



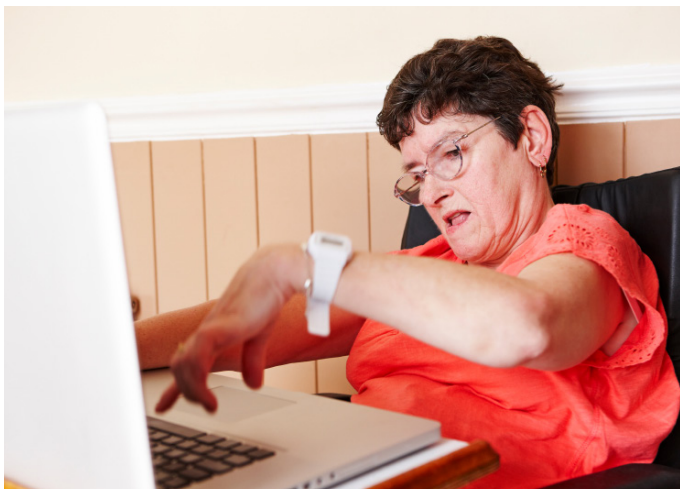
# Annual Report

2015–2016



Communication Rights  
Australia





## Quick overview

“While many people with disability can speak out for themselves when their care is unsatisfactory, and should be encouraged to do so, those who cannot are especially vulnerable.”

**Victorian Ombudsman 2015.**

“People with communication disabilities face considerable hurdles at all points in the criminal justice system.”

**Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2014.**

“Police...say they feel poorly equipped to make the reasonable adjustments required to communicate with many people with disabilities.”

**Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Beyond doubt: the experiences of people with disabilities reporting crime*, 2014.**

“People with disability are at an increased risk of abuse, harm, exploitation and neglect due to a range of factors, including reliance on others for support, social isolation, fear of retribution and difficulties with communication.”

**National Disability Insurance Scheme, *Proposal for a National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguarding framework, consultation paper*, 2015.**

“Research methodologies that exclude people with disability on the basis of where they live – for example, those in residential or institutional settings, or in regional or remote locations – or how interviews are conducted – for example, asking a carer to speak on behalf of a person with disability – is clearly inappropriate.”

**Commonwealth Senate Report into Violence 2015.**

# Chairperson's report

The Board wishes to acknowledge the CEO, Jan Ashford, and staff for their continued dedication to people with little or no speech and the disability advocacy sector in general. They have shown great perseverance in what has turned out to be another challenging year for the organisation and the sector.

It is fair to say that the sector is in a precarious state due to the changes associated with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Advocacy agencies, including Communication Rights Australia, continue to grapple with decisions about whether they should technically be taking on the role of service providers for the purpose of funding and sustainability. Putting funding aside, the advocacy sector is concerned that new players who come into the field to take advantage of open tendering for services may not have the expertise that our community needs.

We have had to re-examine the philosophical tenets that have underpinned our organisation for decades in the context of these changes. These decisions are proving difficult and challenging, given that our priority is, and always will be, the rights of people with little or no speech to receive quality, impartial and competent services. We remain dedicated to these objectives and are confident that any decisions we make will be the right ones for our community.

**Chairperson**  
**Julie Phillips**

# Our team

## 2015–2016

### Board Members

Evelyn Moseley  
Julie Phillips  
Rosemary Crossley  
Corrine Collins  
Wayne Green  
Craig McIntosh  
Bob Ilievski  
Zubin Pratap

### Staff

Jan Ashford  
Jai Phillips  
Monique Sweetland  
Amelia Turner  
Louise Hird  
Rachel Clarebrough  
Lauren Howe  
Jennifer Powell  
Jim Nicholis  
Jade Friend

### Volunteers

Jane White	Chris Draper-Joyce
Lisa Irvine	Samuel Byrne
Nicole Brand	Hayley E Wright
Freda Chang	Vincent Nuotso
Jasmine Sim	Samuel Mander
Simeon Khaw	Annabelle Chai
Saul Block	Jen Choo
Joshua Bach	Man Da
Matt Molloy	William Tang
Samuel Byrne	Sinthu Siva
Hugh Oliver	

# Chief Executive Officer's report

The team at Communication Rights Australia has been extremely busy with an increase in demand for services from individuals and their supports. As people become more aware of their rights, they have an expectation that service providers will meet their human rights obligations. Tensions arise when these expectations are not met.

