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# Community Visitors Handbook

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November 1999

# Community Visitors Handbook

Community Residential Unit/Training Centre

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The Community Visitors appointed to this region or training centre are:

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Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

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Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

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Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

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Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

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The address for Community Visitors is:  
The Community Visitor Board  
Office of the Public Advocate  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, 436 Lonsdale St  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

The above information must be made available to staff and clients under section 64(c) of the *Intellectually Disabled Person's Services Act 1986* (IDPS Act)

# Community Visitors Handbook

This handbook is designed to foster better communication and relationships between DHS staff and Community Visitors. It outlines the role of Community Visitors, the legislation covering their work and the responsibility of DHS staff to Community Visitors. It also provides a convenient means of recording visits, comments and resulting action.

## Background

The IDPS Act requires that a group of independent people should monitor residential services provided to people with an intellectual disability. Community Visitors ensure that people with an intellectual disability are afforded the same rights and opportunities as any other members of the community.

Community Visitors are volunteer community representatives of various occupations, and have usually had some involvement with people with disabilities. They share a common belief that people with disabilities should be given the opportunity to live and act as independently as they are able.

## Administration

The Community Visitor Program is administered by a coordinator, Mr Eric Mushins, employed by the Office of the Public Advocate. Mr Mushins may be contacted on (03) 9603 9500.

Community Visitors are appointed to a region rather than to a specific facility or facilities. However, for ease of administration, the Office of the Public Advocate allocates groups of Community Visitors, known as panels, to particular facilities.

A panel of Community Visitors usually consists of two or three people. Each panel has a nominated panel secretary who is responsible for arranging meeting dates, making notes and reports, and representing the consensus views of the panel to staff and/ or residents.

One Community Visitor in each region is nominated as a *Regional Convenor*. In some regions, however, more than one convenor is appointed. The Regional Convenor(s) has overall responsibility for the activities of Community Visitors in the region, in addition to undertaking normal community visitor duties.

## Functions of Community Visitors

According to the IDPS Act, Community Visitors are required to:

- ascertain the appropriateness and standard of accommodation, physical well being and welfare of the residents;
- inquire about the adequacy of opportunities and facilities for the recreation, occupation, education and training of residents;
- determine whether services are being provided in accordance with the principles of the Act (section 5);
- inquire into the use of restraint and seclusion;
- access clients' Individual Program Plans (IPPs) to determine whether they have been complied with;
- determine any failure to comply with the provisions of the IDPS Act;
- respond to, and inquire into, any complaint made to them by a resident;
- visit each Training Centre at least once every month and community residential units at least twice each year;
- submit a report to the Public Advocate on visits made at least twice a year.
- Community Visitors will meet at least quarterly with regional Disability Services

management to discuss issues identified through the quarter. The frequency of these meetings may be varied by mutual agreement, if required.

*\* It should be noted that issues relating to staff work conditions do not fall within the parameters of Community Visitors' responsibilities.*

Community Visitors are permitted to inspect any documents or records required by the IDPS Act relating to any resident in order to carry out these functions.

In addition to the Act requirements, the Office of the Public Advocate requires Community Visitors to sign an oath of confidentiality. Before appointment, all Community Visitors must undergo a police check.

## **Powers of Inspection**

A Community Visitor is entitled to inspect any part of the premises and see a client, with or without notice, at any time. Usually Community Visitors will notify DHS staff prior to a visit as a matter of courtesy. A Community Visitor can make any enquiries relating to the admission, care and treatment of clients. Community Visitors have the right to inspect any document or record relating to the client or residential institution.

Information gained by Community Visitors will only be used for the purpose of carrying out their responsibilities under the IDPS Act.

The Office of the Public Advocate expects Community Visitors to visit each Community Residential Unit (CRU) twice per year. However, due to the numbers of Community Visitors available, this may not always be possible.

## **Requests**

In addition to the regular visits, clients or people acting on their behalf may specifically request to be seen by a Community Visitor. According to the IDPS Act, the house supervisor or unit manager is required to advise the Community Visitor of this request within seven days. However in practice, the request should be facilitated by contacting the Community Visitor as close to, or very soon after, the request and not later than seven days.

An address and telephone number for Community Visitors should be made readily accessible to all clients and staff. Coordinator of the Community Visitor Program, Mr Eric Mushins, will provide DHS staff with the names and telephone numbers of Community Visitors for your region and these should be listed in the front of this handbook.

