

Annual Report 2019 - 2020



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Chief Executive Officer's Report

Kevin Stone



We are living through a very interesting time. There has never been a year like this, and we have all had to find ways of getting through it. For the VALID family, our ability to adapt and find new ways of being relevant to the needs and interests of people with a disability and their families has been a revelation.

In February, we managed to come together in Geelong for one of our most successful Having a Say conferences, with over 1,100 delegates and volunteers focused on the theme: 'A Good Life: Are we there yet?'

We weren't to know how ironic that question was about to become. Within days of the conference ending, the enormity of the COVID-19 threat began to impact our daily lives, affecting many of the very qualities that make life good for us. As we all went into 'lockdown', VALID staff learned how to work effectively from home, using Teams and Zoom – and arguing about which is better or worse!

We moved our meetings to the online world and worried that many of our networks and groups might not be able to follow, only to discover that the people we support were, for the most part, equally adaptable. Before we knew it, we were all becoming experts in the online world, and our work went on defiantly in the face of what was, and still is, one of the greatest threats and challenges the world has known.

While we are proud of the way we have responded and continued to make an impact, we are also deeply conscious of the impact of lockdown on both ourselves and the people we support. In prison, one of the worst punishments is to be placed in isolation. Now we all know why. Social isolation is tough. It goes against our very nature, to be confined to our homes and restricted as we have been.

For many of us, despite our best efforts to combat the effects of lockdown, it has affected our mental health and affected our relationships.

Many of the people we support have found this period very, very tough, as have many members of VALID itself. Being confined at home is bad enough but having our meetings and social gatherings confined to those little square boxes on a computer screen – despite all its advantages – has also had the effect of de-personalising our interactions, exacerbating tensions and contributing to misunderstandings.

In the advocacy environment, where we are often dealing with communication breakdowns, clashes of understanding and different interpretations, these perils are often magnified. While the advantages of tele-health and online plan reviews and meetings are wonderful, without the warmth of face-to-face contact, and the important dimension of body language, it's so much easier to misjudge and to feel depersonalized and devalued.

Within VALID, we were greatly assisted in our ability to overcome such problems by the work of our employment project team, Liz, William and Andrew, who developed more inclusive ways of running our meetings and staying in touch. Heather proposed and organized a weekly social get-together, which turned out to be the highlight of our social lives, with cooking competitions, quizzes and genuine camaraderie. William also organised the development of one-

page staff profiles, as another way of everyone getting to know each other and staying in touch.

Our Peer Action Groups and Self Advocacy groups also quickly adapted. To our amazement, attendances at these online forums were soon exceeding the in-person meetings. So, too, with our training courses for self advocates and family members.

While much of VALID's important work has been maintained, we have had to work a lot harder to overcome the perils of isolation and to remain positively focused and constructively engaged. Yet, despite the obstacles, we have achieved some great outcomes.

As we prepare to come out of this devastating crisis, therefore, we are mindful both of retaining some of the great innovations we have developed, while also cherishing and appreciating the advantages we had previously taken for granted; especially, the company of valued friends and colleagues.

I also want to make a special mention of Brian and Lee Johnstone whose generous ongoing support makes it possible for us to extend and continue our systemic advocacy work, particularly in relation to the NDIS.

In this report, we highlight some of the achievements of the VALID year and assure our members and supporters our work has only just begun!

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President's Report

John Handley



My predecessor, Dot Leigh, retired last year having served as the inaugural President of VALID from 1993. I will not achieve that period of service nor match the breadth of her experience of service to persons with disability and to VALID. It would be remiss not to acknowledge Dot and her contribution to and the esteem of her held by VALID.

I endorse the report from Kevin Stone but it must be said he has, as usual, been modest in his leadership and steering of VALID, in what has been a very busy and often turbulent year. Predominately, he has led a submission and given evidence to the Disability Royal Commission; participated in many meetings with the NDIA as a member of a number of its committees; membership of NDIS Quality and Safeguard Commission Consultative Committee; prepared and advocated for funding from State and Federal Departments and agencies and made representations to relevant Ministers; brought public attention to the presence of the covid virus in residents and staff in group homes and agitated for immediate

changes in work and management practices; pursued, developed and supported relationships with many organisations and networks; consulted with many organisations in developing their policies and encouraged and promoted external communication, including extensive on-line technology.

Special mention must also be given to David Petherick, the deputy CEO for his excellent executive, corporate and human resources management of VALID throughout the year.

This year the VALID staff have worked remotely due to the covid virus yet the dedicated teams have continued to function and undertake outstanding work. All staff and the team leaders are to be congratulated on their dedication and commitment. The Committee of Management (CoM) received regular reports of the work of the teams and acknowledge their appreciation for the work undertaken.

Earlier this year, the CoM decided the volume of work, reporting and making its

decisions was greater than could reasonably be undertaken in meeting every second month. The CoM decided to endorse a proposal to have an Executive sub-committee (to oversee HR, Finances, Risk and Operational Policies) and a Governance, Policy and Strategy sub-committee (to support the development of Systemic Advocacy Policy). These subcommittees, constituted by CoM members, meet every other month and report to the next CoM meeting.

I would also like to extend a heart felt thank you to Brian and Lee Johnstone. Their generous and continuing donations to VALID for our systemic advocacy work allows us to keep working hard to make the NDIS better for all Australians with disability and their families.

In conclusion, I express my thanks and appreciation to the members of the CoM for their contributions throughout the year. Together with the work undertaken by Kevin, David, the team leaders and staff, the reputation of VALID continues to grow and is emboldened against every challenge it frequently confronts.

Committee of Management

John Handley, President

John was a solicitor in Melbourne and Shepparton for 11 years until he accepted an appointment to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal as a senior member in 1989. Prior to retirement in 2015, he additionally had responsibilities for the Tribunal's mediation practice, case management and was responsible for the NDIA list in the Victorian registry. He has subsequently completed a Cert. IV in Disability, volunteers one day per week at the Lower Plenty site of Araluen and provides monthly summaries of AAT and Federal Court decisions of NDIA appeals to the advocacy team at VALID.



Peter Dibbs, Treasurer

Former TAFE Accounting and Business teacher (20 plus years!). Peter also ran his own Tax Practice from home in Mentone until 2014 when he decided it was time to go to full time fun mode. A dedicated traveller and since 2015 he has added Alaska, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Poland and Estonia to the beautiful spots visited since first leaving Australia over 40 years ago. Hopeful of becoming a Grey Nomad but currently not in possession of a caravan. A disappointed but hopeful Demons follower. Enthusiasms: Good food, red wine, red sports cars, jazz and group exercise classes.



John Leatherland, Vice-President

Second Vice President John Leatherland. Having been a committee member between 2010 and 2014, John re-joined the Committee early in 2019. He enjoys volunteering in VALID's Choice Mentor program. John trained as a social worker and worked for many years in the then Department of Human Services. As the Eastern regional director between 2001 and 2009, he played a key role in the closure of the Kew Cottages institution and placing over 400 residents in group homes in the community where they could enjoy a better quality of life. Since 2009, John worked as a consultant in the human services field. While now mainly retired, enjoying more time with family and friends, he continues to be a member of the Mental Health Tribunal.



Deb Johnson

Deb is a married mum of four and a retired SRN/midwife. Her eldest two sons, Will and Andrew, have autism and multiple disabilities and are in residential care, yet still needing frequent assistance from their mum. Daughter, Holly, is now a fully qualified OT and youngest son, Lachie, is doing final year VCE. Hubby, David, spends retirement working on his Land Rovers in the garage and going 4WDing. Debs was part of the VALID Fight the Fee Hike campaign and loves being on the VALID committee and is also with AFSA. She has lobbied on disability-related issues and is passionate about the impact of privatization of housing within the disability sector. In her spare hours, Deb loves photography, gardening/watching Costa on the telly, barracking for the Geelong Cats and completing Sudoku puzzles without cheating.



