

Our Activities

Submissions to Government Inquiries

Throughout the year submissions were made to

- the consultation on the Family Violence Bill.
- the Victorian Law Reform Commission's reference on abortion.
- the Shadow report on Australia's progress on the implementation the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.
- the Commonwealth Green paper on Homelessness.
- the Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA).
- the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act Review.

"Women with disabilities encounter discrimination on many levels, each of which restricts their opportunities for equal participation in economic, social, educational and political life. Women with disabilities share the same demographic makeup as the rest of society. We are parents, we are in paid and unpaid work, we care for aging parents, we are old and young, we are students, we travel, visit tourist venues, take part in leisure activities; we are married, single, lesbian, heterosexual, from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and races."

Submission to the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act Review

The VWDN Advocacy Information Service

VWDN has established a formal partnership with Women's Health Victoria to establish the information and advocacy service for women with disabilities – the VWDN AIS. The VWDN/WHV Partnership Agreement was signed in 2005 for the period to 2010 with agreement that it should be reviewed in 2007. Representatives from the VWDN Board and WHV staff reviewed the Partnership Agreement and a new set of goals for the 2007-09 period were formulated focussing on the transfer of the auspice for the VWDN AIS to VWDN on July 1, 2009.



The 2007-08 VWDN AIS annual plan was scoped around five key goals:

1. To continue the development of the Network's membership and governance
2. To strengthen and grow the VWDN AIS's organisational processes and resources.
3. To maintain effective relationships with VWDN members and VWDN AIS partners
4. To advocate regarding the priority issues of the VWDN AIS
5. To develop the VWDN AIS clearinghouse to support the advocacy priorities of the VWDN AIS

Violence against women with disabilities: Advocacy and Information

The Framework for Influencing Change

The Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service's (VWDN AIS) strategy, 'A Framework for Influencing Change - Responding to Violence Against Women with Disabilities, 2007-2009' was developed by the then Program Manager, Keran Howe, and provides the basis for the continuing work being undertaken.

The framework is an important template and tool for raising awareness. The Framework has sparked discussion and opportunities to influence change in both the disability and family violence sectors.

The framework was launched in October 2007 by Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, Christine Nixon, who spoke of being humbled by what she heard of the issues facing women with disabilities. Commissioner Nixon pledged to promote greater awareness around the issue within Victoria Police.

More than 130 people attended the launch, which provided a significant opportunity to highlight the issues of concern and influence a wide audience. This included politicians, the Disability Services Commissioner, the Executive Director Disability Services Division, ministerial advisors and staff from the Departments of Human Services, Justice, Planning and Community Development. Also present were staff from the Victoria Police, the Courts, family violence, sexual assault and disability service providers, advocacy groups and women with disabilities.

At the launch Keran spoke about the incidence of violence against women with disabilities, and that for too long it has gone unnoticed. She challenged those present to take up the issue and join with VWDN in recognising that we all have a role and responsibility to take.

" ... For people with disabilities, respectful and affirming relationships whether within families, shared houses, workplaces or communities, are by no means guaranteed ... We have all heard the facts and figures on isolation, discrimination and marginalisation ... It is therefore shocking that as a community we have largely ignored violence against women with disabilities," Keran Howe.

The framework was also presented at forums including the Family Planning Victoria Forum at the Royal Women's Hospital and at the National Forum on Violence against Women with Disabilities hosted by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse in Sydney. The framework was acknowledged for providing leadership to other services and offering a guide to government policy in other states.



Photo: Commissioner Christine Nixon, Keran Howe and Tricia Malowney

Mentoring and Support

A key role for VWDN is encouraging our members, and women with disabilities in general, to extend their skills and confidence in being actively involved in community life and in providing community education. Our members represented VWDN at a number of key forums such as

- the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,
- the Premiers Women's Summit,
- the Commonwealth State Disability agreement forum and
- a forum on the Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities.



Photo: John So, Lord Mayor, Margaret Stevenson and Bronwyn Pike, Minister for Education

Networking

VWDN collaborates closely with other relevant women's organisations and in particular organisations for women with disabilities. VWDN met with Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), Women with Disabilities Western Australia and Lorri Mackness New Zealand. VWDN also met with Women's Health Association of Victoria (WHAV), Vichealth, DVVic and DVIRC.

