



A Neglected System Leads to a System of Neglect and Abuse



VALID supports the Victorian Ombudsman's call for an independent investigative agency to help safeguard people with disabilities against abuse and neglect.

The Ombudsman recommends, in principle, a single independent oversight body to be accountable for dealing with serious incident reports involving people with disability.

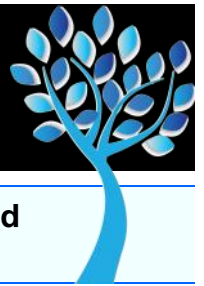
Its function should include receiving mandatory reports of all serious incidents, including complaints /allegations of physical and sexual abuse, unexplained injuries and deaths, from all registered disability service providers, including SRS, DHHS, Community Visitors, OPA, the TAC and independent advocates.

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A Neglected System Leads to A System of Neglect and Abuse



This is a summary of the issues recently presented by VALID to the Family and Community Development Committee of the Parliament of Victoria Inquiry

VALID believes the many failings of the disability service system have contributed to a culture which has led to conditions in some services that are conducive to abuse and neglect.

Over the past twenty years, despite overall improvements to the support system in many regards, VALID has frequently voiced its frustration regarding the inability of the various complaints bodies, DHHS management and successive Victorian Governments to satisfactorily recognise and address these problems.

The record shows that we have stood up frequently and vocally, and have led the call for public inquiries and indeed a Royal Commission into abuse in disability services. Despite our best efforts in speaking up, it is sadly true that we have failed to be heard.

While we are proud of the work we do in individual advocacy, we are the first to say our service is inadequate to meet the needs of people with intellectual disability across Victoria. Our individual advocacy service is thin on the ground, focused on people in crisis, incapable of providing longer term advocacy support and incapable of getting to people who are isolated. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that every other advocacy organisation, including the Public Advocate, has similar limitations.

The truth is, many of the issues that are brought to VALID and other advocacy groups are not capable of being resolved by either internal or external complaints processes. They are endemic to a system that is both crisis-driven and crisis-producing. In many ways, the complaints bodies - along with advocacy groups - are left trying to bandage a system that we all know is badly bleeding. We believe all organisations involved in the safeguarding system have been trying to raise the alarm bells for many years.

Despite this, we still have organisations out there that fail to get the message. They neglect to adequately train and supervise their staff, they

neglect to exercise proper management and they neglect to ensure proper accountability. Such systemic neglect often leads to service cultures that are conducive to the neglect and abuse of people they are being funded to support.

As a stark example, VALID was recently made aware that a 'seclusion box' was allegedly designed and constructed by management of a Day Service to seclude a particular client without authorisation from either VCAT or the client's family. VALID has supported this complaint to be directed to the Disability Services Commissioner to be thoroughly investigated.

In our opinion, there are many factors contributing to the prevalence of abuse in the disability sector, and they each need to be examined and understood if we are to really get anywhere on the issue. Below is a short list of factors that emerged from a recent focus group conducted by VALID:

- Disability service staff, clients and families are not educated to recognise 'grooming behaviours' of potential predators.
- Staff competencies have been systematically eroded over time. Staff are frequently being asked to support clients without any training or supervision in appropriate techniques - e.g. working with people with autism and challenging behaviours, designing developmental programs to ensure people are constantly learning and growing, positive behaviour support techniques.
- DHHS and agency Induction processes are often useless.
- Increased auditing and risk assessment processes are taking time away from staff to work with clients and are contributing to stress and burn-out. If staff are feeling abused, then is that affecting their attitude to clients?

- There are a lack of opportunities for staff to step outside the daily household operations to reflect on practice and talk issues through.
- There is a severely demoralised staff culture in many organisations.
- The problems with recruiting and the use of casuals has caused a massive decline in regarding disability services as a worthy vocation and career.
- The type and quality of house supervisor is important key for determining whether residents' rights are protected. House supervisors could be better empowered.
- Management needs to be properly skilled as people managers.
- Staff aren't adequately informed of their rights to go to the Commissioner. Information about the DSC often stops at the CEO's desk.
- The focus on mediation means there aren't well-publicised cases that might encourage people to divulge.
- Advocacy organisations are often regarded as unwelcome.
- Potential whistle-blowers often feel vulnerable - because they are. Speaking up can cost staff their usual rosters, their next shift, their access to information, their promotions etc.
- Complaining can cause family members to be branded as trouble-makers and cost them their relationships with staff and managers, and sometimes even their own sons and daughters.

While implementation of the Ombudsman's recommendations would undoubtedly improve the reporting and response environment, we need to be conscious that the disability service system is a complex and diverse one, and the lives of people with a disability intersect with a vast range of specialist agencies, generic bodies, social groups etc. Real leadership must come from Government. It should equip itself with a thorough understanding of the nature and extent of the problems - as we believe the Family and Community Development Committee of the Parliament of Victoria is now doing - and then engage with the relevant stakeholder groups to drive change.

Leadership won't come from any single body. It will come from the sector coming together to collaboratively drive reform - but only Government can support this to happen.

