

The Rights Stuff

Tips for solving problems and making complaints

A toolkit for consumers of community services in NSW





This toolkit is for people who use community services, their families, carers and advocates.

The toolkit is designed to help you promote and protect your rights when using community services, and to help you to build good relationships with your service providers so that you can play an active role in shaping the services you receive to ensure that they meet your needs.

The toolkit also provides advice about how to raise any concerns you may have with your service, and how best to resolve them.

What does the Toolkit cover?

The main focus of the toolkit is to provide you, as an individual, tips on how to interact effectively with service providers. It covers:

- information on the community services system in NSW
- your rights as a user of community services
- how you can improve your relationships with service providers
- how you can raise and resolve concerns and complaints
- individual and systems advocacy, and
- where you can find support and assistance.

Although the information in this toolkit is focused on community services in NSW that are within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, some of the ideas and suggestions are relevant to other service areas such as the health sector. In fact, many of the ideas on communication and resolving complaints can be applied in everyday situations and daily interactions with a range of people.

The toolkit is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to the whole community services system. Rather, it is a handy collection of practical information and tips to build your confidence in raising issues and resolving complaints with service providers.

We hope that you find it useful.



Bruce Barbour
NSW Ombudsman

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1. Getting informed

What are community services?

In the broadest sense, community services are an organised way of meeting the social needs and well-being of individuals and communities, so that people are supported to participate as fully as possible in society and share society's benefits. In NSW, community services are provided by a variety of government, non-government, community and private agencies.

Who can use community services?

Community services are used by a wide range of people. Some people only need community services for a short time while others may require services throughout their lives. Some people have complex needs which means that they may receive services from a number of providers, including federal and state government departments, local government and non-government services.

Some individuals and groups are particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable. They are often more likely to use community services. They include people with a disability, Aboriginal people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, frail older people and people on low incomes.

Service providers usually have 'eligibility criteria' that describes who can use their services.

How does the community services system work in NSW?

The community services system works at many levels. Both the Federal and NSW Governments deliver community services. They also give funds to local government and non-government providers so that they can deliver services. Some community services programs are funded jointly by the Federal and NSW Governments, others are not.

The Federal and NSW Governments monitor and set standards for the delivery of community services by non-government organisations.

The main Commonwealth Government agencies in the community services area are the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Centrelink, and the Department of Health and Ageing.

They monitor, deliver and fund a range of services including:

- aged care services including hostels and nursing homes
- aged care standards and accreditation
- Home and Community Care (HACC) services
- income support and family payments
- child care
- employment services for people with a disability
- housing and rent assistance
- initiatives to reduce homelessness
- initiatives to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians, and in particular provide a better future for Indigenous children.



What services are provided by NSW Government departments?

Some of the main NSW Government agencies that provide community services, or fund others to provide services, include:

The Department of Family and Community Services

The Department of Family and Community Services is made up of five agencies: Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Community Services, Housing NSW, NSW Aboriginal Housing Office, and the Office for Women's Policy.

Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC)

Provides services for people with a disability and older people, and funds a range of non-government service providers. Services include large residential and community accommodation, therapy services, day support, post school options, Home and Community Care services and licensing of boarding houses.

The Home Care Service is also part of ADHC. It provides support and personal care services for frail older people, and people with a disability so that they can remain in their own homes.

Community Services (CS)

Promotes the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through its child protection, out-of-home care, early intervention, adoption and family support programs, and those who have been affected by disasters. It provides funds to non-government providers to deliver services in a range of areas and licenses and monitors children's services.

Housing NSW

Helps to build a stronger community by providing housing solutions for people in need.

NSW Aboriginal Housing Office

Develops affordable and culturally appropriate housing and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW

Administers the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and works to achieve improved social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Juvenile Justice

Supervises young offenders in the community and in juvenile justice centres and delivers youth justice conferencing.

NSW Department of Health

Provides and funds health care services, mental health services, community health services, ambulance services, health care and assessment for people with long term disabilities and frail older people.

The Guardianship Tribunal

Appoints guardians and financial managers, and consents to medical and dental treatment for adults with decision-making disabilities.

The Public Guardian

May be appointed by the Guardianship Tribunal to provide guardianship services for those 16 years and over who cannot make decisions for themselves. A guardian is a legally appointed substitute decision-maker. The role of a guardian is to make a lifestyle decision or provide medical and dental consent on behalf of a person under guardianship during the time of a guardianship order. Guardians are responsible for ensuring that a decision or consent is in the best interests of the person.

NSW Trustee and Guardian

May be appointed by the Guardianship Tribunal. Protects and administers the financial affairs and property of people unable to make financial decisions for themselves (where there is no other suitable person willing to assist).

Concessions

The NSW Government also funds a range of concessions to people getting social security benefits, and people with special needs. These include:

- transport concessions
- ambulance and pharmaceutical scheme concessions
- electricity, water, sewerage and council rebates.

There are a number of other community service providers in NSW including:

- local councils
- non-government organisations (for example charitable or religious bodies) that get funding from the NSW and/or Federal Governments
- businesses operating to make a profit.

What role does the NSW Ombudsman play in community services?

The NSW Ombudsman is an independent, impartial watchdog body dealing with issues and complaints about community services in NSW. It promotes improvements in the delivery of community services, and the rights and best interests of service receivers through its recommendations.

The Ombudsman oversees all community and disability services provided by:

- Department of Family and Community Services which includes Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Community Services, Housing NSW, NSW Aboriginal Housing Office.
- Non-government organisations that are either funded or licensed or authorised by the Minister for Family and Community Services, the Minister for Disability Services or the Minister for Ageing.

The types of community services covered by the Ombudsman include:

- out-of-home care services for children and young people
- child protection and support services provided by Community Services
- family support services
- children's services such as long day care and family day care
- disability services such as residential services, respite care, community access and community support
- home and community care services such as food services, home help, community transport, home nursing and personal care
- supported accommodation and assistance program services such as refuges for families, young people and women
- neighbourhood centres
- licensed boarding houses.

What are service standards?

Obligations are placed on services to promote and protect the rights of people who use their services. Some of these obligations are contained in laws; others in service standards and some in policies and procedures.

Service standards are one way of achieving good quality practice. In NSW, there are specific standards for:

- disability services
- out-of-home care services
- Home and Community Care (HACC) services
- centre-based long day care and family day care services for children
- supported accommodation assistance programs (SAAP).

In some areas, standards may be voluntary. Where this is the case, compliance with them is often required by the government in its service funding agreements.

What things are usually covered by service standards?

Service standards cover such things as:

Access to services so that people who are eligible for a service have equitable and non-discriminatory access to the service.

Information and consultation so that people get adequate information about their service provider, how services will be delivered, and how they will be involved in any decisions that affect them.

Efficient and effective management so that service providers have a range of processes and tools in place to promote good management. It includes having policies and procedures, planning and evaluation processes.

Coordinated, planned and reliable service delivery so that there are requirements around direct service delivery — for example, a documented process for assessing individual needs and developing appropriate support plans.

Standards also cover such things as:

Privacy, confidentiality and access to personal information so that service providers have policies and procedures to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of service users are respected.

Complaints and disputes so that service providers have written policies and procedures for handling complaints, and ensuring that people can raise issues and have them dealt with in an open and supportive environment.

Safety and security so that services are provided in safe and secure environments for service users and staff. For example, there should be guidance in relation to the safe use of equipment, the adequacy of accommodation, and how to respond to threatening incidents.

Advocacy so that the use of advocates, where appropriate, is promoted by service providers. (See *Section 4* for more information on advocacy).

Why are standards important for you?

Knowing which standards cover your service provider(s) will be useful in making sure that you are getting quality services or in circumstances where you wish to make a complaint about the service. You can ask your service about what standards cover them, or call their funding body to find out.

Know your rights

As a service user, you have a right to expect that the services you receive will meet your needs.

