

Regional  
Disability  
Advocacy  
Service



# 4th Annual Report

2020 - 2021

Free - Independent - local



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**RDAS is certified under the National  
Standards for Disability Services**

- **Acknowledgement**

During the 2020/2021 financial year Regional Disability Advocacy Service Ltd received funding grants from a range of sources to provide advocacy type services to people with disability including frail older people and family and carers. RDAS gratefully acknowledges funding received from:

- Department of Social Services (Commonwealth)
- Department of and Communities and Justice (NSW)
- Intellectual Disability Rights Service Justice Advocacy Service
- Department of Family, Fairness and Housing (Vic)
- National Disability Insurance Scheme - Information Linkages and Capacity Building



## Vision

To maintain and grow our reputation for values based accessible service delivery for people with disability across regional areas.

## Mission

Empower, inform, support and advocate for people with disability so that they can live the life they choose.

We will advocate and communicate about community inclusion and the contributions that people with disability can make to society

## Values

RDAS Ltd embraces values of:

- **Service:** always remembering that we exist to provide services that are delivered in the best interest of people with disability is our foremost obligation.
- **Respect:** at all times we provide extensive respect for our clients/ participants, staff, colleagues, and the environment.
- **Integrity:** alignment of our values for human rights and in the way we serve consumers
- **Excellence:** pursuit of excellence in all our activities and operations
- **Innovation:** a commitment to taking a thoughtful and creative approach to service delivery, taking account of the latest developments in technology, research, skills and new knowledge
- **Client/participant confidentiality:** respect for the privacy of our clients, maintaining confidentiality and in all dealings
- **Ethics:** undertaking all activities in an open, honest and ethical manner, maintaining the highest professional integrity
- **Transparency:** ensuring that our services are provided open and transparently

## Strategic plan on a page

<p>Maintaining the principles of the Human Rights Convention for People with Disability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain independence from the service system</li> <li>Transparent separation of services between Advocacy and Support Coordination services</li> <li>Active involvement of people with disability in RDAS Ltd decision-making processes and programs, including those directly concerning them</li> <li>Systemic advocacy</li> </ul>
<p>Sustainability – to ensure RDAS Ltd continues to provide quality services into the future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding – and income diversification</li> <li>Strong service models to meet the changing environment</li> <li>Service growth through reputation</li> <li>Strategic partnerships that do not compromise independence</li> <li>Sound governance</li> </ul>
<p>Our people - to ensure clients and participants are supported by trained, resourced and supported staff with high retention rates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining a positive organisational culture and well-being</li> <li>Separation between Advocacy and Support Coordination plan management</li> <li>Suitable office and working conditions</li> <li>Policy and procedures</li> <li>Training</li> </ul>
<p>Growth – to support people with disability to across a larger geographical area and in hard-to-reach communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding for growth</li> <li>Additional geographic areas</li> <li>Offices and infrastructure to support growth</li> <li>Staff</li> <li>Innovative service models</li> <li>Strategic collaborations with service delivery partners</li> </ul>
<p>Reputation – to maintain a strong reputation for quality and independent service provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Perception</li> <li>Consumer Perception</li> <li>Funding Provider Perception</li> <li>Staff perception</li> </ul>



## Meet the Directors



**Denise Parry—(Chairperson)** Appointed 6 July 2017 for a 1-year term. Re-appointed for 3 years in October 2018.

Denise has a background in public health and commercial administration. Denise has a Masters in Business Administration and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



**Johanna Schmidt—(Deputy Chairperson)** Appointed 6 July 2017. Re-appointed for 3 years in October 2019. Johanna lives with a physical disability and has a passion for equity, inclusion, and human rights.



**Brian Fealy (Treasurer)** - Appointed 2 May 2017 for a 2-year term. Re-elected for 3 years in October 2019. Retired 21 October 2020

Brian was a member of the DAIS Board. He is a retired Chartered Accountant. Brian has spent many hours assisting RDAS with accounting and financial advice.



**Apoorva Kallianpur - (Treasurer)** - Appointed 21 October 2020 for a 3 year term.

Apoorva is a qualified Chartered Accountant, with extensive experience in Corporate Finance, She is committed to building a more diverse and inclusive community, that empowers all individuals to thrive.



