

In conversation with...

Lynda

Community Visitor



What does your role involve?

The role of a community visitor (child) is to visit children and young people and to advocate for them based on their views and wishes. Community visitors also have a monitoring role in ensuring that the Charter of Rights¹ for children and young people is upheld and that they are receiving services appropriately as per their entitlements and human rights. The role also involves raising complaints.

What is your professional background?

I have a background in early education which led me to have a special interest in children placed in foster care. I then ran a large foster care program for many years. I started working as a community visitor many years ago with the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian before it became the Office of the Public Guardian. In 2016 I relocated to Far Northern Queensland to be closer to my grandchildren and I immediately wanted to become a community visitor again due to my knowledge and my previous work with children and young people.

What does your typical work day look like?

My days are normally organised in the same way to ensure I'm working efficiently. In the mornings I read any reports or notes about children or young people I am scheduled to visit that afternoon. I also document my visits from the previous afternoon and follow up with child safety officers or other relevant agencies about any concerns that the children or young people have raised with me at the visit. Doing all of this in the morning allows me to have as much time as possible in the afternoons to visit children and young people when they return home from school.

What challenges have you faced in your role?

As I live in Far North Queensland, the main challenges are related to our unpredictable weather and being able to visit children and young people who live in rural and remote areas. Some other challenges include visiting young people with serious mental health issues. It takes many visits to build rapport and trust but, through my persistence and compassionate nature, I have developed some wonderful relationships and achieved great outcomes; and this is so rewarding.

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

I visited a 17-year-old young person who was living in residential care who was very unhappy and had been self-harming. I was able to establish, through trusted communication with the young person, that this was mainly because they were placed in the same suburb where they had been assaulted a few months before. The young person expressed to me that they really didn't like this situation. I strongly advocated for their views and wishes to request a move to a different placement and suburb. My advocacy directly resulted in a positive outcome where the young person was quickly moved to another setting. I continued to visit this young person until they were 18 years old and I was very proud of them and what they achieved after the move to the new placement. This included going back to study and having positive relationships with their peers. As a result of these positive changes, the young person's health also improved. It's a good example of where listening to what an individual needs to live well brings about positive results.

What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is the relationships I have with the children and young people I visit and knowing what I do matters to them and makes a difference to their lives. I'm also inspired by my colleagues in the Far Northern region, who are professional, committed, and supportive of each other.

1. The Charter of Rights is outlined in the *Child Protection Act 1999*.