

“To Stand with and for vulnerable people with disability through vigorous independent advocacy”

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IAT Management Committee Members:

Pam Spelling – Chairperson

Dorothy Smith – Vice Chair

Ricky Stoddart – Treasurer & Public Officer

Elise Whebell – Secretary

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IAT Staff:

Marnie Coombes - Co-Ordinator

Maxeen Alexander - Advocate

Tracey French - Advocate

Rusi Varani - Advocate

Amanda Fisher - Office Administrator

A Note from the Chairperson

Hello members and allies,

Welcome to our newsletter, with articles and contributions full of hopefulness, struggles, changes and triumphs for people with disabilities!

“Right To An Ordinary Life” was the title and theme of the Federal parliamentary secretary for Disabilities, the Honorable Bill Shorten’s National Press Club speech on 1st April 2009.

There seems to be a real shift in the language used and it would seem thinking of the Federal government, with respect to people with disabilities as can be seen simply by the title of the speech. A move towards “human rights” and explorations and an understanding of people with disabilities lived experiences, gives us some hope for future changes being based on what matters most for people who continue to be marginalized and excluded from community life.

During the Minister Anastacia Palaszczuk, the new Queensland Minister for Disability’s recent visit to Townsville, she indicated her commitment to working closely with Bill Shorten and having conversations with people with disabilities and other stakeholders across Queensland to look at more flexible and new ways of improving people’s lives. There were approximately 60 people in attendance, and it was an opportunity to put forward our thoughts about what needs to change.

As there’s so much unmet need, it will take many and continued “conversations that matter” amongst us all, along with political will, to deconstruct and reconstruct authentic changes for the better for the most vulnerable people with disabilities.

IAT will as always, continue to work with government and non government stakeholders to vigorously advocate for the rights of people with disabilities to live an inclusive life.

Pam Spelling Chairperson

NEW QLD COMPANION CARD

The Companion Card allows people with a disability, who require attendant care for the rest of their lives, to participate in community activities and events. Companion Cards can be presented at participating organizations where cardholders will not be required to pay an admission fee for their companion who is providing attendant care.

The Companion Card operates in several Australian states and Queensland has just joined in early 2009. To obtain a Companion Card, you first need to register interest by logging on to www.disability.qld.gov.au/support-services/carers/companion-card. Or phone 13 13 04 (Monday to Friday, 8am – 6pm).

To support our *E-Petition* for a Power Subsidy for people with Thermoregulatory Dysfunction in Queensland.

A number of Queenslanders with severe disabilities are unable to control their body temperature. These people rely on either air-conditioning or heating to maintain a safe body temperature. This requires extensive power usage above average power consumption. The great majority of these people are on pensions and incur financial hardship.

Thermoregulatory Dysfunction is suffered by people with a variety of Medical Conditions and Disabilities including people suffering from: Stroke, Head Injury, Spinal Injury, Neuro-degenerative Condition's (Parkinson's, Motor Neurone and Huntington's Diseases), Multiple Sclerosis, Skin Conditions (Severe burns and inflammatory diseases), Vascular Disease and Multiple Amputations.

Electricity Subsidy schemes for people with these conditions already exist for those who reside in Western Australia and Victoria.

To support our E-Petition go to:

http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/EPetitions_QLD/CurrentEPetition.aspx?PetNum=1191&Index=-1

Coordinators Column

Hi to all our members, friends and allies

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2009. We are making a few changes to our newsletter this year to try to ensure you stay informed and feel welcome to contact us – please let us know what you think.

Below you will find some information about our systemic advocacy, an introduction from our newest staff member, and information about the world and work of advocacy, as well as issues impacting on people with disability. One of our primary focus points at the moment is the Human Rights Consultation – we certainly support the need for a system that will enhance our ability as a community to safeguard and promote the rights of our most vulnerable citizens, and would urge all of you to do the same. We have provided information in this newsletter on a couple of ways you can do so.

IAT has also recently become a co-signatory for the position paper of the Community Safeguards Coalition campaign entitled "My life, my home, my solution". All too often we see people forced into living situations that are far from ideal due to funding and support policies in Queensland. The Coalition believes that when people with disability take control of their housing and their lives, just like everyone else, they create better solutions; therefore the focus of the campaign is to promote policies and practices that mean people with disability and those who care about them make their decisions around accommodation and lifestyle, and that innovative and individualised support solutions are offered rather than one-size-fits-all policies.

You will also see examples of initiatives being taken by other advocacy groups in the state, and an introduction to one of the other individual advocacy agencies.

