

SOUTHWEST ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION INC.

Incorporation Registration A0025914Y



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ANNUAL REPORT 2007/2008



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SOUTHWEST ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION INC

MISSION STATEMENT

Southwest Advocacy Association Incorporated aims to provide an advocacy and information service that empowers and gives a voice to people with disabilities; that strives to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are respected; and that fosters the positive and full participation of people with disabilities in the community.

ADVOCACY

Action on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a person or group, without conflict of interest, in order to promote and protect their welfare, rights & interests.



COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT MEMBERS

2007-2008

Graham Durston (President) joined the Committee of Management in 2005. Graham is an enthusiastic and energetic member of the committee and has a strong commitment for the rights of people with a disability. Graham previously held the joint Vice Presidency in 2005/2006 and accepted the role as President in 2006.

Michael Downes (Vice President) joined the Committee of Management in June 2006. Michael has a strong interest in the rights of people with a disability and is currently employed with Community Connections Victoria. He has an ongoing commitment to social justice issues and is involved with several community organisations, particularly welfare focus groups (eg Lifeline, St Vincent de Paul Society). Michael has also studied in the welfare/pastoral care field (Bachelor of Theology, Diploma of Community Services).

Peter Sheen (Secretary) has a degree in social work and is a program manager with Community Connections Victoria. Peter has been a key member of the SWAA Committee since 1998, is a former President, and has now been the Secretary of SWAA for several years.

Andrew Harman (Treasurer) accepted the position of Treasurer part way through the 2004-2005 year and has done a commendable job in managing the accounts of the Association during this time. He has a background in accountancy and has been involved with groups such as the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council and DASH.

John Furniss is a long standing and valued member of the SWAA Committee of Management, having served on the Committee since 1992. John has a particularly strong interest in mental health and social justice issues.

Gary Lucas has a strong background in community participation and activism. Gary has a Diploma of Community Services and is currently employed with Community Connections Victoria. Gary joined SWAA in January 1999 and has previously held the position of Treasurer.

Kevin Boyce has played an active role in the community and is committed to advancing the rights of people who have a disability. He is currently on several statewide committees relevant to the needs of people with disabilities. Kevin has been an active member of Southwest Advocacy's Committee of Management since November 2001 and it is now unfortunate that Kevin has resigned from the Committee and will be missed as a valued member.

Louise Endean has a Diploma in Community Services, and has worked in the community sector in south west Victoria for many years, and she is currently employed by MIND. Louise has been an enthusiastic and supportive member of SWAA since March 2002.

Gillian Blair has been on the SWAA Committee of Management since November 2003. Gillian's interests are quite diversified and include social issues, politics and the environment. She has been heavily involved in a range of community activities for many years.

Bill Hill-Peters became a member of the Committee of Management in November 2006. Bill's interests among others include the Polio Support Group and the Chronic Illness Support Group Network. Bill is very active in trying to integrate all the support groups.

Gary Barling has been on the Committee of Management since 2007 has become a most valued member of the organisation.

Southwest Advocacy's Constitution allows for a Committee of Management of up to 12 people, who are elected from the General Membership of the organisation. In an effort to ensure that SWAA is managed and directed by the people that it exists to serve, SWAA endeavours to ensure that at least half of the Members of the Committee of Management are people with disabilities.

People who are interested in nominating for a position on the SWAA Committee of Management are encouraged to contact us for an information pack.

General Membership of SWAA is available to any individual who supports the aims and objectives of the organisation and people with disabilities are particularly encouraged to apply. Membership of SWAA is free, involves you in the partnership between Southwest Advocacy and people with disabilities in south west Victoria and entitles you to vote at Annual General Meetings, to nominate for the Committee of Management and to receive newsletters and mail-outs.

Associate Membership is available to organisations that support the aims and objectives of SWAA. Associate members receive regular newsletters and mail-outs from SWAA.

Please feel free to contact our office for further information.



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2007-2008

It is with great pleasure that I present my second Annual Report as President of Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA).

Once again SWAA has continued to manage a busy individual advocacy caseload across the south west region and advocate on a broad range of systemic issues, despite the fact that operations continue to be restricted by funding constraints.

