

Regional Focus

Northern region

Official Community Visitor message

By Bernadette Chance, Official Community Visitor

The Northern Region Official Community Visitors cover both coastal and rural areas of NSW: from the



Central Coast, through Newcastle and the Hunter region, to the New England region and northern NSW, as well as the mid north coast and far north coast up to Tweed Heads. Such broad coverage encompasses a number of different areas with varied social, political and economic factors. Northern Region's Visitors cover a number of modes of service delivery.

Owing to the broad geographical area covered by our region, some of us travel great distances to services we visit, while others work closer to home. For some, a day's work might encompass travelling a considerable distance to visit a group of three young people in a country town. Others might be visiting large residential units caring for up to 30 residents living in congregate care.

The Visitors who travel long distances to rural and remote parts of the region regularly encounter residents and service providers who are often faced with unique challenges on a daily basis, which those in city regions may not encounter. While it is true that accessing health and support services for people with disabilities and young people in care in the city can be difficult, residents and services in the remote parts of our region face additional pressures, such as travelling great distances to the nearest hospital and other allied health facilities.

Services for the people in visitable services in the remote areas of our region are fraught with



other complications, such as limited access to appropriate residential services, shortages of suitably skilled staff and limited support options. Some Visitors visit residents and services who are dealing with complexities of ongoing organisational reconfiguration, the ongoing dynamics of devolution of large residential centres and issues of resident compatibility. Difficulties are also encountered due to the fact that while our region's Visitors often work with the same organisations, the practices and modes of governance in different areas across the region can often affect staff information sharing and support.

All in all, the issues faced by the people we visit are never simple regardless of where they reside.

For the northern region's Visitors the tyranny of distance between colleagues brings its own challenges. We have three regional meetings each year where we give each other much appreciated collegial support, network, and ascertain the breadth of systemic issues and trends across our region. This without doubt proves to be an invaluable touchstone for us all.

Figure 9: OCV Identified Issues — Northern Region

Target Group of Services	Total number of visitable services	Number of issues identified	Key Issues
Children and young people	31	25	Medication and Consents Environment and Facilities Nutrition, Health and Hygiene
Children and young people with a disability	13	46	Meeting Individual Needs Privacy and Respect Community Activities
Adults with a disability	247	599	Meeting Individual Needs Environment and Facilities Education and Occupation
Total	291	670	

OCV Profiles



Joan Andrews

- degrees in social work, community and business management, workplace training and assessment
- visits people with a disability in the New England area
- extensive experience in disability, health and ageing services
- awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).



Wendie Bradley

- visits children and young people, people with a disability, and people in boarding houses, in the Hunter and Central Coast regions
- experience in senior roles with Home Care
- trained in human resource management, mediation, public relations and conflict resolution.



Bernadette Chance

- visits children and young people, and people with a disability in the Mid North Coast and New England regions
- experience with CALD and ATSI communities, working with people with disabilities, mental health, research and university tutoring
- degrees and training in communication, English literature and visual arts.



Sandy Muir

- visits children and adults with a disability in the Hunter and Central Coast regions
- experience working with homeless people, in disability services, and community development
- degrees in fine arts and social science.



Grant Nickel

- visits children and young people, and people with a disability in the Hunter and Central Coast regions
- experience in university lecturing on disability, nutrition, and student advocacy
- degree in health sciences.



Francesca Seychell

- visits children and young people, and people with a disability in the Far North Coast region
- experience in advocacy, counselling and education for families and people with a disability at local, national and international forums, and board member of Carers NSW
- degree in social science
- Francesca's term as a Visitor ended in November 2006.



Regional Focus

Southern region



Official Community Visitor message

By Meg Coulson, Official Community Visitor



The Southern region of the scheme covers a very diverse geographic area, from the Illawarra to Albury and out to Goulburn and the Southern Highlands. This provides a mix of locations from urban to rural and regional. The distance means that travel to services is a considerable challenge for some of our members.

Our region comprises myself, Helen Hewson, Denise Fraser, and Margaret Stevens. During the year Barbara Broad joined us working in the Southern Region bringing the number covering this large area to five Visitors.

It has been good to see the upgrading of some of the DADHC group homes in the region; in some cases this has included extensions to increase accommodation to provide for five or six residents and to establish this as the norm.

The reconfiguration of some group homes to focus on meeting the high behavioural needs of residents is another development which we are watching with interest. It is also worth noting that there are some homes that work very well with residents of diverse ages and remarkably different needs.

One of the other changes in services has been within boarding houses. There are not many boarding houses in our region and there have been some changes with one new boarding house and a number of changes in the others. The changes and disruptions have caused concerns for residents and we will continue to follow up on these in the coming year.

Figure 10: OCV Identified Issues — Southern region

Target Group of Services	Total no. of visitable services	No. of issues identified	Key Issues
Children and young people	11	17	Safety Entry and Exit Liaison with other agencies
Children and young people with a disability	5	10	Safety Behaviour Management /Family and Friends / Entry and Exit
Adults with a disability	104	95	Meeting Individual Needs Environment and Facilities Management Responsibility
Total	120	122	

OCV Profiles



Meg Coulson

- visits children and young people, and people with a disability in the Illawarra and the South Coast regions
- experience in women's probation services, research and lecturing in sociology, promoting equal opportunities for people from CALD communities, community development, domestic violence, and indigenous issues.



