

Submission to the Productivity Commission

Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU)

'Self Advocacy is important for many people with a disability, most typically those with an acquired brain injury, intellectual disability or severe communication impairment, whose voice is most at risk of not being heard. These groups are often isolated within disability advocacy, within support services and within the community more generally.' **Self Advocacy Resource Unit Model Development Report: Fyffe, McCubbery, Frawley, Laurie and Bigby**

This submission is informed by self advocacy groups throughout Victoria and emphasises the need for their recognition and strong national resourcing through the ILC. It would be a travesty, if through the full roll out of the NDIA, that group self advocacy and associated peer support were to become weaker or to cease.

Self advocacy groups are run by and for people with a disability who have joined together to have their voices heard and to support each other. They work together to make sure they have the same rights, choices and opportunities as anyone else in the community.

One of the key factors associated with the successful implementation of the NDIS is well informed, empowered and engaged people with disabilities and their families. It is widely acknowledged that self advocacy, and in particular group self advocacy, has the potential to develop an active citizenry with greater capacity to use NDIS resources effectively, and to strengthen community capacity to support the inclusion of people with disabilities in social life.

A consistent national framework for group self advocacy and its resourcing has the potential to empower people with disabilities to take control and provide greater self-direction about the types of supports and services they receive through the NDIS. Whilst this is often acknowledged as critical to NDIS reforms, group self advocacy in Australia remains very poorly funded and is delivered in an ad hoc manner. Just where group self advocacy fits in the NDIS and NDAP reforms is unclear.

The impact on self advocacy of the rollout of the NDIS and impending changes to state and federal funding of group self advocacy further complicates this situation. Whilst there has been some clarification by the NDIA about the role of and funding for self advocacy through the ILC, the question 'will there be a place for the funding of group self advocacy through the National Disability Advocacy Program? and/or the ILC', still remains.

Why Group Self Advocacy Matters

The power of group self advocacy to transform lives, improve the quality of services provided through the disability support system and to change communities so that they are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities is becoming widely acknowledged.

Group self advocacy plays a critical role in developing personal capacities and an increased ability for people to 'speak up', active networking with peers and community, increased capacity for community organising and good governance, access to resources that raise consciousness and sustain advocacy effort and a politics of disability, and a range of other social & personal benefits and outcomes including friendships.

The Australian government Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Violence, Abuse and Neglect Against People with Disability in institutional and residential settings emphasised that all levels of government need to acknowledge the vital role that formal and informal advocacy plays in addressing violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability. The recommendations included:

- government service contracts to include provisions to enforce access to facilities for advocates, requirement for self-advocacy programs;
- further consideration of the Victorian Self Advocacy Resource Unit, with a view to roll out across other states and territories;
- an increase in funding for self-advocacy programs;

More recently the Victorian Parliamentary Report into Abuse in Disability Services included the recommendation that "The Victorian Government use its position on the Disability Reform Council to support the roll-out of a self-advocacy program nationally, based on the Victorian Self Advocacy Resource Unit model."

In this context, self advocacy works on a number of levels to promote change – individual, disability support, community and government. The multi-faceted approach has the potential to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in promoting opportunities for social inclusion and addressing issues of systematic abuse and devaluing of the lives of people with disabilities.