Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) Ltd

Annual Report 2012-2013

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Produced by Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) Ltd

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**Directors’ Report**

**Introduction**

DANA has worked hard in the past year to consolidate its position as the representative body for independent disability advocacy organisations across Australia and as the means by which the interests of those people with disabilities who rely on advocacy agencies to take up their issues are represented in national level policy discussion and decision-making processes. During this period much of our work has focused on promoting understanding of the role and value of independent advocacy in particular in relation to the National Disability Insurance Scheme; monitoring and reporting on challenges with the implementation of the new National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) quality assurance processes; scrutinizing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) legislation and rules; and contributing to the development of the Shadow Report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

DANA’s membership and funding base has continued to grow, a policy officer and a part-time communications officer have been added to create a staff team, and the DANA office, which we share with Homelessness Australia, has been established. During the year DANA has undertaken a range of complex projects and has proven itself to have the capacity to advocate effectively for the disability advocacy sector at the National level.

**Advocating for People with Disabilities**

**National Disability Strategy**

In this period DANA worked to maintain a focus on the National Disability Strategy in the reform agenda. DANA met several times with the COAG Reform Team and worked to ensure this important driver of reform was not overshadowed by the monumental effort to establish a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

**National Disability Insurance Scheme**

Advocating in favour of establishment of a National Disability Insurance Scheme and monitoring and contributing to the development of the framework for the NDIS was perhaps the primary area of work in this period.

The first half of the year DANA primarily focused on safeguards and complaints mechanisms. DANA met with the NDIS Taskforce and the NDIS Quality Standards and Safeguards Expert Group to promote the DANA position based on the DANA Independent Advocacy Research Paper and Complaints Review paper. In these meetings as well as in meetings with a range of parliamentarians, DANA aimed to enhance the understanding of why advocacy support will remain essential and necessary within the NDIS.

From late 2012 DANA began the enormous task of providing detailed feedback on the legislative and regulatory framework being built for the NDIS. DANA provided written submissions, presentations and verbal feedback on the NDIS legislation, the NDIS COAG Regulatory Impact Statement, the NDIS Rules Discussion Paper, the draft NDIS Rules and various amendments to both the draft legislation and rules.

DANA received valuable input into its submissions from members and in June 2013 DANA convened a members’ forum on Advocacy and the NDIS launch sites, which was well attended and resulted in valuable discussion and a range of recommendations for DANA activities to support members’ work in the launch sites and more broadly.

It was critical throughout the year that DANA was a strong voice advocating for the continued role for independent advocacy after the establishment of the NDIS and the importance of advocacy being well-resourced and independent of both NDIS and other service provision.

**Advokit**

DANA was successful in attracting Practical Design Fund funding for a project to establish an online resource and toolkit to support advocacy for people with disabilities in connection with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The outcome is known as the Advokit (<http://www.advokit.org.au/>). This expansive project brings together detailed information and case studies about the many various aspects of the NDIS and highlights issues for advocates to be aware of and ways in which people with disabilities may find themselves experiencing challenges in achieving choice, control, and their own goals within the NDIS. DANA convened a reference group for the development of this project that included a number of representatives from member organisations and people with disabilities, and experts on web access

**Shadow Report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The Shadow Report was launched in August 2012 and the DANA CEO spoke at the launch. Throughout the year DANA continued working as part of a Project Group with other advocacy, consumer, legal and human rights organisations and the pro-bono support of DLA Piper Australia to promote the Shadow Report, including to parliamentarians and senior public servants.The purpose of the Shadow Report is to assist the International Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to consider Australia’s level of compliance with the CRPD and to make recommendations to the Australian Government about areas for improvement. DANA also played a role in preparing for and organising the civil society delegation to the 10th session of the CRPD Committee in September 2013.

**Independent Advocacy in the Future**

The Productivity Commission Inquiry Report into Disability Care and Support strongly endorsed the important role of independent advocacy when there is an NDIS and was clear that to avoid any conflict of interest, advocacy organisations should not be funded through the NDIS and should also not be Disability Support Organisations or service providers.

DANA has continued to provide the government and community with advice about the work that independent advocacy organisations do and the difference they make to the lives of people with disabilities, as well as about the importance of advocacy remaining independent under the NDIS and how that could be administratively organised. This work was based on the DANA Independent Advocacy and the NDIS policy paper and the National Disability Advocacy Framework and included addressing these matters in submissions including on the NDIS and the federal budget; though presentations to groups and at forums; and through direct advice to government officials.

