

## The Enabling Justice ABI Project

### About the Project

People with an acquired brain injury (ABI) are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. In Victoria over 40% of men and over 30% of women in prison have an ABI compared with much lower rates in the general community. This underlines the need to explore the experience of people with an ABI within the criminal justice system so as to identify the pathways that lead to these outcomes, and develop innovative and practical ideas for addressing this problem.

The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) is administering a grant to RMIT's Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ) in partnership with Jesuit Social Services to deliver the 'Enabling Justice Project'. The Project will explore ways to address the over-incarceration of people with an ABI. We will do this by having people with an ABI who have direct experience of the criminal justice system and imprisonment at the centre of the discussion.

### Principles and objectives of the Project

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities enshrines the rights of persons with disabilities to access to justice and full inclusion and participation in the community. It is essential to identify and eliminate barriers to the enjoyment of these rights. People living with a disability have the right to participate in the process of improving the systems that affect their lives. This Project is guided by, but also seeks to implement and promote, these rights and principles. This approach is not only human rights based but practical. People with disabilities have crucial knowledge and insights about their experiences that can and need to be used to achieve positive change.

### Project plan and key activities

A key activity of the Project will be establishing a Justice User Group. The Group will consist of people living with ABI who have had direct involvement in the criminal justice system. Together with CIJ Jesuit Social Services will establish and coordinate the ABI Justice User Group. The group will meet on a bi-monthly basis for 18 months. Jesuit Social Services will support participants with access to practical support to facilitate their engagement in the project.

The purpose of the meetings is to support people with an ABI and/or family members or carers who have been through the criminal justice system in telling their stories, reviewing and producing ideas for changes to the law, policies and procedures, and conducting advocacy and education to promote their proposals and share their experiences.

CIJ and Jesuit Social Services will work to promote the ideas of the Justice User Group, and will support the Group to engage with and educate the community and justice system stakeholders.

The CIJ will produce a final report capturing consultation with stakeholders and recommendations made by the Group for innovative reforms to legislation, practice and policy.

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*The **Enabling Justice Project**, a collaboration between Jesuit Social Services and RMIT University's Centre for Innovative Justice, is a three-year project that aims to address the overrepresentation of people with acquired brain injuries in the criminal justice system.*