Janice Castledine, Vice-President

During the course of her career Janice has lived and worked overseas in many countries which has given her 'the wander lust' and really enjoys travelling. Being a Melbourne girl, footy is always on the menu, along with live theatre, movies, horse racing, and catching up with family and friends. Janice advocates for many families and especially families who may have a family member with behaviours of concern. Janice co-facilitates a Peer Action Group for VALID for families who have a family member who displays behaviours of concern. Janice is currently holding the position of Second Vice President of VALID. Janice is a mother of two men, one of whom has profound Autism. He is the reason why Janice is passionate for social justice for all people with a disability.



Thea Calzoni

Thea Calzoni is an independent writer and parent support facilitator at Melbourne City Mission. Mother of Julian, a vibrant young man with an intellectual disability, she values government and community support to enhance the capacity of people with disabilities.



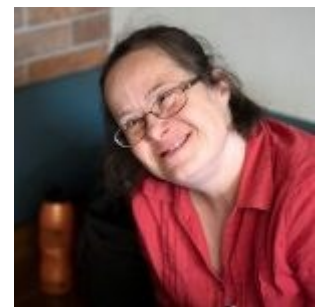
Mark Thompson

Mark was always interested in sailing big yachts. In 1995 while, bringing back a yacht across Bass Strait, he was involved in a drowning accident. Later on whilst in the Nursing home, Mark recognised the need for supporting the elderly, disadvantaged, and those without a voice. This was the beginning of his journey. He has been involved in the past as a Board Member on VRD, VICNORD, Pinarc and now is a volunteer for OPA , GDA and enjoys his role as a Peer Action Group leader in Ballarat. Marks strengths are governance and policymaking and in his spare time he enjoys ocean swimming and gardening.



Mary Nickson, Peer Action Group Representative

Mary loves to work in the disability sector and enjoys being a self-advocate. Mary has had a lot of involvement with VALID, participated in the Keys to Success training and took part in Inclusion TV. Mary is a member and facilitator of the Frankston Peer Action Group where she is involved in the Friendship Project and is now on the Committee of Management as the Peer Action Group Representative.



Leah Scott, Having a Say Local Reference Committee

Leah has represented self-advocates on the VALID Self-Advocacy Forum for almost 20 years. She has attended every Having a Say Conference and been the Chairperson of the HaS Local Reference Committee multiple times. Her passion is for people with disability to find their 'voice' and for them to be heard by services and government.



Jane Neubeker, Self-Advocate Representative

Jane has been a member of VALID for nearly two decades. Jane has been involved in many of VALID's projects and was involved in a joint project with DHHS, Breast Screen Victoria and Cancer Council on promoting better awareness of cancer screening for people with disabilities. Jane has a strong history of being involved in self – advocacy groups such as SARU Voice At The Table and Stroke Support Peer Group. In 2003, she was president of Brain Injury Matters – a self-advocacy group run by and for people with acquired brain injuries. Jane loves to travel, one of her greatest adventures was in 1983 where she sailed 10,000 nautical miles around the South Pacific. She is proud of the role she played as nurse to her friend and mentor before he passed away. Jane enjoys reading, word games, painting, and socialising. Jane is passionate about improving public awareness about ABI and advocating for the rights for all people with disabilities.



Shannon Joyce, Self-Advocate Representative

Shannon is a newly appointed member of VALID's Committee of Management. He is passionate about speaking up for the rights of people with disabilities and for those who are homeless. Shannon is very community minded and has volunteered his time with SARU, St Vincent de Paul soup van and Royal Children's Hospital. Shannon enjoys socialising, playing PS4 games and has an interest in politics and community affairs. Shannon heard about VALID through his cousin James who spoke about how VALID supported him and others to have their say. This drew Shannon to get involved with VALID. Shannon has set a challenge for himself to learn how to deal with conflict, to become more confident and to know how to speak up for the rights of people with disabilities.



VALID Staff



Kevin Stone
CEO



David Petherick
Deputy CEO

Admin

Derek Scriven, Office Manager
Brenda Tranter
Melanie Watson
Lynne Forman

Keys to Success Program

Jon Slingsby, Coordinator
Zoe Broadway

VALID Self Advocacy

Rick Ruiu, Coordinator
Sara De Grandis
Anthony Risoli
Suzannah MacNamara
Greg Tucker
Anthony Reid
Jenny Bowden

Family Team

Christine Scott, Coordinator
Maree Hewitt
Donna Shaw

Community Development

David Craig, Manager
Paul Dunn, Coordinator
Michelle Wilcox
Annette Axen
Ann Hutchinsen
Mark Thompson
Josie Cohen

Advocacy

Sarah Forbes, Manager
Emily Piggott, Coordinator
Dariane McLean
Miia Tolvanen
Katy Gagliardi
Frederikke Jensen
Vicky Doufa

Employment Project

Liz Collier
William Ward-Boas
Andrew Minge

Inclusion Point

Linda Studena
Tully Zygier

Keys to Success Program Report

Jon Slingsby



Well what a year!

What started out as a seemingly typical new financial year in July 2019 ended in mid-2020 as a mix of a good dose of self-preservation and voluntary home confinement.

The beginning of the 2019-20 year saw the continued delivery of the KSP and Staying Safe courses around the state in locations including Altona Meadows, Blackburn, Boronia, Dandenong, Ferntree Gully, Geelong, Maryborough and Warrigal just to name a few.

During this time, the KSP Team also revamped the Keys to Success Program booklet and PowerPoint presentation to align with the ILC funding submission that was submitted in September 2019.

In November, Heather and Zoe delivered new videos developed for the VALID Staying Safe program at the Speak Out Conference in Devonport, Tasmania.

The KSP Team were also involved in supporting a group of self-advocates to provide feedback to National Disability Services (NDS)

about the NDIS Code of Conduct for disability support workers and providers.

Towards the end of the year the KSP Team decided to develop some posters and postcards to enhance the messages that were being delivered during the Staying Safe sessions. In total three A3 posters and six A5 postcards were produced. The posters can be displayed on notice boards and walls and the postcards can be handed out to people to spread the message of who people can contact if they are feeling unsafe.



Zoe with a sample of the new posters developed for the Staying Safe program

However, despite all things appearing to be normal in our part of the world, who would have thought that as we completed our work commitments for 2019 and prepared for both the end of the year break and the Having a Say Conference in February 2020 that a shadow of incredible turmoil that none of us had ever experienced in our lifetime was about to be cast over us. In February 2020 the KSP Team were involved in another highly successful Having a Say Conference delivering information sessions on both the Keys to Success and the Staying Safe programs. We also carried out our duties within the conference team despite the information that was arriving from overseas of the virus that was affecting parts of China, Iran, and Italy.

A few days after the conference had finished, I headed off on a long-awaited trip to France and Spain for four weeks with a stop off in Singapore on the way

home. As we travelled around, we were being followed by a wave of closures as tourist sites and then the rest of Europe slowly went into shut down. We were shocked into reality when we were informed that our return flights to Singapore and then onto home had been cancelled, it was decision time – let's go home, now!