VALID

VALID AGM

VALID invites you to attend its
Annual General Meeting 2015

Wednesday, 14th October

Time: 12 noon

Venue: VALID Office

Featuring:
A focus on VALID's Peer Action
Groups

RSVP's essential by:
Friday 9th October

For more information

bookings@valid.org.au



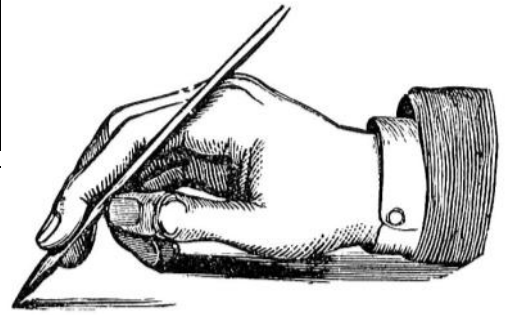
**Red star on the front of your
newsletter?**

If you have a red star on the front of your newsletter you are not a financial member for July 2015 to June 2016.
Please support VALID by becoming a member.

A membership form is enclosed or can be
downloaded from www.valid.org.au

Letter to Premier Andrews

How will families using Direct Payments easily transition to Self Management, and keep the 'good life' going under NDIS?



Dear Premier

We write as a group of very concerned parents, who in the past, have been well supported by the Victorian State Government and in particular the Department of Health and Human Services, to care and support our young adults with disability to live, work and enjoy leisure activities in the community.

Over the past 10 years, we have been funded through the Individual Support Packages (ISP) and we have all chosen the Direct Payments method. We have used that funding to purchase things that support our young ones, as well as directly employing support to get them good, happy and healthy lives in the community.

This has worked extremely well for us all. Our young adults are managing their funding well with very little assistance. They are able to purchase things that create their good lives in their own communities.



As parents and carers we were the first people to go out to the rally for Every Australian Counts in the hope we could help all families to get the good lives our young ones get. We attended talks & conferences where we were promised that the transition to the new system of funding would be an easy transition and we wouldn't have to worry about anything, all that would happen would be that the existing funding would go from State to Federal and nothing would change for us. We were promised that **NO ONE** would be worse off.

To receive the direct payments we had to set goals, write plans that met the goals and then we were allocated the appropriate funding.

With Direct Payments the funding arrives in a designated bank account on the first Thursday of each month and we use the funding to pay for the goals set out in the plan. We keep the receipts. We acquit to the department annually and we get on with our lives supporting our family members. We write a new plan (if needed) every three years.

Anyone can do this system, you don't even need a computer - although it does assist when paying the bills.

Minimal government scrutiny satisfies accountability requirements and we don't feel we have Big Brother watching over our shoulder. Going by all reports from DHHS, There is clear evidence that this system works well and that families manage funding responsibly.

YES, there is a degree of mutual trust ... the families trust that the government will put the funding into the account and the government trusts the families will spend it appropriately!

As a group of very concerned families, we would like to firstly ask the Victorian Government

Are you sure we will not be any worse off? and Secondly,

Are you still saying there will be no difference? That the funding will just transition? and that we don't have to be concerned?

Well, we are concerned, because, when we read the NDIS website and we attend discussion groups that are presently meeting, we are coming away with many concerns of huge changes, e.g. that the funding will not transition easily without re writing goals and plans and that the funding may not cover many of the things that are currently funded. This means that our adult children with disability will be worse off.

Over the years we have given great deliberation to, and had much practice in exploring and coordinating what it takes to make a good life in the community. It is not simply a matter of hiring support workers and purchasing some therapy. It is far more nuanced and requires that funding allow for experimentation and flexibility as a person's lifestyle evolves. We are greatly concerned that the NDIS, despite the rhetoric, will force us back into funding that allows only for traditional models, albeit dressed up under the guise of the new NDIS terminology.

As families, we have been supporting our young ones for years. We have supported the DHHS to implement system change over those years, the crafting of systems around Direct Payments, Direct Employment, Peer to Peer support systems, Mentoring programs, The introduction state wide

and the writing around ISP'S. We have run parent support groups, both formally and informally, we have been on committees of management and boards that formulate supports around families in need. It amazes us and concerns us greatly that all of our collective experience has not been tapped into and we have not even been considered worthy of an opinion, when it comes to planning and implementing the NDIS nationwide.

We ask. "What is the Victorian Government doing to ensure that the good work of the past few decades is not lost in the transition to NDIS? What is it doing to defend the quality of life that families like ours have worked so hard to achieve - with the support of successive Victorian State Governments?"

Surely the vision and work of Victorian families is worth more than just rolling over to the Federal Government and giving all our good work away. We wonder why the NDIA did not implement all the work Victoria had done especially implementing ISP's, and the options of Direct Payments and Direct Employment. Then used that experience when they drafted the model that is to become the NDIS of the future. It would have saved the government billions of dollars.



Our question is now...

"If families have an ISP, and it is working well, they have set the goals, written the plans and especially those using Direct Payments with Direct Employment ... can we just roll over to federal funding as you originally promised us?" ... and could you please leave us alone to get on with supporting our young ones to establish their good lives, using the support provided by our ISP's and our Direct Payment funding.