Basic service provision should include:

Respect

You should always be treated by your service provider with respect, courtesy and honesty. This includes respect for your cultural, religious, and social needs and beliefs.

Individual needs

You should receive services in a way that addresses your individual needs. Your service provider should assess the level of help that you need, review this regularly, and change the service as your needs change.

Connection to family and community

If you are living in care, you have a right to maintain and develop close relationships with the people who are important to you, such as family, friends and advocates, where it is safe to do so. Services should support you to participate in the community.

Privacy and confidentiality

Services should respect your privacy and the confidentiality of the information that they have about you.

Safety and freedom from abuse

You should receive services in a safe environment, free from abuse of any kind.

No discrimination

No one should unfairly discriminate against you in the way you receive services, nor should you be subjected to harassment or exploitation.

Access to information

You have a right to information about the services you are getting in a way that you understand. For example, how you will receive your services, your choices, how your money will be managed, the expectations or 'rules' of the provider. You can ask any questions to help you become fully informed about the service provider.

Participation in decisions

You should be able to participate in decisions that affect your life and the services you receive. Your service provider should consider your views and preferences in a meaningful way, and clearly explain any decisions that it makes. You can ask the service to put the reasons for its decisions in writing.

Complaints

It is OK to complain about the services you are getting, without fear of losing the service and without it affecting the way in which your service is delivered, or how you are treated. The service should tell you how it handles complaints, and should keep you informed about the progress and result of your complaint.

Support

You are allowed to have a support person of your choice when you talk to your service provider about the services you are getting — for example, a family member, friend, advocate or Official Community Visitor (for people in full-time care).

Your responsibilities

As a service user, you are responsible for your decisions. You should respect service providers, staff and other service users.

2. Effective partnerships

Now that you have used this toolkit to find out more about the system, and understand your rights as a service user, this section looks at things you can do to have a good relationship with services and staff.

Often when you get a service to help you, it can feel like you are just the 'receiver' of a service, and you play a passive role. However there are things that you can do to be a more active partner in the relationship with the service.

Getting on well with services is important to reduce stress for you and the service, and means you will be better able to communicate and get your needs met. If you have a healthy relationship with the service, it will certainly help you to resolve problems if they arise.

Some ways of improving the relationship may simply mean taking advantage of things already built into the way that the service operates. Other ways may include new ideas for both you and the service.

Building a positive relationship with services

Here are just a few ideas:

Planning

- planning meetings are good when you are new to a service, or want to change the service you are receiving
- make a written agreement with the service provider about the service they will provide — what it includes, how often, who will provide it and when, what you can expect from the service etc.

Communication

- make an agreement with the service provider about how you will communicate. Some issues to consider are:
 - Discuss methods. For example, is phoning always ok? When should it be in writing? Is faxing or email an option?
 - Discuss times. For example, don't call me before 10a.m. as I am busy with children. Worker unavailable Mondays but another worker will be available.
 - What needs to be communicated?
 - Who communicates?
- special communication needs. For example, translator, sign language interpreter
- think about your communication style — remember a polite manner is more likely to be met with a positive response.

Feedback

- have a clear process for feedback on a regular basis
- find out about the complaints policy and process of your service provider, and use it
- where appropriate, give the service positive feedback. This can be a compliment, in a letter or even in a contribution to the service's newsletter.

Interaction

- attend service open days, user forums or annual general meetings
- keep a file on each service that you use, so information is kept together and accessible when you need it
- keep up to date with changes affecting the service by reading its newsletters
- make sure that you know the name and contact details of the relevant staff and managers. Keep them handy by the phone or on a notice board
- participate in the service's broad assessment/review processes. For example attend a focus group or fill in a survey and have a say about the service.

Communicating with services

Good communication means exchanging messages clearly — it is a two-way process. Building a positive relationship with your service providers can prevent misunderstandings and will help you get what you need from the service. Good communication is very helpful if you have a problem with your service. Even though it is impossible to control other people's communication, we can control our own communication style and responses to others.

Tips for good communication:

- Let people finish what they are saying
- Give people time to reply to you
- If you are not sure what someone said, ask them to repeat it
- If you do not understand what someone has said, ask them to explain it
- When you are listening to people, try to make sure they know you are listening
- Tell people how you feel, don't assume they know
- If you are unhappy with how someone does something, don't criticise. Tell them how you feel and what you would like to be different
- Create positive body language – show you are listening
- Be assertive, rather than passive or aggressive
- Give a clear example of a situation that shows the problem
- Stick to the facts wherever possible
- Be careful of making assumptions, or accusations about other people's motivations.

Adapted from Making it work for you: How to get the best out of your Home and Community Care (Pittaway, E., HACC, & Disabled Peoples International (NSW) inc, 1989).

Positive communication

The way you talk with people can make a big difference to the relationship you have with direct workers and services. For example:



DO BE ASSERTIVE

Being assertive is saying what you want in a firm but pleasant way. It is the best way to communicate, and takes practice.



DO USE "I" STATEMENTS

Focus on the problem and how it affects you, how it makes you feel.



AVOID BEING AGGRESSIVE

Communicating in an angry way could be called aggressive. This can cause offence or defensiveness, and may get in the way of good outcomes.



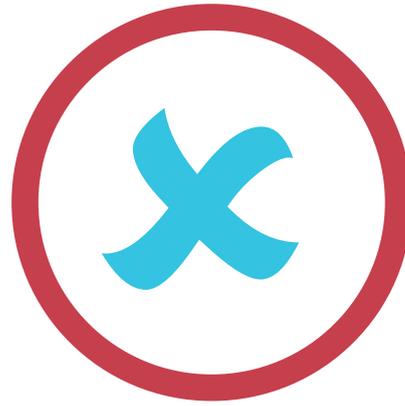
AVOID BEING PASSIVE

If you are upset or feel bad about a situation but say nothing at all that is being passive. Passive is going along with something even when it feels wrong.



AVOID USING BLAMING WORDS

When we are upset or angry, we tend to use emotional and exaggerated words, but these usually make the situation worse. Avoid using 'always', 'never' and 'you' when raising a problem with someone.



PRACTICE	AVOID
<p>I am tired of the same dinners, I would really like some variety ('I' statement)</p>	<p>Oh it's alright, I wouldn't complain (passive)</p>
<p>I've got some real concerns about what's been happening in my service, can we arrange to discuss the situation to improve things? (I statement, assertive and constructive)</p>	<p>Your service stinks — it never seems to get anything right (exaggerated, negative and aggressive)</p>
<p>It is really important for you to call me when there are updates or changes to my service. I need to know in advance if possible</p>	<p>Why don't you ever call me? I can't believe you don't do your job and tell me when there are updates (aggressive and blaming)</p>
<p>I've noticed that you have been late quite a lot recently, I'd really appreciate it if you could arrive on time (assertive)</p>	<p>You are <i>a/ways</i> late, don't you have a watch! (aggressive and blaming)</p>
<p>Would you fasten the seat belt more firmly, as I am concerned when you turn corners, I may get hurt if I am not secured (assertive, 'I' statement)</p>	<p>You are a rotten driver and you never tighten the belt properly! (aggressive and blaming)</p>

3. Resolving problems with services

It's OK to complain!

- Anyone who uses a service has a right to complain.
- Dissatisfaction is determined by YOU.
- The law in NSW says that community service providers have an obligation to deal with your complaint fairly and quickly. This law is called the *Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993* (known as CS-CRAMA).
- Making a complaint is not saying that the service or worker is bad, and doesn't mean you are 'making trouble' for staff.
- Is it safe to complain? Services must not victimise you if you make a complaint. CS-CRAMA and the Ombudsman Act protect people who complain from retribution. That means being treated poorly as a result of complaining.

A complaint may also be known as a:

- concern
- problem
- issue
- worry
- something that you are not happy with.

