



Providing advocacy support across the Central Highlands and Wimmera:
Ballarat, Horsham, Ararat, Stawell, Daylesford and Clunes

Information for Service Providers

**“Disability Advocacy
and
How it is Delivered by GdA”**

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Introduction

Grampians disAbility Advocacy (GdA) is an independent, not-for-profit, community organisation that is funded by the Commonwealth and Victorian State Government to provide information and advocacy for people with all types of disabilities.

MISSION

*To listen to, take direction from, and stand beside people with a disability, from the Central Highlands to across the Wimmera, in their interactions with organisations and the community.
GdA will help people to learn about and act on their rights to achieve the best possible result.*

GdA is dedicated to furthering the rights and interests of people with disabilities. We are committed to providing a high quality, professional advocacy service that empowers and gives a voice to people with disabilities.

SCOPE

Acting with minimum conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of an individual or group with a disability, of any age, with any kind of disability, in order to promote, protect or defend their welfare, rights or interests.

The Principles Underpinning Disability Advocacy

These principles guide GdA's approach to advocacy. They have been widely adopted by disability advocacy organisations throughout Australia and promote a form of advocacy characterised by the following:

- A clear value base of social justice and equity.
- A focus on the fundamental human needs, rights and interests of people with disabilities.
- Loyalty and accountability to the people with disabilities it serves.
- Independence, and the highest standards of integrity and ethical behaviour.
- Advancement of the rights of people with a disability to be fully included in the community.

How Advocacy is Delivered

GdA engages in two areas of advocacy. While our major focus is the provision of information and advocacy to individuals with disabilities, we also contribute to systemic advocacy and provide NDIS support.

Individual Advocacy

Individual advocacy is ***action taken to assist individuals with a disability to defend and assert their rights and achieve equal access and participation in the community.***

Advocacy for individuals is tailored to the client's needs and abilities. Some people only require some initial information to enable them to conduct their own advocacy, some people require ongoing information and support to resolve an issue, and others request personal representation from a GdA advocate.

Where people are able and prepared to conduct their own advocacy, they are encouraged and assisted to do so. We believe the less intervention the better: it is far more empowering for people to resolve issues themselves.

However, where someone with a disability requires or specifically requests representation, GdA will act on their behalf. In these instances, the advocate works closely with the client. Where appropriate, the advocate will also work closely with family members or significant others nominated by the client (e.g. case manager).

Systemic Advocacy

Systemic advocacy is ***action taken to influence or produce changes to systems or communities in an effort to ensure fair treatment, social justice and enhanced opportunities for people with disabilities.***

GdA has worked towards achieving changes in legislation; the policies and practices of Government or non-Government agencies; community attitudes; and access to premises, facilities and services.

Systemic advocacy is an important part of GdA's work, as it has the potential to benefit large numbers of people with disabilities and lead to long-term positive changes. Moreover, individual and systemic advocacy are inter-linked. Individual issues usually have an underlying systemic basis, while the practice of individual advocacy informs systemic advocacy action.

If a person becomes aware of a systemic barrier faced by people with disabilities, they are encouraged to bring this to the attention of a GdA Board member or advocate. When organisational capacity allows, GdA will attempt to pursue issues it has become aware of.

NDIS Support

GdA provides individual advocacy in relation to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. A person can request support to understand the NDIS and its processes and to attend a planning meeting. The ability to provide support at the planning stage is limited by the resources available and the level of demand at the time of the request. Preference is given to those who have no other supports while undertaking the process.

GdA can also support people to request an internal review if they disagree with a decision of the National Disability Insurance Agency. An NDIS Support Person can also help someone to take the matter to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and to seek legal assistance to do this.

Individual Advocacy Practice Model

GdA's day-to-day practice of individual advocacy for people with disabilities is guided by a 9-step process that encourages the following core values:

- i) Respect for our clients' rights.
- ii) Client self-determination.
- iii) Clients being empowered to make informed decisions.
- iv) Faithfulness to the client.

