

Communication Rights
Australia

Annual Report 2014–2015

Highlights for 2014–2015

Communication Rights Australia have stayed focused on the needs of our community over the last year. The sector has been unsettled due to changes and worries around funding and continuity of service but we have not compromised our efforts to represent our clients.

We have improved accessibility through two innovations. We established a 1300 Intake and Advice Hotline that streamlines requests for services quickly and efficiently. This process also helps us to identify our market penetration and areas that we can target in the future. We also introduced Skype appointments, which provide more opportunities for people with communication or speech difficulties to speak to us directly through face-to-face contact.

The management team has been working on developing an independent fundraising strategy with the assistance of The R.E. Ross Trust.

While through our submissions to government inquiries during the year, the voices of people with communication and speech difficulties have been articulated across many new areas.

Our team 2014–2015

Board Members

Chairperson Evelyn Moseley

Finance Craig McIntosh

Legal Zubin Pratap

Marketing and Communication Bob Ilievski

Strategy Wayne Green

Sector Representation Julie Phillips

Chairperson until 19 May 2015 Benny Brown

Staff

CEO Jan Ashford

Snr Advocate Jai Phillips

Advocate Monique Sweetland

Advocate Georgina Wu

Administration Jennifer Powell

Bookkeeper Jade Vriend

IT Jim Nicolis

Volunteers

Lisa Irvine

Louise Hird

Monash Team 1

Freda Chang

Jasmine Sim

Simeon Khaw

Saul Block

Joshua Bach

Matt Molloy

Samuel Byrne

Hugh Oliver

Chris Draper- Joyce

Samuel Byrne

Amy Pereira

Monash Team 2

Samuel Mander

Annabelle Chai

Jen Choo

Man Da

William Tang

Sinthu Siva

Hayley E Wright

Vincent Nuotso



Chairperson's report

I took over the Chair after the departure of Benny Browne in May. I want to extend my thanks to Benny for his hard work and commitment to the organisation.

Life is not easy for many people with communication or speech difficulties, as seen in the number of human rights infringements people experience on a daily basis. Children with speech difficulties are being discriminated against within schools and the system seems unable to appropriately respond. These children are our future and we are failing them. The justice system also remains a challenge for people who have communication or speech difficulties trying to report a crime to police, or putting their case forward to tribunals and courts. In many cases the system refuses to act because communication is too difficult. These cases are a sad reflection on the Australian way of life.

I would like to thank each of our Board members for their commitment and support over the last 12 months. It has been an exciting year where we have exchanged strong views and made several key decisions, which required time-consuming commitment from all board members.

Communication Rights Australia's achievements for 2014–2015 have been many, ranging from successes on behalf of our clients, submissions to a large number of different government inquiries and reviews, and strong key stakeholder engagement. Although our financial situation is not as robust as in previous years, it does not weaken the commitment of our organisation. Responsiveness to people with communication or speech difficulties must, and will always be, our top priority. If there is a battle to fight on behalf of individuals trying to communicate their rights, we will be there to assist.

We thank our local Member of Parliament, Nick Staikos, for providing support and encouragement during difficult times. I also wish to thank the Department of Health and Human Services for their ongoing funding.

The Board of Directors wish to thank our dedicated and passionate staff who work above and beyond expectations in their determination to achieve results. I wish to acknowledge Jan Ashford, our CEO, for her unwavering leadership in these challenging times.

Chairperson
Evelyn Moseley

Chief Executive Officer's message

Communication Rights Australia will continue to promote and support our community and maintain the service standard that is most valued by the people we represent. We have maintained our quality accreditation under the Department of Health and Human Services and are compliant with the National Standards of Disability Services.

Our staff continue to advocate for a fair and just society on behalf of people with communication and speech difficulties to make sure their voices are heard and their human rights respected.

We have been very fortunate to receive funding from The R E Ross Trust, which will allow us to employ a consultant to advise us on setting up a fundraising program. Our Board has allocated resources for this role and we will be appointing the consultant in the next few months.

We are thankful for the donations we have received from appreciative family members and the Myer Foundation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the staff, both present and past, for their hard work on behalf of the people we represent and the organisation.

