

9. REFERRAL

This section

(a) explains why referral is sometimes necessary;

(b) provides guidelines for the making of effective referrals.

Why is Referral Necessary?

There will sometimes be occasions when, as a youth information worker, you will identify a need to refer a caller to another organisation or professional for more specialist help or guidance.

Being a generalist service, Youth Information Centres are not in a position to provide 'expert' information on all subjects, and there will be occasions when a query, or the associated needs, can be addressed more effectively by the specialist agency involved. Even where information is provided by the YIC, it can often be both helpful and prudent to also refer the caller to the relevant specialist agency for further assistance.

Acting as a link between a person with a need or a problem and the agency, which can meet the need or solve the problem, is a very important part of the work of any information service.

Referral or 'signposting' is, therefore, an important function of the Youth Information Centre, but knowing when and how to refer requires skill and experience. If badly handled, it can result in a negative and frustrating experience for the client and create a bad impression of your Centre.

The following guidelines should help in ensuring that the referral process is a positive and fruitful experience for your client and one, which reflects well on your Centre.

Guidelines for the Making of Effective Referrals

- Have a good network of contacts. Keep good records of relevant agencies and the relevant personnel. Be familiar with what they do.
- If you don't know the answer to a query, be honest about it. Do not give out inaccurate information.
- Do not refer to another agency just to get rid of a difficult query or because the caller sounds difficult. There can sometimes be a tendency to do this on the part of nervous new information workers. This is not good practice.

Remember, the enquirer may have made many calls already before coming to the YIC so try to provide as much information and help, as possible.

- If you do decide to make a referral, make sure you know what information or help the other agency can provide and explain this to the client so that they know what to expect.
- Always provide the name, address, telephone number and opening hours of the agency in writing - maybe also the email and website addresses, if available. If referring to a large organisation e.g. Government department, Health Board or FÁS, give the relevant section and, if possible, a direct line or extension number. Try also to give a contact name, if known.
- Depending on the particular client and the case, there may be occasions where you feel it appropriate to offer to make the referral appointment yourself. However, as emphasised in *2A Confidentiality*, do not release personal details of clients without their permission.
- Even when you do decide to refer, try to provide some basic, preliminary information on the query to the client, including a handout, where possible.
- Be positive and helpful.