



Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

‘Women On The Web’

A Project to support women with disabilities
to cross the Digital Divide and access the
Internet

Final Report

September 2003

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Winner Australian Human Rights Award 2001
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Introduction

The Project "*Women on the Web*" was undertaken between June and September 2003 by the Telecommunications Group of Women With Disabilities Australia Inc. It formed a part of a larger "*Telecommunications Consumer Representation Grant*" Project in which the Telecommunications Group represent the interests of women with disabilities in Information and Communication Technologies through membership of a number of telecommunications consumer advisory bodies.

Women With Disabilities Australia is supported in this by the Commonwealth through the Telecommunications Consumer Representation program of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

Women with disabilities are among the most marginalised of groups in their ability to take advantage of Information and Communication Technology. This applies especially in the area of Information Technology. The term Digital Divide has been coined to describe the gulf which exists between those for whom the Internet is an every day tool and those who are denied its use. Women with disabilities are over represented in the latter group. The Project's aim was to support women with disabilities in the ACT to cross the Digital Divide and improve their access to the Internet.

This report documents the findings of the Project. WWDA hopes it will inform those who may be engaged in similar endeavours.

Carolyn Frohmader
Executive Director

1. Background

Since the late nineties Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) has been concerned that the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is occurring in such a way as to restrict women with disabilities from having equitable access to it.

The WWDA platform in telecommunications is for ICT information, services and equipment to be designed to be accessible and available to women with disabilities at affordable cost. In addition WWDA encourages all sectors of the ICT industry to consult people with disabilities in the inaugural stages of design of equipment, and the incorporation of universal design features in equipment. Further WWDA promotes the ideal of maximising compatibility (or 'Any-to-Any' connectivity) of all ICT equipment.

This platform includes support for initiatives which seek to bridge the Digital Divide. People with disabilities are one of the marginalised groups who are on the 'wrong side' of the Digital Divide. Women with disabilities are at a greater disadvantage than their male counterparts in gaining access to the Internet.

A national survey in 1999 found that 84% of women with disabilities are restricted in their access to telecommunications. Forty-nine per cent of responses from women with disabilities cited restrictions due to issues of affordability; 76% due to poor design of telecommunications equipment; 20% due to lack of training; 20% due to lack of information; and 18% due to discrimination.

A number of factors relegate women with disabilities to the ranks of those on low income. Among the causes are lower levels of education, employment, and if employed lower levels of remuneration than other women and men with disabilities.

A study conducted by WWDA in 2000 [1] found that the costs of purchasing, operating/maintaining and getting internet connections for a computer were major factors preventing women with disabilities from accessing the Internet. Access to affordable and appropriate training was also a major barrier.

Women place great importance on social interaction - networking and maintaining contact with family and friends. Many women with disabilities experience a high degree of social isolation with consequent negative affect on their self esteem, mental health and general well being. Telecommunications play a large part in overcoming this isolation. In the WWDA study respondents ranked contact with family and friends as their highest priority for using the Internet. It is ironic that this group with high need for Internet communication is denied access to the Internet.

One of the objectives of the WWDA Telecommunications Consumer Representation Grant Project is to support initiatives which seek to promote equitable access to the Internet for disadvantaged groups. The 7-member WWDA Telecommunications Group identified the "Women on the Web" Project as fulfilling the above objective. The Project was administered by Sue Salthouse, co-ordinator of the WWDA Telecommunications Group.

For further information about WWDA and the position of women with disabilities in Australia see Appendix 1.

2. Project Aims

- ❖ The "Women on the Web" Project aimed to support women with disabilities in the ACT to cross the Digital Divide and access the Internet.
- ❖ The "Women on the Web" Project aimed to find feasible means of similarly supporting women whose disabilities restricted their ability to get out into the community.

3. Objectives

The Objectives of the Project are to:

- 3.1 Make contact with women with disabilities who want support to increase their ability to access the Internet.
- 3.2 Identify the individual ICT needs of Project respondents.
- 3.3 Identify the most economical places to purchase and service computers.
- 3.4 Identify the most economical plans offered by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) operating in the ACT.
- 3.5 Identify free or low cost computing and Internet training courses available in the ACT.

