

Voices

THE DRC ADVOCACY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 4 | NOV 2020



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Welcome to the spring edition of *Voices*,

Kerri Cassify Photo: Ally Scott

The last three months have been like no other for those of us living in Victoria. The DRC Team and Committee of Management have continued to work hard through Stage 4 Lockdown, meeting regularly by videoconference and supporting our clients and community. When I sit in a Zoom meeting with colleagues and partners in other states it is easy to identify the Victorians - most of us look tired and are in desperate need of a haircut! It reminds me that unless you have been living in a prolonged lockdown it is very hard to understand just how difficult it is.

Just yesterday I received a call asking if we'd like to have our office lights upgraded – and I could not help myself from saying “Mate, our lights have been off for six months. That’s the least of our concerns here in Melbourne!” We hold on to our sense of humour as best we can while acknowledging that we are at times lonely, and that every day we wish to have some part of our old lives back!

This edition of *Voices* has an update on our Individual Advocacy ([link](#)) as well as the details of our upcoming Annual General Meeting with Special Guest Senator Jordon Steele-John ([link](#)), who will be talking about Living with Resilience.

These last couple of months in Transport have been eventful. DRC turned in a submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission in response to the Australasian Railway Association’s request for temporary exemptions to the Disability Discrimination Act, raising our concerns about the continued lack of prioritisation of passengers with disability. We also submitted a series of recommendations to Consumer Passenger Vehicles Victoria (CPVV) on their proposed framework for training and assessing drivers of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles. Another noteworthy event was the release of a report from the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office about the Accessibility of Tram Services ([link](#)) in Melbourne <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/accessibility-tram-services>. We were alarmed to learn that whilst 27% stops had level access and 38% of trams were low floor, a low floor tram connected with a accessible stop in only 15% of services (and this presumes that you will be able to get off the tram at your destination)! It is both disheartening and motivating to realise just how much work must still be done to make Melbourne’s tram system fully accessible.

I look forward to sharing our 2019-2020 Annual Report with you next month and to celebrating what we have achieved in the past year whilst we move into the 40th year of Disability Resources Centre.

Thanks for your continued support,

Kerri

DRC ADVOCACY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

With special guest speaker

Senator Jordon Steele-John

Greens MP* Jordon Steele-John is Australia's youngest senator, and the first with lived experience of cerebral palsy.

Before Jordon entered politics, he worked in youth and disability advocacy, so we reckon we've all got a bit in common! Jordon has graciously agreed to volunteer his time to speak at our AGM (via zoom, of course), reflecting on his experience of the word 'resilience'. We feel honoured to share some time with him, and hope you will join us to hear him speak 23 November!

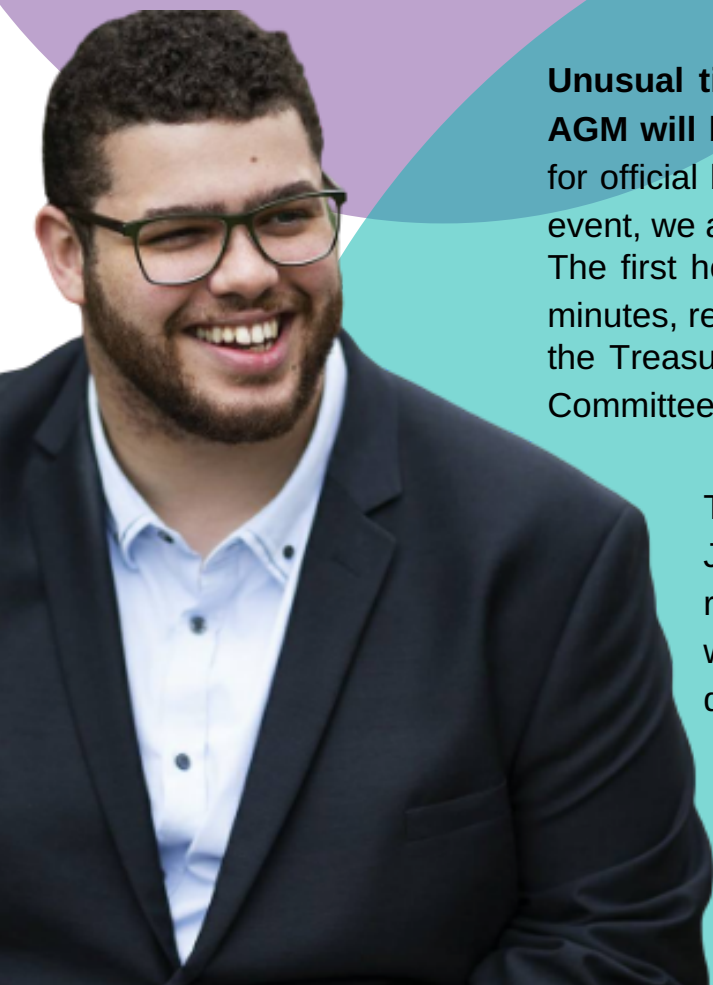
Monday 23 November
1:30 - 3:30, via zoom

