

In conversation with...

Peter Community Visitor



What does your role involve?

My role as a community visitor (adult) is to protect and advocate for the rights of adults with impaired decision-making capacity. This entails visiting adults in their home, listening to their views and wishes, and consulting with service providers and other stakeholders. I also review relevant documentation relating to the adults so that they receive what they are entitled to and live their lives their way wherever possible. The role also includes raising enquiries or responding to complaints.

What is your professional background?

I have degrees in both education and business and have worked in the disability field for 35 years in many Commonwealth and State public sector roles. Before becoming a community visitor I was the North Coast Regional Director for Disability Services for more than ten years. While I enjoyed this job, I wanted to get back to working directly with people with a disability before I retired so I became a community visitor. I love my job so much I still haven't retired after seven years!

What does your typical work day look like?

A typical day would be planning up to three visits in one day, including both announced and unannounced visits. A typical visit will take 1.5 — 2.5 hours depending on the number of adults residing at each disability site and the extent of concerns or queries they have. A visit will include talking to the adults residing at the site and support staff about any concerns or issues, and reviewing relevant documentation at the site to assess the environment and services being delivered. After the visit I will make follow-up phone calls and emails with service provider managers to enquire or clarify outstanding queries or issues. I then like to get my visit reports written while the information is still fresh in my mind and so the service providers receive them in a timely manner after the visit.

What are some challenges you've faced?

Some of the challenges I face when conducting visits include learning to communicate with non-verbal clients, dealing with challenging behaviours at times and managing my time at each visit. At some sites I have a lot of adults residing there which means that it can be difficult to get uninterrupted time to speak with the adults and review their documentation. However, there is always the option to reassess my visiting frequency to a site whenever needed to ensure all the concerns at the site are addressed.

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

I was involved in a matter recently where a woman with a degenerative neurological condition was having great difficulty swallowing and getting enough nutrients and fluid into her body. The woman needed a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) which would allow her to get the nutrients she needs directly into her stomach, but her elderly parents would not consent to this treatment. It was my role to advocate for her, so I obtained advice from a number of staff at OPG and it was found that the parents were an informal decision-making support rather than legal guardians. This means that while their view is valued when making a decision, their view only makes up part of the full decision considerations. It also means that their views don't immediately mean that they can stop the client receiving treatment. Fortunately, the woman was able to indicate her consent so she was referred to Queensland Health to have the PEG inserted. This is a great story and I'm glad that I was involved and played a part to improve her quality of life through advocating for her views and wishes.

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

The most inspiring thing for me is seeing people with a disability achieve their goals and overcome great challenges. At a site I visited recently, a young man with severe autism has gone from not being able to leave the house due to high levels of anxiety to now being able to go for walks, do his shopping, visit his mum and be a part of his local community. Being a CV is really rewarding.

What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is when I feel I have made a positive difference to someone's life even if it is a small change. I have been visiting some adults for seven years and have built many friendships which I value greatly. Seeing the smile on some of their faces when I visit is fantastic. The autonomy and flexibility is also great as it means I can achieve a great balance between work and life.