- 3.6 Identify Community Access Points in the ACT where computers with Internet connection are available at no (or low) cost.
- 3.7 Identify organisations or individuals willing to act as 'buddies' to Project respondents by sharing skills in a one-on-one support situation.

4. Strategies & Actions

4.1 Disseminate information about the Project.

This was done by Media Release to the Chronicle Newspaper (a free weekly community newspaper delivered to households Canberra-wide), and to the compere of the "Morning" program at the local ABC Radio station. Both the newspaper and the radio station responded to the media release.

The Project co-ordinator had a 10-minute on-air interview about the Project on the morning of 28 July 2003.

A photo opportunity was set up at the Council of the Ageing (ACT) [COTA] computer training facility on 20 July 2003, and an article about the Project was in the Chronicle on Tuesday 5 August 2003.

4.2 Questionnaire

It was necessary to identify the individual ICT needs of respondents so that the support given could be tailored to meet these requirements. A questionnaire was developed to enable a detailed profile to be drawn up. All questionnaires were completed by phone interviews with the respondents.

4.3 Sources of affordable computers

A number of avenues were investigated to source affordable computers – GreenPC, Personal Computer User Group (PCUG) of the ACT and Charity Computers. In addition Darrell Burkey from Computing Assistance Support and Education was approached for information about likely sources of computers. None was identified.

Charity Computers offered the most affordable computers and most economical after-sale repair and help desk service. Charity Computers is a not-for-profit ACT organisation, providing computer services to individuals on low income or holders of concession cards and to other

not-for-profit organisations. Like GreenPC, they also refurbish computers. A complete set-up with computer [2], monitor, mouse, modem and power cords costs \$50 and comes with a 12 month guarantee. Windows 98 and a shareware word processing program are pre-loaded on each computer. When available printers are given away and are not under guarantee.

Charity Computers runs a free helpdesk service from 9.00 – 5.00 Monday to Friday, conducts beginner lessons from \$25 per day (often one-on-one tuition) and a repair service for \$10 per hour.

This organisation ably fulfilled the Project's needs for a source of affordable computers, with the only shortcoming being their location in a suburb not easily accessible by public transport.

The Manager of Charity Computers worked co-operatively with the Project co-ordinator to make sure that the standard refurbished computers would be suitable for women with disabilities.

It was necessary to check that the shareware program for word processing was similar to Microsoft Word. A computing novice can be easily disheartened if their own software differs markedly from that used at their training location. The shareware passed the test.

Checks were also made to ensure that the shareware was compatible with the voice recognition program (Dragon Version 7 Naturally Speaking) being used by one of the organisations conducting training. The shareware was able to support the voice recognition program software.

In addition, Charity Computers was amenable to providing a higher capacity computer capable of running a screen reader software program, so that the project would be able to accommodate the needs of women with disabilities who are blind.

Charity Computers has an important twin function. The computer refurbishments and repairs are done under supervision by people who are training in the 'Work for the Dole' program run by the organisation.

Details about the other computer sources considered are in Appendix 2.

4.4 Internet Service Providers

The task here was to find affordable Internet Service Provider (ISP) plans. Plans needed to be found which did not rely on credit card automatic deductions for payments. Many women on disability support pensions or other Centrelink Allowance do not own, or have access to a

Credit Card. Nor do they have cheque accounts. The ability to make payments by cash or money order was essential. In addition, the ISP plans had to give value for money regarding the maximum number of connection hours included. Third, the ISP plans had to include a reasonable download capacity, so that net 'surfing' could be undertaken without the risk of penalty costs. Fourth, the ISPs plans had to have no (or low) joining fee. Finally the ISP Plan had to have a low monthly fee.

An online search was made of twenty different ISPs to locate plans which best suited the above criteria. Two ACT companies (Cyberone and Webone) were approached for sponsorship. Neither company was willing to offer either sponsorship or concession rates. The latter was contacted on its final trading day, and the new owners indicated they were not in a position to consider special offers for some time. No ISPs offer plans with concessions to holders of a pension card.

As some respondents (4) did have credit cards, information on 2 credit card payment plans was also obtained.

Only land-line plan information was sent out to respondents. However they were invited to ask for a search to be done for broadband or other connection methods where applicable.

Affordable plans meeting these criteria were difficult to find.

Details of the short-listed ISP plans are in Appendix 3.