RSVP:
kerri@drc.org.au

Unusual times call for unusual strategies, so this year's AGM will be conducted via Zoom! It's not an ideal medium for official business, but keeping with the theme of this year's event, we are resilient and will do our best to make it work. The first hour of the AGM will involve a review of last year's minutes, reports from members of staff, the Chairperson and the Treasurer, followed by voting on any nominations for the Committee of Management.

The second hour will include a speech from Senator Jordon Steele-John. All members should have received their first invitation to the event already, but we'll be sure to send another reminder closer to the date. Non-members are also encouraged to attend, particularly for the second half (2:30-3:30). We'd love to have you take part and help us ring in our 40th year of operation!

**DRC is not affiliated with, nor endorses any political party. Senator Steele-John has been invited in his capacity as a leader in the disability community.*



DISABILITY & BUSHFIRE RESPONSE

Graham Smith is an esteemed member of DRC's Committee of Management. He is also a former volunteer firefighter who acquired his disability while fighting bushfires in Victoria. Recently, DRC was approached by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to help them with their Preparing Vulnerable People (PVP) project – an initiative designed to improve the readiness of people more at risk from bushfires due to age, disability or social isolation. And we had the perfect person for the job. Bushfire season is fast approaching. If you live in a bushfire affected area, having a plan is important. Graham shares his advice and insight on what you should do to prepare.

STAY UP TO DATE ON BUSHFIRE RISK IN YOUR AREA



Check the fire risk where you live

Download the VicEmergency app to your mobile device

Start checking Fire Danger Ratings daily

Check warnings – make sure you understand the three levels of warnings and what they mean

BE READY TO LEAVE IF NECESSARY

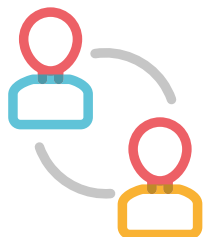


Make a Bushfire Plan - it's hard to think straight in an emergency. Follow the tips to make sure you'll know what to do.

If you need help with your Bushfire Plan, ask your carer, a family member, or somebody you trust to help you. CFA has E-learning for Workers, which can help.

Pack an emergency kit of essentials. This should include important documents, medications, a mobile phone, torch, battery operated radio, money and clothes so you can leave quickly before a fire starts. This year, make sure you add additional face masks, hand sanitiser - more than 60% alcohol, and antibacterial wipes.

TALK TO PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR PLANS AND ASK FOR HELP



Talk to your household and neighbours about how you'll know when to leave and where to go to stay safe.

If you have a significant disability, and are especially vulnerable, talk to your care provider about the DHHS Vulnerable Persons Register. Other options may include alerting the local Red Cross and Local Government to your situation.

For more information on how to get prepared, visit the CFA Website Plan & Prepare section.

