

# THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY VISITOR SCHEME

## THE ADVOCATE

2<sup>nd</sup> EDITION May 2017

### *CVS Instrumental in Getting Answers*

Welcome to the second edition of *The Advocate*, the Community Visitor Scheme newsletter. The aim of this publication is to ensure our key stakeholders are kept informed of the significant issues, policy work and good news stories as a result of work done by the Community Visitor Scheme.

The Community Visitor Scheme was established in 2011, as a Statutory Body reporting to the Minister for Mental Health and the Minister for Disabilities, with the purpose of providing protection of the rights of people with a disability or mental illness.



The Community Visitor Scheme (CVS) has been instrumental in bringing to the fore the concerns of families with loved ones in the Oakden Older Persons Mental Health Services. Visit reports had consistently highlighted concerns related to Allied Health positions not being filled and the pressure this placed on other staff at Oakden and risks to patients.

Following a meeting between the Community Visitor Scheme office and a concerned family member, Barbara Spriggs, a complaints process commenced.

The CVS office was informed that an investigation would be initiated and a report would be prepared. There was a long delay in the release of the report, even though the Principal Community Visitor (PCV) and Mental Health Coordinator were liaising with the Director of Mental Health, Northern Adelaide Local Health Network (NALHN) and the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist.

The PCV sent a formal letter to the Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse in October 2016 expressing concerns regarding Oakden. During these times, the CVS kept in close contact with the Spriggs family and provided support to them to assist in getting a resolution to the matter.

In December 2016, the Spriggs family and the PCV met with the Chief Executive of NALHN who personally apologised to the family for the inadequate treatment and long delay in responding to their complaint. The Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse also agreed to an independent review of the Oakden facility led by the Chief Psychiatrist.

The Community Visitor Scheme was reported in one newspaper as "A leading mental health watchdog..." (The Advertiser, 26 April 2017), for its concerns about the conditions for patients at Oakden and calling for examinations of several other sudden deaths. The PCV Annual Report to the State Government in 2016 also raised fears about Oakden, including "significant concerns" that it was classified and resourced as a subacute facility, but accepted patients with complex problems and occasionally aggressive behaviour.

As reported, the Oakden facility will be closed and patients moved to other facilities, and there are pending further investigations to take place. These very serious instances provide evidence that the work undertaken by the CVS can lead to changes and improvements in service delivery. The PCV would like to acknowledge the incredible courage, patience and resilience of Barbara, Clive and Kerry Spriggs for lodging their complaint in the interest of service improvements.

## Disability



### Disability client finally has encouraging outcome

During the latter part of last year the CVS was contacted by a man with a disability to advise he had been admitted to an Adelaide hospital on an Inpatient Treatment Order (ITO). At the time of the call, the man was not happy with the way he was being treated and requested advocacy support.

Throughout the following months, support was provided by staff of the CVS and a great deal of interest was shown and reported to the Chief Executive of Health, DCSI and the Minister for Disabilities as the man was stabilised within 2 months of being admitted and yet still an inpatient during early 2017. Although this person was well enough to be discharged, he remained in hospital as there was no suitable accommodation available. During this 6+ months, he was extremely vulnerable to infections and the like and should not have been kept in a hospital ward, as it not only affected his ongoing recovery but took up a hospital bed for someone who required medical assistance.

After attending a case conference and meetings with the relevant departments, treating staff and his family, the individual concerned was finally discharged this month (May 2017) after what must have felt a very long time.

What concerned CVS (and others) was the fact it appeared the delay in discharging the individual from hospital was due to disability accommodation funding, there were a number of community accommodation respite places available. This is not only an unacceptable option for the individual and family, it is far more costly to the State overall and just does not make sense. Had CVS not become involved in this situation, the man would likely still be an inpatient.

CVS is continuing to report issues similar to the Chief Executive and Minister and would encourage anyone in a similar situation &/or who knows of similar situations to call CVS for assistance.

## Mental Health

### Positive outcome for Mental Health client

During a scheduled visit, two of our Community Visitors popped in on a client who had called the CVS Office looking for some support during one of their scheduled Glenside Campus visits. Although the visitors felt that they couldn't engage much with the client, they spoke with the client's mother and explained the purpose of the CVS and what we can offer.