4.5 Community Access Points and Training Locations

A list of Community Access Points (CAPs) and community training locations was drawn up. It contained information about CAP organisations, their locations, contact details to make bookings, opening hours, and the number of computers available. It also gave information about whether Roving Tutors [3] or other teaching was available. Also included was information about specific free or low cost training courses. The list was organised by Canberra geographic areas. Most Canberra libraries have free-access computers and are in the Roving Tutor scheme, so a brochure on library opening hours was included.

4.6 General Information Sheet

A general information sheet was compiled, giving simple explanations about PCs/MACs, ISPs, Connection Costs (remembering to include the cost of phone calls in calculations about overall costs), download, megabytes, modems, etc.

4.7 ACT Government Booklet

An ACT Government booklet 'Welcome to the World of Computers and the Internet' contains basic information on computing and using the Internet. It is an easy to use guide designed to provide people with an opportunity to develop their computer, Internet and email skills. It was produced to assist in bridging the Digital Divide in the ACT and has been made available free of charge at all libraries and most CAPs.

4.8 Information Kit

After completing the questionnaire, it was possible to draw up a profile of each respondent's needs. Accordingly information was selected from 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.7. The 5-page table in 4.5 was sent as a unit, so that respondents had information on all CAP/Training locations, not just the area closest to their homes.

The appropriate selection of sheets formed an Information Kit which was mailed to respondents. All respondents received the General Information sheet (4.7).

4.9 Buddies

One of the aims of the Project was to identify people who would be willing to act as tutors or 'buddies' to the respondents. The biggest challenge for WWDA in projects aiming to bridge the Digital Divide is to assist women whose disabilities restrict their ability to get out into the community, making it difficult for them to use the CAP computers or the free training. These are also the women whose social isolation is greatest, for whom the Internet offers great benefit.

Negotiations were commenced with PCUG at an early stage in the Project. To date despite their co-operation, it has not been possible to put any buddy scheme in place. PCUG volunteers tutor learners at a number of CAPs and other locations.

At one stage, a breakthrough was imminent with the discovery of the SeniorNet group and their buddy scheme. Their website was still in existence, but the group had ceased operation in 2002.

One person volunteered her assistance after reading the article in the Chronicle. A respondent in the same suburb was notified of this offer and for confidentiality the onus was on her to contact the potential 'buddy'.

5. ACT Council of the Ageing

The ACT Council of the Ageing (COTA) conducts computing and Internet training for people 50 years old or more on a pension. People less than 50 years of age on a Disability Support Pension are also eligible. Training is tailored to individual needs, and consists of 5 x 2-hours sessions. COTA also teaches members of the Southpaw Stroke Club and so has experience teaching people with disabilities. It was the only training location which used assistive equipment – track balls as an alternative to the mouse, and 'Dragon Naturally Speaking Version 7.0' voice recognition software. However COTA's training capacity was limited by the number of computers available – only two.

WWDA was able to donate a computer with 19" monitor to COTA to increase their training capacity. The computer had become available in Canberra at the end of the project "Increasing Access to Online Information for Women With Disabilities" [4]. Both now and in the future COTA will be able to offer training places to women with disabilities of any age on low income.

6. Respondents

Only 9 people responded to the publicity, 2 following the radio interview and the remainder from the newspaper article. In the latter group, one respondent was a primary carer of a woman with disability.

Five respondents were on a Disability Support Pension (DSP), two on NewStart Allowance, one on Compensation Insurance [5] and one on low income (a couple's combined annual income less than \$40,000).

One respondent was in the 21-30 year age range, one in the 31-40 year age range, four in the 41-50 year age range and three in the 51-60 year age range.

All had no, or only slight restrictions preventing them from getting out, with 5 owning a car although finances limited how much each car was used. For 4 respondents their ability to get out fluctuated depending on their health status.

Only two respondents already owned a computer. One respondent was a MAC user.

All respondents had some computing and Internet experience. All wanted extra training or 'refresher' training, with one person having high level skills but needing retraining to use a

voice recognition program. The primary carer wanted advice on ISP plans which would give unlimited download.

Only one respondent in need of technical and software program support did not have a friend or family member on whom they could call for technical and computing/Internet assistance.

All respondents were sent Information Kits by 20 August.

7. Follow-up

Follow-up phone calls were made in September.

