



Communication Rights Australia

Annual Report

2017 - 2018



Introduction

The Communication Rights Australia Board of Directors present the 2017 – 2018 Annual Report to our members and interested stakeholders. The Report describes our performance during the last twelve months against our Strategic Plan, its objectives and priority areas revised in early 2018.

Our priority areas include:

- Provide quality evidence-based and best practice in all areas of service operation.
- Promote and protect the human rights of people we represent to ensure their full participation in all aspects of life.
- Develop a business framework that will meet the organisation's new service system and guarantee sustainability.
- Operational evidence-based best practice governance.

We will achieve this by:

1. Developing a strong marketing and communication strategy with feedback loop to engage people with communication support needs to raise issues of concern with their organisation. We will do this through the following means:
 - Maintain and enhance a web-based gateway, telephone information service, and broad communication channels to disseminate information throughout Victoria, and Australia.
2. Reach, engage and educate all key stakeholders and decision makers on the impact of barriers and issues to our community inclusion.
3. Develop a lobbying strategy to bring change.
4. Develop accessible information on the rights and entitlements of people with disability, and the means to enforce and redress them.
5. Identify the range of organisations and networks participating in disability advocacy in Victoria.
6. Staff training on measuring outcomes.
7. Identify new opportunities for sustainability within the new market.
8. Develop a new data collection system to meet the changing needs of the organisation.

Communication Rights has obtained external accreditation for both our financial and quality standards as required for ongoing registration as a charity, and also met our obligations to remain registered with the Department of Health and Human Services quality standards and the National Disability Standards.

We value feedback on this Report and any of our activities over the last year. Email your feedback or questions to admin@communicationrights.org.au or call us on 1300 666 604. Alternatively, make an appointment to visit our office located at 4/3 Tuck Street, Moorabbin, 3189.

Chairperson's Report

One constant theme over the last twelve months has been 'change' for Communication Rights Australia, and it looks like this will continue for some time into the future. Change has brought both opportunity and loss to our organisation. Despite this, we are still achieving a significant amount for the community and for the individuals we represent.

Early in the year, our long-standing CEO advised us that she would be stepping down from her role at the end of September 2018. We wish her well in her new adventures.

Although we had developed a succession plan for such an event, we will be more than sad to see Jan leave our organisation. Jan has represented the organisation and the community in an exemplary manner over her 35 years and initiated many changes and developments to grow the agency. During her time, Jan was a recipient of an 'Ethel Temby Scholarship' to study human rights audit tools in America, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

As a result of this work, we have seen the development of our in-house CRM human rights audit tool that allows us to report on human rights infringements experienced by our community members on a yearly basis. The CRM also provides a strong evidence base for public inquiries, government feedback, and a basis of dialogue for change as a result of the data collected.

Jan led the organisation to receive the National Disability Award for Excellence in Advocacy and Rights Promotion in 2012, and has been nominated as a finalist for a 'Lifetime achievement honour roll under 2018 Victorian Disability Awards'.

We are in the process of selecting a replacement for the position of CEO who will take up the role mid-September.

Communication Rights has worked hard to be an Australia-wide information hub for people with communication support needs to access when they require specialist information. Recent developments have allowed this to occur through a National Disability Insurance Scheme National Readiness Grant in the area of education.

The new Teachers' Toolkit will be accessed by teachers across Australia, and will have an information hotline for support with the capacity to respond to teachers, Principals, parents of students, and advocates requesting information regarding inclusion at schools.

Julie Phillips

02

Annual Report
2017 - 2018

Our Team

Board Members

Julie Phillips
Corrine Collins
Hanife Ymer
Kathleen Latage
Evelyn Moseley
Ashley Streegstra
Clover Laurier

Volunteers

Zara Michael
Lynn Evans

Staff

Jan Ashford
Jai Phillips
Monique Sweetland
Serena Hansen
Sandra La Scala
Isabel Redman
Vanessa Saunders
Kathleen Pellizzer

Consultants

Jade Vriend
Jim Nicolis



CEO's Report

In my final CEO Report, I wish to acknowledge what a pleasure it has been representing people who have communication support needs over my years at Communication Rights.

