

*The Committee and Staff of VALID
wishes our members and readers
a happy and safe
Christmas and New Year*



Self advocates from the VALID Network meetings celebrating the end of year break up

Articles on self advocacy by *Heather Forsyth, a highly experienced self advocate, who has overcome many challenges in her life to become a leader and support worker for other people with a disability.*



My Orlando trip

On Friday the 21st October I travelled to Orlando, Florida with my co-workers and Janice from VALID's Committee of Management, to the Inclusion International World Conference.

We arrived a few days early so that we could do some sight seeing before the conference. On the Sunday Janice and I looked around Disney Springs which was mainly Disney shops selling gifts and merchandise. We then checked out WalMart which was big and had everything!

On Wednesday morning we took a bus to NASA and a tour guide took us around, talking about the spaceships and how the astronauts had to survive on the food they were given, It was a very long day and the tour lasted 10 hours.

At the start of the conference all the self advocates got together. The self advocates representing five regions from around the world: Europe, Africa, America, Middle East & North Africa and Asia Pacific. We talked about the future of self advocacy. At the Opening ceremony they had the cast from *Born This Way* on stage. They are self advocates from across America and the show is about people with a disability living their lives in the community. After their presentation people could have their photo taken with the cast. I was one of those people.



One of the topics discussed at the conference was supported decision making and I felt that America was a little behind Australia. They haven't encouraged people with a disability to make their own decisions. It really showed me that Australia has advanced in encouraging supported decision making.

Inclusion International has been working for the last two years to build a picture of what self-advocacy is like around the world. At this years conference we learnt that there are a lot of different ways to think about self-advocacy and a lot of people still don't really know what self-advocacy is about.

Everyone has a different experience about self-advocacy in their own communities. Some communities do it really well, in others, the lack of awareness and understanding of intellectual disability remains a barrier that stops people from speaking up.

There are still some obstacles to true self-advocacy. Sometimes people are afraid to speak up. We need skills and self-confidence but we also need good support and encouragement from our families, friends, and volunteers and sometimes from paid support people.

For those of us who have had the opportunity and support to become strong self advocates in our own lives and in our communities we want to share and support people who haven't had that opportunity. Together we can learn and empower each other.

The conference made me feel excited that people with a disability are working together and we are one voice.

Heather Forsyth



10th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

13th December 2016

10 years ago today, the United Nations adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Through 8 UN - Ad Hoc Committee negotiating sessions in the headquarters of the United Nations in New York city, Inclusion International ensured that people with intellectual disabilities and their families were being heard. People with intellectual disabilities and their families helped shape this historic human rights treaty!

Whether it was education, living and being included in the community, the right to decision making or the need to support families, we ensured that the voice of people with intellectual disabilities and their families were heard; that the importance of inclusion was embedded in each article of the CRPD.

Over the last 10 years we have influenced its implementation and have been part of making history. The CRPD has given us a legal tool to make a difference in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. It is our voices that bring that tool to life as we break down barriers and transform systems to be inclusive.

In honour of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the CRPD, we are releasing a [video about our impact](#). Inclusion International spoke with some of the leaders from the disability community to hear from them about the influence of our voice.



Special Guest Keynote Speaker, Robert Martin will be presenting on Wednesday 8th February at the Having a Say conference at the Opening Ceremony. Robert was elected onto the United Nations Committee and is looking forward to taking up his role in January 2017. He is the first person in the world with a learning disability to be on any United Nations committee.

Community Development Forum

VALID on 3CR Radio station for International Day of People with Disabilities

VALID had the opportunity to work with Helen Gwilliam, a volunteer at 3CR Radio Station to develop programming for the stations International Day of People with Disabilities celebrations which were held on Saturday the 3rd of December. Helen attended the last Community Development Forum for the year held in November to record the presentations and interview some of our regular attendees and other people associated with the Peer Action Groups. Kevin Stone, VALD CEO, also visited 3CR on the 3rd of December to record an interview with Helen which was part of the broadcast.

