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Southwest Advocacy News

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CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Welcome to all SWAA's members and supporters to another edition of *SWAA News*. For those of you who do not already know, after 14 years as Co-ordinator of SWAA, I am leaving the organisation at the end of August.

In addition to the provision of individual advocacy casework to hundreds of some of the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and disempowered people in south west Victoria, there have been a number of significant achievements and effective systemic advocacy activities for SWAA over the last 14 years, including:

- advocacy for and involvement in the development of Local Government Disability Action Plans & Advisory Committees across the 5 LGA's in south west Victoria;
- written submissions to reviews of various pieces of legislation and Government policy, including Workcover legislation, the State Disability Plan, Victorian Disability Service Standards, the Disability Act, access to legal services, the DDA Education Standards, the DDA Transport Standards, the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program, the Australian Building Code Access to Premises Standards, the DHS review of Supported Residential Services, Guardianship legislation, and the Mental Health Act;
- participation in numerous statewide & national disability advocacy campaigns, such as "Young People in Nursing Homes", "Crisis Account" (unmet need), "Disability Counts" (State election campaigns), the National Disability Strategy, and a National Disability Insurance Scheme;

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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 electronically.

**HAVE YOU VISITED SWAA'S WEBSITE:-
www.southwestadvocacy.org.au**

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- an extended advocacy campaign for better wages and conditions for people with disabilities working in supported employment services;
- an extended advocacy campaign for Australia Post offices & services to be made more accessible;
- persistent advocacy for more accessible public transport for people with disabilities;
- the development of the Active Participation Register in collaboration with Rural Access; and effective advocacy for improvements to accessibility in relation to a myriad of local and regional pieces of infrastructure, facilities and services including CBD's and streetscapes, transport services, public toilets, performing arts centres, Courthouses, children's' playgrounds, shops, cinemas, hotels, etc.

The major problem that SWAA has faced during my tenure as Co-ordinator over the last 14 years and one that the organisation continues to face today is meeting the need for advocacy across a huge region with an inadequate level of Government funding. Since the organisation's inception what was never more than a modest level of funding has failed to keep pace with rising operational costs. This has inevitably meant that SWAA has always been under financial pressure and has not been able to employ staff to address unmet advocacy needs throughout the region.

The inadequate funding of SWAA and the National Disability Advocacy Program in general simply underlines the fact that Government does not see the plight and the rights of people with disabilities as a high priority and this is, in turn, reflected in inadequacies in the funding of the disability services system in general. While there has been progress, people with disabilities remain disadvantaged in so many areas and unmet need for adequate services and supports is still huge. The reality is that until people with disabilities, carers and their advocates become a unified, politically active movement and force disability issues onto the political agenda at State and National levels, progress will inevitably remain slow and patchy.

On the positive side of the ledger, I believe that I am leaving SWAA with robust organisational structures and as a strongly client-focussed and progressive organisation with an unwavering commitment to the protection and promotion of the rights and interests of people with disabilities. Feedback from consumers and service providers indicates that SWAA's commitment to consumers, the quality of its' advocacy work and adherence to sound human rights advocacy principles is admired and valued.

SWAA's systemic achievements and our advocacy casework work on behalf of people with disabilities is only made possible by the hard work of the staff and volunteer Committee of Management who combine as a team to make it all happen. I would like to formally thank them, and also you, the Members and grass roots sup-

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porters of SWAA, for your generous support and interest in the disability rights movement, which SWAA is an important part of.

I wish SWAA and everyone associated with it all the best for the future.

Robert Dick
Co-ordinator

Attention Team Leaders & Staff of Community Residential Units!

Staff, please inform your residents about the following FREE training sessions.

AMIDA has been funded by DHS to develop and deliver a Training Program for residents of Community Residential Units throughout Victoria, about residents Housing Rights. To do this AMIDA produced a Booklet & DVD outlining the Residential Rights, this is used during the training sessions at the homes we visit.

The training session is 2 hours duration and can be organised at a time and place that suits individual houses. The training is run by a registered trainer and peer facilitator. Sessions are interactive, fun and practical for the residents. Residents may invite family or friends to join in the training.

For further information or expression of interest form, contact Mary Reid.

AMIDA office: 9650 6810

Email: cmery@bigpond.net.au

All inquiries will be replied.

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.

*Southwest Advocacy Association
31 Princess Street
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Tips for preparing for school meetings

- Read the minutes from the previous meeting and make a note of actions that have been done and those for follow up.
- Review your child's learning plan and how it is progressing. Look back through the communication book to refresh your memory.
- Think about all aspects of school life for your child and identify any issues that you want to discuss, eg., safety, equipment, therapy, academic, social or personal care needs.
- Think about the term ahead and identify any special events that require planning, eg. school camp or swimming lessons.
- Make a note of anything that has changed at home that the school might need to know about.
- Prioritise the issues you want to discuss in case there isn't enough time to raise them all.
- Ask that your discussion items be put on the agenda and circulated to all members of the group.
- If you are taking an advocate or support person with you, give them advance notice of the meeting.
- Celebrate achievements and acknowledge what is working well.

Education planning

The beginning of Term 2 is a good time to reflect on what is working well, what could be improved and what further planning is required for the rest of the school year.

By now your child is settling in at school and is getting to know the classroom teacher, school routines as well as making new friends. Discussions at your first planning meeting, which may be called a Student Support Group (SSG) or Program Support Group (PSG) meeting, would have identified a range of learning goals strategies to achieve these and the resources needed to further these outcomes. Typically referrals for specialist support or service such as speech, physio or occupational therapy would have occurred at the end of the previous year and your child should have been receiving these in Term 1.

