



Advocates Discuss: harassment and abuse in public spaces

From June to October 2022, Disability Advocacy Network Australia ran the "Advocates Discuss" series of fortnightly hour-long discussions via Microsoft Teams - creating an opportunity for interested advocates to take a closer look at and speak about a number of key topics emerging in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission or DRC) and its examination of abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect. Participants were encouraged to share their insights, observations, stories and case studies, and the discussion questions each week included opportunities to share perspectives on what recommendations advocates would like to see being made by the DRC, in relation to the topic in focus.

Identifying details have been removed from the edited transcript below. Participants in each session are identified as advocates from their state or territory, and are also numbered, where multiple advocates from that jurisdiction took part. Participants were informed that sessions would be recorded to capture their insights and observations. Care has been taken but errors may exist in the transcription.

DANA would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the various lands around Australia from which advocates participated in these virtual meetings and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past, present, and emerging.

DANA would also like to acknowledge the time and generosity of participating advocates from a diverse range of advocacy organisations around Australia, and the funding of the Australian Government Department of Social Services for DANA to provide DRC systemic advocacy support. Visit www.dss.gov.au for more information.

Contents

Transcript from discussion – 16 August 2022	2
Comments In Chat.....	18



Transcript from discussion – 16 August 2022

Mary Mallett:

Welcome, everyone, and I will start the meeting. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands that we all meet on today. I'm in Canberra today, so I'm on the land of the Ngunnawal people and I offer our respect to their Elders past and present and acknowledge any Aboriginal people who are with us today.

[...] So what we're talking about today, and I think Siobhan explained it in the email that went out, it is in the lead-up to the hearing that the Commission are doing, which we don't actually know very much about. Siobhan dive in if you know more than I do.

It is a hearing about really what happens to people with disability in public spaces about, obviously, from the Commission's perspective, it's about abuse primarily, but that happens to people in public arenas... So we just wanted to ask advocates from your perspective in the work you've done as advocates over the years, what you have seen about this, the kind of things that happened to the people that you advocate for, have things improved? Have they got worse? Where is it sitting at the moment? There is - as part of the new National Disability Strategy - a piece of work connected to that about some research that is going to be happening about community attitudes which, of course, plays into this whole area.

Anybody who wants to dive in and start, I think we will have a free-flowing discussion about this and you can take it where you will, whatever direction, things that you have grappled with and seen that the people you're advocating for have to deal with over the years.

In the chat... [TAS Advocate 1] understands that the Office of the Solicitor Assisting (OSA) wanted to focus on people with disability's lives [which] are limited by choosing not to go out and access certain spaces in order to avoid experiencing harassment and abuse. Is that something that you see –do you know people who limit where they go and what they do because they're worried about how people will respond to them?

[SA Advocate 1]:

Hello, everyone. It's [SA Advocate 1]. When I think about the people that we advocate for, I'm not sure that people are not going out because they're worrying about harassment and abuse, but in fact that people have had very limited lives and very impoverished lives in regards to social engagement and just belonging and being embedded in their community, and so I'm thinking of a couple of people in particular who don't feel comfortable in public spaces or at public events because they've got no



experience of that, that the experiences that they have had have been about being in segregated and congregated places or being physically in public places but with a support worker alongside and no facilitating of a relationship building or engaging with people who might also be in that space. Does that make sense to people? That's kind of what I think that we see for a lot of the people that we advocate for.

Mary Mallett:

That's interesting. To some extent they're limiting their own spaces because of where they feel they're welcomed, maybe or belong?

[SA Advocate 1]:

I think so.

Mary Mallett:

Or are familiar with.

[SA Advocate 1]:

Yeah. I think you can't do what you don't know and certainly those people have experienced a lot of abuse and rejection and isolation and so going to new places is probably one of the big things as well because there's that sense of "I don't know what's going to happen to me when I go there". So I hope that makes some sense to people.

Mary Mallett:

Yes. Anybody else want to give us what you've seen in your organisation or with people that you work with. Yes, thanks, [VIC Advocate 1].

VIC Advocate 1:

I was just going to say I think one of the problems that we've got is you go into these lovely big shopping centres and you go into the shop, they're junked up with whatever, clothes and bits and pieces, and people can't get in with wheelchairs. There's just no space. While you can get to the actual shopping centre, so many of the actual shops are just so confined with so much stuff in that people can't get in. I suppose even just on a personal note I suppose ... that I went out to a very flashy restaurant the other week with my family and my dad is in a buggy as well, he has one leg, and then there was another person that was wheelchair bound. They, obviously, hadn't rung to say that they needed that a little bit of extra room around the table to support that, so they were put, I don't know, far up the other end [of the] restaurant and then to get out, to me it - well, it just brought things down so low with every single person in the whole restaurant basically needing to move out of the restaurant so they can get out with their wheelchair. I suppose for us in some ways we were lucky we had rung and said



we needed a table that could support the buggy for my dad to drive in. The downfall to that is that we were stuck at the door with every door opening and closing with the breeze, but that's okay, but I think people are compromised and can't get into places. There's just no space.

