

Official Community Visitors  
Annual Report 2006–2007



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Official Community Visitors

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The NSW Ombudsman assumed responsibility for the oversight and co-ordination of the scheme for the first full year in 2003–04. Previously the former Community Services Commission was responsible for the oversight and co-ordination of the scheme. Official Community Visitor data for 2003–04 to 2006–07 is available.

Where examples are used in this report, names have been omitted to protect people's privacy.

For more information or a copy of the Ombudsman's Annual Report 2006–07, contact the Team Leader, Official Community Visitor Team, on 02 9286 1000, toll free on 1800 451 524, or download the report from the Ombudsman's website [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au)

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Minister  
Kristina Keneally MP



Minister  
Kevin Greene MP



# Letter to the Ministers



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December 2007

The Hon Kristina Keneally MP  
Minister for Disability Services  
Minister for Ageing  
Level 56 GMT  
1 Farrar Place  
Sydney NSW 2000

The Hon Kevin Greene MP  
Minister for Community Services  
Level 56 GMT  
1 Farrar Place  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ministers

I am pleased to submit to you the twelfth Annual Report for the Official Community Visitor scheme for the 12 months to 30 June 2007, as required under section 10 of the *Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993*.

I draw your attention to the requirement in the legislation that you lay this report, or cause it to be laid, before both Houses of Parliament as soon as practicable after you receive it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'B. A. Barbour'.

Bruce Barbour  
**Ombudsman**



# Message from the Minister

It is a tremendous honour and privilege to be appointed as the Minister for Ageing and the Minister for Disability Services.

This year has been a busy and exciting time and I plan to ensure disability services and ageing remain a focus for the Government.

It was a great pleasure to meet many of the Official Community Visitors at the annual conference held in May and I thank you for the warm reception I received.

I acknowledge the major role that Community Visitors continue to play in the lives of people with a disability — conducting over 3,000 visits this year, reaching over 6,500 people in care.

The work of Community Visitors is greatly appreciated and contributed enormously to the ongoing well being and quality of life of people with a disability.

This annual report outlines the significant work Community Visitors carried out in the last twelve months.

I would like to thank all Community Visitors for the hard work and dedication during the year.

I am very excited about the challenges that lie ahead and look forward to working with Community Visitors to ensure services and supports continue to improve for people with a disability in care.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kristina Keneally'.

**Kristina Keneally**  
Minister for Disability Services  
Minister for Ageing



# Message from Official Community Visitors

By Megan Jones, Official Community Visitor

As I near the end of my three years as an Official Community Visitor, visiting people with a disability in their homes, I am aware that a key aspect of the provision of residential care is that it involves people working with people. As such, the situation in any one home, or in any section of a large residential centre, is dependent on the values and commitment of the people who work there and the people who manage them. Because of this, the living experience for people in care can change from time to time.

This is where the Official Community Visitor's role provides a valuable contribution. We visit people on a regular basis and are able to see what is happening for them over a period of time. We are independent, and able to talk to anyone who wants to talk to us; the residents, their family members, or staff. We also look at service documentation to gain an idea of the quality of care people are receiving and ask a lot of questions to try to ascertain how things are generally for the people who live in that place. Where we feel that the service standards are not being met, or if a resident asks us to raise an issue on their behalf, we request the management of the service to look into the situation.

Visitors need to consider what is reasonable to request for change and improvement. Where this is the case (as I know from my own experience), services will try to make positive changes for the residents. Service managers have sometimes told me that they

see us as their eyes and ears, a type of quality improvement tool on behalf of people with a disability.

I have had great pleasure visiting homes where residents have a good life and where there is very little for me to do. It also gives me satisfaction to visit homes after an issue was raised and see that it was resolved, and that the situation improved for the people who lived there. Similarly, there have been places and people I have visited where I saw a steady improvement in their care and lifestyle over time.