A highlight of the program was the poetry reading by Sandy Jeffs who read from a range of her work including Poems from the Madhouse. Her poems, about the challenges of trying to get through on a mental health phone crisis line, and the trials and tribulations of medication, really resonated with forum attendees. Sandy was also recorded at the forum which she opened with a wonderful reading of her poems which was well received by the 'audience'. There are 3 shows with interviews from VALID advocates and forum content which you can listen to by accessing the following link to 3CR's website - <http://www.3cr.org.au/episode/disability-day-2016> A big thank you to Helen for all of her work to support VALID's involvement in 3CR's Interactional Day programming. The radio shows were supported by funding from the City of Yarra.

VALID Peer Action Groups (PAGs)

VALID's Peer PAGs continue to expand with new groups being set up in Ballarat, Horsham and St Albans and plans for groups in Daylesford/Hepburn Springs, Bendigo and Dandenong in 2017. Existing groups continue to attract new members

as word gets out about the program. People who are currently being registered with the NDIS in the North East Metro Area (NEMA) have found that participation in the PAGs has enabled them to develop plans with greater confidence and have valued the support to change and challenge processes and decisions that were inconsistent with NDIA guidelines and principles. In other PAGs we are seeing the development and deepening of friendships between participants and a growing sense of ownership of the group and its potential to be an ongoing support for those who want to be more involved in their local communities.

In November the Geelong PAGs were instrumental in informing VALID's response to the Commonwealth Government Senate Inquiry into the transition of the Mobility Allowance to the NDIS. Transport has been a key focus of the Geelong PAGs so the Senate Inquiry was timely and provided us with an opportunity to draw on the experience of parents and carers, service providers and people with disability who are already experiencing the impact of changes to the mobility allowance associated with the transition to the NDIS.

Our PAG Leaders Group held their last meeting for the year on the 7th of December at the Jasper Hotel in Melbourne. Some great plans were hatched for 2017 including a Leaders Retreat and a range of other activities and events which will enable the groups to collaborate across the state and respond to key issues identified in 2016. For anyone going along to Having a Say next year, the PAGs will be presenting a session on the Thursday afternoon from 2.30 – 3.30. Please come along to meet some of the PAG members and hear more about their work. If anyone is interested in finding out more about the PAGs or would like to join or start a new group please contact David Craig, Coordinator Community Development david@valid.org.au

VALID Community Development Forums

The last VALID Building Inclusive Communities forum was held on the 15th of November at the Jasper Hotel in Melbourne. The forum (***'It Can Happen if....' - Linking Individual and Community Planning***) focussed on some of the challenges associated with linking the needs and aspirations discovered in individual planning conversations with strategies for guiding and informing community planning.

Our keynote speaker Dr. Christina David from RMIT, provided a great framework for thinking about the potential links between individual and community planning. Christina drew on her PhD thesis, which explored the relationship between the rhetoric and reality of self directed funding and service approaches, to present a range of questions for us to consider within the emerging NDIS context including:

- If funding and services are individualised, how will we know about collective needs and what sorts of change and planning needs to happen in the community? Where will the pressure to change come from?
- What supports are required by people who struggle to operate as a 'consumer' in the NDIS 'market place'?
- How can the community reorganise to address barriers to inclusion?
- Who wins and who loses in the NDIS? How can everybody win?
- What enables and what blocks choice, inclusion and citizenship?

These questions stimulated some interesting discussions in the forum workshops. We were, of course, not able to come up with clear answers on the day. However, what we were able to do was start a debate about the best way of ensuring that the voice of people with disabilities is used to inform social and political transformation in our communities. We will take up this debate in a range of ways next year at VALID, through the work of the Community Development Team.

As well as Christina's presentation, we also had three great presentations from a panel of speakers, Annette Axen from VALID; former

Rural Access Project Coordinator at the City of Latrobe, Bill Lawler and Jenny McPherson from the BIG (Belonging in Geelong) Peer Action Group. They drew on their many years of experience, both lived and professional, to talk about the challenges associated with turning individual aspiration into community transformation.

