2025-2026

VALiD

ANNUAL REPORT



www.valid.org.au

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country and pay respect to their Elders, past and present. We extend the same respect to all First Nations people we are in contact with. We work on sovereign Aboriginal land that was never ceded. Our main office is on the land of the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulin nation.

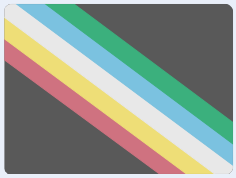



Statement on Lived Experience

VALID values and respects the lived and living experience of people with disabilities. We acknowledge their resilience and strength in challenging generations of discrimination, coercion and neglect. We support their ongoing fight for inclusion, empowerment and rights.

Statement on Diversity

VALID celebrates, values and welcomes people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, religions, ages, bodies and abilities. We are committed to creating safe programs, services and workplaces in which everyone can think, act and express themselves freely and without fear.

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Vision, Purposes, Aims and Values

VALID is the peak advocacy organisation representing adults with intellectual disability in Victoria.

Vision

A society where everyone is empowered to exercise their rights in line with:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- Other human rights standards

Purposes

1. To strengthen and promote the human rights of people with intellectual disability, including in relation to:
   - Inclusion
   - Access
   - Employment
   - Health
   - Education
   - Housing
2. To provide support to the family and carer networks of people with intellectual disability in these pursuits.



Aims

VALID aims to empower people with intellectual disability to:

- **Exert control and influence over the decisions and choices which affect their lives** (people will have a say about what happens in their own lives)
- **Inform and influence the policies, processes and practices of disability service agencies, governments and other authorities** (people will have a say about what organisations connected to disability do)
- **Exercise their human rights and citizenship status within their local communities** (people with intellectual disability will be able to do the same things as anyone else).

Values

Respect
This means we accept and value people for who they are.

Collaboration
Working together.

Courage
Being brave and strong.

Humility
Understanding that we do not know everything.

Passion
Caring a lot about what we do.

Dedication
Not stopping until we live in a society where the human rights of people with intellectual disability are happening in practice.

Integrity
Doing what we say we will. Being honest when we make mistakes.



Chair's Report



This has been an important year for VALID and for me personally as I stepped into the role of Chair. I have approached the role with a strong sense of responsibility to our members, VALID's history and the people with intellectual disability and families who rely on our advocacy.

A key focus for the Board going into the future is strengthening our inclusive governance. This means looking honestly at how we work and making sure people with intellectual disability have the right support to participate, influence decisions and take on leadership roles.

We have also worked to strengthen VALID's advocacy positions and build closer relationships with Disabled People's Organisations and Disability Representative Organisations. At a time of major change across the disability sector, it is important that we work together while remaining clear about the needs and rights of people with intellectual disability.

During the Senate inquiry into the recent NDIS Bill, VALID supported people with intellectual disability,

families and supporters to understand the process and make submissions. Their experiences needed to be heard in decisions that will directly affect their lives.

I have been proud to represent VALID at conferences and in meetings with state and federal ministers, bringing our community's concerns directly to decision-makers.

Good leadership also means continuing to reflect, listen and ask whose voices are missing. I thank my fellow Board members, CEO Fionn Skiotis, staff, members, self-advocates, families, partners and funders. Together, we will keep building a strong and inclusive VALID that is ready for the challenges ahead.

William Ward-Boas
Chair, Board of Management





CEO's Report



In 2025–26, VALID continued to face long-term challenges while, as we have for many years, pushing ahead with new ideas and initiatives aimed at increasing the voice and presence of people with intellectual disability.

On the challenges first: VALID still lacks dedicated funding for systemic advocacy, and we sorely missed this in a year which saw the much-criticised NDIS Bill developed and proposed (and subsequently passed in 2026–27). Despite scarce resources, we consulted with our people on the planned changes at the 2026 Advocacy in Action conference and developed a strong submission to the Senate enquiry, among other actions.

VALID has never been an organisation content to wait around for others to create change for us. Over the past year we have once again discussed, developed and put into action several initiatives aimed at strengthening the voice of our community. A sample of these include our VALID Conversations webinars featuring self advocates, our internal lived experience staff group, the VALID Voices group for self advocates interested in public speaking, and VALID Q, our LGBTQIA+ group for people with intellectual disability.

Through our advocacy work, we continue to hear from people with intellectual disability and their families who are struggling to understand changes, access the supports they need and have their voices taken seriously. These experiences show why strong, independent advocacy remains so important. As we strengthen VALID and create more opportunities for people with intellectual disability to lead, we will be better placed to support our community and challenge systems that are not working fairly.

My thanks to VALID's Board members, who continue to do an excellent job, and to all our members, partners, donors and friends for their ongoing support and interest, which is greatly appreciated. Huge thanks also to all my colleagues on VALID's diverse staff team, who have worked with enormous dedication, insight and good humour to make all we do possible.

