

The *Rights Stuff*

Tips for making complaints
and solving problems

— A toolkit for consumers of
community services in NSW



NSW Ombudsman



This toolkit is for people who use community services, their families, carers and advocates.

The toolkit is designed to help you promote and protect your rights when using community services, and help you to build positive relationships with your service providers so that you can play an active role in shaping the services you get.

The toolkit also aims to help you raise issues with your service, and resolve complaints so that the services you get, meet your needs.

→ What does the Toolkit cover?

The main focus of the toolkit is providing you, as an individual consumer, tips on how to interact effectively with service providers. It covers:

- information on the community services system in NSW
- your rights as a user of community services
- how you can improve your relationships with service providers
- how you can raise and resolve concerns and complaints
- individual and systems advocacy, and
- where you can find support and assistance.

Although the information is aimed at community services in NSW that are within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, some of the ideas can be useful when receiving services from other sectors, such as health services. In fact, many of the ideas on communication and resolving complaints can be applied in everyday situations and daily interactions with others.

The toolkit is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to the whole community services system. Rather it is a handy collection of practical information and tips for consumers and their families, to build confidence in raising issues and resolving complaints with service providers.

We hope that you find it useful.



Bruce Barbour

NSW Ombudsman

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Getting informed

1

→ What are community services?

In the broadest sense, community services are an organised way of meeting the social needs and well-being of individuals and communities, so that people are supported to participate as fully as possible in society and share society's benefits. In NSW, community services are provided by a variety of government, non-government, community and private agencies.

→ Who can use community services?

Community services are used by a wide range of people. Some people only need community services for a short time — others may need services for all of their lives. Also, many people have complex needs — this means they may receive services from a number of providers — from Commonwealth or State government departments, from local government or from non-government services.

Some individuals and groups are particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable and are more likely to use community services — they include people with a disability, indigenous people, people from non-english speaking backgrounds, frail older people and people on low incomes.

Service providers usually have 'eligibility criteria' that set out who can use their services.

→ How does the community services system work in NSW?

The community services system works at many levels. Both the Commonwealth and NSW Governments deliver community services, monitor and set standards for the delivery of community services, by non-government organisations and also give funds to local government and non-government providers so that they can deliver services.

Some community services programs are funded jointly by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments, others are not.

The main Commonwealth Government agencies in the community services area are the Department of Family and Community Services, Centrelink, and the Department of Health and Ageing.

They monitor, deliver and fund a range of services including:

- aged care services including hostels and nursing homes
- aged care standards and accreditation
- Home and Community Care (HACC) services
- income support and family payments
- child care, and
- employment services for people with a disability.



→ What services are provided by NSW Government agencies?

Some of the main NSW Government agencies that provide community services, or fund others to provide services include:

Department of Community Services (DoCS)

Promotes the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through its child protection, out-of-home care, early intervention, adoption and family support programs; supports people who are homeless and those who have been affected by disasters; provides funds to non-government providers to deliver services in a range of areas; licenses and monitors children's services.

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC)

Provides services for people with a disability and older people, and funds a range of non-government service providers. Services include large residential and community accommodation, therapy services, day support, post school options, Home and Community Care services and licensing of boarding houses.

The Home Care Service is also part of DADHC. It provides support and personal care services for frail older people, and people with a disability so that they can remain in their own homes.

NSW Health

Provides and funds health care services, mental health services, community health services, ambulance services, health care and assessment for people with long term disabilities and frail older people.

Guardianship Tribunal

Makes orders for guardianship, financial management and medical treatment for adults with disabilities who cannot manage their own affairs.

Public Guardian

May be appointed by the Guardianship Tribunal to provide guardianship services for adults with impaired decision-making abilities — for example when decisions need to be made about where a person will live, what services they should get, and what medical treatments they should have.

Protective Commissioner

May be appointed by the Guardianship Tribunal to provide financial management services for adults with impaired decision making abilities.

Concessions

The NSW Government also funds a range of concessions to people getting social security benefits, and people with special needs. These include:

- transport concessions
- ambulance and pharmaceutical scheme concessions
- electricity, water, sewerage and council rebates.

Other Community Service Providers in NSW

- Local Councils
- Non-government organisations (eg charitable or religious bodies) that get funding from the NSW and/or Commonwealth Governments
- Businesses operating to make a profit.

→ What roles does the NSW Ombudsman play in community services?

The NSW Ombudsman is an independent, impartial watchdog body dealing with issues and complaints about community services in NSW. It promotes improvements in the delivery of community services, and the rights and best interests of service receivers through its recommendations.

The Ombudsman's Community Services Division oversees all community and disability services provided by:

- Department of Community Services (DoCS)
- Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), and
- Non-government organisations that are funded, licensed or authorised by the Minister for Community Services, Ageing and Disability Services.

The types of community services covered by the NSW Ombudsman include:

- Out-of-home care services for children and young people
- Child protection and support services provided by DoCS
- Family support services
- Children's services such as long day care and family day care
- Disability services such as residential services, respite care, community access and community support
- Home Care and HACC services such as food services, home help, community transport, home nursing and personal care
- Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program services such as refuges for families, young people and women
- Neighbourhood centres
- Licensed boarding houses.

→ What are service standards?

Obligations are placed on services to promote and protect the rights of people who use their services. Some of these obligations are contained in laws; others are spelt out in policies and procedures, and in service standards.

Service standards are one way of achieving good quality practice. In NSW there are separate sets of standards covering Disability services, Out-of-Home Care services, Home and Community Care (HACC) services, centre-based long day care and family day care services for children, Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP), and conditions applicable to licensed boarding houses and children's services.

In some areas, standards may be voluntary but, even so, they are often used by the government in service funding agreements.



→ What things are usually covered by service standards?

Service standards cover such things as:

Access to services so that people who are eligible for a service have equitable and non-discriminatory access to the service.

Information and consultation so that clients get adequate information about their service provider, how services will be delivered, and how they will be involved in any decisions that affect them.

Efficient and effective management so that agencies have a range of processes and tools in place to promote good management. It includes things like policies and procedures, planning and evaluation processes.

Coordinated, planned and reliable service delivery so that there are requirements around direct service delivery — for example, a documented process for assessing clients' needs, development of support plans etc.

Privacy, confidentiality and access to personal information so that agencies have policies and procedures to ensure that their clients' privacy and confidentiality are respected.

Complaints and disputes so that agencies have written policies and procedures for handling complaints, and ensure that clients can raise issues and have them dealt with in an open and supportive environment.

Safety and security so that services are provided in a safe and secure environment for clients and staff — for example, there may be standards in relation to safety of equipment, adequacy of accommodation, and how to respond to incidents that may pose a threat to clients or staff.

Advocacy standards may require services to ensure they respond effectively to a client's decision to involve an advocate in their dealings with the service. (See *Section 4* for more information on advocacy).

→ Why are standards important for you?

Knowing what standards cover your services will be useful in making sure you are getting quality service, or if you wish to make a complaint about the service. You can ask your service about what standards cover them, or call their funding body to find out.

