**SPECIFIC ADVOCACY FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAFBLIND**

(combined vision and hearing impairment)

DeafBlind Association (NSW) Inc has been operating as an unfunded systemic and individual advocacy organisation for over 20 years. This was essential when funding was not available after a freeze was put on new advocacy funding in NSW, and no other organisation could understand the very specific and non generic needs of people who are deafblind.

**Cathy -** was a 24 year old woman in 1989 when Hornsby Challenge was asked by the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) to accommodate a young woman who had been kept at RIDBC for 6 years longer than usual because of challenging behaviour (frustration). She had been refused accommodation at all other services, and they were told she would need to go into a Nursing Home if this was not successful. Advocacy from DeafBlind Association was sought and communication needs were implemented, her accommodation is still secure and she worked in open employment with minimal support, but with advocacy and communication, for the next 15 years before making the choice to remain at home and join other social venues. She is currently a happy person making her own choices.

**Jess-** DeafBlind Association (NSW) became aware of Jenny, in 1993 and went to visit her, she was a vital 23 year old who was interested in her surroundings, who showed some knowledge of sign language and was wanting to offer her new visitors coffee. Advocacy for further sign language implementation and training for staff was rejected.

In 2008 Jenny was visited by Deafblind Association, at the request of the Public Guardian, to find a 38 year old woman lying in a foetal position on a vibrating chair and wearing restraints (challenging behaviour because of the frustration of not being able to communicate her needs). Basic signs have now been introduced and staff trained in these, but is it too little too late? Staff is still saying that if they sign ‘too much’ she will want to communicate all the time (surprise?) and they have so much paperwork they can’t do this. A tragedy that should not have happened.

**Van** – was a 21 year old living in respite accommodation for 3 years after leaving RIDBC at 18, where he had been a boarder since the age of 8. Deafblind Association was asked to advocate with DADHC on his behalf in 2008, to find appropriate accommodation. Van is currently living in a group home where his communication is part of his daily life, he also attends a day/work program where his caseworker is a fluent Auslan signer.