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Welcome to our second newsletter – the Summer Edition. Thank you for your positive feedback to our first newsletter. In this newsletter I would like to focus on the release of our first annual report and the strategic plan.

The first Annual Report was released in October 2008 in accordance with our legislative obligation. At the end of our first year, the annual report shares some reflections on our achievements and the challenges we have faced so far. As well as information about Disability Services Commissioner's work, the report represents data submitted by registered service providers across Victoria on

complaints they have received and how those complaints were resolved. This data offers valuable insights into the concerns of people using disability services and the current status of complaints systems within Victorian disability services as we work to our priorities and objectives for the future, and continue to strive for a service system where *'It's OK to complain!'*.

Copies of the annual report have been sent to registered disability service providers and other interested groups. The Annual Report will be available on our website or for a copy you can call our general enquiries line on 1300 728 187.

I am also pleased to launch the Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) Strategic Plan. The DSC Strategic Plan clarifies our work priorities from now until 2012 and we use this Plan to ensure that we are on track in meeting our objectives. You will see from the Plan that we are clear that everything we do is informed by our values and principles. The key objectives for the office are:

- Promote people's right to complain
- Develop effective ways of resolving complaints that reflect our values and principles
- Provide leadership with disability service providers to have a culture where *'It's OK to complain!'*
- Identify areas of improvement in the disability services system through the analysis of complaints data
- Be a learning organisation

The Strategic Plan will also be available on our website or for a copy you can call our general enquiries line on 1300 728 187.

**Laurie Harkin, Commissioner**





I know what I have given you. I do not know what you have received.

Antonio Porchia

*Exhibition: Refraction. Artworks from 'Art Unlimited' — a Geelong based art group for people with disability. A feature exhibition of the 2008 Awakenings festival in Horsham.*

## A complaint: John's Story



John lives in a group home. He was very unhappy and wanted to complain about the fact that he never had any opportunities to make choices about what went on in the house.

He felt like he wasn't listened to and gave examples of how his individual support arrangements were changed to suit the house's staff roster without

first discussing with him. He felt that the meals were not healthy or big enough and often the staff would drink coffee in their area and talk about him rather than with him.

When he contacted the Disability Services Commissioner he found it really hard to talk about what was going on in the house. He didn't want the staff in the house to know that he was complaining because he thought that they would be upset with him and treat him badly.

Previously when he had told staff he wasn't happy he felt like they didn't want to listen and told him that things were done in that way to suit everyone in the house.

He told the Assessment Officer at the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner that he didn't have anywhere else to live. He wondered if things could get worse if he made a complaint.

As a result of building trust with John and planning strategies that would protect him, the Assessment Officer was able to ask the disability service to respond to the concerns which resulted in a satisfactory resolution for all concerned.

*Details of this story have been altered to protect privacy of the complainant.*

**If you have a complaint regarding your disability service you can call the Disability Services Commissioner on 1800 677 342 (TTY 1300 726 563).**

## Protocol signed with the Office of Public Advocate (OPA)

The Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) and Public Advocate (OPA) recently signed a protocol between their two offices. Given the shared interest in promoting the rights of people with a disability, the protocol provides clarity on how their two offices can work together to achieve this objective.

The role of OPA in providing advocacy for people with a disability through its various functions means that it may need to bring complaints

before the Commissioner. Equally the Commissioner may need to bring matters to OPA that require advocacy.

The protocol encourages the sharing of information and referrals between the two offices. This protocol will help both organisations in benefiting shared clients.

For more information about the Office of Public Advocate visit their website at [www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au](http://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au) or you can call them on 1300 309 337.



**Commissioner Laurie Harkin with Colleen Pearce signing the protocol.**

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.

Harper Lee

People working at Kyeema's Seawinds Nursery.



## The Commissioner visits disability services

The Disability Services Commissioner continues to visit service providers across the state promoting the work of the Office and hearing service provider's reflections on how they seize the opportunity complaints provide to improve their service. Providers have also discussed how they have embedded this approach in the culture of their organisations.

**Right: Commissioner Laurie Harkin with Barbara Prenter and Janet Evans from the Murray Valley Centre for the Intellectually Handicapped Inc. during his regional visits.**



## Antz Pants group to perform at the Having a Say Conference in February 2009



**Members of the Antz Pants Theatre troupe from the Meeting Place in Colac.**

The Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) is committed to involving people with a disability in conveying the message that *'It's OK to complain!'* and in promoting the role of the DSC. We are pleased to confirm that the all-abilities amateur theatre troupe

Antz Pants, from the Meeting Place in Colac will be performing at the Having a Say Conference in February 2009 on our behalf. The performance will deliver the message that *'It's OK to complain!'* to participants at the conference.

We will also have a stand at the conference and welcome you to come by for a chat.

The Having a Say conference is the largest conference attended by people with disabilities in Australia with this years conference attracting over 1,000 participants. Next year the conference will celebrate its 10th year.

The Having a Say Conference 'Celebrating 10 years of Having a Say' will be held: From Wednesday 4th to Friday 6th February 2009 at Deakin University, Waterfront Campus, Geelong, Victoria.

More information about the Having a Say Conference visit VALID's website [www.valid.org.au](http://www.valid.org.au) or by contacting VALID on 03 9416 4003.



We have two ears  
and one mouth, so we  
should listen more than  
we say.

Zeno of Citium

## Protocol signed with the Child Safety Commissioner

The Disability Services Commissioner and the Child Safety Commissioner (CSC) have a shared concern for the rights and entitlements of children with a disability and children of parents with a disability.

This protocol assists the two Commissioners to promote the rights and maximises outcomes for those children with a disability and parents with a disability who may seek the involvement of either Commissioner. The protocol also assists in building the relationship between their two offices by identifying opportunities for contact and information sharing and to support joint involvement of the two Offices.

For more information about the Child Safety Commissioner visit their website at [www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/) or you can call them on 8601 5884.



**Commissioner Laurie Harkin with  
Child Safety Commissioner Bernie  
Geary OAM signing the protocol .**

## What to do if you have a complaint relating to HACC services

You can make a complaint directly to your Home and Community Care (HACC) service.

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint then your HACC services can assist by providing you with information on other external complaints bodies, such as the Office of the Health Services Commissioner, depending on the type of service provided.

You can refer the matter to your local Department of Human Services (DHS) representative for the HACC program. Your HACC service can provide you with the contact number of your local DHS representative for the HACC program; or you can contact the Office of the Director, Aged Care at DHS (HACC services are funded by the Aged Care branch of DHS) directly on 9096 7389 or by email [aged\\_care@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:aged_care@dhs.vic.gov.au) and ask for the

contact number of your local DHS representative for the HACC program.

For more information on the HACC program you can visit this website: [www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/index.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/index.htm) or you can call the DSC on freecall 1800 677 342.

For information on the HACC program national complaints policy you can visit this site: [www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/quality\\_frmwrk/prog\\_nat\\_comp\\_pol.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/quality_frmwrk/prog_nat_comp_pol.htm)

**The Commissioner and staff would like to wish you  
compliments of the season and a safe and happy new year!**

For any matters relating to the newsletter you can contact Dina Theodoropoulos at [dina.theodoropoulos@odsc.vic.gov.au](mailto:dina.theodoropoulos@odsc.vic.gov.au) or call on 1300 728 187

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