Mary Mallett:

Yeah, thanks, [VIC Advocate 1]. You've reminded me of times when I've been trying to make a booking or see other people do it in a restaurant and there will be limited restaurants anyway where there even is room or where there's good access, and then where there's room and definitely some restaurants, I would say, actively discourage people coming in where there are guests in wheelchairs because they don't want to be bothered. Like you said, moving tables around and making other people get up or they put people in the worst spot, so, yes, that's an issue as well. Anyone else? [TAS Advocate 1] and then [VIC Advocate 2].

[TAS Advocate 1]:

We did a bit of work with OSA in the prep for this hearing. Our clients experiences of harassment and abuse in public spaces fell into two broad categories and the main one was transport-related, particularly as it pertains to people limiting going out to avoid harassment. A huge proportion of our clients avoid public transport because they've just had so many experiences of being harassed or abused either by other travellers or by the bus drivers. We've got examples of clients being told by bus drivers - a support worker or family member might be told to get "it" off the bus, referring to the person with disability, saying things like people come before wheelchairs, implying that the client is not a person. Bus drivers just straight-up refusing to let the person on the bus at all, or when they do, do that, you know, using the access ramp, putting it down suddenly, dangerously, you know, close to the client, risking collisions and injuries, which our clients report... that is they feel it's done wilfully because the bus driver feels like they shouldn't have to bother.

In terms of issues on the bus itself, clients reporting things like if the client has an invisible disability, a lot of travel with other passengers when it comes to use of the accessible seating, lots of issues with prams being prioritised over wheelchairs for space. People report shoving, grabbing, verbal abuse, and a lot of clients with invisible disability reported things like they started carrying a mobility aid, like a folded-up walking stick so they could have some sort of visible signifier that they had a disability and were entitled to use that seating. It wasn't foolproof, but it was quite a common strategy that people were using. Outside of public transport, we saw a lot of issues anywhere that I guess you'd have people waiting in congregations, so in doctors' offices, in queues in supermarkets, at public events, sporting events, and particularly



one of the major themes in there was women and female presenting people with visible disability, receiving a whole lot more harassment and abuse than others.

One client reported considering getting spiked handles on her manual wheelchair to stop people from pushing her, although ultimately she just removed her handles and stopped going out. Another one reported that she puts in headphones and plays music at full blast any time she has to go out in public just so she doesn't hear the people yelling at her or the comments. It means that she can't engage with anyone she does know when she runs into them in public because she has this mindset that out in public she is not safe, and for good reason.

Other bits and pieces along those lines, but yeah definitely transport and women with disability in public were the two major themes where we were finding our clients were reporting abuse.

Mary Mallett:

Thanks very much, [TAS Advocate 1]. [VIC Advocate 2]?

[VIC Advocate 2]:

Look, a lot of what [TAS Advocate 1] has just said echoes a bit of what I was going to talk about, particularly on trains as well. There's people with a disability, either physical disability or... ID [intellectual disability], have experienced abuse and harassment on trains, and feeling trapped, they feel like they don't get off until the train stops again, and if you get off, where are you? So lots of issues around that and also issues for a person close to me who has Parkinson's and is often thought of to be intoxicated because of her gait, and has been questioned going into an RSL club for dinner, if she was under the influence of alcohol and so those kind of things are very off-putting for people to have to attend and answer questions like that.

Mary Mallett:

Put your hand up or just dive in if you want to contribute. [TAS Advocate 1], what I was thinking when you were talking, what it reminds me of, a whole range of very similar things that I remember from when I was at [TAS advocacy organisation], but it's Metro Tasmania that we're talking about there, that's the transport company in Tassie, and it sounds like they haven't improved, and there certainly were people that I can think of who did make formal complaints and progress them and there was some resolution that the people ...were happy with, but the bus drivers were going to get more training, this is some time ago that I'm remembering that, but, of course, who knows whether that has continued, was it just done as a one-off, so I'm interested in knowing if you know people who have made complaints and pursued these issues and had any good outcomes?



[TAS Advocate 1]:

Absolutely. Our clients go to the anti-discrimination commission about public transport regularly. It's the same process every time. The transport provider comes to the table and sit down and say 'this is terrible, this is inconsistent with our standards and our values, we will train our staff' and nothing changes. So pretty rote procedure.