Why complain?

There are important benefits of making a complaint:

- you are more likely to get what you need
- it can help others in similar situations
- it can help to improve services
- it can help to raise bigger issues, like poor policies and insufficient funding
- you can participate in decisions that affect your life.

What can you complain about?

You, or someone on your behalf, can complain if you believe a service provider has acted unreasonably or unfairly:

- in the way it provides services to you
- if it fails to provide a service
- if it stops providing a service
- in the way it administers a service
- if it changes a service, and
- in the way it manages a service to you.

Options for making a complaint

How you make the complaint and where you lodge it depends on what your complaint is about and how serious it is. Here are some options:

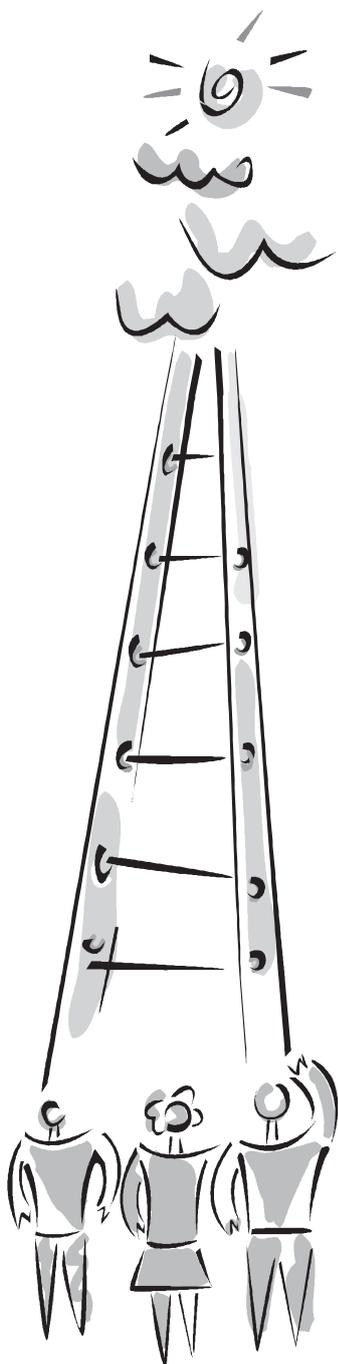
- make a phone call to the service — sometimes that is all that is required to sort out the problem
- write a letter to the worker, his/her/their manager or the Management Committee
- organise a meeting to discuss the problem
- contact the person responsible for complaints in your service. At Community Services, it is possible to call a Complaints Officer or alternatively write to the Complaints Manager. All employees of ADHC, including contractors and volunteers, are required to handle complaints.
- call the emergency line (000) or the Police Assistance Line (131 444) if the complaint is very serious — for example, if you have been subjected to violence or abuse by a service employee
- contact an advocacy organisation to talk over the problem and get advice or support.

If you are unable to resolve the issue directly with the service provider or cannot raise the issue yourself, lodge a complaint with an external body that is, independent of the service provider, for example, the NSW Ombudsman.

If you are unsure what to do, or would like to discuss some options for dealing with your issue, you can contact the NSW Ombudsman for advice and information. You can do this without making a formal complaint. You can contact us on (02) 9286 1000.

A step-by-step guide to making a complaint

Following there are six steps to think about and to guide you in making a complaint



Step 6

If there is still no response or an unsatisfactory response, make a complaint to an external agency that is independent of the service provider. For example, the Ombudsman or the Government department that funds the service provider.

Step 5

If the organisation has a person or unit that specifically deals with complaints, contact them.

Step 4

If still unresolved, go up higher in the organisation to management. For example, Manager, Regional Manager or Management Committee Chairperson.

Step 3

If unresolved, then approach their supervisor. For example, Refuge Manager, Day Care Centre Director, Team Leader.

Step 2

Try to sort out the problem by raising it with the person who provides the service. For example, the respite worker, child care worker, case worker.

Step 1

Got a problem with a service – do you want to take action to resolve it?

START HERE

Tips for making a complaint

It can be difficult and nerve-wracking to make a complaint. However, there are some things that you can do that might help your complaint be dealt with quickly and efficiently. These things will also help you in the process and improve the results of the complaint.

Act sooner rather than later



Don't leave things too late. Things usually get worse and snowball if they are left. If you think there is a problem with any part of your service, it is best to raise the issue straight away and try to resolve it quickly. It is usually best to raise issues locally — directly with the worker involved or their supervisor, before making a formal complaint.

Arm yourself with knowledge



Ask for information about the issue. Do you have all the facts? Make sure there is not a simple misunderstanding. It is good to find out about the service provider's policies. You should have been given this information when you first started using the service, including information about the process for handling complaints. If you don't have the information, request it from the service.

If your concern is about a decision made by the service, you are entitled to ask for 'reasons for decision' in writing. This gives the service a chance to explain the decision and why it was made and it will also clarify the situation for you. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Think things through



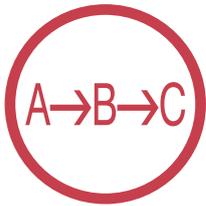
Identify the key issues in the complaint. Think about the incidents. What actually happened? When and where did it happen? Clarify the issue. What is it that affects you? What outcome do you want? What do you want to achieve? For example, do you want an apology? A change in policy? A change in the decision? Identify some options for resolving your complaint.

Keep records



It is a good idea for you to record information about the issue, and about what you have done to try to sort it out. You need to remember and explain the details of what has happened so it is worthwhile to keep a diary. Record notes of phone calls, who you spoke to and the date. Ask someone to help you if you need it. Make a folder for all correspondence. The information that you record may be very useful in the future.

Follow the process



It is important that you find out what process the organisation has for service users to make complaints. You can ask the organisation about their complaints process at any time. It is always best to try to solve the problem informally with the worker directly involved before making a formal complaint. There is other information in this toolkit on how to actually make complaints.

Talk to the right person



Make sure you are talking to the right person. That is the person who is responsible for addressing the problem. For example, there is no point in constantly telling the child care worker at your day care centre that you need more child care. These decisions are worked out by the centre's coordinator, so you need to raise the issue with them.

Make sure things happen



When you make a complaint, the service provider has a responsibility to deal with your complaint. If raising the issue verbally, you should ask the person that you are speaking with to record your complaint. There should be agreement about what should happen next, and timelines for when they will get back to you. They should respond to your complaint and tell you what action they will take.

Go to the next level – (see chart on page 17)



If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, or is not dealt with in a reasonable time, you may want to take it further.

You can go to:

- the next level of management in the service such as the Management Committee, or
- the internal person/unit in the service that deals with complaints, if one exists, or
- an external complaints body like the NSW Ombudsman, or
- the Government department that funds the service provider.

Get support



Complaining about something may be hard work and stressful so it is a good idea if you can have someone to help support you through the process. This could be a family member, or friend, who you can talk to

about the issues and help you consider your options. It is helpful to have someone to think through the issue with you, attend meetings with you, and offer advice. If the issue is serious, and you feel that the service provider is not responding to your concerns, or if you don't have a support person, you should ask an advocate to help you with the complaint. Please refer to Section 4 for information on advocacy.

Stay strong



Making a complaint can be draining. Be persistent and don't give up! It's your right to make a complaint and have it heard.

How to write a letter of complaint

Sometimes it can help if you put your complaint in writing, but it is not essential.



What are the advantages of putting your complaint in writing?

- helps you clarify the problem/issue
- helps you think of the outcomes you want
- helps you think of possible solutions to the problem
- assists in getting the service to allocate someone to deal with the complaint
- helps to ensure that the service has a clear understanding of how you see the issue
- is a written record of the complaint (keep a copy as it may be useful in the future).

