



Family Advocacy Strategic Plan

2023 – 2025

We're strengthening the opportunity for more people with disability to lead valued lives

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices stand, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the sorrow of the Stolen Generations and the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also recognise the resilience, strength and pride of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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Family Advocacy Strategic Plan 2023 – 2025

What is the change we are seeking?

OUR VISION is of families being agents of positive social change so the inherent value of people with developmental disability is recognised within a just and inclusive society.

OUR PURPOSE is to attain positive social roles for people with developmental disability. This is accomplished through the development and support of advocacy by families and by strengthening the knowledge, role and influence of families.

OUR FOCUS is to encourage and support families to speak up and seek opportunities with and at times on behalf of their family members so they can enjoy the same environments, lifestyles and living conditions afforded to most Australians.

Our focus areas

Valued and included early years

Children in the early years are nurtured with high expectations, are seen as valued members of their family and community and are experiencing the many typical opportunities on a pathway to a full and inclusive life.

Equitable and inclusive education for all

Children and young people with disability are experiencing full access to the formal and informal curriculum and activities of school life through an inclusive education. They are smoothly transitioning through each stage of their education and experiencing the same high expectations and rites of passage as their non-disabled peers.

Securing futures through employment

People with disability are working in valued jobs that are based on their interests and career aspirations, with equal pay in workplaces that offer accessible and equitable opportunities.

Empowered to thrive in community

People with disability are seen as contributing and valued members of their community and are experiencing the same opportunities to be included and are leading their own lives making choices and decisions important to them.

Parent Advocate quote: *“I’m a single parent to an outgoing, funny, cheeky, compassionate and resilient 12 year old girl named Eva, who also happens to have some complex disabilities. When schooling started for Eva I wanted her to attend the local school with all the other kids in our area but I was met with what I came to know of as “gate keeping’. A fully inclusive education system benefits all kids. Eva just wants to belong, like everyone else.” Traci Caines*

How we make it happen

Family Advocacy

We assist families to develop advocacy skills, a strong vision and the confidence to speak up and act alongside their family member with disability, so they can lead a meaningful and inclusive life.

Family Leadership and development

We support families to participate in leadership development to help them to become agents of positive social change both alongside their family member and within broader society.

Systemic Advocacy

We undertake systemic advocacy in areas that make the greatest impact by reducing systemic barriers to inclusion.

Our story

Celebrating over 32 years of providing advocacy across New South Wales

Family Advocacy, formally known as 'The Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development' is an independent advocacy organisation that supports families across New South Wales to promote and defend the rights and interests of people with developmental disability¹. The organisation was founded by families and continues to be governed by families. This intentional foundational structure enables the organisation to be embedded in the 'lived experience' of disability including the many issues and barriers that present themselves in the lives of their family members with disability.

Family Advocacy recognises that advocacy is often undertaken by families and that advocacy efforts can be required over the lifetime of their family member. The organisation also recognises that the advocacy undertaken by families can act as the greatest safeguard in their family member's life.

Family Advocacy is also managed and staffed by families and allies of people with disability, who recognise the issues and systemic barriers that people with disability face. They work to overcome these barriers by focusing on the advocacy and leadership development of families whilst addressing the broader systemic issues within society.

All of the advocacy work we undertake, including our events, workshops and resources are underpinned by a theory that provides a comprehensive framework for how to support people with disability achieve the good things of life. The theory is called Social Role Valorisation (SRV) and can be a powerful framework for families to use to improve the life of their family member with disability.

¹ Developmental disability occurs in the developmental period of a person's life (from conception to adulthood) and includes intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism and any combination of physical, intellectual or sensory disability.

Timeline

Creating positive change for more than 32 years

Family Advocacy was founded by families of people with disability in 1991, however, our beginnings go back even further, to the creation of the Family Education Unit (FEU) in 1984. We differ from carer organisations in that our family members are advocating for people with disability to have a good, ordinary life through natural community based supports and socially valued community roles. We do not advocate for parents or siblings themselves, and believe first and foremost in the importance of authentic inclusion for all people with disability.

Our 4 strategic priorities

The strategic priorities that Family Advocacy will take forward over the next three years, represents a mix of actions that will help to achieve the focus areas and ultimately help Family Advocacy and its allies, work towards our long-term Vision.

Our action plan and goals

1. *Valued and included early years*

- a. Build the knowledge of families by providing timely information about child rights, the evidence base, and where they can obtain support, targeting the places and spaces they engage.
- b. Assist families in the early years to strive high and learn about the rights and interests of people with disability through visioning for an inclusive life and build their advocacy skills.
- c. Grow family leaders in the early years, who then provide peer support to other families within their communities.
- d. Influence the influencers of families, so they are providing them with good information and guidance to set up their family members on a pathway for inclusive lives.
- e. Strategically collaborate and build allies in early childhood so children with disability are accessing the same pre-school opportunities and environments.

2. *Equitable and inclusive education for all*

- a. Grow the capacity of families to enact positive social change for better inclusive outcomes to be experienced by all children and young people with disability.
- b. Support and equip family members to advocate for their family members in education.
- c. Increase family and community knowledge about the latest resources and proven best practice for inclusive education.
- d. Strategically collaborate with educational stakeholders and other organisations to ensure the transformation of the school system to an inclusive education for all.