He's my Tropfest brother

February 28, 2009
Sydney Morning Herald

In a quiet moment in an otherwise hectic week, Genevieve Clay hugged the star of her Tropfest-winning short film.

"You've done well," she said. Gerard O'Dwyer smiled as he hugged her back. It was clear that the world's biggest short-film festival has launch more than just careers this year – it has also forged a warm friendship between two unknowns who triumphed last Sunday night.

Clay, an elfin 20-year-old who was sleeping on a friend's floor at Neutral Bay until recently, won the festival with the drama *Be My Brother*.

In his first role, O'Dwyer, a chatty 24-year-old from Guilford, was name best actor. Their connection – and the seeds of Tropfest success – began when Clay was commissioned to make a documentary about people with Down syndrome and their dreams. She approached O'Dwyer, who has long wanted to become an actor, and was "absolutely gobsmacked" when he launched into a Shakespeare soliloquy and some comic impressions.

"I thought this guy is incredible," she said. "If I can help him achieve his goal, I would be a very happy lady because he deserves it."

Clay wrote *Be My Brother* around O'Dwyer's personality. It has him wining over a hesitant woman at a bus stop with a similar mix of Shakespeare and impressions.

Congratulations have come from everywhere since their double triumph at Tropfest. "It's been amazing, and I'm moved by it," O'Dwyer said, adding proudly that the prize included \$3000 donated by Nicole Kidman. But he is still waiting for one particular call – an offer to appear on *Packed to the Rafters* or *Home and Away*. *All Saints* or *Neighbours* would be just as good.

Clay, who used three crew members with disabilities for her film, believes scriptwriters should write O'Dwyer into their shows.

"I think the film industry should be mindful of including people. It's hard enough for people without disabilities to get a foot in the door, let alone people with disabilities." Some filmmakers would be wary about an actor with Down syndrome, but Clay described Tropfest's newest star as a director's dream.

"He's really focused, and he learns scripts in an instant. We had three rehearsals, and he took direction wonderfully."

Clay now wants to make a feature film, a drama about forgiveness and redemption. And, needless to say, she plans to cast O'Dwyer.

"I've already written him into it. That's for certain."

Acknowledgement of N.C.I.D Information and Publication Service March 2009

Australian Human Rights Consultation -

The National Human Rights Consultation provides the opportunity for you to share your views on human rights. The Consultation is run by an independent Committee. The Committee is supported by a Secretariat in the Attorney-General's Department.

The Consultation is a chance to hear people's ideas about human rights and talk about ways to protect and promote human rights in the future.

Key Consultation Questions

- Which human rights and responsibilities should be protected and promoted?
- Are human rights sufficiently protected and promoted?
- How could Australia better protect and promote human rights?

You can share your views by making a written submission either online or by post. You can also attend a community roundtable discussion.

You can share your views about human rights with the National Human Rights Consultation Committee in a number of ways.

1. You can make a submission on the below website.

www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au

2. You can send your written submission to:

National Human Rights Consultation Secretariat
Attorney-General's Department
Central Office
Robert Garran Offices
National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

3. You can register to attend a Community Roundtable session near you.

The deadline for submissions is 15 June 2009.

If you have any questions about making your submission or attending a community roundtable you can ring or email the National Human Rights Consultation Secretariat:

- 1800 086 134 (freecall, available between 10.00am and 4.00pm)
- humanrightsconsultation@ag.gov.au
- TTY users - phone 1800 555 677 then ask for 1800 086 134
- Speak and Listen (speech-to-speech relay) users - phone 1800 555 727 then ask for 1800 086 134
- Internet relay users - visit the National Relay Service website and ask for 1800 086 134.

Systemic Advocacy Project - Community Information

IAT believes that the community, not just people with disability, benefit from advocacy in its many forms – be it informal, unpaid advocacy, parent advocacy, citizen advocacy or any variation of these. So one of our goals is to ensure that our community has access to information about what we do and how and why we do it. To this end, we developed the Community Information Project, the aims of which are to actively raise awareness about the role and function of advocacy, and to develop our networks in the communities we work with. IAT workers will make themselves available to provide information to people with disability and their families, government departments, community groups, non-government agencies, students and others. Presentations are based on IAT's mission, vision and values, and the presentation style is flexible and suited to the needs of the group. We prefer a very interactive session, with participants encouraged to ask questions as we go, and we welcome the opportunity to challenge our collective views about people with disability and how these impact on their lives and the community.

Community Information sessions are available to anyone - If you are interested, please contact Marnie Coombes on either 4725 2505 or marnie@independentadvocacy.org.au and we would be happy to make the necessary arrangements.

