



# Southwest Advocacy News

Reg. No. A00 259 14Y

JUNE 2008

## CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Winter greetings and welcome to another edition of *SWAA News*.

SWAA has had some mixed news in relation to funding for the forthcoming year. Unfortunately, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, has not seen fit to increase our modest recurrent funding, despite the fact that it has not been keeping pace with rising operational costs for a number of years. This means that in real terms SWAA has less money to do its advocacy work on behalf of people with disabilities each year. The Government has announced that it will provide a one-off grant of \$10,000 that can be used for equipment and training, but it is really recurrent flexible funding that is needed.

On a more positive note, SWAA has obtained \$5,000 from Rural Access to extend the Active Participation Register project into the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Shires. People with disabilities and organisations who are interested in getting people with disabilities more involved in the community are encouraged to register an interest in this information sharing and empowerment project. Please complete and return the enclosed registration form or contact SWAA for further information.

Victorians with a disability and their families are set to benefit from a new \$2.5 million State Government scheme designed to increase the mobility of people with a disability. Under the scheme, financial assistance will be available for private vehicle modifications. A maximum subsidy of up to \$10,000 will be available to assist people with a disability who require modifications to drive or travel as a passenger in their vehicle. The subsidy can be used to provide specialised lifters,

*(Continued on page 2)*

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### Inside this issue:

Co-Ordinator's Report 1

Exploring the possibilities: Post-school options for young people with a disability 2

Digital TV and captions 3

Stop Press: 2008-09 Federal Budget Update 4

Accommodation for People with a Disability 5

Human Rights through Sign Languages 6



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*(Continued from page 1)*

carriers and trailers for wheelchairs, ramps fixed to a vehicle and modified driving controls to enable a person with a disability to drive. For information about applying for the scheme please call 1800 995 009 or email [vmss@bhs.org.au](mailto:vmss@bhs.org.au).

From July 2008 funded support packages, Support and Choice, Homefirst, Community Options and Futures for Young Adults, will be streamlined into one Individualised Support Package with one set of guidelines and processes. People on a package will now have a choice whether to continue to have their funds paid to the service provider, to manage it themselves or to have a financial intermediary. At a recent Statewide Forum convened by DHS to discuss these changes, individual support package recipients who were part of a pilot project agreed that the changes would be positive and empowering. The concept of individualised funding essentially involves a shift of control over the way disability supports can be delivered, and some people will need the assistance to ensure a smooth transition to new arrangements. For further information on these changes to the individual support packages, contact DHS Disability Services 1800 783 783.

SWAA's campaign to try to make Post Offices more accessible to people with disabilities is continuing. Following its' inspection of some regional post offices, Australia Post is now saying that the Hamilton Post Office will be subject to major renovations that will make postal services more accessible in the coming financial year. SWAA also understands that renovations have been recommended to make the Terang Post Office post boxes accessible and that Australia Post is reviewing its policy on the display of merchandise inside post offices with a view to enhancing accessibility. Unfortunately Australia Post is refusing to agree to calls from disability advocacy organisations for the development of a comprehensive Disability Action Plan to systematically address issues that disadvantage people with a variety of disabilities. SWAA will "keep you posted" on developments.

**Robert Dick**  
Co-ordinator

## **Exploring the possibilities: Post-school options for young people with a disability**

If you have a child or young adult in Year 10, 11 or 12 now is the time to start thinking about and planning for post-school options.

Exploring the possibilities is a new resource guide to assist young people with a disability aged 15 to 18 and their families to plan for the future and life after school.

The guide explores the range of options available to young people in the transition from school to adult life. This may include further study, employment, volunteer work or prevocational training.

Copies of the booklet are available free of charge from VALID on 9416 4003 or visit [www.valid.org.au](http://www.valid.org.au)

Further information about planning is available from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) website [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au)



## DIGITAL TV AND CAPTIONS

The digital television switchover is due to begin in December 2008. Communications Minister, Stephen Conroy, announced in December last year that the switchover will be complete by December 2013. Once complete, analog televisions will be completely switched off and audiences will only be able to watch TV using digital television set or a digital set-top box.



Digital television does include captions, so if you want to be able to access captions it is important to ensure you buy the right equipment.

All digital television receivers (including set-top boxes) that comply with Australian Standard 4933 must decode and display captions.

A list of equipment that complies with the standard is available on Media Access Australia's website under the 'Equipment' link. [www.mediaaccess.org.au](http://www.mediaaccess.org.au)

If you have any further inquiries regarding captioning or the digital switchover you can contact Media Access Australia on (02) 9212 6242.

*Taken from vicdeaf Issue 12 Autumn 2008*

## 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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## STOP PRESS: 2008-09 Federal Budget update

Given the re-negotiation of the Commonwealth State Territories Disability Agreement (CSTDA), this was never going to be a bumper budget for disability. But there was one surprise announcement in the Federal Budget about reforms to Carer Payment (child) eligibility.

AAFCD welcomes the announcement of \$273.6 million to improved support for carers of children with a disability or severe medical conditions. These changes are in response to the recommendations made by the Carer Payment (child) Taskforce report, which former AAFCD CEO Michael Gourlay participated in. New changes to the eligibility criteria and assessment process for Carer Payment (child) will be implemented from 1 July 2009. The Carer Payment (child) is up to \$546.80 per fortnight.

