

A smiling woman with dark hair and a flower crown featuring a large white lily and orange roses is seated in a wheelchair. She is wearing a bright blue sweater and a colorful floral skirt. The background is a solid light pink color. A large purple rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title and organization information.

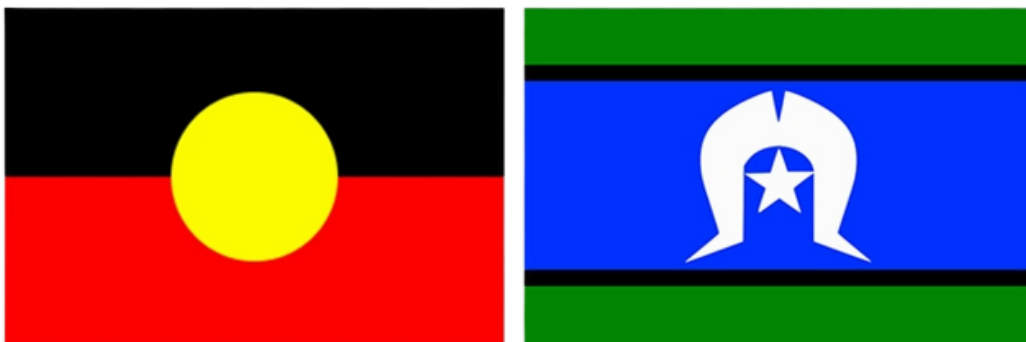
ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

DISABILITY RESOURCES CENTRE
NOVEMBER 2022

Acknowledgement of Country

Disability Resources Centre acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them, to their cultures, and to their elders both past and present.

In particular we acknowledge the Bangarang, the Yorta Yorta, the Ladji Ladji, the Gunditjmarra, the Kerrupjmarra, the Gunai Kurnai, the Watha Wurrung, the Widjbaluk, the Wemba Wemba, the Daung Wurrung, the Dja Dja Wurrung, the Wurundjeri and the Bunurong from the areas in which we live and work.



DRC Team

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

Chairperson	Martin Leckey
Treasurer	Andrew Turner
Secretary	Frank Hall-Bentick
Members	Felicia Andronicou, Pradeep Hewavitharana, Anna Leyden, Amy Marks, Katherine Marshall, Mary Rispoli, Emilio Salve, Graham Smith and Liz Wright

STAFF

Executive Officer	Greg Ferrington, Kerri Cassidy
Interim Executive Officer	Phyllis Campbell-McCrae
Team Leader, Individual Advocacy	Garry Kerridge
Intake Officer	Cath Edwards
Advocates	Kim Collinson, Neysha Machnig and Katrina Newman
Project Coordinators	Anja Homburg and Ally Scott
Administration Officer	Sinead Mooney

The Disability Resources Centre gratefully acknowledges the funding assistance of the Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Disability, the City of Melbourne and the NDIA Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Fund.

We thank the Australian Communities Foundation for their support with the Australian Disability and Indigenous Peoples Education Fund. We particularly thank all volunteers who contribute to the life of the DRC.

Table of Contents

Chairperson's Report Martin Leckey	3
Executive Officer's Report Greg Ferrington	5
Individual Advocacy Neysha Machnig	7
Transport Campaign Ally Scott	10
The Buddy Network Ally Scott	12
Youth Engagement Anja Homburg	14
Treasurer's Report Andrew Turner	15
Financial Statements	17



Chairperson's Report

Martin Leckey

Image: Martin Leckey Photo: Provided

The Disability Resources Centre (DRC) has continued to make excellent contributions to both individual advocacy and systemic change, helping people with disabilities improve their lives. We have done this alongside many changes in the team, and the challenges of recruitment and training that this has involved. We continue to grow in the provision of both individual advocacy and other projects.

One major achievement of the Committee of Management has been the recruitment of the new Executive Officer, Greg Ferrington, via an exhaustive selection process. In the second round of this process, we engaged agency NGO Recruitment to assist with sourcing and screening candidates. My sincere thanks to those who joined me on the recruitment panel: Liz Wright, Andrew Turner, Anna Leyden and Phyllis Campbell-McCrae. And a heartfelt welcome to Greg.

Our transport campaign has continued, focusing on the slow progress of building accessible tram stops. We again held direct-action protests across the city, which gained media attention. We became so frustrated at the lack of funding for accessible transport that we staged a protest at an inaccessible tram stop on every one of the 16 days that parliament sat between June and the State election in November. Thanks go to our project coordinator Ally Scott for helping to organise all these actions, and to all the DRC members and others that have joined in support of the campaign.

