



Leadership⁺ Plus

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019



Contents

Chairman’s Report	1
Case Study: Is early transition to the NDIS early enough?	2
Chief Executive’s Report	3
Case Study: Gabrielle gets the NDIA run-around.....	6
Treasurer’s Report	7
Staff 2018-2019.....	8

Chairman's Report

On behalf of the Leadership Plus Board of Directors I am pleased to present our Annual Report for 2019.

It has been a significant year for Leadership Plus. We have finalised our new strategic plan which builds and expands on our advocacy strengths and involvement with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. We are committed to empowering our clients through our advocacy services. I would like to express my gratitude to our CEO Geoff Southwell and the dedicated advocacy team for their contributions to this process.

Our advocates continue to provide high level advocacy services including for those seeking to appeal decisions taken by the NDIA. We use our individual advocacy experiences to inform our systemic advocacy and continue to provide written submissions to improve the lives of those with disabilities. This year, we have relocated to Anzac House which is located within close proximity of our old premises, Milton House.

We are proud to continue to be part of the Decision

Support Pilot which ensures that people with disabilities with severe cognitive or communication issues are included in the NDIS process. We have developed a practice guide together with La Trobe University based on human rights principles to ensure those part of the Pilot are not being discriminated against due to their disability.

We are excited to have obtained funding to provide support for the Royal Commission. This Royal Commission is a once in a lifetime opportunity and we are committed to ensuring everyone will have access to the supports they need to ensure their voice is heard. We hope this will lead to lasting positive changes for those living with a disability.

The Board has welcomed John Evans to complement our current skills on the Board. Peter Birleson, Jacqui Weatherill and Marija Maher will be leaving the Board and their expertise will be greatly missed. We continually seek to strengthen the governance of the Board and will be reviewing all our policies and procedures in the upcoming year.

We seek to strengthen our relationships with other

organisations in our field such as the Self-Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU), Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) and United Brains, and have applied for funding to provide national ABI self-advocacy supports.

I would like to thank the Federal Department of Social Services and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services who make it possible for us to safeguard the rights of those with a disability.

As we look back over another year's work, I thank our CEO and his very capable team for their perseverance and hard work. I would also like to sincerely thank my fellow Board members for their invaluable work and dedication.

My best wishes and thanks to all our members who continue to support Leadership Plus during this time of incredible change and growth.

Robbert Roos
Chairperson

Case Study: Is early transition to the NDIS early enough?

The transition from state-based services to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the NDIS, was always going to present challenges, and while the respective roles of state governments and the NDIS are specified, not every case goes smoothly.

Mary was living at home after being discharged from a rehabilitation hospital after a brain injury from a stroke with multiple medical complications during recovery. Her family had modified their home at their expense to make it possible for her to live there, but were not able to secure the supports and services she needs.

We wrote to the Department of Health and Human Services to ask for urgent allocation of funding for an Individual Support Package, and Mary was recognised by DHHS as a priority for funding and inclusion on the Disability Support Register.

The NDIS transition was imminent in Mary's area, so the National Disability Insurance Agency was contacted requesting early

access to the Scheme, as is allowed for in the Scheme's legislation and rollout plans, and the NDIA contacted DHHS to confirm Mary's situation.

As a result, the agency agreed that early access was appropriate, but that Mary would not be eligible for a plan in four months, and that the family should approach DHHS for funding in the interim.

We wrote to DHHS pointing out that NDIA had recommended that Mary's circumstances warranted early transition, and that in the bilateral agreement between state governments and the commonwealth, the Victorian Government was responsible for service delivery until the person can transition to the NDIS.

As a consequence, the NDIA agreed to bring forward the planning meeting, and a plan was approved for Mary two weeks later.

Chief Executive's Report

The year has been full of challenge, change and growth, and it's been an exciting year to be in disability advocacy.

We continue to provide disability advocacy under the NDAP program funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS). Under this program we have addressed over 300 issues for 267 clients in the year to June 2019.

The NDIS has becoming an increasingly frequent cause of advocacy issues, including engaging with the NDIS, internal reviews and interactions with service providers. While this is to be expected as the NDIS grows, it's worth noting that only 10% of people with disability will qualify for an NDIS plan, and there will always be many issues faced by people with disability which are completely unrelated to the NDIS

The NDIS continues to have an impact on advocacy workload, not just in numbers but in complexity and work effort. Interactions with the scheme are consistently complex and slow, resulting in us spending nearly half our time on NDIS related

matters even though they account for around a third of our cases.

