

**SOUTHWEST  
ADVOCACY  
ASSOCIATION INC.**

Incorporation Registration A0025914Y



**S . W . A . A .**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2010/20011**



# **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  
2010/2011**

<b>PRESIDENT:</b>	Graham Durston
<b>VICE PRESIDENT:</b>	Liz Graham
<b>SECRETARY:</b>	Louise Endean
<b>TREASURER:</b>	Andrew Harman
<b>MEMBERS:</b>	Erica Smith Lisa Downs Camarita Sinclair
<b>STAFF MEMBERS:</b>	Robert Dick (Co-ordinator/Advocate) Adele Markwell (Advocate) Margaret Gottlewski (Administration Officer)
<b>AUDITOR:</b>	Cameron Young Young's Chartered Accountants



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Once again it is with great pleasure that I present this year's Annual Report as President of South West Advocacy Association (S.W.A.A.).

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, despite the fact that it remains under-funded, we have continued to manage the Active Participation Register because we recognise the importance of this program.

While this year has presented its' own challenges to a small organisation like ours, the provision of funding for the Active Participation Register remains a concern and SWAA is constantly looking for further funding to continue the service to people with a disability. It will be a challenge to maintain this service for the 2011/2012 year.

I would like to recognize the long association that the Co-Ordinator Robert Dick has had with the organisation over the last 14 years, and on behalf of the Committee of Management I would like to wish Rob and his family well in any future venture that they undertake.

In conclusion I would like to thank our hard-working and dedicated staff, Rob, Margaret, Adele and Judy 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



## CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Given that I am leaving Southwest Advocacy Association (SWAA) after 14 years, it is with a mixture of pride and some sadness that I deliver what will be my final Annual Report as Co-ordinator of SWAA.

I believe that I am leaving SWAA with robust organisational structures in place and as a strongly client-focussed and progressive organisation. Over the last 14 years SWAA has continuously endeavoured to improve its' capacity to fulfil its' primary objective of giving people with disabilities an effective voice and protecting and promoting their rights and interests. Feedback from consumers and service providers indicates that SWAA's commitment to consumers, the quality of its' advocacy work and its' adherence to sound human rights advocacy principles is admired and valued.

Before turning to 2010-11, I would like to take this opportunity to list a few of SWAA's most significant activities and achievements over the last 14 years. 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 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 Mult-Purpose Taxi Program, the Australian Building Code Access to Premises Standards, the DHS review of Supported Residential Services, the Guardianship and Administration Act and the Mental Health Act;
- participation in numerous statewide & national disability advocacy campaigns, in relation to such things as "Young People in Nursing Homes", "Crisis Account" (unmet need), "Disability Counts" (State election campaign), the National Disability Strategy, and a National Disability Insurance Scheme;
- 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;
- consistent advocacy for more accessible public and community transport options for people with disabilities, including more Wheelchair Accessible Taxi's in regional towns;

- production of a research report entitled, "*A Voice for Them*" on the needs of people with disabilities in relation to advocacy;
- the development of Protocol Agreements with Psychiatric Services and DHS Child Protection;
- obtaining DHS funding to deliver advocacy as part of the Disability Rights Victoria Consortium;
- the development of the Active Participation Register in collaboration with Rural Access;
- participation in the development of South West Healthcare's Access and Inclusion Plan;
- 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;
- various community education activities designed to raise awareness of the rights, needs & issues faced by people with disabilities;
- the development of a comprehensive suite of organisational policies & procedures and the establishment of a solid equipment base at SWAA;
- the completion of a comprehensive SWAA Risk Management Plan.

Measuring the success of advocacy can be extremely difficult. While in some cases it may be possible to directly attribute an outcome to a specific advocacy action or campaign, more commonly success may only be partial initially or the desired outcome may be delayed and may only be fully achieved when the seeds laid by advocacy come to fruition in a more favourable socio-economic or political climate. The desired outcome of an advocacy action or campaign may only come about as a result of the efforts or collaboration of a number of organisations and there may be a number of contributing factors in addition to advocacy that lead to the outcome. Nevertheless, advocacy remains fundamentally important, because without advocacy significant issues of disadvantage and injustice might never be raised effectively, addressed in as timely a manner, or even addressed at all.

