

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) Update Report April 2006

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the peak organisation for women with all types of disabilities in Australia. It is a not-for-profit organisation constituted and driven by women with disabilities. It is the only organisation of its kind in Australia and one of only a very small number internationally. WWDA is inclusive and does not discriminate against any disability. WWDA is unique, in that it operates as a national disability organisation; a national women's organisation; and a national human rights organisation (more information about WWDA can be found at the organisation's extensive website: www.wwda.org.au). Please find below a brief Update Report from WWDA for the month of April 2006. If you have any questions, or would like more information on anything in this report, please email Carolyn or Angela at: wwda@ozemail.com.au.

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1. Diana Palmer wins International Women's Day Award in ACT

Diana Palmer has long been associated with the disability movement in Australia, and was a founding member of the National Women's Network, formed originally as a sub-group within Disabled People's International (Australia) and which became Women With Disabilities Australia in 1995. Diana formed the affiliate group Women With Disabilities ACT at the same time, and was its Convener for 10 years. As a trailblazer in the area of women's rights, and especially those of women with disabilities, Diana was one of the first blind women to have permanency in the Australian Public Service, one of the first people with a guide dog to take up residence in a Government Hostel in Canberra, and one of the first blind people in Canberra to become an independent tenant in public housing. Diana has always been a social justice crusader, and is well known by Ministers in both Territory and Commonwealth Government circles for her penchant for starting 'at the top' when taking up any equity matters. Diana shared the ACT limelight with 4 other notable ACT women.



She is pictured here, with Crystal, receiving her award from ACT Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher, Diana received a framed Lino Cut Print commissioned from an ACT woman artist, plus a framed award certificate. WWDACT has had framed Braille version of the certificate made so

that Diana can share that part of her award with friends. WWDA congratulates Diana on this award which recognises the considerable contribution she has made to improving the inclusivity of our society. A copy of the WWDACT citation can be obtained from Sue Salthouse at sudata@optusnet.com.au. WWDA congratulates Diana.

2. **Advancement through Advocacy for Women With Disabilities Project - Update**

The overall aim and long term goal of this project is to improve the status of women with disabilities through systemic advocacy. The major objective of the Project is: 'to enhance WWDA's capacity to promote the participation of women with disabilities in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life.' Specifically, the Project will:

- Develop systems and processes whereby women with disabilities can be identified, trained and recruited to act as advocates to improve the status of women with disabilities;
- Develop the necessary tools to support women with disabilities in their representative and advocacy roles;
- Research and identify representation, leadership and systemic advocacy opportunities for women with disabilities.

The Project is now well and truly underway. A wise, talented and enthusiastic Reference Group has been formed. The members are Louise Bannister (Canberra), Michele Castagna (Alice Springs), Karen McQuigg (Melbourne), Rayna Lamb (Perth), Lina Pane (Melbourne), Belinda Wardlaw (Tawantin [Noosa]) and Sue Salthouse (Project Manager, Canberra). The Group bring a wide range of life experience, as well as a raft of experiences in advocacy, mentoring and leadership.

Dissemination of information about the Project has begun in earnest using the contact networks of each Reference Group member; the email lists of women's organisations (Pamela's List, Australian



Women's Health Network); the 4 Office for Women funded Secretariats (WomenSpeak, Australian Women's Coalition, Security for Women and National Rural Women's Coalition); disability organisations (OzAdvocacy, Physical Disability Council of Australia, Disabled Women's Network), and WWDA's established information distribution network to politicians, relevant government departments/agencies, peak bodies, and relevant research organisations. All Disability Advisory Councils have been contacted, as well as Women's Advisory Councils.

Feedback has been immediate, and come from Far North Queensland and everywhere in between. Offers of participation and assistance have come from women with disabilities – those with scads of experience, and those whose latent talents are ready to burst forth; trainers and advocacy bodies themselves. An article about the Project has been submitted to FeMail (Tweed Shire Women's Services) and to LINK magazine.

Data Bases have been set up for: the information dissemination network; the Advocacy Bodies and representative positions; organisations which train people as representatives, and the Register of Advocates/Representatives. In addition a number of organisations have been approached with requests for exemplars of policies and protocols for representative work. These include 2 community organisations (one national and one ACT), a national government instrumentality and a national commercial organisation. Finally, liaison with Disability In-Service Training Support Service (DISTSS), a national disability workers training organisation, has been set up, and information will go to their six and a half thousand affiliates in the first week of May.