If you are new to the school and you haven't had an SSG/PSG yet, it's time to ask for one! Becoming familiar with, and using, the SSG/SPG framework will assist you to understand how to work with the school to establish a good planning process for your child's educational needs. If this process is working well then you will recognise your child's achievements in their mid-year report.

SSG/PSGs are available to any student with additional learning needs, irrespective of funding. Members of the SSG/PSG can include: parent/s, class teacher, principal or nominee, a parent advocate (this can be a person of your choice who is not in receipt of a fee to act as your advocate), the student (where appropriate), and consultants by invitation as agreed by the group. Good communication

between all members of the group will contribute to a shared understanding of your child's abilities and needs.

"If something isn't clear or not being addressed, an SSG/PSG is the best place to work through your concerns."

It's better to address issues early and to have structure around planning for your child's needs and to identify who is responsible for actioning the plan. This planning can include learning needs, health management and behaviour plans. It should become a natural part of the rhythm of school life and everyone should be comfortable that SSG/PSGs are part of this and that they will happen.

Schools should be able to respond to the diverse range of children's needs. If your child has autism and attends a Victorian government school, DEECD is now implementing the Inclusion Support Program which to create an 'autism friendly' environment as well as professional support to staff and intensive support for students. Central to this is the ASD Co-ordinator who has specialist ASD knowledge and who oversees the Individual Learning Plans of all students with ASD.

Think about the team of people who support your child's learning, including therapists, and how they could contribute to planning. Each person's knowledge can contribute to the development of a learning plan.

If your child is in prep, the beginning of Term 2 is a good time to review reports and recommendations from specialists who supported your child's transition to school, for example, providing a quiet space for your child or meeting their communication needs. If these aren't happening, ask for an SSG/

PSG to discuss this further. The school should be open to a partnership approach but if they are reluctant to convene a meeting you can put your request in writing to the principle. If getting everyone together at the one time is difficult, consider using technology such as telephone or video conferencing.

It is unacceptable for schools to make excuses for why children with a disability can't participate in an activity or to restrict their attendance. Planning ahead is the norm for all children at school and should include the diverse needs of all students. An education provider must make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate a student with a disability. All Victorian schools must comply with the Disability Standards for Education 2005 which include the right to comparable access, services and facilities.

Always thinking ahead will assist your planning for the rest of the year. Ask about camps, excursions and projects and start a dialogue around these so that your child doesn't miss out on these opportunities and milestones. This can involve making a list of events and what adjustments are needed. An SG/PSG can add structure to this planning and who is responsible for what action and when it will happen.

So if things aren't moving along by the start of Term 2, ask for an SSG/PSG so that everyone can give feedback on your child's progress and plan ahead for their learning needs for the rest of the year. At the end of the SSG/PSG meeting remember to set the date for the next one!

Di McCarthy
Manager, Parent Support

Tips for advocating for your

child

- Be clear about what you want to achieve and what is an acceptable outcome.
- Find out who is responsible for the outcome you seek.
- Don't always expect conflict, as others may agree with you.
- Be firm and persistent.
- Think about what you want to say and how you will say it.
- Write down the points you want to cover.
- Think about points that others may raise and how you might respond.
- Agree on an appropriate time and place for any discussion.
- Stay focused on getting the best outcome for your child.
- Be open to other solutions that may be just as effective.
- Negotiate and be open to compromise.
- Keep some notes about what was discussed.
- Follow up on agreed actions.
- Try to stay calm but if emotions overwhelm you, ask for a few minutes to gather your thoughts.
- If you need support, ask a friend or advocate to help you.
- Seek further information and advice from an advocacy organisation if you need to.

Disability Standards for

Education

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 set benchmarks for education and training providers with which all Victorian schools must comply. The standards cover enrolment, participation, curriculum development, student support services, and the elimination of harassment and victimisation.

Part 11 of the Disability Standards for Education provides for a review of the Standards every five years and the standards are currently under review.

For more information visit [Www.deewr.gov.au](http://www.deewr.gov.au) or [Www.ddaedustandards.info](http://www.ddaedustandards.info)

Student Support Group Guidelines

[Www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/handbook/](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/handbook/)

Catholic Education Commission

<http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au>

Independent Schools Victoria

[Www.independentschools.vic.edu.au/schools/gov-programs/special-education.htm](http://www.independentschools.vic.edu.au/schools/gov-programs/special-education.htm)

These tips are taken from our Positive Education Planning booklet for parents, available from the Association office or online at [Www.acd.org.au/information/education_planning.htm](http://www.acd.org.au/information/education_planning.htm)

Tips and information for teachers is available online in our Inclusive Classroom School Resource at [Www.acd.org.au/inclusive_classroom/index.htm](http://www.acd.org.au/inclusive_classroom/index.htm)

(Taken from NoticeBoard magazine of the Association for Children with a Disability—Autumn 2011)



SOUTHWEST ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION

*Invites all past & present
Committee of Management and Mem-
bers of SWAA
to a farewell dinner in honour of*

Robert Dick

*To be held
on
Tuesday 23rd August, 2011
at
6.00pm*

*Cramer's Bistro
Warrnambool Football Club
Cramer Street
Warrnambool*

Please forward RSVP for dinner reservations.

All Welcome

R.S.V.P.
Margaret Gottlewski
19th August, 2011
Telephone: 5561 4584
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