

# **Southwest Advocacy Association**

## **Submission to Department of Health Review of Supported Residential Services**

**August 2008**

Attention: Manager, SRS Legislation Review

SWAA is an independent, not-for-profit, community organisation that has been funded by the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to provide advocacy and information to people of all ages & with all types of disabilities throughout south west Victoria since 1993. There are three registered SRS's in southwest Victoria - Themar Heights in Warrnambool, Victoria House in Koroit, and Seaview House in Portland - and SWAA has had experience advocating for people with disabilities residing at all three of these facilities.

While Southwest Advocacy Association ("SWAA") appreciates that the closing date for submission to the SRS Legislation Review has passed, SWAA would like to register its' interest in the Review and submit the following brief comments.

1. In our experience, people with disabilities comprise a majority of people living in SRS's and are among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the community. These residents are commonly deficient in communication and basic self advocacy skills and are often intimidated about raising issues because of fear of reprisals by SRS proprietors and staff, including loss of their accommodation.
2. SWAA's over-riding concern is that the existing legislation and regulations applicable to SRS's do not sufficiently protect the rights of people with disabilities. People with disabilities who live in SRS's should have the same or similar rights that people with disabilities have under the Disability Act 2006, including access to an independent complaints body with powers to investigate and resolve complaints against SRS providers.
3. SWAA also believes that many of the Standards applicable to SRS's are not currently upheld and need to be more effectively monitored and enforced.
4. The protections created for SRS residents through the Office of the Public Advocate Community Visitors Scheme are not adequate or effective. The Community Visitors Scheme has raised numerous concerns about SRS's in its' Annual Reports over the years without achieving significant change in the interests of SRS residents.
5. The current legislation and regulations do not adequately protect SRS residents from the possibility of financial exploitation, abuse and neglect and that there needs to be much higher levels of accountability placed upon proprietors and staff in relation to the management of residents' finances and the development, implementation and regular review of residents' care plans.

6. There should also be strict requirements introduced to ensure that adequate resident-staff ratios are maintained and that SRS staff have relevant qualifications to ensure that they are competent to provide the support and care that is required by residents with disabilities. Adequate resident-staff ratios, qualifications and ongoing training should be mandatory for SRS's.

We hope that these brief comments from our perspective as an independent advocacy organisation for people with disabilities prove useful to the Review.

We would appreciate it if you would keep us informed of developments that occur as part of the Review.

Yours faithfully,

**Robert Dick**  
**Co-ordinator / Advocate**