Denise Fraser

- visits children and young people, people with a disability and people in boarding houses in the Southern Highlands and South West Sydney
- experience in health and disability services, criminal justice, and psychiatric services
- degrees and training in teaching, social work, management and criminology.



Margaret Stevens

- visits people with a disability in the Riverina/ Murray region
- experience in the management of children's services and skills training, tutoring at TAFE on disability, and community development training in welfare.

Barbara Broad



- visits people with a disability in the Goulburn/Queanbeyan and South Coast regions
- qualifications and experience in Nursing, degrees in Applied Science, a Master of Education, a Graduate Certificate in Health Economics, and Graduate Certificate in Management
- experience working for ACT Health, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

Helen Hewson



- visits adults with a disability in south-west Sydney and the southern highlands
- Bachelor of Social Science, CSU, (Sociology, psychology and criminal justice)
- experience in OOHC and in disability as a support worker, manager and rehabilitation consultant.

Regional Focus

Western region

Official Community Visitor message

By Lina Moffitt, Official Community Visitor



Visitors in the Western region cover a vast area that stretches from the Blue Mountains to Forbes, Dubbo and Coonamble. It is a region which presents considerable challenges for Visitors. While we may visit one residence in one town, our next visit could be several hours drive away. This can mean time away from home and family to meet our commitment to residents and services.

The services available range from boarding houses, DADHC and non-government group homes, and a large residential facility. There are few out-of-home care placements in this region.

At the start of this year we had seven members of the regional group. Three Visitors, Wendy Watson, Lyn Porter and Phyllis Setchell, all finished their second term. Between them we lost 18 years of experience from the scheme. With the loss of two others, our challenge has been to cover such a large region with the support of colleagues from other regional groups. We are working with the Ombudsman's office with the recruitment process to ensure the needs of residents to receive visits, is being met.

It is heartening that the majority of services provide a good service for clients and offer opportunities for inclusion in the community. The majority of disability service managers have been quick to respond to issues raised by Visitors, with residents consequently enjoying better quality of life through increased choices, safety, independence, and financial autonomy.



Families often contact Visitors to raise issues of concern. This is often because their family members live considerable distances away and we can provide independent feedback on the care they receive.

There are other issues that cause problems for residents. There are limited alternatives for placement in residential services. With few options in rural areas, residents who do move face considerable difficulties in maintaining their networks of support. This places challenges on services to assist residents to settle when moves are made.

OCV Profiles



Lina Moffitt

- visits adults with a disability in the Central West area
- experience in disability. Certificate in Disability Studies.



Errol McCann

- visits adults with a disability in the Central West area
 - experience in disability and education services.
- Also appointed as an Official Visitor to mental health services
- former School Principal
 - Errol resigned as a Visitor in December 2006.

Figure 11: OCV Identified Issues — Western region

Target Group of Services	Total number of visitable services	Number of issues identified	Key Issues
Children and young people	6	27	Nutrition, Health and Hygiene / Meeting Individual Needs Entry and Exit
Children and young people with a disability	4	2	Liaison with other agencies / Meeting Individual Needs
Adults with a disability	114	391	Meeting Individual Needs Nutrition, Health and Hygiene Safety
Total	124	420	



Lyn Porter

- visits children and young people, and people with a disability in the Blue Mountains and Sydney
- experience in child protection and domestic violence
- Lyn's term as a Visitor ended in May 2007.



Tim Sullivan

- visits adults with a disability and people in boarding houses in the Blue Mountains and Central West area
- experience in disability, health and mental health services
- training in psychiatric nursing
- awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).



Phyllis Setchell

- visits people with a disability in the Orana and Central West regions
- experience in early childhood, adult literacy, employment training, family support, disability and community development
- Phyllis' term as a Visitor ended in May 2007.



Wendy Watson

- visits children and young people, and people in boarding houses in the Blue Mountains and Sydney
- experience in the education and welfare of children and young people
- degrees in history, philosophy, politics and special education
- Wendy's term as a Visitor ended in May 2007.

Financial

The Official Community Visitor scheme forms part of the Ombudsman's Crown Transactions Entity. Visitors are paid on a fee-for-service basis and are not employed under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002*. However, for budgeting purposes these costs are included in Employee Related Expenses (see Visitor Related Expenses below).

Costs that are not included here are items incurred by the Ombudsman in coordinating

the scheme, including Ombudsman staff salaries, and administration costs such as payroll processing, employee assistance program fees, and workers' compensation insurance fees. Full financial details are included in the audited financial statements in the Ombudsman Annual Report 2006-07. Copies of this report are available from the Ombudsman on (02) 9286 1000, toll free on 1800 451 524 or on the website at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.