Two weeks following the visit, the Mental Health Coordinator received some fantastic feedback from the client's mother about how appreciative she was of the visitors taking time to meet with her son. The mother of the client was extremely happy with the genuine concern the visitors took regarding her son's welfare. Since the visit, the client has made significant progress in their treatment and is now in an open ward with the possibility of commencing daily leave from Glenside Campus and discharge in a few weeks.

The client's mother really emphasised that she appreciated what the CVS is about and the willingness and interest that visitors take to ensure things are OK for clients who are placed on Inpatient Treatment Orders.

**Pat Sutton**, advocate for educating people about the lived experience of people with severe illness, gives her account of how families are coping with loved ones with severe mental illness.

The full story can be seen on Youtube.

Just go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD6vS3EjeQM>

Insight 2016 on  
SBS: How are  
families managing  
severe mental  
illness?

## Supported Residential Facilities & Day Options programs

There has been growing concern across the Supported Residential Facility (SRF) sector regarding the impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the ongoing viability of 'pension only' SRFs.

The SRF Association has continued to profile this issue, with a recent Portside Messenger article (29 March 2017) quoting its president as estimating approximately 50% of South Australia's 24 SRFs are likely to close as a direct result of the NDIS.

The sector currently provides supported accommodation to approximately 800 residents, recognised as a particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged population group.

There continues to be considerable confusion as to the estimated percentage of SRF residents who will be eligible for NDIS. This poses an identified risk that SRF residents will 'slip through the gaps' and not be appropriately assessed for NDIS registration if not proactively managed. This has additional relevance to those residents not currently in receipt of a support package.



The support services currently provided by SRFs can camouflage the support needs an individual has, resulting in a lack of personal insight as to the true extent of their support requirements and underlying issues. The proposed contact and assessment model being proposed by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is not deemed appropriate for the SRF residents.

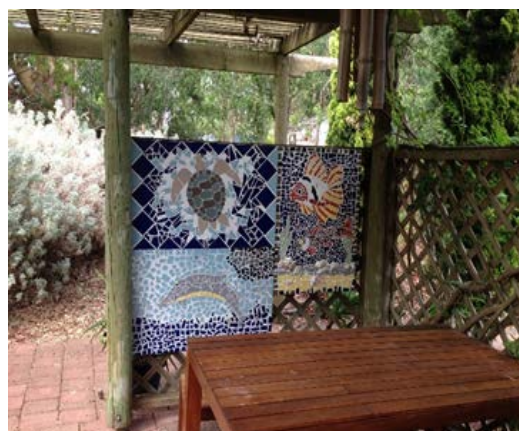
The CVS has written to Ministers Bettison and Vlahos requesting an opportunity to discuss these concerns. It has also raised these issues at its Advisory Group meetings and communicated with the relevant departmental representatives.

### Day Options programs update

The Community Visitor Scheme visits Day Options programs as part of its disability service provision. The Community Visitors have experienced a broad variety of programs, representing the range of interests and activities of participating clients. The photos below are from a visit to Minda's Blackwood site – beautiful mosaics complementing the 'Tranquil Garden'.

On 16 March, the CVS hosted a Day Options workshop for its Community Visitors. Presenters were Manager Contracting & Sector Liaison DCSI, Principal Project Officer NDIS Implementation NDIS Reform and the Senior Practitioner DCSI. They provided a historical perspective of the Day Options Program, potential impact of NDIS and reflected on the success or otherwise of today's program when considered in light of the original goals.

A key focus of the presentations was the role of CVS in reflecting whether programs were enabling participants to develop and extend themselves. The current model was also considered, which takes people out of their home for most of the day, often involving considerable travelling time. It was noted that this is not in line with how most people live their lives and the NDIS would potentially increase and individualise the way people are able to choose to spend their day – both at home and away from home.



## Recruitment & Training

### INTERESTED IN BECOMING A COMMUNITY VISITOR?

**J**oin a great team of Volunteers!

The Community Visitor Scheme is an independent statutory authority, which undertakes visits and inspections to Acute Mental Health facilities, Emergency Departments of hospitals, Disability Accommodation, Supported Residential Facilities (SRFs) and Day Options programs.

If you are passionate about the rights of South Australians with a mental illness or a disability and want to improve the care and treatment provided to patients and residents, then this could be the right opportunity for you.

You will receive comprehensive training and reimbursement for out of pocket expenses.

While no formal qualifications are required, you will need:

- » Good communication skills;
- » An understanding of advocacy;
- » To be able to show empathy for people living with mental illness and disability;
- » To possess objective report writing skills; and
- » To be computer literate.