The changes to Carer Payment (child) include:

- New eligibility criteria for Carer Payment (child) that will see an additional 19,000 carers of children under 16 years with profound disability or illness eligible for the payment;
- A single assessment process, based on the level of care required, for Carer Payment (child) and Carer Allowance;
- Access to the payment for short-term or episodic care and more generous arrangements for carers of children in hospital to retain their payment; and,
- Improved transitions between Carer Payment (child) and Carer Payment (Adult).

Other 2008-09 Federal Budget initiatives include:

- \$20 million dollars over four years for carers who have experienced a catastrophic event involving a young child through the Carer Adjustment Payment of up to \$10,000;
- \$428.1 million for carer bonus payments for Carer Payment (\$1,000) and Carer Allowance (\$600) recipients to be paid by the 30 June 2008;
- \$100 million to be provided in 2007-08 to state and territory governments to support older carers through accommodation for their children with a disability;
- Development of a National Disability Strategy;
- \$114.5 million over four years to establish 38 child care centres, including six autism-specific centres (as part of the Government's plan to establish 260 child care centres);
- The \$500 utilities allowance will be extended to recipients of the Carer Payment and Disability Support Pension;
- The \$132 telephone allowance will be extended to recipients of the Carer Payment for those with internet connections;
- A 50% refundable tax-offset for key education expenses (maximum rebate \$375 per primary school child, \$750 per secondary school child) for families receiving Family Tax Benefit (Part A); and,
- Confirmation of the transfer of \$901 million from the Disability Assistance Package to the CSTDA.

While we welcome these announcements, there is still a lot more that needs to be done. We will continue to urge the Federal Government to use the CSTDA re-negotiations to fix the widening gaps in the service system, particularly in relation to the availability of supported accommodation and aids and equipment. We hope the Rudd Government will ensure that every available dollar of government funding to support children and adults with a disability and their families is well targeted and well spent.

## **Accommodation for People with a Disability.**

### **In March the Victorian Attorney General (A.G.) released a report called Accommodation for People with a Disability.**

The report talks about the major problems the AG found with the lack of support and accommodation and the way the existing support and housing is running. The Report says 6.5%% of Victorians have a severe disability and need intensive support and the numbers are growing. Currently around 4,600 people live in 914 shared supported houses or Community Residential Units (CRU's). People live in groups of 4, 5 and 6 with rostered staff support. About 40% of these houses are run by community services and the rest are run by the Disability Services.

### **The Waiting List is Huge**

At present there are 1370 people waiting for needed support and housing., The demand is going up by 405% per year. The AG found that the Department of Human Services (DHS) has not worked out the future support needs or how to meet this need. Instead they choose the person most in crisis when a place becomes available. The AG said this crisis driven system will continue unless DHS plans to meet the need. Meanwhile people who are waiting are under enormous strain. Of the 1370 waiting, 230 are in extremely urgent circumstances. The AG found cases where the carer themselves needed support.

### **Problems in Supported Housing!**

Unfortunately even when people get into supported housing problems occur. The AG found that people get no choice of where they live or who

they live with. They can't say who will work in their home. The AG found houses that still operate like an institution. One home they visited had a buffer zone included in it's design to isolate it from the nearby rural community. Another had lino halfway up the wall like a hospital like approach in the way they dealt with the residents.

### **All talk no action**

He said the new Disability Act, the standards and the goals of the State Plan are not being put in place in these houses. He said much more needs to be done retraining staff who work in houses so they understand their role is to support people to have a great life in the community, not to just do basic tasks around the house.

The AG said the money is tied to the house at the moment and it would be better if it were allocated to each person. He found that funding does not match resident needs that may change over time. He said transport options often limited people to group activities and that this barrier needed addressing.

The actual houses themselves need upgrading. The AG found that even though money has been spent another \$145.5 million needs to be spent and 200 houses still don't meet current occupation health and safety standards.

While DHS have accepted 8 of the 9 AG recommendations and partially accepted the ninth we will be demanding more action from them to deliver better results for people with a disability.

## Human Rights through Sign Languages

### *Deaf Perspectives on the United Nation's Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities*

Vicdeaf was privileged to have Colin Allen make an overnight trip to Melbourne to give a presentation on 'Human Rights through Sign Languages (WFD Mission); Deaf People's Perspectives on the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities'.

Colin has been a Board Member of the World Federation of the Deaf since 2003 and has lived overseas since late 2000. Prior to this, he was an active member in the Australia Deaf community having been president of the Australian Association of the Deaf (now Deaf Australia) for over 9 years.

Colin gave his audience of approximately 90 people an overview on the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) as an organisation and its role within the International Community. He then gave a presentation on 'Human Rights through Sign Languages', one of the WFD's missions. The WFD has a vision of the world as a more accessible and equal place, not only for Deaf people but also for all people globally. To make this happen, they have identified that several key areas need to be looked at continuously including:

- Politics
- Sign Language
- Deaf education
- Technology
- Access and Interpreting
- Families
- Self-determination and empowerment

The next part of Colin's presentation saw him speak about Deaf People's Perspectives on the United Nation's Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities. The WFD worked closely with the United Nations to ensure that the needs of Deaf people were being included in the Convention.

#### **The Convention:**

- Recognises sign languages as languages and considers them equal to spoken languages.
- Guarantees a right to get professional sign language interpreters.
- Guarantees a right to interact in sign languages, to get information and to express oneself in sign language and also for official interactions.
- Facilitates formal recognition of sign languages.

*Taken from Vicdeaf Issue 12 Autumn 2008*

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