Mary Mallett:

Just the issue about the trains with you [VIC Advocate 1]; this in Sydney?

[VIC Advocate 1]:

No, Melbourne.

Mary Mallett:

But there are staff on the platforms, I can't remember what they're called ...they're not train police, but they're something that work on the trains.

[VIC Advocate 1]:

Yes.

Mary Mallett:

Are they of any assistance? Do they help and intervene?

[VIC Advocate]:

Yeah, if they're there at the time, but they're not always on every train or on every station, so yeah, they can step in. But often the people that I've heard from don't want to make a bigger fuss than has already been made and just want to leave the situation, which is very sad.

Mary Mallett:

One of the things that popped into my mind about... [TAS Advocate 1] when you were talking about people with invisible disabilities choosing to bring a walking stick or something that is an outward symbol to indicate to other people, so that they will be kind of accepted or something, but I was remembering there are various versions of these things. There was something to do with sunflower lanyards. I know there was a couple of years ago there was ...talk about it in some of the airports were going to bring them in and they have used them in the UK, they get used to some extent. What I can't remember, are they specifically meant to be an indicator of autism? Is anybody familiar with that sunflower scheme thing? I've seen debate on both sides, some saying it is good and others say 'why should people wear some sort of identifier?'



[TAS Advocate 1]:

Overtones of a scheme they tried to introduce an autism card to show to police which is absolutely not solving the problem.

Mary Mallett:

I think [Tas advocacy organisation], I can't remember what the thing is called, but I'm pretty sure they got maybe ILC funding or something else to do something like that. Thanks, Siobhan has put a link in the chat, but I think that's for people with acquired brain injury. Some people find these things useful and others don't want to have a bar of it. [TAS Advocate 1], was there another issue you wanted to come back to?

[TAS Advocate 1]:

There was another category of public abuse which was religious abuse, people coming up and saying that you are cursed or a punishment of God or a sinner, or forcibly praying for you, laying hands upon you. There was a pretty strong theme of that which picked up pretty significantly during the religious discrimination debate.

Mary Mallett:

[AUS Advocate 1].

[AUS Advocate 1]:

Yes, from [national advocacy organisation]. We have heard the same thing in our membership of people being prayed upon and manhandled, touched, whether being on their head or back. It's a wider issue, actually, with being physically manhandled for our community where someone is trying to way-find and someone else comes in and decides they're going to "assist", and often makes the situation more precarious for that person.

Mary Mallett:

[AUS Advocate 1], are they doing that whether the person, for instance, is using - has a dog or using a cane. Does that make a difference that people just tend to--

[AUS Advocate 1]:

No, it doesn't make a difference. What we have found is that even if someone does have a dog or a cane what quite often will happen, something I've experienced being a white cane helper, the person trying to pull the aid, direct with the aid, and the dog is often given instructions, like the dog is the person that has all the agency, but, yeah, we do find that even if the mobility aid is there and it's very obvious - I think sometimes making it more obvious that the person does have a disability because of the mobility aid makes people more inclined to actually walk up and manhandle and trying to assist that way.



Mary Mallett:

Generally, people are - it's because people are trying to be helpful but they tend not to just say - they don't ask "Can I help?", they just make an assumption and start dragging the person around.

[AUS Advocate 1]:

That's right. We've heard it particularly around way-finding with public transport, the airport is another major one and that even includes security personnel, et cetera, actually physically assisting without verbalising first they're about to do it. Yeah, so it can be a mixture of both. If the person is asked, that makes it a bit different and you can say, actually can I hold on to you. It is important that you can say let go, but not always does the person give that level of politeness to the person to ask first.

Mary Mallett:

Yes. Okay. Thanks. Anyone else has examples or categories that people experience?

[SA Advocate 1]:

I think one of the things that we see... people with intellectual disability being abused financially, so in the street and people coming and taking money from them or coercing money or property, so it might be cigarettes or money or that nice watch or your shoes, the jacket on your back, and that's a common experience, I think, particularly for people ...if out and about in the world quite a lot, very marginalised, but out in the world and equally I understand that on the bus is also being quite problematic for a couple of people who have been told to get off the bus because they're speaking too loud or the bus driver won't help somebody getting onto the bus who had quite a bit of shopping, she had a child and some shopping and they didn't help and left her sitting at the bus stop and drove off. A complaint was made. I don't know what the outcome of that was, but yeah.