3. *Securing futures through employment*

- a. Grow the capacity of families to have high employment expectations for their family member and from the earliest ages, so they can effectively support them to access typical employment pathways, good jobs and pay equity.
- b. Increase understanding and use of the customised employment models among families, people with disability and employers.
- c. Strategically collaborate and form new alliances with government and other organisations to shift the employment landscape and employment service design so that all people with disability have access to equitable employment.

4. *Empowered to thrive in community*

- a. Safeguard the rights and interests of people with disability through individual and systemic advocacy and building the capacity of families to advocate with, or at times on behalf of, their family member.
- b. Grow the numbers of family leaders and expand the reach of family led peer networks so families are supported within their community.
- c. Increase the knowledge of advocacy organisations to strengthen their advocacy practices in relation to supporting families to undertake the advocacy for their family member.

Key perspectives

What our friends and allies say

Friends and allies, and other services alongside our members, have provided important perspectives to inform the future focus and direction of the organisation.

- Family Advocacy is recognised as being a strong voice representing the interests and advocating for people with disability. Their focus and work on policy, capacity building and leadership is recognised as being critical for our families and systems.
- There is a real need and opportunity for Family Advocacy to further strengthen connections with community. Opportunities to provide a strong voice to government and opportunities to strengthen capacity and development for families for long term commitment.

Disability Advocate story: At Sydney University, Emma audited subjects. This means she attended all classes and tutorials and could join in all aspects of university life, but wasn't required to complete assignments or exams. As she is an aspiring artist, Emma studied art and art history. This has deepened Emma's appreciation for artists she admires and is influenced by, which has helped her develop her own artistic style.

Disability Advocate and parent quote: "Our vision was for Jacob to be fully engaged in his community, to work and have purpose in his life. So we wanted him to go to the same school as his brother, sister and preschool buddies. But we faced many challenges... people with disability are viewed and treated very differently when it comes to where they go to school, who they go to school with and what they are expected to do after graduating. The system needs to be supporting educators and parents towards progressively realising an inclusive education." Annette and Jacob Bush

Disability Advocate and parent quote: "The safest place for Mac is to be respected as a member of his community, to be engaged as a member of his community and to actually be in his community. The most dangerous place is for him to be an outsider and not part of the community." Gina

How we work

How we support people with disability lived valued social roles and build inclusion

- We work across New South Wales for the benefit of people with disability alongside their families.
- We are values and rights based, and work to end discrimination against people with disability, so they can live full and empowered lives.
- We create a catalyst for action and change in areas where it will make the greatest impact.
- We walk alongside families so they can advocate for good lives for their family member, in safe, non-judgemental, and welcoming ways.
- We hear, learn from, and respond to the experiences of people with disability with and through their family.
- We consult with people with lived experience, researchers and other experts to promote evidence-based practice.
- We strive to be inclusive of diversity and lived experience in all elements of our work.
- We collaborate with and influence others to maximise our impact.

Our theory of change

- We deliver advocacy advice and support, workshops and mentoring to shift expectations and create a strong vision for an inclusive life.
- Families become agents of positive social change and support their family member to live a full life embedded in community.
- The rights of people with disability are recognised and upheld and they live in inclusive, accessible communities with natural and formal supports, connections and relationships.
- Everyone in the community expects to share the same environments as people with disability and understand, uphold and safeguard their rights.

Advocacy support, resources and skills

Families are empowered to strive high and learn about the rights and interests of people with disability. Family supporters develop skills, vision and confidence to speak up alongside or at times on behalf of their family member with disability and in doing so seek out and create opportunities for them to lead valued and inclusive lives.

Leadership development and leadership roles

Families are supported to participate in leadership training, mentoring, they connect with one another in leadership development opportunities, through peer networks and advocacy related events. The strengthening of vision, capabilities and connections, over time, help families to influence change to broader communities and systems themselves. They become agents of positive social change through leadership within families, communities and systems.

Changes in leadership, protection and progression of rights

Family leaders across NSW volunteer to advocate for system change together with grassroots organisations (e.g., have input into policy development). Families act as a safeguard so that an inclusive life can be realised by their family member with disability – where the rights and interests of people are upheld, equal opportunities to participate are created, and the community and policymakers expect people with disability to lead inclusive lives.

People with developmental disability lead lives embedded in community through the focus on the attainment of socially valued roles

People with disability realise their goals, contribute socially and economically and lead inclusive lives through the support of families. The rights and interests of people are protected and safeguarded through the advocacy leadership development of families.

Disability Advocate and parent quote: *"We attended a workshop run by Family Advocacy and our life changed. We listened to a story by another family and it was very powerful. Family Advocacy has supported us on the way, through connecting a group of like-minded families who share this vision of inclusion for people with disabilities. They helped us to form a vision of a good life and holding high expectations for our son. I really learned how to advocate for my son's interests and ensure he could achieve his best self in life."* Annie and Roger

Family Advocacy is an independent and impartial advocacy organisation, working with families in NSW to defend and promote the rights and interests of people with developmental disability.