

## Ten statements about support brokers

**1) The role of Support Broker is a key element of individualised funding systems.**

This means that individual funding systems are incomplete without the inclusion of independent Support Brokers. Equally, it means that the Support Broker role only becomes effective when accompanied by systemic change in the structures, procedures, and culture of the social care system as a whole.

**2) Support Brokers provide a skilled, technical service that is distinct from the role of Advocate.**

Like many professions within social care, the Broker's work may sometimes include elements of advocacy – for example, reminding people in meetings to pay attention to the views of the disabled person. But Brokers are mainly providing technical assistance to help people identify and achieve changes they require in their lives, and should be working in a system that recognises and values this role.

**3) Support Brokers should be fully independent, with no conflicts of interest.**

This means more than not working for social services or social care providers. Brokers also need to be free of loyalties to the professionalised social care system, and fundamentally in alliance with people who use services, their families and allies, and with the wider community.

**4) People who need a Broker should not be discouraged from using one, and should be able to choose their Broker.**

This means that there is a need for government (probably through local councils) to invest in the development of independent Brokers, so that there is not an undue financial disincentive to use a Broker, and so that there are enough Brokers to provide a real choice.

**5) Support Brokers are accountable to the disabled people they work for, providing assistance as each person requires, and on the basis each person requires, from the range of services that falls within the scope of the Broker's role.**

**6) Support Brokers have no authority to make decisions**

They have no right to determine or veto a plan or an element of a plan, or to talk to other people (e.g. care managers, support workers) to get or share information about the person they are working for, without the consent of the person (or, where necessary, the consent of the family on their behalf). This also implies

that the social care system cannot impose a requirement on Brokers to report back to other professionals, such as care managers.

**7) The scope of the Broker's role includes helping people to identify the changes they want to make to their lives; find support services and community opportunities that the person requires; negotiate with providers and prepare community resources as necessary; cost and write a support plan; identify and obtain funding (including securing agreement on social services funding, by whatever procedures are required within the IF system); and initiate implementation of the plan.**

**8) The role of the Broker does not extend beyond the implementation of the plan.**

Some people will need continuing help with financial administration, or with monitoring and managing their supports, but these are different roles and are best kept separate from the Broker role. There are a number of reasons. Firstly, it helps to define the Broker role clearly, with a definite start and finish point. (People should, of course, be free to enter into a fresh contract with the Broker later on, if they wish.) Secondly, the different roles are likely to require different 'skill mixes'. Thirdly, there are potential conflicts of interest if the roles are combined in one person (and possibly even in one agency). And finally there is the practical problem that if Brokers stay involved indefinitely; Broker resources will rapidly be used up.

**9) Support Brokers are offering a professional service, in the sense that they should be operating within a context of regulation that ensures minimum competences, accountability to each customer; and safeguards.**

The challenge for the development of Support Broker resources is to make sure that Brokers don't become 'professionals' in the negative sense of remote, bureaucratic, and unaccountable to the people they supposedly serve.

**10) National policy needs to address the danger of Support Brokers becoming 'professionalised' in a negative sense, by giving responsibility for the support and regulation of local Brokers to disabled people, family members, and their community allies.**

The National Brokerage Network provides basic oversight and regulation, plus services such as professional insurance, and these are undoubtedly valuable. However, Brokers need to be more strongly linked to local communities, and to the people who may use their services.

Steve Dowson  
28<sup>th</sup> February 2007  
sdowson@ndt.org.uk

