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Southwest Advocacy News

Reg. No. A00 259 14Y

DECEMBER 2011

CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Welcome to my first newsletter as the new Co-ordinator of Southwest Advocacy Association Inc.

I would firstly like to acknowledge Rob Dick for the tremendous work that he has done for this organisation and for people with disability throughout the southwest for the past fourteen years. There are many people who have benefited from Rob's unwavering belief in the rights of people with disability and the voice that he has given those who wanted it and the support he has given those who wanted to do it themselves. As an Advocate and also as a work colleague he will be missed.

To let you know a bit about myself, I have worked at Southwest Advocacy for nearly twelve years as the other Advocate, two days per week. This has allowed me to work in other organisations for that other three days each week, giving me a broad experience and knowledge of the sector. I have always been passionate in my position as an Advocate for people with disability and am excited about doing it on a full time basis and taking over the co-ordination of the agency.

My first month in this position has been very busy with attending to the caseload, both ongoing and new and taking over the co-ordination of the agency. I have started having

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The Committee of Management together *with Adele & Marg* would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

**The Southwest Advocacy Association office
will be closed from
Thursday 22nd December 2011 and will re-open on
Tuesday 3rd January 2012**



(Continued from page 1)

meetings to try and get some additional funding to support the continuation of the Active Participation Register and also to enable us to employ another Advocate. I will keep you informed as to any progress in these areas.

I would like at this point to thank Marg, our office administrator for her support and assistance to me in this new position, I couldn't do it without her and also to our Committee of Management for having the faith to appoint me to the position and then to support me in it. I am determined not to let any of you down.

Adele Markwell
Co-ordinator/Advocate



Any donations or bequests to Southwest Advocacy Association would be greatly appreciated and help to benefit the organisation in its work to provide advocacy & information to people with a disability in the Southwest of Victoria.

S . W . A . A . These donations or bequests would be tax deductible because of the charity status of Southwest Advocacy Association.

**Southwest Advocacy News is also now available at
www.southwestadvocacy.org.au**

Kindergarten Inclusion Tip Sheets

If you're thinking about kindergarten for your child next year, now is the time to start planning.

A successful year of kindergarten requires planning and input from parents and a positive approach from everyone involved in kindergarten programs towards including children with a disability.

Inspired by real life parents stories, our Kindergarten Inclusion Tip sheets are designed to provide parents of children with a disability with information about kindergarten.

The sheets include parent stories and information on the following topics:

- Kindergarten is a program for all children
- Choosing a kindergarten service
- Overview of support for kindergarten services to include children with a disability

- Planning with the Program Support Group
- Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services packages
- Encouraging your child's independence
- Communication
- Looking after yourself
- Being part of the kindergarten community
- A second year of kindergarten
- Going to school

The tip sheets were developed in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and are available in Arabic, Chinese and Vietnamese and can be downloaded from our website or you can request print copies by contacting the Association office on 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (rural callers) or mail@acd.org.au For bulk orders, please use the Publication Order Form on our Website www.acd.org.au

(Taken from Noticeboard magazine of the Association for Children with a Disability—Winter 2011)

**CONTRIBUTIONS
To SWAA NEWS**

We welcome any contributions to the newsletter in the form of letters, stories, articles and news items relevant to disability issues.

Items printed in SWAA News do not necessarily reflect the views of SWAA, staff or Committee of Management

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is a great way to support our work, and we are very keen for people who have used the service to become members. Members receive our quarterly newsletter and other mail outs about disability issues and can have a say in the running of Southwest Advocacy by voting at our Annual General Meetings.

Membership of Southwest Advocacy is free.

If you would like to become a member please contact Southwest Advocacy for a membership form.

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INTERVIEW with the Disability Services Commissioner

We asked Laurie Harkin about his role as the Disability Services Commissioner (DSC).

The role of SDC was established as part of the implementation of the Victorian Disability Act 2006.

Why was the role created?

To strengthen protections about the rights of people with a disability and to provide for an independent review of concerns people may have about their disability supports.

What vision does DSC work towards?

We aim to demonstrate faithfulness to the principles and requirements of the Disability Act 2006 and to always demonstrate impartiality and fairness in our work.

We respond to issues brought to us in ways that respect people's experience and are always even handed in how we go about this. It is vital in our view for service providers to see that complaints present an opportunity to improve the services they provide. As part of enabling this, we put much effort into working with everyone to improve relationships between service providers and the people with a disability and their families that they support.

We invest significantly in our educational efforts to achieve this and to influence ongoing change that leads to improved outcomes for people. All of our education work draws on the practical learning that arises

from our complaints handling experience.