An exciting new project for this year has been the Buddy Network, an online peer support network for people with disabilities in Victoria. The pilot program has proved successful, and the DRC have gained funding to continue supporting this vital program. Other projects undertaken this year have included a youth internship program and the Vaccine Support project, helping people with disabilities access Covid vaccines. More details are available elsewhere in this report.

I want to express my gratitude to each member of the DRC Team. I would particularly like to thank Katrina Newman, who resigned after more than 17 years working for the DRC, for all her outstanding work as an individual advocate. Her advocacy work in the outer south-east and the Mornington Peninsula, as well as her contribution to programs supporting applicants to the Disability Support Pension, has changed many lives for the better. A special mention also goes to Phyllis Campbell-McCrae, who stepped in as Interim Executive Officer after Kerri's departure and stayed on until Greg began.

I extend my appreciation to them and the rest of the DRC Team: Advocates Kim Collinson and Neysha Machnig, Team Leader Gary Kerridge, Intake Officer Cath Edwards, Administration Officer Sinead Mooney, and Project Coordinator Anja Homburg.

I would also like to thank the Committee of Management for their invaluable assistance this year, particularly vice-Chairperson Anna Leyden and Treasurer Andrew Turner, who helped me through some challenging times while Secretary Frank Hall-Bentick was on illness leave. Frank has now returned to his role as Secretary, and it is good to be reminded that a disability-led organisation we continue to support one another in achieving our goals and caring for ourselves. Thanks also to the committee members that have left this year, Katherine Marshall, Liz Wright, Amy Marks, Fel Andronicou and recently Anna Leyden, and the continued contributions of Pradeep Hewavitharana, Emilio Savle and Graham Smith.

Martin Leckey, Chairperson



Executive Officer's Report

Greg Ferrington

Image: Greg Ferrington Photo: Provided

It is my pleasure to write this- my first Executive Officer's report. I would like to welcome new members to the Disability Resources Centre and thank those members that continue to support the work of this amazing organisation, particularly the Committee of Management.

One of my first observations in the role has been the high profile of DRC within the sector and its reputation for having a strong voice for people with a disability. I have noticed that it works from a strengths-based approach in meeting the needs of its members and the wider community.

I would like to also honour the work of the previous Executive Officer, Kerri Cassidy, for building the foundations of DRC and developing a strong structure for further growth. I would also like to thank Interim Executive Officer Phyllis Campbell-MacRae for providing me with a sound footing in my first months in the role.

The theme of this my first annual report is one of "Outreach". Having worked in other sectors I see there are clear opportunities for collaboration and partnership, both within and outside the disability advocacy sector and making the most of these opportunities is informing the plan for my first 12 months in the role.

The last year has been tough as we have negotiated multiple lockdowns followed by a slow transition back into the office. We are currently in the process of negotiating a new lease within Ross House which will see us re-locate to a much bigger and more accessible space on another floor.

Over the last year we have also seen some staff changes. Neysha Machnig has joined our Advocacy team and we also farewelled team members Garry, Katrina and Catherine. We also saw Anja Homburg take maternity leave to have her beautiful daughter, Raelia, but we thankfully have her back on board now.

We have seen a 50% increase in our Individual Advocacy funding, allowing us to employ two full-time advocates. We have developed a workplan for the next 12 months which will ensure that we have a clear focus on achieving our key performance indicators as set by the Department of Fairness, Families and Housing.

2021-22 has also seen the funding, planning and implementation of The Buddy Network pilot. Early in 2023 the results of research on the pilot, completed by the University of Melbourne, will be launched. Ongoing funding for another 12 months has just been secured from the Victorian Government and State Trustees, which means we can further embed the program within the organisation. This will also mean we can employ another part time staff member to support Ally in co-ordinating the program.

With the support of ILC funding we are about to roll out our summer internships which will see the employment of two interns for a 10-week period. The interns will work with Anja on the development of a youth advisory group, which will provide strategic advice from a youth focus to the Committee of Management. Anja has been building strong connections with tertiary providers and other community sector organisations in the recruitment process.

Another area of focus over these first few months in the role has been to make connections to relevant peak bodies within the disability advocacy sector, and I currently have nominations in for both the AFDO and the Disability Advocacy Victoria boards. I look forward to my next 12 months in the role and the opportunity to lead the work of DRC. Again, I would again like to thank the committee for their ongoing support.

