



Media Release

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Twenty-five years on, work not over for the Public Advocate

The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) today marks its 25th anniversary by vowing to continue its fight for the rights of people with a disability.

Public Advocate Colleen Pearce said that, although OPA had achieved important improvements for Victorians with a disability in the past, there are still many issues that need to be addressed.

“There are still institutions for people with an intellectual disability operating in Victoria,” Ms Pearce said. “This issue needs to be addressed to ensure the residents are given the opportunity to live and participate in their local community.”

“People with a disability are also being abused, exploited and neglected every day in this state. The work to address this continues.”

Ms Pearce attributed the achievements of OPA to the hard work and determination of its volunteers and staff, working with its stakeholders.

“Without the passion and commitment of our wonderful volunteers and staff working with our stakeholders we would not have achieved such significant results.”

Throughout its 25-year history, OPA, and the many hundreds of people who have volunteered with it, have been a significant force in protecting the rights of people with a disability.

Over the past quarter century, OPA, and Volunteers from its three volunteer programs, have been instrumental in many reforms including the closure of institutions: Aradale psychiatric hospital, Kew Cottages, Mayday Hills, Lakeside Hospital, Caloola, Janefield, Kingsbury, Plenty, and Pleasant Creek.

More recently, in March this year, a report by the Victorian Ombudsman found that Department of Human Services carers dragged a disabled man along the floor of a Melbourne home for people with a disability causing second-degree carpet burns. The investigation came after OPA's volunteer Community Visitors reported the incident and followed it up over a two-year period.

The history of OPA has been documented in a thesis titled *The Victorian Office of the Public Advocate: a first history 1986 – 2007*. The thesis, written by Dr Mark Feigan, looks at OPA's establishment and its first 21 years of operation since first Public Advocate, Ben Bodna AM, took the oath of office in July 1986. The thesis is now available on the OPA website

www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au.

A booklet entitled *A short history of the Victorian Office of the Public Advocate 1986-2011*, will be launched at a function at Queen's Hall, Parliament House, today by the Attorney-General, Robert Clark.

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