We need to know that the Victorian Government is sticking up for its most vulnerable citizens. We need to be assured it is not preparing to sacrifice our sons and daughters as "collateral damage" in the national roll-out of the NDIS.

This all leaves us gravely concerned about how the "Good Life In The Community" is going to be achieved by our young ones under an NDIS.

Maureen McLeish, Cheryl Simpson & Janice Castledine on behalf of a group of other concerned parents

11th August 2015



VALID Behaviours of Concern Group

"Citizenship, Dignity and Inclusion for All"

This peer support group supports parents and adult carers of people aged 18 and over having intellectual disability and behaviours of concern. There may be a history of seclusion, physical and chemical restraint, injury and trauma.

We seek to provide a safe and confidential opportunity to tell our stories, share accurate information and learn about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Guest speakers will be invited with the aim of developing an advocacy toolkit for families

We have a monthly at the VALID Office
235 Napier Street, Fitzroy Vic 3065



If you would like more information or would like to join the group

Email:
behavioursofconcerngroup@gmail.com

VALID PEER ACTION GROUPS



The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was introduced across Australia in 2013. The Australian Government's commitment is to expand the program, from the initial launch sites, to the rest of the country over the next 4 years. This will mean some big changes for many people with disabilities, and their families, who are eligible for disability supports.

So that people with disabilities and their families can find out what is happening, and how this will affect people currently receiving or waiting for disability support packages, the government has funded a number of organisations to operate as Disability Support Organisations. DSO's will support people with disabilities and their families get ready for the full introduction of this scheme.

VALID is one of six community organisations in Victoria that received funding to support the development of peer groups that will prepare people for participation in the NDIS. VALID will be able to build on the work it has done previously to support people with disabilities and families with the introduction and implementation of Individual Support Packages (ISP) in Victoria under the State Disability Plan.

While the aims of providing individuals and their supporters with more choice and control in their lives, by empowering eligible participants with decision-making power over how their funding is spent and who delivers their support, are much the same for ISPs and the NDIS support funding, there are some significant differences in the way they work. In order to continue to inform, support and empower people with disabilities in Victoria as they prepare to engage with the NDIS, VALID is setting up peer action groups across the state.

What is a Peer Action Group?

VALID's Peer Action Groups will be made up of between 5-12 people who will meet regularly (usually monthly) to:

- Get up-to-date information about the roll out of the NDIS and how this will affect participants in this disability funding support scheme
- Share information and ideas with other people on how to make good use of this funding

- To get new skills in making choices and taking control over decisions about work, recreation, skill development and home life
- To find out what kinds of activities and opportunities are available within the local community
- To have a place where there is encouragement to speak up and be heard
- To give advice on issues to VALID so that we can take up issues with the NDIS and seek to make systemic changes
- To get and give encouragement among peers and support to challenge discrimination and poor community attitudes to people with disabilities
- To build social connections and friendships with other peers



Who should join a VALID Peer Action Group?

VALID is setting up Peer Action Groups for people with disabilities, as well as for family members, who are interested in finding out more about the NDIS and how they can prepare for when it is rolled out in their area. At the moment, only people living in the Barwon region in Victoria are participating in NDIS and VALID has several groups already operating in this area. We are expecting that an announcement will be made very soon about which region will be the next to have the NDIS rolled out.

VALID is setting up groups across all regions of Victoria because we believe that participation in peer action groups is valuable to people with disabilities and their families - regardless of whether the NDIS has been rolled out or not. We think that VALID's Peer Action Groups will play an important ongoing role in supporting people with disabilities to become more empowered in decision-making and more involved in a wide range of community settings.

It is not just about the NDIS and that is why we are calling our groups Peer Action Groups. **We want to support people to become more active in the decisions about their own lives and to act together with others to promote more inclusive communities.**

Different Types of Peer Support Groups to Meet Different Needs

To meet different needs and circumstances of people who might want to join a peer support network, VALID is offering different models of peer support.

1. Face To Face Local Groups

Most of the VALID Peer Action Groups will meet face to face at a local venue in the community and we will encourage people who join these groups to attend regularly and to help in making their groups run well. Some of these groups will be for people with disabilities and some will be for families and some may be mixed groups.



2. Special Interest Groups

VALID is also keen to support peer action groups for those who have a specific area of interest and are looking to use peer support strategies to address particular issues.

a. Behaviours of Concern Family Support Group

This group meets at VALID in Fitzroy monthly to work on improving the way the disability support system responds to the needs for people identified as having behaviours of concern.

b. Parents with Disability (See item in this newsletter for more information)

Based in Central Victoria, this group supports parents with disabilities in relation to parenting and dealing with child protection services.

3. Peer Support to Buy Support - Meet Up Groups

Two groups are currently operating, one in Geelong and one in Melbourne, that use the Meet Up online resources to maintain contact between meetings and each provides a forum that focuses on effective strategies for participants to buy the support that best meets their needs.



4. Teleconference Peer Action Group

Specifically designed for those who can't attend a face to face meeting or are not comfortable with use of internet and computers and who would like to join in a peer group discussion on a regular basis. There will be a day time teleconference group and an after-hours group facilitated by John McKenna with teleconference costs picked up by VALID.

