



Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) Update Report September-October 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 months of September-October 2006. If you have any questions, or would like more information on anything in this report, please email Carolyn or Angela at: wwda@wwda.org.au.

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1. WWDA Projects Update

1.1. Advancing through Advocacy Project

The 'Advancing through Advocacy' Project has continued to consolidate its Register of women with disabilities. Letters were sent to all those on the Register for whom a postal address is held, with hard copies of the Registration proforma and return postage. Negotiations have continued with federal, state and territory administrators of Registers in order to work out the best way to maximise dissemination of information about vacancies on government committees and boards to WWDA Registrants. Different jurisdictions operate their registers in different ways necessitating different arrangements with each. Initiatives to increase the representation of women on boards were discussed by Ministers for Women at their meeting (MINCO) held in Adelaide in September. The Project is incorporating findings from a relevant report from that meeting into its operation. A discussion was held with the ACT Manager of the Office for Women, Bronwyn Webster, ACT Register Secretariat, Fiona Baker, WWDACT representative on the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council for Women, Louise Bannister, and Sue Salthouse to discuss the new online registration format for the ACT Register of Women. Initiatives which will assist already busy women, and women with disabilities who need to accommodate fluctuating energy levels with their desire to do representative work were discussed. Practical mechanisms for setting up mentoring partnerships are also

under consideration. An Ad Hoc meeting with Claire Braund, one of the Directors of the Federal Women on Boards (WOB) Register was attended and strategies for skilling women with disabilities to apply for positions on corporate boards were discussed. The Project Manual for Representatives is currently being prepared for publication.

1.2. Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities Project

Work on all the booklets for the Manual on Violence against Women with Disabilities has progressed at a great pace. The accompanying research work, especially for the booklet which will include a Literary Review and Resources list, has been time consuming and intense with a comprehensive dossier of international and national resources documented. These resources have been analysed and appropriate synopses included giving background information which will be of great use to researchers and individuals wanting further information. All booklets in the 4-booklet manual have now had a considerable amount of graphic design and layout work completed, with most of the text also finalised. The draft booklets have been submitted to the Office for Women for approval. Even at this stage, requests for copies of the manual are coming in to WWDA. It is anticipated that the manual will be ready for distribution early in 2007.

2. Parliamentary Group on Population Development

Goal 1 of the WWDA Strategic Plan (2004-09) is to *promote and protect the rights of women with disabilities internationally, nationally and locally*. At the international level, among its Key Objectives are to increase WWDA's capacity to support women with disabilities in developing countries; and to contribute to relevant international initiatives relating to women with disabilities. To this end, WWDA attended the second roundtable discussion convened by the Parliamentary Group on Population Development, held at Parliament House on September 11.

The meeting discussed *Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals in the Australian Aid Program – the Way Forward*, and was opened by Annmaree O'Keeffe, Deputy Director-General AusAID Global Programs Division, and HIV/AIDS Ambassador for the Asia-Pacific. Of importance is the 2006 AusAID White Paper *Promoting Growth and Stability* which includes an outline of an approach to increased health assistance focussing on basic services for women and children including tackling major diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. It can be accessed at:

http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pubout.cfm?Id=6184_6346_7334_4045_8043.

With guest speakers from all over Australia and internationally from Denmark, much of the discussion related to disability which is acquired by women during the course of their pregnancy, at the time of termination of an unwanted pregnancy or at childbirth. Women are empowered by having the ability to plan their pregnancies and thus control family dynamics and economics. Unfortunately, the unmet need is great with an estimated 120 million women world wide being denied adequate access to contraception, and a US\$700 million shortfall in funding. At least 13% (perhaps as high as 25%) of maternal mortality is attributable to unsafe abortion.

Copies of papers presented at the Roundtable are available on application to WWDA.

3. Welcome to new Office for Women (OfW) Group Manager

WWDA welcomes the appointment of Julia Burns as Group Manager of the Office for Women (OfW) (Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs). Julia's immediately previous position was as the head of the Corporate Services Division of the Australian Bureau of Statistics. We look forward to working with her to further the status of women with disabilities in Australia and the Pacific Region and for positive participation in international processes.

4. Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) Face to Face Meeting

On September 12, AFDO convened its first face-to-face meeting with representatives from its primary membership. The meeting was held in Canberra and was attended by Maryanne Diamond, AFDO Executive Director, Collette O'Neill (AFDO Senior Policy Officer) and Brenda Lacey (Administration Officer) as well as representatives/Executive Directors from WWDA, Blind Citizens Australia, Brain Injury Foundation, Deafness Forum, the Australian Association for the Deaf, Mental Health Alliance, Multicultural People with Disabilities, and the National Council for Intellectual Disability. Ben Wallace (General Manager, Disability and Carers Branch, Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) headed the team from FaCSIA who also attended. Major agenda items were Reports from FaCSIA and each organisation; development of AFDO policy on implementation of the initiative to develop appropriate housing for young people currently in Residential Aged Care; update on the Transport Standards and their Review process; and assessment of Disability Sector Capacity. AFDO had recently surveyed members to assess this latter capacity. To date results show a consistency of responses highlighting lack of funding resources with this shortfall being increasingly coupled with more stringent administrative and reporting requirements. Potential for sharing of overhead costs was explored.

