

## **There are votes in this! Persuading politicians** **by Tony Tregale**

We set up a small support and lobby group, Lifestyle in Supported Accommodation Inc. (LISA) to overcome some of the barriers faced by those born with an intellectual or multiple disability and their families. When these families are no longer able to provide 24 hour, 7 days a week care they seek support. There are many forms of support, but not much of it! And support is not an entitlement, it is a hand-out in this country!

Supported accommodation group homes are LISA's focus. We are concerned with the quality of life care residents receive, especially in the group homes where the Department of Human Services is the direct service provider.

The Department of Human Services produces a very extensive and comprehensive range of very good care policies, standards and values on how care should be provided in their group homes. The major problem is the implementation of these care policies, standards and values at the service points - the group homes. Direct care staff are public servants with a captive market - residents and their families have no choice of service provider.

The Government direct service system seems to make every aspect of service provision as difficult as possible for families, so our group empowers families to better understand the complex system, so they are better equipped to question the level and quality of care their family member is receiving.

We also lobby the Department of Human Services and allied areas to be more accountable and transparent. We do this by studying and understanding all their care policies, standards and values, and using these to actively question the level and quality of their services.

We use all areas of government to challenge the questionable activities of the Department of Human Services. We use Freedom of Information (FOI), the Ombudsman, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), the Office of the Public Advocate, the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Health Services Commission and Government Ministers.

We use precedents and local and overseas research and opinion to reinforce our aims and opinions through as many communications avenues as is possible, or that we can afford.

We say, If you consider you have a right to a service, demand it! Don't beg and crawl! Know your enemy! Have access to, and understand their policies, so you can question them on what they should be doing. Stand in their shoes. Don't be fobbed off. Keep on keeping on from as many angles as possible, in the 48 hour day you will need to do all this.