Communication Rights Australia has had to be creative in responding to this increased demand. Our staff are required to develop specialist knowledge, including:

- an understanding of alternative and augmentative communication
- human rights
- the standard advocacy skills of negotiation and resilience
- strong interpersonal skills.

As a result, we have had some advocates leave after a few months due to:

- finding the work too difficult because of the complexity of the individual's problems
- resistance from the service system in meeting their obligations
- there being no effective way of ensuring service accountability
- the uncertainty of long-term employment in the sector.

Jai, our senior advocate, has been the backbone of our advocacy team. She has met the various challenges and demands of case work and worked on the barriers raised by unresponsive service providers with professionalism. Monique, our experienced remote advocate, was engaged to support those who could be assisted without a face-to-face meeting. This model has worked well as it has allowed us to utilise her extensive skills, which are not readily found in generalist advocates. Other team members have included Rachael, Louise, Lauren and Amelia. We want to thank all of you for your passion and commitment.

We greatly appreciate the attention to detail and smooth running of the office managed by Jennifer. Our team of volunteers – Amy, Jane, Nicole and Lisa – do an outstanding job in their roles from social media through to reception and research. Jade managed our finances efficiently and effectively again over the last 12 months. This allowed us to navigate through our independent audit without any problems.

We expanded upon the barriers that the community faces in the following submissions:

- Productivity Commission Inquiry into Human Services – Identifying Sectors for Reform
- Department of Social Services – the National Disability Advocacy Framework
- Department of Education and Training – Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities
- Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment – Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support
- Family and Community Development Committee – Inquiry into abuse in disability services, Stage 2. We also appeared at the Parliamentary Inquiry.





We represented the interests of people with communication and speech difficulties:

- on the National Relay Service Consultative Committee
- on the Barwon Disability Advocacy Network
- through Disability Advocacy Victoria
- on the Disability Discrimination Legal Service Management Committee
- at Victorian Council of Social Services Portfolios.

We also launched a new website that we hope is easier to access and more user friendly now that it is compatible with mobile technology.

Access to the NDIS has been a hot topic for our members, with accessibility to information and having a voice during their planning meeting being major concerns. In response we have held a forum for parents on these issues and continued our lobbying through the media along with a letter writing campaign.

The Board of Communication Rights Australia has undergone some necessary changes due to the complexity of the environment. The organisation required a stronger understanding of the changes within the community sector from the Board, so a more targeted nomination and selection criteria was developed. I wish to thank the hard working directors for their commitment to the community, vision and direction of the organisation in these uncertain times.

**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Jan Ashford**

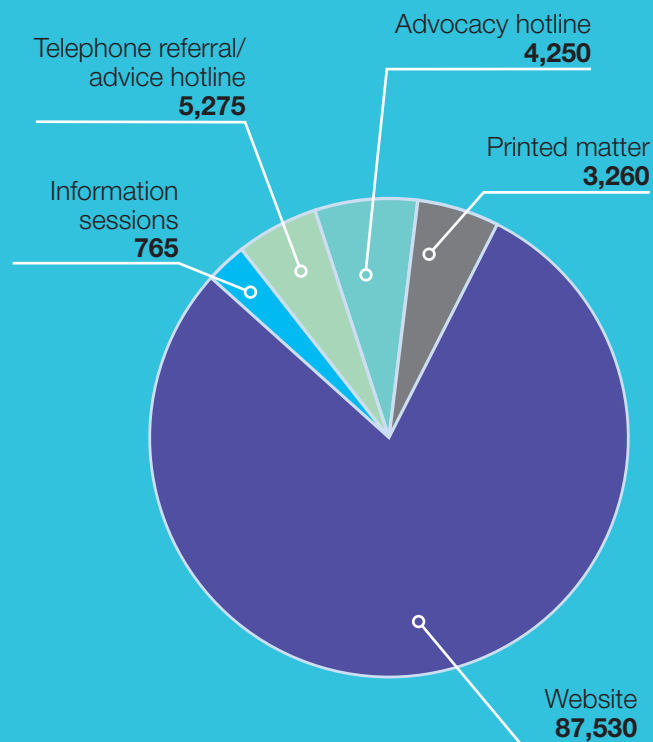
# Information services

We provide specialist information to individuals with complex communication needs, their families or carers, service providers and government departments.