Together, the three Community Development forums we have run in 2016 have enabled VALID to connect with a range of potential new partners including local libraries, local government authorities, neighbourhood houses, self advocacy organisations, disability service organisations, and NDIS officers. We have seen our numbers steadily increase throughout the series as word has got around, with 65 people attending the November forum. This augurs well for a series of Community Development Forums in 2017 – one of which will be held in Geelong in April. The program for the forums will be available early in the New Year. For more information, contact Paul Dunn, Community Development Project Officer paul@valid.org.au



VALID Self Advocacy Network

I can't believe its December already. The VALID Self Advocacy network has gone through many changes this year. Zoe has transferred to VALID's KSP team and Rick's focus has been delivering information sessions for people with disability to prepare for transition to NDIS.

Earlier in the year, Katie and Anthony joined the VALID Self Advocacy team and Self Advocacy Networks. Katie and Anthony continue the good work that Rick and Zoe established with empowering members of the Network to speak up, gain knowledge on disability & community organisations and continue providing opportunities and support with skill development for the members e.g. chairing meetings, presenting information and sharing personal stories.

Katie has since left VALID to work for the Office of Professional Practice and we wish her all the best. We welcome Sara who joined the VALID team and Self Advocacy networks in December and we are all looking forward to getting to know her better.

A range of Guest Speakers have attended the Network Meetings each month, these have included representatives from;

- Victorian Electoral Commission
- CO Health
- Victorian Taxi Commissioner
- Metro Access Workers from various City Councils
- Metro Trains
- Metropolitan Fire Brigade
- Disability Service Commissioner
- VALIDs own guest speakers Heather, Kylie, John, Zoe and Rick

Members of the network also contributed their individual advocacy stories, they included:

- Brendan McCarthy on Changing Places
- Samson Hauli on Western Peer Action Group
- Luke Nelson on Banyule Peer Action group

- Brendan on raising money for men's health through Movember
- Adam James and Paul Campbell on Inspire Awards
- Gary Cottrell, Bobby Usas, Adam James, Lisa McLeish and Paul Campbell with the Self Advocacy Forum Report

We ended the year with a celebration and to express our thanks to the Network members for their contribution, insights and their warm friendly enthusiasm.



Having a Say Conference



One of the highlights of the Having a Say conference will be the panel session on Friday morning. The Hon Martin Foley MP will be talking about accommodation and housing for people with disability under the NDIS.

Screening of the short film featuring the highlights of the documentary 'On Richards Side' which tells the story of the long term struggle of Richard & his mother Deidre Croft for quality of care & accommodation.

Panel discussions including:

- A parent planning for her son's move into a house with two other people, with support & funding through the NDIS in Barwon
- A prominent Geelong business man who is developing housing under the NDIS Specialist Disability Accommodation framework
- The Geelong Accommodation Project (GAP) activities towards providing housing options

**Housing Forum
Friday morning
9.30 - 11am**

We have an exciting new band at the dinner disco 'Unlimited' who will be playing party anthems by the truckload including rock n' roll, funky hits and rarities of the 80's.

Theme for the disco is Happy Hippie.



Would you like to take home a memory of the conference? The Distinctive Options' photography Teams are setting up a photo booth in the courtyard during lunch on the Wednesday. There will be some props for you to have fun with and a background to pose in front of. You have the choice of having your photos taken with our professional cameras or using your own device. Come and capture some memories with your friends!

There are some exciting new come & try activities at the conference in 2017.

- Woodbine will help you to create a self portrait
- Try the latest trend, colouring in for adults, it's a great way to relax and pass the time
- Art Centre Melbourne run a flash mob event every year, they are going to show you all the moves and invite you to join them at the event in March
- Public Speaking, this come and try activity is a great way to build your self advocacy skills
- Wheelchair basketball and rugby, a great way to get fit and have fun at the same time



DISABILITY, TRANSPORT & the NDIS

VALID would like to thank the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs for the opportunity to make this submission in response to the Social Services Legislation Amendment Act (Transition Mobility Allowance to the National Disability Insurance Scheme) Bill 2016 (Mobility Allowance Bill).

