

Working with Self Advocacy Groups

A guide for organisations



About this resource

This guide has been written to help organisations
work well with self advocacy groups.

1

What are self advocacy groups?

Self advocacy groups:

- Are made up of people with disability who have joined together to create change
- Are run by and for people with disability
- Work to make sure that people with disability have the same rights, choices and quality of life as people without disability
- Work to stop the discrimination and abuse of people with disability
- Provide training for people with disability to help them to understand and speak up for their rights
- Support skills and information sharing
- Build a connected and active community for all people
- Work for equality and full citizenship for all people

Many self advocacy groups are particularly concerned with rights of people with cognitive disability. Groups work to break down the barriers that stop people with cognitive disability having equal rights.



2

What sort of work do self advocacy groups do?

Self advocacy groups:

- Run rights training for people with disability
- Run inclusion training for organisations
- Provide advice about inclusion and accessibility
- Lobby governments to make sure that people with disability are not disadvantaged
- Work to stop the abuse of people with disability
- Protest against discrimination
- Hold inclusive events and forums
- Make resources
- Write songs
- Hold exhibitions
- Give speeches
- Many other activities



3

Who supports self advocacy groups?

- Self advocacy groups rely on volunteers for most of the work they do
- In Victoria some self advocacy groups are funded by the State Government Office for Disability
- The NDIS supports some user-led organisations, this includes self advocacy groups
- The Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU) supports and resources Victorian self advocacy groups
- Some groups receive philanthropic support, however most groups are unfunded
- Since the beginnings of the self advocacy movement in the 1960's self advocacy groups have achieved many gains for people with disability with very little resourcing and support



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4

How does working with self advocacy groups benefit other organisations?

“ No amount of research, education, skill or compassion is a substitute for the knowledge and understanding that comes from direct lived experience. ”

- Self advocacy groups are committed to making sure that the rights of people with disability are known and actioned. They are also committed to equal access and inclusion for people with disability across all of society. Working with self advocacy groups helps organisations to be more inclusive in their practice and supports workplace diversity
- Working with self advocates helps workplaces to overcome the organisational barriers that stop the inclusion of people with disability. It develops understanding and knowledge sharing across sectors and communities
- Working with self advocates grows organisations' capacity to meet the needs of diverse populations, builds workforce skills and helps to keep organisations up to date with current community issues and needs

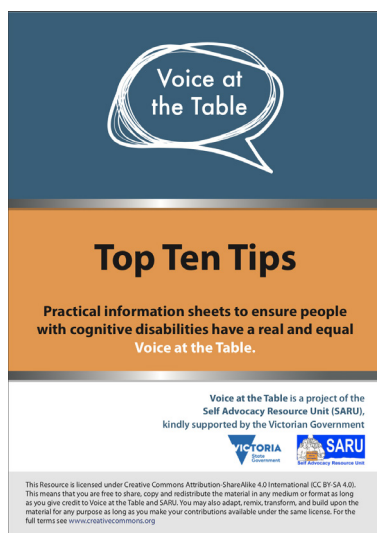
By including people with disability as equals rather than clients, organisations are part of growing a culture of equality, respect and inclusion of all.



5

How can organisations support the work of self advocacy groups?

- Contact your closest self advocacy group and organise a time to meet with them. Tell them about the work you do and ask about the work they do. Look for ways you can work together
- Invite self advocates to be part of your professional networks
- Provide resources and support to a self advocacy group; support can be financial or in-kind
- Share self advocacy resources, achievements and campaigns through your networks and newsletters
- If you are a disability service provider make sure that self advocacy training and resources are available to all clients and staff
- Ask a self advocacy group how they would like to be included in the work your organisation does



These resources have been made to help organisations work with self advocates

6

How can organisations work well with self advocacy groups?

- Take time to reflect on your judgements and thoughts about working with people with disability, and challenge any negative assumptions you find
- Inclusive organisational practice takes time to develop, get training to support your staff to do this well
- Listen, consult and take advice. People with disability are the experts in disability and inclusion, do not presume to know better
- Many organisations take over when working with people with disability. Don't do this, include people in every step of the process and share the decision making
- Make sure that people with disability hold equal power
- Share information and be honest
- Use accessible language, meeting and workplace practices
- Support equal access to everything
- Having a good relationship with a self advocacy group can be very good for business. Long term relationships are beneficial for both parties and are liked by funding bodies. If you have a chance to work with a self advocacy group don't blow it! Work hard to be inclusive in all of your work
- Take time to evaluate how well your organisation is working with self advocates and include self advocates in the evaluation process. Be brave: honest evaluation is an opportunity for your organisation to be the best it can be



7

Tips from Self Advocacy Groups

1	Speak and write to us using language we can understand. Find out if we prefer Plain or Easy English and check in regularly to make sure we understand communications.
2	Tell us how you think we can work well together. Talk to us about how you plan to be inclusive and be honest about the things you want help with. Self advocates can give lots of tips and information about working well with people with disability.
3	Find out what support we need and want. Ask us about our support needs, we are the experts. Make sure you include support in your budget.
4	Respect our privacy. Information about our disability and personal stories are our business. Don't share information without asking if it is okay.
5	De-briefing time is important. Take time to check in with self advocates after meetings and events and see if we need support or more information.
6	Follow up. Always follow up and do the things you have said you would do. If something goes wrong and you have to change plans or things are delayed make sure you let us know.
7	If you take notes or minutes, please do them in Plain or Easy English. Send notes to us so we can check that we are happy with what they say.
8	Think about payment. Include travel, preparation and de-brief time when working out payment. Support needs should also be included when working out finances and budgets.
9	Plan well. People with disability often need more time to organise meetings and complete tasks. Make sure you include enough time in the project planning.
10	Treat us like you treat other colleagues. People with disability want the same treatment as everyone else, show us the same respect you show other people.

8

Where can organisations go for information, help, training and resources?

- Visit the Australian Self Advocacy website at www.voicestogether.com.au to find a self advocacy group close to you and download self advocacy resources
- Visit the Voice at the Table website at www.voiceatthetable.com.au for information about inclusive meeting, committee and organisational practices
- Visit the SARU at 247 Flinders Lane in Melbourne or go to www.saru.net.au



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