

GOLD COAST ADVOCACY INC INFORMATION BOOK

WHAT IS GOLD COAST ADVOCACY INC

Gold Coast Advocacy Inc (GCA) is an independent, community-based individual advocacy organisation for people with disability who live within the boundaries of the Gold Coast City.

GCA is funded by Disability Services Queensland to employ a part-time manager/advocate, a part-time individual advocate, and one part-time advocacy resource worker, and advocates for people from conception up to the age of 65.

A board of skilled people, the majority being people with disability, form the Board of Management. The Board of Management is elected by members of GCA each year at the Annual General Meeting. The Board meets on a regular basis and is responsible for the financial and organisational management of GCA for a period of twelve months.

THE MISSION, VISION & OBJECTS OF GCA

Mission Statement

GCA's Mission is to promote, protect and defend through advocacy, the fundamental needs, welfare and rights of people with disability who are vulnerable.

Vision

GCA envisages a more civil, just and humane society that embraces diversity and difference, where people with disability:

- ♣ are valued and treated with dignity and respect
- ♣ have their fundamental needs met, and are able to grow to their fullest potential
- ♣ claim their place as citizens, and have influence in society
- ♣ have the fundamental freedom to move around society, to be participants, contributors and leaders in the social, economic, financial, political and spiritual fabric of society.

Objects

The Objects of GCA are

- ♣ To provide quality, independent advocacy for people with disability who are vulnerable by acting, writing and speaking on their behalf
- ♣ To promote, protect and defend their rights and wellbeing, so that their fundamental life needs are met
- ♣ To provide information and strategies to others in their advocacy efforts which aim to enhance the lives of people with disability

- ♣ To strive through advocacy, to make it possible for people with disability to belong to, and participate in community life
- ♣ To challenge ideas and practices which limit, and/or are harmful to people with disability
- ♣ To promote a positive image of people with disability
- ♣ To support and promote advocacy development
- ♣ To be an efficient, effective and accountable organisation that reflects the principles and practices of advocacy
- ♣ To network with individuals or organisations who support advocacy against unfair and unjust things happening in the lives of people with disability

GCA MEMBERS

GCA members believe that people with disability should be able to participate and be included in their local community. GCA members agree with GCA's mission and objects and support the work of the organisation by electing and supporting the Board, attend the AGM, other events and Special Meetings run by GCA.

If someone wishes to become a member of GCA, they fill in a membership form and sign the form to show that they agree with the objects and the work of GCA. A person becomes a member after their membership has been accepted at a meeting of the Board, and a fee has either been paid or waived.

Membership forms and the Rules of GCA are available from the GCA office.

WHAT DOES GCA DO?

GCA has adopted the definition and principles for strong independent advocacy endorsed by the Combined Advocacy Groups Queensland in the Combined Advocacy Groups Position Paper 2007. (A copy of the Position Paper is available from the office of GCA).

GCA strives to do advocacy that:

- ♣ is independent, autonomous, and on the side of the disadvantaged party (partisan)
- ♣ focuses on the fundamental human needs and/or rights and interests of people or persons
- ♣ has a clear value base of social justice and inclusion of people with disability as contributing/participating members of the community
- ♣ is about striving for justice
- ♣ is about striving for equity
- ♣ has minimal conflict of interest
- ♣ remains loyal and accountable to the disadvantaged person over the long term where necessary
- ♣ is distinct from service delivery
- ♣ is not service provision or personal care support

- ♣ is emphatic and vigorous whether costly or likely to be costly to the advocate or advocacy group

GCA strongly supports people with disability who are vulnerable and have been taken advantage of or their rights have been infringed upon because of their disability. GCA especially supports individuals who may be subject to disadvantage – over and above their disability – because of race and/or the isolation they often experience within society generally.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY

People with disability and their families often experience, or are at least vulnerable to discrimination, neglect, exploitation or abuse: their rights, whether human rights or legal rights, are commonly ignored and denied.

The following extract is from the Advocacy Development Network Information Sheet “Need for Advocacy”.

“Access to ways of enforcing their rights, while readily available to many others in society, may be restricted or denied to people with disability. Resources necessary to ensure the honouring and equitable recognition of those rights are often not provided. Where there are no recognised rights available to assist in a struggle for justice, something more is needed. Even where rights exist something more than the mere existence of rights is needed if those rights are to be respected, honoured, and protected. That ‘something more’ is advocacy.

Advocacy challenges us to take responsibility for each other and in particular for those among us who are most vulnerable. The need for advocacy for people with disability arises for a number of reasons: the impact of impairment; the social situation facing people with disability including the effect of current social values especially in time of economic and social stress; and the effects of human service systems.

Advocacy may be needed more in the future as people with disability continue to be devalued, isolated and marginalised in our community.”