Figure 12. Visitor related expenses 2006-07

Payroll expenses	2005-06	2006-07
Visitor's remuneration	390,638	419,413
Superannuation	37,995	38,889
Payroll tax	23,368	24,979
Payroll tax liability	2,280	2,311
Subtotal	454,281	485,592
Other operating expenses		
Advertising — recruitment	8,659	16,660
Advertising — other	-	6,948
Fees — staff development	3,204	946
Fees — conferences and meetings	20,899	15,336
Fees — contractors	-	30,049
Minor expenses	148	0
Printing	24,657	14,283
Stores	1,693	0
Travel — petrol allowance	106,562	139,101
Travel — subsistence ¹	39,529	51,313
Travel — other ²	39,171	30,686
Subtotal	244,522	305,323
Total	698,803	790,915

¹ Meal allowances are included in 'Travel — subsistence'

² 'Travel — other' includes Visitors' costs, such as air, bus, train and taxi fares, postage, stationery and telephone bills

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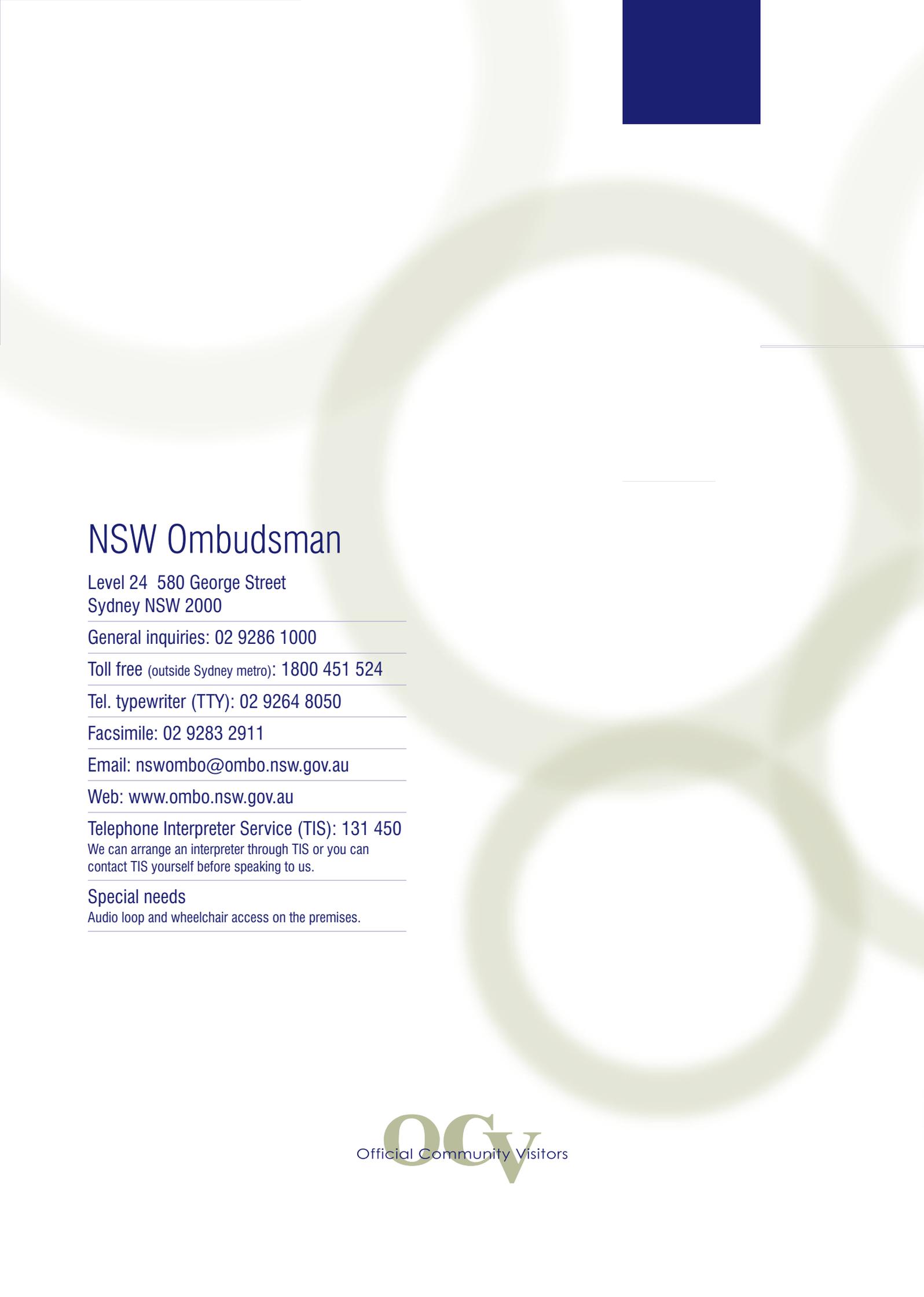
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OCV
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We can arrange an interpreter through TIS or you can contact TIS yourself before speaking to us.

Special needs

Audio loop and wheelchair access on the premises.