→ Know your rights

As a consumer of community services in NSW, you have a right to expect that the services you get will meet your needs. For services to work effectively, you need to know your rights and be able to assert them. The general things you should expect from a community service include:

Respect

You should always be treated by your service provider with respect, courtesy and honesty. This includes respect for your cultural, religious, and social needs and beliefs.

Individual needs

You should receive services in a way that addresses your individual needs. Your service provider should assess the level of help you need, review this regularly, and change the service as your needs change.

Connection to family and community

If you are living in care, you have a right to maintain and develop close relationships with the people who are important to you, such as family, friends and advocates, where it is safe to do so. Services should support you to participate in the community.

Privacy and confidentiality

Services should respect your privacy and the confidentiality of the information they have about you.

Safety and freedom from abuse

You should receive services in a safe environment, free from abuse of any kind.

No discrimination

No one should unfairly discriminate against you in the way you receive services, nor should you be subjected to harassment or exploitation.

Access to information

You have a right to information about the services you are getting, in a way that you understand — for example, how you will receive your services, your choices, how your money will be managed, the service's rules. You can ask any questions to help you be fully informed.

Participation in decisions

You should be able to participate in decisions that affect your life and the services you receive. Your service provider should consider your views and preferences in a meaningful way, and clearly explain what has been decided. You can ask the service to put the reasons for its decisions in writing.

Complaints

It's OK to complain about the services you get, without fear of losing the service and without it affecting the way your service is delivered, or how you are treated. The service should tell you how it handles complaints, and should keep you informed about the progress and result of your complaint.

Support

You are allowed to have a support person of your choice when you talk to your service provider about the services you are getting — for example, a family member, friend, advocate or Official Community Visitor (for people in full-time care).

Your responsibilities

As a service user, you are responsible for the outcome of your decisions and should respect service providers, staff and other consumers.

Effective partnerships

2

Now that you have used this toolkit to find out more about the system, and understand your rights as a service user, this section looks at things you can do to have a good relationship with services and staff.

Often when you get a service to help you, it can feel like you are just the 'receiver' of a service, and you play a passive role. However there are things that you can do to be a more active partner in the relationship with the service.

Getting on well with services is important to reduce stress for you and the service, and means you will be better able to communicate and get your needs met. If you have a healthy relationship with the service it will certainly help you to resolve problems if they arise.

Some ways of improving the relationship may mean taking advantage of things already built into the way the service operates, and some may be new ideas for the service or the consumer.

→ **Building a positive relationship with services**

Here are just a few ideas:

Planning

- planning meetings are good when you are new to a service, or want to change the service you are receiving
- make a written agreement with the service provider about the service they will provide — what it includes, how often, who will provide it and when, what you can expect from the service etc.

Communication

- make an agreement with the service provider about how you will communicate. Some issues to consider are:
 - discuss methods eg. Is phoning always ok? When should it be in writing? Is faxing or email an option?
 - discuss times eg. don't call me before 10am as busy with children, worker unavailable Mondays but another worker will be available
 - what needs to be communicated?
 - who communicates?
- special communication needs eg. translator, sign language interpreter
- think about your communication style — remember a polite manner is more likely to be met with a positive response.

Feedback

- have a clear process for feedback on a regular basis
- find out about the service's complaints policy and process, and use it
- give the service positive feedback as well — for example, a letter, a compliment, contribute to the service's newsletter.

Interaction

- attend service open days, client forums or annual general meetings
- keep a file on each service you use, so information is kept together and accessible when you need it
- keep up to date with changes affecting the service by reading their newsletters
- make sure you know the name and contact details of the relevant staff and managers — have them handy by the phone or on a notice board
- participate in the service's broad assessment/review process — eg. attend a focus group or fill in a survey and have a say about the service.

→ Communicating with services

Good communication means exchanging messages clearly — it's a two-way process. Building a positive relationship with your service providers can prevent misunderstandings and will help you get what you need from the service. Good communication is very helpful if you have a problem with your service. Even though it is impossible to control other people's communication, we can control our own communication style and responses to others.

Tips for good communication:

- Let people finish what they are saying
- Give people time to reply to you
- If you are not sure what someone said, ask them to repeat it
- If you do not understand what someone has said, ask them to explain it
- When you are listening to people, try to make sure they know you are listening
- Tell people how you feel, don't assume they know
- If you are unhappy with how someone does something, don't criticise. Tell them how you feel and what you would like different
- Create positive body language – show you are listening
- Be assertive, rather than passive or aggressive
- Give a clear example of a situation that shows the problem
- Stick to the facts wherever possible
- Be careful of making assumptions, or accusations about other people's motivations.

Adapted from *Making It Work For You*

Positive communication

The way you talk with people can make a big difference to the relationship you have with direct workers and services. For example:



ASSERTIVE

Being assertive is saying what you want in a firm but pleasant way. It is the best way to communicate, and takes practice.



“I” STATEMENTS

Focus on the problem and how it affects you, how it makes you feel.



AGGRESSIVE

Communicating in an angry way could be called aggressive. This can cause offence or defensiveness, and may get in the way of good outcomes.



PASSIVE

If you are upset or feel bad about a situation but say nothing at all that is being passive. Passive is going along with something even when it feels wrong.



BLAMING WORDS

When we are upset or angry we tend to use emotional and exaggerated words, however these usually make the situation worse. Avoid using ‘always’, ‘never’ and ‘you’ when raising a problem with someone.



PRACTICE

AVOID

I am tired of the same dinners, I would really like some variety ('I' statement)

Oh it's alright, I wouldn't complain (passive)

I've got some real concerns about what's been happening in my service, can we arrange to discuss the situation to improve things? (I statement, assertive and constructive)

Your service stinks — it never seems to get anything right (exaggerated, negative and aggressive)

It is really important for you to call me when there are updates or changes to my service. I need to know in advance if possible

Why don't you ever call me? I can't believe you don't do your job and tell me when there are updates (aggressive and blaming)

I've noticed that you have been late quite a lot recently, I'd really appreciate it if you could arrive on time (assertive)

You are *a/ways* late, don't you have a watch! (aggressive and blaming)

Would you fasten the seat belt more firmly, as I am concerned when you turn corners, I may get hurt if I am not secured (assertive, 'I' statement)

You are a rotten driver and you never tighten the belt properly! (aggressive and blaming)

Resolving problems with services

3

→ It's OK to complain!

- All consumers have a right to complain
- Dissatisfaction is determined by **YOU**
- The law in NSW says that community service providers have an obligation to deal with your complaint fairly and quickly — this law is called the *Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993* (known as CS-CRAMA)
- Making a complaint is not saying that the service or worker is bad, and doesn't mean you are 'making trouble' for staff
- Is it safe to complain? — services must not victimise you if you make a complaint — CS-CRAMA and the Ombudsman Act protects complainants from retribution.

A complaint may also be known as a:

- concern
- problem
- issue
- worry
- something that you are not happy with.

Why complain?

There are important benefits of making a complaint:

- you are more likely to get what you need
- it can help others in similar situations
- it can help to improve services
- it can help to raise bigger issues, like policies and funding
- you can participate in decisions that affect your life.

→ What can you complain about?