Respondent A: had purchased a computer from Charity Computers, had completed a word processing course at a school CAP and was to continue with an Excel course. She frequented the school's 'drop-in' sessions for advice between lessons and used the local library to access the Internet. Advice was given about free email accounts, and 'A' was confident of being able to set up an account with student's help.

Respondent B: had bought a computer, and was budgeting to connect to the DODO.com.au \$9.90 plan after Christmas.

Respondent C: had resumed contact with the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service. Changes in the nature of her disabilities meant a need to change the type of work she was doing. Through the CRS she was retraining in computing and Internet skills. Her success with this, plus the probability of soon getting a hearing aid had boosted confidence. She had contacted Charity Computers and was budgeting to buy a computer from them.

Respondent D: was waiting to take delivery of an I-MAC which was located by another Canberra member of the WWDA Telecommunications Group and donated to the Project.

Respondent E: was using the pre-paid ISP's (as recommended to her carer) and was better managing her Internet use.

Respondent F: continued to struggle with a shareware 'Office' program on a laptop computer. Although the program mimics Microsoft Office, she was not familiar enough with that program to adapt to the shareware program.

She was encouraged to use the same facility used by 'A' to get help with her laptop program and to do a word processing course as a 'refresher'.

Respondent G: had found the amount of information sent too daunting to process, and did not want to proceed further.

Respondent H: had not taken any action due to changed financial circumstances. It was not possible to contact the ninth respondent.

8. Discussion

8.1 Dissemination of information about the Project.

There were limitations to using only the media to disseminate information, especially when there was no follow-up media exposure. Wider dissemination of information is effective through specific disability organisations, supported accommodation houses, services providing assistance to people with disabilities and community services. However this strategy requires a long lead time to get information out because the various organisations send newsletters at different times and at irregular intervals. As a consequence responses also come in over a long time period. The time and funds allocated to the Project made this approach impractical.

8.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was an essential tool for the Project. However it was difficult for respondents to describe their skill level. Face-to-face meetings at a computer would be necessary for this but was beyond the scope of this Project. It is also difficult for respondents with little knowledge of how the Internet and email can be used to articulate what they would use it for. Naturally the respondents on NewStart Allowance had a specific, immediate need for job searching skills.

One respondent expressed a specific need for assistance with genealogy searches and therefore needed retraining in word processing and using basic Internet search engine skills as a precursor to achieving that goal.

8.3 Sources of affordable computers

Sources of affordable computers are few. A donated computer or one bought second-hand through the paper, at a market or from a friend comes without guarantee. It would be impossible for a novice buyer to purchase in this way. The GreenPC computers refurbished through Infoxchange in Melbourne cost a minimum of \$250 plus freight charge to Canberra of

at least \$100 and have only a 3-month guarantee. Once again a novice would be unable to assess the suitability of the computers' specifications. Ironically the shopping and sales are done over the Internet.

Government Departments and private corporations may have an altruistic desire to donate their redundant computer stock to marginalised individuals on the wrong side of the Digital Divide. However without an infrastructure which can manage software licence changeover and post-donation services such computers are unsuitable for most recipients.

Fortunately for the Project, there is a single suitable source of computers in Canberra – Charity Computers. Its product and follow-up services are excellent. Nevertheless for people on Centrelink allowances even the \$50 cost of computers from this organisation is a big lump-sum outlay.

For much of the time Charity Computers has an excess of supply. Federal (Centrelink) and Territory Governments may need to think about a voucher system which would enable people on Centrelink Allowances to purchase computers. Alternatively a subsidy scheme for an organisation such as Charity Computers would enable computers to be supplied at a lower cost. Certainly such organisations need support to continue to operate.

The cost of assistive software also needs to be considered. A screen reader program (such as 'JAWS') costs approximately \$1500, whilst a voice recognition program (such as 'Dragon Speaking Naturally v.7.0') is approximately \$800. Specific disability organisations may sometimes be able to subsidise hardware, software and training costs for members. Sometimes it is possible to get software cheaply when a version is made redundant. This is unreliable and unsatisfactory for people in urgent need.

8.4 Internet Service Providers

There is very little on offer which is affordable for people on low income. Lack of credit card or cheque account is a further limitation. The same irony exists as in Para.8.3 that it is very difficult to find out about ISPs except on the Internet. The Canberra Yellow Pages Directory offers 45 different service providers from which to choose. Each provider has a plethora of different plans.

