

POSITION TITLE:	Advocate, Independent Family Advocacy Support		
REPORTS TO:	Senior Advocate, Independent Family Advocacy Support		
PROGRAM AREA:	Civil Justice	LOCATION:	Bendigo
CLASSIFICATION:	VLA3	POSITION TYPE:	Maximum Term Contract – 3 years, Full Time

POSITION SUMMARY

To provide high quality non-legal advocacy services to families involved in the child protection system. The role involves providing information about people’s rights and the system, supporting them to enact those rights using self-advocacy strategies, referring to legal and non-legal services and providing advocacy. The focus will be assisting families prior to the commencement of legal proceedings.

The Child Protection Legal Aid Services Review identified the need for early support for families involved in the child protection system. Victoria Legal Aid’s existing Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) service provides strong evidence of the benefits of independent advocacy services. Building on the strengths of the IMHA service, the Independent Family Advocacy Support Service (previously known as the Child Protection Early Intervention Unit) will provide non-legal advocacy services to families in the child protection system. The service is a 3-year pilot and will prioritise working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and parents with an intellectual disability. The Advocate will work with a team of Advocates including a Senior Advocate and the IMHA Manager.

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Provide high quality non-legal advocacy services to families involved in the child protection system by:
 - a. Listening, clarifying and understanding what the family wants.
 - b. Assisting the family to understand their rights, the processes available to exercise these rights and the potential impacts of their choices.
 - c. Supporting the family to self-advocate, or as directed, represent their views or preferences to others.
 - d. Make referrals to legal and non-legal services required by the family.
2. Receive referrals and triage inquiries from clients of the program, organisations and services including, but not limited to, child protection, family support, Child First, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, disability services, legal practitioners.
3. Contribute to the implementation and continuous improvement of the Independent Family Advocacy Support Service including the development and review of policies, procedures and guidelines as well as evaluation.
4. Contribute to positive engagement with families and organisations to ensure family’s needs are at the center of service delivery.
5. Participate in public promotion and education to assist internal and external stakeholders to understand the service and the role of an advocate.

RESPONSIBILITIES

6. Contribute to the health and wellbeing of self and others by participating in individual and team debriefing and mentoring.
7. Participate in individual and team professional development and keep up to date with relevant policies, legislation and maintain an understanding of issues impacting the broader child protection sector.
8. Collaborate with other VLA staff and contribute to the VLA strategy and other broader organisational forums, projects and events including the Child Protection Transformation team.

KEY SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Demonstrated experience in working with families who have experienced the child protection system, with an understanding of the challenges impacting these families
2. Experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and/or adults with intellectual disabilities, particularly within the child protection system.
3. Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, and a demonstrated ability to influence and negotiate with people across all levels of the organisation and with external stakeholders.
4. Proven ability to work both independently and collaboratively in a team environment.
5. Knowledge of the child protection system and other relevant service sectors; and understanding of relevant policy and legal frameworks.
6. Demonstrated experience and/or understanding of working with people who experience disadvantage and providing advocacy and coaching for self-advocacy to families.
7. Demonstrated knowledge of and commitment to social justice principles, understanding of the legal and non-legal sectors and a commitment to VLA's vision and values.

QUALIFICATIONS/ EXPERIENCE

- Experience in social work, community development, community sector advocacy, social work, child protection or family support service provision or other similar fields (mandatory)
- Post-secondary qualification (certificate, diploma or degree) in a relevant field such as social work, health, community development (highly desirable)
- Lived experience of the child protection system (desirable)

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

- To be eligible to apply for this position you must be an Australian or New Zealand citizen, permanent resident or hold a valid work permit or visa.
- You may be required to consent to a police check. Please note that people with criminal records are not automatically prevented from applying for this position and each application will be considered on its merits.
- You will be required to undergo or hold a current Working with Children Check.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

- From time to time you will be required to travel between various office locations to deliver quality services to our clients or for professional development.
- This position will require you to independently travel to outreach, attend meetings etc. within the Greater Bendigo region, as well as occasional travel to Melbourne.

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

In September 2017 VLA released the [Final Report](#) of its Child Protection Review. The Review was undertaken to bring about child protection legal services that are timely and appropriate; better at supporting children, particularly those at risk of long term disadvantage; more consistent across the state; and of higher quality. VLA committed to 36 actions for change set out in the Final Report. One outcome of this review is a 3 year pilot of the Independent Family Advocacy Support Service (previously known as the Child Protection Early Intervention Unit) and this senior position within the new team will report to the Manager, Independent Mental Health Advocacy.

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) is a state-wide non-legal advocacy service for people subject to compulsory treatment in Victoria. IMHA was established to support people to be involved in decisions related to their mental health treatment and recovery and to express their views and preferences. IMHA provides people with information about their rights, the mental health system and options; coaching for self-advocacy; advocacy and referrals to legal and non-legal services. IMHA has teams of advocates in four VLA offices: Melbourne, Geelong, Dandenong and Bendigo and outreaches to all designated mental health services in Victoria. IMHA is part of Civil Justice Mental Health and Disability Advocacy Program.

The Independent Family Advocacy Support Service will work closely with VLA's Family, Youth and Children's Law (FYCL) Program which assists people to resolve their family disputes to achieve safe, workable and child-focused parenting and care arrangements. FYCL also assist parents to build their capacity to resolve future disputes without legal assistance. The FYCL Program is responsible for the delivery of services across five subprograms:

- Child Protection
- Family Violence
- Family Law Services (including to parents in parenting and property disputes and as Independent Children's Lawyers)
- Child Support
- Family Dispute Resolution Service (VLA's lawyer-assisted family dispute resolution service).

OUR VISION & VALUES

Our vision

A fair and just society where rights and responsibilities are upheld.

Our purpose

To make a difference in the lives of our clients and for the community by:

- resolving and preventing legal problems.
- encouraging a fair and transparent justice system.

Our values

Fair

We stand up for what is fair.

We aim to be fair when making choices about who and how we help people.

OUR VISION & VALUES

Care

We care about our clients and the community in which we live.

We look out for and take care of each other.

Courage

We act with courage backed by evidence about what is best for clients and the community.

We act with courage to be the best we can be.

VLA is an Equal Opportunity Employer and is committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce. We encourage people from culturally diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to apply for positions within our organisation. We will make reasonable adjustment where possible for people with disabilities.

Position Description authorised by Resourcing & Remuneration Manager.

Signed: 

Date: 23/5/18