Mary Mallett:

The financial abuse that years ago I went to visit the small advocacy organisation in [regional NSW town] and they had regular Self Advocacy group and one of the older gentleman with intellectual disability who had been going to that Self Advocacy group for years and years, and he was walking down the street one day on the way to the Self Advocacy group meeting and he was chatted to by three young teenage girls and they persuaded him to go to the ATM and get out all of his money, every cent that he had in the bank. Like you said, that's not that uncommon. What was interesting for me about it, he was attached to an advocacy organisation, he was part of a Self Advocacy group where they would have, and they did, talk about those kind of things to try and keep people safer and help them understand how to navigate these things,



but that didn't protect him. He still was completely vulnerable to whatever story. I don't know what story these teenagers gave him, but he just gave them all his money.

[SA Advocate 1]:

And there's a common response to that kind of financial abuse where services and people might go, "Oh, we need to protect that person from that kind of exploitation by making an application for administration orders", and, of course, all that does is it doesn't protect the person from exploitation, it just means that instead of being exploited for all of that money, you'll get exploited for whatever money you've got. One of the things that has happened with somebody that we know is that he now has a strategy where he carries his money in his wallet but he also carries a bit of change in his pocket because having - it's hard to say no to somebody who is wanting money from you for many reasons because fear of being assaulted, also about friendship. These are people who are exploitative who pretend that they're friends and so not wanting to lose the relationship and so the strategy has been carry a bit of loose change and if somebody says, "Have you got any money?", "Yes, this is what I've got", and that might mean they get \$5 instead of \$50 in your wallet and similarly with cigarettes. So only leaving the house with the number of cigarettes you need while you're out. It is complex but it is something of a protective measure - it is something that happens over and over and over again and it is very difficult for people to protect themselves from that because of all of the power imbalance that we all understand.

[Mary Mallett]:

So some people develop those strategies or are helped to develop strategies about, like you said, a small amount of money and eking out their cigarettes, so they don't lose their packet. Other people stay more to themselves or stay inside or avoid going out.

Siobhan has put something up in the chat about scammers. The scamming is interesting because a lot of the people that we're talking about in this, particularly for some people with intellectual disability, they don't necessarily have access to large amounts of money, but, of course, that doesn't mean that they can't be - whatever they have got is taken from them. Some other stuff ...about public transport systems.

A comment from [VIC Advocate 3] about women with disabilities experience more harassment compared to women without disabilities and men with disabilities. Thanks for that.

[TAS Advocate 2]:

I don't have a solution, but one of the things that occurs to me, and it's in some of the literature around the Disability Royal Commission and other places as well, is that



balance between the autonomy and rights of a person with disability and then the need to safeguard and protect from abuse, neglect, et cetera, and just that conversation resonated with me about... the solution [chosen] is often to impose the Public Trustee or the public guardian and the person actually loses control, so how - that safeguarding has to be so carefully thought through in a way that doesn't undermine a person's autonomy and control over their own life, and ...also respecting that people can make choices which are poor choices, like everybody can, and even though objectively you might say 'that is a poor choice' - a person without a disability is not going to have somebody intervene in that poor choice whereas someone with a disability may have a substitute decision maker imposed because they don't like the choices that they're making. I don't have an answer, but it seems that that taking decision making away is a way of 'best interests' on everything for somebody in a roundabout way in terms of protecting them.

Siobhan Clair:

Yeah. The other thing that has come through, just repeating what [TAS Advocate 2] and as [SA Advocate 1] said, restriction is not necessarily safeguarding.... like, it's often presented and obviously there are contexts in which there is, you know, maybe that balancing between autonomy and risk and the dignity of risk, but often it's... the way that that's presented is kind of a false dichotomy because often it's not the taking away of control that actually makes people with disability safer. Like, we know that in so many different scenarios, that it's not necessarily just getting the balance right. It really is often the more control and autonomy and education around rights and people having more understanding and more support to exercise their rights is actually the thing that is going to keep them safe.

[SA Advocate 1]:

People are kept safer if they are embedded in their local community, and I'm talking particularly about people with cognitive impairment, that if you are embedded in your community and you are well-known and you know people, these sorts of exploitative things and abusive things still happen but when you are embedded, you are more likely to have somebody step up and say, 'hey, what's going on?' And we have seen direct evidence of that, of people who have been embedded in their community and one person who was assaulted but the community stepped up, the local supermarket, the person next-door, because this person... marginalised person was known and it didn't stop the assault necessarily, but it may well have stopped other assaults... so that being embedded, and there's not enough attention paid to how are people in relationships with the people in their own community, and if we don't do something about that, these sorts of restrictions aren't safeguards, but being embedded and known in your community is a greater safeguard than putting in a Public Trustee or a substitute decision maker.