The advocacy team, headed up by Jai Phillips, shows a strong commitment and passion for the rights of people with disabilities. I wish to acknowledge their 95 per cent success rate in reaching the goals of the people who come to us for advocacy. This is an outstanding effort in what is a very complex, and at times fractured, environment.

Jade Vriend manages our finances and oversees the budget and payment of accounts, presenting excellent reports to the Board. Jim Nicolis maintains our IT and is a committed presence at any time of the day or night.

Our volunteers have included Lisa Irvine and Louise Hird, and 12 students from 180 Degree Consulting (Monash University). We thank all of them for their hard work on behalf of our community.

Communication Rights Australia prides itself in working collaboratively with a range of partners. We work closely with the Disability Discrimination Legal Service, giving our clients strong links to high quality legal advice. We also represent the community through our involvement in Disability Advocacy Victoria, Barwon Disability Advocacy Network, Victorian Council of Social Services and

a position on the National Relay Service Consultative Council. Each of these roles provide us with avenues of influence to promote the rights of people with communication or speech difficulties.

We have made a large number of submissions over the last 12 months so that the voices of people with communication or speech difficulties have been heard including:

- Commonwealth Department of Education and Training – Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005
- Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee – Senate Inquiry into the Abuse of People with Disabilities
- Review of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities
- Department Social Services – Response to the National Disability Advocacy Framework
- Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee – Inquiry into Violence, Abuse and Neglect against People with Disabilities in Institutional and Residential Settings
- Supplementary response to Senate Inquiry into the Abuse of People with Disabilities

- Terms of Reference – Family and Community Development Committee – Inquiry into Abuse in Disability Services
- Family and Community Development Committee – Inquiry into Abuse in Disability Services
- Supplementary Response to Reporting and investigation of allegations of abuse in the disability sector: Phase 1 – the effectiveness of statutory oversight
- Response to the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguarding framework (NDIS)
- Response to the Information, Linkage and Capacity Building Framework (NDIS)
- Response to the Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities 2015.

Links to our submissions are available on our website or you can ask for copies from our office.

CEO
Jan Ashford

Information services

Communication Rights Australia offers a range of information services to help people understand and exercise their rights. Our information and advice includes strategies on how to implement and protect people's rights; how to get access to communication devices across Australia; referrals to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) speech pathologists that can support people within their region; through to more complex and targeted information in specialist areas. We provide training sessions on human rights, advocacy and the 'right to communicate'.

Requests for information come from parents, individuals, family members, advocates, community representatives, service providers, the National Disability Insurance Agency and government representatives. Communication Rights provides the information free and without bias.

Our information is available online, in hard copy and through our Information and Advice Hotline, however the most popular avenue is face-to-face contact either by Skype or in person. Our evidence shows that people prefer

information provided to them by someone who can directly identify their specific needs and give them reassurance and support as needed.