The Cyberone Cyberlite plan was the only one found which fitted the criteria for cash/money order payment, unlimited time, reasonable download (50mb) and reasonable cost (\$11 set-up and \$8.50 per month). Similarly there was a single credit card only plan, DODO.com.au offered affordable connection (\$9.90 per month for unlimited time and unlimited download).

Respondents who lived in a household where others had higher income were able to use the household's Internet-connected computer. Respondents living independently face great challenges in getting connected.

There is no culture amongst ISPs of providing free or concession rates to any of the marginalised groups on the wrong side of the Digital Divide. Federal or Territory Governments may need to consider regulations or incentives for ISPs which would make this happen.

8.5 Community Access Points and Training Locations

All of the CAPs and training programs operate with support grants from the ACT Government. The libraries' facilities are part of the ACT Government's Public Library Service. Continuation of this Government support is essential for bridging the Digital Divide.

Experience in previous WWDA projects [6] has shown that many women with disabilities assimilate new information slowly, and that repetition of exercises is often necessary.

Low esteem, low energy levels, high pain levels and mental health problems can lead to loss of concentration and poor retention of new information. Many women with disabilities are coping with these difficulties when trying to learn new skills.

Training courses for women with disabilities need to be flexible with the opportunity for extra hours to be added.

8.6 General Information Sheet

The co-ordinator was aware of the responsibility of undertaking a Project such as this. Advising people on low income about ways of spending money is risky. Of necessity the Information Sheet began with a caveat that respondents took individual responsibility in purchasing hardware, software and services.

A newcomer to ICT is faced with a minefield of jargon – PCs, MACs, megabytes, modems, ISPs, downloads, dial-up, broadband – which can be daunting. The Information Sheet tried to address give basic information in Plain English but may have just added to the plethora of information.

8.7 ACT Government Booklet

As noted in Para. 8.5, acquisition of new skills can be challenging for women with disabilities. The Government Booklet serves as an excellent '*aide memoire*' for the beginner.

8.8 Information Kit

Unfortunately the Project was not able to offer face-to-face one-on-one support to respondents. All respondents would have benefited from this.

The Information Kit varied in size from a minimum of 5 'A4' pages (Location of CAPs & Training Courses) to a maximum of 16 pages plus the ACT Government Booklet. For the reason outlined in Para.8.5 this was a great deal of printed information for respondents to digest. Respondent G had found that the written information was overwhelming and withdrew from the Project. It is likely that all respondents found it was difficult to wade through.

Although respondents were invited to phone for extra help they did not do so. Having received the Information Kit all subsequent decision-making had to be done by the respondents themselves.

It was heartening that 5 of the 9 respondents had used the information sent and had made progress in learning new computer/Internet skills and getting their own software/hardware.

8.9 Buddies

All of the respondents had access to public or private transport, so the aim to support women whose disabilities restricted their ability to get out into the community was not addressed. This was fortunate because no effective 'buddies' were identified.

For both parties, there are inherent problems of privacy, personal safety and security in having two virtual strangers meet up in a private home. The person with disabilities is particularly vulnerable. Many women with disabilities will have experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse during their lifetime. This can make them very apprehensive of a situation where a stranger enters the home.

Where individuals volunteer their services, there are insurance problems for both the householder and the volunteer in the case of accident to persons or damage to equipment. Ideally security screening of buddies should be done to be sure of their suitability for the 'buddied' individuals. It is also necessary to know that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to pass that knowledge on. Goodwill is not sufficient to make the buddying happen safely and successfully.

Where an organisation is involved they must carry their own insurance to cover their members who work as volunteers.

Women with disabilities in supported accommodation have greater likelihood of having a buddy – housemate, carer, regular visitor – in the house to assist and support them in accessing the Internet.

One model currently being trialled in the ACT involves a major Disability Services Provider. This organisation has appointed a Computer Officer who trains and supports clients and their carers in their own homes. The scheme is small at present with a small number of people being supported. Nevertheless it has merit.

The ACT Community IT Access Plan has begun a pilot program administered from the Department of Health which is exploring access and training possibilities for people whose disabilities prevent them getting to CAPs.