There are many challenges working in a small community organisation, especially with changing government priorities, but there has not been a day that I doubted my work with the people who I have been asked to represent. Our community has been very generous to me as we challenged the different barriers together.

Over this time I have made some wonderful friends. I have also witnessed the passing of many good people who have been very active in the advocacy sector. Many of these people carried the history of Communication Rights Australia with them, and some had a wider knowledge of the sector's history. It has been sad to say goodbye to these people.

Communication Rights was recently a recipient of the National Disability Insurance Scheme National Readiness Grant that gave us the capacity to address our families' constant concerns about the exclusion of students with communication support needs from schools, systemically.

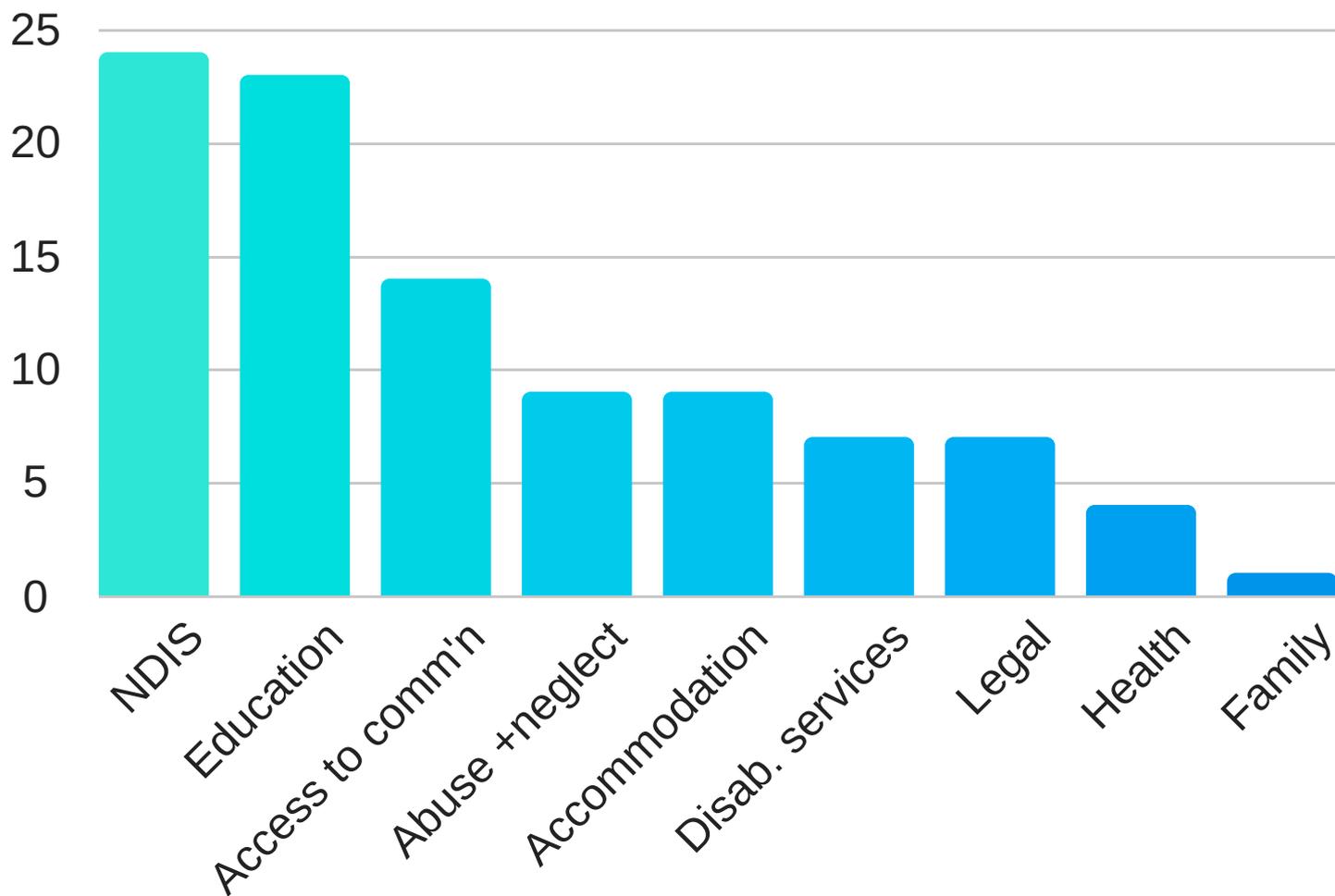
The development of our Teachers' Toolkit Web App has been a collaborative exercise between Department of Education staff, school Principals, allied health professionals, young people with communication support needs who have experienced discrimination at school and their families.