Website hits

99,316



Communication Rights Education Sessions participants

1,125



Advocacy requests

112



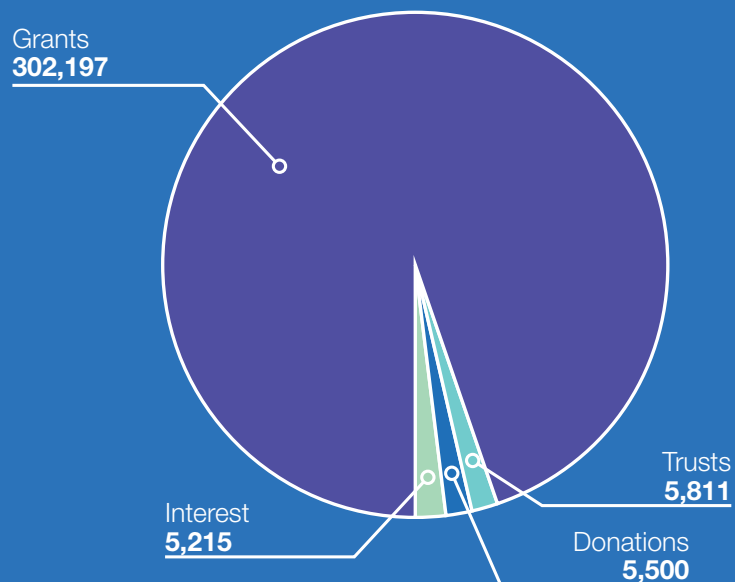
Requests for advice and referral

8,350

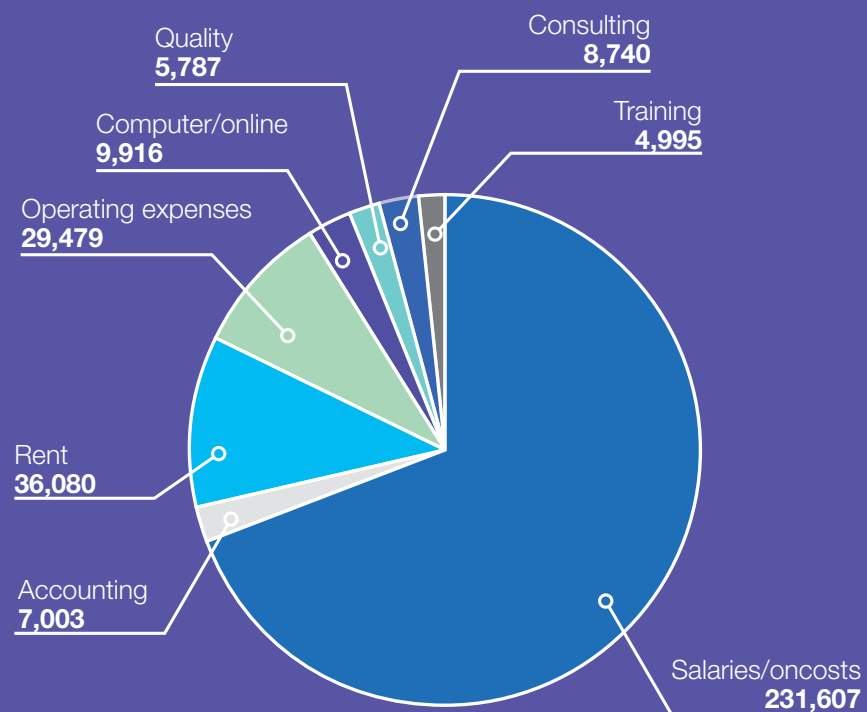


Financial Overview 2014–2015

Where the money comes from



How the money was spent



Current Assets	190,654
Fixed Assets	
Leasehold improvements	18,049
Motor Vehicles	5,119
Office Equipment	4,523
Furniture and Fittings	590
Total Non-current assets	28,281
Total Assets	218,935

Current Liabilities	
Creditors	4,543
GST payable control account	13
Provisions	
Provision for employee entitlements	25,196
Total Current Liabilities	29,752

Non-Current Liabilities	
Employee entitlements	47,283
Total Liabilities	77,035
Net Assets	141,900
Equity	
Retained Profits/ (accumulated Losses)	141,900
Total Equity	141,900



Advocacy

The Communication Rights Australia advocacy unit saw some staff changes over the last 12 months but we were able to maintain the high quality service that our clients expect. Advocacy is a challenging role and requires a clear set of skills, expertise and commitment to the cause.

A major development for the end of 2014 was the completion of the Gandel Philanthropy 'Access to Education' funded project. There was a massive under-estimation of advocacy needs to respond to discrimination in the education system and we were quickly overrun with requests for advocacy support. Despite the project restrictions, we were able to successfully reinstate 21 students with communication or speech difficulties back into the school system. This project provided the opportunity for extensive engagement with a number of pre-school, primary, secondary, special development and autism schools across the state.

The project also enhanced our engagement with the Department of Education and Training, allowing detailed and intense conversations with senior staff across the state.

Although we provide human rights advocacy for people with disabilities in Victoria, we prioritise,

and have our greatest expertise in, the area of communication and speech difficulties and human rights. The most ongoing and challenging infringement of rights is 'freedom of expression'. Whether a person is taking part in an education setting, day program, health service or interacting with the justice system, it is vital that the individual has a functional method of communication so their rights can be respected and realised, especially for people faced with serious life decisions.

