

Voices

THE DRC ADVOCACY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 3 | AUG 2020



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HELLO FRIENDS,

Recent months have been highly unusual both locally and around the world due to COVID-19 and the restrictions it has brought. All of us have our own response to this; from enjoying the slower pace of life and time to spend with family to higher levels of isolation and loneliness, and concern about the added complexity around disability services and exposure to the virus. We are now facing the unknown of how long restrictions will remain and how things may change for the long term.

Kerri Cassify Photo: Ally Scott

DRC staff moved to working from home on 16th March and adapted very quickly to this new way of operating. We already had remote access to our IT systems and telephones, and switched to the remarkable conferencing technology of Zoom for both staff and Committee of Management meetings. Keeping connected as a team throughout this period has been essential and having regular opportunities to meet online, both for work purposes and socially, has been one of the positives to come from this experience.

Our Individual Advocacy program, which is largely email and phone based, was forced to cancel all in-person meetings after the Victorian government declared the state of emergency. Some of these meetings could be switched to Zoom whilst some have been postponed. The initial demand for Advocacy reduced as people were focused on obtaining necessities and basic services as well as bunkering down at home. We saw more people reach out for Advocacy support as the first stage of lifting restrictions began, and it will be interesting to see how Stage 4 restrictions impact engagement. We remain concerned that there are those who have fallen through the gaps because they do not have access to technology, or have difficulty communicating by phone, and we continue to seek solutions for this in the short term. Special thanks to our Advocates Julie, Katrina and Kim for their continued dedication in an increasingly difficult climate.

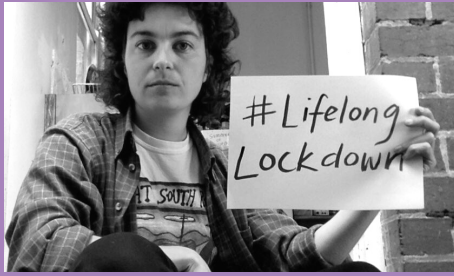
Our Accessible Public Transport Campaign plans were also dealt a blow due to restrictions around large gatherings. We met with disability activists in Sale and Traralgon in early March for our Skill-up and Campaign workshops, where we learnt about the avenues for social change, why it's good to complain and how sharing your impact story is a powerful way to influence change. WIN News came to our Sale session and people were able to put their learnings to good effect by sharing their stories of inaccessible public transport and the barrier this is to going where we want to go.

Our remaining regional workshops, planned for Warrnambool, Shepparton, Ballarat, Echuca and Melbourne were sadly cancelled. Rather than despairing lost plans, our Community Development and Campaign worker Ally saw this as a unique opportunity. Within a month the idea of online Transport Tuesday meetings was birthed and we were joined by disability activists across Victoria who participated in our adapted online workshops over three Tuesdays. This culminated in a very successful digital campaign known as #LifelongLockdown. As Victorians were locked down due to COVID-19 restrictions, we tapped in to the community's newfound understanding of what it's like to be largely homebound, and showed how inaccessible public transport can feel like a lifetime of lockdown for many. You can see some of our impact stories and join the Campaign at our website: <http://drc.org.au/join-transport-for-all/>.

As we prepare for six weeks of more intensive lockdown, I know many of us are feeling weighed down by the stress of COVID, the uncertainty it brings and the loneliness that can come with isolation. While I can attest to the importance of prioritising self-care and self-compassion, what one can do for one's self isn't always enough. With that reality in mind, a list of supports with links and information is included in this issue. Whilst it is hard to see the end of this right now, it will come, and in the meantime we can support others when we can and ask for help when we need it.

Take care,

#LIFELONG LOCKDOWN



In May the Disability Resources Centre conducted its first digital action, co-hosted by Friends of the Earth. We asked those impacted by inaccessible transport, as well as people who believe a public transport system should work for everyone, to post a picture of themselves with the hashtag #LifelongLockdown, tagging the former Minister for Public Transport Melissa Horne and sharing a personal reason public transport access matters to them.

This action was inspired by the shared experience of physical and social isolation brought on by COVID-19 restrictions. These lockdowns will come to an end, but for many people with disabilities, lockdown life is normal life. As we know, inaccessible public transport means that people with disabilities cannot fully participate in education, work and community life. You can see some of the posts [here](#) on our website, and you can read an article based on the ABC news story that covered the action [here](#). The event generated over 15,000 engagements and 100 new FB followers and has enabled us to broker some valuable partnerships for the next stage of our campaign.

Since then, a ministerial reshuffle has brought us a new Minister for Public Transport, Member for Niddrie Ben Carroll. We hear he is sympathetic to the needs of the disability community (his favourite TV show is Employable Me) so we are looking forward to working with him. He is also Minister for Roads and has already made commitments towards improving traffic congestion in Melbourne, as well as renovating facilities at 16 stations such as improving access to toilets and installing new visual/audio displays,. We are keen to see further investment to ensure that our public transport system becomes the reliable, sustainable and accessible one Victorians deserve.