VALID's submission to the Inquiry draws on the experience of carers and people with disability in the Barwon trial site who are part of three local groups – ***The Geelong Parent Network, Geelong Peer Action Group*** and ***Belonging in Geelong Peer Action Group (BIGPAG)***.

The Geelong Parent Network was established in 2003 to provide peer to peer support for people with disabilities and their families and to help inform VALID's systemic advocacy work.

VALID has also established 2 Peer Action Groups in Geelong as part of the NDIS Disability Support Organisation Program. These 2 groups have brought people with disabilities and families/carers together to share information about the implementation of the NDIS in the Barwon Trial Site. They have been a crucial source of information for VALID in relation to issues associated with the NDIS roll out and have drawn heavily from the lived experience of NDIS recipients.

VALID is Victoria's peak advocacy organisation for adults with intellectual disability who are in receipt of or eligible for State-funded disability services. It provides a state-wide individual advocacy service funded by the Office for Disability (DHHS). Through individual advocacy work, VALID has extensive experience in supporting people with intellectual disability to access community life and we are acutely aware of the range of barriers which prevent people from living independent lives in their local communities. These issues include access to affordable public transport.

To read the whole submission go to the VALID website.

Creating Inclusive Communities

Community Development Forum

The fourth forum will be held at the Deakin Cats Community Centre Kardinia Park, Geelong in April 2017
(date to be confirmed)



To participate fully in the life of the community work often needs to be done to change the way that communities imagine, plan and respond to the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities.

If you would like more information about the forum contact Paul Dunn.

Email: paul@valid.org.au



Tony McDonald (*sitting*) who recently retired from the Committee of Management after many years of service was invited to the end of year lunch. Tony is still actively involved in her local community. Dot Leigh, President of VALID presented Tony with a card signed by the Committee and staff and a floral arrangement of Australian Flowers.

Our Choice Expo

10am - 5.00pm, Thursday 16th March, 2017

Bendigo Exhibition Centre
Prince of Wales Showgrounds, 42-47
Holmes Rd., Bendigo

VALID and The City of Greater Bendigo invite you to visit the Our Choice Expo featuring a wide range of local, regional and state wide services, including community activities, disability supports, personal care, equipment, training, accommodation, technology and other supports available for participants of the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme). Especially of interest to individuals in the Loddon area who are looking to be informed and prepared for the transition to the NDIS, starting from 1st May 2017.



Free visitor entry

VALID

The expo is supported by
the City of Greater Bendigo



Centrelink Assessment, “Do I have a Disability” by Luke Nelson

“In early December I got a request from Centrelink and the Dept Health and Human Services, for me to go to a review by a Centrelink Doctor, to confirm I have a disability in order for me to keep receiving the disability pension.



They told me there was no excuse for not attending, it was purely at my own cost and if there were any difficulties I would still have to be there, no excuses acceptable. The assessment had to be done by a Centrelink Doctor and was carried out at Centrelink. I use a wheelchair and I had to attend the only accessible Centrelink office which is in Tullamarine. The day of the appointment was at my choice, however I had to be assessed to keep receiving my pension.

As soon as I arrived for the assessment the doctor said, “I can see you have a disability”. She had all the medical records and asked a lot of questions. I recommend that if you get asked to go to an assessment that you take someone, a carer or parent with you because they like to ask questions and you might need some help answering them.

It would have been much easier if Centrelink would accept an assessment from my personal GP and I can see some people would have difficulties with travelling find the experience too hard.

Apologies to both Elica Petroska and Eliza Charters. The article on page 23 of the October newsletter, interview with Elica by Simone Stevens, showed a photo of Eliza instead of Elica.





Disabled man sexually abused multiple time in state funded facility

Matthew, a non-verbal man with autism, was sharing a state-funded emergency facility, Autism Plus, with four other young people. One of them had already attacked Matthew several times.



For months, Ms Thomas begged the Department of Human Services to have the perpetrator removed.

For months, little was done – despite three incidents, one involving police.

