

Interview with an OCV – Carmel Hanlon



1. What does your OCV role involve?

The role of an OCV involves giving a voice to residents living in residential services in our community. I have a rights-based approach to looking at how each person is supported, with a focus on the care, support, dignity, and respect they receive, as well as the independence and autonomy they have. I need to be observant when I visit, and take the time to talk to residents and hear directly from them about how they are feeling, whether they like living in their home, and if there are any issues affecting them that need to be raised with their service provider.

On my visit, I also talk to staff, review resident records, and observe how the house is run, how residents and staff are interacting with each other, and try to get a feel of what it is like to live there.

My visit time is short, so I need to make sure that I make the best use of it. Is the care and support provided to the residents meeting their needs and, if not, what action is being taken to address the situation? I raise the issues that I identify in my visit report, and send it to the provider after my visit.

The visits I make are mainly unannounced, so that I can get a good picture of how the home functions on a regular day. I visit mainly in the afternoon, evenings and on the weekends as most residents will be at home at that time.

2. What does your typical OCV week look like?

Each week can be very different from the next. One of the advantages of the role is that the work is flexible and I can set my own schedule within the guidelines of the OCV scheme. Some weeks I work almost every day, other weeks I work two or three days, and sometimes I have whole weeks where I do not do any OCV work at all. OCV work is not full-time, but there are times when I may do two or three visits in one day. My visits can take up to two hours, depending on what issues I find. I generally write my OCV visit reports the morning after the visit – I find this is when I am fresh, and I can look back and be more objective.

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

Some of the challenges relate to visiting residents who are not living the best life they could be or being supported to reach their potential. While this can be very frustrating, I know that this is one of the reasons why the OCV role is important – to raise the issues that are affecting them in order to achieve improved outcomes and uphold their rights.

The OCV role is one you carry out alone, which can sometimes be a challenge. There is peer support and ongoing support from the OCV Team, but the solo drive home from a difficult visit can still be hard one. The wheels of change can turn slowly for residents, when the service provider does not have an interest in resolving the issues in a timely manner, and the matter needs to be escalated as a complaint.

I have found that patience and perseverance is key. Having talked about some of the challenges, it is also wonderful to arrive at a house where issues you have previously raised have been addressed, and the residents are happy with the outcome.

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

Visiting services in a regular and consistent way over a 12-month period takes planning and organisation. I arrange my visiting schedule by planning how many visits I need to undertake each month; how often I need to visit each service location; and how much of a gap is required in between visits to make sure that my visiting is spread-out evenly. I find that it is reasonably easy to arrange my other commitments around the OCV role. I appreciate the way the OCV role gives me options of when I

work, as life can sometimes be tricky and changes may need to be made at short notice. However, it is important that I catch up on any missed visits in a timely way. This may mean working an extra evening, or fitting an extra visit into the days I had planned to be out, so I can meet the required visiting schedule.

5. How do you plan your visits over the 12-month visiting period?

I plan my visits for the year ahead in July, after I receive my allocation of services from the OCV Team. I use the OCV scheme database, OCV Online, to see all my allocated services, visits and visit hours for each service location. I set up my visits in geographic clusters – grouping more than one house on each visit day assists me with travel time and convenience. I use a hard copy diary to set out my visits on specific weeks and days, and use it to record my travel time, mileage, meal costs, and any extra time taken, such as phone calls I have on the day.

I have an OCV laptop, which assists with my planning. I access OCV Online to read previous OCV visit reports and service responses before I visit a house, and make a note of any issues that may need to be followed up. Being an effective planner is important, as time gets away from you very quickly! Some of the houses I visit twice a year, where others I may visit four times a year. By planning early for the year ahead, I know where I have some flexibility to move my visits around, and where I can do more work if needed.

6. How do you keep track of who you visit and what issues you are raising on their behalf?

I raise any issues that I identify in an OCV visit report to the service provider. I ask questions and seek information from them to clarify what is happening in relation to the issues, and provide a timeframe for their response. A well-written visit report, with enough detail on the issues, will also give context on what I need to do on my next visit. I find a review of my visit reports to a particular house often shows systemic issues and patterns emerging over the year. I also keep good notes of matters relating to my visits, including outstanding issues I need to follow-up with management or during my next visit; who lives at the house; what issues the residents have raised with me; and what was addressed/not addressed on the visit. Good record keeping is important for this role.

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

When a resident doesn't want to talk to me, I take some time to 'read the mood'. If reasonable, I will sit nearby and engage with staff or other residents, until an opportunity arises to have a chat with that resident. Sometimes I find that just being around and chatting happily with staff and other residents helps to reassure them, and they may feel able to engage at a later time.

While some residents are not able to communicate verbally, I find that they often have other ways in which they can communicate. I take the time to see if they use a form of sign language, like Key Word Sign, or if they use other tools. I ask staff how they communicate with them, and if there are any particular non-verbal cues I should look for. Observing interactions between residents and staff can be very helpful. Records are also very important to review – they give me an idea of how a resident is going, if our direct conversations don't give me the information I need.

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

The best part of working as an OCV is that I can make a difference in the lives of people who do not always have a voice and may not have any other person in their lives who is independent of the service provider supporting them. As I visit, I get to know the residents, and enjoy seeing the improvements, big and small, that have occurred as a result of my visits and the issues I have raised. My OCV colleagues are another good aspect of the role. I work with a group of like-minded and diligent colleagues who want to make a difference.