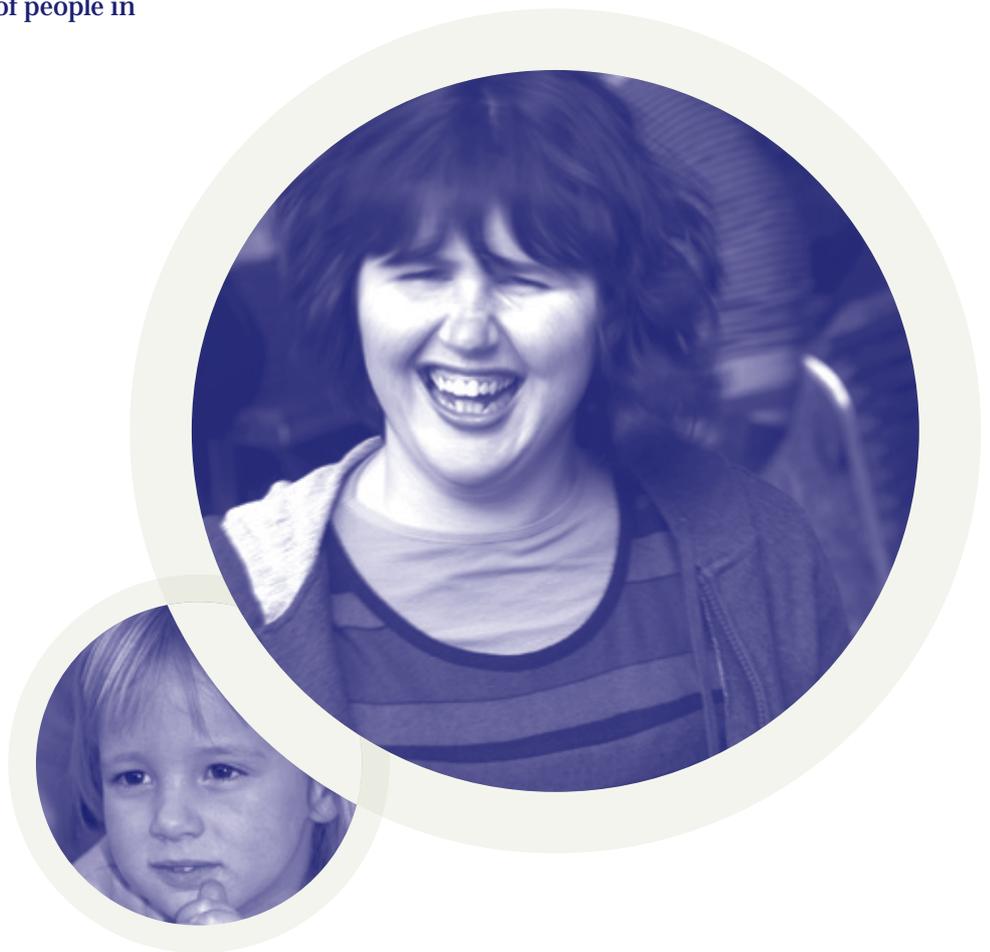
Significant issues that will continue to be raised in services include those of compatibility between residents, access to work or day programmes for all residents, and the emerging need for services to support people who are ageing and spend more time at home. In some cases, unless additional funding is available people will have less opportunities to age in place, requiring them to be located in other accommodation settings. Of course there are those perennial issues of: staff numbers, consistency, attitude and turnover; changes in management and policies of the organisation responsible for the residential service; insufficient numbers of readily accessible specialist behavioural/psychological and therapy support staff and psychiatrists experienced in working with people with an intellectual disability; the need for expensive specialist equipment; and appropriate maintenance of the home environment. Health issues, such as the need

for routine follow-ups with specialists, and the relative lack of specialist dental care and long waiting times, are a concern for some residents.

While many of these issues require additional funding to resolve, those relating to the quality of care do not. Some staff are remarkable for the individualised attention they provide to each person, while others adopt a more laid back approach. This aspect of service provision directly affects the quality of life of people in

residential services. It is important that staff care about their clients as fellow citizens, affording them the respect they themselves would wish for, and providing for them the support they themselves would hope for.

As Official Community Visitors we can commend staff who are doing a good job, and raise issues to improve the quality of care provided in other cases.





# Message from the Ombudsman

The Official Community Visitor scheme in NSW focuses on ensuring that some of the most vulnerable members of our community receive the best possible service. Visitors monitor the support provided to those living in accommodation that is operated, funded or licensed by the Department of Community Services and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

There are over 1,200 visitable services in NSW, which in turn accommodate over 6,500 children, young people and people with a disability. Visitors meet and talk with residents, staff and involved community members, striving to achieve swift and satisfactory resolutions to problems.

As Megan Jones commented in her message, Visitors have the ability to act as the “eyes and ears” of service managers. They are able to identify issues and work with staff and residents to achieve positive outcomes. Megan’s comments demonstrate the commitment and passion that all Visitors bring to their work.

It is important to recognise the contribution of staff and service providers of the various services. Without their cooperation, the Visitor scheme would not operate as effectively as it does.

I would like to thank the current Visitors, as well those who have left the scheme during the year, for their hard work and dedication. They can justifiably be proud of the difference they make. I would also like to thank the members of staff who have continued to provide invaluable support to the Visitors. Their combined efforts have ensured the rights of those living in residential care are better respected and protected.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "B. Barbour". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Bruce Barbour**  
Ombudsman

# Year in Summary

## Visitable services

Official Community Visitors visit accommodation services for children and young people, and people with a disability that are operated, funded or licensed by the Department of Community Services (DoCS) or the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), where the residents are in full-time care. At 20 June 2007, there were 1,230 visitable services in NSW accommodating 6,582 children, young people and people with a disability.

## Visits conducted

During the year ending 30 June 2007, Visitors made 3,164 visits to these services.

### Services to children and young people

There are 107 out-of-home care services that are visitable, accommodating 213 children and young people. During the year, Visitors made 370 visits to these services.

### Services to children and young people with a disability

There are 59 services that are visitable, accommodating 204 children and young people with a disability. During the year, Visitors made 196 visits to these services.