PROBLEM PAGE

As part of our new newsletter format, we would like to invite readers of our newsletter to contact us to ask any questions about issues you have experienced (as a person with disability, family member, friend or worker) that are relevant to the rights of people with disability and/or advocacy. We will answer your question in the next newsletter. You can contact us on 07 4725 2505 or toll-free on 1800 887 688; or via e-mail on admin@independentadvocacy.org.au If the issue relates to a person please be sure to either change or omit the name to protect confidentiality. We also don't need to include the name of the person submitting the question. If we decide to include your question in the newsletter, we will contact you beforehand to discuss this with you. So,

An extract from:

Right to an Ordinary Life
Hon Bill Shorten MP
Member for Maribyrnong
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services
Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction

01/04/2009

National Press Club

Today, I want to talk of another group of Australians: Australians with the same ilk of courage, spirit and ethos, whose circumstances are vastly different from most, whose days and nights are a mighty struggle to achieve a capacity and independence that others of us have never once wondered about and always presumed to be available; Australians who speak clearly and strongly to themselves - or they simply wouldn't survive - but whose voices are rarely heard by the broader many who live in their midst and otherwise occupy this nation.

I'm talking of a silent, aching, struggle, ever infused by love, affecting millions of lives, which falls mostly under the radar.

It happens daily, quietly and inexorably, and has been going on for too many years to count or know. It is invisible, or at least so accepted and entrenched in our society that we fail to see its most fundamental infringement of human rights and dignity.

I'm talking of young men and women with lifelong disabilities living in aged care homes. Living with people in their later years, nearing the end of their lives, people they are unable to connect with and share experiences with all because they have no other choices available to them.

THE COMMUNITY SAFEGUARDS COALITION

IS THIS HAPPENING TO YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER?

*The parents of a young man who had individualised funding were advised by DSQ that in order for him to get enough support to meet his needs, he would have to give up his individual funding and pool it with the funding of two other people. No other alternatives were offered. This is not real choice when the outcome is likely to be a situation where nobody could leave this arrangement unless there was a vacancy in a similar arrangement with a similar level of funding. **DSQ call this Shared Accommodation. We call it forced co-tenancy.***

If this or similar incidences are occurring for your son or daughter, **please let us know.** We want to hear your story so that we can be clear when we advocate to government that this practice of 'forced co-tenancy' is wide-spread.

The above issue has been brought to QPPD's attention about the pressure being applied by government and many non-government services for people with disabilities to co-tenant with another person as the solution to meeting support needs rather than increasing the individuals funding package or offering other alternatives. While those who are responsible for this practice would say that people are given a choice, it is often a choice between a vacant room in someone else's already existing house, a room in a "new" house that a person will share with strangers OR **no house at all.**

It is a fundamental right to choose where and with whom one will live. Due to the seriousness of this issue of 'forced co-tenancy', the Community Safeguards Coalition of which QPPD is a member decided to seek action from the government. The Community Safeguards Coalition is a network of people with disabilities, families, friends, advocacy agencies and allies of people with disabilities in Queensland.

The Community Safeguards Coalition members have met monthly to determine strategies with which to move forward. CSC has written a four-page Position Statement (attached), defining 'forced co-tenancy' and outlining the negative impact it is having on the lives of people with disability and their family. On the 17th March representatives of the Coalition, people with disabilities and allies went to the previous Minister's office to talk about the issue and present the Position Statement.

During this meeting a number of issues were raised. Some of these are as follows:

1. Block funding locks people with a disability into a difficult situation because the funding cannot be transferred. The person leaves the service and they lose the funding.
2. DSQ's Shared Accommodation model has created unintended consequences for people with disability and their family. The objective of the Shared Accommodation program may have been well meant in that it appeared to be an effective way to use scarce resources and not to allow any 'beds' go empty in funded arrangements. However, the inadvertent consequence is that the person with a disability can find themselves in places that may be a long way from their family and community simply because that is where there is a vacancy. Another example would be a person living in their own accommodation very happily for many years and making the place their 'home'. Over time, the person's needs increase. On seeking more support from government, the person learns that the only way support will be provided is through another person moving into their home. It was probably not the intention of the Shared Accommodation program to disrupt this person's home life, but this is an unintended consequence.
3. Parents want to secure a future for their sons/daughters. However, parents are now fearful that their son or daughter may not be able to access public housing because of the current policy of Queensland Housing and the Memorandum of Understanding between DSQ and Queensland Housing which prevents people with disability accessing public housing unless they have an adequate support package from DSQ. **No other Queensland Housing tenant has to provide such information.**
4. There is a reluctance to fund individuals and there has been no funding round for 2 years in relation to Adult Lifestyle Support Packages.
5. People with disability have found that they can't exit out of a service because funding is not transportable and they are therefore trapped unless a vacancy occurs in a similar situation.