VWDN also maintained strong links with other disability organisations in Victoria through Victorian Disability Advocacy Network (VDAN), where the VWDN representative, Margaret Steven, Chaired the Co-ordinating Committee; and through the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU).

Strategic Representation

At VWDN we use our knowledge and experience as women with disabilities to educate government and community organisations in how to improve opportunities for women with disabilities in Victoria.



Photo: Keran Howe, Jenny Bullock, Julia Gillard, Acting Prime Minister and Tricia Malowney

VWDN met with

- the Acting Prime Minister Julia Gillard, at the International Women's Day Lunch to promote the need for representation of women with disabilities at national forums, particularly the 2020 Summit and the Social Inclusion Board.
- Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children to highlight the need for a gender perspective within the Commonwealth State and Territories Disability Agreement;
- Lisa Neville, Minister for Community Services, regarding the priority needs of women with disabilities and in particular the parenting support needs of women with disabilities.
- Terry Healey, Deputy Secretary, Department of Planning and Community Development regarding inclusion of women with disabilities in family violence policy and planning
- Arthur Rogers, Executive Director, Disability Services Division regarding a gender perspective in Victorian disability policy and
- Ministerial advisors to raise concerns relevant to the VWDN priority issues.

Building the Evidence

Following the development of the Framework, the VWDN AIS was successful in gaining \$35,000 through Reichstein Foundation and an anonymous donor for the development of a research program that provide evidence for the need for change with regard to violence against women with disabilities. VWDN AIS developed a partnership with Professor Cathy Humphreys at The University of Melbourne and Chris Jennings at Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre to implement the Building the Evidence Project. Dr Lucy Healey was appointed as Co-ordinator of Research and and Felicity Julian was appointed as Research Officer. The research is responsible for examining the evidence on the status of policy and practice in Victoria with regard to family violence against women with disabilities.



Photo: Chris Jennings, Felicity Julian, Keran Howe, Cathy Humphreys and Lucy Healey

Representation

Representation of women with disabilities occurs on the:

- Family Violence Statewide Advisory Committee;
- the Sexual Assault Prevention Committee; and
- the Domestic Violence Victoria Co-ordinating Committee.

Community Education

VWDN provided community education to a range of domestic violence services, disability advocacy services and disability service providers on the importance of providing accessible services to women with disabilities who experience domestic violence.

Submission for funds

The VWDN AIS submitted for funding to continue the work of addressing violence against women with disabilities. The Service was successful in gaining recurrent funds for the Policy Officer to be appointed in 2008-09.

Health Advocacy and Information

For women who live with a range of disabilities, health is about maximising a state of wellbeing, enhancing support and quality of life and preventing, as much as possible, the negative affects of impairment and disability. This requires an understanding of the links between the social and psychological conditions associated with disability. These cause a higher incidence of ill health– as well as greater physical vulnerability to illness for women with disabilities, as a result of the failure of health providers to take account of their specific needs.

VWDN provides information to women with disabilities through our monthly newsletter and our weekly email bulletins. We also encourage health and other community services to provide information in accessible formats to address the different information needs of women with disabilities.

Members are given links to the Women's Health Victoria Clearinghouse Connector (on line health information bulletin) which provides up to date evidence based knowledge about addressing specific health problems.

Representation on the health issues of women with disabilities included:

- attending the World Health Organisation's Forum on the Social Determinants of Health,
- involvement in developing the Women's Health and Wellbeing Data Index,
- presentation on access to health services for women with disabilities to the Health Issues Centre strategic planning day,

revised VWDN constitution, board structure and endorsement as a Health Promotion Charity paves the way for the VWDN to grow and to assume the auspice of the Advocacy Information Service, a key goal of the Partnership Agreement. I would like to acknowledge PILCH, the staff of Russell Kennedy and Jennifer Holdstock of Cornwall Stodart for their pro bono assistance with the significant legal work involved.

The development of the 'Framework for Influencing Change: Responding to violence against women with disabilities' provided a strong basis for our advocacy on violence against women with disabilities. Our work in developing a partnership with the University of Melbourne and the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC) paved the way to researching this issue in greater depth. We are grateful to those philanthropic trusts who generously sponsored this work:

- the Reichstein Foundation;
- Bokhara Foundation;
- and the Melbourne Community Support Fund.

The unstinting support of Professor Cathy Humphreys and Professor Alfred Felton, Chair of Child and Family Welfare, University of Melbourne, provided a wonderful partnership to commence the Building the Evidence Project. I would also like to acknowledge Chris Jennings, DVIRC, who generously gave of her expertise.