**National Disability Advocacy Program review implementation**

Following on from an earlier review of the NDAP in 2009 the Commonwealth Government initiated a process of consultation and discussion on the future of the National Disability Advocacy Program. Forums were held for NDAP funded agencies in February 2013 and DANA also participated in this process. DANA was also included in the NDAP Implementation Reference Group, which held its first meeting in July 2013.

**National Strategy on Restraint and Seclusion**

In March 2012 DANA had provided feedback in relation to the proposed National Strategy on Restraint and Seclusion in Disability Services. Our feedback called for the progressive elimination of restraint and seclusion practices in line with the CRPD. While there has been limited progress in this area DANA has followed up by providing feedback to the Cross-Jurisdictional Reference Group on the draft strategy and by joining other peak agencies in calling for a national inquiry into abuse in disability services.

**Advocating for Advocacy**

Much of DANA’s work over the course of the year has been directed to providing advice to government in relation to advocacy and the NDIS. DANA has undertaken a sustained effort to provide information on the important role of independent advocacy into the future to a broad range of political, bureaucratic and community stakeholders. DANA has also maintained the important role of providing advice and feedback to government on the operation of the National Disability Advocacy Program including with respect to the NDAP Quality Assurance Processes and the NDAP Implementation Reference Group.

Our work in these areas has included:

* Regular meetings with each of the Policy and Advocacy areas of FaHCSIA
* Meetings and other communication with Nick Hartland, David Bowen and other key FaHCSIA, NDIS Transition Agency and DisabilityCare Australia staff.
* Regular meetings with Senator McLucas and/or her advisors
* Meetings with Senators and MPs including Chris Back, Bridget McKenzie, Gary Humphries, Mitch Fifield, Dean Smith, Andrew Leigh, Craig Kelly, Ken Dowd, Rachel Siewert, and Andrew Wilkie.
* Presentation and provision of information about Advocacy to the Senate Community Affairs Committee
* Provision of the DANA Independent Advocacy Research Paper and Complaints Review paper to the NDIS Quality Standards and Safeguards Expert Group.
* Presentation to NDIS Quality Standards and Safeguards Expert Group.

This sustained engagement with government has contributed to developing the understanding of and views on advocacy in government, not least the place and role of advocacy in the context of the NDIS.

DANA has also continued to communicate with FaHCSIA regarding the NDAP Quality Assurance Processes and the costs of associated audits and has provided advice to consultants regarding the NDAP Implementation process.

Despite this work it is DANA’s view that independent advocacy remains in a period of significant reform on several fronts and the future of NDAP and other advocacy programs remains uncertain.

**Connecting with our Members**

The DANA CEO has been a guest at and provided reports to NSW, Queensland and ACT State Disability Advocacy Network meetings throughout the year, and has attended meetings of the Barwon Disability Advocacy Network and Citizen Advocacy Network. DANA Board members have also been active in each of these Networks and maintain good connections with advocacy organisations in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania.

Members have been invited to contribute to DANA submissions and DANA has stayed in touch with members through DANA members meetings in each state and Territory except NT, and through organisation visits, multiple email and telephone discussions and NDIS specific forums. DANA also provided a number of e-bulletins with briefings on specific issues and in the later months of the period the DANA newsletter also became a regular fortnightly feature.

Throughout the year this variety of mechanisms has led to strong engagement by the membership of DANA with the work undertaken by DANA.

**Networks and Linkages**

In addition to the linkages with other disability consumer and human rights organisations though the joint NDIS and Shadow Report work outlined above, DANA maintains contact with National Disability Services, Carers Australia and a range of mainstream community services peak bodies including ACOSS and the national COSS network.

Additionally DANA continues to build linkages with individuals and organisations with a specific area of knowledge or expertise with whom DANA can collaborate on an ‘as needed’ basis to add to the breadth and depth of the advice we will be able to provide to members and to governments in the future.

**Membership**

DANA membership reached 70 advocacy organisations from all the States and Territories of Australia and which between them provide individual, systemic, legal, citizen, family and self-advocacy support for some of the most vulnerable of all people with disability.

All of our members are committed to DANA’s vision of “A nation that includes and values people with disabilities and respects human rights for all”; all work incredibly hard to improve the life circumstances of people with disabilities and all, to the extent possible, support and lend their expertise and skills to the work that DANA does on behalf of people with disabilities nationally.

**Board of Directors**

The DANA Board composition has been arranged to provide for strong accountability, continuity, renewal and direct connection to the work of member agencies. This means, among other things, that when Board members move on from their agencies they automatically vacate their Board position and that no Board member is permitted to serve on the Board for more than two consecutive two year terms.