At the end of this meeting, members of CSC sought a commitment from government to engage in meaningful discussions with representatives of the sector to find practical solutions to the issues.

The Coalition asked for a response within 24 hours of the meeting.

The next day a response was received from the Deputy Premier, Paul Lucas, stating that the Bligh government committed to immediately engaging with representatives from the Coalition and other interested groups around the issue. This is considered a significant step forward, however only another step in the process.

We at QPPD and the Community Safeguards Coalition are interested in hearing from people with disability and those who have sons or daughters in co-tenancy situations. We believe that if we can present DSQ with non-identifying stories about the co-tenancy issues for people in Queensland, DSQ will be more likely to take notice and work with us to find solutions. There needs to be a paradigm shift towards a rights based delivery of services.

We would like to hear from YOU -

- Your story,
- If you or your family member is in a co-tenancy situation – is it working or not?
- Were you offered other options rather than co-tenancy?
- Did you feel pressured or intimidated?

Please email or post your stories to the QPPPD office – PO Box 466, Salisbury, Qld 4107, or ring us on the free call number 1800 805 184. To know more about the Disability services act please log onto the following website.

<http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/ACTS/2006/06AC012.pdf>

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Quote

**I Long to accomplish a great and a noble task,
But it is my chief duty to accomplish small
Tasks as if they were great and noble.'**
Helen Keller

Advocacy News

New funding for Queensland

The successful applicants for funding in identified areas of Queensland have been announced by the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP). The agencies will be conducting advocacy activities in the following areas:

- Bundaberg Regional Council area
- Fraser Coast Regional Council area (covering Hervey Bay and Maryborough)
- Logan City

IAT is pleased that the Commonwealth Government is attempting to address the issue of access to advocacy in regional areas and believe this will be of significant benefit to vulnerable people with disability, and their families and communities. NDAP has also recently invited submissions for funding in additional identified areas across Australia – in Queensland, this will be for the Sunshine Coast. We will keep you posted.

Youth Disability Advocacy

The Youth Affairs Network of Qld. is proposing the development of a state-wide Youth Disability Advocacy Service. It is envisioned the service would provide individual and systemic advocacy (and possibly some legal advocacy), and conduct community education and awareness activities on issues impacting on young people with disability. The proposal is currently still in the planning stages.

Office of the Public Advocate Abolished

The Bligh Government has acted on the recommendations of the Queensland Law Reform Commission (QLRC) to abolish the Office of the Public Advocate. The Office of the Public Advocate was established in 2000 to undertake systemic advocacy to promote and protect the rights and interests of adults with impaired decision-making capacity. The Public Advocate seeks to identify issues in the systems that impact on adults, and works towards influencing appropriate change. Those systems include policy, service and legislative systems across the government and non-government sectors:

The recommendation of the QLRC was part of the review of Queensland's guardianship system, a process which has not yet been completed. The Bligh government's decision entails the absorption of the Office of the Public Advocate by the Office of the Adult Guardian, who has the role of making decisions on behalf of people with impaired decision making capacity. The operation of the Office of the Adult Guardian was included in those systems that have been monitored by the Public Advocate; therefore the absorption of this Office into the regime of the Adult Guardian has the functional effect of eliminating independent scrutiny at one level. Queensland Alliance, Queensland Advocacy Inc. and National Disability Services (Qld) have made representations to Disability Services Minister Anastasia Palaszczuk and Director General Linda Apelt protesting the decision as one that will remove an essential safeguard for the most vulnerable people in Queensland.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The role of the Management Committee is to manage the organisation by affirming
And promoting its vision, its purpose and its priorities.

This is done in three ways:

1. By developing and safeguarding the vision of advocacy and social justice on behalf of people with a disability.
2. Managing the resources, energies work, activities and wellbeing of the organisation as a whole.
3. By managing the staff who work for the organisation.

By becoming a member of the management Committee, people gain an overall understanding of what IAT does, together with a wider perspective on advocacy and the advocacy movement. It also brings into focus the issues which affect people with disabilities and their families at different points in their lives, as well as the systems that they are associated with, including governments, advisory and peak bodies and services.

If you would like to be on our committee
(and we would love to have you)

Please contact the office 4725 2505