Arriving back in Melbourne, I found that the whole of the VALID office had gone into lock down and everyone was working from home. For the first few weeks during the lockdown the KSP Team were busy adapting both the KSP and Staying Safe programs to be delivered online via Zoom or Teams. Zoe delivered a series of Staying Safe sessions from the comforts of her home to the All Abilities Advocacy group in the southwest of the state. The most amazing thing is that Zoe had people from as far away as America and Canada joining in with the group

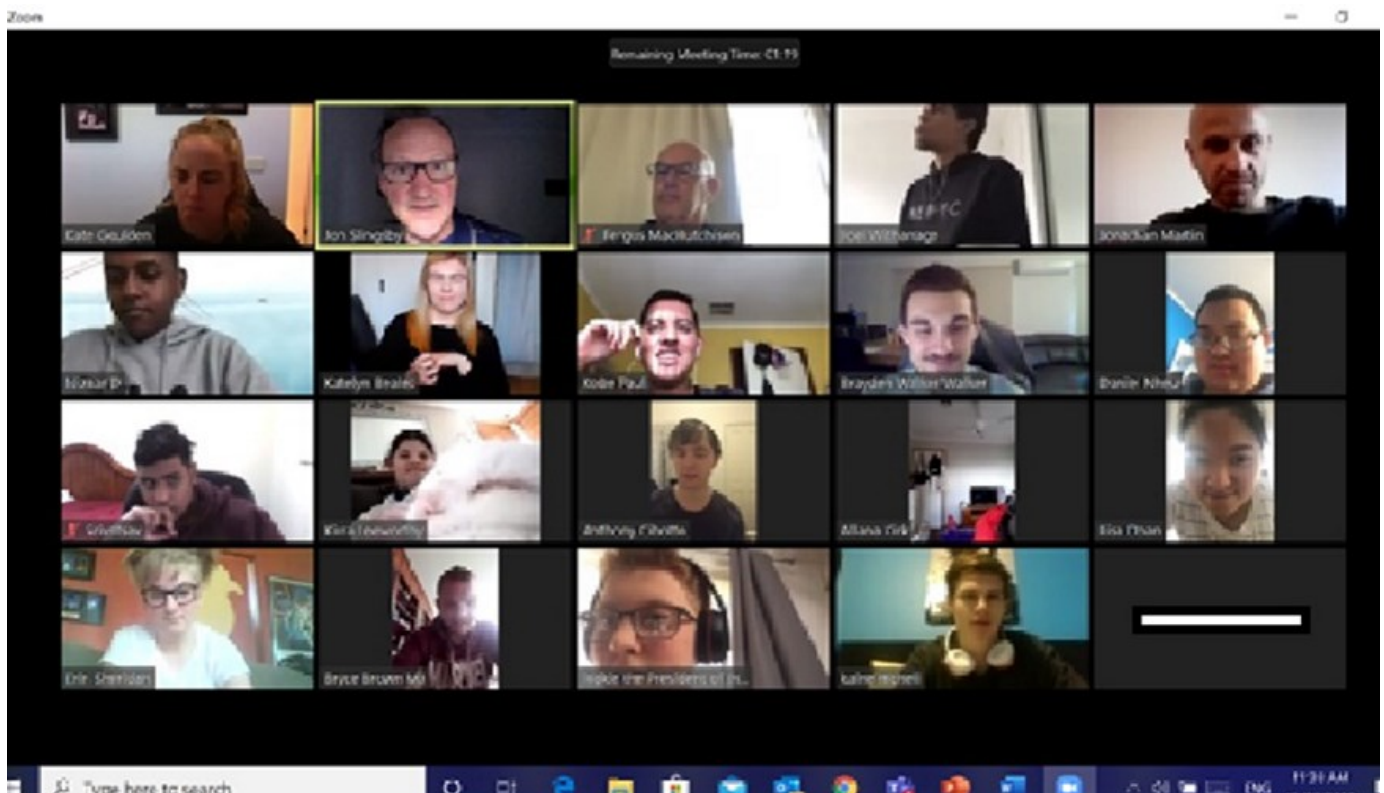


Zoe leading the Zoom Session with the group from All Abilities Advocacy

Participants provided lots of positive feedback, saying they appreciated the gentle and considered delivery of the information and conversations each week. Some participants said that “sessions like this help us to understand our rights” and “It’s good to talk about abuse and neglect, it can be hard to bring up, so it’s good to practice in a group” One of the participants, Becky Rose said “I found the staying safe training workshop very educating, full of information to help me to look out

for abuse and neglect. I know now what to do if it should ever happen to me or someone else; speak out more about it. It made me feel sad a bit because it reminded me about my past when I’ve been bullied and abused. It still happens to me to this day but at least I know what to do now thanks to this wonderful workshop, thank you VALID”.

Courses have also been delivered to participants at Burke and Beyond and Knoxbrooke.



Jon Zooming with participants from Burke and Beyond

Some of the feedback from the sessions with Bourke and Beyond has been really encouraging – “Well, I think that Jon is a great facilitator and the course is still really engaging over zoom, so I have been enjoying it a lot”. And “I like the conversation”, “I like watching the stories about others setting and achieving their goals” and “It’s been entertaining, inspiring and fun”.

Although the time spent during lockdown and the continued request to work from home could be viewed as having a very negative effect on the team, far from doing this, the KSP Team saw this time as an exciting challenge that enabled them to use

this time in a positive way. It has made the team think of different ways to deliver the KSP and Staying Safe programs. It has helped members of the team to learn new skills, such as how to use Teams and Zoom. It has shown the team that they can work remotely and keep in touch with co-workers and it has helped them to embrace change.

Over the next few years, the effects of what we have experienced during 2020 will continue to influence the way the KSP, the Staying Safe and other programs are delivered by VALID.

My thanks to the team

Jon Slingsby
KSP Coordinator

Systemic Advocacy

Sarah Forbes



VALID's systemic advocacy work takes a massive team effort across the whole organisation. One of the main jobs is contributing to national and state committees and working groups to represent the views and needs of our members, clients and supporters. This year, our CEO, Deputy CEO and advocacy staff shared responsibility for membership on groups including the NDIA Intellectual Disability Reference Group, National Disability Data Asset Advisory Council, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission Disability Sector Consultative Committee, Disability Advocacy Network Australia Board, Victoria Police Disability Portfolio Reference Group and many more. Kevin has also been an important voice on the Victorian Coronavirus (COVID-19) Disability Taskforce making sure that people with intellectual disability are supported through the lockdowns and beyond. You

might also have seen Kevin on the news and in the papers more than usual – he's been working hard during COVID-19 to make sure people in group homes are being considered in the government's response.

VALID has also been heavily involved with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Kevin, Alan Robertson (Self-Advocate) and Sarah Forbes (Advocacy Manager) gave evidence at the December 2019 public hearing on group homes. Darlane McLean (Individual Advocate) also gave evidence in September 2020 at the public hearing on Psychotropic medication, behaviour support and behaviours of concern. VALID staff and self-advocates have been interviewed for Inclusion Australia's huge written submission, telling important stories about the changes people with intellectual

disability need to be safe from abuse and neglect. And a big thankyou to VALID volunteer, John Leatherland, who has been supporting families to prepare written submissions!

VALID has also been interviewed for research projects on housing, allied health standards, individual advocacy frameworks, the legal system, child protection and more with Melbourne University, Deakin University, RMIT, ORIMA, Social Ventures Australia, the National Disability Advocacy Program, DHHS and the Office for Disability.

One important part of systemic advocacy is writing submissions to government inquiries. This year, we prepared submissions for improvements needed to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, changes needed to Supported Independent Living funding, to the inquiry on the death of Anne-Marie Smith in South Australia, and

assisted Inclusion Australia on a big submission on Support Coordination. We also published two open letters with our concerns about the NDIA introducing mandatory independent assessments.

We are continuing work to update our position statements on important systemic advocacy issues including home, individualised funding, communication, spirituality and the role of advocacy. We have started consulting and researching for updates and we are developing a framework for strong position statements so that we can go out doing our systemic advocacy work with even more confidence! Watch this space!