You, or someone on your behalf, can complain if you believe a service provider has acted unreasonably or unfairly:

- in the way it provides services to you
- if it fails to provide a service
- if it stops providing a service
- in the way it administers a service
- if it changes a service, and
- in the way it manages a service to you.

Options for making a complaint

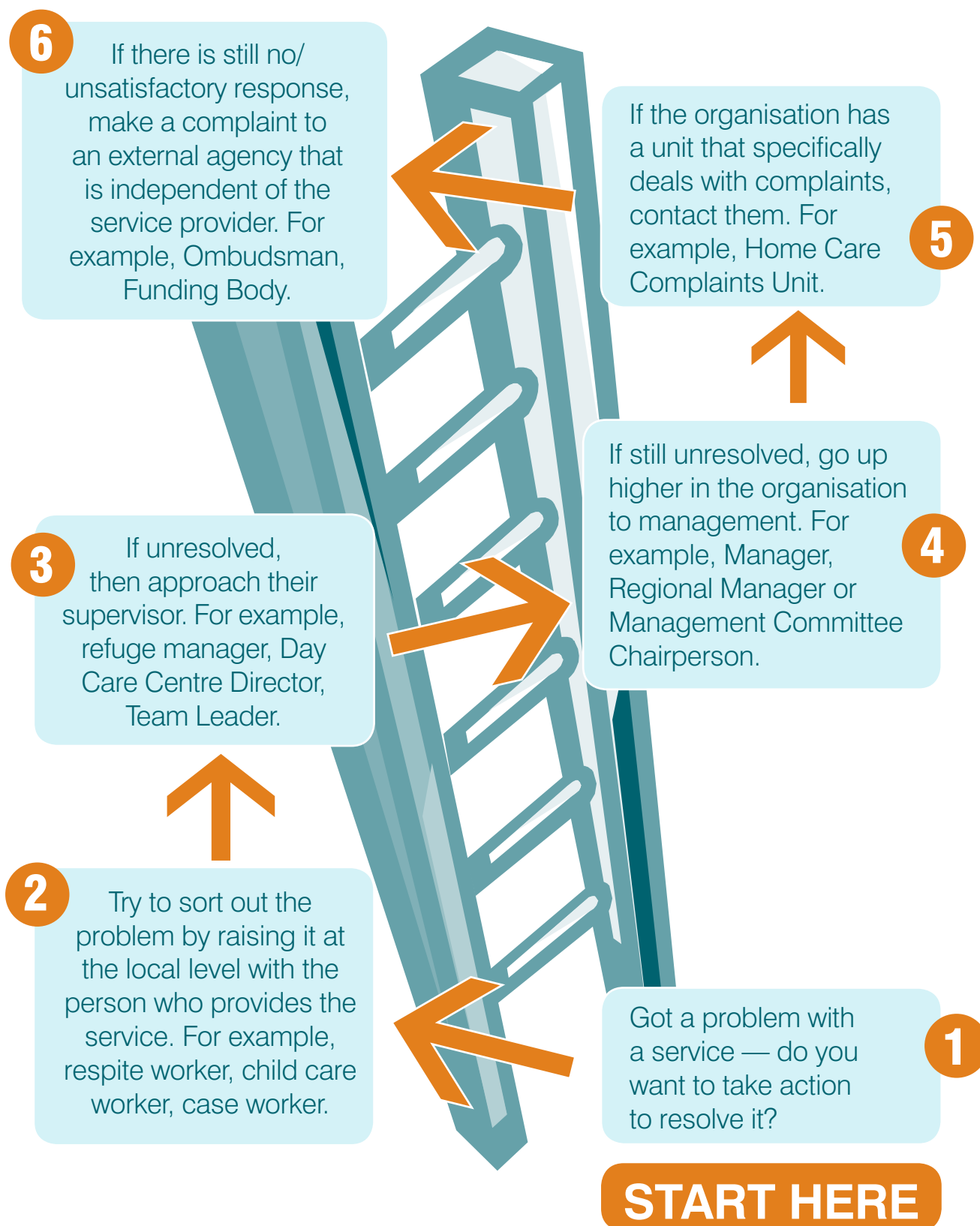
How you make the complaint and where you lodge it depends on what your complaint is about and how serious it is. Here are some options:

- make a phone call to the service — sometimes that is all that is needed to sort out the problem
- write a letter to the worker, their manager or Management Committee
- organise a meeting to discuss the problem
- contact the service's Complaints Unit if they have one (eg. the Department of Community Services and Home Care Service both have Client Feedback units)
- call the emergency line (000) or the Police Assistance Line if the complaint is very serious — for example, if you have been subjected to violence or abuse by a service employee
- contact an advocacy organisation to talk over the problem and get advice or support (see section 5 for a list).

If you are unable to resolve the issue directly with the service provider or can't raise the issue yourself, lodge a complaint with an external body, independent of the service provider — for example, the NSW Ombudsman (See *Section 5* for contact details).

If you are unsure what to do, or would like to discuss some options for dealing with your issue, you can contact the NSW Ombudsman for advice and information. You can do this without making a formal complaint.

A step-by-step guide to making a complaint



→ Tips for making a complaint

It can be difficult and nerve-wracking to make a complaint. However, there are some things that you can do that might help your complaint be dealt with quickly and efficiently. These things will also help you in the process and improve the results of the complaint.

Act sooner rather than later



Don't leave things too late. Things usually get worse and snowball if they are left. If you think there is a problem with any part of your service it is best to raise the issue straight away and try to resolve it quickly. It is usually best to raise issues locally — directly with the worker involved or their supervisor, before making a formal complaint.

Arm yourself with knowledge



Ask for information about the issue. Do you have all the facts? Make sure there is not a simple misunderstanding. It is good to find out about the organisation's policies. You should have been given information when you first started using the service, including information about the process for handling complaints. If you don't have the information, request it from the service.

If your concern is about a decision made by the service you are entitled to ask for 'reasons for decision' in writing. This gives the service a chance to explain the decision and why it was made and it will also clarify the situation for you. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Think things through



Identify the key issues in the complaint. Think about the incidents — What actually happened? When and where did it happen? Clarify the issue — What is it that affects you? What outcome do you want? What do you want to achieve?

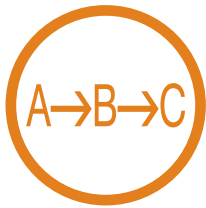
For example do you want an apology, change in policy, a change in the decision? Identify some options for resolving your complaint.

Keep records



It is a good idea for you to record information about the issue, and about what you have done to try to sort it out. You need to remember and explain the details of what has happened so it is worthwhile to keep a diary. Record notes of phone calls, who you spoke to and the date. Ask someone to help you if you need it. Make a folder for all correspondence. The information you record may be very useful in the future.

Follow the process



It is important that you find out what process the organisation has for consumers to make complaints. You can ask the organisation about their complaints process at any time. It is always best to try to solve the problem informally with the worker directly involved before making a formal complaint. There is other information in this toolkit on how to actually make complaints.

Talk to the right person



Make sure you are talking to the right person. That is the person who is responsible for addressing the problem. For example, there is no point in constantly telling the child care worker at your day care centre that you need more child care. These decisions are worked out by the centre's coordinator, so you need to raise the issue with them.

