

# Independent Advocacy SA Inc.

## Our Values

This statement is designed to provide a firm foundation for everything we do and say at Independent Advocacy. All our decisions and behaviours should be consistent with *Our Values*.

### At Independent Advocacy, we believe that...

**Human beings are interdependent social beings.** It is impossible to separate the autonomy and interconnectedness of humans. Everyone has the capacity to live and interact in a productive way; no-one can function effectively in isolation. Equally, it is impossible to separate human beings from the physical environment in which we live. We are the caretakers of our environment, and should be mindful of our affect on the environment. We are responsible for using resources in a way that is conscious of their sustainability and availability.

**Individuals within society have responsibilities.** Each person should model their own life on the kind of society they would wish to see, provided that this vision is not at the expense of the wellbeing of others. As interdependent beings, we each hold responsibility in other people's lives. We are each responsible for listening to our conscience and supporting others to do the same.

**Every human being has basic needs.** These are inseparable from our human rights. Our needs and rights are physical, emotional, social, spiritual and political. Every human being is entitled to subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, rest, creativity, identity and self-assertion. **We strenuously uphold everyone's right to have these basic needs met.**

**We believe that society has the capacity, and obligation, to meet the basic needs of all its members.** Some members of society are particularly *vulnerable* - that is, they have heightened dependence on others to ensure that their basic needs are met. We are particularly aware of the risk to these members of society in terms of their safety (and even survival), and believe that the more likely an individual is to being exposed to real harm, the more that person must be strongly defended. **We particularly assert the responsibility of society to meet the basic needs of people with an intellectual disability.**

**Everyone is entitled to be actively included in society and to experience a reasonable quality of life.** *Quality of life* is having access to the range of experiences and relationships common to most people; to be part of the ordinary life of a family and community. Society works best when its members have a sense of being part of a network of ongoing, close, committed relationships. Because we learn from others about our place in the world, and how to be in the world, it is important that we are all involved in community life in a valued way which is meaningful for us. A sense of belonging is critical to human wellbeing and, no matter what their background and experience, everybody should be enabled to live interdependently.

**More vulnerable members of society are likely to need support to achieve quality of life.** In particular, people with intellectual disability often require help to find love, experience a sense of family relationships and have their role in the community valued. This includes their access to generic services and activities. Grouping people with a particular disability together increases the likelihood of their being defined primarily in terms of their disability, and decreases their ability to belong within their community as a whole.

**Each individual should be recognised for their human worth, regardless of their gender, class, race or ability.** Given the inherently equal value of every person, it is not acceptable to waste the time, energy or life of any human being.

**It is critical that society as a whole, and its individual members, embrace and celebrate diversity.** Communities are inherently enriched when relationships between people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences exist. The individuality of each member of society should be recognised and validated. Everyone has something of value to offer, and should be appreciated for what they bring to community. Social institutions should be made up of local populations that reflect the diversity surrounding them; they should welcome and embrace this variety of human expression. Mutual understanding can only occur if people spend time together. Therefore positive change of people's attitudes about, and behaviour toward, people with intellectual disability is limited if people with disability are segregated.

**A good society is one which enables meaningful participation by all its members.** Life is meant to be a rich experience that all can participate in. Life is meant to be lived to the fullest - to be challenging, rewarding, fun and hopeful. Every individual is a key expert in their own life, and this experience should be valued. Each is entitled to mechanisms through which their voice can be heard. Each should be supported to express themselves appropriately. People should be defined by their positive strengths and characteristics, rather than by their disability. People with intellectual disability should be included as far as possible in decision making that affects their lives.

**Society has a moral obligation to enable all its members to readily participate.** This includes providing the means for each member to learn and be socially productive; to educate and employ all its members. To enable people to reach their full potential, society must support and resource them to access the quality of life to which they are entitled through having their basic needs met.

**Given that our society has not yet achieved these goals it is critical that social change occur.** We should strive to address the rejection, isolation, segregation, devaluing, life wasting and death making currently present in the lives of people with intellectual disability. People with high levels of competence have a moral obligation to do what it takes to enable those with less competencies to share in the richness of life. Social structures should reflect relations of mutuality, cooperation, understanding, interdependence and shared power, thus modelling the way people should relate to one another in the wider society. Individuals, society and government should actively embrace practices that enable people with disability to have quality of life.

**Governments have a key role in protecting individual members of society.** They are responsible for safeguarding and advancing advocacy for those members of society who are most at risk, and should ensure protection for all who are vulnerable. If individuals are unable to provide for themselves, the State should provide for them. The most appropriate way to deliver State support should be determined by the person's allies with, if possible, the person's input. Every human being should be protected from harm inflicted by others. However, legal processes need to change to reduce the over-representation of people with intellectual disabilities in prisons. Society should creatively address crime by considering the social, economic, psychological and historical context of offenders, and never biology alone. Overall, government policy should reflect a clear commitment to enhance the lives of the more vulnerable in society.