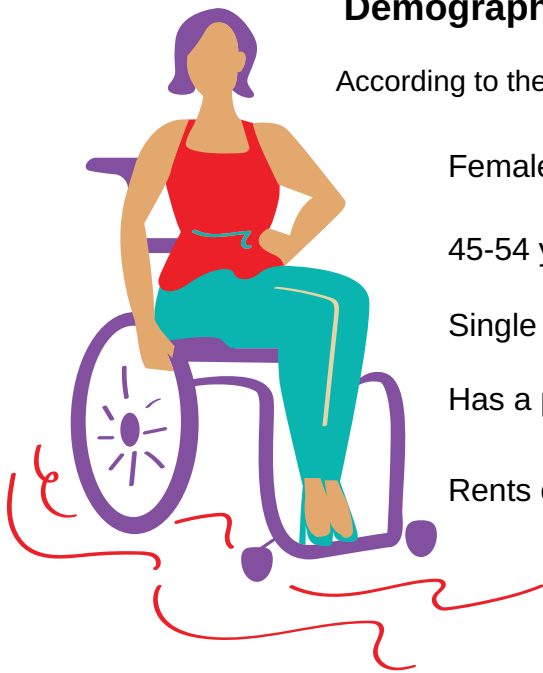
REMEMBER: LEAVE EARLY IF YOU CAN!

DRC MEMBER SURVEY

Many of you took part in the DRC Member Survey earlier this year, and we want to take this moment to once again offer our thanks to everyone who participated. The data collected has given us a picture of who our members are, what they care about and how they communicate with us. If you're interested, a full Member Survey Report can be found [here](#), along with a detailed breakdown of responses. Alternatively, you can check out our key findings below.

Demographics

According to the survey, the "average" DRC Member is:



Female (62%)

Lives in Melbourne (69%)

45-54 years old (38%)

Born in Australia (80%)

Single (76%)

Tertiary educated (71%)

Has a physical disability (51%)

Not in paid employment (67%)

Rents or owns their home (89%)

Insight: Data indicates people with disabilities living in supported accommodation struggle to engage with advocacy providers. With so few members living in supported accommodation, it's possible DRC isn't currently accessible to this group.

Communication Preferences



Most DRC Members:

Prefer to be contacted via email (95%)

Prefer to receive information by text (74%) or video (47%)

Engage with DRC through our newsletter (89%)

Insight: Only 21% of respondents use Facebook to keep in touch with us, suggesting our Facebook followers are largely non-members.

Systemic Advocacy Concerns

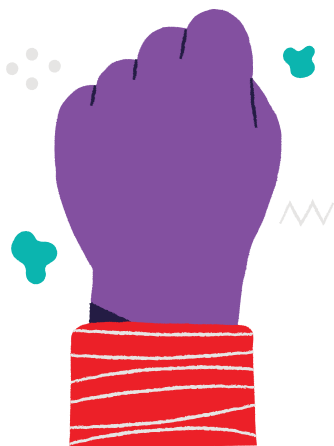
DRC Members who participated in the survey were most concerned about:

Community awareness of disability (74%)

Public transport (63%)

NDIS (63%)

Question: How does a lack of public awareness about disability impact members?



COVID-19 & INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY



DRC's Individual Advocacy service has seen a significant increase in inquiries over the past month. During the early weeks of COVID restrictions there were fewer than normal requests for advocacy and we believe this was largely due to people putting issues on hold while they adapted to changes in daily life. We have seen some specific COVID related issues arising such as access to food, housing and income support. People's specific disabilities have presented some unique challenges. For example, we worked with a woman with vision impairment who was pressured by her landlord to take photos of her home as house inspections are not possible. Our Advocate helped her understand her rights and supported her to negotiate a delay in her house inspections until restrictions are lifted. We have also assisted clients with existing advocacy issues over this period, which has required us to work through the layers of complexity and anxiety created by COVID-19. Our Advocates do an incredible job in a very challenging environment and we continue to value them greatly.

AUSTRALIAN DISABILITY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' EDUCATION FUND

DRC is proud to auspice the Australian Disability and Indigenous Peoples' Education Fund, an organisation that offers small grants to Indigenous Australians and Australians with disabilities in support of formal and informal education.

Supported by the Australian Communities Foundation and private donations, the Fund received 32 applications for the September 2020 round, 12 of which were successful. Seven of the recipients are Indigenous Australians. We offer our congratulations to this round's recipients and wish them the best in their educational pursuits.

For more information and to apply for the Fund's March 2021 Scholarships, visit adipef.org.au