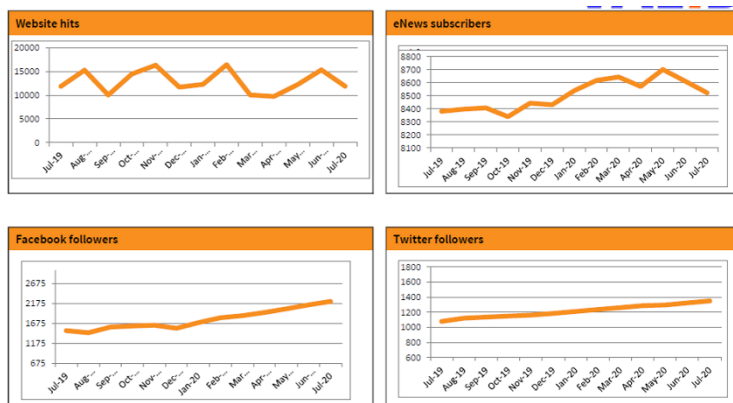
Communication

It has been a very busy and rewarding year for VALID with our new website launched and our eNews and social media continuing to be consumed by large numbers of people. Some very impressive key statistics for the year include:

- almost 170,000 hits on our website. This is a great result and shows that the information we have on our website is valued and useful.
- more than 8,500 subscribers to eNews – this means VALID now has over 8,500 members and associates receiving regular updates about our work and the work of the disability sector in general.

- 2,222 followers on Facebook – up from 1,493 at the beginning of the year. This represents a 50% increase over the year.
- 1,350 followers on Twitter – up 300 from the start of the year. An almost 30% increase over the year.

Much of the credit for this goes to the hard working Tully Zygiere who is doing a fantastic job looking after our social media and eNews and keeping our website up to date. It also suggests that there are a lot of people who see VALID as a trusted and credible source of information and we should all be proud of the work that has gone into the last 30 years to build that reputation. We look forward to an even bigger year ahead.



| Jul-19 | Aug-19 | Sep-19 | Oct-19 | Nov-19 | Dec-19 | Jan-20 | Feb-20 | Mar-20 | Apr-20 | May-20 | Jun-20 | Jul-20 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 11904 | 15302 | 10066 | 14509 | 16366 | 11731 | 12325 | 16486 | 10067 | 9758 | 12274 | 15361 | 11919 |
| Jul-19 | Aug-19 | Sep-19 | Oct-19 | Nov-19 | Dec-19 | Jan-20 | Feb-20 | Mar-20 | Apr-20 | May-20 | Jun-20 | Jul-20 |
| 8382 | 8398 | 8407 | 8340 | 8444 | 8432 | 8539 | 8618 | 8644 | 8572 | 8702 | 8613 | 8523 |
| Jul-19 | Aug-19 | Sep-19 | Oct-19 | Nov-19 | Dec-19 | Jan-20 | Feb-20 | Mar-20 | Apr-20 | May-20 | Jun-20 | Jul-20 |
| 1493 | 1440 | 1581 | 1606 | 1627 | 1549 | 1692 | 1813 | 1866 | 1946 | 2037 | 2139 | 2222 |
| Jul-19 | Aug-19 | Sep-19 | Oct-19 | Nov-19 | Dec-19 | Jan-20 | Feb-20 | Mar-20 | Apr-20 | May-20 | Jun-20 | Jul-20 |
| 1079 | 1122 | 1137 | 1149 | 1163 | 1186 | 1211 | 1237 | 1262 | 1287 | 1297 | 1324 | 1350 |

Advocacy Report

Emily Piggott

The past 12 months has seen considerable changes to staffing and ways of working within the advocacy team. This is especially so since March when we all moved to working from home. COVID-19 has presented many difficulties for the advocacy team, but has also allowed us to expand our skills into working with people online. We have found that whilst some advocacy clients have had difficulties with accessing technology and support, others have easily managed to communicate with us via online meeting platforms. Some clients have become further trapped and hidden by lack of access to technology, whereas for others, access to technology has enabled them to speak freely and often. One of the lessons of COVID-19 for us has been about the importance of technology in all of our lives, and that we should now view access to technology as a right for all people with disability. During

the pandemic technology has been a great tool for inclusion, but it has also been powerful for some clients in having greater agency and control over lives.

One advocacy client who was not able to speak to or make eye contact with his advocate when they first met was sent a VALID iPad earlier in the year. He is now participating in online meetings with his care team and regularly has online conversations with his advocate. He receives support to set up the meeting, but is now confidently using the iPad and plans to keep communicating this way. Another advocacy client has taught his advocate how to use an online meeting platform, and regularly calls for a chat. Whilst he has been using online meeting platforms for some time, his advocate was not confident but was encouraged to try it out at the beginning of the pandemic when he suggested it might be a good

way to communicate.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has been extremely difficult for some advocacy clients. One advocacy client was trapped in a high-rise public housing tower with deteriorating mental health, and no access to food, medication or support. Several of our clients who are involved with Child Protection have seen their access to their children diminish during the pandemic, and our clients in prison reported that they were 'locked down' (meaning they were locked in their cells alone) for most of the day with only around four hours per day outside their cells.

Sadly, some service providers chose to impose restrictions beyond the lawful directions given by Victoria's Chief Health Officer. For one client, despite the fact that unlawful restrictions were imposed, it was not possible to successfully advocate that the client be treated like any other member of the community who could still leave their home for exercise in a place of their choosing. The advocacy client had a hearing at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) where the matter of the unauthorized restriction was raised. The client's lawyer and advocate both argued that the unauthorized restriction had caused deterioration in his mental health and behaviour, but the VCAT member agreed that the service provider could continue the restriction.

Despite a very difficult year in many ways,

we have also had some wonderful moments and some great successes with our clients. The advocacy team has been instrumental in:

- preventing people from being moved from hospital to aged care against their will
- preventing people from longer terms of imprisonment, or from going to prison in the first place by assisting people to gain access to the NDIS and then supporting them to choose their services
- getting better accommodation outcomes in public housing by raising awareness of disability discrimination
- getting better outcomes for people involved with Child Protection by raising discrimination issues and educating staff on disability rights
- advocating that a trauma-informed and person-centred approach be taken in non-disability focused services
- supporting clients to provide statements to the Disability Royal Commission
- supporting clients to have restrictive practices decreased
- preventing people from being moved into group homes against their will
- supporting people to change their services, choose their care teams and direct their staff (which can be a disturbingly controversial activity!)

The types of referrals that we receive has changed significantly over the past 12 months, and we are able to identify patterns occurring in both Victorian systems but also at the level of the NDIA. Often when there is a particular problem occurring we see an influx of referrals based on that problem. Often the problems are ones that should and can be fixed within the system itself and is not a reason for an advocate to become involved. Other issues can be resolved by an advocate by supporting a client, family member or service provider to fix the problem themselves. As we are only able to take on a limited number of new cases, we prioritise people who are experiencing abuse, neglect, exploitation, coercion and discrimination. Within that definition we further prioritise people where the impact of the problem is the greatest. Some of the most common issues we respond to are:

- Women with intellectual disability experiencing discrimination and further trauma when involved with Child Protection and the courts
- People who have not previously been diagnosed with intellectual disability who commit a crime who are at greater risk of harsher punishment because they do not have access to the NDIS
- Support Coordinators who are unclear about their role and often wish to involve an advocate when they are not

able to solve a problem – these problems often relate to a person experiencing a crisis, often around homelessness, inadequate support and funding, or who are at risk of hospitalisation, police contact or serious physical harm

- Service providers who are unclear about their responsibilities with duty of care and safeguarding, and often try to engage advocates to avoid difficult situations with clients and family members – this often involves situations where it is clear to us that the person requires guardianship
- Knowledge about supported decision making is in its infancy and is an under recognised form of funded support. Many service providers and NDIA staff appear to view both advocacy and guardianship as legitimate substitute decision making mechanisms

On average we receive between 20-25 requests for advocacy per week. Sometimes people come to us with issues that we cannot assist them to resolve, but we always aim to provide as much advice, support and referral as we can. As a service that does not receive nearly enough funding to meet demand, we have to prioritise the most serious and urgent issues where the impact to the person will be the greatest if the problem is not resolved. Often we become involved in situations where no one else is willing or able to solve

the problem, or where knowledge of disability rights is so poor that professionals are regularly engaging in discriminatory behaviour and breaching human rights without even realising they are doing so. As the NDIS has shifted the landscape of disability, and people with intellectual disability are now exposed to so many new services and systems, the lack of disability rights and practice knowledge is starkly apparent, and increases the pressure on advocacy immensely.