Step 1: Referral and Access

People may be referred or may self-refer. GdA tries to be as accessible as possible and caters to client needs.

Step 2: Establishment of a Working Relationship

Using interpersonal and communication skills, the advocate builds trust and a rapport with the client.

Step 3: Issue Identification

The client defines the issue with the assistance of the advocate.

Step 4: Information Provision

The advocate provides information relevant to the issue and clarifies GdA's role.

Step 5: Identification of Options and Strategies

The advocate gathers relevant information from the client and other sources and then together with the client identifies possible strategies to address the issue. This includes outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each option so as to enable the client to make an informed decision and instruct the advocate accordingly. Referrals are made to other more appropriate organisations where appropriate.

Step 6: Action Plan

The advocate and client agree on a course of action. Identified issues, desired outcome and agreed actions are documented in an Individual Advocacy Plan. The relationship between the advocate and the client is one of trust and honesty. When this rapport is established, the best results can be achieved.

Step 7: Taking Action

The advocate and client follow through on agreed actions.

Step 8: Outcomes

Outcomes may be positive, negative or incomplete. Outcomes are documented and discussed internally for purposes of learning and improving service delivery.

Step 9: Debriefing

The advocate discusses the outcomes with the client and ensures that the client understands their implications.

It should be noted that at no stage do GdA's advocates direct clients as to what their goal should be. Rather, the advocate works for the client, in accordance with the client's instructions, to achieve a goal identified by the client.

Unlike the Office of the Public Advocate, GdA advocates have no legislative mandate or moral right to determine what is in a client's "best interests". Advocates act according to instructions given by the client, after careful consideration of all options. Any concerns about the instructions held by the advocate are discussed openly with the client. Actions must be within the law.

Relationships with Service Providers

GdA is keen to establish good relationships with all service providers.

GdA recognises that there are complex and competing demands on service providers and that a great deal of excellent work is conducted under difficult circumstances. GdA's staff and Board members treat all service providers with respect and relate to them in a professional manner at all times.

Nevertheless, advocacy organisations like GdA exist to promote the rights and interests of people with disabilities. In the course of representing and advocating for people with disabilities, it is inevitable that GdA will sometimes have cause to question and challenge service providers, Government departments and funding bodies. This may result in complaints being lodged against service providers, either on behalf of clients or by GdA in its own right. Sometimes disability service providers feel this is an attack on themselves. However, as described above, GdA's first loyalty is to its clients. GdA advocates reserve the right to advocate for their clients in a robust manner, but at the same time with respect towards all parties.

Complaints against GdA can be directed to the Executive Officer in the first instance, or the Disability Services Commissioner, or the Complaints Resolution and Referral Service.

GdA welcomes feedback about how its performance can be improved.

Accountability

GdA staff are, in the first instance, accountable to the organisation's clients, the Executive Officer and the Board. The GdA Board consists of up to eight volunteers elected from the GdA general membership. As an organisation, GdA is accountable to its general membership and to its funding bodies, the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and the State Government Department of Human Services (Office for Disability).

GdA is subject to both the National Disability Standards and Victorian Government Services Standards. It is subject to an external auditing process that ensures it meets the standards. GdA's individual advocacy practice is guided by a set of policies and procedures. All GdA clients are provided with an information booklet about GdA's advocacy at service entry and it is available to any individual or organisation upon request.

GdA has established processes to obtain client feedback to improve performance and to ensure it meets the required disability standards. It also has a continuous improvement process in place.

For further information phone the GdA Executive Officer on 1800 552 272, or email asas@netconnect.com.au

Gda also operates from outlets in Horsham and Stawell, Ballarat, Daylesford and Clunes.

Horsham: 5381 2400

Ballarat: 5333 7344

Daylesford: 5348 3350

Check out our website: www.grampiansadvocacy.org.au