



Association for
Children with a
Disability

Association for Children with Disability

Snapshot: Achieving outcomes for Victorian children and families

April 2024

Background

Association for Children with Disability (ACD) is the leading advocacy service for children with disability and their families in Victoria. We are a not-for-profit organisation led by, and for, families of children with disability.

Our vision is an inclusive community where children with disability and their families thrive.

Each year, ACD supports 15,000 Victorian families raising children with disability through our Support Line, workshops, and information and resources. We empower families to advocate for their children with disability by supporting them to understand their child's rights and to speak up for their child.

Disability advocacy funding enables ACD to provide advocacy support to build the capacity of families to advocate for their children to enact their rights. This plays an essential safeguarding role.

As demand for disability advocacy increases, it's vital funding for advocacy organisations keeps pace so organisations like ACD can continue to support and safeguard the rights of children with disability.

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1. Achieving outcomes for Victorian families

ACD has been achieving outcomes for Victorian families raising children with disability for more than 40 years.

Each year, education is the number one issue raised by families through our Support Line. In the first month of 2024 alone, ACD received a 30% increase in calls about education compared to 2023.

ACD received 190 advocacy calls about education in the first six weeks of Term 1 in 2024.

While demand for advocacy support spiked during the onset of COVID-19, the need for support continues to be high.

Over a five-year period, ACD's Support Line saw a 160% increase in education-related calls.

The need for advocacy support is not the only thing increasing. There has been an increase in the *complexity* of cases – requiring more time and more resources per family to resolve issues and achieve positive outcomes.

There has been a 68% increase in complex cases to ACD's Support Line in the first three months of 2024.

Education is not the only state-based issue families are seeking help with. Approximately 70% of issues to ACD's Support Line have related to state-based issues. These include kindergarten, school, health, leisure and recreation, disability services other than the NDIS, child protection, transport and accessibility of the built environment, among other issues.

Additional disability advocacy funding has enabled ACD to hire additional, highly-skilled staff to support Victorian families achieve positive outcomes for their children.

2. The impact – hearing from families

ACD has successfully worked with families to achieve positive outcomes for their children. For example, ACD:

- Supported school and family collaboration to implement the right reasonable adjustments for a student to attend school camp, after the student was initially discouraged from attending.
- Worked across a range of systems and departments to support a single mother with disability who was considering relinquishment of her child with disability due to lack of support.
- Empowered a parent with information about their rights around Student Support Group meetings at school, which enabled the parent to confidently contact the school to request another meeting to provide input into their child's Individual Education Plan and Behaviour Support Plan.

Families who we supported through the Support Line reported improved outcomes:

- 94% had a better understanding of their child's rights
- 89% were more confident in speaking up for their child
- 83% reported an improvement in their child's situation

In their own words, families highlighted the power of family-led disability advocacy:

'Clear information, frank discussion, got me to focus on what was most important for my child ie a productive outcome with the school.'

'Provided very good information about the options we had & what were my child's rights on the matter we raised.'

'You are AMAZING! I just wish you had more resources as it took a while to get a call back – this is not your fault – just shows how needed your services are. Once I did receive the call it CHANGED EVERYTHING for our situation.'

'[The thing I liked most about the Support Line was] an advocate supporting us with a service for our child help[ed] to create better outcomes.'

'Gave me the confidence to advocate for my child with information provided by ACD.'

'The support made me feel like I am not going crazy & that I can do something about the situation. I feel stronger to stand up for my son's rights with the correct documentation to back me up.'

3. The importance of disability advocacy

Families who have accessed disability advocacy support understand the invaluable support it provides. But it's not just families and people with disability who recognise the role of disability advocacy.

Recent reports such as the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review have highlighted the role of disability advocacy in reducing the risk of discrimination and improving understanding of and access to human rights.

'Advocacy is essential for many people with disability to understand and exercise their rights.' – DRC final report, Volume 6.

For children with disability, families play a vital role in safeguarding their children's rights and ensuring they can access the services and supports they need.

'Families and carers are often the most immediate source of support for people with disability. They play a critical role in advocating for people with disability and in preventing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.' – DRC final report, Volume 6.

However, not all families have the time, knowledge and resources to navigate complex systems to advocate for their children. These families need additional capacity building and advocacy support from knowledgeable independent advocacy organisations.

'The Royal Commission heard that families need support in understanding their child's rights and need access to advocacy support to navigate the education system. Where families may not have the knowledge or ability to advocate for their children, independent advocates can be invaluable in safeguarding the inclusion of children with disability in education. Independent advocates can also be useful when the relationship between an educational institution and a family is deteriorating or has broken down.' – DRC final report, Volume 6.

The Disability Royal Commission found that not only does disability advocacy improve outcomes for people with disability, but there is also likely significant unmet demand due to funding shortfalls. Similarly, the NDIS Review report 'heard there is approximately twice as much demand for advocacy in comparison to supply.'

More broadly, the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, which reported shockingly high rates of child maltreatment in Australia, found valuing children, upholding their rights and prioritising their safety can help prevent child abuse and neglect. Families also need access to the right supports to provide safe environments for their children.¹

Student and family-focused disability advocacy organisations provide these vital safeguarding services and supports for children with disability and their families. But they can only do this with secure and adequate funding.

¹ Higgins, D [Major study reveals two-thirds of people who suffer childhood maltreatment suffer more than one kind](#), The Conversation, 3 April 2023.