

SOUTHWEST ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION INC.

Incorporation Registration A0025914Y



S . W . A . A .

ANNUAL REPORT 2008/2009



S . W . A . A .

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 2008/2009

PRESIDENT:	Graham Durston
VICE PRESIDENT:	Louise Endean
SECRETARY:	Peter Sheen
TREASURER:	Andrew Harman
MEMBERS:	John Furniss Gary Lucas Bill Hill-Peters Gary Barling Liz Graham Rebecca Kelly Erica Smith
STAFF MEMBERS:	Robert Dick (Co-ordinator/Advocate) Adele Markwell (Advocate) Margaret Gottlewski (Administration Officer)
AUDITOR:	Cameron Young Young's Chartered Accountants



COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT MEMBERS

2008-2009

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 to 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.

Louise Endean (Vice President) has a Diploma in Community Services, and has worked in the community sector in the south west of Victoria for many years. She is currently employed by MIND. Louise has been an enthusiastic and supportive member of SWAA since March 2002 and has acted in the role of Vice President for the past year.

Peter Sheen (Secretary) has a degree in Social Work. Peter has been a key member of the SWAA Committee since 1998, is a former President, and has filled the role of 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 since. 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 in the social and community services sector. Gary joined SWAA in January 1999 and has previously held the position of Treasurer.

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 the community.

Gary Barling has been on the Committee of Management since 2007. Gary has a Commerce degree and has done some postgraduate research related to information systems. He contributes some articles to the Victorian Government's disability related DiVine website.

Liz Graham joined the Committee of Management in 2009 and has proven to be a most valued and welcomed member addition. Liz has an education and training background in disabilities and vocational education. She is currently studying the Diploma of Disability and intends to work in Case Management. Liz is committed to facilitating opportunities for integration and full participation of people with disabilities in their local community.

Rebecca Kelly joined the Committee of Management in 2009 and is also a valued member. Rebecca holds a Certificate III in Aged Care/ Home and Community Care and Disability Work and she is currently completing Certificate IV in Mental Health and Diploma of Disability. Rebecca also works as a Personal Support Worker and she identifies advocacy issues affecting people with a physical disability as being of a particular interest to her.

Erica Smith has worked in the integration of children with disabilities in schools and is currently the Barwon South West Co-ordinator of Deaf Access Victoria. Erica joined the Committee of Management in 2009 and brings a welcome perspective to SWAA.

Southwest Advocacy Association'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 SWAA 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 SWAA for further information.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Once again, it is with great pleasure that I present this year's Annual Report as President of Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA).

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 challenged by severe funding constraints. We have also managed to deliver and participate in a range of community education activities and have continued to manage the Active Participation Register, despite the fact that this work remains unfunded, because we recognise the importance of this work.

While this year has presented its' own challenges to a small organisation like ours, the change of direction by our major funding body, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), resulting in the abandonment of plans for a competitive tender for advocacy contracts and the pursuit of a more consultative approach to the reforming of the National Disability Advocacy Program, has been a welcome development. We are hopeful that the ongoing reform of the National Disability Advocacy Program and the introduction of a Quality Assurance Scheme will result in the introduction of more realistic funding for advocacy organisations.

From my perspective as President, some of the highlights of the previous 12 months for SWAA have included:

- 1 The recruitment of some enthusiastic, high quality new members to the SWAA Committee of Management.
- 2 The provision of governance training to SWAA's Committee of management members.

- 3 A successful audit of SWAA's compliance with the National Disability Service Standards by FaHCSIA.
- 4 SWAA's involvement in the National Disability Advocacy Conference.

- 5 The resolution of issues that enabled SWAA to resume its involvement in the Disability Rights Victoria Consortium.

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

Graham Durston
SWAA President



S . W . A . A .

CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

It is with great pleasure that I deliver this year's Annual Report, this being the 12th consecutive report I have delivered as Co-ordinator of Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA). 12 years is a long time in a challenging job like advocacy and my longevity in this organisation is testament to the value of the people who are involved in it and the fact that SWAA is an organisation that believes in its mission to protect and promote the rights and interests of people with disabilities and that values and supports its' staff.