For a full list of where VALID Peer Action Groups have been set up and who to contact go to the VALID website - www.valid.org.au or contact program coordinator David Craig on 03 9416 4003.

FIN Victoria

The Family Inclusion Network Victoria Inc (FIN) provides information to professionals, parents, families and the community concerning the importance of family inclusion in child protection practice.



VALID and FIN Victoria are collaborating to facilitate a VALID Peer Action Group specifically for parents with disability. For more information contact Denise Smith on 0476 687 692.

FIN Victoria aims to ensure parents and family members have access to information, support and advocacy to participate in the child protection process in an empowered way.

FIN aims to provide ...

- Access to information that is easy to understand
 - Support and advocacy
 - Consistency and mutual accountability
 - Participation in decision making
- ... via information provided on the website, community awareness campaigns and promoting useful research and resources

You can read more about FIN Vic at:
<http://www.finvic.org.au>

We Can Work with the Right Support

Our goal is to organise with people with intellectual disabilities, their families, and supporting organisations to make the promise of inclusion in the workforce a reality.

People with intellectual disability can work when they get the right support. Yet only 8% of adults with intellectual disability work in the open workforce. This is unacceptable and reflects an ineffective national disability employment service system. It's time to change to a system of employment support *that works*.

Inclusion Australia has prepared a petition seeking a national system of transition-to-work and open employment support based on demonstrated high rates of open employment outcomes.

We want youth with intellectual disability to have the best support to get a job. We are asking people with intellectual disability, their family members, employers, disability organisations, and the community to support our petition which we will deliver to the Australian government.

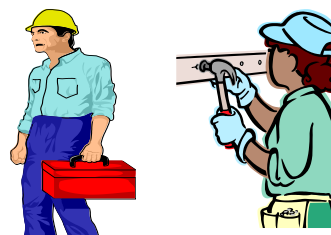
Please sign our petition to improve the employment participation of people with intellectual disability.



Survey link:

<http://wecanwork.nationbuilder.com>

Employment Support for People with Intellectual Disability that Works



We know people with intellectual disability,

1. want to work
 2. can work when they get the right support, and
 3. are hired by employers when this meets the mutual needs of the business and the individual.
- Yet only 8% of people with intellectual disability are employed in the open workforce.

There are two major barriers that have to be addressed.

- The low expectations of people with intellectual disability to work in the open workforce.
- The lack of skilled transition-to-work and open employment support for this group across Australia.

An increase in employment outcomes will be achieved if individuals and families can choose support based on best practice for people with intellectual disability.

- A new employment support system should build on what is achieving good employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.
- A market-based approach should provide individuals, families, and employers with genuine choice informed by published provider outcomes by disability.
- Any changes should not unintentionally harm services performing well in the current employment support system.

The expected 'dovetailing' of Disability Employment Services (DES) and the NDIS provides an historic opportunity to achieve substantial savings while delivering improved employment outcomes.

Best practice transition-to-work and open employment support can provide significant savings as alternative programs for people with intellectual disability (i.e. day programs & supported employment) are more expensive.

Inclusion Australia proposes the following key elements of a new pathway of employment support.

1. A presumption that people with intellectual disability have the capacity to work in the open workforce when provided with skilled support.



2. A national system of;
 - transition-to-work support for people with intellectual disability based on what works as part of the NDIS, that works seamlessly with,
 - open employment support based on what works as part of DES for NDIS clients with intellectual disability.



These elements if based on best practice can provide employment support from school to work for more youth with intellectual disability to choose work and successfully participate in the open workforce.

Good News at Federal Budget Time

Increased Federal funding for state services was passed in the budget to help people with a disability to move into work.

People should be asking about opportunities to look for work, and the training they need to get it!

Gerard Langridge

Heather Speaks Up

Articles on self advocacy by *Heather Forsyth*, a highly experienced self advocate, who has overcome many challenges in her life to become a leader and support worker for other people with a disability.



OUR VOICE – CID CONFERENCE IN SYDNEY

On the 16th of July Our Voice did a presentation about the 12 month NDIS findings to the NSW-CID (Council for Intellectual Disability) conference in Sydney.

At the conference I spoke about the six people from the Geelong trial site I had interviewed about the NDIS. I first spoke with them in August 2014 when they were just starting NDIS funding. In July 2015 I visited them again to ask about their experience with the NDIS over the following twelve months. The two questions that I asked were “What has the NDIS done for you?” and “What could make the NDIS better?” The feedback I received was:

- that having more trained staff would improve the NDIS
- making things that are linked to the NDIS more accessible would make things better
- people agreed that the NDIA need to work on their communication skills, provide more accessible information and to make sure that they tell you about any staff changes.

It was good to touch base with self advocates in New South Wales and it was good that Our Voice had the opportunity to speak about the NDIS.

“too often people with Intellectual disability have not had a choice, this has to change”
... “self advocacy is vital to the success of the NDIS”

It was very obvious that people with intellectual disabilities need more information about the NDIS and support in accessing it. (*Jenny Macklin at NSW CID Conference*)



Judy, Chris, Heather (me) from Our Voice and Rhonda Galbally

Heather interviews Gerard Langridge

Gerard is a Self Advocate who lives independently and has been successful with his employment.

