

Interview with an OCV – Mick Herbertson

1. What does your OCV role involve?

As an OCV, I provide an independent and impartial voice for people who may not be able to speak up for themselves. Through the OCV role, I look to see whether the services are providing a safe, active, and healthy environment for the residents they support, in line with practice and community standards. I provide a monitoring role that looks at how a service meets the dynamic needs of the residents, and that residents are supported to lead meaningful lives.



If an issue is unable to be resolved within my powers and functions as an OCV, an important aspect of my visiting is escalating or referring matters to an appropriate body, such as the NDIS Commission, Children's Guardian or NSW Ombudsman. I am also able to refer residents to independent advocacy support when needed.

2. What does an OCV visit tend to involve?

My visiting day starts with reminding myself of where I plan to visit and reviewing any previous visit reports and responses, to refresh my memory of the house(s). I check whether any specific issues need to be followed up or require my ongoing monitoring. I make sure to visit when I think the residents will be at home, which includes on evenings and weekends. It is important that I have every opportunity to speak with residents when I am at the house.

During my visit, I will make every effort to chat with residents to ascertain their views about where they live and the activities they are involved in. Among other things, I look at whether they have a meaningful and regular say in things that directly affect them, and how the supports they receive are working for them. I always ask whether they have anything they want me to bring it to the attention of service management. I will also spend time in the house office reviewing client files and documents.

Following my visit, I find it is best to write up my OCV visit report as soon as possible, while the information is still fresh and in context. If I'm unable to complete the visit report on the day of the visit, I complete it within the next two days. On occasion, I may need to have direct contact with service management during or after a visit to get a better understanding of an issue that has been raised.

3. What are some of the challenges you have faced in the OCV role?

Challenges of being an OCV can and do include:

- Trying to avoid becoming emotionally involved in the issues you identify during your visits.
- Staff making it difficult to speak with residents privately or alone.
- Understanding and using the different computer systems providers use to access client records.
- Dealing with no or poor responses from service providers to my OCV visit reports, including providers not answering questions or skirting around the issue.
- Managing my time to best effect before, during, and after my visits.
- Ensuring a constructive working relationship with staff and providers supporting residents.

4. How do you fit visiting in with your other work, social and family commitments?

Ensuring residents in my allocated services are visited regularly and completing the required number of visits, requires diligence and a certain amount of flexibility on my part. The OCV role is about being a voice for residents – if you're not visiting regularly or consistently throughout the year, this valuable service is not being provided.

The flexibility of the OCV role enables me to meet my ongoing family and other employment commitments. There have been times when I have had limited availability to visit due to the need to support grandchildren, my spouse, or the need for a break or holiday. One thing I always keep in mind,

even with this flexibility, is that the OCV role is my job – not something I do in-between times. It is important for me to maintain a professional focus and commitment to my OCV workload, meeting my visiting schedule and the other expectations of the role. You need to fit in the visits you missed while on your break, and follow-up any issues that remain unresolved and require your ongoing monitoring.

5. How do you plan your visits over the 12 month visiting period and keep track of the issues?

A good way of ensuring you are meeting your visiting schedule requirements is to develop a rota of visits. I do this through a spreadsheet, my diary, and the use of the calendar app on my work laptop, and on my phone. In the electronic spreadsheet, I colour code the visits I plan to do on the same day, to ensure I keep on track. Once a visit is completed, I put a number in the relevant column that tells me how many visits I have completed to that house during the financial year. If the number is red, it means there are still open/unanswered issues that I have raised through my visit report, or there are issues that need my ongoing monitoring. For example:

Service Name	Address	Suburb	Post Code	Visits	July	Augt	Sept	Oct
Service A – Smith St	23 Smith St	Town	2000	2		1		
Service A – Brown St	8 Brown St	Town	2000	2		1		
Service B – Crown St	303 Crown St	City	2000	2				*
Service B – Alice Rd	10 Alice Rd	City	2000	2				*
Service C – Jones Rd	3 Jones Rd	Village	2000	2			1	
Service C – May St	52 May St	Village	2000	2			1	
Service C – Station St	1 Station St	Village	2000	2			1	

The spreadsheet keeps me on track with my visiting, and provides information about any outstanding or ongoing issues in those houses. Before I go on my next planned visit to a particular house, I review the spreadsheet and this prompts me to check the OCV Online database and my written notes. I do this to remind myself of current issues, resident details, specific situations and circumstances that I may need to follow up on.

6. If a resident does not want to talk to you, how do you manage that during your visit?

On occasion, and if I am visiting a house for the first time, a resident may not wish to have anything to do with me. I never take this personally. At times like this, I find it is a good idea to talk with the staff on duty to find out about the resident's interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes, before trying to establish a relationship. The more you know about someone, the greater the opportunity for a chat. The chat does not have to be about complaints, concerns or issues to raise in my visit report, but just as a means to develop rapport. Pushing a resident too hard, forcing them to engage with you, may create unnecessary barriers during future visits. I find what works well is if I can find some common ground.

I also know that if a resident makes it clear that they wish to be left alone, this is their right. I chat with staff on duty to see if this is usual behaviour, or only when the person is confronted with a new face, or perhaps the resident is upset about something that may have just occurred. Knowing these things helps me tailor my approach and allows me to be more receptive to the resident's needs.

7. What is the best part of your OCV role?

The best part of my OCV role is seeing the positive changes that I have helped to facilitate over the years. For people without a clear or strong voice to raise concerns on their own behalf, the issues I have raised for them, small or large, have been worked on and resolved because of my visiting. It is a great feeling!