Top ten complaint letter hints

A letter of complaint must be clear and to the point. It can be posted, faxed or emailed. Some points to remember when writing a letter are:

- 1** Make sure your name, address and contact details are clearly written at the top right-hand corner of the page.
- 2** Always put the date at the top of your letter.
- 3** Make sure the letter is clearly addressed to the right person — find out the name and title of the person in the service who can deal with your issue.
- 4** Put what the complaint is about at the start of the letter. For example, Reduction in hours: Henry Porter.
- 5** State clearly what your complaint is about – include relevant dates and times, description of incidents, any explanations you think are important.
- 6** Say what you think should be done about your complaint.
- 7** Give a date by which time you expect to get a reply in writing (be realistic).
- 8** Finish your letter with 'Yours sincerely'.
- 9** Print your name clearly at the end of the letter and sign. If you cannot sign your name another person can sign on your behalf.
- 10** Attach copies of any relevant documents.

Adapted from *Making it work for you: How to get the best out of your Home and Community Care* (Pittaway, E., HACC, & Disabled Peoples International (NSW) inc, 1989).

Sample complaint letter

20 Purple Street
Greentown NSW
Phone: 98222 8722
Work: 98789 8989

17 May 2003

Ms Jo Brown
Families Supportive Service
56 Green Road
Redville NSW 2999

Dear Ms Brown

RE: Complaint about Case Worker Emma Frederick

I am writing to complain about my case worker Emma Frederick.

I have been having problems with Emma over the past 6 weeks, and I feel this is affecting the help I am able to get from your service. She takes so long to return my calls and sometimes she doesn't get back to me at all. I have also found that she is not really listening to what I think would be best for my children. One time I know she told other workers, including John Green, about my personal situation and I don't think this is fair or allowed under the privacy laws.

As I have already tried to talk to Emma about these problems, with no real response, I would like to ask for a new case worker please. I am keen to work with a new case worker to resolve some of the issues for my family.

I would appreciate a reply to this letter by the end of this month, as I am worried about my family situation.

Yours sincerely



Marie Parker
Service User

Complaint checklist

Note: Take a copy of these pages and use them when you want to raise a concern or complaint with your service — tick the boxes and make a note of action you, and the service, take as a result of your complaint.

Date:

Service:

Complaint Issue:

When the problem arises:

- Document the problem. For example, write down details of any particular incidents or examples of the problem
- Clarify what it is that you are unhappy with, and think about the options to resolve the problem
- Think about what outcome you would like from making the complaint
- Plan what you want to say
- Use the service provider's complaint process
- Raise the problem early and with those most directly involved
- Use assertive communication skills
- Keep a note of when you raised the issue with the service
- Keep notes of who you spoke to about the problem
- Keep your notes in a file that you keep for all your involvement with the service provider
- If you are not satisfied with a particular decision that the service has made, ask for a written explanation of the reasons for the decision.

When you make a complaint:

- Ask for a timeframe for handling the complaint
- Keep copies of all letters or emails you send and receive
- Keep a journal or diary about what happens
- Get support if you need it.

FAQ's about making a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman

Who can contact the NSW Ombudsman?

Anybody can contact the NSW Ombudsman, including community service users, carers, family members, advocates, and workers. Sometimes services call us for advice about how to deal with a complaint.

What NSW community services can you complain about to the NSW Ombudsman?

You can complain to the NSW Ombudsman about all the agencies which make-up the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. These include: Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Community Services, Housing NSW, and the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office. This includes any service that is funded, authorised or licensed by the NSW Ministers for Family and Community Services, Disability Services, and Ageing. This covers most community services but does not include services such as aged care nursing homes and hostels, employment services and other services funded by the Federal government. You can also make a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman about other NSW Government agencies for example Juvenile Justice or Aboriginal Affairs NSW. If the NSW Ombudsman is not able to deal with your complaint about a service, we can refer you to an agency that does.

How can I make a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman about a community service?

You can phone the Community Services Division Intake Service between 9 – 4pm Monday to Friday on (02) 9286 1000, or contact us by letter, fax, email, or lodge a complaint on our website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au See the back page of this toolkit for all our contact details.

What will the NSW Ombudsman do if I contact the office?

When you contact the NSW Ombudsman, ask to speak to a Community Services Division Inquiry Officer. This person will talk with you about your problem and ways that it can be resolved. If you haven't done so already, the

person will advise you how to bring your complaint to the service's attention. Often the service provider will work with you to solve the problem without you having to lodge a formal complaint. If necessary, NSW Ombudsman staff will talk to the service provider and ask them what options they have to deal with your complaint.

What if I ask the NSW Ombudsman to deal with my complaint?

The NSW Ombudsman will seek information from you and the service provider to help decide the best way to deal with your complaint. The NSW Ombudsman may decide to:

- Refer the complaint to the service in writing, asking them to deal with it and report the outcome to the NSW Ombudsman — this is called local resolution.
- Conciliate the complaint — bring parties together with an independent person to reach a structured written agreement.
- Investigate the complaint — if there are serious questions about current safety, care or treatment of the service user.
- Refer the complaint to the service provider, or another body, to investigate and report to the NSW Ombudsman.
- Refer the matter to another body — if the complaint is outside of the Ombudsman's authority or about criminal conduct. For example, Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) or the Australian Federal Police (AFP).
- Decline to take any further action — for example, if the problem happened too long ago, it is not in the interests of the service user to proceed, or it is already being investigated by another body.

Will the NSW Ombudsman tell my service I have complained about it?

When dealing with your complaint, the NSW Ombudsman will usually inform the service with identifying details. If you wish to remain anonymous, you should discuss this with the officer from the Ombudsman's office who is dealing with your complaint.

What if the service victimises me for making a complaint?

Under the law, the service is not allowed to victimise you or treat you differently if you raise a problem or make a complaint. The Ombudsman Act and the *Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993* (known as CS-CRAMA) take retribution seriously and can protect consumers who make complaints. We recognise the fears and difficulties faced by service users when making a complaint; however we encourage people to contact us if they believe that they have been, or will be treated badly as a result of complaining.

CASE STUDY — Information and advice

Susanna telephoned the NSW Ombudsman about her brother, Marcus, who lives in a small disability service. She and her family were concerned about the quality of care her brother was getting and weren't sure how to raise their concerns with the service provider.

We suggested ways to address the concerns, including asking the service to reassess Marcus' support needs, and review his individual plan. We also provided advice about how to bring a formal complaint to the NSW Ombudsman should their own attempt to resolve the complaint be unsuccessful.

Susanna contacted us later to say that the family had taken our advice and met with the service's executive officer. She said that, though the meeting was initially tense, her family and the executive officer were able to reach agreements about how to best meet Marcus' needs, and how to communicate with the service about issues in the future. Susanna said that our advice was valuable and practical as it provided them with ideas about how to tackle the problem, and made her feel that she was not in the wrong to speak up.



CASE STUDY — Local resolution

Tabitha is a young woman who is in out of home care and under the care of the Minister. The NSW Ombudsman received a complaint that Tabitha was not receiving an adequate casework service from Community Services. Community Services had failed to take preventative steps when her foster placements were at risk of breaking down. Tabitha is now homeless. We raised the issues directly with Community Services and referred the complaint to it for resolution. Community Services agreed to meet with Tabitha and address her concerns. The NSW Ombudsman asked Community Services to provide a full report on the outcome of its efforts to resolve the problems raised in the complaint.

CASE STUDY — Conciliation

Peter is a young man living in a funded non-government disability service. Peter's family complained to the NSW Ombudsman after a serious incident at Peter's group home.

Though we assessed that the service had responded appropriately to the incident, we referred the complaint for formal conciliation because of the ongoing conflict between Peter's family and the service's response to the incident and issues about their communication. The conflict had the potential to jeopardise Peter's future service provision.

During the conciliation, Peter's family and the service's management reached agreements about how the family could actively participate in a review of the way the service supported Peter, and future communication and reporting about incidents involving Peter. This was seen as a positive way forward when service users and services have a long-term relationship.