Fionn Skiotis
CEO





Our People

Board of Management

From 1 July 2025 – 30 June 2026.
All Board members served for the full period unless indicated.



Arthur Rogers
Chair to 5 December
Resigned 5 December



William Ward-Boas
Deputy Chair to 5 December
Chair from 5 December



Stephanie Gunn
Deputy Chair
from 5 December



Samantha Dooley
Appointed 14 November



Georgina Frost



Mark Hancock
Appointed 7 May



Judy Kelly



Nicole Spehar



Graham Russell
Resigned 23 May

VALID Staff

Individual Advocacy

Husna Amani	Individual Advocate
Megan Jacobs	Individual Advocate
Frederikke Jensen	Manager Indivual advocacy
Kamila Kopec	Individual Advocate
Andrew Minge	Senior Advocate
Bernadette Wilhelm	Individual Advocate
Sidonie Zagoda	Individual Advocate

Self Advocacy

Ariadne Ajani	Project Officer
Hala Baksmaty	ACTIV8 Project Officer
Nell Buchanan	Speaking Out, Skilling Up Project Officer
Sara De Grandis	Self Advocacy Team Leader
Tarus Fiu	Housing Justice Project Officer
Kaliopi Karipidis	Housing Justice Project Officer
Raven Moore	ACTIV8 Project Officer









Omar Muhammad	ACTIV8 Project Officer
Sandra Murphy	Self Advocacy Senior Project Officer
Taj Murray	Speaking Out, Skilling Up Project Officer
Celeste Rattray-Wood	Speaking Out, Skilling Up Project Officer
Jonathan Riha	Housing Justice Project Officer
Anthony Risoli	Self Advocacy Team Leader
Barry Robinson	Speaking Up in the Bush Project Officer
Rick Ruiu	Manager, Self Advocacy
Catherine Townsend	My Home, My Plan Project Officer
Gregory Tucker	Speaking Out, Skilling Up Project Officer
Katrina Welsby	Supported Employment Advocacy Project Officer / Our Voice Representative
David West	ACTIV8 Project Officer

Community Development

Bayane Abou Saada	Project Officer
Candace Bates	Community Engagement Worker
Uli Cartwright	Driving Change Project Officer
Genevieve Charles	Project Assistant
Madeleine Clarke	Driving Change Project Officer
Liam Doyle	Project Assistant
Katy Gagliardi	Project Officer
Jana Hand	Regional Coordinator
David Hansen	Regional Coordinator



Ann Hutchinson	Regional Coordinator
Mary Iruthayanathar	Project Worker
Ahilan Croos Marian Jegathesan	Project Lead
Sorgul Maho	Project Coordinator
Michele Semmens	Manager, Community Development
Jessielea Skillicorn	Project Assistant
Mark Thompson	Senior Self Advocate
Jack Ty	Project Assistant
Bashir Ahmad Wali	Project Worker
Inez Winters	V-Team Coordinator



VALID Connect

Zoe Broadway	Senior Project Officer
Naomi Chainey	Easy Read Content Writer
Jon Slingsby	Manager, VALID Connect
Brigitte Stone	Easy Read Content Writer

Quality and Events

Christine Scott	Manager, Quality and Events

Communications

Luke Nelson	Communications Officer
Tully Zygier	Communications Coordinator

Administration

Timothy Allen	Cleaner
Heather Forsyth	Senior Self Advocate
Saleh Mouakkassa (Sam)	Our Voice Representative
Kimberlee Pearce	Administration Assistant
Louise Rau	Business Development Manager
Fionn Skiotis	CEO
Melanie Watson	Administration Manager

Programs

A great deal of VALID's work is carried out by four operational teams: Individual Advocacy, Self Advocacy, Community Development and our fee-for-service arm VALID Connect. Reports from the Managers of each team follow.

Individual Advocacy

VALID's DFFH-funded individual advocates supported 195 people in the 2025-26 financial year. Significant systemic issues have been identified through individual advocacy work.

The team saw people with intellectual disabilities face the same issues as other Victorians regarding cost of living, housing, healthcare and family violence. However, we know people with intellectual disabilities are often worse off because systems do not always protect and prioritise equal support.



For example, we have seen established family violence services unable to take on cases involving people with intellectual disabilities, even when serious abuse and neglect were present, because rules and regulations excluded people with complex needs.

Towards the end of the financial year, we had an increase in enquiries regarding NDIS funding cuts and signs that funding was being reduced prior to plan reviews. We are concerned this may increase the risk of family violence, justice system involvement and hospitalisation as people have less support.

In some cases, people referred to us had family members who could advocate for them. We remain concerned about Victorians with complex needs who do not have family members advocating for equal treatment or helping them access professional advocacy services like VALID.

