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Abstract

This booklet reports on the outcomes of four workshops held for people with disabilities whose services had been reviewed. These outcomes are to be used as a basis for lobbying the government. The information in the booklet includes descriptions of advocacy and the support required for advocacy to happen. It provides examples of people standing up for their rights and where rights are being abused. **Keyword: Advocacy**

OUR RIGHTS

QUEENSLAND ADVOCACY INCORPORATED
Empowering all people with a disability



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QUEENSLAND ADVOCACY INCORPORATED

ADVOCACY
SUPPORT
PROJECT

Produced by people with disabilities who have been involved in the reviews of their services

OCTOBER 1991

QUEENSLAND ADVOCACY INCORPORATED

Empowering all people with a disability

WHO ARE WE

Queensland Advocacy Incorporated is an independent advocacy organisation for people with a disability in Queensland.

We are run by people with a disability and others who are interested.

We are always on the side of the person with a disability.

We are a community based group, **and not part of any government department or other organisation.**

We get money from the Federal Government's Disability Services Programme.

We have a rights and resource office in Brisbane at



WHAT DO WE DO

- ★ Work on changing laws and policies for people with a disability.
- ★ Encourage a positive image of people with a disability within the community.
- ★ Support groups to do advocacy.
- ★ Provide resources to groups of people with a disability. For example a library and a meeting room.
- ★ Give talks on rights and advocacy.
- ★ Offer advice on the rights of people with a disability, including legal advice.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Over the past two years, people from the Advocacy Support Team at QAI have worked with people whose services have been going through reviews. In this work, people with disabilities have been supported to do advocacy by:

- ★ having information about why the review is happening
- ★ talking with others about rights, choices and a decent life
- ★ collecting information and presenting it to service providers and government
- ★ speaking out about injustices and the changes that people want to happen in their lives.

Towards the end of the project, people who had been involved were invited to come to a workshop. Four workshops were held in Brisbane and one in Townsville.

At these workshops we talked about advocacy and rights. We looked back at what has happened over the last two years and talked about:

- ★ rights we still don't have
- ★ good things that have happened because we spoke up about our rights
- ★ what advocacy is about
- ★ what support is needed for advocacy to happen
- ★ where advocacy support can come from.

In the last session, we looked at the ways our rights were being abused and who we wanted to tell about this.

This report is a summary of what people said. It is being used as the basis for lobbying to make sure that people in advocacy, government, services and the wider community are kept aware that rights are still being abused.

SECTION 1 - ABOUT ADVOCACY

1. WHAT IS ADVOCACY ABOUT?

A lot of people talk about advocacy but it is often difficult to say what it is. We have been involved in advocacy on behalf of ourselves and other people with disabilities who use services. From our discussions, this is what we think advocacy is about.

Advocacy is:

- sticking up for our rights
- speaking out about what should happen for people with disabilities
- telling society that we do have rights and that we should get them
- standing up to others when they abuse our rights
- defending ourselves against injustice
- fighting segregation and discrimination
- challenging ideas and practices
- confronting what is wrong
- speaking up for ourselves
- speaking up on behalf of others when it is difficult for them to speak up for themselves
- not just saying it, but doing it getting
- others involved about issues
- working together to support the cause
- being persistent and determined to keep on going
- following things right through to the end
- winning some, losing others

Advocacy is not easy:

- being ignored, not listened to
- being looked down on
- being criticised
- being victimised
- being told you can't do it
- being scared of being kicked out
- dealing with a threatening environment
- dealing with ideas backfiring on you
- having staff and bosses win
- taking up a lot of time and effort
- taking big risks
- lying awake at night and worrying
- feeling very small and alone at times

Advocacy Support comes from:

- being independent
- getting support from outside the service
- having support without conflict of interest
- having people on our side
 - the side of people with disabilities
 - not on the side of the service
 - not on the side of the government
 - not on the side of the public(unless they are saying the same things as we are on a particular issue)

Outcomes from Advocacy

- becoming first class citizens
- claiming our rights
- getting some changes
- making sure we are treated better
- becoming more independent
- getting better lifestyles where we live, work and have leisure
- being part of the community
- having more to life than services
- not being ripped off
- getting better conditions at work
- feeling good about speaking out about rights
- feeling strong because we know we are right
- knowing our rights
- learning about what is possible
- finding out that we are human and can expect the same as others.