While this year has presented its' own challenges to a small organisation like ours, the future seems less uncertain as a result of a change in direction of the Commonwealth Government's policy that has seen abandonment of plans for a competitive tender for advocacy contracts and a consultative approach to reform of the National Disability Advocacy Program.

On an organisational level, highlights of the previous 12 months for SWAA have included:

- Obtaining a grant from Rural Access to extend management of the Active Participation Register into the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Shires. 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.
- ***The conduct of an occupational health and safety review.***
- ***Obtaining grants to provide essential equipment to the organisation.***
- ***A review of financial arrangements that optimises SWAA's financial efficiency.***
- ***Development of a new, accessible SWAA website***

In conclusion I would like to thank our hard-working and dedicated staff, Rob, Margaret, Adele and Judith, and my fellow volunteers on the Committee of Management. It has been a pleasure working with all of you and I look forward to another successful year for Southwest Advocacy Association.

Graham Durston
President



CO-ORDINATOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2007-2008

This year's Annual General Meeting marks the end of another successful, albeit demanding, year for Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA). SWAA's core business - working to protect and promote the rights and interests of people with disabilities and helping to ensure that they have a voice - remains constant. Sadly, the need for advocacy remains high and SWAA's very limited resources remain focussed on helping people with disabilities to obtain essential and basic services, supports and entitlements; fighting against discriminating socio-economic circumstances; and assisting people with disabilities to obtain their rights as citizens.

It is pleasing to note that the Victorian Government now has a Charter of Human Rights in place and that Australia has recently become a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The Victorian Government has had a 10 year State Disability Plan in place since 2002 and the Commonwealth Government is currently consulting on the development of a National Disability Strategy. This increasing recognition of the rights and needs of people with disabilities by Governments is encouraging and SWAA is hopeful that the lives of people with disabilities will be enhanced as a result. Things are slowly changing, but people with disabilities remain disadvantaged in so many areas and unmet need for adequate services and supports is still huge. The reality is that the rights and needs of people with disabilities are not high on the political agenda and 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.

The recent formation of the Disability Advocacy Network of Australia (DANA) and the formation of disability focussed lobby groups prior to elections are positive steps, but much remains to be done to effect systemic change at a macro level. In the meantime, SWAA continues its' work at the regional level through its own systemic advocacy efforts and through its' participation in statewide and national networks.

It is with a great deal of gratitude to the staff and Committee and pride in this organisation that I would now like to draw your attention to some of SWAA's most notable service delivery achievements in 2007-08.

Individual Advocacy

In 2007-08 individual advocacy casework was provided to 192 clients throughout south west Victoria. In addition to this, SWAA fielded another 280 requests for information provision from people with disabilities, family

members or friends and made over 100 referrals to service providers. Major issues dealt with via casework were service provider policy and practice, issues for families and children in schools, access to services, accommodation issues, financial issues, Guardianship and Administration issues, Mental Health Review Board matters and issues related to the removal of children from their parents by the State. While SWAA provided advocacy to people with all types of disabilities, people with psychiatric illnesses, intellectual disabilities, and multiple disabilities comprised the majority of SWAA's consumers.

Systemic Advocacy and Community Development

Over the last twelve months SWAA has devoted as much time as it could to advocating for changes to policies, practices and legislation in an effort to create benefits and opportunities for people with disabilities. We have done so both through our involvement with peak advocacy organisations of which SWAA is a member, and as an organisation in our own right. Some of SWAA's major systemic advocacy efforts and achievements in the past year are listed below.