GCA PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING:

- ♣ INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY
- ♣ ADVOCACY SUPPORT
- ♣ ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

GCA’S INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY

Individual advocacy is when one person speaks, acts and writes on behalf of another person who is being treated unfairly and unjustly.

This is advocacy provided to individuals who are vulnerable on a one to one basis and addresses fundamental needs. Some examples of whom GCA may provide advocacy for include:

- ♣ A person with an intellectual disability who may be unable to see and understand an injustice to which they are subject.
- ♣ A person with severe cerebral palsy who maybe unable to communicate their needs and wishes without significant assistance and others may not be able to understand or be willing to respond to the needs of the person.
- ♣ A person with a physical disability who may be unable to move or gain access without significant adaptation of the physical environment.
- ♣ A person with a psychological disorder who experiences episodes of severe depression who may, during such an episode, lack the volition necessary to meet even their needs for food, shelter and safety.

GCA has two paid part-time advocacy workers who do individual advocacy on behalf of people with disability. If you, or someone you know, are being treated unfairly or unjustly, contact GCA and talk with the workers there. You can ask someone else to contact GCA for you.

The advocacy worker will not take any action without first getting to know the person who is in need of advocacy for their situation. GCA is committed to respecting people's privacy and confidentiality.

When GCA is approached to do advocacy for a person, GCA looks at each situation against the following criteria:

- ♣ *The Issue* - Whether the issue is about meeting the person's fundamental needs
- ♣ *Previous Contact* - Whether the person being advocated for has been assisted by GCA previously
- ♣ *Age* - Whether the person with disability is under the age of 65.
- ♣ *Resources* - What resources are available within GCA to provide the needed advocacy
- ♣ *Geographic Area* – Whether the person lives in the Gold Coast City Region

Within reason, GCA will continue advocating for someone where they move outside the Gold Coast Region until some other advocacy can be arranged. If the new location is not within a reasonable distance of the GCA office, GCA, where possible, will find an advocate for the person in their new area.

THE ROLE OF GCA ADVOCACY WORKER

GCA's advocacy worker:

- ♣ Is on the side of the person needing advocacy and no one else's.
- ♣ Advocates for the person needing advocacy for as long as the advocacy is needed.
- ♣ Will not do things that make people doubt whose side the advocacy worker is on.
- ♣ Has no interest in telling you what to do, but will aim to help you identify what you need and how best to get it.
- ♣ Can also help you get the information you want or need, to use as you see fit.
- ♣ Can help you recognise and make good use of your own personal skills and strengths, while providing help in the areas where you may need it.
- ♣ May also help you challenge people who make unfair assumptions about you, or who treat you with distress.

GCA's advocacy worker, where possible, involves the person with disability and others in their lives (family, friends) in the decisions and actions that are taken on behalf of the person. However, sometimes the person GCA is advocating for may not be able to express what actions they want taken. Then the GCA advocacy worker has to determine actions and make decisions for the person. This is always done in consultation with other people who know the person and with other GCA advocacy workers.

GCA advocates focus on basic needs, such as personal safety, shelter, food, good medical care and appropriate supports to live in the community.

Some examples where fundamental needs are not being met are where the person may:

- ♣ be homeless or in danger of becoming homeless;
- ♣ be in physical danger;
- ♣ be abused or in danger of being abused;
- ♣ live in inappropriate housing eg a young person living in an aged nursing home;
- ♣ have little, poor, inappropriate or no service;
- ♣ be at risk of being in a worse position than they are in now;
- ♣ be in danger of making very poor decisions about meeting their fundamental needs;
- ♣ be in danger of becoming more vulnerable and isolated from the community;

GCA strives to promote a positive image of the person with disability.

HOW GCA ADVOCATES CAN HELP YOU

Advocacy may include issues related to the follow:

- ♣ Housing
- ♣ Medical
- ♣ Education and Training
- ♣ Freedom of Information
- ♣ Handling Complaints
- ♣ Access and Transport, Adult Guardianship/Public Trustee issues
- ♣ Discrimination
- ♣ Contact with the Law either as a victim or as an offender

We advocate only for the person seeking advocacy, not the carer, parent or other interested party.

WHAT GCA ADVOCATES CAN NOT DO

GCA advocacy workers can not provide:

- ♣ Crisis intervention (though we try to respond to urgent needs as quickly as possible);
- ♣ Professional advice, counselling or therapy (though we can refer you to appropriate services);
- ♣ On-going personal support (though people can return to us any time new issues arise or an old issue re-occurs);
- ♣ Be a substitute for inadequate or non-existent services (though we continue to lobby for services, communities and governments to honour their obligations);
- ♣ Help with problems that require changes of law or policy (though we can refer these to GCA's Systemic Advocacy Program).

CAN SOMEONE ELSE SPEAK ON MY BEHALF

Yes! You can ask a family members, friend, guardian or power of attorney to support you at your request.