3. **Medicare Australia**

Sue Salthouse (WWDA Vice President) represents the Australian Federation of Disability Organisation (AFDO) on the Medicare Australia Consumer Communication Group (CCG). The CCG is one of 3 consultative sub groups to the larger Stakeholders Advisory Group, and is made up of representatives from community organisations such as Carers Australia, Chronic Illness Alliance, Consumers' Health Forum, Council of the Ageing-National Seniors, and the Federation of

Ethnic Community Councils of Australia as well as AFDO. In addition to the CCG, there is a Pharmacists Consultation Group and a Doctors Consultation Group.

Medicare Australia (MA), formerly the Health Insurance Commission, is now an integral part of the Department of Human Services (DHS), under Minister Jo Hockey. It has acquired a number of new services including sharing, with Centrelink and ATO Shopfronts, the responsibility for handling enquiries to and payments for Family Tax Benefit Parts A & B, Childcare Benefit, Maternity Payment and Maternity Immunisation Allowance. This change is reflected in the new "Medicare Australia/Family Assistance" signage of its Shopfronts.

A number of new MA and DHS initiatives will directly assist people with disabilities. These include:

- consulting with relevant disability groups to ensure maximum accessibility of both content and format of all DHS information (both printed and electronic);
- trialing the accessibility for people who are blind or vision impaired of the new electronic queuing consoles proposed for installation in Shopfronts;
- similarly trialing the accessibility of the increasing portfolio of online services; and
- continuation of the trialing (with the general population in Tasmania) of Smartcards which will have the potential to hold a range of information for people with complex health needs.

Sue Salthouse is liaising with MA staff to follow up on issues which have impact on people with disabilities. A full report of the meeting can be obtained from Sue via email at: sudata@optusnet.com.au

4. Development and Production of a Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities Project - Update

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is currently undertaking a national project under the Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault funding program (Australian Government, Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs). WWDA's project is focusing on the development and production of a Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities. This Manual will be developed in alternative formats in order to ensure accessibility for women with disabilities.

A detailed Project Plan for the Project has been developed and submitted to the Office of Women (Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) for approval. It is intended that the Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities will consist of a series of Booklets – each of which will cover a particular aspect of the issue. For example, the Booklets will include:

- A Guide for women's refuges and other crisis services to ensure accessibility of their services for women with disabilities experiencing violence or at risk of violence;
- Information for women with disabilities experiencing violence or at risk of violence;
- Information for service providers who work (or potentially work) with women with disabilities experiencing violence or at risk of violence;
- Literature Review; Annotated Bibliography;
- Services, Contacts & Resources;
- Narratives, Poetry and Artwork from disabled women who have experienced violence including strategies to break to cycle of violence.

WWDA is currently seeking input from women with disabilities to contribute their stories and artworks.

More information about the Project can be obtained by contacting:
Carolyn Frohmader (Project Manager)
Ph: (03) 62448288 Fax: (03) 62448255
Email: wwda@ozemail.com.au

5. Louise Bannister completes Australian Institute of Fitness Training

WWDA member, Louise Bannister has recently completed her training as a Fitness Instructor and Personal Trainer. Her qualification was obtained from the Australian Institute of Fitness and Training (AIF), located at Fairbairn in Canberra. Louise, a woman with cerebral palsy, is a wheelchair user. WWDA believes that she may be the first woman wheelchair user in Australia, not connected with an elite or Paralympic training programme, to have such a qualification. She is certainly the first female wheelchair user (though not the first woman with a disability) who has completed the AIF course. The AIF altered its building to construct a ramp for wheelchair access to its premises to enable Louise to start the course, and awarded her a \$500 scholarship to subsidise her course fees. WWDACT will be continuing its liaison with the AIF during the year, so that the organisation can further develop strategies to include people with disabilities. A \$5000 grant, awarded by ACT Sports and Recreation, covered the remainder of the fees and travel costs.

