



Southwest Advocacy News

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December 2007

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CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Greetings to all members, clients and supporters of Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA) and welcome to the final edition of SWAA News for 2007.

SWAA's Annual General Meeting was held on Monday 19 November at the Warrnambool Football Club's Cedar Room. We still have one vacancy on the Committee of Management if anyone is interested and people with disabilities are encouraged to apply. After the necessary reports and business of the meeting were completed David Craig of Disability Rights Victoria gave us his perspective on the restructure that this statewide advocacy network is undertaking and the future of advocacy provision in Victoria. Given that SWAA is major stakeholder in this area, David's address was very relevant and informative for SWAA's Committee and members.

Some of the highlights of the previous 12 months noted in SWAA's Annual Report were:

- Providing advocacy casework to over 200 clients and fielding another 308 requests for information provision.
- Obtaining renewed funding to continue management of the Active Participation Register. This project aims to empower people with disabilities by informing them about opportunities to get involved in working groups, advisory committees and forums where consultation, planning and decision making takes place so that they are able to have an influence in a broad range of areas throughout the community.
- Seeing work which SWAA initiated through the Accessible Children's' Playgrounds Working Group bear some fruit, with

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

The SWAA office will be closed from Monday 24th December 2007 and will re-open on Thursday 3rd January 2008.

Would you like to receive Southwest Advocacy News via E-mail?

If you have an e-mail address you can help us save paper & postage costs by receiving our newsletter via e-mail. Please contact Margaret on 5561 4584 or just send us an e-mail message notifying us of your email details to receive future editions of SWAA News

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Warrnambool Council adopting an access policy and installing some accessible equipment at Lake Pertobe.

- Successfully lobbying Australia Post to install an automatic sliding door to the entrance of the Warrnambool Post Office.
- Being recognised & provided with an Award by Vision Australia for promoting the rights of people with vision impairments.

SWAA's campaign to try to make post offices more accessible to people with disabilities is continuing. We are waiting for a response from Australia Post to specific issues of concern that we have raised in relation to the Warrnambool, Hamilton and Terang Post Offices. In addition to this, SWAA recently attended a meeting at the Disability Discrimination Legal Service's offices in Melbourne and put the case for the development of a detailed and comprehensive Disability Action Plan to systematically address issues that disadvantage people with a variety of disabilities. Australia Post will now seek advice and inform us of their intentions.

Please note that after Friday 21 December 2007 SWAA's office will be closed until Thursday 3 January 2008. I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our clients, members and supporters a Merry Christmas and all the best for 2008.

Robert Dick.
Co-ordinator

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



Season's
Greetings

Do you have a relative or friend who had a mental illness and died by suicide or has gone missing?

Would you like to contribute to improving services and support for others in this situation?

SANE Australia, the national mental health charity, is working on an important new initiative to improve the supports and services for family and friends of people with mental illness who have died by suicide or have gone missing: the Mental Illness Bereavement Support Project.

Suicide is a major issue for people affected by mental illness. This often has a profound effect on families and friends, and this impact and their consequent needs for information and support are poorly understood. However, it is clear that often there are additional and different emotions to contend with when mental illness is involved in a suicide or someone going missing, and as you may know, there is often a lack of specialist support and services available in this area.

The **first stage** of the project will involve conducting interviews to gain a better understanding of the needs of family and friends of people with mental illness who have died by suicide or gone missing, and to explore the challenges current services may experience around delivery of support to this group of people.

If you would like to share your views and experiences please contact the SANE Australia Helpline on **1800 18 SANE (7263)** and ask for Jen Lorains or leave your name and phone number for a call back. Alternatively you can email Jen at jennifer.Lorains@sane.org

This project is funded under the Australian Governments National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

(Taken from VMIAC Newsletter Sept 2007)

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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SANE mental illness Helpline supports more callers concerned about suicide

The number of suicide-related calls to the SANE Helpline has risen by fifty percent. More people are now seeking help about suicidal thinking or behaviour, in themselves or someone close to them. This is usually in association with existing mental illnesses such as depression or schizophrenia.

Answering questions and providing much-needed information and advice to people about mental illness, via the national Freecall number and Helpline online, SANE Helpline supported 10,000 callers in 2006. Released today, the SANE Helpline Report 2007 provides an overview of this activity.

SANE Helpline has a specially-developed procedure for supporting callers concerned about suicide, and Advisors respond immediately with advice and information for people on accessing help.

Responsible and helpful media coverage makes a clear difference; journalists who include the Helpline number generate a noticeable rise in calls after each report, and an increase in visitors to SANE's website to download Factsheets.

There was a fifteen percent increase in calls about depression and anxiety indicating a positive shift towards seeking help early. People's willingness to talk about these conditions reflects a change in community acceptance and understanding of mental illness. A particular focus for the Helpline in 2006 was to inform callers about the new Medicare items available for psychological treatments.