### Services to adults with a disability

There are 1,014 visitable disability services, accommodating 5,373 adults with a disability. During the year, Visitors made 2,201 visits to these services.

### Services to residents in licensed boarding houses

DADHC reports that there were 50 licensed boarding houses operating during the year, accommodating 792 adults with a disability. During the year, Visitors made 397 visits to these services.

## Key issues about service provision

Visitors identified 2,898 concerns about service provision to residents in visitable services during the year. Of these, Visitors reported that 1,222 (42%) were resolved by the services. Visitors report to the Ombudsman about the issues they raise with services across a number of areas. The main areas of concern raised about service provision in visitable services were:

- Development and implementation of individual plans — 463 issues (16%)
- Quality of the living environment — 325 issues (11%)
- Behaviour management — 250 issues (9%)
- Nutrition, health and hygiene — 246 issues (8%)
- Resident safety — 201 issues (7%)
- Entry into and exit from services — 195 issues (7%)
- Privacy and respect — 189 issues (7%)

Other frequently raised issues included access to community activities; education and occupation; service management; medication and consent (including documentation, record keeping and treatment consent); and incident management.

# Our Role

## Objectives and legislative framework

The Official Community Visitor scheme was established in 1995 by the *Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993* (CS-CRAMA) and Regulation. The Minister for Disability Services and the Minister for Community Services appoint Official Community Visitors on the recommendation of the Ombudsman for up to six years. The NSW Ombudsman administers and coordinates the scheme.

Visitors are independent of the Ombudsman, and must not be employees of the Department of Community Services or the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. They are skilled communicators and problem solvers and have knowledge of, and experience in, the community services sector.

Visitors monitor the quality and conduct of services, and work with the Ombudsman to resolve problems on behalf of residents. One of their key functions is to promote the legal and human rights of people in care.

The Visitors' functions are to:

- inform the Minister/s and the Ombudsman about the quality of accommodation services
- promote the legal and human rights of residents
- act on issues raised by residents
- provide information to residents and services
- help resolve complaints
- report to the Minister.



The Ombudsman's functions in relation to the scheme are to:

- recommend eligible people to the Minister for appointment as a Visitor
- determine priorities for the services provided by Visitors
- investigate matters arising from Visitors' reports.

The 2006/2007 year began with 31 Visitors. Four completed their six years of appointment. Five resigned prior to the end of their appointment for personal reasons. Three new Visitors were appointed and were inducted in January 2007.

## Visitable services

A *visitable service* under CS-CRAMA is an accommodation service operated, funded, or licensed by either the Department of Community Services or the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, where the residents are in full-time care.

## Powers and obligations of Official Community Visitors

Official Community Visitors have the authority to:

- enter and inspect a service at any reasonable time



- talk in private with any resident or person employed at the service
- inspect any document that relates to the operation of the service
- report on matters relating to the conduct of a service to the service, the Ombudsman or the Minister for Community Services or the Minister for Disability Services.

Visitors respect residents' right to privacy when they are visiting. Where possible Visitors seek residents' views before inspecting relevant documents, and only disclose confidential information when there is a good reason to do so.

## The Role of the NSW Ombudsman and the Official Community Visitor Team

The Ombudsman provides support to Visitors through an Official Community Visitor (OCV) Team within the Community Services Division. The Team has responsibilities for:

- the day-to-day operation and administration of the scheme
- supporting Visitors to respond to concerns about people living in visible services
- assisting Visitors in the local resolution of issues of concern identified in visible services
- providing professional development and support for Visitors
- coordinating the responses of Visitors and the Ombudsman to individual and systemic concerns affecting residents of visible services

- working with the Ombudsman complaints staff to identify and act on issues of concern requiring further action by the Ombudsman
- working strategically with Visitors and other Ombudsman teams to promote the scheme as a mechanism for protecting the human rights of people in care.

Allocation and prioritisation of visits is coordinated to meet the needs of residents and reflect their circumstances, and to ensure that information and resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. The Ombudsman uses reports from Visitors to monitor visible services and to address individual and systemic issues for people living in full-time care.

## Recruitment of new Visitors

With the early exit and retirement of some Visitors during the year, the OCV Team began a recruitment process towards the end of the year. This is a major project running for approximately six months with completion expected at the end of the 2007 calendar year.

This year the Team refined and further developed the induction process for new Visitors. The scheme is using the expertise and experience of existing and retired Visitors. The focus has been to develop guidelines for



best practice written by outgoing experienced Visitors. These guidelines will serve as a tool for retaining the knowledge of Visitors leaving the scheme, and to enhance the practice of current Visitors.

### Training and development

During the year, the OCV Team undertook to identify the practice and skills training needs of Visitors. A programme of training and sector briefings provided opportunities for Visitors to update their knowledge of broad sector initiatives, identify systemic concerns and develop their own skills and practice in visits.

Areas of focus during the year included:

- training and information on complaint processes and complaint education
- guardianship
- disability standards in practice
- boarding house licensing arrangement and residents' rights.