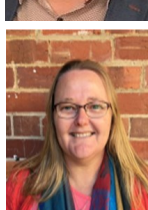
**Sheridan Leonard** - Appointed 5 December 2018 for a 2-year term.

Sheridan has had a long association with RDAS, as a volunteer with the Justice Support program. Sheridan has worked for a disability employment service assisting people with disabilities to maintain employment.



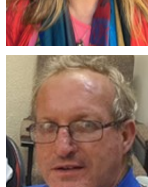
**Paul Power** - Appointed 5 December 2018 for a 2 year term. Re-appointed for 3 years on 21 October 2020

Paul is a regional manager of a disability employment service whose footprint covers a similar region to RDAS. Paul brings management skills, as well as his personal experience of disability.



**Charie Roberts** - Appointed 31 October 2017 for 3-year term. Re-appointed 3 years on 21 October 2020

Charie has a Degree in Social Science and Tertiary Education. In her current role, Charie is responsible for service standards and compliance.



**Len Robinson** - Appointed 31 October 2019 for a 3-year term.

Len is a member of the Wagga Wagga Self Advocacy Group. He is on the board representing members with an intellectual disability. Len will be standing down at thios AGM



**Karen Perry** –Appointed 21 October 2020 for a 2 year term.

Karen has a personal lived experience of Hearing and Vision loss. She works in the Hearing Care field as an Independent Advocate and Hearing Loss consultant. providing a range of unique services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and runs her own Hearing Support Centre. She brings with more than 30 years experience in small business management.

## RDAS Staff

<b>Executive Officer</b>	Martin Butcher
<b>Advocacy Team</b>	Paul McFadyen—Advocacy Manager (Until April 2021) Reg Dury—Advocacy Manager (Commenced June 2021) Amie Favier Andrew Laidlaw Caitlin Read Claire Dart Dave Seiter Deb Randich Paige Summerfield (Until August 2020) Sarah Manley Jaide Berney (August 2020—June 2021) Melissa Race (Commenced February 2021) Adam Jacobson (Commenced June 2021)
<b>Members to leaders Program</b>	Kellie Clarke (Team Leader) Katie Morgan (February 2021—June 2021)
<b>Justice Advocacy Team</b>	Brad Mallinson (Until June 2021) Tanya Jones (Until June 2021) Cassandra Campbell-Smith (Commenced December 2020)
<b>Plan &amp; Connect Team</b>	Dianne Spalding – Manager Jackie Williams Jacquie Ross (Until June 2021) Jo-anne Wilson (Commenced July 2020) Janet Williams (Commenced December 2020) Tulshi Guragai (Commenced February 2021)
<b>Board Support</b>	Stephen Forsyth
<b>Administration</b>	Kellie Storer—Office Manager (Commenced October 2020) Rhiannon Last - Office Manager/Advocacy Assistant (Until March 2021) Julie-Ann Mills—Bookkeeper/Plan Manager



## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

It is with great pleasure and pride that I present the 2020-21 Annual Report for the Regional Disability Advocacy Service (RDAS) on behalf of the Board. Our success is achieved by committed board directors and an operational team led by our Executive Officer, Martin Butcher.

Our services are expanding and our demand is increasing. The Plan and Connect Service has been an outstanding success. This has meant that office accommodation and locations have been reviewed. This included consideration of staff safety and client access. The opening of a new office in Lavington, expanding office space in Wangaratta and locating to the Community Centre in Griffith was well received by local community and staff. Plans for a new Wagga Wagga location are also in progress.

It has been a year where the challenges of COVID-19 have remained, as a regional service in NSW and VIC border closures and COVID-19 response from two different state governments, has meant we have had to be flexible in organisational response and service delivery. Our team has risen to the challenges and ensured that our services have been delivered, as best as they can be, and our staff have been empowered and supported to adapt our business and ensure we keep everyone safe.

Whilst COVID-19 has been in our forefront it has not deterred RDAS from their vision and providing high quality responsive services to clients and participants in our community. RDAS has reviewed our strategic direction and developed a new strategic plan. Our Annual Report will have a summary for your information. There was good consultation with our staff and our board in its development. Our feedback channels provide us with knowing what we are doing well and what we have opportunity to do better. This feedback has informed our strategic plan as well, to ensure we have the voice of our clients and participants heard and acted on. There have also been a number of quality improvements made by the team that have enhanced our service delivery and client outcomes.