We are grateful to Disability Services Division and the Office of Housing, Department of Human Services who enabled us to progress our work through core funding and project grants.

The small but passionately committed team of the VWDN AIS, Melanie Thomson (Information Officer), Lucy Healey (Research Co-ordinator, Building the Evidence Project) and Felicity Julian (Research Officer, Building the Evidence Project) have been an absolute joy to work with.

My heartfelt thanks to Tricia Malowney and the VWDN Board and to Marilyn Beaumont and all of the staff of Women's Health Victoria for your advice and support in growing the VWDN AIS.

Advancing social justice and human rights, respect for women with disabilities and working together to make a difference are the pennants that guide our work. We look forward to 2008/2009 with excitement and with the hope that we will continue to represent women with disabilities in their best interests.

Keran Howe

- Victorian Disability Advocacy Network Committee of Management; and the
- Equal Opportunity Commission Disability Reference Group.

We acknowledge the women who have worked so hard to get us to this position, in particular, our Board including our retiring members, Pauline Vetuna, Jody Saxton and Danielle Chaffey. We also value the unwavering support of our advisors, Gina Lyons, Wendy Brooks and Dominique Saunders.

We would like to extend our thanks to our members and our partners, especially Women's Health Victoria, University of Melbourne, Domestic Violence Victoria (DViVic), Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC), and our colleagues at the Office of Women's Policy, the Department of Justice and Department of Human Services.

Finally I would like to express my appreciation of the committed and insightful work of our core staff and all those who have worked with and supported us during the past year.

We look forward to the coming year as we build our membership, welcoming women from all demographics.

Tricia Malowney

A Message from the Executive Officer

This has been a historic year for people with disabilities and no doubt we will look back on it as a watershed moment for our human rights. On May 3rd, 2008 the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) was signed by a record 130 countries. This landmark convention paves the way for advancement of the rights of people with disabilities around the world. At the same time, VWDN has been building links with organisations and networks of women with disabilities in other states, nationally and internationally. Together, we are drawing on the CPRD to challenge governments in honouring our rights as women with disabilities.

In my role initially as Project Manager, and following my appointment as Executive Officer, VWDN, I have had the privilege of overseeing the development of the Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service (VWDN AIS) under the auspice of Women's Health Victoria (WHV). The



- advice to Royal Women's Hospital on ways of engaging women with disabilities in consultation processes and promotion of the consultations through our newsletter, and
- an article by Tricia Malowney 'What does health equity mean for women with disabilities?' was published in the Australian Health Promotion Association's Health Promotion Storybook.

Parenting Advocacy

Effective support for women with disabilities as parents is a significant concern to many women with disabilities. VWDN AIS receives calls from women wanting support in caring for their children. Individualised disability support packages currently do not assist parents in this way. The VWDN AIS met with the Disability Discrimination Legal Service and Yooralla Society of Victoria to begin to map parenting issues and services that might address these concerns.

The VWDN AIS sought funding to progress research in regard to adequate and tailored family support for women with disabilities through the Department of Human Services but was unsuccessful. Funding will continue to be sought in 2008-09.

Our Information Clearinghouse

The role of the VWDN AIS Clearinghouse is to gather information for use by women with disabilities, community organisations, researchers and policy makers in representing and addressing issues of concern to women with disabilities. In 2007-08 a major focus was the development of the Online Resource Collection on VWDN AIS's priority issues.

In establishing the online resource collection, Information Officer, Melanie Thomson, contacted 120 organisations concerned with issues regarding women with disabilities around the world. We sought permission to include links to their web resources in the VWDN AIS Clearinghouse. The responses were overwhelmingly positive.

"We are more than happy for the Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service to link to our website. Your website looks very professional and we wish you all the best for the future" – New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse

"You have our permission to include a link to the SafePlace website from your website. Thanks for the inquiry. And, your website looks like a phenomenal resource." – Safe Place, Texas, USA

The Clearinghouse received advice from Vision Australia regarding accessibility of the Clearinghouse for users with vision impairments. This ensured that the Clearinghouse is accessible to screen-readers used by women with vision impairment.



By June 2007 the Online Resource Collection amassed 358 resources of which 201 will be available in the online collection.