AIF instructors and Louise's class mates agreed that they learned a great deal about disabilities and wheelchair dynamics during the course – including pushing Lou so fast in a team-building relay that her tyres sheared off the wheel rims (her team won!). Louise intends to volunteer her services to the next classes of the ACT 'Well and Able' fun fitness programme for women with disabilities. (The initial programme run in 2005 as a joint project between WWDACT, the YMCA and the Women's Centre for Health matters was a great success. The programme will start again when sufficient funding is found.) In the future Louise hopes to conduct fitness classes for a wide range of clientele including people with disabilities, seniors and those in water-movers classes. Her association with the AIF is not yet finished. She has still to complete a practicum in personal training which will upgrade her qualification to one which is recognised world wide. WWDA congratulates Louise and wishes her all the best in this new career path.

6. WWDA Telecommunications Working Group - Update

WWDA Telecommunications Group (TG) has been in contact with Telstra over several matters since the end of 2005. In addition, Margaret Cooper represents us on the Telstra Disability Forum (TDF) which last met in March. The following information comes from both sources.

6.1. Telstra rollout of Third Generation (3G) Network

A summary of 3G networks appeared in the last WWDA Update Bulletin, However because the 3G network is often referred to in the media, and can be a meaningless term for the lay-woman, information is given again here.

Telstra has announced the rollout of its new *City to Country 3G* network. What does this mean for consumers? To date there have been 3 mobile phone networks in Australia – GSM¹, CDMA² and SMS³. For a quick overview of the history of mobile phones in Australia, visit the **Australian Mobile Telephone Association Website** at: <http://www.amta.org.au/default.asp?Page=142>. For slightly more technical background information go to the **Commonwealth's 'Telinfo' site** at: <http://www.telinfo.gov.au>.

CDMA phones are the preferred type for people with hearing aids/cochlear implants, with the GSM network being completely inaccessible to most. The current GSM & CDMA systems are 2G networks in which each call requires an exclusive connection. The new 3G network is one with multi-access functions. Multiple users share the same wide frequency for fast, simultaneous internet access. Telstra will progressively change to WCDMA (W = wide band width) over the next 3 years. However, the existing CDMA 850 MHz system and GSM systems will function in conjunction with the WCDMA 2100 MHz system.

¹ GSM = Global Standard for Mobiles (digital phones)

² CDMA = Code Division Multiple Access is the name of the wireless network which replaced the old analogue system

³ SMS = Satellite (Based Mobile) Phone Systems

Tests conducted by Telstra in conjunction with the National Acoustic Laboratory indicate that accessibility for people with hearing aids/cochlear implants will not be compromised. There are also concerns about the cost of the new mobile phones plus concerns about the need for simple design (3-4 buttons) hand sets for those with intellectual disability and the aged.

Rich Technophiles may be rushing to changeover to the new system, but WWDA advises against trading in your existing mobile phone for a while yet.

6.2. Payphones

ACIF is currently developing a Payphone Industry Code. The location of payphones appears on Telstra's website. There are 246 payphones with TTY access. Ninety two percent of all renewed payphones have SMS capability and all new payphone call cards can now be used to ring 1300 and 1800 numbers. To date 54 of 72 nominated payphones have had access upgrades. Telstra has recently announced a programme to reduce the number of payphones it operates. However, it will not remove payphones which are:

- Required for public health & safety reasons
- Are in remote areas
- Required under Universal Service Obligation (of which there are 7,500 phones).

Those removed will be in areas of high vandalism, and where the cost of maintenance far outweighs the degree of use of the phone, where there are 2 phones adjacent to each other, and where private payphones are being installed (such as where a shopping centre management contracts with a private payphone company).

How is notice of removal given? Communities are only informed of phones marked for removal by the appearance of a notice to that effect being placed on the phone for a period of approximately 3 months. If you are dependent on a Telstra Payphone in your area which is thus marked, contact Telstra directly with your concerns, but also alert the WWDA Telecommunications Group (sudata@optusnet.com.au). We may be able to assist with negotiations.

How to contact Telstra about a Payphone? Consumer concerns with payphones can be directed to June Gasson, Consumer & Marketing, Payphones Regulatory & Customer relations on Freecall 1800 011 433.

6.3. Disability Equipment Programmes – DCITA Research Programme

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) have appointed Allen Consulting to do a *Review of the Provision of Telecommunications Equipment to Consumers with Disabilities*. They will examine and report on the effectiveness of current arrangements; key issues for the future; and the cost of existing programs. A number of consumer organisations (including WWDA) have been requesting such an investigation for a number of years.

