



Welcome to the Winter edition of our newsletter. Following the launch of the Good practice guide and self audit tool, we have been working with some providers in assisting them to review their approach to complaints. We are also providing training to staff to develop systems and a culture where it is OK to complain.

This work provides us with opportunities to see different approaches to handling complaints and share good practice with other disability services.

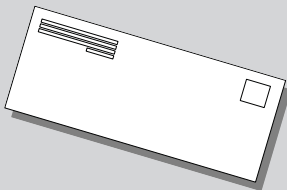
As we come to the end of the 08/09 reporting period I would like to take this opportunity to remind disability services that under the Disability Act 2006, you are required to provide to me information on your complaints experience by the 17th July 2009. This is an important opportunity for providers to contribute their experience to a greater shared understanding of the characteristics of complaints which make the sector what it is. Equally this information will build an evidence base for improved practice as we continue to explore how we can analyse and disseminate this information to providers in the future. On page 3 of this newsletter, you will find more information on what the reporting requirements are currently.

My visits to service providers continue and I am encouraged to see the shared commitment to the work reflected across all organisations. Equally there is a diversity of approaches to the task which reflects the rich history of the sector.

Laurie Harkin, Commissioner

Inside this issue

- A day in the life of an Assesment officer p2
- Annual Complaints Reporting p3
- Complaints relating to children's or education services p4



Hopefully our information always reaches you. If we need to update our records please email your latest details to complaints@odsc.vic.gov.au



Photo taken during Laurie's visit to disability service Amicus in Bendigo. From left Suzanne McCormick, Emma Lowther and Ann-Maree Davis

The Disability Services Commissioner has brochures available in the following languages;

Amharic
Turkish
Spanish
Somali
Serbian
Russian
Greek
Khmer
Chinese
Arabic
Italian
Polish
Croatian
Macedonian
Vietnamese

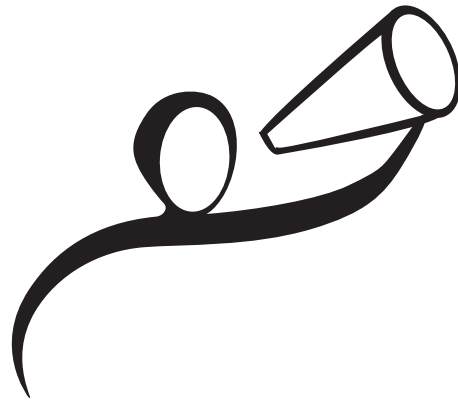


You can request copies of the brochures by calling us on 1800 677 342.

Important DATE!

**Friday
17 July 2009
don't forget
your
2008-09
Annual
Complaints
Report
is due!**

The Disability Services Commissioner upholds the right of people with a disability to complain about the disability service they receive because they are entitled to receive quality services that support their quality of life.



A day in the life of an Assessment Officer

Hello, my name is Jen. I am an Assessment Officer in the office of the Disability Services Commissioner.

My first call of the morning was from a father of a young person with a disability. He talked with me about the frustration he feels and told me about a recent issue he raised with the manager of his son's disability service.

The issue was about meeting the individual goals of his son. The father and disability service were having difficulty communicating and were disagreeing about what would work best. It sounded like they needed some assistance to resolve the issues.

I explained to him how our office works and how to put in a

complaint. He seemed keen to get independent help from the office. I followed up the phone call by sending him an information sheet, brochure and a complaint form.

Another one of my cases has a long history so I spent some time this morning on the phone talking to the person who put in the complaint. I then spoke to the manager of the day program the complaint was made about. I am trying to understand what has changed recently as this may have contributed to the issues in the complaint. After the phone call I noted the follow up actions required as a result of the changes that had occurred.

Last week I had a very long conversation with the person who is complaining about their disability

service. Today I received the person's plan I had requested from the service. I have spent some time reviewing it so that I can understand more about the support the person is seeking.

Sometimes I have to ask lots of questions and think carefully about what is going on. Often the complaints I hear about have more than one part to them and might involve a number of different people. I write up my notes on what I talked about and some possible actions.

Next I ring back a case manager who has been working hard to respond to a complaint that her service has received. She wasn't employed when many of the things happened that caused the complaint, but she is focussed on how to improve the service delivery for the future. Our discussions are about the step-by-step approach that they are taking to improve communication and build up trust. I get the feeling that she is making progress. One of her most effective approaches is that she always returns the call of the mother who made the complaint on the day she rings.

It is not uncommon for families who talk to us, to explain that they have been passed from person to person and no-one seems to be able to help. The other one we hear a lot of is frustration when a person has to leave a message and the call is not returned. I am out this afternoon.



