

# Client Information Handbook



**Providing advocacy support, advice, and referrals  
for people with disabilities in the Gippsland region.**

Gippsland Disability Advocacy recognises, acknowledges, and respects all community members including the culture and values of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past, present, and emerging.



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# Introduction

Gippsland Disability Advocacy Incorporated (GDA) provides advocacy support, advice and referrals for people living with disability.

GDA has been a champion for the rights of people with disabilities since 1986. As the largest independent provider of professional advocacy services in the Gippsland region, we are dedicated to supporting and defending the interests of those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. We do this by matching individuals who lack access to advice or support with a trained advocate. In addition, our individual advocacy work allows us to identify systemic and structural barriers to disability rights. We strive to create a more inclusive and fair society.

GDA has three offices. The Head office is in Traralgon. There is an office in Bairnsdale and one in Wonthaggi.

GDA is funded by the Department of Social Services and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to provide advocacy support, information, and referral to specialist services and provides outreach support to people with disabilities across the six regional local government areas of Gippsland. This includes East Gippsland, Wellington, Latrobe City, South Gippsland, Bass Coast and Baw Baw Shires.

GDA is committed to the principles of access and equity and providing services that demonstrate current best practise and high-quality support to clients.

## **Our Mission Statement:**

To advocate and promote social justice and equitable access for people living with disability.

## **Our Vision Statement:**

A local professional advocacy service driving change and empowering people living with disability to exercise their rights.

# Our Values



## Human Rights

We advocate for the fundamental rights of people living with disability. We strive to promote their dignity and equity in all aspects of our work.

## Empowerment

We provide information and knowledge, build confidence and capacity, connect with community, share leadership, appreciate achievements, and support each other.

## Respect for All

We strive to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. We believe that everyone deserves to be treated with respect, patience, and kindness. We are non-judgemental, and welcome diverse perspectives.

## Independent

We operate without bias. We respect each client’s freedom to choose service providers that best meet their needs.

## Learning

We engage in continuous learning and self-improvement. We embrace the dignity of risk and accept that everyone has the right to fail and learn from their mistakes.



# What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is about assisting people with a disability to stand up for their rights.

Some of the things we assist and support people with a disability to do are:

- know their rights
- get information
- speak up and be heard
- negotiate a good outcome regarding problems they may be facing
- make a complaint
- assist to arrange meetings with other services or organisations
- and sometimes, attend a court or tribunal hearing

There are two types of advocacy that we do at GDA;

- 1) Individual Advocacy and
- 2) Systemic Advocacy, these are explained below.

## 1) Individual Advocacy

Individual advocacy is action taken to assist individuals with a disability to defend and assert their rights and achieve equal access and participation in the community.

Advocacy for individuals is delivered at different levels:

- Some people need some initial information to help them advocate for themselves.
- Some people may need ongoing information and support to help them resolve an issue.
- Others may ask for or need personal representation from a GDA advocate.

Where people can and wish to advocate for themselves, we will encourage and support them to do so. GDA believes the less intervention on the part of the advocate the more empowering it is for people to resolve their own issues.

If a person with disabilities needs or asks for representation, GDA can and will act on their behalf. In this case the advocate works closely with the

person and may need to seek information from family members or significant other people who are nominated by the person. This will only happen with the consent of the client.

The advocate gathers relevant information from the person and other sources before outlining options to address the person's issue/s. This enables the person to make an informed choice about which option to take and they can then instruct the advocate to assist them with the action they want to take.

The course of action taken to resolve the issue is always the person's choice. The advocate works for the person according to the person's wishes to resolve the issue and achieve a satisfactory outcome for the person.

Everyone has the right to express their views and be heard. Sometimes, to facilitate this, it is appropriate for the advocate to help the person express their views.