Thank you to all the people who have contributed to RDAS's success. Our operational teams have diligently and competently worked hard at ensuring our clients and participants had the best service possible during the many challenges confronting them. On behalf of the Board I thank them all gratefully and sincerely for their dedication, caring attitude and their adaptability to the sometimes-constant challenges. I also thank Martin Butcher for his leadership, passion and commitment to RDAS and ensuring that RDAS remained strong, robust and committed to our clients and participants having an excellent service to support them.

Thanks also go to my collegial board directors who volunteer their time to govern the organisation. They have continued to ensure that RDAS is achieving their strategic goals, financial sustainability and providing a safe, quality service to our community. A special thanks to Len Robinson for his time on the board and the contribution he has made representing the members and clients on our board. We wish him well as he takes up a new job.

As we look to the future our Strategic Plan will continue to guide our journey, engage all our key stakeholders, our members, clients, participants and staff to name a few, as we maintain RDAS's high reputation in our community.

It has been a year well done, our success is a team effort that we all should be very proud of.

Yours sincerely

Denise Parry

Board Chair, Regional Disability Advocacy Service

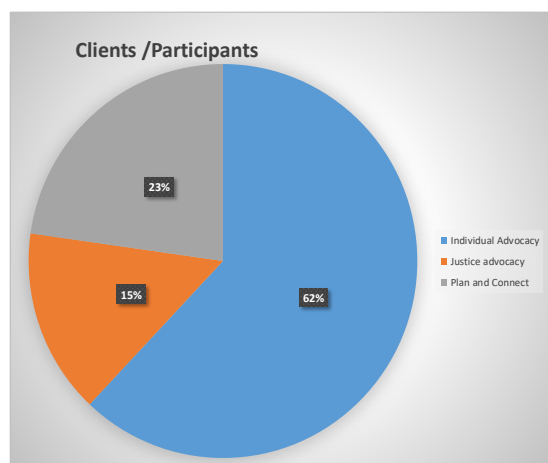


## EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

I am pleased to be able to present the annual operations reports. The reports on the following pages describe a broad range of activities RDAS has provided across the region. The case studies throughout the reports outline the impact RDAS has in achieving positive overcoming barriers for people with disability, and tend to be the most interesting. The purpose of the Executive Officer report is to give an overview of the operations of RDAS.

Like for the rest of the world, responding to COVID 19 has presented the biggest challenge for RDAS over the past 12 month. If anything, the pandemic has taught us to be flexible in the way we deliver services, as we contend with offices having to close with 2 hours notice, and closing of the NSW and Victorian boarder. Boarder closers resulting in Managers not being able to have face to face meeting with their staff for months on end.

Despite the challenges the pandemic has brought, some benefits to the organisation were in the form of additional funding from the NSW and Victorian Governments to update communication and information technologies systems. Now we have a internet based phone system, which means calls coming into the organisation are no longer having to be answered by phones sitting on desks in officers. Incoming calls can be received on mutable devices and locations, meaning we can be more flexible in the way services are delivered, including being able to work from home .



During the year the organisation continued to grow and take on new services. At the beginning of the year RDAS employed 23 people, by June 2021 RDAS had 26 employees. 744 individuals received some level of support from the organisation during the year.

477 clients required individual advocacy, of this 53 % of clients received services for the first time. The main issues continues to be NDIS and government

payments. Although, there is an increase in the number of people requesting general advocacy. New funding over the past few years has been in specific areas, including supporting people to make submission to the Disability Royal Commission, make appeals to NDIS appeals and supporting people in contact with the Justice system.

Plan and Connect continued to expend with the number of participants increasing from 75 to 175 which represents about 8 new participants per month receiving support coordination and/or plan management services. The success of Plan and Connect demonstrates that there is a place in the market for independent intermediately services in the NDIS, that can focus on giving participants choice and control over the service they are receiving.



### Justice Advocacy Program

During the past 2 years RDAS partnered with the Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) to deliver a trial of the Justice Advocacy Service across Southern NSW. At the end of the 2 year contract IDRS advised that they would deliver the service by themselves ending the agreement with RDAS in June.