Much work needs to be done to develop effective ways of supporting and training people with disabilities in their homes.

8.10 General

The Project commenced in early June with work being done to design the questionnaire and gather the background information on all computer sources, ISPs, CAPs and buddying. These were all time consuming tasks. Getting up-to-date information about the CAPs and training courses was extremely frustrating. The situation is one of shifting sands with the scene changing almost on a weekly basis.

As the above discussion indicates, all actions that the respondents may take to get connected are fraught with the difficulty of making selections of products in an area where the purchaser has scant knowledge. All options found were still expensive for people on low income.

The ACT Community IT Access Plan recognises the additional Digital Divide problems facing people with disabilities whose ability to get out into the community is restricted. It contains a clause to investigate subsidising access for people in this situation through a PC Reuse Scheme and an Internet Access Community Service Obligation. WWDA supports such initiatives and looks forward to them being implemented.

9. Conclusion

Bridging the Digital Divide for women with disabilities continues to present challenges. All the costs associated with accessing the Internet continue to make it extremely difficult for women in this marginalised group. Commonwealth and Territory Governments as well as private

companies need to give subsidies and concessions to people with disabilities on low income to assist them to access the Internet.

The Project achieved a small measure of success in meeting its first aim 'to support women with disabilities in the ACT to cross the Digital Divide and access the Internet'. However it did not meet its second aim 'to find feasible means of similarly supporting women whose disabilities restricted their ability to get out into the community.

Endnotes

- [1] Telecommunications and Women with Disabilities, WWDA 1999.
- [2] Pentium with a minimum of 32 Meg Ram and a 1 GIG hard drive.
- [3] The Roving Tutor Scheme operates as part of the ACT Community IT Access Plan. A number of computer teachers follow a schedule of attendance at various CAPs. Individuals can make bookings at their preferred CAP for an individual lesson with a Roving Tutor.
- [4] This project was conducted by WWDA from 1998-2000, using a grant from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts 'Networking the Nation' initiative.
- [5] This respondent had been on the DSP, but was then awarded an initial component of compensation payment after a workplace accident. The current remuneration is \$4/fortnight above the previous DSP. However loss of benefits attached to the DSP has meant the person is now financially much worse off. Such situations are not uncommon for people with disabilities who may work for low income and no longer qualify for the DSP.
- [6] "Increasing Access to Online Information for Women With Disabilities" Project WWDA 1998-2000, "Telecommunications and Women with Disabilities" Report WWDA 1999, and "Telecommunications Use by Women with Disabilities in remote, rural and regional Australia, Report WWDA 2001.

Appendix 1: About Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the peak organisation for women with all types of disabilities in Australia. WWDA was established in 1994, and became incorporated in 1995. It is a federating body of individuals and networks in each State and Territory of Australia and is made up of women with disabilities and associated organisations. WWDA is run by women with disabilities, for 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.

WWDA is a national voice for the needs and rights of women with disabilities and a national force to improve the lives and life chances of women with disabilities. The objectives of WWDA are:

- ❖ to actively promote the participation of women with disabilities in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life;
- ❖ to advocate on issues of concern to women with disabilities in Australia; and
- ❖ to seek to be the national representative organisation for women with disabilities in Australia by: undertaking systemic advocacy; providing policy advice; undertaking research; and providing support, information and education.

WWDA is managed by a National Management Committee, which is made up of women with disabilities and which is elected each year at the Annual General Meeting. The members of WWDA are actively involved in the decision making processes of the organisation. All programs and activities conducted by WWDA are in direct response to the identified issues and concerns of women with disabilities in Australia. WWDA is a registered charitable organisation with Public Benevolent Institution status which means that donations made to the organisation over \$2 are tax deductible.

WWDA is at the forefront of support and advocacy, with, and on behalf of, women with disabilities in Australia, both individually and collectively. WWDA's major roles, functions, and activities include (but are not restricted to):

- Provision of direct practical assistance and advocacy to individual women with disabilities;
- Provision of systemic advocacy for women with disabilities collectively;

- Research and policy development;
- Project development and implementation;
- Addressing the issue of empowerment and women with disabilities, both individually and collectively;
- Quality Improvement

Appendix 2: Sources of Affordable Computers

There were not many avenues to search for affordable computers.