Our services include:

Community engagement (information sessions)	
Telephone referral and advice hotline (both online and telephone)	
Website searches/requests	
Specialist information advocacy hotline (requests on behalf of someone or support to self-advocacy)	
Printed matter distribution	

## Number of people who used our services



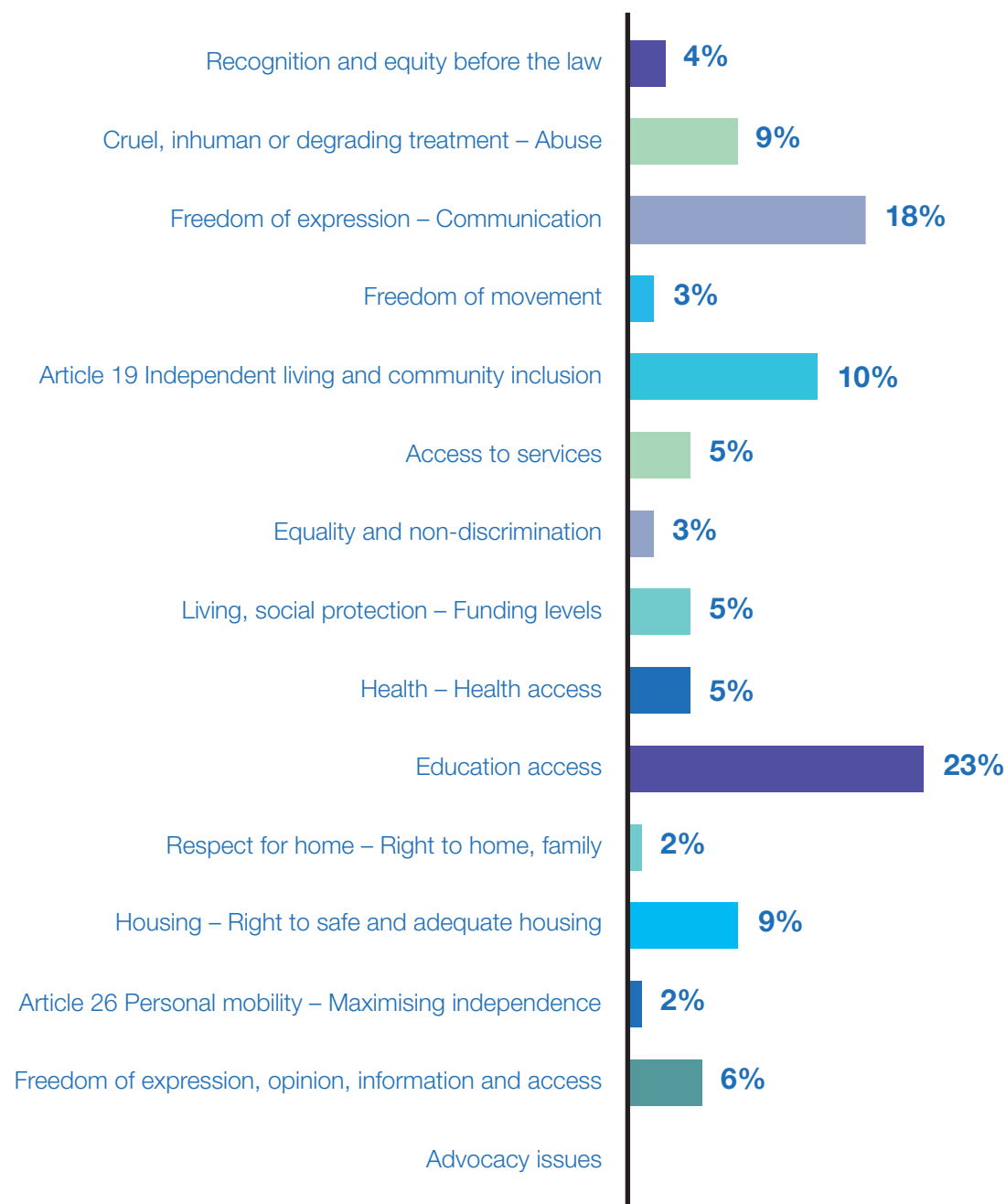
## New advocate's perspective

I started working with Communication Rights Australia at the beginning of the year due to the high number of requests for advocacy resulting in a long waiting list. The advocacy team was expanded to address the increased need for advocacy. During this time there was also a keen focus on fine-tuning the processes to develop a more streamlined response. This has resulted in a much shorter waiting list and clients being assisted within a shorter timeframe.