Make sure things happen



When you make a complaint the service provider has a responsibility to deal with your complaint. If raising the issue verbally, you should ask the person you are speaking with to record your complaint. There should be agreement about what should happen next, and timelines for when they will get back to you. They should respond to your complaint and tell you what action they will take.

Go to the next level – (see chart on page 17)



If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, or is not dealt with in a reasonable time, you may want to take it further.

You can go to:

- the next level of management in the organisation such as the Management Committee, or
- the internal complaints unit if one exists, or
- an external complaints body like the NSW Ombudsman, or
- the funding body.

Get support



Complaining about something may be hard work and stressful so it is a good idea if you can have someone to help support you through the process. This could be a family member, or friend, who you can talk to about the issues and help you consider your options. It is helpful to have someone to think through the issue with you, attend meetings with you, and offer advice. If the issue is serious, and you feel that the service provider is not responding to your concerns, or if you don't have a support person, you should ask an advocate to help you with the complaint. Please refer to the sections on advocacy and contact details in sections 4 and 5.

Stay strong



Making a complaint can be draining. Be persistent and don't give up! It's your right to make a complaint and have it heard!

→ How to write a letter of complaint

Sometimes it can help if you put your complaint in writing, but it is not essential.



What are the advantages of putting your complaint in writing?

- Helps you clarify the problem/issue
- Helps you think of the outcomes you want
- Helps you think of possible solutions to the problem
- Assists in getting the service to allocate someone to deal with the complaint
- Helps to ensure that the service has a clear understanding of how you see the issue
- Is a written record of the complaint (keep a copy, it may be useful in the future).

→ Top ten complaint letter hints

A letter of complaint must be clear and to the point. It can be posted, faxed or emailed. Some points to remember when writing a letter are:

- 1** Print your name clearly at the end of the letter and sign. If you cannot sign your name another person can sign on your behalf.
- 2** Make sure your address and contact details are clearly written at the top right-hand corner of the page.
- 3** Make sure the letter is clearly addressed to the right person — find out the name and title of the person in the organisation who can deal with your issue.
- 4** Always put the date on the top of your letter.
- 5** Put what the complaint is about at the start of the letter.
eg. **Reduction in hours: Henry Porter.**
- 6** State clearly what your complaint is about – include relevant dates and times, description of incidents, any explanations you think are important.
- 7** Say what you think should be done about your complaint.
- 8** Give a date by which time you expect to get a reply in writing (be realistic).
- 9** Finish in a business style like ‘Yours sincerely’.
- 10** Attach copies of any relevant documents.

Adapted from *Making It Work For You*

Sample complaint letter

20 Purple Street
Greentown NSW
Phone: 98222 8722
Work: 98789 8989

17 May 2003

Ms Jo Brown
Families Supportive Service
56 Green Road
Redville NSW 2999

Dear Ms Brown

Complaint about Case Worker Emma Frederick

I am writing to complain about my case worker Emma Frederick.

I have been having problems with Emma over the past 6 weeks, and I feel this is affecting the help I am able to get from your service. She takes so long to return my calls and sometimes she doesn't get back to me at all. I have also found that she is not really listening to what I think would be best for my children. One time I know she told other workers, including John Green, about my personal situation and I don't think this is fair or allowed under the privacy laws.

As I have already tried to talk to Emma about these problems, with no real response, I would like to ask for a new case worker please. I am keen to work with a new case worker to resolve some of the issues for my family.

I would appreciate a reply to this letter by the end of this month, as I am worried about my family situation.

Yours sincerely



Marie Parker
Client

→ Complaint checklist

Note: Take a copy of these pages and use them when you want to raise a concern or complaint with your service — tick the boxes and make a note of action you, and the service, take as a result of your complaint.

Date:

Service:

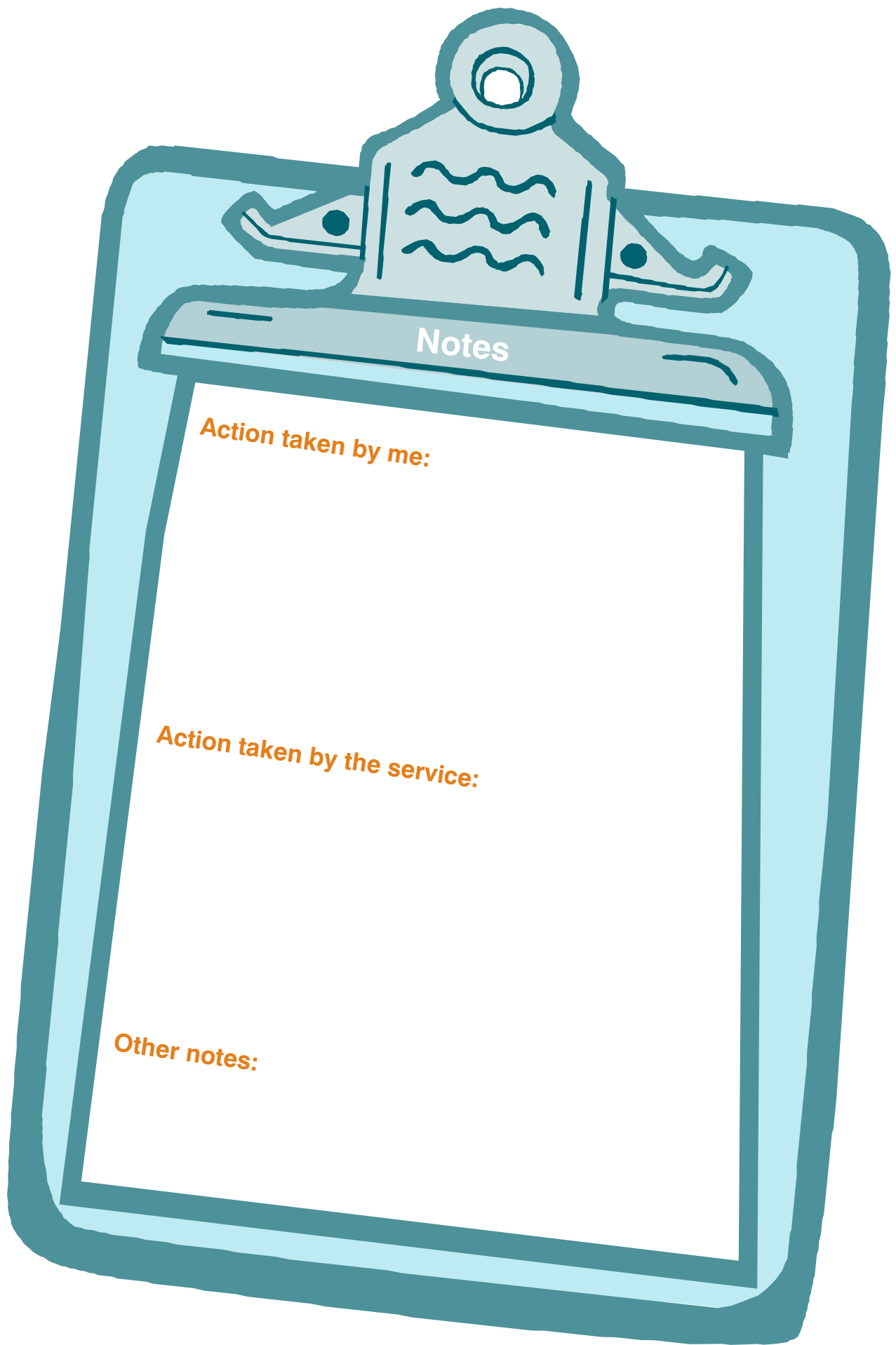
Complaint Issue:

When the problem arises:

- Document the problem. eg. Write down details of any particular incidents or examples of the problem
- Clarify what it is that you are unhappy with, and think about the options to resolve the problem
- Think about what outcome you would like from the complaint
- Plan what you want to say
- Use the organisation's complaint process
- Raise the problem early and with those most directly involved
- Use assertive communication skills
- Keep a note of when you raised the issue with the service
- Keep a note of who you spoke to about the problem
- Keep your notes in a file that you keep for all your involvement with the service provider
- If you are dissatisfied with a particular decision that the service has made, ask for a written explanation of the reasons for the decision.

When you make a complaint:

- Ask for a timeframe for handling the complaint
- Keep copies of all letters or emails you send and receive
- Keep a journal or diary about what happens
- Get support if you need it.



→ FAQ's about making a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman

Who can contact the NSW Ombudsman?

Anybody can contact the NSW Ombudsman, including community service users, carers, family members, advocates, and workers. Sometimes services call us for advice about how to deal with a complaint.

What NSW community services can you complain about to the NSW Ombudsman?

You can complain to the NSW Ombudsman about the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), the Department of Community Services (DoCS), and any service that is funded, authorised or licensed by the NSW Ministers for Community Services, Ageing and Disability Services. This covers most community services but does not include services such as aged care nursing homes and hostels, employment services and other services funded by the Commonwealth government. If the NSW Ombudsman isn't able to deal with your complaint about a service, we can refer you to an agency that does.

How can I make a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman about a community service?

You can phone the Community Services Division Intake Service between 9 – 4pm Monday to Friday, or contact us by letter, fax, or by email.

What will the NSW Ombudsman do if I contact his office?

When you contact the NSW Ombudsman, ask to speak to Community Services Division Inquiry Officer. They will talk with you about your problem and ways it can be resolved. If you haven't done so already, they will advise you how to bring your complaint to the service's attention. Often the service provider will work with you to solve the problem without you having to lodge a formal complaint. If necessary, NSW Ombudsman staff will talk to the service provider and ask them what options they have to deal with your complaint.

What if I ask the NSW Ombudsman to deal with my complaint?

The NSW Ombudsman will seek information from you and the service provider to help decide the best way to deal with your complaint. The NSW Ombudsman may decide to:

- Refer the complaint to the service in writing, asking them to deal with it and report the outcome to the NSW Ombudsman — this is called local resolution.
- Conciliate the complaint — bring parties together with an independent person to reach a structured written agreement.
- Investigate the complaint — if there are serious questions about current safety, care or treatment of the consumer.
- Refer the complaint to the service provider, or another body, to investigate and report to the NSW Ombudsman.
- Refer the matter to another body — if the complaint is beyond the Ombudsman's authority or about criminal conduct. eg. ICAC, AFP
- Decline to take any further action — for example, if the problem happened long ago, it is not in the interests of the service receiver to proceed, or it is already being investigated by another body.

Will the NSW Ombudsman tell my service I have contacted him?

When dealing with your complaint, the NSW Ombudsman will usually inform the service about the details of the complainant. If you want to remain anonymous, you should discuss this with the NSW Ombudsman officer who is dealing with the complaint.

What if the service victimises me for making a complaint?

The Ombudsman Act and the CS-CRAMA law take retribution seriously and can protect consumers who complain about their service. We recognise fears and difficulties faced by consumers in making a complaint; however we encourage people to contact us if they believe they have been, or will be treated badly as a result of complaining. Under the law, the service is not allowed to victimise you or treat you differently if you raise a problem or make a complaint.

CASE STUDY — Information and advice

Susanna telephoned the NSW Ombudsman about her brother, Marcus, who lives in a small disability service. She and her family were concerned about the quality of care her brother was getting and weren't sure how to raise their concerns with the service provider.

We suggested ways to address the concerns, including asking the service to reassess Marcus' support needs, and to develop a new individual service plan for him. We also provided advice about how to bring a formal complaint to the NSW Ombudsman should their own attempt to resolve the complaint be unsuccessful.

Susanna contacted us later to say that the family had taken our advice and met with the service's executive officer. She said that, though the meeting was initially tense, her family and the executive officer were able to reach agreements about how to best meet Marcus' needs, and how to communicate with the service about issues in the future. Susanna said that our advice was valuable and practical as it provided them with ideas about how to tackle the problem, and made her feel that she was not in the wrong to speak up.

CASE STUDY — Local resolution

Tabitha is a young woman who is in out of home care and under the care of the Minister. The NSW Ombudsman received a complaint that Tabitha was not receiving an adequate casework service from the Department of Community Services. DoCS had failed to take preventative steps when her accommodation placements were at risk of failing, and subsequently Tabitha was now homeless. We raised the issues directly with DoCS and referred the complaint to DoCS for resolution. DoCS agreed to meet with Tabitha and address her concerns. The NSW Ombudsman asked DoCS to provide a full report on the outcome of its efforts to resolve the problems raised in the complaint.



CASE STUDY — Conciliation

Peter is a young man living in a funded non-government disability service. Peter's family complained to the NSW Ombudsman after a serious incident at Peter's group home.

Though we assessed that the service had responded appropriately to the incident, we referred the complaint for formal conciliation because of ongoing conflict between Peter's family and the service's response to the incident and issues about their communication. The conflict had the potential to jeopardise Peter's future service provision.

During the conciliation, Peter's family and the service's management reached agreements about how the family could actively participate in a review of the way the service supported Peter, and future communication and reporting about incidents involving Peter. This was seen as a positive way forward when complainants and services have a long-term relationship.

Getting support — Advocacy

4

→ What is advocacy?

Advocacy can be defined as:

- Standing up for the rights of people who are being treated unfairly
- Standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged
- Speaking out on behalf of another person in a way that represents their best interests.

There are a number of different types of advocacy, including:

- **Individual advocacy** — this can be done informally by a friend, family member or neighbour helping to bring about a change in a situation for another individual.
- **Self advocacy** — people with disabilities developing their skills, knowledge and confidence in order to advocate on their own behalf. Self advocacy is when a person makes an informed decision about a matter of importance to her or him, and then takes responsibility for bringing about the change necessary to make that choice a reality.
- **Legal advocacy** — describes the broad range of methods and activities by which lawyers and other skilled individuals help people to defend their rights. Legal advocacy can play an active part in reforming law and policies that are not in the best interests of the disadvantaged people.
- **Formal individual advocacy** — comes from an advocacy service which offer advice, information, support and assistance to resolve your problem.
- **Systemic advocacy** — is aimed at changing systems within society that affect people. Systemic advocacy is working for or against change of a “system”. eg. laws, policies and practices.