Q. *You seem very passionate about people with disabilities getting into employment*

A. *Its an important thing, getting more people with disabilities into work. People want to go to work outside.*

I have been doing things with Paul Cain from Inclusion Australia, and gone on visits to Canberra.

I knew a number of people who left school the same time I did but were only able to get employment in factories.

I have also known some people with disabilities who had been told they could not, or should not, work after they finish school who have since had some support or opportunity to do work and have done very well.

I have caught up with people about things I used to do, courses I used to do. I see how things could be better.

Q. *Tell us about your own entry into employment*

A. *When I finished school I went to Monkami workshop to put chair tips into bags. I did skill development and ended up in invoicing and continued on developing my skills and looking for opportunities until I ended up in my current position with Australia Post.*



Q. *How long have you been at Australia Post?*

A. *I have worked at Australia Post for 16 years. Australia Post has been supportive of me. A woman from Australia post helped me change to the delivery centre I now work at because it was closer to home. It had been very expensive to go from Dandenong to Mooroolbark by taxi.*



Gerard Langridge

Q. *What sort of work do you do for Australia Post?*

A. *Administrative work, work out entries after posties, checking mail for locals and sorts. Making sure people provide me with cages to have inside.*

Q. *Life is not all about work. What do you do for an interest?*

A. *I enjoy performance, especially comedy and comic skits though I do enjoy serious scripts also. I also write my own scripts.*



Q. *Would you ever go to a day service*

A. *No, no, no ... No!*

Q. *Were you involved in the self advocacy group in your area, New Horizons?*

A. *I was involved in Self Advocacy even before New Horizons started.*

New Horizons came into place in 1989, when Minister Peter Spyker decided on having 2 five year plans, a local and a state plan with all areas together. In the Eastern block we were divided into outer and inner Eastern.

Peter Quail, from Community Services Head Office, came together with people from the area to help people with disabilities from these two groups develop into self advocates. An advisory group was set up with Peter Ruzyla the chair. It was comprised of reps from a number of organizations including New Horizons.

New Horizons is still around but I have not had much to do with them over the last few years.

28th Annual Speak Out Conference 17 - 19 September 2015 Tramsheds, Launceston

Nothing Will Stop Us Now
NDIS Full roll out – time to get ready



- Employment forum – We can work with the right support
- NDIS Q&A panel - Ask and have your questions answered
- Be the boss of your own life – Consumer Presentation
- The final countdown – Planning to be in control of your own life - NDIA
- You are a consumer – Negotiating with your service provider - NDIA
- Finding your strong voice – Our Voice Committee
- Men's Cave – Secret men's business
- The powder room – Even more secret women's business
- The Road to Success – Self advocacy
- Speak Out Member Reports
- Being a Consumer Representative

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03 6231 2344

Volunteering at VALID

Volunteers have played an important role in VALID's work over many years. As VALID's work expands and challenges to connect with people with disabilities and their families across the state in preparation for the full rollout of the NDIS, the support of volunteers will become even more important. In order to expand our volunteer involvement VALID will be developing a more formal volunteer program with induction, orientation, background checks and ongoing training and development. This will provide volunteers with better support and increased opportunities for volunteering with VALID.

Key needs for volunteering at VALID include:

Having a Say Conference - our major event in Geelong held every February

VALID Peer Action Groups - become a peer support facilitator for a local Peer Action Group in your area supporting either adults with disabilities or family members to support each other in preparing for disability support reforms. These groups usually meet monthly in local community venues.

Supported Decision-Making - volunteers are needed to support participants in the NDIS rollout who do not have family or friends to support them make important decisions about planning, funding and supports. We are currently recruiting in the Barwon Launch Site in partnership with Office of Public Advocate. If you are interested in becoming a registered volunteer with VALID please email your name and contact details to volunteers@valid.org.au



Extracts from VALID's Submission to the Commonwealth Senate Inquiry into Violence, Abuse and Neglect against People with disability in Institutional and Residential Settings

Getting supports right for people with disabilities

The service system generally reflects a culture and history of blaming the individual for the behaviour rather than recognizing challenging behaviours as a way of communicating frustration, anxiety and trauma.

We believe an investment in ensuring that the individual gets the kinds of supports and the kinds of lives that are meaningful and relevant to them means you will lead to a significant decline in those kinds of behaviours. When you try to control the behaviours by constraining and restraining people, behaviours are generally escalated.

Many people with intellectual disability require support to help them deal with issues ranging from everyday dilemmas to major life-changing challenges. Many will rely on, and receive, the advocacy support of families, friends and neighbours. Many will also require the independent and more specialised support of an independent advocate.

Whether they receive it or not, however, usually depends on either their own capacity to ask for it, or on the willingness of those around them to seek it. The capacity of most advocacy organisations to proactively seek out people in need of support is virtually non-existent.

Need for a strong independent advocacy program

VALID believes there is a need for a strong and robust independent advocacy program that provides various forms of advocacy including responsive as well as proactive strategies for identifying and addressing systemic abuse and neglect.