It is anticipated that when the NDIS is implemented there will again be an increased need for advocacy services from people with little or no speech. This may result in our advocacy services being put under strain again. Advocacy work requires a special set of skills for working with a range of stakeholders. Often the request for services at Communication Rights Australia has only been made after all other avenues have been exhausted and the person's human rights are still being infringed. Advocacy work is both rewarding and challenging, with an increasing demand for our service in this specialist area.

**Advocate**  
**Amelia Turner**

# Advocacy from July 2015 – June 2016



Our role is to make sure that individuals with little or no speech are aware of their rights. With this increased knowledge there is a corresponding increase in demand for advocacy across the state.

Our advocates have successfully enabled 80 individuals to have their voice heard and respected across 14 areas of human rights infringements. Our human rights database provides a quick categorisation of individual advocacy requests against the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights* as well as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

An increasing challenge for us is the lack of specialist advocacy services in this area in other states and territories. We are regularly contacted for support from interstate but unable to respond due to our funding limitations. Recognition by the Australian Government of the need for our community to have a voice is sadly lacking.

Our advocacy referrals are from:

- individuals
- other advocacy organisations
- parents
- Government departments
- service providers who struggle to ensure the individual's communication rights are met while dealing with their concerns.

We acknowledge and appreciate these referrals. It is imperative that individuals who are seeking advocacy are able to effectively communicate their concerns to skilled staff who can also address the issues raised within complex cases.



# Feedback from stakeholders

## Service provider feedback:

Communication Rights Australia advocated for our client's equal access to justice and the right to live in a safe and secure environment, free from physical, mental abuse and sexual harassment which she was facing. The DHHS Case Manager reported "...couldn't have done this without you and the client has just settled down. She is the best she has ever been...thanks. "

**Department of Health and Human Services  
Advanced Case Manager**

## Parent feedback:

Our beautiful 11 year old son is autistic, non-verbal and he has severe behaviours of concern. He attended Special Development School.

We were concerned about his progress at school and the lack of support he received, specifically communication and behavioural support. Any concerns we raised fell on deaf ears.

We contacted Communication Rights Australia as a last resort after being told by the Department of Education to approach the school for any concerns we had.

The advocacy and assistance we received has been invaluable and life changing for our family, specifically our son. They got the school to conduct a Functional Behaviour Assessment by a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst. The school finally agreed for our son to use his chosen method of electronic communication at school and also agreed for staff to be trained in his method. All this was accomplished in one meeting, while we had tried for years and failed.

The advocate ensured his human rights were upheld and that our son received a holistic, inclusive school experience, regardless of his disability.

Communication Rights Australia's advocates have provided us with knowledge, support and guidance that has made such a positive impact on our lives. We are beyond grateful to them for giving us hope that our son can have a better future. They have given a voice not only to our son but to his family too.