### RDAS Strategic Plan

The review of the Strategic Plan was a big achievement during the year, with staff and the RDAS Board considering 5 key strategic questions to steer the organisation over the next 5 years.

#### ***Will the offices meet the current and future needs?***

A review was undertaken of offices to see if they are accessible to clients and safe for staff to work from. Another consideration was if the offices were meeting the current and future growth of the organisation.

**Wodonga:** the office was in a good location and was accessible. As the office was owned by RDAS it is viable. The main issues being that it can be at times a bit over crowded as there was more staff than desks. The office was accessible for people in Wodonga, but it was difficult for people from Lavington and Thurgoona to get to. After looking at options in the Albury and Lavington area, it was decided to open an office in Lavington which was opened in July. The new office provided a base for Plan and connect.

**Wangaratta** RDAS has had a small office in Wangaratta for a few years. With the increase number of clients in the area for advocacy and Plan and Connect an additional office space at Wang Central was secured.

**Griffith** The office was located at the back of a Community Centre. The entrance was through a car park. The office was in poor state of repairs. The new Griffith Community Centre provide an opportunity to move into a modern facility with other community groups.

**Wagga Wagga** The office is on the first floor of an office block. A ramp and lift are not built to standards. As the building is earmarked for redevelopment, most of the government departments have moved out making the office feel empty. Plans are underway to relocate the office to a ground floor location in the CBD.

Another strategic question was around the potential conflict of interest between being an advocacy organisation that is delivering NDIS services through Plan and Connect. The plan outlines strategies to further separate advocacy from Plan and Connect including rebranding advocacy services to reduce confusion from the lead organisation. Strategies also include the physical separation of the 2 service arms of the organisation.

The success during the year is due to the dedicated staff who, through the diversity of COVID have achieved the outcome of for their clients. I would like to thank Reg, Dianne and their teams for their hard work. I would particularly like to thank Kellie for managing the officers and keeping me organised.

**Martin Butcher** Executive Officer

## ADVOCATE TEAM REPORT

2021 has been essentially a continuation of the challenges of the previous year. The Coronavirus Pandemic showed no sign of slowing, and Australia began the necessary process of going into “lockdown” mode. The difficulties of ensuring quality and timely client service delivery across two states, with different rules and restrictions on travel, did not facilitate our task. However, we managed to continue ensuring people with disability continued to receive our service, whilst complying with all the safeguards necessary to minimise contagion risks.

The Advocates used technology to their advantage and we now have the ability to make full use of Microsoft Teams, gaining remote access to clients and each other as needed. Face to face remains for many the preferred option where safe and possible, and we have always tried to deliver the most appropriate and balanced service for each individual. All staff has been vaccinated and we look forward to a little more normality in the next twelve months as restrictions get lifted.

It has also been an exciting year for the Advocacy team, with new staff members on board, including myself! I started in the role of Advocacy Manager in June 2021 after years of service for Corrective Services NSW. A qualified solicitor, I look forward to using my various skills to promote RDAS and lead the Advocacy team into the next year; being part of a growing team of amazing people dedicated to helping others.

We also now have an Aboriginal Outreach Officer, who will amongst her many duties, liaise with the Aboriginal community and run an ambitious outreach program. Already, her dedication has spread awareness to Northern Victoria and even at this early stage, we are seeing results, with an increase in Aboriginal clients connecting with us in their time of need. Offering Indigenous support around Disability Advocacy is so very important for RDAS and we want to ensure this program is further developed in the next few months. RDAS will represent anyone with a disability, no matter who they are, without judgment; we want everyone to feel welcome and safe with us.

Additionally, we have employed Advocate assistant, two new full time Royal Disability Advocates and a new and highly motivated Members to Leaders officer. This means that we can reach more people and process issues more quickly. Our waiting



lists are stable with a reasonable turn around and things are certainly looking up.

2021 was also the year the Justice Advocacy Service NSW went their own way. This was somewhat disappointing and unexpected, however, we retain a good relationship with them are looking at providing our own Court support services in Victoria, which is an exciting opportunity to deliver a much needed service to vulnerable people.

Feedback from our funding bodies, other services and especially our clients have been very encouraging. RDAS Advocacy continues to provide first class service and certainly, 2022 is looking to be a great year for our Advocacy service.