4. Getting support — Advocacy

What is advocacy?

Advocacy can be defined as:

- Standing up for the rights of people who are being treated unfairly.
- Standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged.
- Speaking out on behalf of another person in a way that represents their best interests.

There are a number of different types of advocacy, including:

- **Individual advocacy** — this can be done informally by a friend, family member or neighbour helping to bring about a change in a situation for another individual.
- **Self advocacy** — people with disabilities developing their skills, knowledge and confidence in order to advocate on their own behalf. Self advocacy is when a person makes an informed decision about a matter of importance to her or him, and then takes responsibility for bringing about the change necessary to make that choice a reality.
- **Legal advocacy** — describes the broad range of methods and activities by which lawyers and other skilled individuals help people to defend their rights. Legal advocacy can play an active part in reforming law and policies that are not in the best interests of certain groups of people.
- **Formal individual advocacy** — comes from an advocacy service which offers advice, information, support and assistance to resolve your problem.
- **Systemic advocacy** — is aimed at changing systems within society that affect people. Systemic advocacy is working for or against change of a “system”. For example, laws, policies and practices.

- **Citizen advocacy** — services that link a person with an intellectual disability (for whom there is an existing or potential need for representation) with a typical, ordinary member of the community who is independent, unpaid and not linked to human services, who then advocates for this person.

How can advocacy help?

If you feel unable to make a complaint yourself, an advocate can do it with you or for you. This can help if you are feeling confused, stressed, isolated and unable to stand up for yourself.

CASE STUDY — Formal individual advocacy

Wang, an older Chinese man who is visually impaired, lives in his own unit, and has Meals on Wheels each weekday, Home Share to help with house work and the Community Bus each fortnight for a shopping trip. Wang's children don't live close to him and he was having trouble coping at home, as his needs weren't being met by his current services. When he told the services he required more help they said that he may have to move to a hostel.

After being depressed and frustrated for about six months, Wang heard about the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Service on a community radio station. He called them and they said an advocate could assist him. The advocate met with him to discuss what he wanted. The advocate really listened to Wang and found out that he wanted to stay in his home because it held such special memories of his wife.

The advocate helped Wang apply for a Community Aged Care Package that would give him many more hours of service and a coordinator to assist him plan and manage his care. After three months, Wang was eligible to receive the additional help. The advocate also put Wang in touch with a social network of older Chinese people, and he has joined the advocacy group as a service user representative. Wang is really glad he had an advocate to support and assist him.

CASE STUDY — Informal advocacy

Debbie is a mother of three young children, Jack 6, Louisa 4 and Tom 18 months old.

Both Jack and Louisa have intellectual disabilities and the family receive a range of support services including respite care.

Debbie has been having lots of problems

with the respite service and has been asked to have a meeting with the coordinator, Jayne, about the issues. Debbie thinks this is a good idea but is a bit worried about speaking up and making sure the service understand her needs. Debbie remembered reading the service's policies which said that service users could have an advocate with them at meetings if they wanted to.

So Debbie organised for her friend Marianne, who also has a child with disability, to be at the meeting with her. Marianne knows Debbie and her children well, and can be trusted. She has made complaints before and improved things for her son. Debbie wanted Marianne at the meeting, mainly for support, but also to speak on behalf of Debbie if she was not coping. Debbie made sure that she told Jayne that Marianne would be her advocate during the meeting. The meeting with Jayne went well and Debbie felt more confident about speaking up with her friend Marianne to back her up. Marianne has offered to help Debbie if there are any more problems with the respite care.



Understanding and changing the system

Keeping informed

Getting to know the system of community services and how it works is important because it is the first step in understanding how you and your services fit into the bigger picture. Keeping informed helps you have some influence on the service that you receive, and also on the larger service system.

If you know a bit about how the system works, you are more likely to be able to find the best way of raising your issues and achieving some changes. This does not mean that you have to take on the system yourself, but you might want to add your voice to the efforts of others, or share your experiences to help push for improvements.

What is systems advocacy?

Systems advocacy is individuals, groups or organisations working towards changing the system to make improvements and ensure people's rights and entitlements.

It may include working on making changes to policies and the practices of organisations or government departments, often through lobbying, petitions, campaigns, media or public speaking.

Sometimes there is not enough funding for programs to meet the needs of the community. Sometimes there are unfair policies and practices, and at other times the whole system may just not be working very well. This is when systems or systemic advocacy can help create change.

Systems advocacy involves people taking action, lobbying and working for improvements to the big picture.



Ten ways to get informed, involved and make a difference

1 Take any opportunities to comment on your service

Service providers often ask their service users to comment on how their service could be improved. This might be as part of a regular review or evaluation, or for the purpose of showing how the service meets the standards. It might involve responding to a survey or attending a meeting.

2 Network with other consumers by joining support groups

Networking gives you a chance to share stories and compare strategies with people who have similar experiences. Support groups bring together people who are in similar circumstances and can be a very good source of mutual support.

3 Attend your local community issues forum

This is where people can have a say about what services are needed in an area, or how services can be improved. These forums can influence planning decisions by the relevant government agency or policy and practice issues of service providers. It is a great place to find out about services, meet other service users and hear what others think about community services. To find out about your local community issues forum, contact your local council or community centre.

4 Speak up in consultations, focus groups and forums

Putting the issues on the agenda is an excellent way to raise public interest and spark debate. The voices of service users can be very powerful if they tell their story and link it to the way the system needs improving.

5 Join an advocacy group

This can be one of the best ways to make changes as you will be informed about events and new resources, meet people, find out about issues and how to participate in research, workshops, submissions and forums. You may even want to become a board member, committee member or volunteer.

6 Join an email newsletter, blog or chatroom

This is a good way to discuss common issues with others. You can test out your experience and see how others may have tried to change things. You can be anonymous, you don't need to leave home and information is very current. If you don't have access to a computer and the internet at home, visit the local library or community centre.

7 Contact a peak group or watchdog agency

Most peak groups and watchdog agencies do policy and research work, as well as help individuals with their problems. Raise your concerns and find out what they are doing about the issue.

8 Find out about who's who in the bureaucracy

It is important to know who has authority to make decisions in the service, departmental and Ministerial levels. These are the people to write to, or seek meetings with, if you are trying to make changes to the system.

9 Write letters to the editor or call up talk-back radio

Let people know what the issues are, what it means for the people affected, and possible solutions. Many people don't think about issues that don't directly affect them. Use the media to highlight problems in communities. The media is also an important way to reach the decision-makers.

10 Raise the issue with your local Member of Parliament

Write, call or make an appointment with the State local Member of Parliament. If you do not know who your local member is then call your local council. Election time is a great time to raise issues of concern.



5. Where to get help

There are a variety of places to get help when you have a problem with a service. Different kinds and levels of help are available and can range from:

- **contacting** someone who can just listen to you get something off your chest
- **finding** information about meetings with other service providers
- **discussing** a complaint and finding out what you can do to resolve it
- **asking** an advocate to help you to resolve an issue
- **getting** legal advice about something serious.

It is handy to know about the range of agencies and what they do. It is important to reach out for help when you need to, rather than trying to do everything on your own.

Information, referral, support and advocacy groups

There are many organisations and associations that provide support and information to people in the community.

Included in this toolkit is a list of key main contacts – but there are too many to include a full list.

If you contact one of the organisations listed, they can provide you with information about resources in your local area, and refer you to the most appropriate association or group for your needs. Advocacy groups and peak bodies are also good contacts and often work on systems issues.



Useful contacts

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

The peak NSW Aboriginal organisation to provide policy advice on child protection and out-of-home care issues.

21 Carrington Road
Marrickville NSW 2204

PO Box 604,
Marrickville NSW 1475

Phone: 02 9559 5299
Toll free: 1800 888 698
Fax: 02 9559 1669

Email: admin@absec.org.au
Web: www.absec.org.au

Aboriginal Disability Network

The Aboriginal Disability Network brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability to support one another.