People talked about how advocacy does not always get the results people want. However, in general, we felt that it is worth trying and that you get nowhere unless you try. Yet, to do this, there often needs to be some form of advocacy support as we know it's not easy.

2. GOOD THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED BECAUSE WE STOOD UP FOR OUR RIGHTS

People who services have been through reviews talked about some of the good things that have happened because we stood up for our rights. Many of our stories are about personal experiences which have been good. In some small ways we feel our lives are getting a bit better.

However, only a few of us could tell stories which showed how our lives had really changed so that our basic rights were no longer being abused. Even in those services where big changes have happened, people often told stories about how others still controlled our lives.

When we listened to these stories we realised how far we all still had to go before we are treated like other citizens.

The following stories give some examples of the good changes that have happened for people because we stood up for our rights.

Good Things That Happened For Me

- I realise its not just me. I am treated badly!
- I am able to speak up about things that worry me
- I am not so shy any more
- I've learnt to ignore unimportant little things and push for bigger things
- I know that if I can get support I can get people to listen to my ideas
- I have learnt I can say things myself
- I know my rights now
- I feel great when people have listened and done something about what I've said
- I'm being given more responsibility for making decisions in my life
- I'm thinking about moving out from my parents
- I'm engaged and planning to marry
- I have realised I can support other people and they can support me
- I get asked for advice on things
- I have met more people who take me seriously
- I've become involved in advocacy
- I've been elected to a committee
- I go to meetings and workshops and get involved with others
- I have been to conferences and have lobbied people in government
- I have left my day service and have found better things to do with my life

Good Things That Happened About Others

- Staff now ask me what I want to do
- My suggestion was taken up by Management
- The supervisor I stood up to now respects me and asks me things
- The service is giving us a lot more information about what is happening
- Staff supported me to talk to management
- My parents are allowing me to go out with friends I proved everyone wrong. I could do it and now they expect it and give me support

Good Things That Happened At Work

- We had a pay rise
- We got holiday pay for the first time
- They take our communication boards on the bus each day now
- I got a promotion to supervisor
- I got a licence to drive the truck
- We got a rep elected to be on the board

Good Things That Happened At Home

- I am looking after my own money now with people supporting me
- I've been asked to go to more places and have done more things
- I have my own doctor and go by myself now
- I chose what my room would look like - colours and furniture
- I got a new wheelchair
- I am learning to read phone numbers
- I am trying another service to see if they will help me move out.

Good Things That Happened With Complaints

- When I complained, something actually happened!
- I was supported by staff to make a complaint
- Our consumer committee helped to set the complaints policy
- It is someone's job to sort out complaints now.

Good Things That Happened That Changed My Lifestyle

- I got attendant care and moved out of a nursing home into my own flat
- I moved from an institution to a house in the community
- I don't have staff now all the time, only when I need them for support
- I hire my own staff and control my own life as much as I can
- The service is giving me support to learn to do things in my own home
- I left the ATC and am being supported to find a job and to do it well
- They are setting up a new supported employment service and we're having a say in how it will be run
- I left the ATC and am being supported to go to college.

It should be recognised that these changes did not all happen because of advocacy. Rather, people saw these improvements as a result of changes in services where we have been supported to advocate about rights issues.

SUPPORT EQR ADVOCACY TO HAPPEN

People talked about some of the useful supports which needed to be in place for us to do advocacy well. Without some of these supports people can set us up to fail. We talked about practical supports as well as people. These are our suggestions:

Advocacy support is having someone who:

- comes from outside the service
- can give advice about our rights
- can talk about advocacy
- can organise groups of people to meet together
- knows where to find out information
- knows how to get on to the right person in services or government
- can help to organise things we have difficulty doing:
 - reading information
 - writing things down
 - reading communication boards
 - contacting people
 - arranging
 - attendants
 - interpreters
 - transport
 - typing etc
- has access to funds to pay for assistance
- doesn't cost us extra money to be involved with
- can talk comfortably with people with disabilities
- listens to our ideas
- talks things through with us
- offers us suggestions and helps with problem solving
- puts time into working out what we want to say
- helps us develop our own advocacy skills
- supports us to speak up for ourselves
- doesn't let others get away with things
- understands how difficult it can be for us but doesn't put us down
- takes us seriously
- believes in us, likes us and wants to work with us
- believes in our rights and shows that by the way they act
- gives emotional support when things get rough
- deals with victimisation and punishment
- backs us up
- builds up our confidence
- helps us believe in ourselves

- makes us feel stronger
- goes with us when we need support
- keeps information confidential
- is a person we can trust
- shares the good and the bad times
- clearly is on our side and works for us
- makes contact with others involved in advocacy.