Why would a person with a disability or a family who has a child with a disability approach the commission?

People typically contact us when they have concerns about the disability service they are receiving from their service provider and feel less able to raise those concerns themselves. We can, and do, provide practical advice and support to enable people's concerns to be heard and, wherever possible, resolved.

Many people find the idea of making a complaint quite intimidating. How does DSC support people in such circumstances?

We are sensitive to the challenges that people can feel about making a complaint about the service they receive. We would work through to issues that are giving rise to their concerns and offer practical support and assurance to enable them to take their issues forward.

Are there times when DSC can't support people?

As with any Statutory Body, legislation defines our jurisdiction. While it is the case that we deal with issues of concern that people may have about supports provided by registered disability service providers, where an is-

sue is not within our jurisdiction we would always seek to support and guide people to take issues forward to the organisation which is mandated to deal with their issue.

What have you been most proud of during your first term as Commissioner?

We are most pleased with the level of engagement we have been able to achieve with individuals with a disability and being able to share in their lived experience in often enormously challenging personal circumstances. We find the work inspiring, humbling and uplifting and we are encouraged by the growing number of people with a disability who are more confident about raising issues themselves. We are at the same time conscious that while much has been achieved, there remains much more to do.

What are your priorities for the future?

To continue to use the outreach approach we've undertaken to engage with people with a disability, their families and service providers, to affirm and support people's right to express their concerns so as to enable real change to be achieved and to challenge the cultures that for too long have shaped the character of disability service provision.

Disability Services Commissioner
Level 30, 570 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Phone: **1800 677 342 (free call)**
Phone: **1300 728 187 (local call)**
TTY: **1300 726 563**
Email: complaints@odsc.vic.gov.au
Web: www.odsc.vic.gov.au

Disability
Services
Commissioner

NDIS: A reality

The Productivity Commission inquiry has been completed. The final report has been delivered. The Gillard government has committed to implementing a National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Baillieu government has put its hand up to run a trial.

We're on our way to having access to better disability supports but it is still early days and there is a long way to go. The 1,000 page Productivity Commission report outlined recommendations about how the NDIS could be developed and funded. Areas covered in the report include:

- how a scheme should be designed and funded to better meet the long-term needs of people with disability, their families and carers
- how to determine the people most in need of support, the services that should be available to them, and service delivery arrangements
- the costs, benefits, feasibility and funding options of alternative schemes
- how the scheme will interact with the health, aged care, informal care, income support and injury insurance systems
- its impacts on the workforce
- how any scheme should be introduced and governed
- what protections and safeguards should be part of the scheme.

You can view the full report and other shorter versions on www.pc.gov.au

Next steps include the need for governments to agree on the funding formula, the scheme's design



and delivery. This will need state, territory and federal government agreement and negotiations began on 19 August at the Council of Australian Government (COAG) meeting in Canberra.

A Select Council on Disability Reform will be established and supported by an Advisory Group. One of our Association members, Bruce Bonyhady, has been appointed to the Advisory Group. Bruce took the concept of a universal insurance scheme to the 2020 Summit back in 2008 and along with others was successful in getting support for it. In an interview printed in Vol 2, Issue 2 of the AAFCD Family Voices magazine, Bruce talked about his ideas:

"I am an economist by training. I began my career in the Commonwealth Treasury and have had an interest in good policy, and policy reform, for many years. I joined the Yooralla Board in 2001 and I found that each time I visited Yooralla sites I was inspired by the dedication of staff, humbled by the gratitude of clients and their families and angered by inadequate resources and unmet needs. About three years ago I started thinking about how the disability sector could be reformed ... discussions with many others gradually evolved into the idea that Australia needed a disability insurance scheme..."

Congratulations Bruce, and thank you for all the time, energy and commitment you have given to advocating for a reformed disability support system.

Elizabeth McGarry,
Chief Executive Officer

News from Every Australian Counts (EAC) Campaign

There's still a long way to go and it's important that the campaign grows in strength so that when the going gets tough, and decisions need to be made about the level of support the NDIS will require to be efficient and effective, MPs of all persuasions will hold their nerve in the knowledge that the Australian public is behind them.

What you can do to support the campaign

1. Help the Campaign increase the number of supporters it attracts. At the time of printing NoticeBoard, the Campaign's registered supporters totalled 62,563.
2. Regularly check the EAC website and Facebook page for the latest news.
3. Keep the focus on NDIS by updating your family and friends on its progress.
4. Seek out your local MPs and talk about the importance of NDIS (see the EAC website for tips on talking to MPs).
5. Consider contributing to public debate by reading the newspapers and contributing to blogs, sending letters to the editor, emails or tweets to TV shows, or calling talkback radio.

www.everyaustraliancounts.com.au

A National Carer Strategy

In August, Ministers Macklin, Roxon and Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, Jan McLucas, launched the National Carer Strategy. Its development and implementation is recognition of the invaluable contribution of carers.