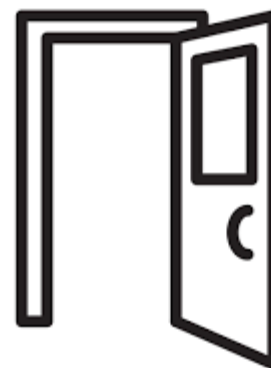
## **2) Systemic Advocacy**

Systemic advocacy is not individual advocacy, though one person can advocate on behalf of a group. The aim of systemic advocacy is to make positive, long-lasting change for a whole group of people i.e. people living with disability or other community members. While this kind of advocacy takes time, planning and resources, in the medium or long term it is more effective than negotiating person by person, over and over again.

Some examples of systemic advocacy are:

1. Speaking up or lobbying to get better access to public transport.
2. Speaking up about not enough accessible parking.
3. Speaking up about information that is hard to read, can't be accessed or is difficult to understand.

# Accessing Advocacy



## Entry to the service

GDA provides an individual advocacy service to people with a disability, as well as advice when appropriate for carers and family members of people who have a disability.

When you ask for a service from GDA we will:

- Do all we can to make you feel welcome and always treat you with dignity and respect.
- Clearly explain to you the details of the individual advocacy service and advise you on what GDA can offer you.
- Deliver an individual advocacy service to you in a way that best empowers you.
- Go through a through Intake process so that we understand what the advocacy issue is you are facing and understand your needs as best as possible.
- Prepare an individual advocacy plan with your input. You may have support for all planning and decision making from any person of your choice. This might be from an independent advocate, friend, or family member.
- All people seeking an advocacy service will be treated fairly. However, when several requests are received at the same time priority will be given to those deemed to be at risk or in the most need.
- Where we are unable to provide people with service, we will do our best to link people to other support services or networks.

## Priority of Service:

Priority will be given to people who are unable to talk about their needs without support and may be experiencing potential abuse, discrimination or negligent treatment, denial or infringement of rights and social isolation.

## Meeting Individual Needs

GDA recognises that you are an individual and have the right to have your needs met in the most appropriate and least restrictive way.

### We do this by making appointments:

On the telephone:



By email



or

Text message



or

at the GDAI office:



Do you need help to read this handbook?  
GDA can assist you to understand the information.

Or

GDA information is available to you in the format listed below.  
If you require information presented to you in any of this format,  
it is important that you inform GDA before any meetings take place.

## Large print – **ABC**

Audio File –  
listen to it.



the information is sent so that you can

GDA is committed to maximising opportunities for every person with disabilities to participate in the decision-making process for all activities and events that affect their daily lives.

Where possible GDA will encourage you to speak up for yourself, help you research the information needed to make informed decisions and advise you of other resources or agencies that may be useful to you.

## Privacy

GDA acknowledges and respects the privacy of individuals and support and endorses the Privacy Principles contained in the Commonwealth Privacy Act.



### In accordance with the Privacy Principles

- We will only collect information about you with your prior knowledge and consent.
- We will only use personal information provided by you for the purpose it was collected.
- We will not disclose personal information to a third party without your written consent.
- Any personal information collected, will be protected from unauthorised access, improper use, alteration or unlawful or accidental destruction or loss.

## Participation and Inclusion

GDA recognises the valuable contribution you can make to the community in which you live. GDA encourages and supports you to join in and actively participate in the life of your community.

GDA upholds and promotes the rights of people with a disability to participate in activities that will enable them to achieve valued roles in the community.





## **Exiting the service – Closing the Advocacy Case**

The service will cease or stop when:

- You don't need the service anymore.
- The problem has been fixed.
- You agree that after everything has been tried and talking about it with your advocate that the outcome you want is not able to be achieved.
- GDA has referred you on to a more appropriate service that is better equipped to assist you and you do not need or want your progress monitored by GDA.

When the advocacy case is closed:

- Your individual advocacy records will be retained by GDA for 5 years.
- You will be asked to complete a review form to inform GDA how the service has met/not met your needs. This will assist GDAI to continue to improve our services for people with disabilities.
- You will also be invited to participate in GDA consumer and self-advocacy groups.

