Volunteer program

Illawarra Advocacy is a not-for-profit, federally funded organisation that provides free advocacy to people with disability that reside in the Illawarra. The organisation is solely funded to provide the Individual Advocacy model of advocacy to clients and currently operates with a small number of paid staff. The organisation is governed by a Board of Management who provide their time and skills on a voluntary basis.

Our funder, the Federal Dept. of Social Services, defines an advocate as ‘someone who seeks to uphold the rights and interests of people with all types of disabilities on a one-to-one basis by addressing instances of discrimination, abuse and neglect’. Individual advocates work with people with disability on either a short-term or issue-specific basis.

Illawarra Advocacy typically assists approx. 100 people per year with issues that vary from accommodation, exploitation and issues with service providers to the forced adoption of children. As a result of the complexity of some of the issues our clients face many of these files can be opened for an extended period of time.

We are funded to provide our advocacy to people that have one or more diagnosed disability however, owing to our small size, we often have to prioritise cases based on the seriousness and complexity of the issue. We also try to empower our clients by not providing assistance in cases where the person is capable of advocating for themselves.

The role of volunteers will be to assist staff to deliver their services to people with disability in the Illawarra. This may include field work, front desk assistance and direct advocacy. Volunteers are not required to have specific skills and will be mentored by staff. Volunteers can choose their own level of commitment and will have remote access to their files via a cloud based database system.

Selected case studies

Illawarra Advocacy recently provided its services to a person who acquired a brain injury in his early 50’s. As a result of some behavioural issues, which were related to his ABI, the client was placed in a local dementia facility. The behavioural issues stopped a short time after he arrived. Illawarra Advocacy became aware of the client during his 6th year at the inappropriate location. During this time he was being financially exploited by his wife, who seemed to profit from all payments the client received and successfully placed barriers between her husband and external assistance. The client, who had been assessed as having testimonial capacity, had threatened self-harm on numerous occasions. Illawarra Advocacy was successful in applying for the Public Trustee to manage his funds and significantly assisted with his move to independent living.
Illawarra Advocacy assisted a person with an intellectual disability to get improved conditions written into the care plan of her child who had been adopted by a local family. The child was initially removed from her by the courts and placed into the custody of the minister. Illawarra Advocacy was able to increase the number of contacts with the child per annum by 50%, request yearly school photos and reports, and have our client receive medical information. We also advocated for the child to have our clients surname as a middle name, which was accepted.

Illawarra Advocacy became aware that a previous client had entered hospital for elective surgery on an ankle. The client has an intellectual disability and is significantly over weight. Early during the clients stay in hospital, Illawarra Advocacy approached Housing NSW and requested a transfer for the client to a ground floor unit at the same location-to keep connections with community. Illawarra Advocacy was able to secure a relocation to a ground floor unit, with modifications, at the same location within 2 weeks-a process that usually takes Housing NSW clients many months to secure.

Interested volunteers should email their C.V. to michaelhall@illawarraadvocacy.org.au