### **Case study**

BT had been homeless and had recently had his leg amputated due to complications with diabetes. BT had received great support through the local health service including a permanent place to live. An attempt had been made to access DSP, however it had not been successful. BT had remained involved with his job provider and was still meeting his commitments to job search. With the assistance of the local Chronic Health Care Coordinator, BT made contact with RDAS for assistance to re-apply for the DSP.

Advocate engaged with BT, who had disclosed that he was not sure why his application had been rejected and that his literacy skills were poor, he also struggled with hearing loss. Advocate obtain written permission to investigate the previous attempt and to determine what medical evidence was available.

It became apparent that BT was still undergoing rehab for his amputation and deemed to be medical not stabilised. Advocate assisted BT to obtain current medical reports from both his doctor and OT. The advocate then was able to assist BT to complete a new application form for the DSP with all the relevant, current medical evidence necessary. The advocate supported BT through the process and various steps with Centrelink and was able to read through and explain correspondence received by BT from Centrelink, which made it easier for BT to respond to queries that Centrelink needed confirmed.

The process took approximately 6 months with a favourable outcome, achieved through contact RDAS the knowledge and skills the advocate had regarding the particular service system.





## **Members to Leaders**



After some initial barriers to overcome, the Members to Leaders Project is finally set to take off this month, with four groups up and running, with the other seven to commence next month. This will see the total number of groups exceed the activity deliverable amount by almost 20%.

Three Peer Group Facilitators (PGF) with a lived experience of disability, have undertaken their induction and training, and are now RDAS casual employees. A further five people with a lived experience of disability are currently in various stages of induction and training.

Early survey results to date indicate extremely positive outcomes for members.

- 100% of members surveyed stated that they feel they have improved their knowledge and self-advocacy skills

- 100% of members surveyed stated since joining the group their motivation and confidence has improved

- 100% of members surveyed stated they feel their contribution in the group is valued

- 100% of members surveyed stated that joining the group has increased their leadership and influencing opportunities

- 90% of members surveyed stated that they feel they have a say on issues that are important to them in the group

## **Risks and Challenges**

One of the predicted risks identified in the Activity Work Plan for the project was regarding issues with recruiting Peer Group Facilitators with disability.

After consistently implementing the documented Activity Work Plan risk strategies, approaching individuals directly, together with a new strategy of recommendations from our existing Peer Group Facilitators, the pool of Peer Group Facilitators has exceeded the goal of six by 50%. We now have three trained PGF's and six currently undertaking their induction and training.

A risk that was not identified in the Activity Work Plan for the project, was the loss of one of the Peer Group Coordinators (PGC). Unfortunately, the Wodonga based PGC resigned in July, which set the start of the groups back significantly. However, we were successful in recruiting a new PGC in August, a week prior to the recent lockdowns.

Another risk that was not identified in the Activity Work Plan for the project was the inability to run the groups in the event of further lock downs.

We have only this month proceeded with the groups in areas where we are allowed to deliver groups face to face. However, we have seen limited numbers attending due to potential members not being fully vaccinated, and therefore are unable to access the venues.

## Case Study

### NDIA Internal Review

Ms F reported she had been having some difficulty with her Support Coordinator and would like the advocate to be present as part of the Plan Review meeting to ensure she was heard.

Ms F, who is significantly impacted by her Complex PTSD and mental health conditions is prone to extreme anxiety around conflict and engaging with official bodies like the NDIA. Attempts were made to organise such a meeting and were initially agreed to by the Support Coordinator, however ultimately Ms F's Support Coordinator would not commit to a meeting, abruptly withdrew services to Ms F, leaving Ms F with no funding left in her plan to engage a new Support Coordinator.

Ms F now required much more intense support with her Plan Review and required it to occur asap so she could access Support Coordination. Advocate contacted the NDIA regarding the urgency in Ms F's review and it was prioritised. Ms F was extremely overwhelmed and anxious regarding the process, and did not fully understand why her Plan Review had been initially lodged.

At the time of writing this Ms F's new plan has not yet been finalised, however this matter was selected to demonstrate situations where advocates may step in at short notice.

Ultimately the client was supported to manage the review process and work to resolve a lacking in services with urgency, for a person who would have not been able to achieve this alone.