The work of the advocacy team is often with people who come to us with complex lives, involvement with multiple services and systems, and restrictions placed upon them. There are times when the advocacy goal cannot be achieved and we are left with a sense of sadness and frustration. When being interviewed for a project recently, one advocacy client described his understanding of the role of an advocate, and the benefit he had received from his relationship with an

advocate. He said with confidence that “my advocate tells me about my human rights and tells me what my rights are when I don’t know. My advocate is there to be on my side”. Whilst we often feel that we cannot do enough to change the world as much as we would like, we also know that advocacy is not just about the outcome, it is also about building relationships with disempowered people to lay the foundations for them to be able to take up their rights and one day become powerful self-advocates.

The advocacy team is:

Frederikke Jensen – Individual advocate

Miia Tolvanen – Individual advocate

Dariane McLean – Individual advocate

Andrew Minge – Individual advocate and project officer

Emily Piggott – Advocacy coordinator

Sarah Forbes – Advocacy manager and systemic advocate

Families as Planning Partners Report

Christine Scott



The End of an Era!

On the 30th of June 2020 VALID's recurrent funding for the family training program has ceased as part of the transfer of all state disability funding to the NDIS. The family training program has been around for over 11 years. We see that empowering families through training and information is a vital part of promoting the self-advocacy of people with disabilities and in supporting them obtain a great life.

Similarly, the additional funding through the Victorian state government for the TSP (Transition Support Program) project has ceased with the roll out of the NDIS in Victoria completed. Correspondingly, the demand for NDIS information sessions and the NDIS version of the course has reduced significantly. Given the end of both our core family program and the TSP project I have included some statistics from

the last 5 years in which we have as a team provided sessions to over 8,000 family members. We regularly have feedback on how the course has given them success in getting a better outcome for their family member, so I want to thank Maree, Donna and Annette for their diligence and commitment to the families we work with.

So, our Team focus has moved to supporting families to understand and effectively manage their family members NDIS Plan through courses, workshops and follow-up support. We also have conducted some specific topic workshops around key areas of concern for families, including several housing forums in February 2020 and in November 2019 a course and workshop on challenging behaviour, the latter in conjunction with DDWA (Development Disabilities Western Australia).

Finally, it was very timely that we started trials of courses online using Zoom in late 2019, so when COVID hit, we were able to quickly move to online courses and workshops. The most significant problem has been family's access to and understanding of the appropriate technology.

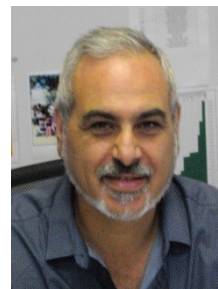
Full Statistics for all family sessions from 2015 – 2020

| 2015 -2020 | Courses delivered | Number of separate sessions | Attendance | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | | Families | Workers | Participants |
| Core courses | 35 | 168 | 353 | 10 | 10 |
| TSP courses | 185 | 864 | 1,765 | 48 | 49 |
| Totals COURSES | 220 | 1,032 | 2,118 | 58 | 59 |
| | Info Sessions delivered | | | | |
| TSP Info ses- | 201 | 201 | 3,800 | 992 | 567 |
| Core Info ses- | 111 | 111 | 2,334 | 771 | 395 |
| Totals Info Ses-sions | 312 | 312 | 6,134 | 1,763 | 962 |
| | | | | | |
| | Totals across both projects | 1,344 | 8,252 | 1,821 | 1,021 |

TSP – additional Victoria Transition Support Project funding
 Core – project funded by Victoria DHHS for family training

Self-Advocacy Report

Rick Ruiu



What a time the 2019-20 period has been! Full of new beginnings, new possibilities, new partnerships, transition, change and of course the COVID-19 pandemic.

As always, the VALID Self Advocacy team continues to support people with intellectual disability to become strong self advocates. Self advocacy is the driving force behind the empowerment of people to have control and influence over the decisions and choices that affect their lives.

The VALID Self Advocacy team would like to acknowledge the commitment of self advocates who continued to attend the Self Advocacy Networks and Forum online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These online meetings are a great opportunity for self advocates to continue to connect and provide encouragement and motivation for each other. It was a reminder that life can be fulfilling and exciting when you practice your right to 'Speak Up', even

through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outlined below are some of the Self Advocacy teams' initiatives and projects that have been at the forefront of our work in the 2019-20 period.

VALID8

Through our partnerships with DHHS and services, the VALID Self Advocacy Program has established extensive self-advocacy activities and networks across metropolitan Melbourne, with a multitude of user-led groups operating within services and engaging with DHHS, service management and the community at many levels.

Informed by these experiences, VALID developed the VALID8 Service User Review of Empowerment Practice Tool, a means by which services can define and develop best practice measures for the empowerment of service users. The tool evolved out of VALID's extensive work with agencies over many years.

The VALID8 tool began as a self-audit of service user empowerment practice in Disability Services, a means by which services were able to define and develop best practice measures for the empowerment of their participants.

VALID proposed to DHHS that the VALID8 tool be adapted and refined into the 'VALID8 Service User Review of Empowerment Practice Tool', a mechanism to enhance and help assure the quality of self-advocacy and empowerment practices within disability residential service agencies. A key feature of the proposal was that self advocates be

recruited and trained to deliver the VALID8 and participate in the development of the tool.

- The VALID8 framework is consistent with the National Disability Standards and requires evidence of achievement in all aspect of service user empowerment, including:
- Person-centred planning
- Support for decision-making
- Participation in organisational governance
- Involvement in service decision-making
- Skill development opportunities
- Input into quality processes



In late 2019 VALID was successful in securing funding for the VALID8 Tool and work began on recruiting self advocates. VALID is pleased to welcome the inaugural VALID8 Team: Greg Tucker, Jenny Bowden, Anthony Reid, William Ward-Boas and Suzannah MacNamara.

- Wellbeing
- Community participation outcomes

The VALID8 team is working hard on developing the tool and training self advocates to begin reviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic much of the training and development of the tool has been online. This has slowed progress but not the enthusiasm of the VALID8 Team and we look forward to visiting Disability Group Homes when safe to do so.

Partnerships

Through the 2019-20 period the VALID Self Advocacy team has been contacted and entered several partnerships with disability services to promote self advocacy and strengthen the voice of people who use their services.

We have been engaged to provide support for Advisory/Self Advocacy groups within Life Without Barriers, Possability and Aruma. Many meetings were successfully held through the later part of 2019 and into 2020.

In late March, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all meetings were transferred to online platforms. It's a credit to both service users and services that every attempt was made to facilitate connection

between participants and continue the groups.

The aims of the Advisory/Self Advocacy Groups are to:

- seek feedback and input into the development and review of practices, policies and procedures from those affected by them.
- provide feedback about day to day service provision and to advise of issues that have not been resolved at a local level through normal procedures.
- provide information about topics discussed by participants.
- engage with and include feedback from all participants.

The VALID Self Advocacy team was also engaged by services to provide support for Resident meetings, group home reviews (both locally and interstate) and to administer a national client satisfaction survey to service users.

