

Consumer Advocate Profile with Cecil Camilleri

How did you start your advocacy journey?

As I was born and raised in Malta it will not come as a surprise that my advocacy journey was initially influenced by my Roman Catholic heritage and the call during Sunday mass for people to help or join the missions. So, you could say, that I've had this urge to lead a life of service from a very young age. I hasten to add that I was not indoctrinated by the church. However, for sure, the Church's call fell on fertile ground. At that young age I believed I had a vocation and a calling to 'feed the world', in particular what we used to call the third world countries. These days we prefer to call these countries undeveloped or underdeveloped economies. Better still, it is more correct to refer to them as simply developing countries. This led me to study applied botany at Wye College of London University and thereafter a masters in agricultural economics with some studies on 'Agricultural Development in Lower Developed Countries'. I even went on to read B.Litt. (Hons). Development Studies at Deakin University following some time in Papua New Guinea, where I was working with subsistence economies. It is fair to say that, throughout my life, I believed in the need for social justice. This belief matured into an understanding of sustainability as social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

How has advocacy enriched your life?

Advocacy has given me purpose and meaning, and certainly the hope that, through social action, one can make a difference. I suppose you could also say that advocacy has not only enriched my life but has also opened my eyes to a life of possibilities. My understanding of advocacy, as a vocation and calling, has ebbed and flowed together with my life-long journey of adjustment to the vagaries of Bipolar Affective Disorder, harnessing the opportunities presented by the disorder whilst managing the pervasive challenges as they emerged during the cyclic nature of the disorder. Disclosure has been simultaneously liberating and disabling. However, as a mental health and disability advocate I hasten to add that 'authenticity' is very important for self-esteem and, perhaps arguably, instrumental in facilitating post-traumatic growth and productive participation in the community. The experience of growth has been facilitated by adapting and incorporating the principles of PERMA in my mental health recovery plan. You may recall that PERMA is the acronym for positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Advocacy certainly provided PERMA and enriched my life.

Why is advocacy important to you?

Advocacy is important to me because I subscribe to the ideal that a life of service is a life well-lived. Advocacy provides me with the opportunity to be of service.



What has your involvement with HCA looked like?

I currently serve on HCA's Policy Council. But, I hasten to add, as a result of my association with HCA, I have the privilege to serve on many other organisations.

How long have you been involved with HCA?

I was appointed to the Policy Council on the 13th of August 2015.

What sort of advocacy work have you been involved in?

I have an ongoing association with Lifeline (Uniting Communities), Centacare, SAHMRI, the Centre for Wellbeing and Resilience, the Health Consumers Alliance of South Australia, Mental Illness Fellowship of South Australia, the Community Visitor Scheme and the South Australian Office of the Chief Psychiatrist.

How do you think your advocacy work has made a difference?

I would like to think that my advocacy work has touched other people in a positive way, clearly demonstrating that recovery is possible despite the very intrusive nature of mental illness. Recovery talks about mental health rather than mental illness. Advocacy is about leading by example. I would like to think that my active participation in advocacy has encouraged others to embrace recovery and move forward with courage and dignity.