402/161 Redfern Street
Redfern NSW 2016

Phone: 02 8399 0881
Fax: 02 8399 1664

Email: enquiries@adnsw.org.au
Web: www.adnsw.org.au

Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP)

Formerly the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)

The Advocate is a NSW government agency that aims to make NSW a better place for children and young people by listening to them and promoting their interests.

Level 2, 407 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9286 7276
Fax: 02 9286 7267

Email: kids@kids.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.kids.nsw.gov.au

Ageing, Disability and Home Care

Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) is part of the Department of Family and Community Services NSW. They provide support and services to older people, people with disabilities and their carers in NSW.

Central Office
Level 5, 83 Clarence Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9377 6000
TTY: 02 9377 6167

Email: servicembx@fac.s.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.adhc.nsw.gov.au

Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA)

The peak body working on policy, research, information, advocacy, lobbying and professional development in the NSW child and family sector.

Locked Bag 13
Haymarket NSW 1240

Phone: 02 9281 8822
Fax: 02 9281 8827

Email: acwa@acwa.asn.au
Web: www.acwa.asn.au

Association for Children with a Disability NSW

Providing information and support to families of children or young adults with any type of disability across NSW.

PO Box 131,
Gordon NSW 2072

Phone: 1300 851 603

Email: acdsw@acdsw.org.au
Web: www.acdsw.org.au

Australia Centre for Disability Law

Formerly the NSW Disability Discrimination Legal Centre.

Provides accurate and easy to understand advice to people with a disability in NSW who want to make a complaint of disability discrimination.

PO Box 989
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Phone: 02 8014 7000
Toll free: 1800 800 708
Fax: 02 9211 5518
TTY: 9211 5549
1800 644 419

Email: adviceline@disabilitylaw.org.au
Web: www.disabilitylaw.org.au

Australian National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline

Reporting or complaining about abuse or neglect of a person with a disability at home, in the community, or in any location.

PO Box Q687
Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230

Toll free: 1800 880 052
TTY: 1800 301 130
NRS: 1800 555 677
TIS: 13 14 50
Fax: 02 8412 7199

Email: hotline@workfocus.com
Web: www.disabilityhotline.net.au

Blind Citizens Australia

Aim to achieve equity and equality by our empowerment, by promoting positive community attitudes, and by striving for high quality and accessible services which meet our needs.

Ross House
Level 3, 247-251 Flinders Lane,
Melbourne VIC 3000

Toll free: 1800 033 660
Phone: 03 9654 1400
Fax: 03 9650 3200

Email: bca@bca.org.au
Web: www.bca.org.au

Brain Injury Association of NSW

Dedicated to achieving equality for people living with brain injury, BIA NSW are the leading support network for those impacted by brain injury.

Suite 102, Level 1
3 Carlingford Road Epping NSW 2121

PO Box 698
Epping NSW 1710

Phone: 02 9868 5261
Freecall: 1800 802 840
Fax: 02 9868 5619

Email: ceo@biansw.org.au
Web: www.biansw.org.au

Care Leavers Australia Network

A support group for people who were brought up in care as state wards, foster children or children raised in institutions. Their aim is to raise community awareness of these issues, and to campaign for government assistance to redress them.

463 Chapel Road,
Bankstown NSW 2200
PO Box 164
Georges Hall NSW 2198

Phone: 1800 008 774
Email: support@clan.org.au
Web: www.clan.org.au

Carers NSW

An association for relatives and friends who are caring for people with a disability, mental health problem, chronic condition or who are frail aged. They have programs for carers including information, support, education and promotion of issues for carers in the community.

Roden Cutler House
Level 18, 24 Campbell Street
Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box 20156
World Square NSW 2002

Phone: 02 9280 4744

Toll free: 1800 242 636

Fax: 02 9280 4755

Email: contact@carersnsw.asn.au

Web: www.carersnsw.asn.au

Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association (CPSA)

CPSA strives for a fair deal for pensioners of all ages, superannuants and low income retirees. It provides information, support, advice and advocacy and a range of specialised services.

Level 9, 28 Foveaux Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9281 3588

Toll free: 1800 451 488

TTY: 02 9281 3893

Fax: 02 9281 9716

Email: cpsa@cpsa.org.au

Web: www.cpsa.org.au

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres

These centres provide a link to and information about a wide range of community, aged care and support services available locally or across Australia, including services for older people, people with a disability, and those who provide care and services. These centres can also assist carers with options to take a break through short-term and emergency respite services, based on assessed need, and provide advice on and coordinate access to respite services in a carer's local area.

Toll free: 1800 052 222

Freecall: 1800 059 059 (for emergency respite support outside standard business hours)

Email: commcarelink@health.gov.au

Web: www.commcarelink.health.gov.au

Community Services

Community Services is part of the Department of Family and Community Services NSW. They provide child protection services, parenting support and early intervention, foster care, adoption services and help for communities affected by disaster.

Head Office:

Locked Bag 4028

Ashfield NSW 2131

Phone: 02 9716 2222

Fax: 02 9716 2999

Phone: 132 111 (to report suspected abuse or neglect of children or young people)

Complaints: Reply Paid 63437

Complaints Unit Community Services

Locked Bag 4028
Ashfield NSW 2131
Freecall: 1800 000 164
Web: www.community.nsw.gov.au

Connecting Carers NSW (CCNSW)

Connecting Carers NSW supports Family and Community Services Carers who reside in the state of NSW. CCNSW provides the following services to Foster, Kinship and Relative Carers:

- Peer support and advocacy
- Local coordinator support
- Ongoing training
- Workshops
- Camps
- Coffee and chats
- 24hr telephone support
- Conferences

PO Box 241
Villawood NSW 2163
Phone: 1300 794 653 (24hr support)
Phone: 02 9794 2352
Fax: 02 9794 2381
Email:
admin@connectingcarersnsw.com.au
Web: www.connectingcarersnsw.com.au

Council on the Ageing NSW (COTA)

The peak independent movement representing older people. It undertakes policy development, information and advocacy.

Level 6, 280 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: 02 9286 3860
Toll free: 1800 449 102
Fax: 02 9286 3872
Email: info@cotansw.com.au
Web: www.cotansw.com.au

CREATE

CREATE connects and empowers children and young people in care and improves the care system through activities, programs, training and policy advice.

Level 3, 630 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: 02 9267 1999
Freecall: 1800 655 105
Fax: 02 9267 9433
Email: create@create.org.au
Web: www.create.org.au

Deafness Forum of Australia

The national representative of all Australians who have a hearing impairment, a chronic disorder of the ear, are Deaf or deafblind, and the families who support them.

Open Systems House
218 Northbourne Avenue
Braddon ACT 2612
Phone: 02 6262 7808
Email: info@deafnessforum.org.au
Web: www.deafnessforum.org.au

Ethnic Child Care, Family (ECCF) & Community Services Cooperative (CSC)

ECCF & CSC provides information, resources, referrals, advocacy, consultation, training, support and assistance in the areas of children, disability and aged services in order to ensure that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are provided with the opportunity to participate and receive services to their linguistic, cultural and religious needs.

Building 3, 142 Addison Road
Marrickville NSW 2204
Phone: 02 9569 1288
Fax: 02 9564 2772
Email: coop@eccfcsc.org
Web: www.eccfcsc.org

Family Advocacy

Independent, community-based social state-level advocacy organisation assisting families with a child or an adult who has a developmental disability.

305/16–18 Cambridge Street
Epping NSW 2121

PO Box 502
Epping NSW 1710

Phone: 02 9869 0866
Freecall: 1800 620 588
Fax: 02 9869 0722

Email: communications@family-advocacy.com
Web: www.family-advocacy.com

FamS (NSW Family Services Inc)

FamS (NSW Family Services Inc) supports non-government organisations in NSW that are providing services to families experiencing stress. It encourages and helps these organisations to provide quality support services.