Mary Mallett:

What strikes me when you talk about that, about people being embedded in their local community, and their local community might have a big shopping centre where they live, but the kind of - you know, what you see, especially in the big shopping centres, you see an obvious person with disability with a support worker who has been - you know, this is their social support and they've been brought because it's convenient for the worker, really. Maybe the person themselves wants to go and shop there, but there's a lot of convenience for the worker because it's easy for them to park in the big park in the shopping centre and some of them will be doing their own shopping at the same time. There may not be any serious work being done if the person needs assistance... to assist them to go to the little local shops in their ...area, if that exists, but it does in lots of places. You know, the kind of place where the person could regularly pop in to buy their lotto ticket or the weekly things that a person becomes recognised and familiar and people can have a conversation about things, and I think the more workers that people are surrounded with, the more they're kind of almost kept to the big anonymous shopping centres.

Now, having the - we're talking about what we started talking about - people being abused, and experiencing abuse and other issues in public areas. Now, of course, if they're surrounded by support workers, they will be left alone. It forms that protective barrier around them but it also reduces the relationships that they have any opportunity to develop. Is this stuff counted? Does it get counted? Is it in - would it be counted in advocacy issues or is it just if there's something significant that happens, that the ordinary everyday level of this, people are unlikely to be coming forward to an advocate every time somebody says something horrible to them at the bus stop, so it's probably not - I don't know. Anybody got a view on this? To what extent does any of this get counted, really, in data about advocacy?

[SA Advocate 1]:

I think you're right. They may not necessarily be coming to advocates because of that kind of thing, because I guess there are lots of people that this happens every day, and so it wouldn't necessarily be something you'd go to an advocate about. You might go to the advocate about something happening with your housing, but I'm not sure.

Mary Mallett:

[VIC Advocate 1]?

[VIC Advocate 1]

I was going say the same. By the time they get to an advocacy [organisation], they go onto a waiting list and by the time they possibly get picked up for advocacy, the issue



has well and truly passed and they've probably had another ten incidents by that stage. So I would say most of these issues are going un-... are missed because [of] demand on advocacy agencies, you can't ring up and say this is what happened to me and an advocate will pick it up for you today.

Mary Mallett:

Yep, thanks [VIC Advocate 1], [AUS Advocate 1]?

[AUS Advocate 1]:

I think a lot of it also is very internally focused. People with disability talk to other people with disability about the experiences that they have, but a lot of it doesn't become external advocacy. I think unless it rises to the level of, for example, in our community we tend to find that unless it ends up in a Human Rights Commission case and then see a repeat of the same thing that caused the case to go to the Human Rights Commission because the organisational company knows that unless a case is run individually against it, that they can get away with it.

Especially things like taxi and ride-share service refusals for dog guides. We're starting to see an increase in that with COVID, with people travelling again back in hotels, of refusing Guide Dogs. We had one this morning. Unless there's individual cases run, it keeps happening. I don't know how you get it [to be] a bit more externally facing.

Mary Mallett:

[TAS Advocate 2] has put in the chat it's not necessarily being reported. [TAS Advocate 1] has put in the chat that support workers are not much of a barrier to that sort of verbal abuse, or exclusion, so that's interesting, that they don't provide very much protection in this area, just because they're with the person.

[TAS Advocate 1]:

I would say they would provide some protection to certain types of abuse, but they don't protect clients from abuse by bus drivers or people shouting things on the street. They certainly don't provide protection against that sort of religious harassment that we described because invariably the people doing that think they're doing a good thing that everyone will accept, but I will grant that they do protect clients to a degree from, I guess, that more physical direct abuse.

They do, in our clients' experience, having a support worker there actually sometimes leads to an increase in certain types of abuse and harassment where someone is talking to the support worker about the client, whereas if the support worker wasn't there, they wouldn't make those comments.



Mary Mallett:

...Do we have any solutions? We've given examples about [TAS Advocate 1]'s example about people going time and time again to the Anti-Discrimination commission locally in Hobart that would be, or in Tasmania, and the bus companies just do the same thing. The only kind of thing that government, if governments could be persuaded to think this stuff was important and do anything about it, I'm 100% sure their solution would be an ad campaign. It's the only solution that large government departments can ever think of that they could run out nationally, and I could kind of imagine something along the lines of the various - is it 'stopping it where it starts', the one that has been ongoing now for a while, which is more about preventing domestic violence, really, and it's stopping children, you know, behaving, little boys reacting badly to girls or something, but that's the thing I can imagine governments thinking would be a good idea, but would it make any difference? I mean, what's likely? What is it that is going to make a difference? Given that this doesn't seem to be shifting much, does it? This is continuing to be the everyday experience of people.