INITIAL CONTACT WITH GCA

When a person contacts GCA the advocacy worker will talk to the person about the issue and about the person who needs the advocacy. Sometimes the advocacy worker will arrange a meeting with the person needing advocacy to get a clearer picture of the situation. If the person needs advocacy, the advocacy worker then

discusses the situation with the other GCA advocacy workers at an advocacy workers meeting.

At the advocacy worker's meeting the advocacy workers discuss the situation and look at the following questions:

- ♣ Does the issue fit GCA's criteria - type of issue, age, geographical area?
- ♣ Are there any other people in the person's life who could assist?
- ♣ How many people is GCA already working with?
- ♣ Does GCA have the resources to take on a new advocacy issue?

Once the decision is made about whether GCA will advocate for the person, the advocacy worker meets with the person or family and friends and talks about how GCA may assist.

GCA advocacy workers recognise the importance of developing a relationship with the person for whom they are advocating. After getting to know the person and their needs they create a vision for the person. An advocacy/advocacy support agreement and advocacy/advocacy support plan is developed. These are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that good decisions are made and that appropriate actions are taken.

If GCA decides not to work with the person, the advocacy worker will contact the person, family or friend and explain why GCA can't take on an advocacy role. They will offer strategies to deal with the situation and suggest other people who may be able to assist.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT

- ♣ Confidentially
- ♣ Free assistance, recourses and information
- ♣ Be treated with respect and dignity
- ♣ Independent advocacy

GCA advocates will always respect and protect your dignity, privacy and confidentiality. This means that your advocate will not talk about you or your issues to other people without your consent. Your advocate will respect your wishes if you ask her not to repeat what you tell her or not to tell certain things to certain people.

Your advocate is required to keep records of the work with you on file. Your file will contain your personal details and all the important information about you and your situation that your advocate needs to be able to advocate on your behalf. Your file is where your advocate keeps notes about meetings and discussions he/she has had with you and with other people on your behalf. Other advocates and the manager at GCA will sometimes look at your file and discuss your situation with your advocate. This is one way that GCA ensures that the advocacy efforts are on track and that the advocate is doing their job well.

Your file will be kept safely in a locked cabinet at GCA's office so that no one else can read it. If you ever want to see your file you can ask your advocate and the advocate will show it to you. Before your advocate can discuss your situation with anyone else or gain any information from others about you, the advocate needs to get your consent to do this. This means that you need to complete an authorisation form giving your advocate consent to discuss your situation with others and to get information from other people about you if need be. This would only be necessary if it will help the advocate to advocate better on your behalf. The authorisation form will be kept in your file.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS

- ♣ You have a right to be represented by a GCA advocacy worker.
- ♣ You have a right to have your complaints dealt with fairly and promptly.
- ♣ You have a right to be informed about the advocacy support provided by GCA.
- ♣ You have a right to be treated without discrimination.
- ♣ You have a right to quality advocacy free from physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- ♣ You have a right to decide on the advocacy GCA does on your behalf.
- ♣ You have a right to privacy and confidentiality. You can expect that no information about you will be provided to anyone outside of GCA without your permission.
- ♣ You have a right view information about yourself, held by GCA (unless there is an exception which applies under the Privacy Act, such as where GCA has a legal duty not to disclose the information or where it maybe harmful to you to do so).
- ♣ You have a right to complain or express your concerns about GCA's advocacy without fear of retribution or losing advocacy support.

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES

As a person advocated for, you have the responsibility to:

- ♣ Respect the human worth and dignity of the GCA advocacy worker and other people accessing GCA;
- ♣ Take Responsibility for the decisions you have made in relation to the advocacy and information received, and lifestyle choices;
- ♣ Express your needs to GCA or seek help from GCA to define those needs;

- ♣ Work collaboratively with GCA to ensure your needs are met;
- ♣ Provide information which is to the best of your knowledge truthful; and
- ♣ Recognise the limitations on GCA imposed upon by statutory funding or duty of care considerations.

ADVOCACY SUPPORT

DUE TO GCA'S VERY LIMITED RESOURCES GCA WILL SUPPORT OTHERS IN THEIR ADVOCACY EFFORTS ON BEHALF A PERSON WITH DISABILITY WHO IS VULNERABLE. HOWEVER, THE ADVOCACY SUPPORT OFFERED WOULD HAVE TO BE IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE PERSON WITH DISABILITY AND DO NO FURTHER HARM TO THE PERSON. THE ADVOCACY SUPPORT IS THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION AND STRATEGIES TO ANOTHER PERSON WHO WILL UNDERTAKE THE ADVOCACY EFFORT ON BEHALF OF THE PERSON WITH DISABILITY.

ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

THIS WORK INVOLVES PROVIDING EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO ENHANCE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF ADVOCACY, ADVOCACY PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE AND THE IMPORTANT ROLE THAT ADVOCACY HAS IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY WHO ARE VULNERABLE.

GCA'S ADVOCACY NETWORKS

Combined Advocacy Groups Queensland (CAGQ)

GCA is a member of the CAGQ. Members of the CAGQ are funded advocacy groups situated in Brisbane, regional and rural Queensland.

Member groups are:

Amparo (Brisbane), **Capricorn Citizen Advocacy Inc.** (Rockhampton), **Citizen Advocacy of South West Brisbane Assoc Inc.** (South West Brisbane), **Gold Coast Advocacy (GCA)** (Gold Coast), **Independent Advocacy in the Tropics** (Townsville), **Ipswich Regional Advocacy Service Inc.** (Ipswich), **Mackay Advocacy** (Mackay), **Mental Health Association** (Queensland Wide), **North West Advocacy** (Mt Isa), **Queensland Advocacy Inc. (QAI)** (Queensland Wide), **Queensland Parents of People with Disability (QPPD)** (Queensland Wide), **Rights In Action** (Cairns), **Speaking Up For You Inc. (SUFY)** (Brisbane), **Sunshine Coast Citizen Advocacy** (Sunshine Coast), **The Advocacy and Support Centre** (Toowoomba), **Advocacy Development Network (ADN)** (Queensland Wide).

Contact can be made with CAGQ by contacting any of the member groups or by contacting the GCA office.

CAGQ links via telephone conference on a regular basis to discuss advocacy issues affecting people with disability in Queensland and to provide support to management and staff of the member organisations.

Advocacy Development Network (ADN)

ADN is a non-funded network of people who are doing advocacy or who are interested in doing advocacy for people with disability in Queensland. The Network aims to foster and encourage strong independent advocacy for people with disability in Queensland by offering a range of training and education opportunities and through convening conferences and networking. Advocacy workshops and training sessions can be organised on request.

ADN has released an Advocacy Workbook to assist individuals and groups who wish to develop their advocacy practice. Membership forms are available for anyone interested in progressing the aims and goals of the Network.

For more information contact the Convenor, Advocacy Development Network, PO Box 103 Roma Street, Brisbane Q 4003, or telephone (07) 3236 9500.

DANA – Disability Advocacy Network Australia

DANA is an Australian wide network of individuals and advocacy groups who are committed to safeguarding advocacy for people with disability throughout Australia. The Queensland contact for DANA is Kevin Cocks, available on telephone (07) 3236 1122.

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)

Whilst QDN is not an advocacy group, it is a network of people with disability that has been funded to provide a mechanism for people with disability to exercise their right to:

- ♣ have a say
- ♣ voice the need for appropriate service responses
- ♣ access information and understanding of service protocol
- ♣ become active change agents in pursuing a responsive service environment for people with disability in Queensland and
- ♣ to provide people with disability the opportunity to network with each other across Queensland.

This Network is keen to involve all Queenslanders with disability.

For more information on QDN, contact Fran Vicory on 1300 363783.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT GCA: WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM NOT HAPPY WITH THE ADVOCACY PROVIDED OR THE WAY I AM TREATED

GCA aims to provide high quality advocacy, so GCA would like to know if you have any concerns with the advocacy work provided or the way you are treated.

GCA's advocacy on your behalf will not be stopped if you make a complaint. Should you be unhappy with the way GCA staff, management or volunteers have interacted with you, or your experience with any of GCA's advocacy, policies or procedures, you can make a complaint without fear of retribution.

Complaints are seen by GCA as a positive way of changing and improving our work and involvement with people with disability and others.

GCA acknowledges that you, as a person advocated for, have the right to be heard on issues of concern. GCA agrees to address all concerns and grievances made, and to quickly work towards an outcome satisfactorily to all parties in an equitable way.

GCA workers will talk to any person about how to make a complaint about GCA. They can send any person a written copy of the procedure or the information on a tape.

People can ask someone to support them when they want to make a complaint about GCA. That person can be a parent, family member, friend or advocate.

Just remember the advocacy being provided will not be stopped if you do so. If you want to make a complaint about GCA:

- ♣ Phone GCA and ask to speak to a GCA worker. Tell the worker you have a complaint about GCA.
- ♣ If the complaint is about things at GCA, the worker will write down your name, address and telephone number, the date of the complaint and who will handle the complaint, in the complaints register.
- ♣ The worker will tell you about the complaints process and you can obtain a copy of the procedure from the GCA office if you want.

Everything you say to the GCA worker is confidential.

If you are not happy with the way GCA handles your complaint, you can contact:

- ♣ Disability Services (DS) on (07) 56565800.
- ♣ Dispute Resolution Centre on 1800 017288
- ♣ Complaints Resolution and Referral Service (CRRS) on 1800 880052.