In line with these principles Seth Howell retired from the Board when he moved on from his member agency role in February 2013 and under the pressures of other commitments Kairsty Wilson retired at the 2012 AGM and George Taleporos retired in August 2013. In addition Craig Nadler, Diana Palmer and Mary Mallet have all indicated that they will retire by the 2013 AGM. DANA owes all of them thanks and appreciation for their contributions to DANA and the Board, and we wish them well for the future. Special thanks go to Craig Nadler for his contributions and leadership as Chair of the board over the past year and a half.

With the addition to the Board at the 2012 AGM of Janene Cootes, Robyn Renton, Seth Howell, and George Taleporos, the Board continued to be strong and broadly representative of DANA’s membership throughout the year; maintaining at least one Director coming from each of the six Australian States and the ACT, from rural and metropolitan based organisations, from organisations that provide individual, systemic, citizen, family, legal and self-advocacy, from Federal and State funded organisations and from those with a mixture of funding. Thus DANA has continued with leadership from across the broad spectrum of the disability advocacy sector.

Board members met face to face for two consecutive days in September 2012 and February 2013 and otherwise attended monthly meetings via teleconference. In total the DANA directors took part in nine ordinary Board meetings over the course of the year and several special purpose meetings. Other urgent business was conducted via email exchanges and phone conversations. Board members also contributed to the work of the Board as members of Board Sub-committees. The Board membership, their Board roles and their attendance at Board meetings is detailed below.

**The Future**

DANA expects the coming year to be one of consolidation and development. The 5th Annual National Disability Advocacy Conference is a major task of the year, and the launch of the NDIS will again require much time and effort, but continuing to advocate for independent advocacy and developing DANA’s role in supporting the advocacy sector across Australia will be also be critical tasks.

With the addition in early 2013 of a policy officer and a part-time communications officer and having moved into the DANA office, DANA’s capacity to pursue an ambitious agenda on behalf of the disability advocacy sector has become more solid and sustainable.

Our work plans for the year include:

* Continuing to promote the role of independent disability advocacy and its value to people with disabilities, both in relation to the NDIS and across the spectrum of government and community activity
* Continuing to promote the inclusion of and human rights for people with disability with a particular focus on promotion of the implementation of the UNCRPD.
* Continuing to promote improved administration of and funding for independent advocacy
* Continuing to build and promote DANA policy/positions on issues affecting the people with disabilities who use advocacy support
* Improving our communication with and resources for members, including developing the Advokit, promoting cooperation, and building the cohesiveness of the disability advocacy sector
* Improving our engagement with the broader community

DANA Board of Directors 2012-2013

**Craig Nadler**, Chairperson

Board Member/Treasurer, Family Advocacy Inc

**Christina Ryan,** Deputy Chairperson

General Manager, Advocacy for Inclusion

**Kairsty Wilson**, Treasurer (to November 2012)

Legal Manager, Principal Legal Practitioner, AED Legal Centre

**Dr George Taleporos,** Treasurer (from November 2012)

Manager, Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS)

**Mary Mallett,**

Manager, Speak Out Association of Tasmania

**Bob Lee,**

Coordinator, Sunshine Coast Citizen Advocacy

**Janene Cootes,** (from November 2012)

Executive Officer, Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS)

**Robyn Renton,** (from November 2012)

Manager, Rights in Action Inc

**Andrew Jefferson,**

Executive Director, People with Disabilities (WA) Inc

**Diana Palmer,**

Executive Officer, IDEAS

**Seth Howell,** (November 2012 to February 2013)

Advocacy Co-ordinator, VALID

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Board Member** | **Meetings Possible** | **Meetings Attended** |
| Craig Nadler | 9 | 8 |
| Christina Ryan | 9 | 6 |
| Kairsten Wilson | 3 | 2 |
| George Taleporos | 6 | 3 |
| Mary Mallett | 9 | 9 |
| Robert Lee | 9 | 7 |
| Janene Cootes | 6 | 6 |
| Robyn Renton | 6 | 4 |
| Andrew Jefferson | 9 | 6 |
| Diana Palmer | 9 | 6 |
| Seth Howell | 3 | 2 |

**Company Secretary**

**Andrea Simmons,** DANA Chief Executive Officer

**Auditor**

**Kim Hanna FCA**

**Patron**

**Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce AC CVO**

DANA Staff

**Chief Executive Officer**

**Andrea Simmons**

**Office Manager**

**Belinda Semmler** (From December 2012)

**Finance Consultant**

**Kerrie Newham** (from August to December 2012)

**Policy & Research Officer**

**Siobhan Clair** (From March 2013)

**Communications Officer**

**Sean Kelly** (From March 2013)

**Policy & Research Officer**

**Lauren Dawson** (From April to June 2013)

**Project officer**

**Libby Conrick** (From October 2012 to June 2013)