

In conversation with...

Shelli Pre-Advocacy Team



What does your role involve?

My role monitors the flow of incoming orders into OPG by providing education to people involved in QCAT hearings and working with alternative decision-making frameworks to ensure the least-restrictive orders are made. I also oversee the Pre-Advocacy Team and implement the QCAT strategy across the office.

What is your professional background?

I studied psychology and worked for a not-for-profit organisation prior to joining OPG 12 years ago. In my previous job I had a great deal of exposure to people with impaired decision-making capacity, so I decided that I'd like to work with the Adult Guardian (now known as the Public Guardian) to further explore this. At OPG I have spent time in general guardianship, as well as many years in the restrictive practices/positive behaviour support team, before recently taking on my role with the pre-advocacy team.

What does your typical work day look?

A typical day in my role consists of attending and coordinating the team to attend multiple QCAT hearings either via phone or in person to advocate for the rights and interests of adults for whom the Public Guardian has been proposed as a decision maker. I can attend up to five hearings per day, and in this space provide Tribunal Members with advice and recommendations about the legislative requirements of the roles and functions of the Public Guardian. Our presence at QCAT hearings also includes an education aspect for other hearing attendees to emphasise that the Public Guardian should only be appointed for necessary personal and/or health matters as a last resort.

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

One of the most inspiring things I have seen in recent times is one of our staff members become an expert in attending matters about child safety referrals for young adults about to exit out-of-home care. To watch their passionate advocacy around ensuring the least-restrictive orders are being made for these young people and getting outcomes with limited need for involvement is truly what this team is all about.

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

Just recently, OPG was proposed as a decision maker by a nursing home for an elderly man named Allan (not his real name). Allan expressed to the nursing home staff that he was worried about what his daughter was doing with his money. When the care staff started asking the daughter questions about Allan's money, the daughter quickly removed Allan from the nursing home and the daughter's husband then became his full-time carer and claimed the carers' allowance.

At the QCAT hearing I attended, it was evident that Allan was being influenced by his daughter and his son-in-law and Allan was not being given the opportunity to voice his own views. So I requested that the matter be adjourned and that the Tribunal member appoint an advocate for Allan so he could express his views and wishes without his daughter's influence. However, at the second hearing it was evident that the daughter and son-in-law deliberately obstructed and refused to allow the advocate to engage with Allan. Although this case is ongoing, I am determined to ensure Allan's voice is heard and to make recommendations about his needs regarding decisions and appropriate decision-making pathways for him to ensure he is protected in his final years of life.

What is the best part of your job?

Being part of a tight-knit team that consistently ensures that the rights, interests and wellbeing of people with impaired decision-making capacity are adequately and appropriately debated and held to a standard of scrutiny. This ensures that they are protected in a way that they deserve and are given every opportunity to have the same freedom of choice and human rights like the rest of society. I love walking out of a hearing knowing that my actions and representations have led to an adult having greater control over what they are capable of managing on their own, and ensuring that they are adequately protected when needed.