**Governments should take a leading role in striving toward a fairer society.** In particular, governments should enable everyone to access their needs and rights, through legislation, policies and funding. The basic needs of vulnerable members, including people with intellectual disability, should be addressed by funding appropriate support structures, legislating against all forms of negative discrimination and tying this to affirmative action policies and strategies. *It is critical that*

*governments resource* the means to enable any negative discrimination to be effectively challenged. Governments should actively promote the participation of *everyone at all levels* in society, and funds should be provided to allow such participation.

**At this point in time, positive social change relies on affirmative action in favour of those who are vulnerable.** We are committed to advocating for *equitable* strategies to be applied to people with intellectual disability ... that is, positively discriminating in favour of those who do not currently have a fair share of society's resources to enable everyone in society to end up equal.

**Redistribution of social resources is a key means through which governments should fulfil their responsibilities to all members of society.** Given the substantial wealth available within Australia, our governments are ideally placed to adequately meet the basic needs, and ensure quality of life, for all citizens. In fact, achieving this is a primary role of government. Taxation is an important tool in enabling redistribution of resources and ensuring the existence of a social safety net. There is no excuse for any member of Australian society to be disadvantaged or devalued, nor for a few to hold the majority of the available wealth. Redistribution of our social resources should positively change the lives of people with intellectual disability.

**Positive social change can occur through action at a range of different levels.** The very presence of an individual, who is seen as different, can generate positive change in a community. Action at the grass roots level can influence the political level, thus generating policy change. Raising and maintaining an issue in the political arena can create the incentive required for change. Efforts towards positive change are more effective if we work together than if we work in isolation ... long term sustainable change is best achieved through cooperative action. A dedicated, focussed collective group of like-minded people can create positive social change, particularly if they use advocacy as a key tool.

**Social Advocacy is an important means of generating positive change in the lives of people with intellectual disability.** People with intellectual disability are likely to need their physical safety and wellbeing defended. We are committed to working within Wolf Wolfensberger's definition of Social Advocacy ...

*... functioning (speaking, acting, writing) with a minimum conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a person or group, in order to promote, protect and defend the welfare of, and justice for, either individuals or groups. Advocacy strives to be emphatic and vigorous, and/or is actually, or is likely to be, costly to the advocate.*

**Social Advocacy involves acting in a way that creates positive change in the life of a disadvantaged person or group.** It is primarily motivated by the desire to promote, protect and defend the interests of the disadvantaged party. It aims to improve their welfare and/or achieve justice for them. A variety of advocacy measures should strive to achieve outcomes that range from improvements in an individual's situation to changes in public policy.

**Social Advocacy can be undertaken by an individual, group or organisation, and may involve standing up for, protecting or working alongside the disadvantaged party.** Our advocacy for people with intellectual disability should be directed by what is perceived to be in their best interest. (It is essential to minimise conflicts of interest so that the interests of the person remain central.) Our advocacy must not increase the vulnerability of the party and must ensure the action does not put others as vulnerable, or more vulnerable, at risk.

**Social Advocacy initiates and takes the lead; it is loyal and accountable; it is passionate and persistent.** We recognise that undertaking this role may be costly to our advocates in terms of time, resources, emotional stress, self-certainty and/or physical safety.

**Effective Social Advocacy functions within a clear values base.** We are committed to operating with integrity - that is, ensuring that everyone in the organisation understands these values, and seeks to behave in a way that is consistent with them. In particular, all advocates are required to work in accordance with the values of Independent Advocacy both in their process of generating a vision for the lives of individuals with intellectual disability, and in all their interactions with individuals and organisations. When acting in the best interest of people with intellectual disability who need to make personal ethical decisions, this involves ensuring they have maximum possible input to these decisions and maximum possible access to the information they need to make the decision. (This may include information about our values.)

**At Independent Advocacy, we will strive to challenge the negative images of people with disability.** We will present and promote ourselves and the people we advocate for, in a positive way. We will network with individuals, groups, government departments and organisations to promote these values and our vision, and to strengthen our support base. We will endeavour to be tolerant of all difference and respectful in our communication with others, even when we are not in agreement with them.

**Good practice does not cause further harm.** We recognise that people with intellectual disability are a particularly vulnerable group within local communities and society at large. When responding to a situation involving more than one party with intellectual disability, we will prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable person. When responding to a situation involving vulnerable parties without intellectual disability, we will be mindful of their needs.

**We are committed to remaining loyal at all levels to the people on whose behalf we speak, and whom we defend.** We will bend over backwards to bring about a positive change in the lives of people we advocate for. We will reflect on our work practices and seek to fully understand the reasons behind the advocacy decisions made. We will be conscious of our individual strengths and limitations, and continue to seek ways to improve our advocacy skills. We will maintain an atmosphere of openness, freedom to express ideas, ability to challenge and explore ideas constructively as a team. We will accept differences of opinions and realities. **In short, the way we work will model the way we would like the rest of society to function.**