The Clearinghouse also scans written and on line sources for relevant information that is used by the VWDN AIS in its work and is distributed to members through weekly bulletins and the VWDN newsletter.

VWDN AIS Evaluation

This first phase in implementation of the evaluation framework for the VWDN AIS focused on: sourcing of key documentation and data; a review of a series of VWDN AIS documentation to develop a profile of work and create a baseline for subsequent evaluation activities; analysis of VWDN membership statistics; pilot testing of evaluation survey tools for VWDN members and external organisations; and planning for future evaluation activities.

This evaluation phase was been made possible by an additional grant from DHS Disability Services Division. The report provides useful material to guide current reflections and to inform the next steps for the further and continued evaluation of the VWDN AIS.

The 2007 – 2008 year has been a momentous one for the Victorian Women with Disabilities Network (VWDN). The improvements we have undertaken have reinvigorated the Network and increased our capacity to influence others to ensure the inclusion of the needs of women with disabilities in policy development and planning.

These changes have included the adoption of a new Constitution and Board structure. Women with disabilities have been appointed as Directors and women with key expertise, who share our vision, have been appointed as advisors.

A key achievement was the appointment of our first Executive Officer, Keran Howe, who has provided us with opportunities to increase our funding as well as expanding our network in Government and Non Government agencies concerned with implementing programs which impact on the lives of women with disabilities.

Through the adoption of a new Vision and Mission Statement, we have reaffirmed our belief that women with disabilities are full members of Victorian society who need to be consulted at all stages.

Having made tremendous leaps in developing strategies to address violence against women with disabilities, now is the time to increase our capacity to improve health services to women with disabilities and to influence policy makers to act on and support the parenting rights of women with disabilities.

We have been successful in our application to the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to be a Donor Gift Recipient as a Health Promotion Charity. We have also achieved income tax concession, Fringe Benefit Tax exemption, GST concession and refunds of franking credits on any Australian or New Zealand investments.

Our Board members now hold key positions or continue representation on a number of high level committees including the:

- Family Violence State-wide Advisory Committee;
- Victorian Advisory Council on the Prevention of Sexual Assault;
- Victorian Disability Advisory Council;
- Disability Services Board;



Our Vision

A world where all women are respected and can fully experience life

Our Mission

“leading the way for Victorian women with disabilities and improving women’s choices by building partnerships and providing support, information and community education.”

Our Values

VWDN works within a value base that upholds:

- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility for all
- Respect for all
- Working together collaboratively
- Effectiveness
- Creativity
- Different opinions and perspectives
- Human Rights
- Social justice
- Valuing diverse abilities



Our Board

Back: Deb Humphris, Delia Portlock, Margaret Bayly, Tricia Malowney(Chair) and Sharon Granek.
Front: Effie Meehan, Danielle Chaffey and Margaret Stevenson.
Absent: Wendy Brooks, Pauline Vetuna and Jody Saxton.
Board Advisors: Gina Lyons (Governance) and Dominique Saunders (legal)

Financial Report 2007 - 2008

VWDN Profit and Loss details

Income Statment

For the year ended 30 June 2008

Income

Cheque Account

Opening Balance	\$	2,230.17
Memberships	\$	590.00
Donations	\$	1,900.00
DHS Grant	\$	1,600.00
	\$	4,090.00

Cash Management Account

Opening Balance	\$	6,442.55
Bank Interest	\$	391.35

Total Income \$ **4,481.35**

Expenditure

Cheque Account

Bank Fees	\$	48.60
Consumer Affair	\$	104.70
VWDN Events & Running Costs	\$	1,836.50
Memberships	\$	55.00
Conferences	\$	285.00
	\$	2,329.80

Petty Cash

Opening Balance	\$	43.85
Expenditure	\$	10.30

Total Expenditure \$ **2,340.10**

Cheque Account

Cash Management Account

Petty Cash

	\$	1,760.20
	\$	6,833.90
	\$	33.55

Current Balance \$ **8,627.65**

as at 30 June 2008

“ Women with Disabilities Working
for Women with Disabilities ”



Victorian Women with
Disabilities Network

Become a VWDN Member
Contact Us at VWDN

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Please note - This report is available in alternative formats
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**Victorian Women with
Disabilities Network**

Annual Report 2007 - 2008

“ Leading the way for Victorian
women with disabilities and
improving women's choices
by building partnerships and
providing support, information
and community education. ”

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