Frederikke Jensen
Manager, Individual Advocacy



Self Advocacy

VALID's Self Advocacy Programs support people with intellectual disability to build knowledge, confidence, leadership and control over decisions affecting their lives.

Programs are co-designed and delivered with people who have lived experience of disability. This keeps information accessible, practical and grounded in the priorities of the people who use it. Across the year, the team delivered peer-led information sessions, quality and safeguarding reviews, housing and employment advocacy, regional self advocacy activities and opportunities for residents to influence government and service-provider practice. The team also supported three metropolitan Self Advocacy Networks and the Self Advocacy Forum, providing ongoing spaces for connection, leadership and collective advocacy.

VALID's Self Advocacy work reaches individuals, families, support staff, disability services, government and community organisations. Its common purpose is to help people understand their rights, communicate their views, identify unsafe or unfair situations, make informed choices and participate more fully in community life.

Partnerships with legal services, evaluation organisations, government and national advocacy bodies have extended the team's expertise and reach. A consistent learning across projects is that information alone is not enough: people benefit most when accessible resources are combined with trusted peer support, practical activities, flexible delivery and clear pathways for follow-up.

Rick Ruiu
Manager, Self Advocacy



Community Development

The 2025-26 year has been an inspiring period of continued development, consolidation and outcomes for people with intellectual disability, their families and communities across Victoria.

Our work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities has continued to expand, with participants gaining information, resources, increased community connections and confidence in talking about disability issues and raising awareness.

It has also been encouraging to see participants from Community Development projects attending VALID's Having a Say and Advocacy in Action Conferences, both as attendees and panellists wanting to share their experiences and learn more about self advocacy.

VALID Q, the LGBTQI+ group, has continued to grow over the past year. Thank you to Community Development and Self Advocacy staff and advocates for advancing this important work.

Newer ventures have included webinars exploring a range of disability issues, coordinated by Community Development staff. The team has also continued to participate in disability and other relevant external networks, helping to promote VALID and strengthen connections across Victoria.

Thank you to our talented, caring and innovative staff team for another excellent year.

Michele Semmens
Manager, Community Development



VALID Connect

VALID Connect had a busy and productive year, creating opportunities for people with intellectual disability to access information, build skills, have their voices heard and contribute their lived experience to work that can make a difference.

In July 2025, the team grew from two to four staff with the addition of two casual Easy Read writers. Their skills and expertise increased our capacity to deliver Easy Read work and support projects across VALID Connect and the wider organisation.



Highlights included our partnership with Cancer Council Victoria to develop accessible cervical screening information and begin delivering sessions with peer facilitators Celeste, Hala and Raven. Planning and participant recruitment also began for Swinburne University's WISE-Ability employment research, with interviews and further activity continuing into 2026–27. Zoe Broadway and Hala Baksmaty contributed to Inclusion Australia's SAFE Project as part of VALID's broader involvement in the Expert Reference Group and website and resource testing. Ellie contributed to the University of Canberra's SPECTROM project, co-designing accessible information about psychotropic medicines.

The team continued to deliver consultations, training, focus groups and co-design activities with mainstream and community organisations, helping to create more accessible services, information and opportunities.

We are proud of the team's achievements and the growing recognition of the value of lived experience in creating meaningful change.

Jon Slingsby
Manager, VALID Connect



Projects

VALID has some program-based (ongoing) funding provided by the Victorian Government, whose Victorian Disability Advocacy Program (VDAP) supports our Individual Advocacy work. Most of our organisational income comes from short-term project-based funding, from a range of sources. In 2025-2026, VALID received funding for, or worked on, 20 projects, some of which are described below.

Inclusive Justice

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

The Inclusive Justice project is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing under its Inclusion and Accessibility Fund: Australia's Disability Strategy – Community Attitudes opportunity, over a two-year period. Project partners are the Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ) at RMIT University and the Social Policy Group, with VALID as lead (contracting) partner.

Inclusive Justice will see the development of a national framework for judicial officers and tribunal members to improve the accessibility of the justice system for people with cognitive disabilities. The project is facilitating collaboration between judicial officers, tribunal members and people with cognitive disabilities who have lived experience of the justice system.

The resulting research, recommendations and training will centre the experiences of people with disability and improve the responsiveness of Australia's judiciary to diverse needs.

The project is being developed alongside the Judicial Council on Diversity and Inclusion (JCDI). The JCDI is a national advisory body, endorsed by the Council of Chief Justices, providing recommendations, best practice advice and training to empower courts and tribunals to respond the needs of diverse communities.

NDIS Capacity Building – Phase 1

Funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

This project was tendered by the Department in late 2025, for delivery from 1 January to 30 June 2026. VALID responded with partners the Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ) at RMIT University, Vacro and Warrnambool-based Indigenous organisation Worn Gundidj, with VALID as lead (contracting) partner. The project sought to develop training and other resources to build the capacity of DFFH staff and staff of the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) on specific areas concerning the NDIS.

