
SEPTEMBER 2019, ISSUE 1

Voices

The Disability Resources Centre Newsletter



ADVOCACY NEWS INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

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Welcome to the first edition of *Voices* - DRC's Quarterly Newsletter.

Kerri Cassidy - Executive Officer

So much has been happening at the DRC in recent months. In July Katrina, Kim and I welcomed four new team members to our office:

Julie McNally – Advocate, Team Leader

Ally Scott – Community Development & Campaign Officer

Anja Homburg – Communications & Promotions Officer

Sinead Mooney – Administration Officer

In June we released *DSP & Me* – a guide that takes people step by step through the process of applying for the Disability Support Pension. We also said goodbye to Nick Wilson who was our DSP Project Officer. We wish him well in his exciting new role at the South Australian Council of Intellectual Disability.

In addition to our core funding, we were thrilled to win a grant to continue our Transport for All campaign. We also received funds through the ILC's Capacity Building round to improve our communications output, share the best stories from DRC history and build connections with our community. The Office for Disability has also granted us funds to prepare for our involvement in the Royal Commission into Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disabilities – a crucial opportunity for us to support people to tell their stories, be heard and feel respected.

There is certainly a sense of excitement and anticipation as we adjust to so much change. Still, the important things remain the same. Human rights continue to be the driving force for everything we do, and our mission remains the full realisation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

I hope you enjoy reading a bit of what we've been up to these past few months, and to see you at our AGM on Monday 25th November.

Sincerely,

Kerri Cassidy
Executive Officer

Strengthening Advocacy Sector Conference 2019

Executive Officer Kerri Cassidy spoke at the Strengthening Disability Advocacy Conference 2019 on 2 September. She and Gillian Wilkins, the Director of Social Security Rights Victoria (SSRV), talked about the tools that can be used to help empower people with disabilities to self-advocate.



Gillian and Kerri spoke about their collaboration on the *DSP & Me* and the *DSP Toolkit*, and discussed how accessing the Disability Support Pension comes up in every area of advocacy: from self advocacy to legal, individual and systemic advocacy. These resources help advocates across the sector work together to make the DSP more accessible for Australians entitled to it due to their disability.

DSP & ME Released

SINCE 2011, THE RATE OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS TO THE DISABILITY SUPPORT PENSION (DSP) HAS DROPPED FROM 60 TO 30 PERCENT.

This drop reflects Government policy to reduce the number of people on the DSP. The changes have also resulted in an increasingly confusing and inaccessible claims process. A recent analysis of Administrative Appeals Tribunal decisions suggests that more information needs to be made available to applicants and advocates. Applicants often did not know what to expect from the process, resulting in frustration, anxiety and rejections of people legally entitled to the pension.

The Disability Resources Centre partnered with people experienced in applying for the DSP to create *DSP & Me: Your Guide to the Disability Support Pension*. The document outlines what people need to know before applying for a DSP, and takes them step by step through the process to ensure they have everything they need to make a claim. The guide is available in plain English and Easy Read versions. *DSP & Me* helps people to:

- Advocate for themselves;
- Better understand what to expect when preparing to claim a DSP;
- Know their rights at Centrelink; and
- Know where to get help if they need it.

You can download *DSP & ME* in plain English, easy English and screen readable versions at:
<http://drc.org.au/resources/dsp-me/>

We recognise that there will always be people who require support to make a DSP claim and we hope *DSP & Me* will also be a resource for advocates guiding clients through the claims process.

Our *DSP & Me* Project Officer, Nick Wilson consulted deeply with participants to understand the barriers in the DSP application process, as well as the things people wished they'd known before they applied. We also asked community members to review *DSP & Me*'s first draft, a process that gave us invaluable feedback— especially for our easy English version. Participants received a gift voucher for being willing to share their time and experience with us.

Our DSP Project Working Group brought guidance and technical expertise to the project and consisted of DRC Vice Chairperson, Mary Henley-Collopy, Jeanette Robinson and Gillian Wilks from Social Security Rights Victoria. We are grateful for their advice and guidance throughout the project – we couldn't have done it without your tough questions and constant adherence to the publication's intended purpose!

DRC Meets with the Minister for Transport



On 22 August, our Executive Officer Kerri Cassidy attended a meeting with the Minister for Transport, Melissa Horne MP to discuss the need for improved accessibility on V/Line's Classic Fleet trains. Also in attendance were Leah Van Poppel (Women with Disabilities Victoria), Emma King (VCOSS) and Paralympian and Transport Advocate Josh Hose.

Josh told Melissa about the challenges he faced trying to access V/Line trains in his wheelchair, a frequent ordeal as his family live in regional Victoria. The Classic Fleet has very few accessible areas. When those are occupied by other wheelchair users or people with luggage, he is often forced to travel in the luggage compartment. His story, like so many others, highlights how difficult it can be to get accurate information about accessible services. When the information is wrong, people with disabilities travelling regionally are re-directed to buses or taxis. Josh's hometown doesn't have an accessible taxi, so one has to be called from an hour away to retrieve him. The high likelihood of long delays means Josh regularly leaves his family earlier than he'd like to ensure he's back in Melbourne for work.

New Velocity trains are earmarked for V/Line but are still several years away. In the meantime – what can be done to keep people with disabilities moving across the regions? Josh suggests re-fitting both the C and D carriages to allow more space for people with mobility aids. It's a sound solution that DRC is proud to support.

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We will be meeting with Minister Horne again in October to further discuss accessibility on the V/Line. We will also use this meeting to talk about the prioritisation of accessible tram stops in metropolitan Melbourne and to highlight the importance of consulting with people with disabilities at every stage of the planning, implementation and evaluation process as we strive for a Victorian public transport system that is fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

You're invited to our Annual General Meeting

You are the reason DRC exists, and we want you to be involved in our plans for the future. Join us at our 2019 AGM to get an overview of this year's projects and how you can take part. We've also got a guest speaker lined up whom we know you won't want to miss (formal announcement coming soon). Refreshments and good vibes will be provided. Come hang out!



**MONDAY 25 NOVEMBER
12:00 PM**

**HAYDEN RAYSMITH ROOM
LEVEL 4, ROSS HOUSE
247-251 FLINDERS LANE
MELBOURNE**

We've Moved!

The recent growth of our team has made our level three office at Ross House a little... cosy. So we've moved on up (literally) to a larger space on level four. So if you are planning to drop in and say hello, or check out the new digs, remember we've shifted.



Stay in Touch

In addition to our regular newsletter, you can keep track of what we're up to in real-time through our social media profiles. Follow us on Facebook and twitter @DRCadvocacy to get daily tid-bits, fun features and a review of the latest disability-related news.



Want to receive *Voices* via email?

Just email anja@drc.org.au from your preferred address, or give us a call on **03 9671 3000**.