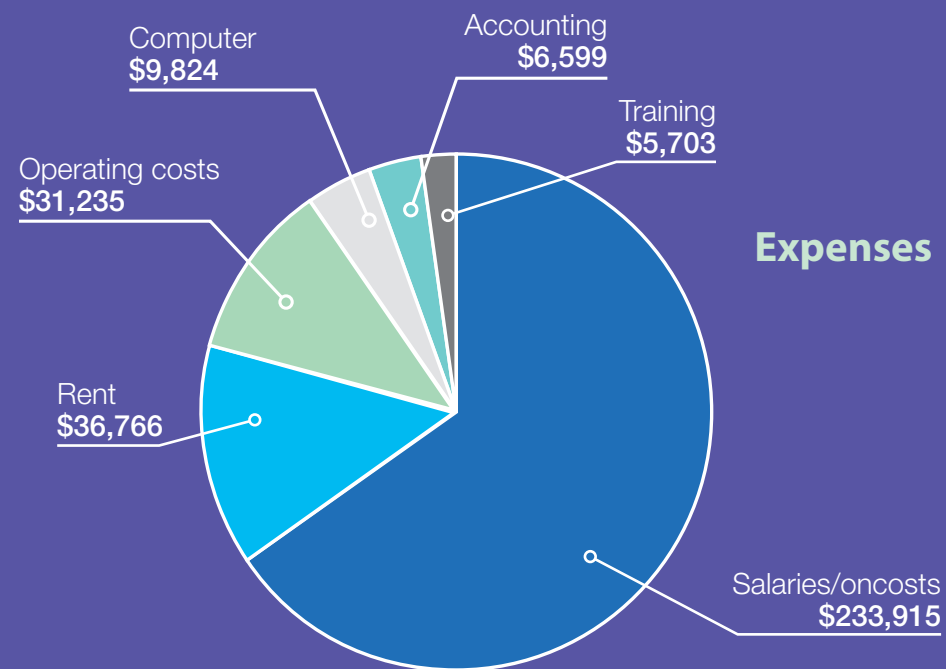
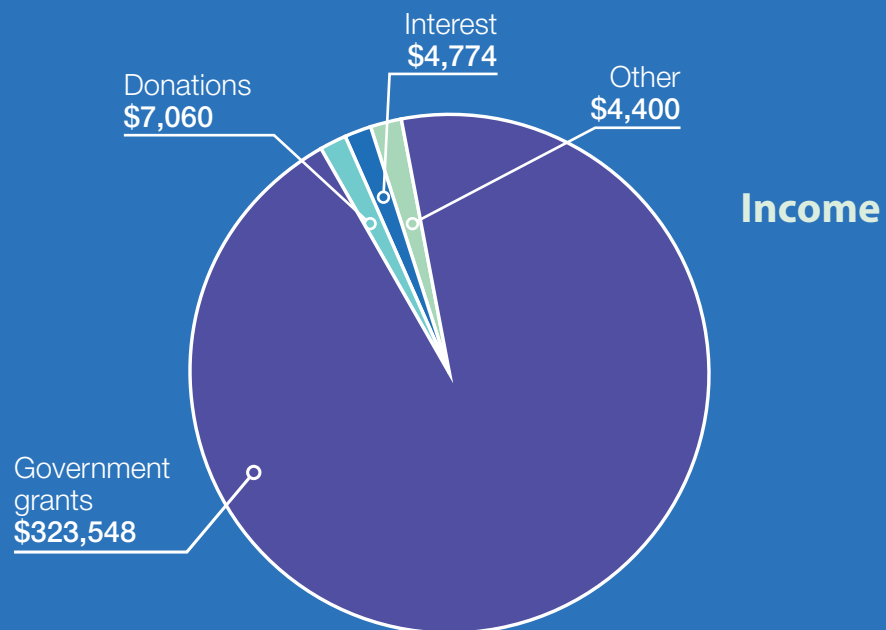
**Parent of an 11 year old boy with an Autism  
Spectrum Disorder and behavioural issues.**

## Parent support group feedback:

Communication Rights Australia presented at the CHARGE Syndrome Family Network Group in 2015. It was a very informative presentation touching on the role of the advocate and the special area of advocacy and discrimination when someone is unable to communicate. It was interesting to learn that being unable to communicate means having little or no speech. For individuals with CHARGE syndrome, communication can be difficult for many reasons. Communication Rights Australia would be an ideal advocacy service to individuals with CHARGE syndrome.



# Financial Overview 2015–2016



## Balance sheet

### Assets

Current assets \$231,107

Non-current assets \$26,191

**Total assets** \$257,298

**Total equity: \$157,639**

## Liabilities

Current liabilities \$47,398

Non-current liabilities \$52,261

**Total liabilities** \$99,659

The full Financial Audited Report is available on our website or through the office.

# Against all odds

Against prejudice, discrimination and obstructive attitudes, Michelle Payne rode in, and won, the 2015 Melbourne Cup. She demonstrated that you can overcome overwhelming obstacles through persistence and a well-planned strategy to win on the day.

Like Michelle, children with communication difficulties face these barriers on a daily basis when they attempt to get an education in Victorian schools. They have to beg for the chance to prove their worth – to be educated and even to be given the chance to communicate and demonstrate their full potential.

These opportunities are currently luxuries for students with complex communication needs. Despite the domestic and international laws that claim equality for people with disabilities, the sad fact is that these basic rights must be strenuously fought for.



# Special thanks to:

- the Department of Health and Human Services for their ongoing support of people with communication or speech difficulties through their funding of Communication Rights Australia



- our families and supporters who have so kindly donated to our work.



# Communication Rights Australia



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National Relay Service  
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**Communication Support Worker**  
**Booking Service:** 03 9555 8552

**Language Interpreter:** 03 9280 1955

ABN: 25 120 926 829



SAI GLOBAL  
DHSS