Meanwhile we are in the process of planning another week of public campaigning. One thing is for sure, **we would love you to get involved**. If you have not yet signed up to join the campaign, please sign up [here](#) and help us get the government's attention.

OUR MEMBER SURVEY IS OPEN!

GO IN THE DRAW TO WIN A \$50 VOUCHER!



Most of you will have received an email inviting you to participate in our Members Survey. Just in case you missed it (or needed a reminder), we've included the link [here](#). This is a **short, 6-minute survey** focused on who you are and what you'd like to see DRC focus on in the years to come. Data will be used to assist us with our Strategic Plan review, which will be conducted over the next few months. Everyone who participates can **go in the draw to win a \$50 Coles/Myer gift voucher**, drawn on Monday 10 August.

Partner Profile: Friends of the Earth

Our #LifelongLockdown campaign owes a great deal to the Victorian branch of Friends of the Earth, a global organisation dedicated to both an environmentally sustainable and socially equitable future.



Their Sustainable Cities team saw an alignment between our public transport goals and their own, and they reached out to us. FoE leaders Claudia Gallois and Leigh Ewbank hold extensive campaign experience between them, and they generously gave their time and energy to support our work. In exchange, FoE has learned more about how people with disabilities are affected by structural issues, enhancing their ability to operate within the social justice model to which they are committed. To learn more about Friends of the Earth and the Sustainable Cities mission, visit [this page](#).

DRC WORKS FROM HOME

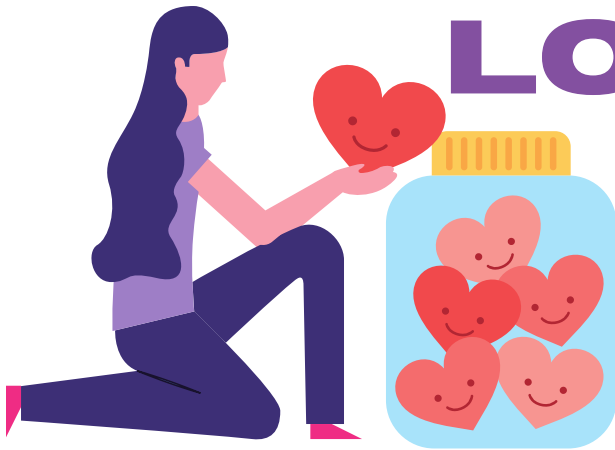


Two weeks before the Andrews government declared a state of emergency, the team at DRC chose to begin working from home. We felt we could do our part to “flatten the curve”, and in an industry where clients and staff are more likely to be high risk, it felt like the safest course of action. There have been many challenges: poor internet connections, communication mishaps and a teething period where we all adjusted to a new way of working. In particular, our Individual Advocacy Team is concerned about not being able to meet the needs of current and potential clients who require in-person interaction to achieve their goals. Kerri has been discussing this problem with other advocacy organisations at sector-wide meetings, and we are continuing to brainstorm solutions for this group.

The team has also discovered that working from home has its benefits. The Individual Advocacy Team’s newly necessary, regular zoom meetings have improved efficiency and working relationships. Staff whose disabilities result in fatigue have found being at home allows them to better manage their energy levels, enabling them to offer their best selves in work without sacrificing well being. And everyone has felt the benefits of not needing to commute long distances to and from the office each day.

While a fully remote DRC Advocacy may be impractical in the long term, the team and Committee of Management are considering how we might use our office space differently moving forward. It’s likely that the practice of social distancing will be necessary for some time after workplaces open, requiring the team to work in our office in shifts. For the foreseeable future though, we will remain at home but always contactable (9:30-4:30 Monday-Thursday) via phone, email and social media.

SUPPORT DURING LOCKDOWN



Some practical, community and mental well being resources to help you through lockdown.

Angel Next Door - angelnextdoor.com.au

A free community platform launched to allow neighbours to help each other during Coronavirus lockdown & Bushfire Crisis. If you need help with anything from grocery shopping to dog walking, the community at Angel Next Door can help. You post requests for specific support, and a community member nearby responds. It's simple, safe and free if you're finding it difficult to get the essentials.



Beyond Blue - beyondblue.org.au



If you find yourself overwhelmed by COVID, short term online and phone counselling is available from Beyond Blue for free. You can call, email or chat online. 1300 22 4636

Nextdoor - au.nextdoor.com

Another free community platform that keeps you up to date on things happening in your local area (eg, a local band playing from their front yard). Requests and offers of help from neighbours can also be organised here.



Lifeline - lifeline.org.au



A series of resources about supporting your mental health during COVID can be found under Information & Support. Staff are also available to talk 24/7 through the hotline on 13 11 14