Greg Ferrington, Executive Officer



Individual Advocacy

Neysha Machnig

Image: Neysha Machnig Photo: Provided

2021-22 has been another year of change and challenge for the Individual Advocacy Team. We continue to work remotely with our clients as COVID remains ever-present, and we have navigated multiple staffing changes. I'd like to take this moment to acknowledge our outgoing team members Cath Edwards, Gary Kerridge and Katrina Newman. During this time of change for the DRC, we have worked to clear our waiting list regularly. The Individual Advocacy team has received an increase in funding which will allow us to expand our outreach work in addition to welcoming our new advocate, Jackie Breasley.

Individual Advocacy remains rewarding work, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Greg, our Committee of Management and supporters of DRC for continuing to value the work we do. Below is a statistical reflection of the Individual Advocacy Team's achievements, followed by a case study of one of our more complex Advocacy Cases.

Neysha Machnig, Advocate



4500 hours of
advocacy
support



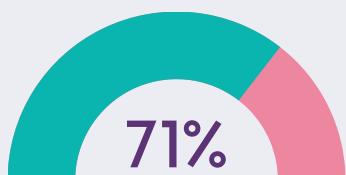
138 cases



122 clients



395 short term
issues
addressed



Seventy-one percent of advocacy
cases reached the objectives set
by the client.

Case Study

Individual Advocacy

This year, DRC's Individual Advocacy Team was approached to assist with a complex case regarding the Disability Support Pension (DSP). Santosh*, a transgender person who described themselves as an aspiring Hari Krishna, had been a recipient of the DSP for 13 years. During the pandemic Santosh's wife, who also lives with disability, had travelled to her native India and found herself unable to return home. By the time Santosh engaged DRC, the couple had been separated for 18 months.

For complex reasons, Santosh's wife couldn't plan a return to Australia in the near future. In order for the couple to reunite, Santosh would need to travel. This presented two challenges: the risk that Santosh would lose their DSP payments while abroad; and the need to apply for permission to leave Australia during the pandemic.

Recipients of the DSP can be outside Australia for four weeks and continue to receive payments. It was highly likely Santosh would need to be in India for longer, necessitating an application for indefinite portability of the DSP. The application process is complex and the guidelines stringent. My colleague Katrina Newman discovered on doing research that applying for indefinite portability could threaten Santosh's existing pension. Qualifying rules around the DSP had changed since Santosh's application in 2007, and it was possible they would lose support altogether. Santosh was informed of the risk, but felt the need to reunite with their wife was more important, as concerns for her safety continued to grow.

With the assistance of Katrina and myself, Santosh gathered the necessary documents, arranged a letter of support from their local MP and contacted the Minister for Home Affairs as part of applying for indefinite portability. Centrelink's rules around applications of this kind are particularly stringent, making the application process extremely difficult. The added stress had negative flow on effects on Santosh's health and wellbeing, exacerbating their disabilities. Things were strained further due to the COVID pandemic. Shortly after hearing that their indefinite portability had been approved, they were made aware that they had to apply for permission to leave Australia. Relief mixed with new anxieties as Santosh navigated legal paperwork and planned an overseas trip.

Santosh was empowered to use their voice to achieve their goals with support from the Advocacy Team. Santosh had grown into a strong self-advocate and familial advocate for their spouse. Ultimately Santosh was granted indefinite portability and permission to travel to India. They are now reunited with their spouse and planning their return home.

DRC's Advocacy Team was enriched by working with Santosh. We gained specialist knowledge about international travel during a global pandemic and a more in depth understanding of the DSP's indefinite portability option. Furthermore, advocates gained tangible experience working within the LGBTQIA+ community and a greater understanding of the unique complexities the exist at the intersections of gender identity, sexuality and disability.

Neysha Machnig, Advocate

*Name changed to protect client privacy.

Public Transport Campaign

This year DRC has continued to campaign for universally accessible public transport, particularly on the Melbourne Tram Network and V/Line regional rail. Transport has been at the heart of DRC's focus since its inception, spanning as it does both real physical barriers and a public representation of exclusion and discrimination. Transport is the glue that brings all our communities together, something that was particularly needed after the long months of lockdown. Yet for many in our community, reconnection was not so easy.



The end of 2021 saw the formation of the Transport for All Coalition, a collaboration of cross sector organisations including disability and environment organisations, age care agencies and unions with one focus - to see our public transport system made safely, reliably and independently accessible for everyone. The coalition partners have met and worked together over the months and will continue to lobby to ensure that the 2026 Commonwealth Games can be reached by a public transport network that works for everyone.

