:

Social isolation - signposting to community, voluntary and statutory services

BUDGETING AND FINANCE:

Support family by providing financial information
Signpost to financial assistance services

EMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE

Signpost family to availability of government initiatives

THE ADVOCACY JOURNEY- A CASE STUDY



If you require further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.



FAMILIES MATTER ADVOCACY SERVICE

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