



Newsletter

Autumn 2019



From the EO

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the RDAS newsletter.

The recent Federal Budget sent mixed messages regarding value placed on people with disability. The Treasurer announced that the \$1.6 billion underspent from the NDIS would be put into the Health System. Advocates argue that the money should be put into employing more people in the National Disability Insurance Agency to make decisions so that people are not waiting years for necessary equipment. There needs to be a broadening of the terms "refinable and necessary" so that people with disability can live the good life they were promised before the roll-out of the NDIS.



Speaking to the Prime 7 News the day after the budget

The budget allocated \$186 million for the Royal Commission into Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. This could be the biggest Royal Commission ever seen in Australia.

For the Royal Commission to be successful it needs to be above politics and free of conflict of interests. Disability advocates are calling for two of the Commissioners to stand aside as they are part of the very system that lead to the abuse.

Do you have a story to tell about you or someone with a disability who has been abused? See page 2 on how RDAS can help you tell your story at the Royal Commission.

Martin Butcher



From the Chairperson

It is now April, and it is incredible how quickly this year is going. The Board is starting to plan for next financial year already.

RDAS has received some extra funding so we will be able to do new projects.

RDAS is a Disability and Family Controlled Organisation (DFCO). That means that at least 50 percent of Board members and staff are people with disability, or people who have a family member with a disability. Having lived the experience enables the Board to have an understanding of the issues that are impacting on people who RDAS provides services to. Board members know what it is like to go through the NDIS process, or be discriminated against because of disability.

As a DFCO we received a grant to provide training to the self-advocacy group in Wagga, with the aim of a member of the group becoming a Board Member to represent the members. The funding will include providing a support person to help the successful member understand business papers and make good decisions.

We all need training and mentoring. RDAS is participating in *Good Governance – helping community organisations to be their best*, a project offered by Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau. A mentor will help us to do governance better.

Johanna Schmidt

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

There are about 4.3 million people with disability in Australia and many of them have told government that they have been

- physically hurt
- treated badly
- taken advantage of
- ignored when they needed support

The Australian Government is in the process of setting up a disability **Royal Commission** (Public Inquiry) to find out what is causing these problems and how they can be fixed.



The Government has invited the following groups to participate:

- people with disability
- their families and carers
- the disability services

Advocacy agencies will be the first point of contact for people who want to tell their stories at the Royal Commission. If you have a story that you want to tell or RDAS to tell on your behalf, contact the intake workers. They will ask you some question. Once we know more about what is needed by the Royal Commission, an advocate will be in contact with you. In the meantime we will keep you updated in the newsletter.



"Stand by Me' Rally, Martin Place, Sydney. Can you see Swie? Look above the "N".

During the lead up to the NSW state election in March the NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance was active with the "Stand By Me" campaign.

The Alliance calls on the NSW government to commit to ongoing and sustainable funding for independent advocacy and reparative organisations in NSW beyond 2020.

It is not the NDIS' role or responsibility to fund advocacy. Each government has a responsibility to fund advocacy.

RDAS was involved in the campaign. Swie attended the main rally in Martin Place, Sydney. Closer to home, we spoke to candidates in Albury, Wagga and Griffith, asking them to pledge their support.



Dr Joe McGirr with Kellie in Wagga.

If the NSW government stops funding independent advocacy, it would have a significant impact on people with disability in the region. RDAS would need to cut advocacy to people living between Albury and Gunnawarra near Barham and close the Griffith Office. This would mean Riley (pictured - right in white T-shirt) would not have access to independent free and local advocacy in Griffith.



Gunnawarra community



Wagga Wagga community

The Wagga Wagga Mardi Gras Parade took place on the 9th of March 2019 on Baylis Street at 5pm, followed by a free after party celebration at the Victory Memorial Gardens.



RDAS staff marched in the parade to demonstrate that it is an inclusive organisation that supports the LGBTQI community. RDAS staff also hosted an information stall at the after party where they provided information about RDAS services and the NDIS to attendees.