TEDICORE (Telecommunications & Disability Consumers Representation Project Advisory Body) has a Position Paper on this proposal at: <http://www.bca.org.au/tedicore/DEP2002.htm>.

The WWDA Telecommunications Group forwarded a number of emails from Allen Consulting to wwda-discuss, inviting consumers to attend forums to air their views. Frustrated feedback from WWDA members about their inability to get to forums was relayed to the company. A number of members did contact the company directly. WWDA also suggested that a survey disseminated via the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) contact list would have given broad spectrum of feedback, which could have been augmented from data obtained at the forums. A final report is due in early June.

6.4. Telstra Affordability/Access for Everyone Packages

A raft of issues were discussed at the Telstra Disability Forum (TDF), including Telstra's response to WWDA's request for an expansion of their Budget Pay system to include an ability to use a payment system available at Post Offices similar to that offered by many State/local government utilities. Currently customers can take advantage of BudgetPay only with the CentrePay and Direct Debit payment options and this was a commercial decision by Telstra.

6.5. Cooperative Research Centre for Assistive Equipment

NovitaTech, is a South Australian organisation which specialises in making and adapting equipment for people with disabilities. In telecommunications, it has done some groundbreaking work adapting commercial products to enable people with multiple and severe disabilities to independently use a phone.

NovitaTech is currently seeking to establish a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) which will be dedicated to working specifically in the area of researching and developing assistive equipment to enhance independent mobility, access to communication, and access to home and workplace environments for people with disabilities.

The concept is transnational, in that the project plan caters for 'nodes' to be set up in any location where there is Research and Development (R&D), manufacture or distribution of end-products. The plan has the potential to act as a catalyst for improved networking from government to consumer in the field of assistive equipment for people with disabilities. WWDA applauds this concept, and has written a letter in support of their application for seeding funding.

6.6. Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) Guidelines

ACIF is undertaking a review of Guideline G586:2001, *Access to Telecommunications for People with Disabilities*. The Guideline is designed to underpin the development of all ACIF Standards, Codes and Guidelines (SC&G) so that consideration of the implications for people with disabilities of any such documents can be incorporated from the outset. The Guidelines are also there for ACIF members to consider in any actions that they undertake. It is available on the ACIF website for consumers to read. The revised Guidelines will take into account the converged telecommunications and broadcasting environments, and the mode of transmission of information between computers, mobiles and conventional phones. Sue Salthouse is a member of the triumvirate undertaking this revision.

6.7. Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) Morgan-Disney Report

The Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) commissioned Morgan Disney to review consumer participation in its activities. Their report was released in December 2005. In essence there was general support for the consumer participation in its current form. However concerns were expressed about that the language used in consumer related Standards, Codes and Guidelines (SC&G) makes them difficult for consumers to understand. Other major concerns were the lack of compliance with SC&G and lack of enforcement of compliance; the number of consumer bodies in the industry with duplication of activities, and the number of bodies in the industry for which there is no consumer input. The report confirmed that consumers require genuine partnership, shared responsibility and mutual accountability for outcomes.

6.8. "Not so Special" Communications Law Centre report

The following is condensed from the Projects and Services page of the Communications Law Centre (CLC) website at: <http://www.comslaw.org.au>.

In March 2006, the Communications Law Centre (CLC) at Victoria University released *Not So Special: Telecommunications Contracts, Disability and Unfair Practices*, a report which examines disputes between telecommunications providers and people with "judgment-related" disabilities in Victoria. Judgment-related disabilities can include intellectual disabilities, brain injuries, mental illness and dementia. The report suggest changes to law and policy that could help reduce disadvantage, including ways that telecommunications providers could improve their services, modifications that could be made to key codes and legislation, and ideas to heighten consumer awareness of rights and obligations.

"Unfair telecommunications contracts and sales techniques can have a severe impact on someone with a disability," says CLC director Elizabeth Beal. "But while the ACCC has tackled *unconscionable conduct* of traders in other industries by taking legal action, there hasn't yet been a case before the courts specifically dealing with this problem."