Since the meeting, WWDA has developed an outline on the Young People in Residential Aged Care strategy and further discussion is pending. Separate funding for face-to-face meetings is not available, so future meetings will similarly only be convened in conjunction with other meetings which bring member organisations together.

5. WomenSpeak Meetings

WWDA has participated in a number of events in its role as an affiliate organisation to the WomenSpeak Secretariat. On September 13, WomenSpeak organised an evening function to farewell Kerry Flanagan, outgoing Group Manager of OfW. Marie Coleman (National Foundation for Australian Women), Sue Conde (Vice President UniFEM) and Sue Salthouse (Vice President WWDA) gave farewell salutations to Kerry who has transferred to the Department of Health and Ageing. In her time at OfW Kerry presided over the transfer of the office from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to FaCSIA, and nurtured an excellent working relationship between the OfW and the women's secretariats.

On September 14, WWDA participated in a teleconference chaired by Kerry, with representatives from all the secretariats and the OfW. At this meeting, WWDA requested that it be involved in the development of OfW Safety Agenda training products for Mensline counsellors, justice practitioners and rural nurses. OfW undertook to provide relevant feedback to WWDA when status reports on the justice practitioners and rural nurses projects are received in the future. WWDA also requested that online reports be made available in formats accessible to screen reader users. (This is now a directive for all government websites.) Secretariats provided update reports. Further information on the meeting is available from sudata@optusnet.com.au

6. Access Card Survey

As a representative of AFDO on the Medicare Australia Consumer Communication Group, WWDA has requested feedback on its proposed Access Card. Medicare Australia has trialled a Smart Card in Tasmania for the past several years and is now at the stage of introducing a card which will eventually replace the Medicare Card and in the long term will obviate the need for separate Centrelink cards. The WWDA/AFDO email request – for level of knowledge about the card, and indications of the best way of getting information to individuals with disabilities - has been disseminated twice via the AFDO network. However, scant feedback has been received. It is not clear whether people with disabilities are not receiving information, or whether they have little interest in the introduction of the card. Those who have responded indicate that

they do indeed have a low level of knowledge about the card. This information will be taken to the mid November meeting of the CCG.

7. S4W 'Talking About Work' Focus Groups

In 2003 Security4Women (S4W) undertook a survey of Australian women to identify the key issues for women in relation to their lifelong economic wellbeing. Major findings from that survey included the fact that work arrangements which helped to balance family and other responsibilities, wage equality and access to secure well paid jobs, were of pivotal importance to women. Earlier this year S4W undertook a follow-up survey. The prevalence of work-related issues in responses has prompted S4W to organise to do further work in this area. It is in the process of undertaking a series of Focus Groups Australia-wide, talking with a cross section of women in the workforce. The Focus Groups will enable participants to elaborate on the reasons they undertake paid work, issues which have been apparent in entering/continuing in the workforce, with some attention also given to discussion of the role and significance of unpaid work in our lives. WWDA will facilitate one of the Focus Groups with women with disabilities in the ACT workforce. The Focus Groups have been tightly scripted to ensure consistency Australia wide; facilitators have met with the research analysts by teleconference, with follow-up contact has been made by the researchers. The results of the Focus Groups will inform an S4W policy paper and ultimately be conveyed to the OfW.

8. First National Civil Society Dialogue

The first national Civil Society Dialogue – *What kind of Australia do we want?* – was held at Parliament House (APH) on 8-9 October. Sponsored by the Members Equity Bank, the forum was jointly organised by the ACOSS, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the ACTU and the National Council of Churches in Australia. The forum gave the opportunity for a wide range of speakers to examine current challenges facing our society ranging from 'big picture' ecological questions to equally to the all-encompassing questions of addressing social justice inequities. There was strong representation of speakers from indigenous communities, including Jacki Katona from the Lumbu Indigenous Community Foundation, and writer Lillian Holt, Director of the Centre for Indigenous Education at the University of Melbourne.

Sessions included in-depth examination of the features of an inclusive society at which former Commissioner of HREOC, Sev Ozkowski was a panellist. Sue Salthouse was a panel member of a session which examined the cornerstones of *Fair Communities*. Led by David Thompson, Chair of the National Roundtable of Non-profit Organisations, the panel also included Frank Quinlan (Catholic Social Services) and Rosemary Young (Frontier Services). WWDA's paper used a Human Rights framework to examine the structure of Fair Communities, drawing on international UN conventions such as the Convention for the (Elimination of all forms of) Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention to Protect the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (August 2006), and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981) to further examine the universally declared set of rights. At the national level for people with disabilities there are Disability Service Standards, and Disability Standards which should make equitable, inclusive communities a guaranteed reality. That a significant percentage of people with disabilities live in isolation and extreme poverty signifies that attitudinal barriers continue to over-ride the Human Rights scaffold.