Due to a range of factors, the project has continued well past the original completion date of 30 June, with Vacro departing the project from that date. Phase 1 of the project is now nearing completion, allowing a smaller-scale Phase 2 to begin planning and delivery by VALID, CIJ and Worn Gundidj.



ACTIV8

Funded by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

ACTIV8 is a peer-led quality and safeguarding review program that helps NDIS providers improve services by listening directly to participants. Trained peer workers with lived experience visit group homes, ADEs, day services and training settings. They hold accessible conversations about what is working well, what could be improved and whether people feel safe, respected and heard. Feedback is recorded through the dedicated ACTIV8 app and brought together in a report for each provider, highlighting strengths, concerns and practical recommendations.

During 2025–26, the ACTIV8 app was completed, tested and used in service visits. The team implemented the project, developed resources and tools, visited five services and heard from 23 participants in this period. The ACTIV8 project team consists of four people with lived experience of disability who work alongside the Self Advocacy team. ACTIV8 demonstrates how lived-experience leadership can build trust, identify issues early and turn real feedback into practical service improvement.



Speaking Out, Skilling Up

Funded by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

Speaking Out, Skilling Up (SOSU) is a project offering free information sessions. It builds the knowledge and confidence of NDIS participants, disability service providers and frontline staff through three accessible, one-hour sessions: Speaking Up and Making Complaints; Fighting Abuse and Neglect; and Understanding the six National Standards for Disability Services. Sessions use Easy Read presentations, videos, practical activities, real-life examples and take-home booklets. They can be delivered individually or as a series at disability services and community locations, reducing travel barriers.

The SOSU project team consists of four people with lived experience of disability who work alongside the Self Advocacy team. Throughout 2025–26 the team delivered over 50 information sessions.



My Home, My Plan

Funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency.

The My Home, My Plan project helped people with intellectual disability and their families understand NDIS housing and support options, including Specialist Disability Accommodation, Supported Independent Living and Individualised Living Options. Accessible workshops used Easy Read information, discussion and practical planning activities so participants could compare options, ask questions and think about what a good home and support arrangement would look like for them.

The project was led by four staff members with lived experience of disability, delivered all 72 planned workshops and reached 506 participants. A total of 383 participant surveys were completed, representing a 75.7% response rate. Twelve workshops were designed specifically for families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with interpreters supporting Tamil, Chinese, Vietnamese and Arabic-speaking participants.



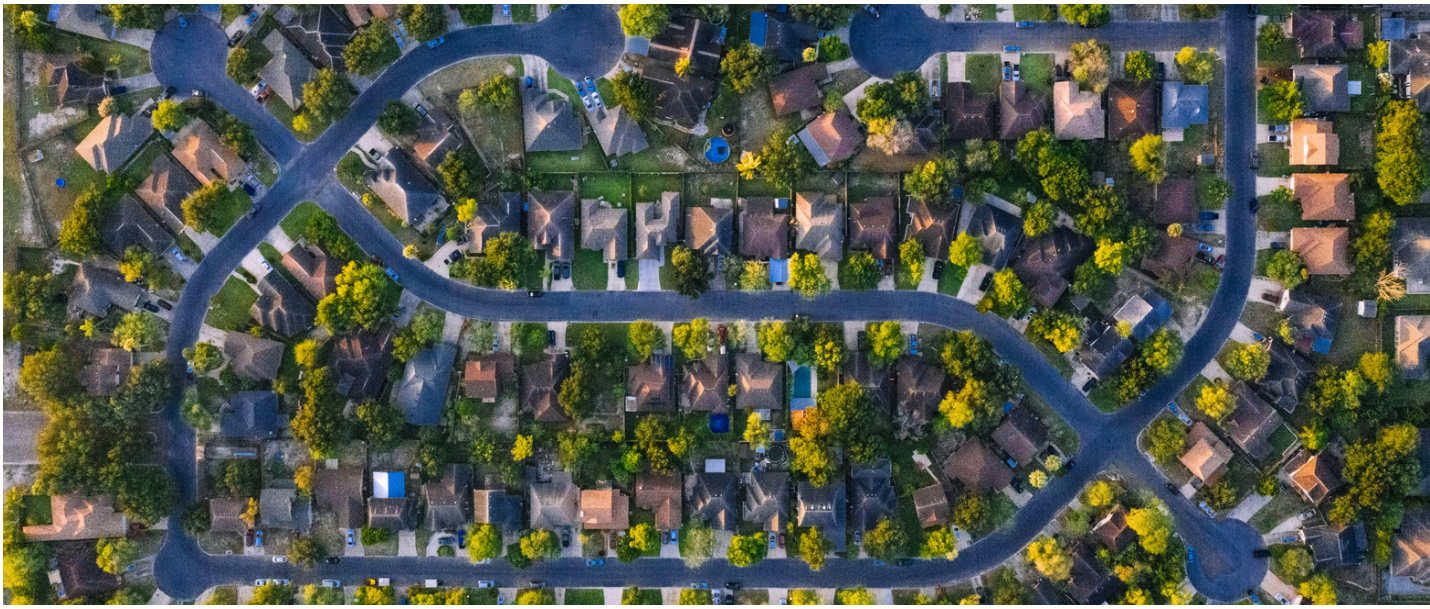
Advancing Housing Justice

Funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner.

