



Independent Family Advocacy and Support  
(IRAS): client participation in a non-legal  
advocacy service

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# Acknowledgement of Country

# Isla's Story



## What is IFAS?

- Provide non-legal advocacy and support to parents/primary carers in the early stages of child protection involvement.
- Pilot running for three years, working with families in LGAs of Darebin, Moreland and Bendigo.
- Focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and parent with an intellectual disability.

## IFAS Background

- Key recommendation of the VLA Child Protection Review 2017.
- IFAS to be a service that complements VLA existing child protection practice.
- Builds on experience of Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) service.
- Reference group informed the design of the service and ensured that service responds to community needs.

# IFAS Initial Reference Group

I was interviewed apart of the VLA Child Protection Review.

During VLA implementing one of the Recommendations I was approached to sit on a reference group as a member with a child protection lived experience.

The initial reference group was made up of people with a Lived Experience, DHHS, VALID, VACCA, Reinforce and Djirra.

During this time the reference group helped to develop and design the program that is now known as IFAS. We came up with the name, the design and what supports and advocacy would be able to assist clients, in regards to what would of helped us during our involvement with Child Protection as Parents.

## IFAS – the beginning

- Opened for referrals in Melbourne (Darebin/Moreland) in October 2018 and in Bendigo in December 2018.
- IFAS has provided coaching for self- advocacy/direct advocacy and complex advocacy to over 50 clients since opening for referrals.
- IFAS has had over 100 Level 1 interactions (general enquiries/do not meet criteria).

# IFAS – What do we do

- Representational Advocacy – instructions from clients
- Supporting Self-Advocacy
- Information on rights, responsibilities and the child protection system
- Referrals
- IFAS ongoing practice continues to be informed by people with lived experience of the child protection system.



# Shared Experience and Support

Shared Experience and Support is the reference group that has been created to continue to inform IFAS.

SEaS members have a wide range of Lived Experience, including living with a Disability, Mental Health, Family Violence, Advocacy and Child Protection.

SEaS have been an integral part of being able to develop parts of IFAS.

## SEaS continued

SEaS Members are able to have a voice to be able to ensure that all documentation is in simple language, for everyone to be able to understand the information.

SEaS have also been able to have a say with other Changes within VLA as well as other programs that are Being reviewed. I then Represent the SEaS members At meetings for their voice to be heard.

SEaS Members have also been given further opportunities Within VLA to be apart of other committees and to be heard.

# IFAS Criteria

## Key criteria

- Parents/carers live and/or work in Darebin, Moreland or Bendigo.
- Child protection involvement at investigation/pre-court/unborn report/PA by notice phase

IFAS provides coaching for self-advocacy to:

- CALD, family violence, AoD, LGBTIQ+, mental health and other disabilities.

## Key priority areas

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Parents with an intellectual disability

# CASE STUDIES

# IFAS Wrap Up

IFAS have consulted with people with a Lived Experience from the beginning and continue to along the way.

Everyone who was interviewed for a position had a Lived Experience Reference Member on the Interview panel to get their opinion.

IFAS acknowledges that parents/primary carers are experts on their family and strives to ensure that their voice is an integral part of the decision making process.

# IFAS Contact

## IFAS phone line

- 1800 849 200 (toll free)

Phone operating hours - will call people back

Monday 9am – 12pm

Wednesday 1pm – 4pm

Friday 9am – 12pm

## IFAS email

- [ifascontact@vla.vic.gov.au](mailto:ifascontact@vla.vic.gov.au)

## IFAS website

- [www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/IFAS](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/IFAS)

## More information

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