It is estimated that 10,000 people attended the Wagga Wagga Mardi Gras, with RDAS staff speaking with approximately 250 people at the event about our services.



RDAS staff worked together with the Mardi Gras organisers and Wagga Wagga City Council to ensure that the event was as inclusive for people with disabilities as possible.

This systemic advocacy resulted in Council owned portable fully accessible toilets with adult change facilities being made available for the event.



On March 27th, the Regional Disability Advocacy Service (RDAS) was invited to be part of the New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW CID) “Communities Can Do” forum, held at the Mercure Hotel in Wagga Wagga.

The forum was well attended by people with a disability, their families/carers, local businesses, health professionals and disability service representatives.

“Communities Can Do” was an interactive workshop where people with a disability were able to take part in the conversations, presented their stories and learnt about being included in their community. Inclusiveness involves but is not limited to:

- employment
- health
- education
- consumer rights
- leadership
- advocacy and
- living a good life

Some members of the RDAS’ Self Advocacy Support Group (SAS) proudly presented their stories. RDAS’ staff members co-facilitated the day with presentations on Self-advocacy, Individual advocacy and Systemic advocacy.



Jack Kelly (pictured in the middle above) was one of the guest speakers at the forum.

To find out more about the Communities Can Do forum, please visit: www.nswcid.org.au

Community Education

Snap shots taken during recent training sessions - "Knowing Your Rights and Speaking Up For Yourself" provided at Kurrajong (photos 1,2 & 3), Griffith Post School Options (photo 4), Job Centre Australia (photo 5) and The Leisure Company (photo 6).



Self Advocacy Groups' Corner

RDAS' Self Advocacy Support (SAS) members are now more self motivated in attending RDAS training sessions and participating in community events. Each of them has been using their diary to manage their busy lives including SAS meetings. (See below - photos 1,2, 3 & 4).

RDAS' Self Advocacy programme supports the active inclusion of people with a disability in their community by:

- Helping SAS members identify and break down the barriers that prevent them from enjoying the same opportunities and choices as everyone else.
- Providing information to help SAS members access community events, mainstream activities and programmes.
- Helping SAS members with ideas to avoid loneliness.

In consultation with members of Self Advocacy Support (SAS) groups around Australia, including the RDAS SAS groups, SARU has completed its Australian Self Advocacy Website project. The development of the website was inclusive to all members of SAS groups and choosing the name for the website was open to all SAS group members and in the end **The Voices Together** was voted in.

The Voices Together site has been LIVE since February 18th. The link is:

www.voicestogether.com.au/self-advocates/ It is an online resource for self advocacy groups, the government and the community to connect, work together and share information and knowledge. RDAS is in the process of making two laptops available for SAS group members to use in the Wagga Wagga office.



Some SAS members recently joined the 'Superhero' Walk fun day. This annual event is organised by the Wagga Autism Support Group to promote community awareness of Autism. Members had the opportunity to pose with the Mayor of the City of Wagga Wagga Greg Conkey (Batman) and Deb Bewick (white blouse), who joined in the fun.



NEW DAILY COACH SERVICE BETWEEN WAGGA WAGGA AND CANBERRA

NSW TrainLink has commenced a new trial coach service connecting Wagga Wagga and Canberra and communities in between.

The new service began on **Monday 8 April** and is expected to run for six months. NSW TrainLink is looking for customer feedback and suggestions during the trial period to see if there are opportunities to improve the services.

Existing regional fares apply to the trial coach services and will cost up to \$35.75 for adult one way fares from Wagga Wagga to Canberra. Different fares will apply for other stops along the route, depending on the distance travelled.

Seniors and pensioners will be able to purchase tickets at \$2.50 across all locations. The trial will use a modern coach with a wheelchair lift, space for up to two wheelchairs and an on-board toilet.