### Disability Royal Commission Report

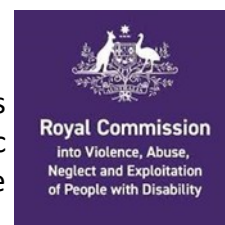
The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) has seen many key developments during 2021. With the pandemic affecting in-person private and public hearings during the first half of the year, DRC Chairman Ronald Sackville requested an extension from the federal government. This was granted, meaning the DRC will now run until September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

This is fantastic news for people with a disability, as the scope of the DRC will not be compromised by time constraints, and it has afforded more time to people considering sharing their story.

To complement the extension, the Royal Commission Act 1902 was amended to afford people making submissions greater privacy protections. Previously, a public submission was only confidential until the end of the DRC. Following the amendments, almost all submissions are protected for 99 years after the completion of the DRC.

This has allowed people who were fearful of retribution, punishment or other adverse action to be able to share their story, confident that their privacy is protected for the duration of their lives.

In June, following the departure of Roslyn Atkinson from her role as



Commissioner, Dr Dinesh Palipana was appointed as a commissioner. Dr Palipana is a medical doctor, as well as a person with a disability. Coming from a culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) background, Dr Palipana will play an important role in connecting with the CaLD communities during the DRC.

2021 also saw the DRC form the First Nations Peoples Strategic Advisory Group. This allows the DRC and its funded services to more effectively and appropriately engage with First Nations Peoples, who are vastly underrepresented in submissions at this point in time.

RDAS now employs five DRC funded advocates, and in 2021 we have supported clients to make seven DRC submissions, both written and via private hearing. These clients include individuals from CaLD communities, First Nations Peoples and people living in a rural/remote areas.

With the DRC being extended and RDAS bringing more funded advocates on board, 2021 has been a successful year, one which will be built on moving forward.

### **Case Study – Disability Royal Commission Submission**

**The person wanted his own personal account of neglect within the Health System told publicly and needed assistance in recording his story. Here is what we did to help:**

- Met with client face to face in the Wodonga office
- Read all of client's supporting evidence which took many hours to complete
- Wrote draft submission story
- Met with client at Wodonga office to go over draft and choose which attachments to include with the submission
- Made a referral to Your story legal service and attended telephone appointment with the service and client
- Ensure referral to appropriate mental health support
- Advocate made the final adjustments to the draft submission before it is ready to be submitted
- Advocate to help client to fill out a notice to produce form which gives client extra protection re: his story with the disability royal commission and any other future court proceedings.

## Case Study

### Communication within the workplace

John is deaf and was upset that he was having pay for an interpreter daily for staff meetings as this was using up his NDIS funding very quickly, leaving him short for funding for an interpreter for his medical appointments and other appointments outside of work where an interpreter was required.

A meeting was organised by John's employer to include John and his interpreter, company manager and John's direct manager. Advocate joined via MS Teams. John was given the opportunity to voice his concerns, which he did well via his interpreter. Both managers listened intently to John's concerns and were able to answer his concerns and offer solutions on the spot that were easy to implement immediately. The advocate was asked to do a quick follow up around funding for improving technology in the workplace so speech to text apps could potentially be used more effectively for all meetings and gatherings.

### NDIS Appeals Case

RR Age 10, has ADHD and Developmental Trauma, is living in out of home care with his Grandparents. RR and his Grandmother attempted to access NDIS numerous times and engaged with NDIS Appeals Advocate to take the Access Not Met decision to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The NDIA first argued the permanency of the diagnosis, it was brought to the attention of the Tribunal by the Advocate that according to the NDIS Operational Guidelines, the NDIA only needs to be satisfied that at least one of the conditions is permanent for a participant to meet permanency.

The NDIA then decided to focus on Functional Impact.

There was a lot of information requested by the NDIA. Advocate worked with RR his Grandmother and his Treating Professionals to supply the information that the NDIA was requesting. The NDIA decided to approve Mr RR for an early intervention plan, which usually lasts up to two years, then following reassessment may continue. A discussion was had between Advocate Mr RR's Grandmother and the Solicitor from NDIA, where a request was made for NDIA to add a clause to their decision, whereby Mr RR would be access met for an early intervention plan, but that the NDIA would guarantee his access for a further 8 years (until he finished school).