Funding is also needed for individual and systemic forms of advocacy. This program needs to be funded to match demand from both a population growth and program demand perspectives as the NDIS expands supports to a larger number of people with disabilities. Severe underfunding of independent advocacy can lead to cases of abuse and neglect going unaddressed as advocacy organisations build waiting lists for support.

Because of the limited supply of independent advocacy, individual advocacy, including VALID's, has tended to become focused on reacting to situations of crisis or high need, and has become less available to people who need advocacy support in their day-to-day lives.

Such advocacy was once the charter of Citizen Advocacy groups, and it is very regrettable that Government support for agencies that recruit citizens from the community to stand alongside people with intellectual disability over the long term has all but disappeared. Instead, individual advocacy has mostly become, like VALID's, a form of crisis-driven, short-term support. Without the long-term, low-level form of advocacy support, many issues that might have been easily resolved at an early stage tend to escalate into major issues demanding our crisis advocacy response.

Full implementation of National Disability Strategy

VALID believes that the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and a commitment by all Australian governments to fund and implement the National Disability Strategy, are vital to creating a fairer and more inclusive society for all people with disabilities.

This structural, high-level work provides a much better framework for preventing and addressing abuse and neglect of people with disabilities who are hidden from public life in segregated service settings.

Where Should I Live?

Where do you live? Where should I live? We all have the right to this basic human choice - so why are so many people with intellectual disability denied the right?



Where do you live? Where should I live? Most Australians have the means and opportunity to take control of this choice in their lives. For most people with an intellectual disability, however, it is a right too often denied.

Many of VALID's individual advocacy cases revolve around accommodation choices or lack thereof. Many of these issues are a result of the incorrect accommodation choices being made on behalf of people with an intellectual disability. If everyone in society was confronted by the same problems our clients have had to endure, there would certainly be far more understanding about the lack of choice for people with an intellectual disability. This lack of choice can also be described as a lack of control people with an intellectual disability have over their own lives.

The Victorian Public Advocate, Ms Colleen Pearce, contributed a compelling article in The Age on August 19th, 2015. Her story captured exactly what can happen as a result of people being placed incorrectly into homes that are not adequately respected, configured or matched to the individuals' personality, needs and interests.

Choosing to live where you want to live is a luxury so many of us take for granted. People with an intellectual disability are rarely, if ever, included or supported to understand and somehow contribute to the decision making process when it comes to choosing a home that best suits them and other co-residents.

I have recently lived the exhausting experience of trying to find a new home for myself. I have been guided in my decision-making by the following priorities

Social connection: for me, living in a bustling city is my ideal choice for my next home.

1. Affordability is crucial: living comfortably and within my means was a major concern. Being close to my place of employment was a huge selling point.
2. Location: the closer to the office I could be the better.
3. Safety: no one wants to live in a high-crime area but that does not mean that everyone can live in a Utopian society where crime never happens. I had the ability to research my potential neighbourhood and the ability to visually gauge how safe the area felt.
4. Amenities: being close to the cinema, library, art galleries and theatre plus recreational activities is important so I can continue to pursue my interests in and near my home.
5. Access: being close to transport hubs is vital too. Short, affordable and simple commute times to work and interests are crucial.
6. Healthcare: I am making sure I am near major hospitals and services for the future.

Choosing a home to live in can take in these and many other factors all competing for our attention. For many people with an intellectual disability, choices about accommodation are often reliant on a process whereby a document outlining an applicant's wants and needs are presented. A panel of strangers gather to review that document and consequently formulate assessments and outcomes often without having met the person for whom the home is being offered or selected.

VALID is frequently involved with cases where the selection process has not adequately explored individual choice and preference, and assumptions have been made without sufficient understanding. We frequently support people who have been clearly mismatched within accommodation facilities.

As a result resident safety is put at risk, health and wellbeing is undermined and staff are pressured to manage situations which often escalate from stressful to outright toxic.

Thankfully every cloud has a silver lining and there are homes and services I have visited in my job as an advocate that truly show the decision making process worked and the house is actually a real home with warmth and personality. Fortunately this is not only due to the modern fabric of the house itself but due to the warmth and character of the roster of staff supporting the residents.



Too often as an advocate, I have had to step into the ring of fire and encourage people involved in the decision-making - including family members, support workers and others - to focus on the choices and preferences of the person with the disability. Finding a new home has to be about the resident and no one else. It's a tough process.

I am comforted by the reality for some people with intellectual disability that the right home and mix of residents is well-considered, well-supported and well-managed. For example, the current process of planning new homes for the residents of Sandhurst in Bendigo is a good example of how well thought out and respectful the decision-making process can be. The work that has been done in planning for a better model of accommodation with tailored designs for each appropriate group of new residents is an arduous process but much ground work has been covered to ensure a better outcome - with the choices and preferences of residents now being at the forefront.

Such examples of good practice demonstrate the importance of supporting people with intellectual disability to have Choice and Control over one of their most basic human rights: the right to live where they want, with whom they want and how they want.

Dom Moollan

Individual Advocate
Coordinator, VALID Inc.