Copies of WWDA's paper are available on request from wwda@wwda.org.au.

9. Meetings with Politicians

On October 9, WWDA President, Annie Parkinson, and Vice President, Sue Salthouse, met with Anna McEachern, Chief Adviser (Women's Issues) to The Hon. Minister Julie Bishop (Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues). The meeting afforded us the opportunity to discuss a number of gender issues which are current and of particular importance to women with disabilities. These included the sterilisation of girls and women with disabilities; violence against women with disabilities, and issues surrounding

reproductive rights, pregnancy and motherhood for women with disabilities. In addition a number of international issues were discussed including CEDAW and its subsequent International Protocol, as well as the recently concluded Convention to Protect the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In a more generalist vein, there was discussion on education, and initiatives to promote the role of women in science. Ms McEachern was generous with her time, and constructive with assimilation of information given to her, whilst at the same time assisting us with suggestions for future actions which might assist WWDA in achieving its objectives.

On October 10, a similar meeting was held with Senator Andrew Bartlett (Queensland Democrat Senator) and his Adviser Karen Lee. After an initial discussion of the issues outlined above, the dialogue ranged from an examination of the challenges facing constituents in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia and with particular reference to Queensland, and to the important role of accessible, affordable telecommunications networks for people with disabilities irrespective of their geographic location. WWDA was appreciative of the time given to us by Senator Bartlett.

10. Senate Inquiry into CSTDA

Following consideration of the WWDA submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth State and Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA) by the Senate Community Affairs References and Legislation Committee, WWDA was invited to appear as a witness to this Inquiry. Hearings were held in Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Glenelg (Adelaide) and the final one at which WWDA presented, being held at Parliament House (APH). Broadly, WWDA reiterated that women with disabilities have a disproportionately low share of the CSTDA service pie, and that that this is a contributory factor inhibiting their ability to participate equitably in Australian life. Questions from the Committee members explored reasons for this, highlighted that there is insufficient data for restorative policies and programs to be put in place to rectify the situation; and explored the usability of current data sources. On questioning, WWDA reiterated that it is not in favour of a separate service being set up for its constituents, but emphasised its call for equitable distribution of current services. Senators were concerned about the necessity to measure 'unmet need' and WWDA was able to draw on anecdotal evidence that a number of its constituents do not request services in the belief that they would not be eligible or that the services are unavailable. Transcripts of the Inquiry hearings are at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/cstda/hearings/index.htm

11. Poverty as a Human Right

To mark Anti-Poverty Week, the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) invited ABC Television Reporter Jennie Brockie to host a Canberra Breakfast on October 20. The meeting brought together 70 community organisations, including WWDA, and government leaders to debate the issue of a human rights based approach to poverty eradication. The tenet that *We should adopt a Human Rights based approach to Poverty Eradication* was explored by panellists Margaret Reynolds (former Senator and current President of the United Nations Association of Australia), Lin Hatfield-Dodds (President ACOSS and National Director of Uniting Care Australia) and Russell Rollason (Vice President of UNAA and former Executive Officer of Anglicare Australia). Margaret Reynolds examined the current international focus on poverty with the enunciation of the Millennium Development Goals and their applicability to the situation for the 2.5 million Australians who remain in poverty and at risk of homelessness. Lin Hatfield-Dodds outlined the ACOSS perspective which is Human Rights based and includes a vision for social justice for individuals and groups, where 'Hope' is the positive beacon which enables organisations such as ACOSS to continue to work towards construction of a Fair Society. Russell Rollason, playing devil's advocate, countered with the argument that a Human Rights approach allows the rich to abdicate their responsibility to address the rights of the poor. He further argued that governments need to also take responsibility and have a targets-based approach to the eradication of poverty, where benchmarks are set, programs planned and there is an accountability outline to measure progress achieved. WWDA represented the viewpoint of those for whom there are additional barriers to the elimination of poverty.

12. WWDA Annual General Meeting

The WWDA AGM was held by teleconference on October 30. The WWDA Management Committee for 2006-07 was elected as nominated. WWDA has pleasure in announcing this as:

Annie Parkinson	President
Sue Salthouse	Vice President
Vicki Alipasinopolous	Secretary
Pamela Menere	Treasurer
Sheila King	Committee Member
Kate List	Committee Member
Helen Meekosha	Committee Member
Josephine Dixon	Committee Member
Margie Charlesworth	Committee Member

President, Annie Parkinson thanked all the 2005-06 Management Committee and WWDA staff for their exemplary input over the past year, conveyed special thanks to outgoing committee member Lina Pane, and welcomed back from her overseas study sojourn Margie Charlesworth. The meeting was also attended in an observer role by Terri Bates.



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