THE END OF ADVOCACY SUPPORT?

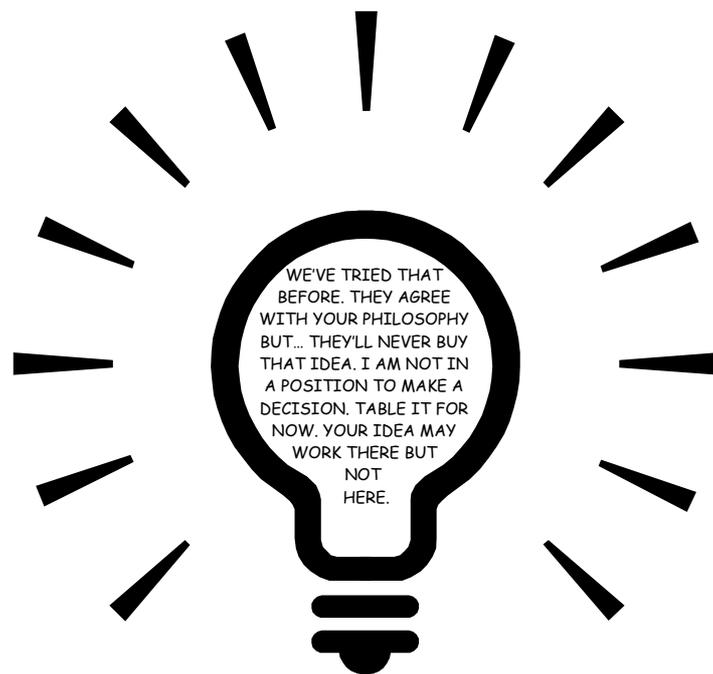
During our reviews we have had much of the advocacy support listed here. However at the end of the Advocacy Support Project there will be very little help available to us to continue to do advocacy.

Currently there are only four advocacy organisations in Queensland. These are Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI), Independent Advocacy in the Tropics (IAT), Speak Up For Yourself Inc (SUFY) and Queensland Parents of People With A Disability Inc (QPPD). Between them they have five advocacy workers and four administrative workers, not all full time. They cannot be expected to pick up this work or to develop it when they are working on other issues which are equally important to our well being.

Are we now expected to continue doing advocacy alone? Who will deal with the basic tenancy and work rights issues that we are grappling with in our daily lives? What about the wider issues that they are a part of?

In the next section we talk about how these issues are part of a much wider way that our rights are being abused. Our lives still show that we are segregated, oppressed, exploited, overprotected and discriminated against.

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU HEARD



RECOGNISE RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND FIGHT IT

SECTION 2 - ABOUT RIGHTS

Over the last two years, people who have been involved in reviews of services have talked a lot about our rights. We have looked at how people in services that we use often abuse our rights and we have raised our concerns about these in the reviews.

At the workshops with OA1 we have talked about some of our worries about the things that are still happening in our lives. We listed some of the rights we still don't have. When we put these together, there were five major ways our rights to a decent life were being abused.

- * People with disabilities are still kept apart from the life of the rest of the community often by the services which have been set up to give us help.
THIS IS SEGREGATION
- * People with disabilities still have our lives controlled by many services or parents who think they know what is best for us.
THIS IS OPPRESSION
- * People with disabilities are forced to work for very little pay and continue to have poor working conditions.
THIS IS EXPLOITATION
- * People with disabilities are still being stopped from doing the same sorts of things as other people do.
THIS IS OVERPROTECTION
- * People with disabilities are still not valued as citizens and are forced to accept very different standards of living.
THIS IS DISCRIMINATION

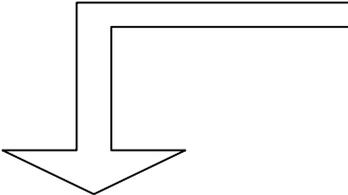
SEGREGATION

We are still waiting:

- to move out of institutions
- to move into our own homes
- to move out from parents
- to move into a real job
- not to have a holiday in an institution



There are not enough community-based options. Funding still goes into services that keep us apart from our communities.