→ **Citizen advocacy** — services that link a person with an intellectual disability (for whom there is an existing or potential need for representation) with a typical, ordinary member of the community who is independent, unpaid and not linked to human services, who then advocates for this person.

→ **How can advocacy help?**

If you feel unable to make a complaint yourself, an advocate can do it with you or for you. This can help if you are feeling confused, stressed, isolated and unable to stand up for yourself.

CASE STUDY — Formal individual advocacy

Wang, an older Chinese man who is visually impaired, lives in his own unit, and has Meals on Wheels each weekday, Home Share to help with house work and the Community Bus each fortnight for a shopping trip. Wang's children don't live close to him and he was having trouble coping at home, as his needs weren't being met by his current services. When he told the services he needed more help they said he may have to move to a hostel.

After being depressed and frustrated for about six months Wang heard about the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Service on a community radio station. He called them and they said an advocate could assist him. The advocate met with him to discuss what he wanted. The advocate really listened to Wang and found out that he wanted to stay in his home because it held such special memories of his wife.

The advocate helped Wang apply for a Community Aged Care Package that would give him many more hours service and a coordinator to assist him plan and manage his care. After three months Wang was eligible to receive the additional help. The advocate also put Wang in touch with a social network of older Chinese people, and he has joined the advocacy group as a consumer representative. Wang is really glad he had an advocate to support and assist him.

CASE STUDY — Informal advocacy

Debbie is a mother of three young children, Jack 6, Louisa 4 and Tom 18 months old. Both Jack and Louisa have intellectual disabilities and the family receive a range of support services including respite care. Debbie has been having lots



of problems with the respite service and has been asked to have a meeting with the coordinator, Jayne, about the issues. Debbie thinks this is a good idea but is a bit worried about speaking up and making sure the service understand her needs. Debbie remembered reading the service's policies which said that clients could have an advocate with them at meetings if they wanted to.

So Debbie organised for her friend Marianne, who also has a child with disability, to be at the meeting with her. Marianne knows Debbie and her children well, and can be trusted. She has made complaints before and improved things for her son. Debbie wanted Marianne at the meeting mainly for support but also to speak on behalf of Debbie if she was not coping. Debbie made sure she told Jayne that Marianne would be her advocate during the meeting. The meeting with Jayne went well and Debbie felt more confident about speaking up with her friend Marianne to back her up. Marianne has offered to help Debbie if there are any more problems with the respite care.

→ Understanding and changing the system

Keeping informed

Getting to know the system of community services and how it works is important because it is the first step in understanding how you and your services fit into the bigger picture. Keeping informed helps you have some influence on the service you receive, and on the larger service system.

If you know a bit about how the system works, you are more likely to be able to find the best way of raising your issues and getting some changes. This does not have to mean that you have to take on the system yourself, but you might want to add your voice to the efforts of others, or share your experiences to help push for improvements.

What is systems advocacy?

“Individuals, groups or organisations who work towards changing the system to ensure people’s rights and entitlements. It includes working on changing policies and practices of organisations, government departments and political parties often through lobbying, petitions, campaigns, media and public speaking.”

— Jessup and McLean from *Advocacy Training in Community Services*.



Sometimes there is not enough funding for programs to meet the needs of the community. Sometimes there are unfair policies and practices, and other times the whole system is just not working very well. This is when systems or systemic advocacy can help create change.

Systems advocacy involves people taking action, lobbying and working for improvements to the big picture.

→ Ten ways to get informed, involved and make a difference

1 Take any opportunities to comment on your service

Service providers often ask their consumers to comment on how their service could be improved. This might be as part of a regular review or evaluation, or for the purpose of showing how the service meets the standards. It might involve responding to a survey or attending a meeting.

2 Network with other consumers by joining support groups

Networking gives you a chance to share stories and compare strategies with people who have similar experiences. Support groups bring together people who are in similar circumstances and can be a very good source of mutual support.

3 Attend your local community issues forum

This is where people can have a say about what services are needed in an area, or how services can be improved. These forums can influence planning decisions by the relevant government agency or policy and practice issues of service providers. It is a great place to find out about services, meet other consumers and hear what others think about community services. To find out about your local community issues forum contact your local council or community centre.

4 Speak up in consultations, focus groups and forums

Putting the issues on the agenda is an excellent way to raise public interest and spark debate. A consumer's voice can be very powerful if they tell their story and link it to the way the system needs improving.

5 Join an advocacy group

This can be one of the best ways to make changes as you will be informed about events and new resources, meet people, find out about issues and how to participate in research, workshops, submissions and forums. You may even want to become a board member, committee member or volunteer. See *Section 5* for a contacts list.

6 Join an email newsletter, blog or chatroom

This is a good way to discuss common issues with others. You can test out your experience and see how others may have tried to change things. You can be anonymous, you don't need to leave home and information is very current. If you don't have access to a computer and the internet at home, visit the local library or community centre.

7 Contact a peak group or watchdog agency

Most peak groups and watchdog agencies do policy and research work, as well as help individuals with their problems. Raise your concerns and find out what they are doing about the issue. See *Section 5* for a contacts list.

8 Find out about who's who in the bureaucracy

It is important to know who has authority to make decisions in the service, departmental and Ministerial levels. These are the people to write to, or seek meetings with, if you are trying to make changes to the system.

9 Write letters to the editor or call up talk-back radio

Let people know what the issues are, what it means for the people affected, and possible solutions. Many people don't think about issues that don't directly affect them. Use the media to highlight problems in communities. The media is also an important way to reach the decision-makers.

10 Raise the issue with your local Member of Parliament

Write, call or make an appointment with the State local Member of Parliament. If you do not know who your local member is then call your local council. Election time is a great time to raise issues of concern.



Where to get help

5

There are a variety of places to get help when you have a problem with a service. Different kinds and levels of help are available and can range from:

- **contacting** someone who can just listen to you get something off your chest
- **find** information about meetings with other consumers
- **discuss** a complaint and find out what you can do to resolve it
- **ask** an advocate to help you resolve an issue
- **get** legal advice about something serious.

It is handy to know about the range of agencies and what they do. It is important to reach out for help when you need to, rather than trying to do everything on your own.

Information, referral, support and advocacy groups

There are many organisations and associations that provide support and information to people in the community. Following is a list of key main contacts, but there are too many to include a full list.

If you contact one of the organisations listed, they can provide you with information about resources in your local area, and refer you to the most appropriate association or group for your needs. Advocacy groups and peak bodies are also good contacts and often work on systems issues.



→ Useful contacts

ABSEC

The peak NSW Aboriginal organisation to provide policy advice on child protection and out-of-home care issues.

PO Box A2409

Sydney South NSW 1235

Phone: 02 9264 0088

Toll free: 1800 888 698

Fax: 02 9264 0090

Email: admin@absec.org.au

Web: www.absec.org.au

Anti-Discrimination Board

Investigates and conciliates complaints of discrimination, harassment and vilification.

