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To: FCDC
Subject: submission to intrem report abuse in disability residential services.

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Interim report:

The report covered many areas of poor practice as iterated by people with disabilities and/or their families/carers. As a person with a passion for social justice and the rights of all persons I am more interested in the strategies the report proffers to minimise these systemic practices.

The report indicates that the existing processes and documentation of incidents are in themselves exemplary (Victoria better than other states). This would lead one to surmise that no matter how theoretical efficient a system is purported to be the reality is often quite the reverse.

Having worked in the disability sector for many years the lack of genuine research supported to look at issues such as

- Levels of abuse- who is doing it to whom and where
- What are common traits exhibited by support workers
- What are common traits exhibited by managers in disability services
- What does current training really provide to the field in terms of worker skills and knowledge

has resulted in a culture where the agency/system has all the power and the person in need of support has none.

In the absence of scientific fact one is forced to rely on observation and anecdotal evidence.

With this in mind I offer the following suggestions:

- Support workers must be given information about abuse ie. Levels of abuse, types of abuse, systems abuse, individual's abuse. This information must be reinforced and restated regularly. It is equally as important as doing CPR each year.
- Look carefully at current training of support workers and evaluate outcomes of this training.
- Community Visitors might be more effective if they had increased powers to report to other than the Public Advocate (this has not resulted in bringing abusers to justice)
- The bodies charged with safeguarding recipients of services, namely DHS, Disability Services commissioner, Senior Practitioner, Community Visitors and the Office of the Public Advocate provided and funded by the department of human services disability sector have so far failed to fulfil their role. A body of paid employees whose task is not to investigate complaints (very few people are complaining) but to physically engage with people using support services and investigate their level of satisfaction.
- There currently exists no mechanism to ensure some minimum standard of service provision but rather a standard of documented accountability but we all know only too well the misnomer that "if it is written therefore it must be".

The sector would certainly be more accountable if "best practice" was seen to be occurring rather than said to be occurring. An accreditation process which adopted this concept might more easily highlight along with abusive and neglectful practices those that we hold up as excellent and therefore worthy of repeating, mirroring and defining as the preferred work culture.

- Much has been said in the report about the NDIS and its current and future role in disability support services as well as the commitment to safeguard those accessing funding through them. The concerns noted in the report give the impression that the angst is about safeguarding a huge organisation rather than a single individual.
- The report gave voice to the fear that “Dobbing” or “Whistleblowing” is culturally adverse in this sector (and many others) so there must be genuine and real protection for persons who report abuse.
- There is tangible evidence to demonstrate a need for highly qualified people (legal qualifications, academic qualifications and researchers) to be drawn into the advocacy arena. Currently it is perceived that highly qualified equates to social or welfare work and although these professions play a substantial and important role in supporting marginalised and vulnerable groups/individuals their expertise falls short of interpreting the law, understanding the disability culture and providing evidence based data.

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