The NDIA eventually came back with an offer that included an access met decision for a full NDIS plan, which would be ongoing and lifelong.



## Plan and Connect

### The Plan & Connect story over the past 12 months:

Plan & Connect is an independent support coordination and plan management service

supporting participants within the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Plan & Connect is a business arm of the Regional Disability Advocacy Service and has strong foundations in human rights, following a model of advocacy and practicing the principles of choice and control.

Within the past 12 months there has been a significant growth in referrals especially in months of January and March this year. Where participants chose Plan & Connect as their preferred service provider. Plan & Connect have more than 175 participants receiving Support Coordination and /or Plan Management services. Plan & Connect are supporting 5 participants who have received Specialist Support Coordination in their plan. Many participants have chosen to request support coordination and/ or plan management services for other members of their family or made recommendations to friends to come on board with Plan & Connect.

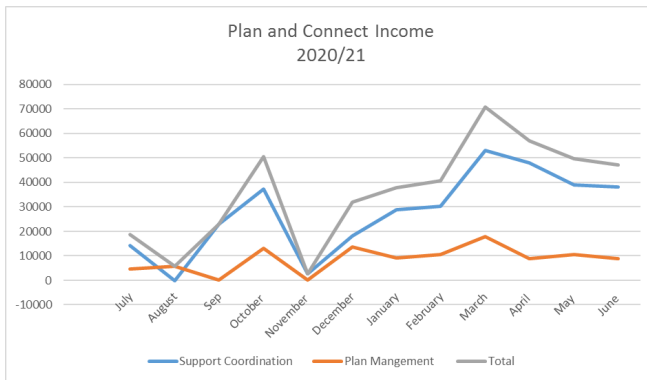
Our team consists of a fulltime Manager/ Support Coordinator, 2 x fulltime Support Coordinators in the Albury / Wodonga area, 1 part time Support Coordinator in Wagga, 1 x part time Support Coordinator/ resource officer, 1 x part time Support Coordinator / Intake Officer and our Plan Manager who is contracted to provide plan management services 2 days per week. Plan & Connect are recruiting a part time Support Coordinator/ Marketing Assistant in Griffith and a Support Coordinator in the Wangaratta area. All staff have completed the NDIS worker screen check.

Plan & Connect are committed to supporting participants to achieve their goals. The support coordination team work towards being responsive to participants and building the participants and their family's capacity to self-manage their plan in the future.

Over the past financial year, there has been a rapid increase of both support coordination and plan management revenue. Plan & Connect commenced using Careview, a database specifically developed for NDIS support services. Careview has assisted the team to correctly claim for support coordination billable hours and plan management fees, with ease, allowing the team to spend more time supporting participants to achieve their goals. As the graph shows below, Plan management fees (the orange line) are a monthly fee, therefore as expected data shows more of a flat line except for when new participants joined Plan & Connect, this is observed with peaks during October, December and March, whereas Support Coordination (blue line) has sharp peaks throughout the year, the office closes for 2 weeks over the Christmas period, where participants and there family usually prefer less services as they spend Christmas holidays with family and friends.







The plan management service strives to respond to participants and service providers in a timely manner, although the average plan management service within NDIS states payments of invoices occur within 7 – 10 business days, at Plan & Connect we strive to pay within 4 days.

Plan & Connect have developed an internal auditing system where the Plan Manager checks every invoice to ensure the invoice meets the requirements of NDIA’s approved rate for supports and services and the Manager of Plan & Connect every week, randomly checks service provider and participant details to ensure these are correct.

### The major challenges:

The COVID – 19 Pandemic has created anxiety for many people where they have utilised more support coordination funding to assist with finding extra services due to day program closures. Families have been unable to cross the border to visit their loved ones, some participants have not been able to access equipment and supplies and they have been unable to attend social and community activities which has left some people isolated and feeling depressed. For some participants and their families who experience compromised health issues they have remained at home which for some, has caused family conflict and carer burnout. There have been very long wait lists for allied health services which has impacted on participants being able to receive the allied health assessments required to follow recommendations.