In March the Transport for All Coalition, led by DRC, held simultaneous actions across metro and regional Victoria – from Clifton Hill to Warrnambool - to demonstrate how inaccessible our public transport system is. At that point the deadline by which transport infrastructure is required to be fully accessible under the Disability Standards was just 282 days away - a deadline that was impossible to meet and being quietly swept under the carpet by state leaders. These protests inspired some very supportive press coverage from the ABC, Channel 10, The Age and The Guardian, as well as regional press and radio. This coverage has ensured that transport access is front and centre for politicians and the public going into our November elections.



DRC contributed to AFDO's submission to the Disability Royal Commission: Institutional Abuse in the Disability Transport Standards, and presented at a national roundtable to discuss the findings. We have also launched a DoGooder platform to encourage people to contact their local candidates in the run up to the Victorian election, and supported Martin Leckey's protests at his local tram stop in North Carlton.

He has protested every day that parliament has been sitting, come rain or shine, and was joined latterly by Jess Kapuscinski-Evans in Northcote.

We now have fantastic support from the Greens, who have announced an election policy to completely upgrade seven tram routes across ten years. This is a major victory for the campaign that means discussions about transport accessibility will take place on the floor of parliament, getting us closer to our vision of a network that is truly public and built for us all.

Ally Scott, Project Coordinator





The Buddy Network

Ally Scott

Image: Ally Scott Photo: Ally Scott

People with disabilities are more likely to live alone (24% vs 9% of the general population) and 32% experience high or very high levels of psychological distress (AIHW 2019). This figure is believed to be considerably greater today as a result of the pandemic. Among DRC's client base, 80% live with both physical disabilities and mental health issues and their needs are complex. Many continue to self-isolate because of the threat posed by contact with COVID and other viruses.

Against this backdrop the services of disability advocacy organisations continue to be in great demand and under resourced. Clients spend weeks on waiting lists with little emotional support to sustain them. Once advocacy is received it is often clear that what is needed above all is a listening ear and meaningful human connection. This is beyond the scope of an individual advocacy service, but not beyond what DRC can provide.

In response, DRC launched The Buddy Network in January- a disability-led peer support project, funded by the City of Melbourne. Here Victorians with disabilities share experiences, deepen understanding and strengthen our community. By coming together regularly we also address the very high levels of loneliness and social isolation that have grown steadily though the pandemic.

Members meet weekly or fortnightly, both in groups and one-to-one, and facilitation duties are shared by participants. Support is given with kindness, respect and openness, so that everyone feels heard and understood. The group provides a space that validates peoples' voices, enables us to know that our experiences are shared, and that we are not alone. Whilst people with disabilities are often on the passive or receiving end of support relationships, this program strives to erode power imbalances and build equality in every relationship. Research shows that those who give support experience equal or greater benefits to those who receive it.

“
Speaking with people who share your lived experience of disability or chronic illness lightens your mental load. You're reminded you are a person and for an hour every couple of weeks, you get to be with your community.
”

Participant

In the Buddy Network everyone can feel the sense of purpose and positivity that comes from meaningfully supporting others.

New members are invited to join two induction workshops to shape their protocols for working together, as well as discuss boundaries and purposeful disclosure. Once participating in regular meetings, members are offered facilitation training and other professional development workshops.

Each meeting involves a deep check-in and a focus for discussion. Recently, sub-groups have formed with the purpose of focusing on particular issues, such as NDIS reviews or workplace experiences. Meetings are held online, allowing the Buddy Network to be accessible to people with a variety of access needs, and particularly those most impacted by isolation.

The pilot project will conclude at the end of March 2023, having engaged 50 people. We were recently informed that we have been granted funding by the State Trustees and the Department of Health to continue the project past the pilot stage. Next year we will use this funding to deliver the Buddy Network throughout Victoria, with a particular focus on regional and rural areas.

Ally Scott, Project Coordinator



Youth Engagement

Anja Homburg

Image: Anja Homburg Photo: Ally Scott

Throughout 2021-22, DRC has been working to broaden and deepen our connections with Victorians with disabilities. Through a survey of our members and statistics from the Individual Advocacy Team, we realised there was progress to be made in engaging people aged 30 and under. As means of addressing this, we developed an internship program open to Victorian's with disabilities aged 18-30 interested in working in the advocacy space. The aim was to upskill younger professionals and increase their capacity for leadership while offering DRC the chance to learn more about the unique issues facing younger disabled people.

Our first intern, Fel Andronicou, worked with DRC from June-September 2021. Over ten hours each week, she and I worked together to identify and work towards Fel's professional goals. Fel had been very positively impacted by participation in social support programs for young disabled people, but had to drive an hour from her home in order to access them. She was frustrated by the absence of similar services in her local area and wanted to create a peer support group for neurodiverse youth like herself in the city of Bayside.