Access to a mobile phone and a computer is essential.

So join us for a rewarding experience, which will enhance your skills and broaden your knowledge of the mental health and disability sectors in SA.

For further information about the Scheme, please visit our website: [sa.gov.au/CVS](http://sa.gov.au/CVS)

If you wish to apply to become a volunteer, please complete the application form, which can be found on our website, attaching a current resume and returning via email to [cvs@sa.gov.au](mailto:cvs@sa.gov.au) or post to South Australian Community Visitor Scheme, GPO Box 292, Adelaide SA 5001.



## General News

The Communication Partner Service is available to children and adults with complex communication needs when engaged in the criminal justice system.

### Communication Partner Service

Communication Partners are trained, independent volunteers who assist in facilitating effective communication between police, lawyers and judges, and victims, witnesses, suspects and defendants with complex communication needs in police interviews, legal meetings and court hearings.

The role of the Communication Partner is to observe and note communication barriers and strategies and recommend reasonable adjustments to the interview and court process to assist those with complex communication needs to provide an accurate and most complete account of their evidence.

The new Communication Partner Service is a staged implementation. **Stage 1 ran from 1 July 2016 – 31 January 2017** and **Stage 2 commenced on 1 February 2017**. Going forward the Service will provide:

- Communication support for children and adults with complex communication needs who are victims, witness, suspects and defendants of any criminal offence;
- Attendance by Communication Partners at police interviews, legal meetings and criminal matters held in Adelaide, Mount Gambier, Murray Bridge, Victor Harbour, Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Whyalla; and,
- On call line from 7am-10pm, seven days a week.

As per the *Statutes Amendment (Vulnerable Witnesses) Act 2015 SA*, which has amended the *Summary Offences Regulations 2016* and *Evidence Act 1929* **criminal justice personal now have additional requirements** to ensure the criminal justice system is accessible and responsive to individuals with complex communication needs, including but not limited to, utilising a Communication Partner whenever necessary.

As a new service, it is integral that people with disability and workers within the disability sector are aware of the availability of Communication Partners. Those in the disability and community sectors in South Australia are key partners in ensuring that clients with complex communication needs access the assistance of a communication assistant (communication partner or another appropriate person, such as parent or carer) when they are dealing with the criminal justice sector.

While referrals must come from criminal justice personnel we encourage anyone contacting the Service to discuss if a referral should be made from relevant criminal justice personnel.

To request a Communication Partner's attendance or to discuss a matter please contact:

- **1800 615 677 and press #6 at the prompt**

For further information please refer to:

- Anisa Leaver, Service Manager at Uniting Communities on 8202 5293 / [anisa@unitingcommunities.org](mailto:anisa@unitingcommunities.org) and <http://www.unitingcommunities.org/communicationpartners>

*The Communication Partner Service is an initiative by the State government funded under the SA Disability Justice Plan.*

# Helpful Information

## REQUESTED VISITS

Individuals, their families, other key people involved in a person's life or service providers can, on their behalf, contact the Community Visitor Scheme office to request an individual visit or support with advocacy.

This requested visit may be managed through a phone discussion or may result in one of the Community Visitors attending in person to talk through the issues they are having.

It is optimal that the individual's consent has been sought or contact details are provided to enable communication with them for consent to a CVS visit or advocacy on their behalf.

However, it is recognised that at times people express concern about the potential for retribution when individuals raise issues about their standard of care or accommodation and therefore may want to remain anonymous. In these situations, CVS will discuss and explore avenues as to how issues could be investigated with non-disclosure of individual names.

Please call CVS on 1800 606 302 and you will be referred to the appropriate coordinator to assist with your concerns.

## PROMOTING THE COMMUNITY VISITOR SCHEME

**Need more brochures?** The Community Visitor Scheme is always happy to supply your facility with more brochures as required. Trifold (DL) pamphlets, A5 flyers, A4 and A3 Posters are available for both Mental Health and Disability.

Please contact the office on 1800 606 302 or email [cvs@sa.gov.au](mailto:cvs@sa.gov.au)



A3 & A5 Mental Health and Disability Posters



A4 and Trifold (DL) Pamphlets available from the CVS office

Want additional copies of this publication, or would like to be updated with future publications?  
Join our mailing list by contacting the office of 1800 606 302 or emailing [cvs@sa.gov.au](mailto:cvs@sa.gov.au)

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