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 not measuring the effectiveness of advocacy, but meeting the need for advocacy across a huge region with an inadequate level of 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 at an adequate level to address unmet advocacy needs throughout the region.

The inadequate funding of SWAA and the National Disability Program in general simply underlines the fact that Government does not see the plight and the rights of

people with disabilities as a significant issue and this is, in turn, reflected in the inadequacies of the disability services system in general.

While there has been progress in the plight of people with disabilities, 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 be slow and patchy.

The sad and disgraceful reality is that the plight of people with disabilities generally is still quite awful. To be entirely dependent on a Disability Support Pension or a Carer's Pension with all the additional costs that disability actually brings, condemns people to an ongoing financial struggle and an extremely frugal lifestyle. People with disabilities are still stigmatised, stereotyped and discriminated against, sometimes unintentionally and subtly and sometimes quite overtly. People with disabilities are more likely to live alone in poor quality and expensive rented accommodation, are more likely to be socially and geographically isolated, are less connected to their communities, are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system and be incarcerated, suffer more avoidable health problems and tend to die at younger ages than other people. Despite the fact that Australia has been riding on the crest of a wave of growing and unprecedented prosperity over the last 40 – 50 years, people with disabilities remain among the most socio-economically disadvantaged citizens and there are huge levels of unmet need for fundamentals like accommodation, supported employment, support in educational settings, personal care, case management, accessible transport, recreation and leisure services, day activities, respite care and aids and equipment. This paragraph reflects comments that I made in a SWAA Annual Report that I delivered about 5 years ago, but, sadly, the comments I made then largely remain applicable today.

As Co-ordinator of SWAA, I leave the organisation with two significant regrets. My first major regret is that, despite my best efforts over an extended period of time, the organisation is not in a more secure and comfortable financial position. The second major regret that I have is that the Active Participation Register (APR) project may not be able to continue in its' current form. While SWAA did receive a generous donation from Rural Access (Warrnambool) to help maintain the APR this year, without the acquisition of some new funding, the APR will have to be curtailed and this will have implications for both SWAA and for those people with disabilities and carers who receive APR mailouts.

On the positive side of the ledger, I believe that I am leaving SWAA with a strong professional practice model and a culture that places the rights and needs of people with disabilities at the centre of the organisation's focus.

It is with gratitude to the staff and Committee and a great deal of pride in this organisation that I would now like to draw your attention to some of SWAA's most notable service delivery achievements in 2010-11.

### **Individual Advocacy**

In 2010-11 individual advocacy casework was provided to over 150 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. Major issues dealt with via casework were problems with service provider policy and practice, unmet need and obtaining access to services, financial and legal issues, and people experiencing problems in the mental health system and the child protection 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 by raising issues as an organisation in our own right and through our involvement with peak advocacy organisations like Disability Rights Victoria, the Victorian Rural 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.

- *Auditor General's Review of Individual Support Plan's* - SWAA made a Submission to this Review
- *South West Healthcare Disability Access & Inclusion Plan* – SWAA assisted in the development of this Action Plan.
- *Universal Access to the Built Environment* - SWAA has been actively lobbying local government authorities, government departments and service providers and businesses throughout south west Victoria to make the built environment universally accessible. Amongst other things SWAA has advocated for enhanced access to the the Capitol Cinema Centre and McGennan's Car Park in Warrnambool.
- *DHS Active Participation Strategy* - SWAA has continued to manage and develop the Active Participation Register throughout the south west.
- *Disability Advisory Committees* - SWAA has been represented on the Warrnambool City Council, Southern Grampians Shire and Glenelg Shire Advisory Committees.



## **Community Education**

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

- SWAA regularly provides presentations on advocacy and SWAA's role to disability support groups, service providers and community organisations. This year SWAA delivered presentations to groups such as the Psychiatric Services Consumer Advisory Group, District Nurses and Terang and District Community Services Network.
- SWAA regularly provides information and presentations to students studying in the social and community services and related fields.
- 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 strategically utilises the media to raise awareness of issues affecting people with disabilities.
- 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.

Finally, 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, 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**



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## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

(For the 2010-2011 Financial Year)

The financial statements for the 2010-2011 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.

Because of very careful management, the Association finished the year with an operating surplus of \$12,849.50 and net Assets of \$60,498.18

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