

Equality & Justice

for people with disabilities



Advocate Summer 2015

The Advocate



Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service Inc.

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Editorial

Victorian Ombudsman's Inquiry

This month we provide an abbreviated newsletter to ensure that people with disabilities, their families and advocates have an opportunity to consider making a submission to the Victorian Ombudsman.

Recent reports of systemic abuse of people with disabilities has resulted in the announcement of two Victorian inquiries [one from the Victorian Ombudsman, and the other from the Victorian Government], and a proposed national inquiry.

The proposed inquiries all have a slightly different focus, however the Victorian Ombudsman is currently forming the scope of their inquiry, therefore submissions made prior to 15 February 2015 will help inform that scope.

Please feel free to make a submission after that date as all submissions will be taken into consideration.

Julie Phillips
Manager

Deidre Griffiths
Principal Solicitor and
Executive Officer

Ombudsman's Investigation into disability abuse reporting

On 8 December 2014 the Ombudsman announced an investigation into how allegations of abuse in the disability sector are reported and investigated.

The investigation is looking at:

- services which include residential, respite and day programs funded by the Victorian Government
- the oversight responsibilities of agencies including the Department of Human Services and the Disability Services Commissioner.

The Ombudsman is keen to hear directly from people who have had experience of reporting abuse, as clients, family members or staff in the sector.

What can I complain about?

The Ombudsman wants to know about your experiences in reporting abuse, not into the abuse itself. If you are a person with a disability, a worker, a family member, an advocate or any other person who has reported abuse and you are unhappy with how that complaint was handled, the Ombudsman wants to hear from you.

What is abuse?

Some of the dictionary definitions of abuse are:

to treat in a harmful, injurious, or offensive way:

to speak insultingly, harshly, and unjustly to or about; revile; malign.

to commit sexual assault upon.

Physical abuse - when someone physically hurts you e.g. hits you, kicks you, physically restrains you when they don't need to, pinches you etc. Neglect can be included.

Psychological/emotional abuse - when somebody talks to you in a way that is very distressing and upsetting, or does something to you that you find distressing and upsetting, like locking you up or bullying.

Sexual abuse - when someone has sex with you, or does sexual things with you that you don't want.

Who can I complain about?

You can complain about Service Providers and Regulators who receive money from the Victorian government. This means not only government services, but services who receive their funding through government.

If you have suffered abuse, and made a complaint, but feel you have been ignored, or disagree with the way the complaint was investigated, the Ombudsman wants to know.

Service Providers - organisations that provide you with accommodation, training, respite, programs and carers. For example Department of Human Services, Yooralla, Scope, any private services receiving money from government, Department of Education, Schools, After-Care Programs.

Regulators - these are organisations that you go to, who you believe should be able to fix your complaint for you. Examples are Department of Human Services (Head Office, Regional Office), Department of Education (Head Office, Regional Office), Disability Services Commission, Office of the Public Advocate, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman.

How do I complain?

You can write to the Ombudsman through letter or e-mail.

You can ask to meet personally with someone from the Ombudsman's office.

You can telephone the Ombudsman's office.

You can ask someone to help you, including a worker or disability advocacy agency.

You can ask for an Auslan Interpreter, other language interpreter or Communications Support Worker.

Do I have to give my name?

No. Complaints can be anonymous.

Submissions can be posted or emailed to the Ombudsman.

Submissions close on 15 February 2015, however if you find out later about the investigation, send your complaint anyway.

Via email

disability@ombudsman.vic.gov.au

By post

Victorian Ombudsman
Level 1, North Tower
459 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000

For assistance, please contact either Disability Discrimination Legal Service or Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service - the contact information is at the bottom of this newsletter. Thanks to United Voices for People with Disabilities for the use of their information sheet.

DDLS Management Committee

Bill Ford (Chair)
Jan Ashford (Vice Chair)
Martin Grillo (Treasurer)
Elizabeth Knight
Wayne Kiven
Julie Phillips (Secretary)

Staff

Manager

Julie Phillips

Principal Solicitor

Placido Belardo

Solicitor

Deborah Randa

Project Solicitors

Catherine Britt

Administrative Officer

Anna Leyden

Bookkeeper

Darrell Harding

Villamanta Management Committee

Lauren Matthews - Chairperson
Andrew Hill - Secretary
Kathryn McBride - Treasurer
Amanda Hiscoe - Deputy Chairperson
Neville Porter - Member
Hank Wyllie - Member
Philip H Clarke - Member

Staff

Principal Solicitor and Executive Officer

Deidre Griffiths

Lawyers

Greg Leeson

Ben von Einem

Viv Avery

Paralegal Worker

Sue Wolter

Administration Worker

Viv Nicol

Accounts administrator/ Personnel/Special Projects Worker

Darrell Harding

Ross House, 2nd Floor
247-251 Flinders Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000
Tel: 03 9654 8644
Fax: 03 9639 7422
Country: 1300 882 872
<https://twitter.com/ddls2014>
<https://www.facebook.com/ddls1>

44 Bellerine St
GEELONG VIC 3220
Tel: 03 5229 2925
Fax: 03 5229 3354
Legal Advice Enquiries -
1800 014 111 1.00pm-3.00pm

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