DRC supported Fel in the development of a strategic plan for her peer support group, called Divergent Connections. Part of the plan required her to identify possible sources of funding for the project. Through this exercise Fel realised that Bayside City Council (BCC) had small grants available for organisations like hers. We approached BCC to discuss the project, developing Fel's professional networking and strategic partnership skills. BCC encouraged Fel to apply for funding, which she was successful in obtaining. By the end of her internship, she had fully designed and funded a pilot project for Divergent Connections. She ran the pilot in Term 1 of 2022, incorporating feedback and learnings to run the program again in Term 2. In addition to these outstanding achievements, Fel was also appointed to Bayside City Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee in July this year. She is the first young person to hold the position.

I was on maternity leave for the bulk of 2021-22, so our youth engagement project has largely been on hold. However, we have just onboarded two new interns to DRC and received confirmation of extended funding for the project from the NDIA's Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Fund. I look forward to reporting on our ongoing progress in the 2022-23 Annual Report.

Anja Homburg, Project Coordinator

Treasurer's Report

Andrew Turner

On behalf of the Committee of Management it is my pleasure to present to you the Treasurer's Report for the year ended 30 June 2022.

The past financial year has seen the Committee of Management conscientiously lead the organisation through a challenging financial period for DRC.

For the financial year ending 30 June 2022, our Committee of Management maintained diligent oversight of the financial position and operating activities, working together with management to curtail a net operating deficit for the financial year to \$93,635 (2021: \$261,039 surplus).

Despite recording a net operating deficit for the financial year, cash reserves of \$432,680 (2021: \$434,922) were able to be preserved to a comparable level to the previous financial year.

Of note, the net of cash receipts and payments used in operating activities for the financial year, as shown in the Statement of Cash Flows, was a smaller deficit \$2,242 (2021: \$100,602 surplus) when compared to the net deficit as shown in the Income and Expenditure Statement for the financial year.

During the financial year the main items of income received by DRC were:

- Grant from Department of Human Services of \$314,664 (2021: \$297,754) allowing DRC to maintain services to our clients
- Grants Received of \$105,435 (2021: \$10,000) for various projects such as the Buddy Network and Vaccine Support to facilitate and further enhance our activities toward promoting the rights and opportunities of those with disabilities.
- Donations for the year of \$9,265 (2021: \$204,732). Whilst lower than the previous financial year, when DRC received a significant bequest, due to the generosity of our members and the general public recognising the valued and good work of the DRC team by making a financial contribution, significant funds were raised during the financial year.

During the year the main items of expenditure were:

- Expenditure related to employees comprised of salaries and wages of \$322,651 (2021: \$338,746) and superannuation of \$32,345 (2021: \$30,730 which combined with consultancy fees of \$89,145 (2021: \$4,350), mostly incurred to maintain the position of Executive Officer whilst a permanent replacement was engaged. Altogether this represented over 82% of all expenditure for the financial year which reflected the Committee of Management's desire to maintain and enhance services to our clients by attracting and retaining our valued team.
- Education grants \$21,850 (2021: \$23,377) were awarded to worthy recipients again during the financial year by the Australian Disability & Indigenous Peoples' Education Fund.
- CSO Network IT Expenses \$16,436 (2021: \$8,535) were incurred during the financial year reflecting expenses incurred in order to maintain and enhance our client software capabilities and improve our team's technology equipment.

DRC is in a sound financial position to continue to operate and continue to deliver the outstanding services to clients.

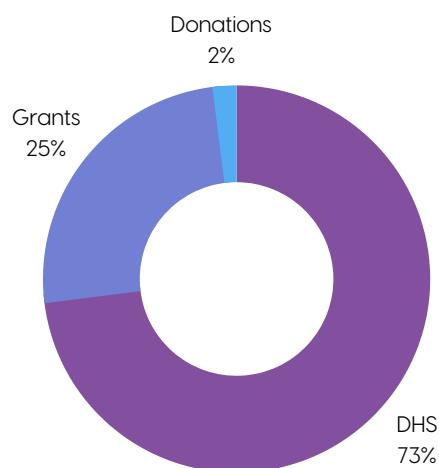
I would like to express my appreciation to the Executive Officer and the Committee of Management for their support and ongoing conscientious approach toward monitoring and overseeing our financial activities and position.

Andrew Turner CPA, GIA(Affiliated), MAICD
Treasurer

Expenditure



Income



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This publication is available in accessible formats on request.