The NDIS Appeals program, where we assist people in having NDIS decisions regarding their access to the scheme or the content of their plan reviewed by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, continues to be very important work. We have assisted over 40 clients in dealing with the AAT, continuing to ensure that plans are fair and that participants obtain access where it's necessary. We remain concerned that the appeals process, with its focus on mediation, can run the risk of participants accepting NDIS offers which may have been less than they were entitled to. The National Disability Insurance Agency will often conduct these sessions with legal representation which the participant does not have access to, and even with advocacy support there is a risk that participants will withdraw or accept lesser plans because of the imbalance at the mediation table.

The Decision Support Pilot which started in 2018 has been extended for another year, and has become a vital part of the process of ensuring people with disability with significant

cognitive or communication issues get to have choice and control in the process of engaging with the NDIS. Leadership Plus has worked with the Living with Disability Research Centre at LaTrobe University to develop our practice guide for this service, helping us to implement an evidence-based practice for recognising the will and preference of participants in the process of applying to the NDIS and developing their plans.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability was announced in May 2019, and includes funding for advocacy support to promote participation in the Commission and to assist people to prepare submissions and to appear. Leadership Plus has received funding to provide this service over the next three years as the Royal Commission proceeds.

Thanks to an Advocacy Innovation grant from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, Leadership Plus ran a successful pilot during 2018/19 of an information service, the Victorian Advocacy Hub, allowing advocacy agencies to ask questions of other

advocates, share information on advocacy issues, and create a knowledge base of advocacy resources. Over 80 advocates in Victoria signed up for the service and much useful information was exchanged over the course of the year. At the conclusion of the project the overwhelming consensus from user feedback was that a similar service should be established at a national level. This is yet to be funded, but remains a possible extension to the pilot.

DHHS has also funded an Advocacy Innovation project to be run by United Brains and Leadership Plus. The project will run over the period May 2019 to November 2020 and will use United Brains' experience in self-advocacy to develop new groups for people with acquired brain injury in regional Victoria. Given that people with ABI are severely under-represented in the segment of people with disability who receive direct funding from the NDIS, it is very important that such alternative community based supports are developed to assist people with ABI.

Occupying much attention during the first half of calendar 2019 was our

office move. After many years at Milton House we, along with Committee for Melbourne, moved to newly fitted premises at Anzac House. This gave us an opportunity to upgrade our telecommunications services, with long overdue new broadband service and phone systems bringing new levels of reliability. The team managed the move with aplomb and minimal disruption to our service, and it's great to have modern, well fitted offices - but of course our expanding services may mean we're looking elsewhere before long.

Systemic advocacy has remained a vital part of our activity, and we endeavour to make changes that benefit people with disability beyond those for whom we directly advocate. We have written submissions ourselves and jointly with Disability Advocacy Victoria to Parliament's Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into the NDIS Planning process and the review of the NDIS Act, otherwise known as the Participant Service Guarantee.

We have been active in supporting disability issues with the Victorian Council of Social Services, contributing to VCOSS submissions on

the National Disability Agreement between the states and the Commonwealth, the Victorian Disability Platform and the Participant Service Guarantee. Other collaborations include contributing to emerging issues with NDIS service provider agreements which can be unfair to participants.

A continuing issue has been the failure of the National Disability Insurance Agency to recognise advocates and advocates' authority to interact with the agency. We have worked with the Victorian Disability Advocacy Network (VicDAN) and Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA), the advocacy peak body, to address this issue with NDIA who recognised the issue and made changes to address it, but who appear to need continuing pressure to preserve the change.

Melanie Muir continues to drive improvements, information sharing and development of the advocacy sector with her leadership in the DAV board, and the Strengthening Disability Advocacy Conference run by DARU both recognised the pressure the sector is under and sought to give advocates tools to deal with

the demands the sector is facing

The board continues to be a source of support and wise counsel for the organisation. The strategy review conducted late in the financial year cemented advocacy as Leadership Plus's central purpose and our commitment to doing, developing and promoting disability advocacy. Our activities are all now framed and evaluated in terms of their contribution to making advocacy more professional, secure and ensuring advocacy services are widely available to those who need them.

None of this could be done without the dedicated and effective Leadership Plus team, all of whom I wholeheartedly thank for their enthusiasm and professionalism throughout the year. We are also fortunate to have an engaged and talented board who generously volunteer their time to help guide and support the organisation, and whose input through the year has been invaluable.