[SA Advocate 1]:

Do you think that - some of that campaign that does happen around domestic violence and that kind of ad campaigning thing about 'if your mate is doing this to his wife, you should stand up and say something', and I think that maybe some of that is working, that there are people who are going - I'm not sure how that would work, but perhaps it might make a difference, but I think part of the problem is that a bit like somebody said before ...said about, 'people before wheelchairs', - this idea that people with disability are not human, whereas I think that the campaign around domestic violence is that we get that men and women are human people and so we might recognise ourselves in them, but it's a worry that people don't - that it is common for people with disability to be seen other than human, sadly.

[VIC Advocate 1]:

I think for me ... bringing it right back to the very basics and I look at it when we go to the shopping centres, and we all see it, we know that a lot of people with disability are at the shopping centres with the coffee, but for me it's about the one-on-one worker or whoever is with them actually not engaging with them. It's them on their phones, totally switched off to anything that the actual person is there for. So for me - and I know that obviously, you can't bring in rules probably about not using phones, but to me it starts there. If that's what everyone is seeing at the shopping centres, if that's what everyone is seeing around, what hope have we got? People need to be - if those people are paid to be engaging with that person with disability and they're seeing that, obviously, they're not - you know, to me, the respect starts there.



Mary Mallett:

That's interesting [VIC Advocate 1] – that ... that would be subconsciously observed by the rest of the population who see that even the person who is being paid to work with this person feels like they don't have to talk to them, they're ignoring them.

[VIC Advocate 1]:

Correct. Attitudes aren't going to change if they don't see engagement, and meaningful engagement I mean. That's the key, I think...

Mary Mallett:

It's a thing that advocates often say and when they're talking about the work that advocates do, that a sort of positive role modelling that advocates provide when they're working with someone, when they're in a meeting and demonstrating to everybody else in the meeting that, obviously, yes, you can and should speak respectfully to this person and that sort of stuff is something that is part of what advocates do, but, yeah, Siobhan has said that that's neglect happening in a public place, and you could describe it as that. [AUS Advocate 2] has pointed out that she is on the [domestic violence advocacy organisation] advisory panel about the domestic violence campaign and there's limited evidence on how effective that has been.

Various other things also in the chat... [TAS Advocate 1] says clients have pointed out some other things - that the language of disability is burden, is one of the problems here and then full inclusion of people with disability in schools so that there's familiarity of the rest of the population, of being familiar with and comfortable with people with disability because they've been with them at school the whole time, and being taught formally what is and isn't acceptable to say to a person. Siobhan has put up a chat and [AUS Advocate 1] has put in something too.

This is a big broad topic and I've mentioned earlier under [Australia's] Disability Strategy that there's a recognition that community attitudes need to change and there's a piece of research happening, but I feel like some of it, at least, I'm in Canberra to go to Bill Shorten's employment forum thing that he is doing tomorrow, and I think the attitudes of employers is one of the - which is part of the spectrum of community attitudes, of course, but that's one of the things that people recognise is one of the reasons why there are a fewer people with disability employed than there should be. It doesn't mean employers are abusing people, but they're choosing not to interact at all and not employ them.

[VIC Advocate 2] has put a comment in about valued roles. Social Role Valorisation is not talked about now the way that it was at one period in time. It's kind of, you know,



come in and out of favour, or perhaps it's the language... maybe seems, I don't know, less current to people, but the messaging in there was very important and there is something about the workforce.

Yesterday I got a taxi to the airport in Hobart coming up to Canberra. A nice young guy, taxi driver, who was telling me he doesn't know how long he will drive taxis and says lots of his friends [who are new migrants] are going into disability support work because it pays much better than taxi driving. I said something like 'do they like the work' and he said, 'it doesn't matter if they don't like it', his premise was that ... it doesn't matter if they don't like it because it pays well and they need to start establishing their life here and being able to buy their houses. Anyway, it struck me that there's probably, I suspect, quite a large percentage of people coming into the disability support workforce now whose only reason for coming... this is because it's work that pays quite well if they're working for the right kind of agency and they pick the right shifts and whatever.

That may have always been the case, but I wonder if that's even more so now, and interestingly tomorrow at this employment thing, part is about employment for people with disability but also about the NDIS workforce and if you notice that just within the last week the government announced that they are lifting the numbers of people, numbers of migrants coming in to Australia for the next year, they've lifted the numbers, and some of it will be about the disability and aged care workforce to try and bring in more people to do these jobs. Anyway, that's one element to this and it wasn't what the main thing was about. [SA Advocate 2]?