Advancing Housing Justice is a tenant-focused project supporting people who live in Specialist Disability Accommodation and Supported Independent Living homes to better understand their housing rights, improve their safety and connect with other tenants. The project is delivered in partnership with Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service, the Centre for Innovative Justice and Victoria Legal Aid.

Three staff with lived experience, supported by the Self Advocacy team, co-designed and co-present free, accessible information sessions.

Sessions explain housing rights and responsibilities in practical language and can be delivered one-to-one or in groups at people's homes, libraries, day programs, workplaces and other community locations. Participants receive an Easy Read booklet to keep and use after the session. Regular online meet-ups also provide a safe space for tenants to share experiences, identify common issues and reduce isolation. Where legal or advocacy issues arise, the project's partnerships create a pathway to free information, advice and follow-up support.



Speaking Up in the Bush

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing via Inclusion Australia

Speaking Up in the Bush is a partnership with Inclusion Australia that supports people with intellectual disability in regional and rural communities to build confidence, understand their rights and participate in self advocacy. The project recognises that people living outside metropolitan areas often have fewer advocacy services, training opportunities and peer networks, while distance and limited transport can make regular participation difficult.

During the year, the project developed flexible approaches combining face-to-face activities, online participation and collaboration with local organisations across Campaspe, Shepparton and the Upper Goulburn Valley. Accessible workshops and peer activities focus on rights, decision-making, speaking up and knowing where to seek support. Activities are adapted to the priorities and circumstances of each community rather than applying a single metropolitan model.

This flexible, place-based approach is creating opportunities for people to connect, share experiences and have a stronger voice in decisions affecting their lives and communities.



Supported Employment Advocacy

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing via Inclusion Australia and DANA.

Supported Employment Advocacy (SEA) is a two-part project. The first part, funded by the Disability Advocacy Network Australia, involves dedicated Employment Advocates providing advocacy for people with cognitive disability to address issues they experience at work.

During the final six months of 2025–26, VALID's dedicated Employment Advocates (members of VALID's Individual Advocacy team) averaged around 40 consultations and conversations, while outreach with organisations resulted in approximately five individual referrals each month.

The project also identified systemic barriers to employment, including NDIS funding reductions affecting the support people need to maintain their employment.

The second part of SEA helps people with intellectual disability to understand employment choices, workplace rights and where to get support. The project provided a series of practical, one-hour workshops that can be attended individually or as a complete series. Sessions were made available in person and online to improve access across different locations. Workshops were co-designed with people with intellectual disability and delivered by presenters with lived experience, supported by VALID's Self Advocacy team.

Easy Read information, interactive activities, worksheets and take-home fact sheets help participants connect workplace rights to real situations. Topics include making informed choices about employment, speaking up when something is wrong, identifying unfair or unsafe treatment, and finding advocacy or other assistance.

This work aimed to strengthen confidence, decision-making and the voice of people with intellectual disability in their working lives.

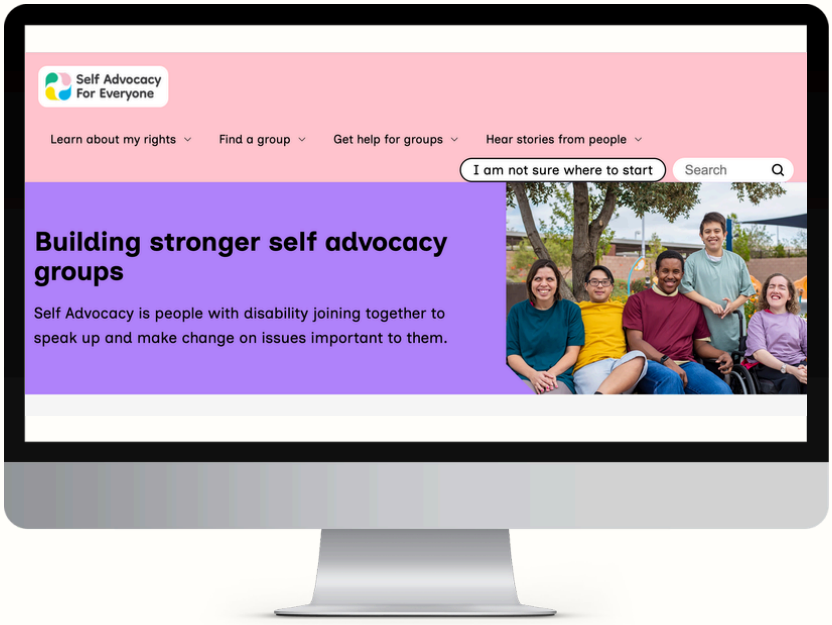
Self Advocacy for Everyone (SAFE)

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing via Inclusion Australia.

