

SUBMISSION TO STAGE 2 OF THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN DISABILITY SERVICES

My name is Dawn Richardson and I joined the Community Visitors Program in 2006 in the Western Metropolitan Region in the disability stream. I am now a Residential Services Community Visitor and a Regional Convenor (team leader) in the Barwon South-western Region. At the end of June 2015, I retired from the Community Visitors Residential Services Board after five years.

I have a background in telecommunications, training and disability industries. I also served on the committee of management for the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union and spent six years in a voluntary position managing Food Relief.

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE GOOD WORK COMMUNITY VISITORS DO SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

1. Two Community Visitors (CVs) visited a pension-level Supported Residential Service in Western Metro Region on a very hot day. There was no air-conditioning, flies were buzzing around the dining room as residents were eating, the facility was filthy with unmopped floors and bathrooms looked like they had not been given a good clean for months. The garden that had been paid for by the state government under the Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative (SAVVI) funding had died due to lack of care, which was such a waste of money. CVs felt most of the residents had not had a shower as the body odour in the dining room was overpowering and when CVs mentioned this to the manager, her reply was that it is a hot day. CVs wrote a very comprehensive report and the Department of Health was notified about potential breaches of the Act. This led to the Department of Health Authorised Officer working with the Proprietor for some time to rectify the situation, which included a threat to remove the ongoing SAVVI funding if they did not comply. Today, I am pleased to report the facility is spotless, an activities officer has been employed and all staff have received training in dealing with residents with mental health issues all costs met by the Proprietor. All these improvements would not have happened had the CVs not been vigilant.

2. Two CVs and a Program Coordinator from CVP attended a pension-level SRS in Western Metro Region where they knocked on a resident's door, as they wanted to talk with them. When CVs opened the door, they found the resident unconscious on the floor surrounded by many opened packets of prescription drugs. The staff were completely unaware that this had happened and they refused to call an ambulance. CVs insisted that an ambulance be called and that the staff monitor the resident's condition until help arrived. Who knows what the outcome would have been if the CVs were not in attendance.

3. CVs noticed that on a weekly basis residents were fed badly cooked oven baked tough chops. After many complaints, a CV provided the cook with a recipe to make a delicious meal using chops. The cook was thankful and the residents happy, not exactly the role of a CV but just an example of forward thinking they often bring to situations they encounter.

4. In a regional area of the state there were no CVs, so when two trainee CVs came on board the Regional Convenor travelled the 475 km return journey each month to provide the necessary training to equip these people to become experienced CVs. On two occasions, she made a 675km round trip to further their training that required a night away from home. All this is done on a voluntary basis because of CVs commitment to the Program.

5. Volunteers are available seven days a week and are very flexible as to when they can visit, something that a paid person could probably not provide.

Dawn Richardson