[SA Advocate 2]:

I wanted to add something to that, where people are coming into the workforce who have no interest in being support workers. I was a support worker a few years ago and I found out that - I'm not sure if it's common knowledge - but people on visas are fast-tracked. There were people I was working with who were on visas and had no interest in the role, no interest in working with people with disability, but they did it just to get a visa and try to get a few years and that was it.

Mary Mallett:

Yeah, thanks. I wonder if they do it once they get their visa, their permanent residency, they immediately move out of the work or do some of them stay in. There's lots of good comments in the chat. Feel free if any want to speak to your issues as well as put them in the chat, you can put your hand up and drive in. We have a few more minutes. [AUS Advocate 1] is saying that attitudes and assumptions are the root cause of a whole lot of the systemic advocacy in employment especially. That's likely to be true. You sort of think - when you read about - I don't know, the history of disability



and especially when people, when you read stuff about the models and the charitable model and we've moved on to the human rights model, but what's interesting about that is there's only a small part of the population that has made that shift in thinking, and the rest of the population is still stuck somewhere with much older frames or mindsets, really. [AUS Advocate 1] is pointing out that the inspirational tropes through the media doesn't help either.

A comment from [SA Advocate 1] as well. We're in agreement that these attitudes are critically important, so - well ...how can they be shifted? It's interesting saying how the government spends a lot of money and energy early on in the whole COVID era to - and used behavioural economists and other people to work out how to help - and the combination of mandates and everything else, to get the population to wear masks and whatever, but that intervention, a lot of it is what worked, mandates and lockdowns and serious restrictions, and then as soon as they've shifted to things like strongly encouraging people to wear masks, almost nobody wears a mask. Governments have at times spent quite a lot of money on health messaging and it's not - if people are resistant to an idea and currently much of the population is resistant to the idea of wearing masks any more, then you can't shift them easily. [SA Advocate 1]?

[SA Advocate 1]:

I'm trying to think about, you know, we're talking about what happens to people when they're in public. One of the things that we would ... try to grapple with is that there are communities or areas, suburban areas, where there are a much greater population of people with disability than there might be in another one. So, for instance, group homes get - they tend to be located in similar areas, so I can think of this South Australia [local government area] is one of the places, so there are suburbs around cities and suburban areas where there's a greater [population rate of people with disability]. So the community that then lives there may be experiencing and some certainly do, like, 'oh my God, all of these people with disability, it's not representative of society as a whole.' You know, I don't know what the percentages are now of people with disability as a percentage of the overall population, but when you look into some of these areas, that is very skewed and so communities, some communities, will have less resilience, I think, around that, and if they've - whereas I think if people lived more like the rest of us in the sense of that people with disability as a part of the ordinary population then, you know - I think that ...that communities might be more open. I think there are some communities that are very closed because they feel like or they have some view that 'there's another person with a disability.'

Mary Mallett:

I think there is something in that about the concentration of people in some places, but the thought bubble that that led me to was, you know, anywhere where, where



disadvantage get concentrated, so Housing Commission areas where there are lots of people all piled into the same units and in smallish areas where almost everybody is unemployed and has lots of people with social issues, and there often is significant aggression and the department's job to solve and sort out these issues, and part of it is, of course, not having almost... like ghettos and it is true where disabled people should live, spread out in the community.

In the UK [United Kingdom] they brought in - so they named this up as hate crime some years ago. Has anybody kept up with how that's been involved at all or paid attention to how that's played out in the UK? It wasn't just about people with disability because it included people who were being abused publicly for any reason, which might have been to do with the colour of their skin or other features, but disability certainly as a characteristic was part of it, but I don't know whether it's making any difference and certainly they were in some places,... especially training police units that were set up to deal with these hate crimes, and it will be interesting to know whether that's made any difference in the UK, whether naming it up as - giving it a name, does that help or does it not help at all. I don't know, but I feel like we should look at it. Siobhan has put in a link to the report. That's a report on disability hate crime, or a short brochure, I think, actually.

All right. [TAS Advocate 1] is saying at least in Tasmania the police can't identify, they have no mechanism to identify these incidents. There was work I think in New South Wales that was being done, maybe the University of Western Sydney, and they had other stakeholders involved and they, I think, are doing something towards this, so maybe that's something that will make a little bit of difference.

