

Deputy Premier John Rau

Attorney-General

Thursday, 10 March, 2016

Communication Partner Service selected for Disability Justice Plan

The State Government has announced it will partner with Uniting Communities to deliver a new Communication Partner Service under the State's Disability Justice Plan.

Attorney-General John Rau said that the introduction of communication partners will help victims, witnesses, suspects and defendants give evidence in police interviews and court proceedings.

"Communication partners will be similar to the role of language interpreters, allowing people with complex communication needs a greater opportunity to provide evidence both in and out of court," Mr Rau said.

"Communication partners will play an important role in allowing the voices of vulnerable victims to be heard. This will help to improve the quality of evidence in cases involving vulnerable victims and to achieve justice."

The new volunteer-based Communication Partner Service will receive nearly \$1.4 million over four years and will start in late June.

A pool of trained, independent Communication Partners will be available to criminal justice agencies to facilitate communication between both people with a disability and children who have complex communication needs, and an investigative interviewer.

Uniting Communities Chief Executive Simon Schrapel said Uniting Communities has extensive experience in service development and delivery for both people with disability and children, with more than 90 community service programs across metropolitan and regional South Australia.

"Uniting Communities has a long history in recruiting and supporting volunteers to work with vulnerable people and those experiencing crisis – having run programs such as Lifeline for over 50 years," Mr Schrapel said.

"Combined with our experience in the provision of Community Legal Services and programs for children and people living with a disability we are excited to be partnering the State Government in the Communications Partner Program.

The Communication Partner Service is one element of a suite of measures in the Disability Justice Plan, designed to improve access to justice for people with disability.

The service will work alongside specialist training for investigative interviewers being provided by Deakin University's Centre for Investigative Interviewing.

Mr Rau said Deakin University was recognised for its world-class researchers and trainers in investigative interviewing and has begun developing customised training to develop and maintain interviewer competence for South Australian investigative interviewers.

“Combined, these measures put South Australia at the forefront of efforts to improve access to justice for people with disability,” he said.

For more information about the Disability Justice Plan visit the Attorney-General’s Department website: <http://www.agd.sa.gov.au/djp>