Barbara Hocking, Executive Director of SANE Australia says: 'It is extremely encouraging that so many people are now seeking help and getting good advice. It's always good to remind callers that they are not alone and that real treatments are now more easily available.'

In July 2006 the Helpline introduced an after-hours answering service, so calls will always be answered by a person. People who phone in can request information packs, and/or register their contact details for an Advisor to return their call the next working day. Crisis numbers are provided for those who need immediate assistance.

The SANE Helpline is Australia's only national freecall helpline for information and advice about mental illness. It is staffed by paid, qualified Advisors who have ongoing training, support and debriefing to ensure the best service is provided.

Contact the SANE Helpline on 1800 18 SANE (7263) or access Helpline online and download SANE Factsheets at www.sane.org

Barbara Hocking, Executive Director of SANE Australia is available for comment.

SANE media contact
Sophie van der Merwe
03 9682 5933
0414 427 291
media@sane.org

Have Trouble Booking Interpreters? Do They Always Seem to be Busy?

It is true that it can be quite difficult sometimes to get an Auslan interpreter when you need one. Certain times of the year are extremely busy for the VAIS office and for interpreters.

Don't despair! Did you know that there are other times of the year when it is not so busy and it's generally quite easy to get interpreters at the times you want them? Believe it or not, it's true!

The months of December, January and February traditionally have very few bookings for Auslan interpreters. So, why not use this knowledge to try and plan some of your interpreting needs during this period? Perhaps its staff training or a staff retreat...or that long postponed visit to the investment counsellor...or anyone of a number of different possibilities.

We look forward to hearing from you!

*Taken from Vicdeaf Communicate
Issue 10 November/December 2007*



Emergency TTY contact

Did you know that there is an emergency number for TTY users?

In an emergency, dial **106**

106 is a dedicated text-based emergency relay service with direct access to fire, police and ambulance services.

The 106 service can only be contacted through a TTY. You cannot contact the service from a mobile phone or a normal voice phone.



Tips for emergency calls

- Always request the service—police, fire or ambulance. You can type PPP for police, FFF for fire and AAA for ambulance.
- Be ready to explain the emergency.
- Do not hang up! Wait for a reply.

*Taken from Vicdeaf Communicate
Issue 10 November/December 2007*

Interested in an alternative treatment for symptoms of schizophrenia?

The Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre (APRC) is currently seeking adult participants for a new research trial involving the use of an experimental treatment: transcranial Direct Current Stimulations (tDCS). We are interested exploring whether tDCS may improve a range of symptoms of schizophrenia including low motivation, reduced energy, difficulties with concentration and remembering things, hearing voices and confused thoughts.

We are currently recruiting individuals with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder who experience these symptoms and who have not responded to medication. The research trial involves daily treatment sessions for a period of three to six weeks in addition to fortnightly interviews. Medication therapy is permitted to continue during the trial.

If you want more information or are interested in participating please contact Sally Herring on (03) 9076 6596 or Kate Hoy on (03) 9076 5030.

Principal Study Investigation: Professor Paul Fitzgerald

Taken from VMIAC Newsletter December 2007

'THE WASTED YEARS' A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE VMIAC WOMEN'S SAFETY PROJECT

Our project, titled 'The Wasted Years', commenced in September this year. We have made considerable progress in firming up the scope of our study and the tangible outcomes we hope to achieve. The project is headed up by Jude Stamp who has had ten years experience as a consumer consultant and has worked extensively with women on inpatient units. Currently, we are gathering information and resources from a wide range of sources in connection with women's safety while receiving care on inpatient units, and the effects of previous assault and abuse on women's experience of mental illness.

An Advisory Team has been developed for the project, and we are fortunate to have an impressive depth of experience in the area of women's safety amongst our members. One of the key tasks to refining the vast amount of issues and information that might have been included in our project, was to make our task manageable given time and resource restraints. It was decided to focus our efforts on promoting the safety of women in Victorian psychiatric inpatient units and to contribute to the development of guidelines and policies with a greater recognition of the consumer perspective.

As an ultimate aim, we hope to influence policy-makers towards ensuring mandatory best practice across all inpatient units in Victoria. Over the last 15 years, little has changed to ensure women are safe from all forms of abuse and assault when receiving inpatient care. In fact, women's care is based on a Department of Human Services document that is 10 years old. 'Tailoring Services to Meet the Needs of Women' provides an optimistic view of women's treatment, but is not sufficiently specific about the strategies needed to affect change.

Current research is looking at the need for 'women only' accommodation and greater gender sensitivity for women's services—but there is an urgent need for practical, workable practice guidelines and policies to ensure care really does address women's needs. We titled the project 'The Wasted Years' because we believe there has been a lamentable lack of action around the safety and privacy issues of some of our most vulnerable women over the past two decades. We plan to ask women, through small discussion groups, what they see as needing to be done to allow them to feel safe.

If you would like to have input into this project please contact Jude Stamp on 9354 5.17 or email systemic@vmiac.com.au

Taken from VMIAC Newsletter December 2007