- *Review of DDA Transport Standards* - SWAA made a written submission to the Transport Standards Review.
- *Autism State Plan* - SWAA participated in consultations as part of the development of the Autism State Plan.
- *Gaps in Service Provision to PWD* - SWAA has done some work on the development of a volunteer assistance model in conjunction with other local agencies.
- *Universal Access to the Built Environment* - SWAA has been actively lobbying local government authorities throughout south west Victoria to make the built environment universally accessible.
- *Access to Australia Post Services* - SWAA is continuing its efforts to ensure that Australia Post offices become universally accessible.
- *FAHCSIA Review of National Disability Advocacy Program* - SWAA participated in consultations and made submissions to this review.
- *Victorian Disability Services Act* - SWAA was represented on the Barwon South West Policy Consultation Group.
- *DHS Active Participation Strategy* - SWAA has continued to manage and develop the Active Participation Register throughout the south west.
- *DHS Review of Supported Residential Services* - SWAA made a submission to the State Government review.
- *SWAA Regional Access and Advocacy Network* - SWAA has initiated the establishment of a regional network of relevant agencies to support systemic advocacy and community development work.
- *SW Community Transport Committee* - SWAA has a place on this regional Committee, which addresses transport issues for disadvantaged people.
- *Warrnambool City Council Disability Advisory Committee* - SWAA is represented on this Committee.

- *Southern Grampians Shire Community Inclusion Advisory Committee* - SWAA is represented on this Committee.
- *Glenelg Shire Disability Advisory Committee* - SWAA is represented on this Committee.
- *One & All Festival Steering Committee* - SWAA is represented on this Committee.
- *Involvement in Peak Advocacy Organisations* - SWAA is a member of Disability Rights Victoria, the Victorian Rural Advocacy Network, the Victorian Disability Advocacy network and the Disability Advocacy network of Australia. These state wide and national organisations are involved in a broad range of systemic issues.

Community Education

In the area of community education and awareness raising SWAA has also continued to be active. Major activities in community education were as follows.

- SWAA was involved in information and training sessions in relation to the Victorian Disability Act.
- SWAA strategically utilises the media to raise awareness of issues affecting people with disabilities and during this year gave interviews on ABC Rural Radio and 3 Way FM.
- SWAA supports and participates in the planning and delivery of major regional activities and events that are particularly relevant to people with disabilities, such as Mental Health Week, International Day of People with Disabilities, Access Awards, etc.
- SWAA participated in regional events such as the Southern Grampians Seniors Expo and the Warrnambool Community Services Expo.
- SWAA regularly provides presentations on advocacy and SWAA's role to disability service providers and community organisations.
- SWAA regularly provides information and presentations to Deakin University and South West TAFE students studying in the social and community services and related fields.
- Production of SWAA quarterly newsletter, *Southwest Advocacy News* continued.

Supporting Disability Self-Help Groups

SWAA has continued to provide support and assistance to disability self help groups and we also remain ready and willing to assist with the development of new disability support and self help groups where the need exists and our resources allow.

Acknowledgments

SWAA's achievements throughout the year and our advocacy 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. Once again this year I would like to thank our Administrative Officer, Margaret Gottlewski, for her efficiency and professionalism, and part-time Advocate, Adele Markwell, for her skilled advocacy work on behalf of clients. I would also like to thank Judith Harris for doing such a wonderful job in maintaining the office environment.

I would also, once again, like to formally thank our dedicated, volunteer Committee of Management and the General Members of SWAA for their generous support of the staff and their interest in the disability rights movement, of which SWAA is an important part.

In the last 12 months SWAA has farewelled Kevin Boyce and Gillian Blair from the Committee of Management and Michael Downes will not be re-nominating for a place on the Committee of Management this year. We thank retiring members of the Committee of Management for their very important contribution and wish them all the best for the future. At present there are 4 vacancies on the Committee, which we hope to see filled in the near future as we embark on another year advocating the rights of people with disabilities.

Robert Dick
Co-ordinator



TREASURER'S REPORT

(For the 2007-2008 Financial Year)

The financial statements for the 2007-2008 year have been drawn up on an accruals basis as per the requirement of our funding body.

Mr Cameron Young has audited the books and records of the Association and the report has been included in the annual report.

Despite very careful management, the Association finished the year with an operating loss of \$45.29 and net Assets of \$69,888.82

Overall our financial position remains healthy with provision made for depreciation on equipment, accrued expenses and creditors.

The Association must again remain conscious of operating within our funding limits in the year to come.

I take this opportunity to thank the staff, committee, clients and friends of the Association for their interest and involvement during the year. I would particularly like to thank Margaret Gottlewski for her diligent work throughout the year, and her accessibility and patience regarding the organisation's financial matters.

Andrew Harman
Treasurer