GreenPCs: Infoxchange Australia runs the GreenPC program which refurbishes donated computers. Details are available at <http://www.greenpc.com.au/>. Prices for the re-birthed computers of sufficient capacity to access the Internet, commence at more than \$200, with delivery charges ranging from \$35 to \$160 depending on the location of the buyer. Computers are sold with a short 3-month guarantee. The purchase is done on-line and the buyer needs to have some knowledge about computer specifications to be able to make a judgement about the suitability of a prospective purchase. All these factors made GreenPCs an unsatisfactory source.

PCUG: The Personal Computer User Group (PCUG) of the ACT conducts regular sale days for members. Pensioner concession membership costs \$38.50. Although membership confers many advantages, all respondents considered the membership cost too high. Similarly knowledge of computer specifications is necessary to be able to purchase a used computer at such a sale. The random range of goods offered at such sales makes it difficult for someone needing a complete computer set-up. Naturally there is no guarantee on equipment purchased in this way. These factors made the PCUG an unsatisfactory source.

CASE: Computing Assistance Support and Education was formed to assist Australian individuals and community organisations in making better use of information technology to accomplish their goals. CASE occasionally is donated computers which are refurbished and donated back to the community. However, in this instance its founder and Director, Darrell Burkey, was approached for information about possible sources of affordable computers. None was identified.

Appendix 3. ISP Plans of best-fit to the Project Criteria

The search for ISP plans which best fitted the Project criteria was exhaustive and fruitless. Respondents were sent plan information according to their individual requirements. The short-list of plans follows:

Cyberone: Their Cyber-Lite Plan offered unlimited hours, a 50 megabyte (mb) monthly download limit, for a set-up fee of \$11 and \$8.50 monthly fee. Contracts were for a minimum of 3 months. The outlay of \$36.50 for the initial contract was payable by cash, cheque, money order (or credit card). Signing of the initial contract involved a trip to offices in the city centre, accessible by public transport. This was the only affordable plan located.

Netspeed: Their Extreme 100 Plan offered unlimited hours, a 100mb monthly download limit, for a set-up fee of \$20 and \$19.95 monthly fee. Although more expensive, Netspeed did not require a 3-month contract. Their offices, at Curtin Shopping Centre, are suitably located for respondents living on the south side of Canberra.

DODO.com.au: Their 3-months dial-up plan cost \$69.90/month and included unlimited time and unlimited download. Payment could be made by Credit Card, Cheque or Money Order. The initial outlay would be beyond the saving capacity of most women with disabilities on low income.

PCUG: This group offer 3-month/75 hour plan for \$41.80, 6-month/150 hour plan for \$71.80, and 12-month/300 hour plan for \$145.20. Added to this is the \$38.50 concession membership fee, and the initial payment of \$80.30 became prohibitive. Although membership of the club confers many benefits, and has the potential for learners to find a co-member 'buddy' to give help, the cost and scope of the plans offered was limiting.

Pre- paid Plans: A number of these were investigated, and at the time of the Project, the most economical on offer was an OptusNet product. It offered 15 hours/60 days, unlimited download for \$19.95, with a top-up 5 hours if

the next disk was registered before the expiry of the first. Ten consecutive top-ups gained a 60-hour bonus, making a \$200 outlay for 260 hours. Although the 'surfing' hours were low and the cost per hour relatively high, such plans do allow the user to 'pace themselves' with spending. However, there is the added inconvenience of having to buy each month, and having to remember to do so before the expiry. Unfortunately, the plans are only available on CD, and this could have been a limiting factor if users had older computers. The majority of the computers available from Charity Computers did have a CD-drive.

OptusNet: Credit Card Only Plan. The OptusNet Dial-up NetRollover plans allow unlimited download each month. Any unused hours for the months are automatically rolled over to the next month for a maximum of 3 months. On signup, 100 bonus hours were available for use in the first month. The NetRollover 15 (15 hours) cost \$14.95/month, and NetRollover 20 (20 hours) cost \$17.95/month.

DODO.com.au: Credit Card Only Plan. For \$9.90/month, this Plan offered unlimited hours, a 70mb monthly download limit, free help desk (0800-2300), 10mb website space, 5 email addresses and other services. This plan was by far the most affordable, but had the credit card payment only limitation.