Then it was too late. On the night of April 18, 2015, the co-resident escaped his carer and set upon Matthew in a toilet – the nature of the assault was so serious police later charged the youth with rape and assault. Now Ms Thomas wants those responsible for letting her son down held to account.

"My son was assaulted and they want to get away with that," she said.

"They don't care how we feel. They let it happen many times. What is wrong with them? What is wrong with DHS and Autism Plus?" Matthew Thomas was 20 when his parents, Maria and Peter, had to move him to the Westmeadows group house.

Just four months into his stay, on November 11, 2014, they were told their son had been sexually assaulted by another resident at the facility. The Thomases were informed that a staff member had discovered another resident in bed with their son.

'Every night I was waking up my husband ... at two o'clock in the morning I said to my husband, 'Pete, we have to go to the facility, we have to check Matthew, I feel something is going on there'. Maria Thomas, mother of Matthew Thomas.

Matthew's health and state of mind deteriorated and for the first time he had a seizure.

"He didn't want us to go home," Ms Thomas said. "Every time we visited him, he was just grabbing our hand." The family started visiting daily in a desperate attempt to protect their son, making a three-hour round trip to be by Matthew's side.

"I couldn't sleep because I was worried about my son's safety," she said.

"Every night I was waking up my husband ... at 2 o'clock in the morning I said to my husband, 'Pete, we have to go to the facility, we have to check Matthew, I feel something is going on there'."

Written correspondence seen by Fairfax Media shows the family was told by the department to visit less frequently because their visits were "confusing" their son.

The letter, dated January 23, 2015, a few months before Matthew was attacked for the third time, shows the department was aware of the family's fears for their son following the "attacks of a sexual nature by co-resident still living in the facility". The letter also notes the parents wanted the offender removed from the facility, but "would be reassured" if sensor alarms were installed on the doors.

However, it says, this safety measure could not be put in place due to lack of funding. Eventually, the accused was moved to another part of the house, and locks and an alarm was put in Matthew's room. But these failed to stop his attacker. Matthew was assaulted for the third time on April 17, 2015 when the resident rushed at Matthew and ripped his shirt in front of multiple witnesses. The next night, April 18, the resident came out of his room and attacked a carer, who fled and locked himself in an office. Then the youth attacked Matthew again.

The man was due to face the County Court on January 30, 2017 but Fairfax Media understands the case was dropped due to fears that the accused's disability was too serious to enable him to comprehend the charges against him. Soon after the final incident, the resident was removed from the house. Ms Thomas, who lost her husband in September 2015 after he suffered a heart attack while visiting Matthew, is now considering suing the facility and the department.

"My husband was eaten by the stress and, to be honest, it cost his life," Ms Thomas said. Stuart Le Grand from Shine Lawyers, representing the family, said the question needed to be asked whether enough was done to protect Matthew. A Department of Human Services spokeswoman said all the allegations were referred to the Disability Services Commissioner and reported to police.

"An independent review of Autism Plus was undertaken in October 2015. The focus of the review was on governance and management, including its obligations to comply with incident reporting obligations," she said. "Recommendations related to processes and systems and all actions were completed by June this year."

Autism Plus managing director Sandra Willis said the organisation took the care and safety of its clients very seriously. "Robust policies and operational safeguards are always in place, and our employees are provided with the highest calibre of training that is very specific to our clients on the autism spectrum," Ms Willis said. "Autism Plus have enjoyed a very positive relationship for many years with the Thomas family, and continue to work closely with them."

Kevin Stone, from VALID, an organisation for adults with intellectual disabilities, said both the department and the facility were responsible for failing Matthew.

He said the department could have removed the accused and the disability service should have done more to protect Matthew within the facility, including hiring more staff to supervise the residents.

Ms Thomas, who gave evidence at the [Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Abuse in Disability Services](#), said she wanted to see those responsible held to account.

"I want someone out there to shoulder this responsibility about what happened to my son, not only for my child, but every disabled person who was abused who have no voice, no power."



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(Training/workshops)

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