Old Bidura House
357 Glebe Point Road
Glebe NSW 2037

PO Box 223
Glebe NSW 2037

Phone: 02 9692 9999
Fax: 02 8512 9866

Email: info@nswfamilyservices.asn.au
Web: www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au

Foster Parent Support Network

Provides telephone support, training and conferences to support carers who foster children in NSW.

PO Box 225
Casula NSW 2170

Phone: 02 9608 8494
Freecall: 1800 262 445 (24 hour)
Fax: 02 9608 9934

Email: fpsn2@bigpond.com
Web: www.fosterparentsupportnetwork.org.au

Home Care Service of NSW – Complaints Unit

The Home Care Service of NSW helps older people and younger people with a disability to live independently in their own home. They also provide support to carers. The Home Care Service is administered by ADHC.

Central Office, Level 5,
83 Clarence Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Customer Feedback and Complaints

Toll free: 1800 044 043

Fax: 02 9689 2879

Email: HomeCareFeedback@facns.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.adhc.nsw.gov.au

IDEAS

Information on disability, equipment, travel, services, recreation, accessible accommodation and other resources. Database of information and expos. Offices in Sydney, Wollongong and Tumut.

Toll free: 1800 029 904

SMS: 0458 296 602

TTY: 02 6947 3377

Email: info@ideas.org.au
Web: www.ideas.org.au

Indigenous Disability Advocacy Service (IDAS)

IDAS is funded to service Indigenous persons with a disability in Western Sydney and regional centres in areas of high need in NSW. IDAS can assist Indigenous people with most types of disabilities, their families and carers when the person they are looking after needs help, especially if they have been unfairly treated or are confused about a big decision.

127 Lethbridge Street
Penrith NSW 2750

Phone: 02 4722 3524

Fax: 02 4722 6126

Email: idas@idas.org.au
Web: www.idas.org.au

Information and Privacy Commission NSW

The Office of the NSW Information and Privacy Commissioners aims to protect and promote privacy rights in NSW.

Level 11, 1 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

GPO Box 7011
Sydney NSW 2001

Phone: 1800 472 679
Fax: 02 8114 3756

Email: ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.ipc.nsw.gov.au

Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS)

A community legal centre that helps people with an intellectual disability exercise their rights under the law. IDRS also run the Criminal Justice Support Network which is a state-wide support service for people with an intellectual disability who are victims, suspects or defendants in criminal matters. The IDRS also runs a website 'making sense' which helps parents with intellectual disability make sense of the child protection system in NSW.

PO Box 3347
Redfern NSW 2016

Phone: 02 9318 0144

24 Hour helpline: info@idrs.org.au

Free call: 1800 666 611
Fax: 02 9318 2887

Email: info@idrs.org.au
Web: www.idrs.org.au
Web: www.idrs.org.au/makingsense

Kids Helpline

A free, confidential and anonymous 24 hour telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5-25.

Toll free: 1800 55 1800

Web: www.kidshelpline.com.au

Legal Aid NSW

Offers free legal advice, and legal representation in most areas of law.

Ground Floor, 323 Castlereagh Street
Haymarket NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9219 5000
TTY: 02 9219 5126
Fax: 02 9219 5935
DX: 5 Haymarket

Web: www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

LawAccess

A free government telephone service that provides legal information, referrals and in some cases, advice for people who have a legal problem in NSW.

Phone: 1300 888 529
TTY: 1300 889 529

Web: www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au

Mental Health Association of NSW

Provides information service, support groups, mental health promotion and advocacy.

Level 5, 80 William Street
Woolloomooloo NSW 2011

Freecall: 1300 794 991
Phone: 02 9339 6000
Fax: 02 9339 6066

Email: mha@mentalhealth.asn.au
Web: www.mentalhealth.asn.au

Mental Health Coordinating Council

The peak body for non-government mental health organisations in NSW.

Ground Floor Broughton Hall
Corner Church and Glover Streets
Lilyfield NSW 2040

PO Box 668
Rozelle NSW 2039

Phone: 02 9555 8388
Fax: 02 9810 8145

Email: info@mhcc.org.au
Web: www.mhcc.org.au

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association

Individual and systems advocacy for people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their family and carers.

10-12 Hutchinson Street
Granville NSW 2142

PO Box 884
Granville NSW 2142

Phone: 02 9891 6400

Toll free: 1800 629 072

TTY: 02 9687 6325

Fax: 02 9897 9402

Email: [mdaa@mdaa.org.au](mailto:madaa@mdaa.org.au)

Web: www.mdaa.org.au

My Choice Matters

Works with people with disability and their families to live their life their way and get the most out of the changing disability system.

NSW Consumer Development Fund
Level 2, 418A Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 1800 144 653 or 02 9211 2605

Fax: 02 9211 2606

Email: info@mychoicematters.org.au

Web: www.mychoicematters.org.au

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is an independent statutory agency whose role is to implement the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which will support a better life for hundreds of thousands of Australians with a significant and permanent disability and their families and carers.

GPO Box 700
Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: 1800 800 110

Email: feedback@ndis.gov.au

Web: www.ndis.gov.au

National Disability Services (NDS)

Australia's peak body for non-government disability service organisations, NDS's purpose is to promote quality service provision and life opportunities for Australians with disability.

Level 18, 1 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

GPO Box 2687
Sydney NSW 2001

Phone: 02 9256 3111

Fax: 02 9256 3123

Email: ndsnsw@nds.org.au

Web: www.nds.org.au

National Welfare Rights Network

Provides advice and representation on all Social Security matters. The Centre can help people by advising them of their rights and entitlements and assisting them to appeal against Centrelink decisions which they disagree with.

102/55 Holt Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9211 5300

Toll free: 1800 226 028 (outside Sydney)

Fax: 02 9211 5268

TTY: 02 9211 0238

Email: Sydney@welfarerights.org.au

Web: www.welfarerights.org.au

New South Wales Trustee and Guardian

An independent statutory authority legally appointed to protect and administer the financial affairs and property of people unable to make financial decisions for themselves (where there is no other suitable person willing to assist).

160 Marsden Street
(near the corner of George St) Parramatta
or 144 Clarence Street Sydney

Locked Bag 5115
Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: 1300 364 103 for enquiries
about Trustee Services (Wills,
Powers of Attorney, Trusts and
Estate Administration)
1300 360 466 for enquiries
about Managed Clients.

Email: tagmail@tag.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.tag.nsw.gov.au

NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) Guardianship Division

The Tribunal has a key role in the protection and empowerment of people living with a decision-making disability.

Locked Bag 9
Balmain NSW 2041

Phone: 02 9556 7600
Toll free: 1800 463 928
TTY: 02 9556 7634
Fax: 02 9555 9049

Email: gd@ncat.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.ncat.nsw.gov.au

NSW Council for Intellectual Disability (CID)

State-wide peak group for people representing rights and best interests of people with intellectual disability. Systems advocacy, information service, community education and extensive library collection.

Level 1, 418A Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9211 1611
Toll free: 1800 424 065
Fax: 02 9211 2606

Email: info@nswcid.org.au
Web: www.nswcid.org.au

NSW Council for Social Services (NCOSS)

The peak body for Social and Community Services in NSW.

Level 3, 52-56 William Street
East Sydney NSW 2011

Phone: 02 9211 2599
Fax: 02 9281 1968

Email: info@ncoss.org.au
Web: www.ncoss.org.au

NSW Ombudsman

Level 24, 580 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9286 1000
Toll free: 1800 451 524
(outside Sydney metro)

TTY: 02 9264 8050
Fax: 02 9283 2911

Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

People with Disability Australia Inc. (PWD)

Represents the rights and interests of people with disability. Conducts individual and systems advocacy and provides disability rights education.