The SAFE project, delivered in partnership with Inclusion Australia, supports people with intellectual disability to build their self advocacy skills, connect with others and have a stronger voice on issues that affect their lives.

During 2025-26, VALID contributed to the development of the project through participation in the Expert Reference Group and user testing of the SAFE website and resources. VALID's involvement included Zoe Broadway from VALID Connect and Hala Baksmaty, who contributed their lived experience and expertise to help ensure the project and its resources were accessible, practical and relevant to people with intellectual disability. Their involvement continued across Expert Reference Group meetings throughout the reporting period.

VALID also contributed to SAFE website testing during the year, supporting the development of accessible information and resources for people with intellectual disability.



Power Through Knowledge

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

Power Through Knowledge is a three-year ILC-funded project delivered by VALID in partnership with Migrant Resource Centre North West Region and the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria.

The project provides co-designed support groups for people with intellectual disability, families and community leaders from multicultural communities, exploring disability rights, disability services, the NDIS and other areas of interest.

Over the past two years, VALID has successfully conducted groups in the Cities of Yarra, Hobsons Bay and Maribyrnong. Participants and families have reported gaining information and resources, stronger community connections and increased confidence in talking about disability issues, raising awareness and effecting positive change in individual lives, the lives of families and communities.



I Can Decide in My Language

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

I Can Decide in My Language is a three-year ILC-funded consortium project with the Council for Intellectual Disability (CID) in NSW.

Over the past two years, the team has successfully engaged people with intellectual disability and their families from Chinese, Vietnamese and Tamil communities to learn about supported decision-making.

The project works within communities where disability can carry stigma and people with intellectual disability may have limited opportunities to make their own decisions. Participants and families have reported positive outcomes, while the project is also contributing to the development of a framework and new resources for the future.



In This Together

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

In This Together takes a whole-of-community approach to inclusion for people with intellectual disability in the Baw Baw and Surf Coast Shires.

Over the past two years, the project has worked across local government, education, media, organisations and community networks to build stronger connections and further inclusion. Activities, workshops, events, promotions and resources are co-designed with people with intellectual disability.

The team has responded to regional challenges, including limited disability services and disability awareness, with innovative approaches such as podcasts and radio broadcasts. On 2 March 2026, a funding extension was announced to continue the project until the end of June 2027.



Family Foundations

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing via Inclusion Australia.

The Family Foundations capacity building project is an ILC-funded initiative of Inclusion Australia's, in which IA members VALID, Speak Out and ACT DSID are partners. The project commenced near the end of the reporting period and will run until December 2027.

The project's purpose is to strengthen the capacity of families and carers of people with an intellectual disability and empower them to support their loved ones and to advocate for them. This is particularly focused around supported decision making and preparing for the future. Project delivery is mainly through workshops delivered to family members.

Engagement with family members has always been a priority for VALID and in the past (when there was more generous funding for work with families) formed a more significant part of our work. We're pleased to get involved in a project which once again involves working with family members and carers.



Partnership with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

VALID's partnership with DFFH was developed to strengthen the voice, choice and control of people living in department-owned Specialist Disability Accommodation. Its purpose is to ensure that residents have a genuine say in the decisions, policies and initiatives affecting their homes and everyday lives.

During the year, planning focused on developing a diverse resident network involving people from metropolitan and regional areas, different cultural backgrounds and a range of lived experience. Residents will be supported to build skills in giving feedback, participating in meetings and contributing to consultations, recruitment activities and review panels. The Self Advocacy team will also work alongside DFFH staff during home visits to support communication that is respectful, accessible and meaningful. Residents will have opportunities to share their lived experience directly with departmental staff and contribute to staff learning sessions and forums.



Cervical Screening

Funded by Cancer Council Victoria.

During 2025–26, VALID's Self Advocacy and VALID Connect teams developed and delivered accessible cervical screening information for women and people with a cervix with disability, with a particular focus on people with intellectual disability.

The project's first stage involved planning and preparation to ensure the sessions and information were accessible and relevant. Delivery also began during the reporting period, with a session before 30 June 2026 reaching up to 30 participants.

The session was positively received, with participants engaging in conversations and asking questions about cervical screening. Family members and staff who support people with intellectual disability also took part, helping to extend the project's reach and build understanding among people providing everyday support.

A challenge during the project was engaging disability organisations and groups to host sessions. This highlighted the importance of continuing to build relationships with services and finding practical ways to make cervical screening information easier for people with intellectual disability and their supporters to access.