## **Resident Rights**

A client in the CRU or training centre where you are working may indicate to you that they do not wish to discuss anything with the Community Visitor.

Staff should respect the right of the client, but also inform them that the Community Visitors act solely on their behalf and allow them to reconsider.

## **DHS Staff Requirements**

DHS staff are required to:

- provide the Community Visitor with the assistance they require to effectively perform their duty or exercise their power;
- give full and true answers to any questions asked by a Community Visitor;
- keep a record of visits by Community Visitor; and

- forward a copy of the record of visit to the Manager Disability Accommodation or Manager Training Centre.

## Grievance Process

If a direct care staff member/manager is concerned that a request made for information is inappropriate, not relevant to the Community Visitor role or relates to information that is of a *highly sensitive* or highly personal nature, such as a client's HIV/Hep B status or Justice Plan information or, a Community Visitor is concerned that a request has not been appropriately responded to, the following procedure will be implemented:

- the identified issue of concern should be raised with the Community Visitor, supervisor and/or staff member on duty **at the time of the visit** where possible.
- if discussion at this point does not adequately resolve the issue, the Community Visitor, supervisor, and on-duty staff member (as appropriate) will arrange a separate meeting in an attempt to clarify the situation and resolve any outstanding issue;
- if the issue is still unresolved, the Regional Convenor of the Community Visitors Program and the Program Manager, Sector Manager or Unit Manager as appropriate will meet to resolve the issue;
- if the issue remains unresolved, it should then be referred to the Coordinator of the Community Visitors Program and the appropriate Manager Disability Accommodation Services or Training Centre Manager for a joint decision.  
**Please note that at this level, the party with the grievance will put the matter in writing;**
- If required, the grievance resolution process will involve referral of an issue to the Manager, Client Services and, if necessary, the Regional Director and Public Advocate. The involvement of the incumbents of these positions in any grievance process will be rare and will only

occur after all previous stages in the grievance process have been undertaken.

Where issues in dispute relate to interpretation of regional or departmental policy, by mutual agreement between the Community Visitor and the supervisor, these may be directed to the relevant Sector Manager, Program Manager or Unit Manager for resolution. If the issue cannot be resolved at this level then the process described above will apply.

## Accountability

The Community Visitors Boards must as soon as practicable after the end of each financial year and no later than the following 30 September submit to the Minister a report on the activities of community visitors during the financial year.

Although there is no set format for this, it usually consists of a report of the activities and experiences of Community Visitors over the preceding year and is arranged on a regional basis.

The annual report does not name individual staff members but may in appropriate cases, identify them by job title. Training Centres and individual CRUs are named.

## Staff Guidelines for Visits

DHS staff are required to:

- request identification from Community Visitors when they arrive. Eg where they have not previously met the Community Visitor;
- be courteous and respectful at all times.
- introduce the Community Visitors and explain their role to the clients. Make the visit homely and friendly. Community Visitors often see our services from a different perspective and may ask questions that staff find intrusive. It is important to remember that they have the client's interests at heart.

- provide the Community Visitors with any necessary assistance with their visit. Remember that Community Visitors have the right to inspect any part of the premises, but try to respect the residents' privacy as much as possible.
- Community Visitors are entitled to inspect any document or file relating to a resident. Ensure they have access to any documentation they request.
- answer any questions which the Community Visitor may have to the best of your knowledge. If you don't know the answer to a question, seek advice from your supervisor immediately, or refer the Community Visitor to someone who can get the required information as soon as possible.
- Community Visitors and staff should sign a Record of Visit report before they leave and add any comments or recommendations arising from the visit.
- A copy of the signed Record of Visit form should be forwarded to the Manager Disability Accommodation or Manager Training Centre.

## **Further Information**

Information on the Community Visitors Program can be found in the following documents:

- Community Visitors Handbook (OPA publication)
- Community Visitors Practice Instruction (IDS Accommodation Services Practice Instruction Manual, 1993, Vol.1)
- Community Visitors Protocol, Policy Unit, Disability Services



# ACTION SHEET

<b>Unit/House:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Person/s Responsible:</b>	
<b>Issues/Recommendations (list in point form only):</b>	
<b>Action Taken/Action to be Taken:</b>	
<b>Signed by senior Staff Member on duty:</b>	
<b>Signed by House Supervisor/Unit Manager:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

Copy must be forwarded to Manager Disability Accommodation/Manager Training Centre