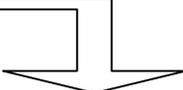
We still have little support:

- to find another place to live
- to change jobs
- to go on to college
- to try new things
- to do things in our own home or on the job
- to make connections with the wider community

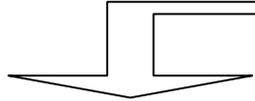
There is limited support to find and explore options for a decent life.

We still can't choose:

- Where we live
- who we live with
- who works with us
- what type of job we are interested in
- where we go



We are often lumped together. Our only options are those the service has provided for us.



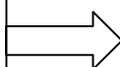
Relationships are restricted to carers, paid workers and other people with disabilities.

We have little opportunity:

- to do things away from the service or our family
- to meet other people
- to develop relationships
- to make friends outside the service

We have lost contact:

- with our families
- with our local communities
- with our culture

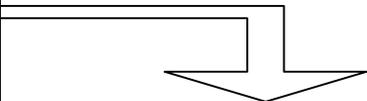


Services are centralised with support being centre based. Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are in services run by white staff with white values.

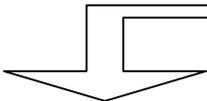
OPPRESSION

We are still abused where we live and work by:

- being hit or pushed
- being yelled at and picked on
- being stirred up and called names
- being teased and put down
- being laughed at and made fun of
- not being listened to, respected or believed
- being blamed for others' mistakes
- having personal care roughly done



Abuse is not recognised and dealt with properly. People continue to control rather than support us.



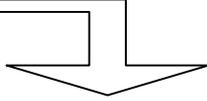
We do not have proper complaints systems in services, even if they say we do. Often staff are the ones who are protected and we must be grateful.

We cannot speak up without fear because we:

- are punished for raising issues
- are labelled trouble makers and victimised
- are punished for raising issues
- are called behaviour problems and stirrers
- are moved around
- are told we will be thrown out and sometimes are

We have no privacy because:

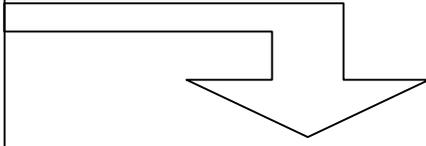
- everyone knows our business
- information is not kept confidential
- relationships become public and are interfered with
- we get into trouble for things that happen outside the service in our private lives
- our homes become public places



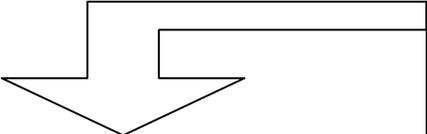
Our lives are public property and people then assume they own us and control us.

Even when things might look OK, we know that we can:

- be used as tokens
- be set up to fail without support
- be put on committees that are controlled by staff
- be put on boards and have to say yes to others' ideas
- not have information that is available in ways we understand it
- be expected to pay out lots of money to be included
- have our landlord, our employer and our support service all the same people



Services and their staff do not acknowledge the immense power they have in controlling people's lives.



We are unable to get much help from people outside the service who are free from conflict of interest and we have little support to join together to continue our struggle.

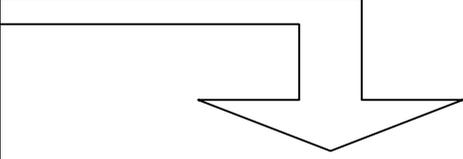
We don't have contact with people outside our service so we:

- have no one to follow up on complaints
- have no one to support us to speak up about injustices
- have no support to make contact with people outside
- can't choose who we discuss important issues with
- have limited access to outside advocacy
- have limited access to others experiencing similar oppression

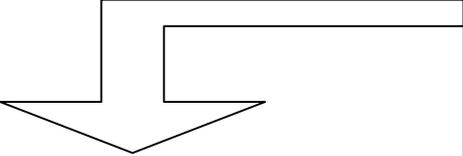
EXPLOITATION

We are not seen as workers because:

- we are grouped together because of a label
- we are expected to volunteer our labour for something to do
- we get names like clients when we are workers
- we are expected to train all our lives
- our wage is often tied to the pension
- we do not get promoted or moved out to real jobs



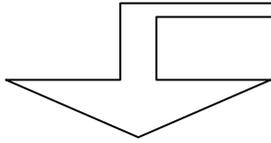
People expect we should be grateful for having a place to go to and having something to do.