The ACIF Disability Council and the ACIF Consumer Council, have been similarly concerned for some time. The ACIF Codes on Prices, Terms and Conditions and Consumer Contracts have not brought about an end to unscrupulous marketing to people with disabilities, in particular people with judgment related disabilities. The ACIF DC and CC recently held a forum dedicated to teasing out a definition of what is meant by 'Informed Consent'. There was no definitive answer, but the forum highlighted the need for service providers to behave in a responsible manner in their dealings with all consumers.

6.9. Making a Complaint

WWDA reminds consumers, and their carers that complaints can be taken to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) at <http://www.tio.com.au>. Follow the links which outline the steps that need to be taken. It is important to note that the TIO will not take any action until you have attempted to resolve your complaint directly.

7. National Survey into the Barriers Confronting Tourists with Disabilities

A national survey of the barriers confronting tourists with disabilities when making travel arrangements, finding accommodation and visiting tourist venues has highlighted the difficulties which tourists with disabilities confront when making arrangements to take a holiday, compared to tourists who do not have the need for accessible facilities. The survey, undertaken by Access for All Alliance, confirms that the number of accessible hotels/motels and other tourist facilities in Australia is low, making holidays for tourists with disabilities difficult and time-consuming to arrange. Access For All Alliance Inc, is a volunteer community group, established to ensure equitable and dignified access to all premises and facilities which the public are able to use.

The survey of 1307 people of all disability types, identified many factors which made their holidays less enjoyable, including:

- difficulty in finding suitable accessible accommodation;
- lack of audio display in hotels/motels and tourist venues;
- lack of Braille and/or tactile signage in hotels/motels and tourist venues;
- no visual alarms for emergency egress in hotels/motels or tourist venues;
- damage to mobility aids on flights;
- lack of awareness/understanding of disability by hotel/motel and tourist venue operators;
- lack of information in alternative formats in both hotels/motels and at tourist venues.

The survey costing \$30.00 (including postage), can be purchased in hard-cover or on CD. The full report can be read from the Access for All Alliance website at: www.accessforall.org.au

For more information contact:

Sheila King (Secretary)
Access For All Alliance Inc
Ph/Fax: (07) 4125 7771
Email: accessforall@bigpond.com
Web: www.accessforall.org.au

8. Supported Accommodation Task Force (SATF) for People with Disabilities (South Australia)

The South Australian Government has recently appointed a task force to examine all aspects of supported accommodation including supply and demand, vacancy management and eligibility. The Minister has agreed that the task force will take public submissions.

If any person with a disability, family member or carer is on a waiting list for supported accommodation or is likely to require supported accommodation in the future or has issues with the current level of support and accommodation that they receive they are strongly encouraged to

make a submission. It is very important that service providers and support agencies advise all their clients, families and associates of the opportunity to make a submission. It is hoped that the Government will advertise this task force and the chance to make submissions and the future public consultations in both the Advertiser and local papers both in the metropolitan and rural areas, otherwise people without internet access will be disadvantaged.

It is thus very important that this task force, the chance to make submissions, and the future public consultative process is broadly communicated by people with a disability, service providers and agencies to all their contacts and associates. The future of supported accommodation is the big, big issue for disability in South Australia.

Submissions should be directed to:

The Executive Officer
Mr. Paul Willey
Ph: 08 8226 6520
Fax: 08 8226 6262
Email: paul.willey@dfc.sa.gov.au

9. National Same-Sex Relationships Inquiry

The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) is conducting a national inquiry into discrimination against same-sex couples regarding access to financial and work-related entitlements. The Inquiry intends to conduct an audit of Commonwealth, State and Territory laws in order to develop a full list of circumstances in which same-sex couples may be denied financial and work-related benefits and entitlements that heterosexual couples enjoy.

The Inquiry will also be collecting individual stories about the impact of such laws on people in same-sex couples, and any children of same-sex couples. The Inquiry will make recommendations to the Federal Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock, and Federal Parliament as to how to address any discrimination.

Terms of Reference, Background Papers and a Discussion Paper "Same-sex Entitlements" are available from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) website. The deadline for written submissions is June 2nd. Verbal submissions will also be taken at subsequent hearings in the state and territory capitals.

Submissions may also be sent to:

Same-Sex Inquiry,
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission,
GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001
Submissions can be emailed to: samesex@humanrights.gov.au
For more information ph: 02 9284 9600

For further information about the inquiry go to <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/samesex/index.html>



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