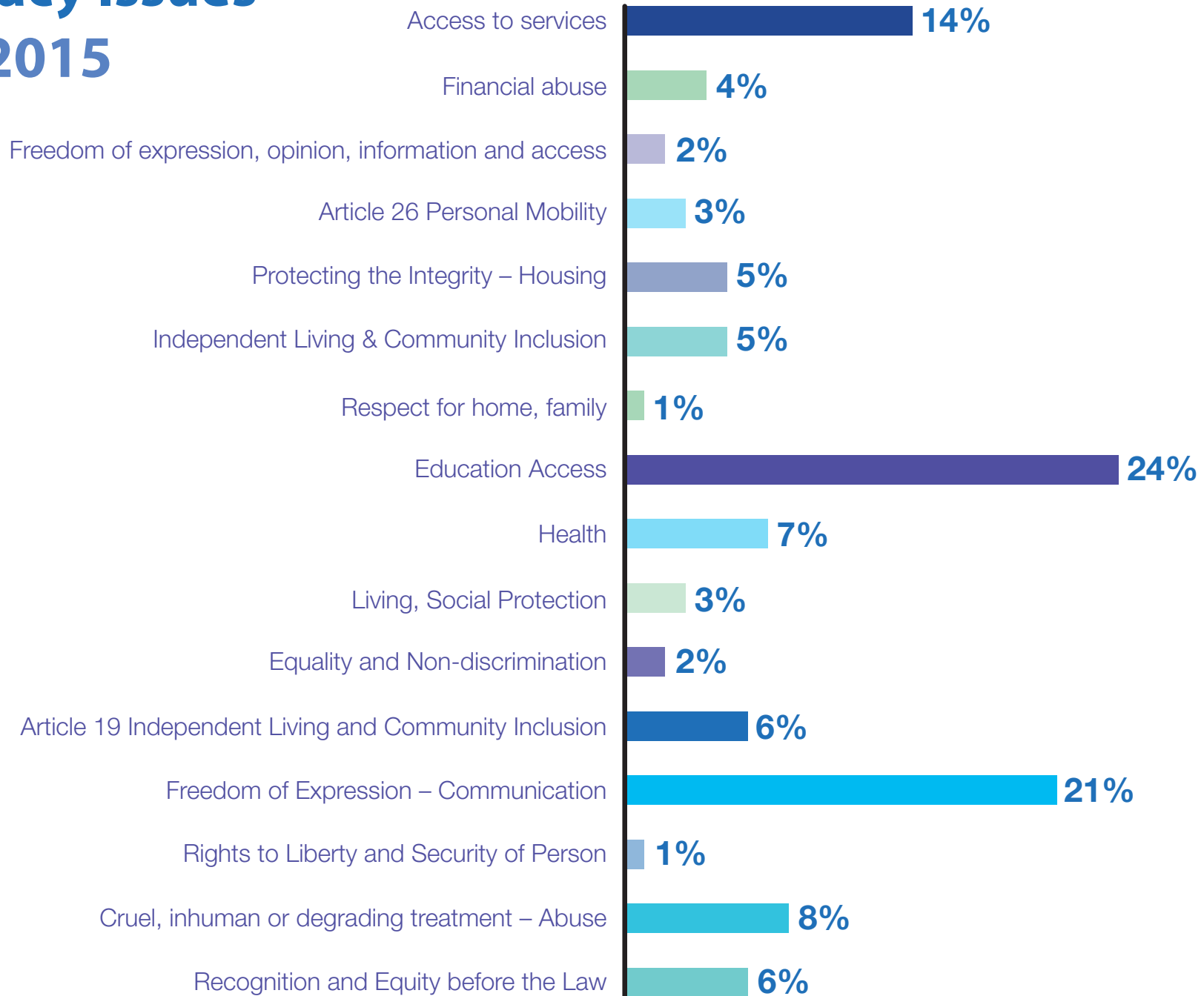
A number of our advocacy cases have raised concerns about the decline of safeguards that protect the human rights of vulnerable people by the Department of Justice and Regulation and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Throughout the year our advocates have worked tirelessly. Issues raised have been varied and often complex. Advocates have needed to be constantly negotiating, learning and developing new skills to resolve cases successfully.

People facing problems with the NDIS are also contacting us already to complain about barriers for people whose voices are not being acknowledged.



Advocacy Issues 2014-2015



Troy has the right to communicate and choose his medical options in hospital

Troy, a man with cerebral palsy and swallowing difficulties, was admitted to hospital.