We're running out of time, and thanks, everyone, for your input today. It will be interesting to see how the hearing is run and what kind of evidence is provided and also interesting to see what kind of - we should think about what kind of media... That's the one thing about the Royal Commission hearings, it does generate media attention on the issues, but it's difficult to know from the advocacy sector perspective how can we capitalise on the fact that the media might be interested around that time, because usually, you know, it's not people's sob stories that we want to be putting forward. Ideally, it's solutions. Thanks, Siobhan, who has put up a link to that UK approach. We have just gone around this issue, we haven't come to any major conclusions, but it is useful to think about and I agree with people who have said in the chat that, really, this sits under a whole lot of the reasons why some people with disability really have a whole lot of areas of their life that they struggle with, and prevailing attitudes of people sit underneath a lot of that. So thanks, everyone for your time today.

END OF SESSION



Comments In Chat

[SA Advocate 1]:
Restriction is not safeguarding

[TAS Advocate 1]:
It would be nice if the various guardianship & administration systems acknowledged this

[SA Advocate 1]:
lots of coffee in shopping malls watching life happening but not having a real life

[TAS Advocate 1]:
In our experience support workers aren't that much of a barrier to verbal abuse, or to exclusion by people with (localised) power, e.g. bus or tram drivers

[TAS Advocate 2]
I would think it would be very much unreported to advocates and more broadly.

[SA Advocate 1]:
if your common experience is being abused it can become something not recognizable by the person

[VIC Advocate 4]:
we need more people being active bystanders

[TAS Advocate 1]:
Our clients have talked about two major themes in prevention of abuse here-

1. Media and political discourse standards around language, away from the language of disability as "burden"
2. Full inclusion of PWD in schools, so people grow up with understanding and familiarity of difference and inclusion (and having been taught formally what is and is not acceptable to say to a person)

Siobhan:
In Victoria there's a new mechanism to at least notify/ report harassment on public transport: [Unwanted and anti-social behaviour on public transport](#)



[AUS Advocate 2]:

I'm on the [Domestic violence advocacy organisation] advisory panel re that DV ad campaign. At this stage the evidence is limited as to how effective the ad campaign has been.

[AUS Advocate 1]:

Perhaps if coercive control was more recognisable outside of professional circles for the general public? What is it? What does it look like? What is gaslighting and how does it look? We went through this with Victoria Police in the context of disability for their training to consider how to recognise a bit more about how it might look where there is someone with disability involved.

[AUS Advocate 2]:

The campaign is called "[Change the story]"...

Siobhan Clair:

And arguably that is neglect happening in a public place...

[VIC Advocate 4]:

Absolutely... Too many are not engaging with their clients.. And there are rules to not use their phones but are ignored. To many, its a just a job

[VIC Advocate 2]:

greater inclusion and opportunities for people with disability in valued roles in the community

[AUS Advocate 1]:

Especially in leadership and decision-making circles.

[TAS Advocate 2]

I think there are also people who would interact respectfully but may not have enough knowledge about how to do this so may interact inappropriately or chose not to engage at all. Also skills about how to intervene if witness something that's not right.

[VIC Advocate 3]:

Changing the Landscape (the report) offers a number of essential actions to prevent ableism. The report focusses on women but most recommendations apply to all PWD.



ADVOCATES DISCUSS



[SA Advocate 1]:

services predominantly operate from rosters rather than individual support needs....and hence we get support workers on phones because they have not been assisted to understand how to support the person well

[AUS Advocate 2]:

Yes [VIC Advocate 3] we fought hard to get ableism in there!

[TAS Advocate 1]:

A lot of people without close contact with PWD take their tone from the "discourse" in media. ABC and SBS have come forwards in leaps and bounds in the way they talk about disability, but if we could broaden those standards more, we might see a shift in what the general population understand as acceptable behaviour when they meet PWD in public

[VIC Advocate 4]:

They see it as an easy job, especially if they are just providing support for community access

[SA Advocate 1]:

a largely unskilled workforce.....cert 3/4 but no real understanding of individual needs

[VIC Advocate 1]:

which is why there needs to be minimum requirement on education to be employed in the role.

[SA Advocate 1]:

certification does not necessarily make a good support worker.....attitudes and values very important

[VIC Advocate 1]:

Agreed [SA Advocate 1]

Siobhan Clair:

There is this research report that DRC Commissioned published a little while ago - [Research report - Changing community attitudes to improve inclusion of people with disability](#)) Some good advocacy perspectives included

European report: [290021_1.pdf \(osce.org\)](#)



ADVOCATES DISCUSS



[TAS Advocate 1]:

In Tasmania at least, police systems have no capacity to identify any particular incidents as hate crimes, which absolutely contributes to lack of action

Siobhan Clair:

UK approach [Disability Hate Crime and other crimes against disabled people - prosecution guidance | The Crown Prosecution Service \(cps.gov.uk\)](#)

[AUS Advocate 1]:

Thank you!