Doing work is confused with supporting other people to work. The employer and the support service are the same people.

We have little support to get real jobs for real pay because:

- we don't get training
- others assume we can't work
- there's no support outside to help us:
 - find work of interest
 - learn the job
 - hold the job
 - have a job to be proud of



Workshops underquote for contracts and can be supporting other parts of service organisations such as large staff and administrations. They often are not profitable.

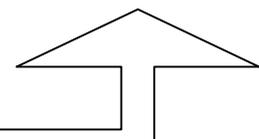
We do not get proper pay for work we do because:

- we do not have awards
- we do not all have sick leave, holiday pay and leave loading, long service leave or overtime
- we get less money when there isn't enough work
- we get our pay docked if we swear or argue
- we get very little money for the work we do

We have poor working conditions with:

- unsafe work practices
- unsafe clothing
- poor equipment for handling
- work done by hand that could be done by machines
- tough supervisors putting extra pressure on because of changes
- repetitive and boring work
- long periods of standing on cement floors for some

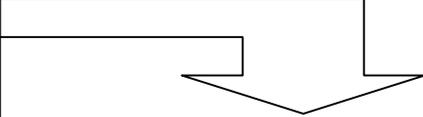
People are not valued as workers so that usual industrial conditions do not apply.



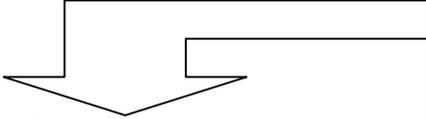
OVERPROTECTION

We do not have correct information:

- about our bodies, ourselves
- about our history
- about plans for us
- about services
- about possibilities and choices
- about rights



People think that we do not need to know about things, as services and families continue to decide for us.



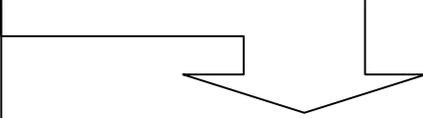
The focus of services is on what we can't do, rather than supporting us to do what we want to do.

Others do not have faith in our abilities:

- to make decisions which affect our lives or have support to
- to build on what we like and the things we can do to
- choose and employ our own staff
- to have some say in our own future

We are not allowed to take risks:

- to learn new things to
- have relationships
- to handle money
- to move on to be more independent
- to succeed or fail
- to have fun
- to do what others do

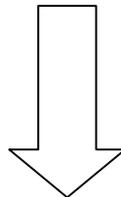


We continue to be treated like children, rather than be allowed to grow up and become adults.

DISCRIMINATION

We are treated differently in many of the roles we have:

- as tenants we do not have accessible, affordable housing and tenancy rights
- as workers we do not have access to real work and workers rights
- as students we do not have access to all levels of education
- as players we do not have access to all forms of recreation
- as commuters, we do not have accessible affordable transport
- as service users we do not have proper complaints systems and user rights
- as citizens we do not have legal rights, especially when we are abused
- as friends, lovers, spouses, we do not have relationship and privacy rights
- as people, we do not have basic technology to communicate and move freely about, and we don't have the support to be part of our communities.



We are not valued as members of our community. Our lives can be described as a form of apartheid for people with disabilities. We are kept apart from the community and are treated very differently. Often the very services set up to help us maintain this discrimination.

ABOUT CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION

Most of the services we use have not gone through transition under the Disability Services Act. They have remained funded under Section 13 and have not been approved to go to new service type funding under Section 10. The time for this to happen is fast running out - June 1992.

We have identified many rights issues which show that our services do not and will not fit with the Principles and Objectives of either the current Commonwealth or proposed State legislation about Disability Services.

Those of us who still use Section 13 funded services are most concerned about what will happen now. Some of us are to have our services transferred to the State; others will stay with Commonwealth. When we looked back over the past years, we have seen very little real change in our lives. Is this what we can expect forever?

Yet we have known people who have managed to get services which do much more towards helping people to have a decent life. They have shared their stories with us and we know that major changes can happen.

We want those changes too. We do not want to remain away from our communities in places where we are overprotected and controlled by our carers. We do not want to be exploited at work or discriminated against because we have disabilities.

All we do want is the opportunity to live as citizens with equal rights and a decent life in the community of our choice.