Driving Change Project

Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing via the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health.

The Driving Change project brought together people with intellectual disability, families, carers and health professionals to identify how the Victorian Government could improve healthcare for people with intellectual disability. Project staff planned and delivered a series of accessible workshops providing a rich set of data which was then analysed.

These groups' experiences informed Driving Change: A Call to Action for Intellectual Disability Health (Victoria). Key recommendations in the project report included disability training for hospital staff, dedicated outpatient clinics and more Disability Liaison Officers. The full report and accompanying Easy Read resources put lived experience at the centre of calls for a fairer, more accessible and inclusive health system.

The project's findings and recommendations formed a key element of VALID's advocacy on health-related issues for people with intellectual disability in the lead-up to Victoria's State Election in November 2026. The project concluded in June 2026.



Other Activities

Through a combination of program funding, donations and fundraising through fee-for-service work, VALID has been able to successfully engage people with intellectual disability in a variety of peer support and information sharing activities in 2025-26. Some of these are described below.

Self Advocacy Networks and Forum

VALID's Self Advocacy team supports three Self Advocacy Networks across Melbourne's Northern, Western and Eastern metropolitan areas. Another group, the Self Advocacy Forum (SAF), is supported jointly by VALID's Self Advocacy and Community Development teams. The Networks provide regular, welcoming spaces where people with intellectual disability can connect with peers, build confidence and strengthen their self advocacy skills. The SAF provides a broader opportunity for self advocates to share priorities, hear information and contribute their views on issues affecting people with disability. SAF participants can express interest in joining VALID's Board of Management.

The Networks have been part of VALID's self advocacy work since 1998

and remain an essential foundation for leadership and peer connection. Supporting three Networks extends the Self Advocacy team's reach beyond individual projects and provides an ongoing pathway for people to influence advocacy priorities. We hope to re-establish the Southern Network, now dormant, in 2026-27. We will also explore the possibility of establishing other Networks, such as a Barwon region Network and a Network for people of CALD / multicultural background.

VALID Q

VALID's group for LGBTQIA+ people, known as VALID Q, was established some time ago and is now doing well, with a logo (and t-shirts) developed, a Terms of Reference adopted and a session delivered jointly with partners Rainbow Rights at the 2026 Having a Say conference. The group currently draws its membership from VALID's staff team, but is in the process of opening its doors to any person with intellectual or cognitive disability in Victoria who identifies as LGBTQIA+ or is questioning their sexual identity.

Though operating on a very "lean" basis, VALID Q now enjoys a small amount of funding from the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing under its Self Help Group program. The funding is for two years and will assist VALID Q to plan and engage in a number of activities including broadening its membership and planning activities such as workshops and other events. VALID Q will once again be at the 2027 Having a Say conference, delivery a plenary panel session with allies and staffing a Queer Space along with Rainbow Rights.



VALID Voices

VALID Voices is a group for self advocates who wish to train in public speaking and then take on paid opportunities to speak to community groups, businesses or others about their experiences and the issues currently faced by people with disabilities. Group members are now completing their training and beginning to take on speaking opportunities, including within VALID and on a voluntary basis. We hope to expand this group in 2026-27 and to be able to source regular speaking opportunities which pay speakers for their preparation and time.

VALID Conversations

Commencing in early 2026, VALID launched a series of six bimonthly webinars called VALID Conversations. Each webinar features a number of self advocate (and other) presenters, facilitated by our friend (and former VALID colleague) media expert John McKenna.

The lunchtime webinars have been a great success, with steadily building attendance figures culminating in the most recent event, Navigating the Rough Waters of the NDIS, which "broke" VALID's Zoom licence. Other webinar topics have included Building Inclusive Communities, on including people with cognitive impairment and intellectual disability on boards, and From Lived Experience to Leadership.

Though initially planned as a limited series, given the very strong level of interest and engagement, VALID is now working to attract funding to make VALID Conversations a regular activity.

And also ... VALID is planning a new public event for 2027 – a public lecture delivered by a self advocate as a memorial to the great New Zealand self advocate Sir Robert Martin. Please stay tuned for further details!

Events

2026 Having a Say Conference

The Having a Say Conference (HaS) 2026 celebrated 25 in-person conferences and was the 26th conference overall. Its theme was “25 Years: Strengthening our voices for a better future!”

The late-January dates, immediately after a public holiday, affected attendance. An extreme heatwave, with temperatures above 40°C during the first few days, also led to around 40 cancellations. Despite these challenges, 949 people participated in the event in some way, including around 400 people with disability. Additional members of the public visited the expo as walk-ins.