Our Association formally participated in the consultations that preceded the development of this Strategy and we expect that, over time, the initiatives that fall out of it will justify its existence and purpose.

Carers in Australia are valued and respected by society. They have rights, choices, opportunities and capabilities to participate in economic, social and community life. The Strategy aims to respond to the diverse and changing needs of carers with services and supports that are co-ordinated, flexible, appropriate, affordable, inclusive and sustainable.

Six priority areas have been identified for action:

- Recognition and respect
- Information and access

- Economic security
- Services for carers
- Education and training
- Health and wellbeing

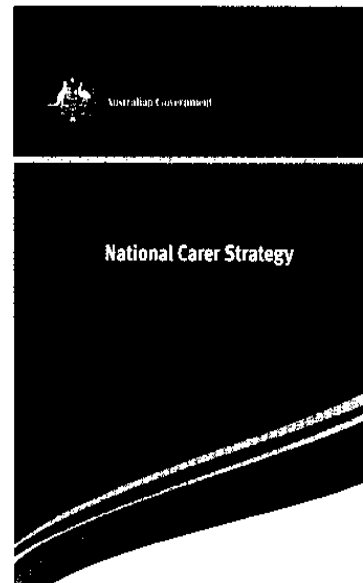
Some of the initiatives identified for implementation under the Strategy are:

- \$42.6M over four years to extend automatic eligibility for Carer Allowance (child) for carers of children with Type 1 Diabetes aged between 10 and 16 years
- \$2.9M over four years for fairer access to Carer Supplement
- \$10.3M to continue the Carer Adjustment Payment for a one-off payment to families following a catastrophic event involving children 0 to 6 years
- \$2.1M over four years for fairer access to the Bereavement Payment.

Our Association will continue to work with others to monitor how the strategy is implemented.

Elizabeth McGarry
Chief Executive Officer

Taken from Noticeboard magazine of the Association for Children with a Disability—Winter 2011



For the first time, Australia has a National Carer Strategy—the second element of the Australian Government's National Carer Recognition Framework.

The Strategy was developed in consultation with carers, state and territory governments, service providers and peak organisations.

For more information about the National Carer Strategy visit www.fahcsia.gov.au

Are you receiving Active Participation Register Mail outs?

Don't miss out — contact SWAA on 5561 4584 & complete a registration form.

You can help Southwest Advocacy by passing this newsletter on to someone else who might be interested in reading it after you.

People with Disabilities need access to Independent Advocacy Support

“Australia’s representative body for disability advocacy agencies (DANA) calls on the Australian Government to ensure that people with disabilities have access to independent advocacy support so that they can speak out when they experience instances of abuse, neglect or discrimination and when they need assistance to negotiate with services and systems to ensure that their fundamental human needs and rights are met,” said CEO, Andrea Simmons.

“New quality measures for advocacy agencies, currently being considered by Parliament, allow organisations that provide services to people with disabilities to also receive funding to advocate on behalf of people with disabilities against their services. This creates a clear conflict of interest for organisations funded to provide both advocacy and services and will leave many people with disabilities without independent advocacy support when their services fail them.

“A significant proportion of the harm experienced by people with disabilities in this country occurs due to service failure. Over the 20 year life of the National Disability Advocacy Program much of the work of independent advocacy agencies has been directed to seeking improvements in services to people with disabilities and redress for people with disabilities who have experienced poor, abusive or neglectful service delivery. This is why the nationally funded Disability Advocacy Program has had a policy of not funding service providers to deliver advocacy support to people with disabilities.

“Unless the government acts now to ensure that advocacy support in the future is provided only by agencies that are not also service providers it will be putting more vulnerable people with disabilities at significant ongoing risk. It will also be disregarding the recommendations of many advocacy program reviews, the *National Disability Strategy*, the *United National Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* and the clear advice of the Productivity Commission in its recent Inquiry Report into Disability Care and Support. The Commission (page 525) said that organisations funded to provide advocacy services should not be eligible for funding for disability service provision.

“People with disabilities in rural and remote communities are particularly disadvantaged when funded advocacy support is delivered through service providers because the funded advocacy provider for their area is likely to be the same as, or work closely with, the organisation that provides their disability services.

“DANA will continue to work to ensure that people with disabilities have access to independent advocacy support that is directed to their specific needs and interests, Ms Simmons said.

(Media Release 7.10.11)

Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) Limited