The aims of Group Home reviews are to:

- observe interactions between staff and residents to determine quality practices
- monitor wellbeing of residents and report any concerns using appropriate pathways.
- provide information about topics

discussed by residents that require follow up by the organisation

- review best practice including the use of active support in line with national disability standards.
- ensure documentation is up to date and meets support requirements

The aims of Resident meetings are to:

- seek feedback and input into the day to day running of the group home, what is working well and opportunities for improvement, discuss household shared purchases and significant changes e.g. vacancy filling, requests to change vehicles.
- provide feedback about day to day relationships within the group home, including minor conflict resolution and to advise of issues that have not been resolved.
- provide information about topics discussed by participants that require follow up by the organisation
- engage with and provide feedback from all participants including people who have profound disability or complex communication needs.

Many timelines were altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic and we continue to work with services on completing these initiatives.

Palliative Care Victoria Partnership

In mid-2019 VALID was approached by Palliative Care Victoria to join in a project to create several resources about grief, loss, palliative care and death. Many people with an intellectual disability are not given the opportunity to express or explore their experiences around these topics. Self advocates continue to be engaged in the creation, design and eventual launch of these resources. VALID looks forward to continuing the work on this meaningful project and will give further updates once the resources launch in the next financial year.

Mainstream and Government Consultations

The 2019-20 period has continued to see consultations between mainstream and government organisations and self advocates grow. This has been a positive shift into acknowledging people with a disability's views into service delivery, mainstream strategic planning and co-production of resources.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of both the Self Advocacy team and the VALID8 team for their dedication, enthusiasm & hard work throughout the year. Both teams are an invaluable part of VALID and its mission to empower people through Self Advocacy.

Community Development Report

David Craig



VALID's Community Development work has continued to evolve and develop over this reporting period. This work is concentrated on building the capacity of people with disability to lead in their own lives and strengthen their capacity to make decisions and engage more fully in all areas of local community life. The main two programs we support are the Peer Action Groups (PAGs) and Choice Mentors. PAGs use peer support and collective action to build both personal self-determination for individual members as well as skills and experience in making social impact in local communities. The Choice Mentor Program brings volunteer mentors into a relationship of person-centred support for decision-making and building social connections for individuals with limited or no informal or family supports. In addition to these two programs we also run projects and initiatives from time to time that emerge from or support this work.

COVID-19 Impacts

While most of our work is done face to face in either an individual support role or in meeting together regularly in groups, the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions on face to face work was a significant challenge during 2020. However, most of our groups were able to make the transition to using Zoom to continue online networking. Early in the state-wide lockdown we focused our efforts on supporting and encouraging Peer Action Group members to get access to digital devices and support to use them so that they could continue to meet online. Support from the NDIA to allow more people without devices to use their support packages to purchase equipment was an important factor in keeping people connected. Our survey of group members to ascertain the level of access and support to online communication highlighted how many people with intellectual

disabilities in particular have been largely excluded from the digital world of information and communication.

While we lost contact with a number of members of our PAGs, we also picked up new members who found it easier to attend when transport challenges and distance were a factor for face to face meetings. We have also experienced growth in networking across groups as people were able to connect more easily to groups in other regions. This success will mean that we need to create effective ways of offering participation opportunities in both face to face and online when social distancing restrictions have been lifted.

Working online has also introduced the capacity to keep people connected and active through a series of arts projects that engaged people in storytelling, drawing, video production and radio programs. PAG members were encouraged to share stories of life in lockdown, to take photos of favourite places on their local walks within the allowed 5km zone and to create bookmarks for Book Week. Feedback from participants has indicated how important these activities and events

were in keeping people focused on the positive during a socially challenging time under social distancing restrictions. Strong partnerships with Watsonia and Jika Jika Neighbourhood houses have seen some wonderful joint activities marking life in lockdown

Peer Action Groups

This was a year of continuous development of the Peer Action Groups Network that has been created through a series of transitional funding grants by both the Commonwealth and State governments following the original Disability Support Organisations grant.

As we moved towards the NDIA's release of larger 2 to 3 year grants for Information, Linkages and Community Capacity Building (ILC) work, the focus of our work through local Peer Action Groups moved from efforts to maintain between 20-25 groups around the state to consolidating our work in 8 – 10 areas where the work has been most effective. This transition is based on the plans to build "local place-based networks" that provide a support structure for citizens with disability to lead social change in their local communities. Key elements of this work include:

- **Leadership by people with a diverse lived experience of disability** who are motivated to lead the kinds of social, economic, civic and cultural changes in their local community that improves opportunities for all fellow citizens
- **Partnerships with key local community agencies** are a key feature of this work. Neighbourhood Houses, community centres, libraries and volunteer resource centres are important places for people with disability to transition to a life that is more active in mainstream community membership. In partnership with disability advocacy efforts and community development work, these community settings offer safe and supported places to experience a sense of belonging and create avenues for contribution and community leadership. Our commitment to work with Neighbourhood Houses in particular is based on some successful joint projects that have emerged from partnerships. There are 400 Neighbourhood Houses spread across Victoria where a variety of community groups and various activities offer the prospect of connection to



is the bedrock of our work. The dedicated and passionate volunteer leaders and staff in the PAGs continue to grow and build skills, knowledge and experience that is creating a healthy foundation for future development. Our group of 20 plus leaders meet regularly for planning, training and information sharing to ensure that we worked well in one or more local PAGs. While we have been able to provide a pathway to paid employment for a couple of our leaders in a very part-time capacity, it is our intention to increase these opportunities through future ILC grant funding.



community for people with disability. This presents a meaningful and welcoming alternative place to specialist disability day centres for people with disabilities looking for a place to belong and to contribute their gifts and knowledge.

- **Effective engagement with disability support agencies** that empower people with disability to begin to connect more effectively with the wide range of social, cultural and economic opportunities enjoyed by other citizens in more inclusive settings is an important element in our work. We have been fortunate to work with some disability support providers who have collaborated with us to bring the joint capacity and expertise together to enable their clients to become active members of a local Peer Action Group. This was particularly evident through the long period of COVID-19 social distancing restrictions and lockdowns. This type of cooperation, unfortunately, is not common and the tendency of disability support agencies to play a gate-keeping role around participation in Peer Action Groups continues to be a challenge.

- **Citizen Activism** provides the

bedrock for leading the kinds of social change projects our Peer Action Groups engaged in throughout the year. Running Fantastic Flicks film events that raise awareness about disability issues, successfully lobbying for a safe pedestrian crossing, establishing a friendship project, running local access campaigns, making community radio programs, or engaging performing artists with a disability with the mainstream performing arts sector are just some of the projects local PAGs are working on each month.

Special Interest Peer Action Groups

In addition to local place-based Peer Action Groups, we have again been able to support some interest specific groups during this reporting period.

- Behaviours of Concern Peer Action Group have continued to provide a forum for families of individuals with complex support needs to share experiences, learn from each other and gain access to independent and accurate information. New members with younger children joining the group have had the opportunity to access mentoring support from families with a longer experience of dealing with disability support systems and,

in particular, the NDIS. Peer networking has given group members the confidence to navigate the challenges of Self-Managed Packages and a chance to improve approaches used by families to empower the voice of their family member with a disability. We have been fortunate to have Dariane Mclean, one of our advocates and a family member, and VALID's Advocacy Manager, Sarah Forbes, supporting and facilitating the group as they work through the challenging emotional, physical and financial complexity that group members face in each individual situation.

Significantly, this group has been able to meet with senior policy makers to share their stories and to use their lived experience to change the way in which disability supports are funded for people with complex support needs. This has systemic benefits for many other families beyond the group who benefit from a more flexible disability support system and highlights the power of peer support groups to have impact beyond the group who regularly meet together.

