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MY SUBMISSION TO ISSUES PAPER 10

Advocacy and Support and Therapeutic Treatment Services.

TOPIC A : Victim and survivor needs and unmet needs.

Advocacy is an extremely important service for victims and survivors as we are an independent service promoting the human rights of, with and for vulnerable people. From my own experience as an advocate for people with a disability, I have found that some service users have disclosed abuse from institutional care or family to me whilst I am visiting their services conducting independent employee meetings. I believe that due to the discussions we have at these meetings about my role as an advocate and what that may look like and what I can help with really allows for people to understand that I am there to help or find help for whatever issues arise. This kind of protection is paramount in supporting vulnerable people. It is always communicated that Grampians disAbility Advocacy is an independent organisation which means that our employee meetings are private and that gives the benefit of a relaxed, supportive environment free from the usual people that work with employees, therefore I believe people to feel that they can talk to me and know that I will support them to be protected and that their voice is heard. Mind you I believe it does take time also to establish a good service relationship, I believe continuity to be paramount in ensuring this relationship occurs.

From my experience as an advocate, what works is having an independent and trusting service delivery, ensuring continuity and educating people on what advocacy can do to protect human rights and ensure support through these processes. What I have found harmful for victims or survivors is inadequate training for other services to ensure support for people with disability in communicating abuse to police, counsellors and other services. This can be either verbal or non-verbal communication methods, travel issues, distance from services or waiting periods to receive support from a service. It can be quite a confusing experience for some people with a disability to have to endure when approaching support. There are plenty of barriers for people with a disability in obtaining protection from abuse.

To help facilitate access so that victims or survivors receive what they need, there needs to be one clear process of who, what, when, where to go when a disclosure has been made. This one clear process or organisation also needs to receive complaints about any dealings with police, counsellors etc for a person accessing these services if they face issues, so that one organisation can implement effective strategies when noticing systemic issues for people accessing supports and services. Barriers in receiving advocacy for people with a disability could be communication such as police or counsellors not understanding the person or the person's method of

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communication or travel, such as major distances of accessing services or lack of knowledge of appropriate services to support the victim or survivor. Funding or secure accommodation whilst disclosing abuse to police within the persons local area is also an issue, if this was available it would mean the person could still access their local community and local supports for whom they are familiar with and feel secure with. From my experience advocating for people with a disability disclosing sexual abuse to police means this person depending on circumstances could may have to temporarily relocate to an area possibly 2 or more hours away to receive emergency supported accommodation due to no placement availability within local shire districts.

Advocacy services are underfunded, with this in mind, our first priority would be to ensure the protection and support of the person who has been abused. Therefore, secondary victims and survivors may not receive the highest of priority compared to the first victim or survivor.

TOPIC C: Geographical considerations

Challenges service providers face when trying to respond to the needs of victims and survivors in regional, rural or remote areas are time and distance. From my experience it can pose an extreme challenge to provide advocacy support for two victims of abuse that are within opposite ends of my district if needed at the same time due to the driving distance between the two being almost 2 hours from one to the other. Due to advocacy funding constraints, single advocates cover large areas and populations to deliver the service of advocacy. When having to then travel to meet face to face, time and money is the biggest disadvantage in supporting people with a disability receive appropriate support and protection.

Innovative ways to help victims and survivors outside metropolitan areas addressing geographical barriers to providing and receiving support could be to provide more funding towards advocacy so to help these agencies employ more advocates which means they can cover more cases faster and that would also ensure more support for these often single advocates working large areas to be able to immediately support somebody disclosing abuse within a disability setting. More funding could also ensure an advocate on call service within our funded areas so that no matter what time of day, people with a disability could access appropriate support and protection through the process of disclosure to police and linking in with an appropriate support service.

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