Level 4, 175–183 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box A2122

Sydney South NSW 1235

Phone: 02 9268 5555

Toll free: 1800 670 812 (within NSW)

TTY: 02 9268 5522

Fax: 02 9268 5500

Web: www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb

Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA)

The peak body working on policy, research, information, advocacy, lobbying and professional development in the NSW child and family sector.

Locked Bag 13

Haymarket NSW 1240

Phone: 02 9281 8822

Fax: 02 9281 8827

Email: acwa@acwa.asn.au

Web: www.acwa.asn.au

Care Leavers Australia Network

Care Leavers Network Australia (CLAN) is a support group for people who were brought up in care as state wards, foster children or children raised in institutions. Their aim is to raise community awareness of these issues, and to campaign for government assistance to redress them.

PO Box 164

Georges Hall NSW 2198

Phone: 02 9709 4520

Email: support@clan.org.au

Web: www.clan.org.au

Carers NSW Inc

Carers NSW is an association for relatives and friends who are caring for people with a disability, mental health problem, chronic condition or who are frail aged. Programs for carers including information, support, education and promotion of issues for carers in the community.

PO Box 20156

World Square NSW 2002

Phone: 02 9280 4744

Toll free: 1800 242 636

Fax: 02 9280 4755

Email: contact@carersnsw.asn.au

Web: www.carersnsw.asn.au

Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association (CPSA)

CPSA strives for a fair deal for pensioners of all ages, superannuants and low income retirees. It provides information, support, advice and advocacy and a range of specialised services.

Level 9, 25 Foveaux Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9281 3588
Toll free: 1800 451 488
TTY: 02 9281 3893
Fax: 02 9281 9716
Email: cpsa@cpsa.org.au
Web: www.cpsa.org.au

Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)

The Commission is a NSW government agency that aims to make NSW a better place for children and young people by listening to them and promoting their interests.

Level 2, 407 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 92867276
Fax: 02 9286 7267
Email: kids@kids.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.kids.nsw.gov.au

Commonwealth Carelink Centres

Information centres for older people, people with disabilities and those who provide care and services. Centres provide free and confidential information on community aged care, disability and other support services available locally, interstate or anywhere within Australia.

Toll free: 1800 052 222

Email: commcarelink@health.gov.au
Web: www.commcarelink.health.gov.au

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres

The centres can help arrange respite care, including in-home, emergency, short-term and other flexible respite options.

Freecall: 1800 059 059

Council on the Ageing NSW (COTA)

COTA is the peak independent movement representing older people. Undertakes policy development, information and advocacy.

Level 4, 280 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9286 3860
Toll free: 1800 449 102
Fax: 02 9286 3872
Email: www.info@cotansw.com.au
Web: www.cotansw.com.au

CREATE

CREATE connects and empowers children and young people in care and improves the care system through activities, programs, training and policy advice.

Level 6, 280 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9267 0977
Freecall: 1800 655 105
Fax: 02 9267 9433
Email: create@create.org.au
Web: www.create.org.au

Disability Discrimination Legal Centre

Provides accurate and easy to understand advice to people with a disability in NSW who want to make a complaint of disability discrimination.

PO Box 989
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Phone: 02 9310 7788
Toll free: 1800 800 708
TTY: 02 9310 4320

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC)

Central Office
Level 5
83 Clarence Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 8270 2000
TTY: 02 8270 2167
Email: info@dadhc.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au

Department of Community Services (DoCS)

Reply Paid 1113
Complaints Manager
Department of Community Services
Locked Bag 4028
Ashfield NSW 2131

Freecall: 1800 000 164
Web: www.community.nsw.gov.au

Ethnic Child Care, Family And Community Services Cooperative

ECCF & CSC provides information, resources, referrals, advocacy, consultation, training, support and assistance in the areas of children, disability and aged services in order to ensure that every Australian from non-english speaking background is provided with the opportunity to participate and receive services to their linguistic, cultural and religious needs.

Building 3
142 Addison Road
Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone: 02 9569 1288
Fax: 02 9564 2772
Email: coop@eccfcsc.org
Web: www.eccfcsc.org

Electricity and Water Ombudsman (EWON)

EWON provides an independent way of resolving customer complaints about all electricity and gas suppliers in NSW and some water suppliers.

Level 10, 323 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Reply Paid K1343
Haymarket NSW 1239

Freecall: 1800 246 545
Fax: 1800 812 291
Email: omb@ewon.com.au
Web: www.ewon.com.au

Family Advocacy

Independent, community-based social state-level advocacy organisation assisting families with a child or an adult who has a developmental disability.

305/16–18 Cambridge Street
Epping NSW 2121

PO Box 502
Epping NSW 1710
Phone: 02 9869 0866
Freecall: 1800 620 588
Fax: 02 9869 0722

Email: familyadvocacy@family-advocacy.com
Web: www.family-advocacy.com

Foster Care Association (NSW) Inc.

Supports and strengthens foster carers in NSW and promotes the value of foster caring through information, networking and representation and advocacy on behalf of the organisation and foster carers.

PO Box 269
Stanhope Gardens NSW 2768

24 Hour Carer support line
Freecall: 1800 783 663
Email: fcansw@fcansw.org.au
Web: www.fcansw.org.au

Guardianship Tribunal

Level 3

2A Rowntree Street

Balmain NSW 2040

Phone: 02 9555 8500

Toll free: 1800 463 928

TTY: 02 9555 8534

Email: gt@gt.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.gt.nsw.gov.au

Foster Parent Support Network

Provides telephone support, training and conferences to support carers who foster children in NSW.

PO Box 5185

Prestons DC NSW Australia 2170

Phone: 02 9608 8494

Freecall: 1800 262 445 (24 hour)

Fax: 02 9608 9934

Email: fpsn2@optusnet.com.au

Web:

www.fosterparentsupportnetwork.org.au

Health Care Complaints Commission

Independent watchdog body that handles complaints about health care practitioners and health care services.

Level 13

323 Castlereagh Street

Sydney NSW 2010

Locked Mail Bag 18

Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Phone: 02 9219 7444

Toll free: 1800 043 159

TTY: 02 9219 7555

Fax: 02 9281 4585

Email: hccc@hccc.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.hccc.nsw.gov.au

Home Care Service of NSW — Complaints Unit

Central Office

Level 3, 6 Parkes Street

Parramatta NSW 2150

Customer Feedback and Complaints

Toll free: 1800 044 043

Fax: 02 9689 2879

Email: mail@homecare.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au

Human Rights Commission

Investigates complaints of discrimination under the federal anti-discrimination legislation, including disability, sex, race and age.

Level 8, Piccadilly Tower

133 Castlereagh Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9284 9600

TTY: 1800 620 241

Fax: 02 9284 9611

Complaints Infoline: 1300 656 419

Privacy Hotline: 1300 363 992

Email:

complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au

Web: www.hreoc.gov.au

IDEAS

Information on disability, equipment, travel, services, recreation, accessible accommodation and other resources.

Database of information and expos.

Offices in Sydney and Tumut.

Toll free: 1800 029 904

TTY: 02 6947 3377

Email: info@ideas.org.au

Web: www.ideas.org.au

Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS)

IDRS is a community legal centre that helps people with an intellectual disability exercise their rights under the law. IDRS also run the Criminal Justice Support Network which is a state-wide support service for people with an intellectual disability who are victims, suspects or defendants in criminal matters.

