

Self-Advocacy With A Service Agency: Steps and Tips

By John Mossa, Independent Living Skills Coordinator, Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT) Inc.

- When problems arise with aspects of your service, it's important to first define or outline the problem and then raise your concerns as soon as possible.
- Always record the date, who you spoke to, and how/if your concerns were resolved. You may work alone or with an Independent Living Skills Coordinator, Lawyer (on legal aid) or a Self-Help group.
- You may choose to write letters or have meetings with the individuals who make decisions that affect you. What follows are steps or tips you may choose to resolve problems with a service agency.
- **Step One:** First discuss your concerns with the person most directly responsible. Describe how you want things done and clearly outline your expectations. Allow the appropriate time to correct the problem.
- **Step Two:** If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage and a reasonable amount of time has passed, contact the person's supervisor/manager. Discuss with them what the problem is, what steps you have taken to resolve the issue and again, clearly outline your expectations/solutions. At this point you may want to find out about the organization's compliant and appeals policies and lay a compliant.

- **Step Three:** If your issue is still not resolved, repeat Step Two moving steadily up the management structure. For example, in most organizations authority is as follows:
 1. Employee;
 2. Employee's supervisor;
 3. Program (Supervisor's) Manager;
 4. Executive Director;
 5. Board of Directors
- **Step Four:** If after appealing to the Board of the service agency, the issue still is not resolved, you may choose to contact the Program Supervisor of the Government Ministry with responsibility for that agency.

OR

- You can lay a complaint with a professional body that regulates a service provider like The College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO).
- In other cases, where Attendant / Homecare / CCAC Service Provider considers you 1) ineligible for services 2) excluded a particular service from your plan of service 3) changed the amount of any particular service from your plan of service and 4) has terminated any particular service from your plan of service, you may appeal to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board (HSARB) after you have followed Steps 1-3 above.

- In cases of discrimination, you may choose to contact your Provincial/Federal Human Rights Commission. Be sure this is the most appropriate choice. Talk to Human Rights experts or with people who have experience with Human Rights.
- In cases of a violation of privacy or the misuse of personal information there may be an appropriate privacy commission to raise your concern with. In Ontario there are both Provincial and Municipal authorities to file an appeal with. Again talk to some others and get some advice.
- You may choose to contact your City Councillor, Member of Provincial Parliament, and/or Federal Member of Parliament. In other words, raise awareness about your issue with your elected representatives. This choice may not be appropriate if you are still in the midst of completing Steps One to Four or if you have decided to pursue the options outlined above.
- Another option you may choose is to contact the media. However, be aware, this option may have unexpected consequences. Media may misrepresent or misquote your issue. If you choose this option, contact an individual or organization with experience dealing with Media. Talk with people who are aware and can give you some good advice about all the pros and cons of working with media.
- You may choose to contact Patient Ombudsman. They facilitate resolutions and investigate patient and caregiver complaints – without taking sides – about patient care and health care experiences in public hospitals, long-term care homes and Community Care Access Centres (CCACs).