The NDIS has offered a range of initiatives to meet the ever-changing Covid – 19 environment, some of these were only short term responses and are no longer available including, approving the utilisation of funds from the CORE budget to assist participants to access more support coordination assistance when these supports are running low (ceased in March). Prioritising change of circumstances requests as participants funds are reduced to minimal amounts. Offering rollover plans rather than going through a review, extending plans for a 2-year period, deep cleaning of a participant’s residence if a staff member returns a positive covid -19 test, approval for PPE to be purchased from the plan, assistance from the support coordinator to organise vaccination appointments and the introduction of approval for meal delivery services.

### New Offices means increased accessibility for participants

Plan & Connect and a member of the advocacy team will move into the Lavington office in July 2021. There is also plans towards new offices for the Wagga, Griffith and Wangaratta.

**Regional Disability Advocacy Strategic Planning process: working towards a sustainable, quality service for years to come:**



Plan & Connect staff participated in the strategic planning process over the year developing a strong working document to guide Plan & Connect into a position which will ensure it remains to be an independent, quality support coordination and plan management service.

**The Plan & Connect Website:**

Plan & Connect 's website is under construction. A participant who dabbles in photography has offered to take photos for our website, most staff have completed their Biography for the website and we are seeking interest from other participants to be part of the project. Unfortunately, this was put on hold due to Covid-19 however it is hoped this

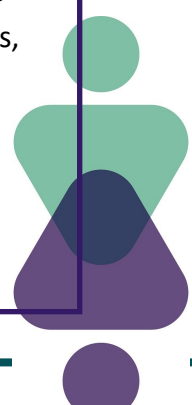
**CASE STUDY 1: FROM LIVING IN A RETIRMENT VILLAGE IN REMOTE NSW TO MY OWN PLACE IN SYDNEY.**

Mr S who has a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy, is in his mid 20's and has been residing in a Retirement Village due to a family breakdown. Mr S informed the support coordinator that his biggest goal was to move out of the retirement Village and move to Sydney where he would have more opportunities to meet new people, have more services and supports and finally have an opportunity to follow his dreams.

During this year, the support coordinator has been working closely with the Occupational Therapist to complete a functional capacity assessment and suitable housing assessment, she has worked with The Summer Foundation and NDIA and has been researching suitable housing opportunities in the Sydney area, she will also work with a support coordination agency in Sydney to assist with the transition to his new home. Mr S is looking at a property and the supports he requires and may move to Sydney in December or early next year.

**CASE STUDY 2: MOVING OUT OF HOME INTO MY OWN HOME WITH SUPPROTS AND A DOG.**

Ms M has lived with psychosocial disability for more than 20 years, she has long stays in hospital and although her family have supported her throughout this time, they report their experience being a long struggle working within a broken system. Ms M has been working with her support coordinator to move out of home into her own home with support services dropping in. She started by living in medium term accommodation and had some moments of success and others of struggle as she tried to manage her illness, her family and her own low expectations of achieving success. Over the past 12 months Ms M has now moved into a privately rented house, she receives a range of allied health supports, mainstream mental health services and a dedicated staffing who have been trained to support her individual needs, Ms M will continue to require ongoing supports, however she has had the opportunity to access delivered meals, which has assisted her to lose weight, she attends appointments are required with support and she has purchased a dog that she cares for, given her purpose as she plans her next goals.



### **CASE STUDY 3: WORKING TOWARDS A GOAL FOR INDEPENDENCE**

Living in the family home all of their lives with their single mother who is now in her 70's has been all the J brothers have known. The Brothers are in their mid forties, they have recently been approved for Supported Independent Living and are developing new independent skills such as cooking an evening meal for their mother for the first time in their life. The support coordinator continues to look for a unit for her to move into, therefore allowing the brothers to learn to live more independently and give her the opportunity to build her relationship with them as a mother rather than a carer.

### **CASE STUDY 4: A WHOLE NEW BEGINNING**

When the support coordinator met Miss Q she was not participating in any meaningful activities during the day and was associating with people who took advantage of her and she was in trouble with the law. 6 months later, Miss Q's life has changed immensely, she is making good choices and is enjoying a hospitality program that is teaching her some extremely useful life skills and increasing transferable skills for employment opportunities. Miss Q has been able to organise her days for work and is now organising all her transportation needs for NDIS and mainstream services. She is meeting new people and trying new activities. Her family have noticed the change in Miss Q and are very happy with her progress.



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