Performing Arts Peer Action Group is a new group that has formed during

this reporting period that grew out of the passion of one of VALID's admin team members, Mel Watson. Mel has volunteered to bring her passion for the performing arts to



people with disabilities who share this passion. The aim of the group is to inform, inspire, showcase talent and create opportunities for inclusive theatre practice and performance. As a volunteer leader with good connections in the performing arts community, Mel has been able to create opportunities for people with disabilities to meet at the Malthouse Theatre to explore and extend their skills and interests in performance. The Performing Arts Peer Action Group has attracted a strong and enthusiastic group of people. Annie Bourke at the Cooper's Malthouse Theatre company has shown a strong commitment to forming a partnership with the group to create inclusive performing arts

opportunities that will open new doors to group members and bring the talents of performers with disabilities to a wider audience.

While the group has had limited face to face meetings at the Malthouse Theatre due to COVID restrictions, they made the transition to online forums with a program called 10@10 where group members interview a range of people connected to the world of performing arts. Mary Nickson, David Baker and Erin Pocervina as session facilitators have been the face of this program interviewing a diverse range of guests from the performing arts sector. These conversations have sought to draw on the experience of guests as they share their journey with the online audience as well as challenging guests to address how the sector can do more to create opportunities for people with disabilities.

Community Development Projects

The Community Development team have continued to develop and support a number of projects that have emerged from our local PAGs as well as from some state-wide initiatives.

Dulcie Stone Writers Award

This annual writing award for writers with intellectual disability was opened for 2020 but due to COVID was delayed until later in the year to increase the prospect of holding the event at the usual venue at the Wheeler Centre. The theme for this year's award is – "A Good Life – Are We There Yet? This project with Writers Victoria is a valuable opportunity for the wider community to hear the voice of people with intellectual disability who have had limited opportunities and encouragement to express themselves through writing.

Friendship Project

This project funded by Gandel Philanthropy is based on face to face meetups bringing socially isolated or marginalised people together around common interests. A working group has been established involving local community agencies, disability support providers and is led by several Peer Action Group leaders from the Frankston PAG. Again due to COVID this project was placed on hold until face to face connections are again possible and safe.

Inclusive Geelong Sculpture Project

While the development of a significant public sculpture in Geelong to promote inclusion of people with

disability has slowed down due to COVID some progress was made in wider consultation about the design of the sculpture and a survey conducted to identify what messaging was most important to convey through a public sculpture. This project is a partnership with City of Geelong, Arts Gusto and Geelong Christian College and will continue to play an active role in guiding this project to the final installation of the final sculpture in a key public location in Geelong. The sculpture, when completed, will act as a symbol of the efforts of local citizens with disability to make their city a more inclusive and accessible city.

International Day Events

International Day Events in Ballarat,



Moe and Pakenham have created opportunities to:

- Celebrate an Access and Inclusion Awards Event based on community audit program in Ballarat that lead to the

selection of 5 venues that best met access and inclusion criteria.

- Enjoy a celebration of a pedestrian crossing in Pakenham that was constructed when the local PAG ran a campaign in their local community.
 - Partner with historical societies in Gippsland to celebrate the stories of people with disabilities living in “the valley”.
 - Launch a friendship project in Frankston supported by a \$57,000 grant from Gandel Philanthropy to address loneliness and social isolation issues faced by people with disabilities (and many others) in this community
- Anecdotes to Evidence Project
- VALID was part of a 5-agency consortium (Amaze, Carers Vic, VMIAC and Down Syndrome Vic) that was funded by DHHS to capture benefits of peer support programs and to provide guidance about their role in the future roll out of the NDIA’s Information, Linkages & Capacity Building program. Individuals and groups from each agency were surveyed

about the impact of their involvement in peer support programs conducted by each agency and a forum was held to identify strategies for strengthening this work across Victoria. Key recommendations from this project were:

- That the Victorian Government introduce a Peer Sector funding program to resource peer led groups and projects as part of their ongoing responsibility under the National Disability Strategy to empower people with disabilities as leaders of social change in their local communities.
- That the Victorian Government fund a peak state-wide body to support networking, communities of practice and peer leadership development across the state to ensure a strong grassroots based driver for social change and inclusion.
- That the Victorian Government take an active leadership role in sustaining peer sector funding and development and engagement with the NDIA around effective investment of Information, Linkages and Capacity Building in Victoria.

We will continue to advocate, in partnership with other agencies involved in the empowerment and support of peer led groups, for the Victorian Government to stay active in supporting this model of community development and collective action. Having transferred the funding of the Metro and Rural Access Program to the NDIA, we believe it is essential for the state government to both advocate for peer led work under the NDIS as well as investing state government resources in this work.

Inclusive Community Development Network (ICDN)

VALID Community Development team has continued to support and convene the Inclusive Community Development Network as a means of bringing together practitioners, academics and leaders with a lived experience of disability to share ideas, explore effective practice around creating more accessible and inclusive community and support projects of mutual interest. In this reporting period, 3 such events were held. The first 2 were face to face meetings with a focus on information sharing

and networking. With significant commitments of ILC funding for community capacity building work on the horizon there was a strong focus on how the sector could most effectively use this funding to ensure maximum impact and benefits for people with disabilities. Concerns about lack of collaboration across the sector and proposed design of investment strategies were a key feature of these discussions.

With COVID restrictions closing down face to face meetings, ICDN's April meeting went online and 65 people (including interstate participants) attended a session with guest presenter Peter Kenyon from Perth challenging us with "Moving from Servicing Community to Strengthening Community". Peter provided us with examples of how Asset Based Community Development principles can be used by local communities to lead the change they want to see. Using online platforms for this purpose has opened up the way for providing easier access for people unable to attend in person and will be a feature of these forums in the future.

Choice Mentors Program

VALID's Choice Mentor program was established to support people with disabilities with limited or no informal and family support to have support with their decision making. Choice Mentors meet fortnightly with the person they are mentoring to build a relationship of mutual connection and trust so that they can begin to build capacity and confidence in decision-making. The program has a group of inspiring volunteer citizens filling a vital role in supporting decision making around NDIS plans as well as many other key life decisions related to living situations, community engagement and making social connection.

We have continued to operate this program without an external source of funding for this reporting period and relied on both volunteers and students on placement to maintain the program for a significant part of this year. Establishing the program and getting some solid momentum has been a challenge during this period. As there were about still 12 effective matches between volunteer mentors and people

with disabilities being supported in this program when government funding ended we decided that we would continue to support the program with limited internal resources and funding. We were able to commence with a 1 day a week position for a Coordinator late in 2019 and increase this role to 3 days per week early in 2020. Josie Cohen has taken up this role and worked very hard to both increase numbers and consolidate the program as an important support option for a growing number of people with disabilities.

We have been grateful for the quality and commitment of volunteers who have chosen to become a Choice Mentor and the variety of backgrounds and life experience they bring has been a real asset to those participants they have been matched with. Volunteers regularly attend training and support sessions and have continued to catch up with participants through the lockdown via phone or zoom. Feedback from participants has been encouraging with people mentioning the value of having

someone “outside the system” that they can talk with who is independent. Participants in this program have been able to get better support at NDIS planning meetings, work on moving to a new home, sort out issues and concerns about abuse and neglect among other outcomes. Choice Mentors work closely with advocates in some situations and are developing effective and complementary support roles in the lives of a number of the Choice Mentees.

We continue to be astounded at the poor referral rates from many disability agencies when we are sure there are many people with disability who need this kind of decision-making support but appreciate those agencies that have been supportive. The Client Rights and Empowerment team at Yooralla and a number of independent and committed Support Coordinators have been exceptional in their support of this program.



**William Ward - Boas
and
Andrew Minge**

10 Employment Project

Liz Collier

The VALID Employment Project is a one-year project funded by the NDIS through the ILC Economic and Community Participation round.