Troy's health rights were not being heard or respected. He was unable to make himself understood by hospital staff and his Community Residential Unit (CRU). His CRU insisted if he didn't allow the hospital to insert a tube to assist with his eating he couldn't return home, as they didn't provide palliative care.

Troy didn't want surgery or the feeding tube to be inserted into his stomach. He wanted to continue to consume food orally.

Our advocate supported Troy to be heard and respected. We made sure that Troy was fully informed about his options and when he made his decision we worked with the hospital, his doctor, the CRU and his family to implement those decisions.

Troy received the medical treatment he chose. A care plan documented his choices for the future. Troy happily returned home to his CRU, where the house staff received support to implement and respect Troy's decisions.

Sean has the right to a full and inclusive education

Sean, a boy with autism and no speech, was denied the right to an education and had no device to communicate. Sean had been attending a special development school for three years.

Sean's parents arranged appointments with an Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) specialist. A communication method was established using his iPad. The school didn't support or acknowledge Sean's method of communication during school hours.

Our advocate spoke to the school's speech pathologist, who had refused to let Sean use his method of communication at school based on the time he took to communicate impacting on other activities. Sean's right to an education and his freedom of expression were being impacted. We negotiated with the Department of Education and Training.

Sean's teachers, aides and the school speech pathologist completed training with the AAC specialist. Sean then received support at school. His learning exceeded the school's expectations. Sean transitioned across to a mainstream school, where his aides received training allowing him to reach his education potential.

Jill has the right to communicate, have access to justice and live in a safe and secure environment

Jill was denied access to justice, urgent alternative supported accommodation and means to communicate after being physically, emotionally and financially abused by her father and sister in their family home.

Jill informed her day centre of the incidents and incident reports were made to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the police, but no action was taken by either.

We advocated for Jill's right to communicate and to live in a safe and secure environment. DHHS informed us that without an intervention order they would not seek alternative accommodation for Jill.

We liaised with the DHHS director, the Victorian Police and the courts. As a result of our persistence with the police they obtained an intervention order for Jill not to return home as she was in immediate danger.

Jill is now living in permanent, supported accommodation, receiving training from an AAC expert, and is using a funded electronic communication device. Jill is now able to communicate her needs and choices.

Volunteer report

Louise Hird

I had been working in a scientific and quality environment when I took a change of direction in my career to embrace the role of a disability support worker.

I contacted Communication Rights Australia in looking for help to better engage with the people with communication or speech difficulties I was now working with. In my new role I quickly became aware of the lack of available supports for an obviously vulnerable group within the community. It concerned me – who sticks up for people when they can't argue for themselves?

I started at Communication Rights Australia volunteering one day a week. My role was to research and develop a 'quick reference flow chart' for families wanting to know how to access a communication device in each state. I was amazed at how difficult it was to complete this task and find the information required. Each state has a different process. If people were away there was no one to help and emails and phone calls remain unanswered.

I was only able to fully complete Victoria, another two states are waiting for their final approval, while four other states had job vacancies and hence no one to help, or did not respond to my requests. It would have been almost impossible to navigate the complex system for a parent without support.

Volunteering at Communication Rights Australia has given me an even greater passion and zeal for the sector. I wish to thank the staff for helping me on this journey.

Team 2

180 Degrees Consulting Group – Monash Branch:

Working with Communications Rights Australia allowed us to be a part of a meaningful cause and to understand the many challenges non-profit organisations face.

Our team had the opportunity to work on different areas of the organisation, from corporate sponsorship to creating legal fact sheets and identifying relevant grant applications. We were proud to work alongside Jan and Jai at Communication Rights Australia who are passionate about creating a lasting social impact through effective advocacy.

As a result, we were able to produce tangible outcomes in our project and develop invaluable skills. It was an honour to work with Communications Rights Australia and we look forward to working on future projects with them.



Communication Rights Australia



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03 9555 8948
Advice and Intake: 1300 666 604



www.communicationrights.org.au
Email: info@communicationrights.org.au



National Relay Service
Voice / TTY 133 677
1300 555 727

Communication Support Worker

Booking Service: 03 9555 8552

Language Interpreter: 03 9867 3788

ABN: 25 120 926 829



SAI GLOBAL
DHSS