2C/199 Regent Street
Redfern NSW 2016

Phone: 02 9318 0144
24 Hour helpline: info@idrs.org.au
Free call: 1800 666 611
Fax: 02 9318 2887
Email: info@idrs.org.au
Web: www.idrs.org.au

Kids Helpline

A free, confidential and anonymous 24 hour telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 – 25.

Toll free: 1800 55 1800
Web: www.kidshelpline.com.au

Legal Aid Commission of NSW

Offers free legal advice, and legal representation in most areas of law.

Ground Floor
323 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box: K847
Haymarket NSW 1238
Phone: 02 9219 5000
TTY: 02 9219 5126
Fax: 02 9219 5935
Web: www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Legal Helpline

Phone: 1300 888 529
TTY: 1300 889 529
Web: www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au

Mental Health Association of NSW

Provides information service, support groups, mental health promotion and advocacy.

Level 5
80 William Street
East Sydney NSW 2011

Freecall: 1300 794 991
Email: info@mentalhealth.asn.au
Web: www.mentalhealth.asn.au

Mental Health Coordinating Council

The peak body for non-government mental health organisations in NSW.

Rose Cottage
402 Central Avenue
Callan Park, Rozelle NSW 2039

PO Box 668
Rozelle NSW 2039

Phone: 02 9555 8388
Fax: 02 9810 8145
Email: info@mhcc.org.au
Web: www.mhcc.org.au

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association

Individual and systems advocacy for people with disability from non-english speaking background and their family and carers.

40 Albion Street
Harris Park NSW 2150

PO Box 9381
Harris Park NSW 2150
Phone: 02 9891 6400
Toll free: 1800 629 072
TTY: 02 9687 6325
Fax: 02 9635 5355
Email: www.mdaa@mdaa.org.au
Web: www.mdaa.org.au

NSW Council for Intellectual Disability (CID)

State-wide peak group for people representing rights and best interests of people with intellectual disability. Systems advocacy, information service, community education and extensive library collection.

Level 1

418A Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9211 1611

Toll free: 1800 424 065

Fax: 02 9211 2606

Email: mail@nswcid.org.au

Web: www.nswcid.org.au

NSW Council for Social Services (NCOSS)

The peak body for Social and Community Services.

66 Albion Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9211 2599

Fax: 02 9281 1968

Email: info@ncoss.org.au

Web: www.ncoss.org.au

NSW Ombudsman

See back cover

Office of the Public Guardian

160 Marsden Street
Parramatta NSW 2150

Locked Bag 5116
Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: 02 8688 2650

Toll free: 1800 451 510

Fax: 8688 9797

TTY: 1800 882 889

Email:

informationssupport@opg.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/opg

People with Disability Australia Inc. (PWD)

Represents the rights and interests of people with disability. Conducts individual and systems advocacy and provides disability rights education.

52 Pitt Street
Redfern NSW 2016

PO Box 666
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Phone: 02 9370 3100

Toll free: 1800 422 015

TTY: 02 9318 2138

TTY Toll free: 1800 422 016

Fax: 02 9318 1372

Email: pwd@pwd.org.au

Web: www.pwd.org.au

Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN)

State-wide representative group for people with physical disability, undertaking systems advocacy. Regular bulletin and a range of issues papers available.

St Helens Community Centre
184 Glebe Point Road
Glebe NSW 2037

PO Box 666
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Phone: 02 9552 1606

Toll free: 1800 688 831

TTY: 02 9552 1370

Fax: 02 9552 4644

Email: admin@pdcnsw.org.au

Web: www.pdcnsw.org.au

Protective Commission

An independent public official legally appointed to protect and administer the financial affairs and property of people unable to make financial decisions for themselves.

160 Marsden Street
Parramatta NSW 2150

Locked Bag 5115
Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: 02 8688 2600

Toll free: 1300 360 466

Fax: 02 8688 9783

TTY: 1800 882 889

Email: opcmail@opc.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/opc

Self Advocacy Sydney

Provide information and support to individuals and groups to promote awareness of their rights and responsibilities within the community.

Suite 4
2A Newton & Fluscombe Roads
Blacktown NSW 2148

Phone: 02 9622 3005

Fax: 02 9622 6030

Email: info@sasinc.com.au

Web: www.sasinc.com.au

Seniors Information Service

Provides confidential information on more than 10,000 organisations, services, support groups and on retirement accommodation.

Phone: 131 244
(local call from anywhere in NSW)

The Aged Care Rights Service

Community legal centre for older residents of nursing homes, hostels, retirement villages, and people receiving HACC and Community Aged Care Packages. Provides advice about costs and contracts.

Level 4, 418A Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Phone: 02 9281 3600

Toll free: 1800 424 079

Fax: 02 9281 3672

Email: tars@tars.com.au

Web: www.tars.com.au

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

Independent alternative dispute resolution scheme for small business and residential consumers who have unresolved complaints with telephone or internet services.

Free call: 1800 062 058

TTY: 1800 675 692

Free fax: 1800 630 614

Email: tio@tio.com.au

Web: www.tio.com.au

OTHER COMPLAINT BODIES:

Commonwealth Ombudsman

Investigates complaints about Commonwealth Government department or agency, including nursing homes and hostels.

Level 7, North Wing, Sydney Central
477 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box K825
Haymarket NSW 1240

Toll free: 1300 362 072

Fax: 02 9211 4402

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

Web: www.comb.gov.au

→ Websites

Websites are a great source of information about community services. If you don't have access to the internet at home or at a friend's house, you can access the internet through public libraries and internet cafes.

A service provider's website will usually have the address of who to write to and how to make a complaint about their service. The links are great to find out about other services and you can use the chat room or email lists to talk to other consumers who may be experiencing similar problems. If you would like to lobby or campaign about an issue such as more funding or better policies then websites can be a terrific place to start.



→ Key Terms

Advocate	A person who acts to support the rights and interests of another person.
Carers	Carers are relatives, friends or neighbours who provide unpaid assistance with the activities of daily living to people who are aged or have a disability. Paid carers are staff or workers.
Clients	A person who uses a community service — could also be called consumer or service user.
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction by a consumer of a service to the service.
Complaints mechanism	The process a service has to resolve a consumers complaint. Sometimes called a complaints policy and procedure.
Consumer	A person who uses a community service — could also be called a client or service user.
CS-CRAMA	The <i>Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993</i> — the law administered by the NSW Ombudsman which, in part, sets out obligations on service providers about complaints handling.
DADHC	The NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
DoCS	The NSW Department of Community Services
HACC	Home and Community Care
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Contact details

Level 24, 580 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000

If you wish to visit us, we prefer you make an appointment.
Please call us first to ensure your complaint is within our
jurisdiction and our staff are available to see you.

Our business hours are:
Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm
(Inquiries section closes at 4pm)

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS): 131 450
We can arrange an interpreter through TIS
or you can contact TIS yourself before speaking to us.

General inquiries: 02 9286 1000

Toll free (outside Sydney metro): 1800 451 524

Tel. typewriter (TTY): 02 9264 8050

Facsimile: 02 9283 2911

Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

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