Some of the highlights of the last 12 months in terms of gains for people with disabilities generally include the release of the "Shut Out" report, which was based on the consultations that will lead to the development of a National Disability Strategy; the emergence of discussions on the need for a National Disability Insurance Scheme; and Australia's becoming a full signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. At the State level the Victorian Government has stepped up its education campaign to help organisations to understand and embrace their obligations under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights; reviews of the Mental Health Act and the Guardianship and Administration Act have been completed that will hopefully lead to enhanced rights and protections for people with disabilities; and the trend toward self directed personal funding is gathering momentum. SWAA has contributed toward many of these developments, either through its own systemic advocacy efforts or through its' participation in state-wide and national networks.

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 and demand for advocacy assistance remains high. Unfortunately the major limitation we face as an organisation also remains the same as when I commenced working for SWAA over 12 years ago. The problem that I refer to is inadequate funding and it is a worsening problem. Funding has not been keeping pace with rising organisational costs and this inevitably means that SWAA continues to lose ground

financially. Nonetheless, we remain hopeful that Government will recognise that, in order to provide a quality assured service, an advocacy organisation has to have enough funding to pay the rent, not to mention its' staff.

For our small organisation it is pleasing to note that over the last 12 months we have successfully completed self assessment and independent auditing processes that confirmed our compliance with the National Disability Service Standards; we have had an information technology review conducted and been able to have our website redesigned to make it a much more accessible and useful tool; and we have been able to offer our Committee of Management members access to the National Advocacy Conference and rounds of Governance training.

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 2008-09.

Individual Advocacy

In 2008 - 09 individual advocacy casework was provided to 184 clients throughout south west Victoria. In addition to this, SWAA fielded many requests for information provision from people with disabilities, family members, friends and service providers and made dozens of referrals to service providers. Major issues dealt with via casework were problems with service provider policy and practice, issues for families and children in schools, unmet need and obtaining access to services, accommodation issues, financial issues, Guardianship and Administration issues, and people experiencing problems in the mental health system. While SWAA provided advocacy to people with all types of disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, psychiatric illnesses, 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 to deliver enhanced benefits and opportunities for

people with disabilities. We have done this both through our involvement with peak advocacy organisations and as an organisation in our own right. 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. Some of SWAA's major systemic advocacy efforts and achievements in the past year are listed below.

- *Review of Mental Health Act* - SWAA made a written submission.
- *National Disability Strategy Consultations* - SWAA participated in consultations and made a submission.
- *National Access to Premises Standards* – SWAA made a submission to the Parliamentary Enquiry.
- *Universal Access to the Built Environment* - SWAA has been actively lobbying local government authorities, government departments and service providers throughout south west Victoria to make the built environment universally accessible.
- *Access to Australia Post Services* - SWAA continued its efforts to ensure that Australia Post offices become universally accessible.
- *Transport Issues* - SWAA made a contribution to the Moyne/Corangamite Transport Connections Project and has advocated for enhanced wheelchair accessible taxi services in the south west.
- *FAHCSIA Reform of National Disability Advocacy Program* – SWAA has continued to participate in consultations and make submissions.
- *Victorian Disability Services Act* - SWAA participated in review consultations.
- *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 initiated and has endeavoured to establish a regional network of relevant agencies to support systemic advocacy and community development work.
- *Disability Advisory Committees* - SWAA is represented on the Warrnambool City Council, Southern Grampians Shire and Glenelg Shire Advisory Committees

- *South West Acquired Brain Injury Network* - SWAA is represented on this network.

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 endeavours to support and participate 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 regularly provides presentations on advocacy and SWAA's role to disability service providers and community organisations. This year SWAA delivered presentations to groups such as District Nursing, Lyndoch Community Services, Coinda (Terang), Kyeema (Portland) and the Socialisers.
- SWAA regularly provides information and presentations to Deakin University, South West TAFE and SEAL students studying in the social and community services and related fields.
- SWAA strategically utilises the media to raise awareness of issues affecting people with disabilities and during this year was interviewed on 3 Way FM.
- 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 and her cheerful demeanour

I would also 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 long standing SWAA Secretary, Peter Sheen, from the Committee of Management. We thank Peter for his contribution and wish him all the best for the future. At the same time we have welcomed Liz Graham, Rebecca Kelly and Erica Smith onto our Committee and they are proving to be valuable contributors. At present there are 2 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 2008-2009 Financial Year)

The financial statements for the 2008-2009 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 \$13,361.56 and net Assets of \$59,527.26

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