Well said!!

After Ann Coulter referred to President Obama as a "retard" in a tweet during Monday night's presidential debate, Special Olympics athlete and global messenger John Franklin Stephens penned her this open letter:

Dear Ann Coulter, Come on Ms. Coulter, you aren't dumb and you aren't shallow. So why are you continually using a word like the R-word as an insult? I'm a 30 year old man with Down syndrome who has struggled with the public's perception that an intellectual disability means that I am dumb and shallow. I am not either of those things, but I do process information more slowly than the rest of you. In fact it has taken me all day to figure out how to respond to your use of the R-word last night. I thought first of asking whether you meant to describe the President as someone who was bullied as a child by people like you, but rose above it to find a way to succeed in life as many of my fellow Special Olympians have.

Then I wondered if you meant to describe him as someone who has to struggle to be thoughtful about everything he says, as everyone else races from one snarky sound bite to the next. Finally, I wondered if you meant to degrade him as someone who is likely to receive bad health care, live in low grade housing with very little income and still manages to see life as a wonderful gift. Because, Ms. Coulter, that is who we are – and much, much more. After I saw your tweet, I realized you just wanted to belittle the President by linking him to people like me.

You assumed that people would understand and accept that being linked to someone like me is an insult and you assumed you could get away with it and still appear on TV. I have to wonder if you considered other hateful words but recoiled from the backlash. Well, Ms. Coulter, you, and society, need to learn that being compared to people like me should be considered a badge of honour. No one overcomes more than we do and still loves life so much. Come join us someday at Special Olympics. See if you can walk away with your heart unchanged.

John Franklin Stephens

Do you want to get prepared for transition to the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme)?

VALID is running Information Sessions on:

- The basics of the scheme
- What's myth and what's fact
- What you can do to prepare and be more confident when you sit down with the NDIA (National Disability Insurance Agency) staff
- What is good planning and how to get started, working out your goals and what works well for you and/or your family member



There are upcoming sessions (in Cranbourne, Brighton, Banyule, Frankston, Preston or Eastern region). Alternatively if you would like to talk to us about having a session in your area, especially rural areas, please contact Christine to discuss. (We can organise the session without charge if you can supply a venue & tea/coffee).

Email Christine on christine@valid.org.au or ring the VALID office (9416 4003) and leave your details.



Clickability is a brand new Australian disability service directory which features ratings and reviews from the people who actually use the services.

We like to say we're kind of like TripAdvisor, but especially for reviewing disability services.

Clickability was founded by two passionate social workers, Aviva and Jenna. For us, it's simple. Everyone deserves consumer rights. We want to see lots of good quality support services available in Australia, and we want to make sure consumers and their families have informed choice and access to advocacy.

This grassroots project needs your REVIEWS to make it work. The more feedback you can give, the more relevant and reliable services can become, and the easier it will be for other people to choose good services that suit their needs.

Have you had an experience with a disability support service?

You might have used it yourself or organised it for someone you care for.

It might have been a good or bad experience. Either way, we want to hear about it, and you can be anonymous.

Sign up to Clickability at www.clickability.com.au to write a review. We've made it easy to sign up.

It's fine to help someone you care for to write a review of their experience with a service provider. If you had a different experience than the person you care for, sign up two different accounts so you can write a review from yourself and a different one from them. We can help you with this.

If you want some more information about us, have a look at www.clickability.com.au. There is a short video which explains what we do, and also explains what the National Disability Insurance Scheme is.

Our website is not 100% accessible yet, and we want to hear from you about how we can do better. Please send us your feedback and ideas about how Clickability could be most helpful to you.

Email us at info@clickability.com.au

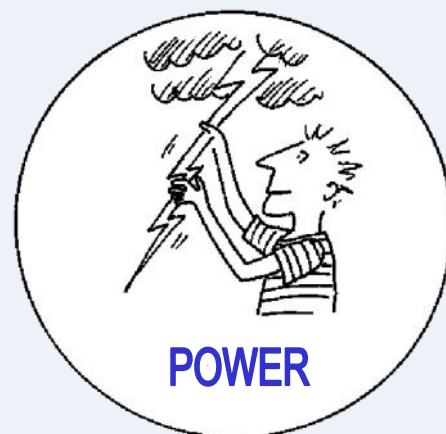
TO STAND BESIDE (TSB)

Advocacy for Inclusion Training Program

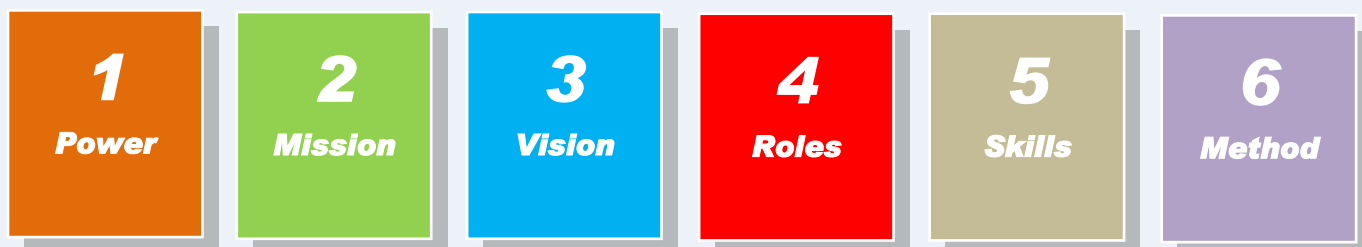
The advocacy training program is a two day intensive workshop aimed at disability support workers, family members, planners, coordinators, managers, paid or unpaid advocates who are involved in supporting, assisting or representing people with disabilities.

