

In conversation with...

Melissa

Positive Behaviour Support Team



What does your role involve?

As a team leader of the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) Team I directly supervise my team of guardians who provide specialised decision making in relation to the use of restrictive practices in conjunction with positive behaviour support. Our team's main focus is advocating for our clients' rights and interests and the reduction and elimination of the use of restrictive practices.

What is your professional background?

I have qualifications in community services and social science. Before I started at OPG I worked as a support and advocacy worker for many years, supporting people living with a mental illness who resided in hostels and boarding houses. This role exposed me to the role of OPG and I decided that I'd like to work with the agency so I applied for a role in guardianship before moving to a PBS role, and now I'm the PBS team leader.

What does your typical work day look like?

My days are very varied which is what I love about the team leader role. I can spend the day reviewing positive behaviour support plans for consent, attending complex QCAT hearings with my team, meeting individually with guardians to discuss complex or challenging cases to workshop our approach to ensure our clients' rights and interests are met, speaking with stakeholders to provide information about OPG's role in positive behaviour support and restrictive practices and so much more!

What are some challenges you've faced?

A challenge my team and I face is ensuring that the community understands OPG's role in relation to restrictive practices decision making. It is really important that all stakeholders understand our legislative and policy commitment to advocating for the reduction and elimination of restrictive practices.

What is the most inspiring thing you've seen or been part of at the OPG?

One of the most inspiring things I've witnessed and been part of is attending a QCAT hearing for the approval of containment and seclusion for one of OPG's clients. My role at the hearing was to advocate for the clients' rights and interests, and to ensure only the least-restrictive option was approved. The client attended the hearing and did an amazing job of speaking for himself and advising the Tribunal of his views and wishes and negotiating the outcome of the hearing. I will always remember the powerful feeling of seeing someone who was deemed to lack capacity for decision making stand up and so articulately and logically put their argument forward; so much so that the Tribunal agreed with him and the outcome that day reflected his views and wishes!

When have you played an integral role in promoting and protecting OPG clients' human rights?

This case might seem like something small and insignificant, but the outcome has really improved the client's quality of life.

I had a client, Rory (not his real name), who was subject to a forensic order which had conditions stating that Rory could not drink alcohol. After getting to know Rory I found that he likes to go the pub on a Friday and have a light beer, so not being allowed to do this made him unhappy. I looked into Rory's history and found that his previous behaviour and challenges were never alcohol related and it seemed the condition on the forensic order may have been applied as a 'blanket' condition given to most people. So I advocated for Rory at the Mental Health Review Tribunal hearing by assisting him to raise this matter with the Tribunal. Due to my advocacy, the Tribunal altered the conditions of the order to allow Rory to have a beer once a week which he is extremely happy about. Now Rory can engage in a normal activity – just having a beer at the pub!

What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is having the privilege of working with some of the most vulnerable people in our community and knowing that I am making a difference to their lives every day.