

Job Title: Patient Representative (Advocate)
Reports to: Executive Director

Employment type: Part-time, non-exempt (~15 hrs/week, \$22.50/hour to start)

Work location: Weekly on-site visits to an assigned designated hospital and/or residential facility with some remote documentation and calls

Position Summary

MadFreedom Advocates (MFA) is a grassroots, non-profit organization run by and for psychiatric survivors, mad folks, and others marginalized by the mental health system. We're working towards equal rights, better services, and ending discrimination. MadFreedom Advocates works across Vermont to support leadership, education, and advocacy for people with lived experience of trauma, institutionalization, neurodivergence, extreme states, or other marginalization by sanism.

Patient Representatives amplify the voices of people held "under the custody of the Commissioner," meaning involuntarily, in Vermont's inpatient and residential psychiatric programs.

You will:

- visit an assigned facility at a set time every week (and as requested)
- inform patients of their legal rights and the grievance/appeals process
- foster two-way communication with treatment teams
- support discharge planning and linkage to community resources
- model Intentional Peer Support (IPS) values of mutuality and shared learning
- document contacts and outcomes in a confidential log
- collaborate with co-workers to advance leadership, education, and advocacy initiatives for individuals with lived experience of trauma, institutionalization, neurodivergence, extreme states, or other forms of sanist marginalization.

Core Responsibilities

Advocacy and Rights

- Explain patient rights, advance directives, and options for legal action in plain language
- Support individuals in writing grievances and/or appeals

- Collaborate with facility staff while remaining an independent survivor voice

Relationship and Communication

- Stay grounded and effective in high-stress situations, manage your own emotional responses, and balance personal reactions with the responsibilities of the role.
- Attend treatment team meetings, hearings, and discharge conferences when invited by individuals in the custody of the Commissioner of Mental Health
- Offer resources, when asked by individuals under the custody of the Commissioner of Mental Health
- Outreach and relationship building with local organizations and community hubs in your assigned region

Documentation and Accountability

- Keep accurate contact logs; collect data for quarterly reports
- Uphold confidentiality
- Participate in weekly meetings with other patient representatives, bi-weekly supervision, and monthly IPS co-reflection

Collaboration and Mission Advancement

- Collaborate with co-workers to advance leadership, education, and advocacy initiatives for individuals with lived experience of trauma, institutionalization, neurodivergence, extreme states, or other forms of sanist marginalization.
- Help shape a survivor-led organizational culture and strengthen the systems that support our work.
- Help maintain the current MadFreedom Advocates resource directory.

Training Provided (paid)

- Intentional Peer Support (Core + Co-reflection)
- Code of Ethics for Certified Peer Support Providers
- Writing effective grievances and appeals
- Vermont mental health system, patient rights, and advance directives
- Comprehensive advocacy skills training that equips representatives to effectively support individuals in the custody of the Commissioner

Ongoing practice development and mileage reimbursement are included.

Required Qualifications

- Personal lived experience of mental health challenges, system involvement or marginalization by sanism, and readiness to draw upon that experience in support of others
- Ability to stay grounded in high-stress situations, respond thoughtfully, and use de-escalation skills to support safety and connection.
- Respectful communication, active listening, and clear writing skills
- Reliable transportation
- Basic computer/phone proficiency for email, video calls, and electronic logs
- Demonstrated commitment to MadFreedom Advocates' mission to end discrimination and coercion—shown through past advocacy, volunteer service, lived experience, or related work.

Preferred

- Experience with peer support, advocacy, or human rights work
- Familiarity with Vermont's psychiatric system or legal processes
- Hands-on experience working with people who are pushed to the margins—such as psychiatric survivors, trauma survivors, neurodivergent individuals, or those facing racism, poverty, or disability—and a track record of building trust and amplifying their voices

Compensation & Benefits

- **Pay:** \$22.50/hour to start; expected 780 hours/year
- **Benefits Include:** 14 paid holidays plus four, paid floating holidays, 60 hours of vacation and 30 hours of sick leave each year; access to the Vermont Saves retirement program; mileage reimbursement; and extensive paid training opportunities

Work Environment and Wellness

Inpatient psychiatric hospitals and therapeutic residences can be emotionally charged. MadFreedom Advocates supports your well-being through:

- predictable schedules and coverage plans
- access to co-reflection groups
- clear safety protocols and incident-debrief processes
- an organizational culture that prizes mutual support and boundaries

Application Process

Please send a résumé (or equivalent life experience summary) and a short letter (500 words max) describing why advocacy matters to you to jobs@madfreedomadvocates.org with the subject line “Patient Representative – [Your Name].”

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until positions are filled.

People with lived experience of psychiatric diagnosis and survivors of involuntary treatment are enthusiastically encouraged to apply.