To ensure the trial is successful, NSW TrainLink encourages the community to use the service so that it can continue on a permanent basis at the end of the trial.

For more information and bookings, visit transportnsw.info/regional or call **13 22 32**.

Wagga Wagga – Gundagai – Canberra			
Monday and Friday			
Wagga Wagga Station	7:00	Queanbeyan Bus Interchange	16:30
Gundagai	8:00	Canberra (Kingston) Station	16:45
Canberra Civic	10:00	Canberra Hospital	17:00
Canberra John James Hospital	10:15	Canberra John James Hospital	17:10
Canberra Hospital	10:25	Canberra Civic	17:25
Canberra (Kingston) Station	10:40	Gundagai	19:25
Queanbeyan Bus Interchange	10:55	Wagga Wagga Station	20:25

Wagga Wagga – Junee – Cootamundra – Canberra			
Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday			
Wagga Wagga Station	7:00	Queanbeyan Bus Interchange	16:30
Junee Station	7:35	Canberra (Kingston) Station	16:40
Cootamundra Station	8:25	Canberra Hospital	17:00
Canberra Civic	10:25	Canberra John James Hospital	17:10
Canberra John James Hospital	10:40	Canberra Civic	17:25
Canberra Hospital	10:50	Cootamundra Station	19:25
Canberra (Kingston) Station	11:05	Junee Station	20:15
Queanbeyan Bus Interchange	11:20	Wagga Wagga Station	20:50



Claire Alexander & Shuh Ahmed



There has been a number of changes to staff at the Wodonga office over the past 3 months.

After 26 years, Jeanette Bawden announced her retirement and Jo Wilson who has been an Intake Worker for the past 4 years had a career advancement. Jo took the advocacy skills learnt during her time with RDAS to another organisation. We wish Jo and Jeanette all the best.

We welcome Claire Alexander as the new Business Manager with her background in accounting. Claire's skills will be valuable in a growing organisation.

We also welcome Shuh Ahmed to the role of intake worker. Shuh has a background in human rights. He worked for 'Save the Children' in Bangladesh before moving to Australia in 2013.

Employment Opportunity for a person with a disability

(8 hours per fortnight for 12 months)

RDAS has received a grant from the Victorian government to develop a Systemic Advocacy Action Plan which will focus on issues impacting people with disability in North East Victoria.

Are you able to:

- Facilitate community meetings ?
- Write a report ?
- Communicate with a range of people ?

Interested ?

Contact Martin Butcher
on 6056 2420



It was with mixed feelings RDAS staff members learnt of our longest running staff member and much valued Office Manager, Jeanette Bawden's early retirement plans, effective from Monday 18th of March 2019.

Jeanette has been with RDAS (formerly the Disabled Persons Regional Council (DPRC) and the Disability Advocacy Information service (DAIS), altogether for 27 years. She began as a volunteer with the DPRC and was employed as Administrative Officer on 20th July 1992.

Legend has it that Jeanette was the backbone of the company especially when DPRC was significantly under funded like most similar organisations. Somehow Jeanette always managed to negotiate better options or reduced prices, and she was heavily involved in applying for every requirement to run the 'new' business during the merger with the Disability Advocacy Network Inc.

Jeanette's dedication to her work and professionalism were second to none. Rumour has it that Jeanette was so organised that her tasks for the day in the morning were laid out on little yellow 'Post It' notes, stuck all over her desk.

There are lots of fond memories that we have all shared with Jeanette. She will be sorely missed by everybody at RDAS. We are, however, all happy for Jeanette because it means that she and her husband Roger, will be travelling Australia in their caravan and spending quality time with their grand-daughter, Sophia.

Thank you Jeanette for your time and dedication at RDAS. So long and best wishes from all of us.



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Regional Disability Advocacy Service provides an independent voice. The information contained in this newsletter does not necessarily reflect the views of the organisation as a whole or any of its funding bodies.



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