The project focuses on:

- what VALID can do to support employees with intellectual disability to understand and perform their roles and develop skills and career opportunities
- what additional supports are available to people with intellectual disability and employers and how they can be used well
- what we can learn from VALID's approach that can also be used to support small-medium businesses to employ people with intellectual disability.

The project started in September 2019, and in December, William Ward-Boas and Andrew Minge joined the team. A highlight of the first few months together was when Zoe worked with us to create a PATH plan for our project. It has been nice to revisit this plan along the way to see how we are going.

The heart of the project is the monthly

Community of Practice meetings, chaired by Andrew and AJ from the VALID8 team. We use meeting tips from Voice At The Table to make sure everyone has a chance to speak up and contribute. We invited people who work at VALID and other organisations like Ticket To Work, Uniting and Inclusion Australia to join the Community of Practice. We met once a month to share what we are all doing and to talk about the project. We have also invited guest speakers to join us, including Emma from Australian Network on Disability.

The Community of Practice worked together to develop questions so that we could interview people about their experiences of work and write a report. In February and March we interviewed twenty people with intellectual disability who work or have worked in open employment. We also interviewed twelve managers that employ people with intellectual disability. We wanted to find out about what employers do well to support people with intellectual disability at work.

We found out that to support people with an intellectual disability at work, some of the most important things workplaces need to do are:

- Make sure people know what they are expected to do
- Work on building trust
- Give people honest feedback
- Know what people's skills are and help them to find ways to use them at work
- Make a commitment to workplace adjustments.

You can read the report here: [VALID Employment Project](#)

We had started to work with Launchpad (the collaborative workspace where the VALID office is) when restrictions due to COVID-19 began. We were not able to continue this part of the project.

The Employment team were able to make changes to the project including:

- finding new ways to work together as a team and learning lots about technology
- moving monthly Community of Practice meetings online
- making a plan for VALID staff to stay and connected during this time.

The plan for Staying Connected included:

- a daily lunch hour on Zoom that is open to all staff
- fortnightly update from Kevin or David
- All staff completing one-page profiles
- introduction of new inclusive meeting practices to the staff meeting

Heather joined the Employment team and also introduced:

- social drinks
- a weekly bake-off
- weekly trivia

It has been an interesting time to do a project about support for people at work. Working from home has meant that there have been big changes to our usual ways of doing things and new things we have all needed to learn. It has opened up honest conversations about what we need and encouraged us to be creative and to support each other in different ways. People have taken on extra responsibility and shown great leadership. Our team is proud of the work we are doing and the way we are all supporting each other during this time at VALID. We have learned some really valuable things that we look forward to sharing with other workplaces .

Linda Studena

Inclusion Point was a project delivered in partnership with NSW CID and was funded through the NDIS ILC Program. The project ran for two years and finished on 30 June 2020.

Information via newsletters

VALID sends eNews to over 8700 subscribers who are now Members or Associates.

Produce new resources, fact sheets and other formats

VALID website - launched on 17 June 2020 and it is AA Accessibility compliant www.valid.org.au

The Keeping Connected project (COVID-19 response), developed a series of 11 videos that are available on our website

Easy Read videos published

What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

VALID Advocate.

My home, my rights Information for people with disability living in group homes.

My home, my responsibilities Information for people with disability living in group homes.

Positions held on advisory groups

Heather Forsyth holds the following positions on advisory groups:

Empower Us – Inclusion International, Self-Advocate Action team member

Our Voice committee – Chair, reports to Inclusion Australia

Support staff for self-advocates on the VALID Committee of Management

Luke Nelson

Mentee on Our Voice committee, mentored by Heather Forsyth

Having a Say 2020 Conference Report

Christine Scott



Having a Say Forever!

The 2020 HaS conference was a vibrant fun three days with around 1100 people participating in all the usual activities.

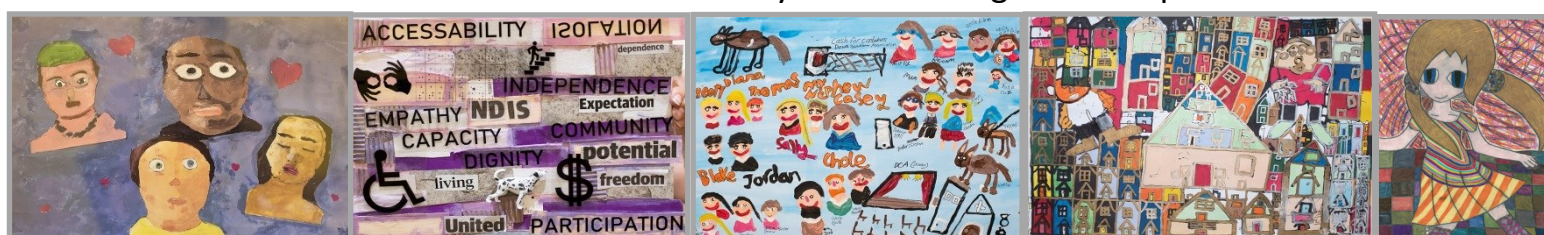
Highlights included:

- Judy Huett & Sonia Hume, Our Voice Committee of Inclusion Australia, spoke about their experience in Geneva talking to the United Nations Committee on Australia's performance against the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- Thanh Nguyen, a self-advocate from Vietnam, performed in her native costume a traditional Vietnamese dance to a song called 'Vietnam My Homeland'
- The end of an era with the current Vic. Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) ending its sponsorship of HaS because



most of its role has been taken over by the QSC. Arthur Rogers, the current DSC, was a keynote speaker at the first HaS conference in Maryborough in 2000, so it has been a long and positive association and pertinent that he was a keynote at 2020 HaS conference.

- Vintage limousine rides as a Come and Try
- Matthew Buckingham, who was awarded by Ambulance Victoria a Community Hero Award in recognition for his actions in potentially saving the life of a co-worker.
- The Our Choice Expo was a constant hive of activity with over 90 exhibits representing all aspects of disability sector.
- The amazing entries into the Having a Say Art Competition which has been named in remembrance of Barbara Donovan's work for people with disabilities over the past 50 years. Winning artworks pictured below.



Guest speakers included:

- The Hon. Luke Donnellan MP, Minister for Child Protection, Disability, Ageing and Carers, who talked about the importance of self-advocacy and advocacy to support people with disability to be treated the same as everyone else and to promote inclusive communities.
- Samantha Taylor, Registrar, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (QSC) spoke about the right to receive good quality services.
- Dan Stubbs, the new Victorian Disability Workers Commissioner, talked about the new Disability Workers Regulation Scheme, that will require all voluntary and paid workers register and meet the regulation standards.
- Martin Hoffman, CEO, NDIA, talked about how the NDIS is seeking to improve things to make the NDIS simpler and easier for people with a disability.

VALID Stream:

- VALID's Community Development team presented on their work with Peer Action Groups which have achieved good outcomes for people with



disabilities through partnering with groups and organisations in their local communities.

- A panel on housing provided information on how they work with the SDA (Specialist Disability Accommodation) Providers to develop and provide tailor made living accommodation for people with significant behaviour needs or high physical support needs. The discussion talked about new initiatives for building new housing for people who miss out on SDA.
- The Families presented their 10 Tips for Preparing for your Plan Review session and some of the current trends in Plan reviews to be aware of.
- Representatives from the four VALID Self-Advocacy Networks reported on what topics and issues have been important to them during 2019.

VALID would like to thank all the many volunteers, sponsors and partners, lists of which can be found in the 2020 Conference Report on our website.



We would especially like to thank the principle sponsors, Chris & Julies Respite Farm and Vic. Department Health and Human Services, along with the NDIA for their support in providing volunteers.



130 Cremorne Street
Richmond Vic 3121

P (03) 9416 4003

F (03) 9416 0850

E info@valid.org.au

www.valid.org.au