Jen with Mary at the Having a Say Conference - Geelong 2009

continues on page 3

Commissioner during an interview in February for the YACKETY YAK radio show in East Gippsland.



In the photo sitting, Shelley Davis
Behind left to right: Cathy Reason, Peter Ward, Andrew Read and Laurie Harkin

Annual Complaints Reporting

All registered disability service providers will be reporting to the Commissioner on the number and types of complaints they received and how they were resolved.

Who must report to the Commissioner?
All disability service providers must report annually to the Disability Services Commissioner in accordance with section 105 of the Disability Act 2006.

What is required?
Service providers are required to specify the number of complaints and how those complaints were resolved.

Where can I get more information?
Information for service providers and the current Reporting template is available on our website www.odsc.vic.gov.au/service.htm or contact: Rosie Chiavaro, Principal Officer Strategic Development on 03 8608 5776 or email acr@odsc.vic.gov.au

When am I required to report?
Services will be required to submit their 08/09 Annual Complaints Report by Friday 17 July 2009 in either hard copy or electronically to acr@odsc.vic.gov.au

Why do I report complaints?
Reporting annually to the Commissioner improves our understanding of the complaints experience of providers and contributes to service improvements across the disability service system.



The Commissioner has developed a template to assist service providers in their reporting requirements. This template has been emailed to all services and is posted on our website www.odsc.vic.gov.au

A day in the life of an Assessment Officer... continued from page 2

“One of her most effective approaches is that she always returns the call of the mother who made the complaint on the day she rings.”

I have received a complaint from a parent of a person with a disability about their Community Residential Unit. I have organised to meet the person so that I can find out what they think about how things are going and to ask if they are okay with me continuing to work on the issues that their parents have told me about. This discussion is really important and helps me to understand about the issues from the person's perspective. Sometimes this is very similar to what the parents think but other times meeting the person can highlight what

is really important to them and it can be new information to focus the complaint. I get to hear many complaints in my job. I found that it's when we all take the time to listen, patiently and genuinely to what the complainant is seeking that we can come to a resolution.

If you are thinking about putting in a complaint; think about what outcome you are seeking. My role is to help you identify that – as sometimes that can be hard to do.

Artist: Louise Hunter

Title: Swimming

Work undertaken as part of the
Footscray Community Arts Centre



What to do if you have a complaint relating to children's or education services

If you have a complaint about children's services (childcare services, kindergarten, Early Childhood Intervention Services, Primary School Nursing, and Maternal and Child Health Services) then contact can be made directly with the service provider. Guidance on how to do this can be found at: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/childcare.htm

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint provided by the service, you can contact the relevant Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional office (www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/childcare/csg/RegionalOffices.pdf for contact details), where a regional Children's Services Advisor can assist and advise you about your complaint or phone the Licensed Children's Service help line on 1300 307 415.

If you have a complaint about schools, you can initially direct your complaint to the school that the complaint is about. Depending on the nature of the issue, you may wish to phone, write to or make an appointment to see the teacher, principal or other relevant person/s at school. Guidance on how to do this can be found at: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/schools.htm

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint provided by the school, you can contact the relevant Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional office (www.education.vic.gov.au/about/structure/regions.htm for contact details), where a regional Community Liaison Officer can assist and advise you about your complaint. If a satisfactory resolution is not reached at the regional level, complaints can be taken to the Education Department's central office, email: community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au or fax: (03) 9637 2180.

Further contacts

Victorian Ombudsman
www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
Ph: 03 9613 6222 or 1800 806 314 (non-metro areas) who can investigate decisions, actions and conduct of Victorian government departments.

Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission
www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au
Ph: 9281 7100 or TTY 9281 7100 who can assist in resolving complaints about discrimination, sexual harassment and racial and religious vilification.

Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria
www.justice.vic.gov.au/disputes
Ph: 03 9603 8370 or 1800 658 528 (non-metro areas) can assist in dispute resolution without having to take legal action.

Parents Victoria
www.parentsvictoria.asn.au
Ph: 03 9380 2158 or 1800 032 023 (non-metro areas) is a statewide organisation representing parents of students in Victorian government schools and encourages parents to come together to ask questions, share views, and learn from each other. It can provide advocacy for parents on matters including integration of students with disabilities into schools.

Association for Children with a Disability
Ph: 1800 654 013 or
email: mail@acd.org.au can assist families of children (aged 0-18 years) with a disability with information, support and advocacy.

For any matters relating to the newsletter you can contact Dina Theodoropoulos at dina.theodoropoulos@odsc.vic.gov.au or call on 1300 728 563.

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