



ADVICELINE VOLUNTEERING

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND ROLE DESCRIPTION

About SENAC

The Special Educational Needs Advice Centre (SENAC) is a regional charitable organisation, set up in 2003 to provide independent special educational needs (SEN) advice on the application of the statutory SEN System.

The charity was set up by families of children with SEN as a solution to the lack of independent advice on SEN within Northern Ireland. Our primary aim is to advance the education of children and young people with special educational needs and disability and to safeguard and progress children's rights and parent's rights within the SEN system.

SENAC has developed extensive specialist knowledge of all aspects of special educational needs assessment and provision, the rights of children and parents and the duties of Schools and the Education Authority. An experienced team support children and young people and their parents to secure the necessary education provision, provision which is not available or offered prior to SENAC's advice and intervention.

Each year we support and advise hundreds of families and professionals. On average we receive referrals from over 70 different organisations and agencies across Northern Ireland. We also deliver community-based workshops on SEN with over 100 participants each year.

Our services exist because many children do not receive the appropriate assessment to identify their needs and/or do not receive the additional or specialist educational provision and interventions needed to aid learning and inclusion. Resource pressures, lack of early intervention, waiting lists for specialist services, and inconsistencies in practice and application of the statutory SEN processes are all factors which create barriers to learning.

Consequently, children experience inequality in education, are subject to exclusionary practices, educational outcomes are poor. Many children are out of school or only attending for short days due to anxiety and an inability to cope in school without the appropriate support.

Our services include:

- A confidential telephone SEN Adviceline providing immediate advice and information to parents/carers/young people/professionals.
- An Education Advocacy service working with families, schools, and the Education Authority to advocate directly for a child's educational needs and secure appropriate provision.
- A Community Support and Information Service providing front line information and resources to community/family support groups/Family Hubs and other organizations and delivery of community-based workshops on SEN.
- A Tribunal Support and Representation Service for families appealing Education Authority decisions to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal.

SENAC is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors with a diverse range of skills, background and experience including finance, human resources and business management and includes parents of children with special educational needs who have used SENAC's services.

Understanding the Adviceline Volunteer Role

Volunteering on SENAC's SEN Advice Line is a hugely rewarding role and your advice will make a difference not only to the caller but to their child whose educational needs is at the heart of every enquiry we receive.

If you are considering applying for this role it is important that you understand the nature of the role. The types of calls to the Advice Line can be varied. Parents may be emotional, worried and/or confused as to how to help their child get the SEN provision they need, or they may just want reassurance that they are doing the right thing. It is your ability to listen, identify the advice and information most relevant to their circumstances and explain what is required that will make the difference to both the caller and their child.

The role requires concentration, an ability to communicate the complex processes of the SEN system simply, and the ability to employ careful active listening on each call to ensure accurate and useful advice is provided.

Training

The training for this role is comprehensive. We will provide you with advice on handling enquiries, as well as gaining knowledge on the technical information and understanding of the Statutory SEN system, which is essential. All SEN advice is based on the current SEN Legislation. As well as attending training sessions you will be required to undertake reading both as preparation and follow-up to the training sessions. Once training is complete you will be supervised by a SENAC staff member to support you during your initial Adviceline sessions. You will also receive training on Data Protection, Safeguarding and use of SENAC's Database for the recording of all enquiries.

This is a significant volunteering role. You will be representative of the Charity and the integrity of its advice and support to families and professionals. You will gain experience and practical application of skills which may benefit you in future endeavours. Central to the role is the knowledge that you will have a positive impact on parents and children in need.

At SENAC we value the huge contribution and generosity of time our volunteers provide. Feedback from the Adviceline (examples below) shows the real difference it can make to worried parents/carers/professionals by just speaking to our volunteers.

'I'm definitely glad I called today and had a chance to chat with someone, now I know I am not going mad and someone agrees with me. Thank you so much for your support and advice, it gives me so much more confidence going forward'
(Parent)

'I learnt a lot more today from talking to you than anyone else' (Parent)

If you think you can undertake this vital role and help families in need, please consider the following role description and forward an application.

ADVICELINE VOLUNTEER ROLE DESCRIPTION

Purpose: To provide support, advice, and information via a telephone advice service to parents/guardians of children with special educational needs.

Location: Usually at Volunteer's home (via a BT divert telephone system).
Training and visits to SENAC's offices may also be required

Hours required: 3-6 hours per week

Main tasks:

- Responding to advice line calls during an agreed time (3-hour sessions on the Adviceline and an additional 1-2 hours logging call data on SENAC's database).
- Providing advice and information to callers on all aspects of the Statutory SEN Framework.
- Maintaining a record of calls, including logging details of the call onto SENAC's confidential database.
- Promptly referring callers to SENAC's Advice Coordinator when required.

What SENAC expects from an Adviceline Volunteer

- Good listening skills.
- Empathy in relation to children with special educational needs and the concerns of parents/guardians/professionals.
- Ability to communicate information clearly.
- Objective manner when dealing with calls.
- Ability to respect and maintain *strict confidentiality* of all adviceline information.
- Organisational skills.
- To abide by SENAC's policies and procedures.
- To complete the mandatory Training for Adviceline Volunteers. (approx. 15-20 hrs).
- To volunteer at the times agreed and inform SENAC when this is not possible.
- To attend support, supervision, and training events in relation to the role.
- Have access to a computer/broadband and telephone at home.
- Ability to complete any necessary record keeping as part of the role.

- You will be asked to sign a volunteer agreement, this is an honorary agreement, not binding, but we do ask given the resources SENAC uses to train volunteers that you commit to undertaking this role for *a minimum of six months.*

What an Adviceline Volunteer can expect from SENAC:

- Training for the role.
- Ongoing support from SENAC staff.
- Professional Indemnity Insurance.
- To be treated with respect and in line with SENAC's policies i.e., health and safety, equal opportunities, volunteer policy.
- Agreed out of pocket expenses.
- Gain skills/experience of managing enquiries.

Conflict of Interest

- *To avoid conflict of interest between a volunteer's personal or professional activities and the roles they undertake for SENAC, potential volunteers will be asked to complete a 'conflict-of-interest' form during the recruitment process. Potential conflicts that are identified by SENAC will be discussed prior to appointment as part of the decision to recruit.*