## **Protection of human rights and freedom from abuse**

- GDA acts to prevent abuse and neglect, and to uphold the legal and human rights of people with a disability living in Gippsland.
- GDA takes all practical and appropriate steps to prevent abuse and neglect of its clients.
- GDA provides outreach advocacy support across Gippsland to support and protect the rights and wellbeing of people with disabilities. GDA employs skilled and experienced staff to ensure the safety and wellbeing of clients is protected in line with GDA's "Duty of Care to Clients".

## Complaints and Disputes

If you experience any problem with the advocacy service you receive from GDA or are unhappy with the way you are/were treated, you have the right to raise a complaint.



GDA has a complaints and disputes procedure that is friendly and fair. If a problem does happen, we will work through it with you until it is resolved.

You will not get into trouble for raising a complaint with GDA. Your complaint is an opportunity for GDA to improve our service. Information on how to raise a complaint is in the back pages below.

### Want to make a complaint ? This is how you can.

There are three steps.

#### Step 1:

Speak to your advocate if you are unhappy about the support you have received or if you have any other concerns regarding your treatment at GDA.

If you prefer not to discuss your concerns with your advocate or you can speak to the Executive Officer of Gippsland Disability Advocacy about the complaint or what you are not happy about and together try to resolve the complaint.

**Telephone:** (03) 5175 0444



#### Or write to:

The Executive Officer  
Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc.  
PO Box 9251 Traralgon Vic 3844



#### Step 2:

If you do not want to discuss the complaint with the Executive Officer, or if you believe the problem can not be fixed by the Executive Officer, you should ask for the complaint to be referred to the Board of Management. GDA will then try to fix the problem by offering you a meeting with senior

members of the GDA Board of Management, as soon as possible after receiving your letter.

The GDA Board of Management will decide if any member of GDA, who is part of the complaint should attend the meeting. The following people will be invited to attend the conciliation meeting:

- Yourself and/or an advocate or representative of your choice.
- Senior members of the GDA Board of Management.
- The Executive Officer and/or any member of GDA involved in the complaint.

### **Step 3:**

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, you will be advised of your right to seek further help to fix your complaint.

A conciliation meeting with an independent conciliator will be arranged. At the conciliation meeting, information about the problem will be asked from both sides. Everything at this meeting will be confidential.

Minutes of all meetings will be taken.

Everyone at the meeting will be given a copy of the minutes. These will verify what happened at the meeting including actions to be taken, if any, and when these actions will happen.

If the matter is still unresolved GDA will provide contact details for:

- Gippsland Community Legal Service  
**Phone: 1800 004 402 (freecall)**
- Department of Justice - Mediation services and dispute resolution  
**Phone: 51 16 5700**
- Complaint Resolution and Referral Service  
**Phone: 1800 880 052**
- Office of the Public Advocate  
**Phone: 1800 136 829**

## How is GDA Managed?

GDA is governed by a voluntary Board of Management. The Board meets on a regular basis to monitor how the service is working. The Board is responsible for ensuring that GDA adopts quality management systems and practices to provide excellent service for people with a disability. The Board delegates responsibility to the Executive Officer to manage the day-to-day activities of the advocacy service.

## Staff Recruitment, Employment and Training

Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc GDA encourages people with a disability who are appropriately skilled and qualified, to apply for positions when they are available.

We will provide reasonable support for a staff member with a disability by supplying any aids or equipment that can help them to do their job. We will always provide training opportunities to help our staff do a good job for our clients.



## GDA Membership

GDA is a community based Incorporated Association with full charity gift recipient status and is funded by the Department of Social Services and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

As a truly community-based organisation, becoming a member of Gippsland Disability Advocacy is open to all people of the community who wish to show support for the aims, vision, and philosophy of Gippsland Disability Advocacy.