Geoff Southwell
Chief Executive Officer

Case Study: Gabrielle gets the NDIA run-around

The NDIA gave Gabrielle the wrong advice and then didn't fix it. And they kept on not fixing it.

Gabrielle has an NDIA plan which includes Assistive Technology funding. Her physiotherapist supported using that funding to buy three items of furniture to manage the physical impact of Grace's disability. The total cost was within the \$1000 allowed in her plan.

She sought advice from her Local Area Coordinator and on that advice, in January 2018, she purchased the furniture directly from a retailer who had told her they were a registered NDIS provider. Expecting it to be reimbursed by the NDIA, and with no savings, Gabrielle took out a personal loan to buy the furniture.

Following the purchase, Gabrielle was unable to get reimbursement from the NDIA. She pursued the issue, sometimes with the help of an advocate. Finally the NDIA agreed to an 'irregular' payment, yet reimbursed only a third of the amount.

A series of farcical, confused and expensive AAT teleconferences followed over the following 18 months, involving the costly time of NDIA lawyers, Registrars and the Deputy President of the AAT and advocates, concluding

that the AAT had no jurisdiction over matters of reimbursement, and advising other paths for restitution, neither of which have proved applicable as the NDIS is a "corporate entity".

To save \$600, the NDIS wasted approximately \$20,000 of administrative, legal and judicial time, and failed to deliver a meaningful outcome for the participant.

Gabrielle's eventual direct call to the NDIS Minister's office, describing the saga of 18 months of misleading advice and unsatisfactory administration produced a full investigation, which concluded that NDIA had given incorrect advice, followed incorrect procedures and took full responsibility for the errors, yet no responsibility to reimburse.

Treasurer's Report

Audited income for the financial year 2019-2020 totalled \$1,015,867 (\$786,677 in 2018-19) and Expenditure totalled \$1,014,015 (\$781,253 in 2018-19). Consequently, the organisation reported a net surplus for the 2018-19 financial year of \$1,852 after deferring some grant income to 2019/20. In the environment of short term funding and difficulty in establishing alternative revenue sources, this is a commendable achievement.

The Department of Social Services continues to be our largest funder with \$611,277 in NDAP funding, \$181,170 in NDIS Appeals funding received in FY18-19 and an additional grant of \$157,640 to pilot Decision Support activity for people engaging with the NDIS and we thank them for their ongoing support of our various programs. The department's core funding has remained static over recent years but we are fortunate to receive the necessary funding to finance the payroll indexations that apply under the SCHADS Award. We have managed our expenditures well and are confident of meeting our outgoings in the next financial year. We continue

to actively look for partnerships with other groups to improve our program quality and reach and enhance our opportunities for new funding and grants. There will be some opportunities under the new NDIS framework for organisations, like ours, and the Board is planning for this future.

We have adopted General Purpose statements for our financial reporting, allowing our finances to more completely reflect accounting standards and improving our disclosure. Our auditors, PBR Partners have completed the financial audit, with the finalisation of the audit report yet to be presented. An in-camera session with the Finance and Risk Committee revealed no unresolved audit issues. Such an audit finding is a testament to the CEO's leadership, the internal controls in place, the appropriateness of the accounting policies used, as well as the governance of Leadership Plus Inc.

The budget for the upcoming financial year demonstrates that we will deliver a small surplus with the funding which has already been committed. This budget has been

prepared on a status quo basis, including DSS funding. However, we will continue to develop alternative services and alternative sources of funding, along with any opportunities to partner with organisations with complementary or matching services.

Finally, my thanks to the Board, the Management and the staff of Leadership Plus for their efforts in regard to the organisation's financial management and the transparency of financial reporting.

Dr Marija Maher, GAICD
Treasurer

Staff 2018-2019

Geoff Southwell	Chief Executive Officer
Jeff Coley	Finance Manager (to September 2018)
Melanie Muir	Team Leader
Paul Hume	Individual Advocate
Giovanna Amato	Individual Advocate /Program Coordinator /Administration
Amanda Roe	Individual Advocate
Andreas Cassinides	Individual Advocate
Leigh Meyer	Individual Advocate
Jean Ellerby-Mutu	Advocate / Decision Supporter
Tilly Houghton	NDIS Appeals Advocate
Saskia Doherty	Individual Advocate
Kate McDonald	Advocate / Decision Supporter
Marlea Hutson	Individual Advocate