You will gain from a:

- greater knowledge of advocacy concepts and principles
- deeper understanding of personal values
- greater appreciation of the advocacy role inherent to all who work in the disability sector
- greater awareness of the potential conflicts of risk inherent to the advocacy role
- stronger framework for dealing with advocacy-related issues
- 'tool box' full of practical ideas/strategies



The training program comprises six modules:



The two day workshop will run from 9.30am - 4.00pm

Thursday 26th & Friday 27th November, 2015

To be held in Geelong, Venue TBA

CATERING: Morning and afternoon tea provided

\$60 People with disability, family
GST inc and voluntary advocates

\$140 Paid staff and workers
GST inc

A copy of the 'To Stand Beside: Advocacy for Inclusion Manual' is included in the cost

For more information or to request a registration form
please email bookings@valid.org.au



Having a Say Conference 2016



The seventeenth annual Having a Say conference will be held at Deakin University, Waterfront Campus on the 10th, 11th & 12th February 2016.

The conference theme is about connecting with your community. Life doesn't have to be a lonely marathon. It can also be a fun run. There are others who share your hopes and dreams. There are others who share your doubts and fears. They need you as much as you need them.

To be part of *the community* you first need to be part of *a community*. You need to *connect*. For the past sixteen years, the Having a Say Conference has been the number one place to connect. Now we need your help to take it to the next level. From participating in Speed Friendship and Dreams & Aspirations sessions to learning about the importance of Peer Groups, Self Advocacy Groups and Parent Networks, and from listening to leaders and politicians to going crazy on the Dance Floor with your friends – we want the 2016 conference to be all about you and your connections.

About the conference

The first day of the conference is buzzing with excitement as people register and start planning which sessions, workshops, performances and come & try activities they would like to attend. The presentations and workshops will have a focus on people connecting with their community and getting ready for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which is rolling out around the country in 2016.

After a busy first day some of the delegates attend the Red Face Talent Show auditions, which is a social event held on Wednesday evening at the Sphinx Hotel. It is a lot of fun as the 20 acts perform on stage, the audience joins in on the fun by singing along and dancing to the music. The three finalist from the evening perform at the closing ceremony on Friday in Costa Hall. Special Guest judge, Geelong Mascot 'Half Cat' will be returning in 2016 .



Dinner Disco

The Dinner Disco will be held at The Pier, Geelong on the Thursday evening with the band "Controversy" returning in 2016 for another exciting night of entertainment. Many people said that 2015 was the best disco ever and the band was "**awesome**", they had the crowd on their feet dancing and singing along to the music.

As an alternative people can choose to attend the dinner and chat in the Baveras Restaurant with the opportunity to be inspired by a Guest Speaker and have the chance to relax and network.



Other features

- The Art Competition has been running for the past six years will be sponsored once again by the Office of Professional Practice (OPP). Four of the art works will be awarded a certificate and cash prize by the sponsors. The four winning art works are proudly display in the office of the OPP.
- Come & try activities run throughout the conference and give registered delegates the chance to try something new. Some of the new activities next year are:
 - ◇ Story Telling
 - ◇ Textiles
 - ◇ Theatre Sports
 - ◇ Video, mini films



Our Choice Expo

The Having a Say conference will host the third Our Choice Expo. The expo's aim is to provide current National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants with information to assist them to self-direct, as well as to support those preparing for transition to the NDIS, with accessible information on what is available and possible through the scheme.

Information sessions will run through out the day.

The expo will run from 9.30am - 3.30pm on Friday, 12th February Free entry to the public!



Having a Say goes digital!

The 'Open Mic' sessions are an important part of the conference, it gives people the opportunity to go on stage to share their stories, their achievements, their experiences and how happy they are to be at the Having a Say Conference.



In 2016 you will also be able to have your say on a computer. You can tell us what is important to you and provide us with your feedback about the conference. Your feedback is very important, it helps us to make the Having a Say conference better each year, so be sure to tell us what you like and don't like about the conference.




The feedback table will be located opposite the registration desk, so please make sure to tell us about what you are thinking at Having a Say.



For more information about the Having a Say Conference check out the VALID website: www.valid.org.au - facebook pages VALID Inc and Having a Say

VALID and the Local Organising Committee invites you to attend the Having a Say conference. Hope to see you in Geelong in 2016!





VALID is committed to the vision of an Australian nation in which people with a disability are empowered to exercise their rights, as human beings and as citizens, in accordance with the Victorian Charter on Human Rights and Responsibilities, the Disability Act 2006 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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Registrations - training/workshops:
bookings@valid.org.au

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