Some of the special activities for the 25th anniversary included:

- former Local Committee members invited to attend as guests
- free registrations for people with disability from former significant sponsors
- cutting of a 25th anniversary cake by Leah Scott, who is the only person with disability to have attended all 25 conferences
- an Open Microphone session on each day for people to come up and talk about their experiences of HaS over the years
- special commemorative sessions with guest speakers who talked about their experience of HaS over the years
- big balloons at the disco and a photo booth for souvenir photos.

The program featured more than 140 people with lived experience performing or presenting about their achievements and the issues that are important to them. Despite the concerns about the NDIS changes, most sessions were on other important topics including health, domestic violence, housing, sibling support, employment, being safe online and relationships and intimacy.



We thank our Silver sponsors: Deakin University, Life Without Barriers, Melbourne Disability Institute, Disability Dialogue, Endeavour Foundation, Scope and InLife; and our Bronze sponsors: RIAC and Amaze. We particularly appreciate the continuing support of our Platinum sponsors: the Victorian Disability Worker Commission (VDWC), which supported the Disco; Melba Support, which sponsored the Expo; and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), whose grant enabled well over 50 group home residents and their support staff to attend.

2026 Advocacy in Action Conference

VALID's second Advocacy in Action conference was held in June 2026 at the Novotel in Preston, with 225 people attending across the two days.

Registration fees were kept at the previous year's rates, with discounted day registrations and a rate of $20 per day for people with disability. This enabled 63 people with disability to attend, representing 28% of overall attendance.

The first day focused on changes to the NDIS. Keynote speakers included Kevin Stone, who spoke passionately about why we must not return to previous funding systems, given the abuse and neglect experienced by people with disability under those systems.

The second day covered justice, renters' rights, safeguarding and health, as well as VALID's second webinar highlighting the VALID Voices group. Feedback was positive, and the first-day social event was well received.

Christine Scott
Events and Quality Manager



Financial Summary

Information on VALID's financial position on 30 June 2026, and our financial performance during the 2025-26 financial year, is summarised below.

VALID's accounts are audited by In.Corp (now Ascentium) Audit & Assurance and all figures are taken from the 2025-26 audited financial statements.

Financial position at 30 June 2026

Assets	
Current assets	$3,012,780
Non-current assets	$1,175,112
Total assets	**$4,187,892**
Liabilities	
Current liabilities	$2,268,015
Non-current liabilities	$1,041,137
Total liabilities	**$3,309,152**
Net assets (Equity)	**$878,740**

Financial position at 30 June 2025

Assets	
Current assets	$2,339,275
Non-current assets	$1,280,948
Total assets	**$3,620,223**
Liabilities	
Current liabilities	$1,682,128
Non-current liabilities	$1,143,298
Total liabilities	**$2,825,426**
Net assets (Equity)	**$794,797**

Financial performance during 2025-26:

Income	
Grant income	$3,906,902
Donations	$18,810
Project income	$157,354
Conference and events	$280,534
Other revenue	$103,914
Total income	**$4,467,514**
Expenses	
Employee expenses	$3,240,906
Administration expenses	$489,916
Depreciation expenses	$152,289
Occupancy expenses	$51,056
Project expenses	$253,313
Finance expenses	$58,124
Other expenses	$137,967
Total expenses	**$4,383,571**
Total surplus for the year	**$83,943**

Financial performance during 2024-25:

Income	
Grant income	$2,843,290
Donations	$6,225
Project income	$373,158
Conference and events	$264,891
Other revenue	$137,704
Total income	**$3,625,268**
Expenses	
Employee expenses	$2,432,124
Administration expenses	$514,713
Depreciation expenses	$140,097
Occupancy expenses	$69,941
Project expenses	$136,940
Finance expenses	$41,000
Other expenses	$85,275
Total expenses	**$3,420,090**
Total surplus for the year	**$205,178**



Report from Inclusion Australia

Inclusion Australia is the national peak body for people with intellectual disability and their families in Australia. VALID is the member organisation of Inclusion Australia for Victoria.

The 2025-26 year brought big changes for both Inclusion Australia and the NDIS.

With so much change happening, strong disability advocacy was more important than ever. We focused on making information easier to understand so people can learn about their rights, the NDIS and other important topics.

We continued to work closely with our member organisations and partners.

VALID remained a key partner in strengthening the voice of people with intellectual disability and their families. We proudly attended the VALID Having a Say Conference where hundreds of self advocates, families and supporters came together to share their experiences, celebrate

achievements and talk about what inclusion should look like in everyday life.

We also took part in VALID's Advocacy in Action conference, which was especially important as people navigated major NDIS reforms. It gave people a safe place to ask questions, raise concerns and talk about how the changes affect their lives.

Another major change this year was welcoming our new CEO. After six and a half years, Catherine McAlpine stepped down. In April 2026, Maeve Kennedy became CEO, bringing strong experience in advocacy, inclusion, policy and community leadership.

We look forward to working with our team, member organisations and community in the next chapter for Inclusion Australia.



Contact Details

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