Level 10, 1 Lawson Square
Redfern NSW 2016

PO Box 666
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Phone: 02 9370 3100

Toll free: 1800 422 015

TTY: 02 9318 2138

Toll free: 1800 422 016

Fax: 02 9318 1372

Email: pwd@pwd.org.au

Web: www.pwd.org.au

Public Guardian

Promotes the rights and interests of people with disabilities through the practice of guardianship, advocacy and education.

160 Marsden Street
Parramatta NSW 2150

Locked Bag 5116
Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: 02 8688 2650

Toll free: 1800 451 510

Fax: 02 8688 9797

TTY: 1800 882 889

Email:
informationssupport@opg.nsw.gov.au

Web:
www.publicguardian.justice.nsw.gov.au

Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN)

State-wide representative group for people with physical disability, undertaking systems advocacy. Regular bulletin and a range of issues papers available.

St Helens Community Centre
184 Glebe Point Road, Glebe NSW 2037

Phone: 02 9552 1606

Toll free: 1800 688 831

Fax: 02 9552 4644

Email: admin@pdcnsw.org.au

Web: www.pdcnsw.org.au

Resourcing Families

Resourcing Families provides support and information to families of children and young people with developmental disability in NSW. It provides information and strategies to help families develop a vision, build and nurture support networks, and explore the possibilities of a self directed approach.

305/16-18 Cambridge Street
Epping NSW 1710

PO Box 502
Epping NSW 1710

Phone: 02 9869 7753

Freecall: 1800 774 764

TIS: 13 14 50

Fax: 02 9869 0722

Email: info@resourcingfamilies.org.au

Web: www.resourcingfamilies.org.au

Self Advocacy Sydney

Provides information and support to individuals and groups to promote awareness of their rights and responsibilities within the community.

Suite 106b, Level 1
30-32 Campbell Street
Blacktown NSW 2148

Phone: 02 9622 3005

Fax: 02 9622 6030

Email: info@sasinc.com.au

Web: www.sasinc.com.au

Seniors Information Service

Provides confidential information on more than 10,000 organisations, services, support groups and on retirement accommodation.

Locked Bag 2090
North Ryde NSW 1670

Toll free: 13 77 88

Email: info@service.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.seniorsinfo.nsw.gov.au

Service NSW

Service NSW offers a broad range of NSW Government services and transactions through its website, telephone service and service centres. This includes providing information on Ageing, Disability and Home Care services and on the NSW Trustee and Guardian.

Toll free: 13 77 88

Web: www.service.nsw.gov.au

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCIA)

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia is all about promoting independence, and continues today with a proud history of providing consumer based support and exercise rehabilitation services to people with physical disabilities.

1 Jennifer Street
Little Bay NSW 2036

PO Box 397
Matraville NSW 2036

Phone: 02 9661 8855
Fax: 02 9661 9598
Freecall: 1800 819 775 (outside Sydney)

Email: office@scia.org.au
Web: www.scia.org.au

The Aged Care Rights Service

Community legal centre for older residents of nursing homes, hostels, retirement villages, and people receiving HACC and Community Aged Care Packages. Provides advice about costs and contracts.

Level 4, 418A Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9281 3600
Toll free: 1800 424 079
Fax: 02 9281 3672
TIS: 13 14 50

Email: tars@tars.com.au
Web: www.tars.com.au

Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

The peak organisation for women with all types of disabilities in Australia. WWDA is run by women with disabilities, for women with disabilities.

PO Box 407
Lenah Valley TAS 7008

Phone: 0438 535 123
Email: wwda@wwda.org.au
Web: www.wwda.org.au

Other complaint oversight bodies:

Anti-Discrimination Board

Investigates and conciliates complaints of discrimination, harassment and vilification.

Level 4, 175–183 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box A2122

Sydney South NSW 1235

Phone: 02 9268 5555

Toll free: 1800 670 812 (within NSW)

TTY: 02 9268 5522

Fax: 02 9268 5500

Email enquiries:

adbcontact@agd.nsw.gov.au

Email complaints:

complaintsadb@agd.nsw.gov.au

Web:

www.antidiscrimination.justice.nsw.gov.au

Australian Human Rights Commission

Handles complaints of discrimination and breaches of human rights under the federal anti-discrimination legislation, including disability, sex, race and age.

Level 3, 175 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001

Phone: 02 9284 9600 or 1300 369 711

Fax: 02 9284 9611

TTY: 1800 620 241

Infoline: 1300 656 419

Email: infoservice@humanrights.gov.au

Web: www.humanrights.gov.au

Commonwealth Ombudsman

Investigates complaints about Commonwealth Government departments or agencies, including nursing homes and hostels.

Level 7, North Wing

Sydney Central

477 Pitt Street

Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box K825

Haymarket NSW 1240

Toll free: 1300 362 072

Fax: 02 9211 4402

SMS: 0413 266 662

Email:

ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

Web: www.ombudsman.gov.au

Complaints Resolution and Referral Service

Complaints resolution service for people using Australian Government-funded disability employment and advocacy services.

PO Box Q687

Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230

Free call: 1800 880 052

NRS: 1800 555 677

Fax: 02 8412 7199

Email: crrs@workfocus.com

Web: www.crrs.net.au

Electricity and Water Ombudsman (EWON)

EWON provides an independent way of resolving customer complaints about all electricity and gas suppliers in NSW and some water suppliers.

Level 11, 133 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Reply Paid 86550

Sydney South NSW 1234

Freecall: 1800 246 545

Fax: 1800 812 291

Email: omb@ewon.com.au

Web: www.ewon.com.au

Health Care Complaints Commission

Independent watchdog body that handles complaints about health care practitioners and health care services.

Level 13, 323 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2010

Locked Mail Bag 18
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Phone: 02 9219 7444

Toll free: 1800 043 159

TTY: 02 9219 7555

Fax: 02 9281 4585

Email: hccc@hccc.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.hccc.nsw.gov.au

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

Independent alternative dispute resolution scheme for small business and residential consumers who have unresolved complaints with telephone or internet services.

PO Box 276
Collins Street West, VIC 8007

Free call: 1800 062 058

TTY: 1800 675 692

Free fax: 1800 630 614

Email: tio@tio.com.au

Web: www.tio.com.au

Key Terms

ADHC	Ageing, Disability and Home Care – part of the Department of Family and Community Services NSW.
Advocate	A person who acts to support the rights and interests of another person.
Carers	Carers are relatives, friends or neighbours who provide unpaid assistance with the activities of daily living to people who are aged or have a disability. Paid carers are staff or workers.
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction by a user of a service, to the service.
Complaints mechanism	The process a service has to resolve a user's complaint. Sometimes called a complaints policy and procedure.
Consumer	A person who uses a community service – could also be called a client or service user.
CS	Community Services – part of the Department of Family and Community Services NSW.
CS-CRAMA	The Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993 – the law administered by the NSW Ombudsman which, in part, sets out obligations on service providers about complaints handling.
HACC	Home and Community Care

Peak Body	A peak organisation or peak body is an association of organisations or groups. Peaks are generally established for the purposes of developing standards and processes, coordinate activities, or to act on behalf of all members when lobbying government or promoting the interests of the members.
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
Service provider	An agency or organisation that provides community services.
Service user	A person who uses a community service – could also be called a client or consumer.

Contact details

Level 24, 580 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000

If you wish to visit us, we prefer you make an appointment.
Please call us first to ensure your complaint is within our
jurisdiction and our staff are available to see you.

Our business hours are:
Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm
(*Inquiries section closes at 4pm*)

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS): 131 450
We can arrange an interpreter through TIS
or you can contact TIS yourself before speaking to us.

Telephone: 02 9286 1000
Toll free (outside Sydney metro): 1800 451 524
Tel. typewriter (TTY): 02 9264 8050
Facsimile: 02 9283 2911

Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

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