This resource has already received glowing reports during its early stages, and we look forward to it being updated over the next 12 months to ensure our students have the best chance to gain an inclusive education.

I want to acknowledge the volunteer hours of the Board and their support they have shown me over my years at Communication Rights. It is wonderful to work with such a committed group of people. Our staff numbers have doubled over the last 12 months with each member showing a strong commitment to supporting individuals with communication support needs, families and the wider community to bring the changes necessary to protect their rights.

Jan Ashford

Advocacy Cases



Information Knowledge Hub

Communication Rights provides specialist information to people with communication support needs, their families, and key stakeholders in all areas of life. We use a range of mediums; face-to-face, Skype, website, 1300 number, email, Facebook, and letters to ensure the person can obtain the information they require to access services that ultimately protects their rights as an equal member of the community.

Last financial year we were contacted by over 10,000 people across Australia requesting specialist information.

We have been advised by the Department of Health and Human Services that our information funding will cease for this service as of June 2019. Our community, families and their supporters, are concerned that their access to specialist information will cease to exist if the Communication Rights' Information Service funding is terminated.

Governments have a responsibility to provide equity of access for their citizens to ensure the free flow of specialist information in a manner that enhances a person's ability to exercise their rights. Online information is not accessible to many of our members.

The current National Disability Insurance Scheme Information, Linkages, and Capacity Building (NDIS ILC) grant scheme, although has great merit, is not ongoing and does not allow for the collection and updating of information required by people across a range of areas in a person's life. NDIS ILC is also a short-term project response, only lasting for one or two years.

If this service is closed, there will be a loss of intellectual property around the advice provided to people with communication support needs which will impact on their ability to exercise their rights.

In the meantime, we will continue to provide up-to-date information to people with communication support needs on recent government policies, National Disability Insurance Scheme, how best to obtain a means to communicate, and many more different areas.



Advocacy Report

High demand for advocacy support from our community has continued this year, with a significant rise in requests relating to the NDIS. The inquiries and cases we have assisted with indicate widespread confusion about timeframes and processes, and inconsistencies in the information and types of supports being provided. Whilst there continues to be often lengthy delays for reviews, there appears to be an emerging trend of the review process addressing the gaps participants previously experienced.

Traditionally our advocacy service provides support to people who have faced a breach of their human rights in accessing services or being included in the community. The transition to the NDIS has brought slightly different types of cases to us, ones where we are increasingly being requested to assist people (with communication disabilities and no family support) during their NDIS planning process. This has put considerable strain on our human resources, but we certainly see the value in having advocates involved during this process.

Access to education for students with communication disabilities continues to be another key area of need, with a significant proportion of our new cases involving issues relating to inclusive education and reasonable adjustments to teaching and learning strategies. While it is slow, we believe systemic progress is being made with a growing understanding across schools of the types of issues that students with complex communication needs face and the types of supports that can assist these students to get the most out of their education. A new project we have been working on this year has certainly assisted in this area. In July, we launched the Teachers' Toolkit For Students With Little Or No Speech, after months of collaborating, researching, writing, and refining.

The reference committee that guided the project included representatives from the Victorian Department of Education, school Principals from mainstream and specialist schools, allied health professionals, families and students with communication support needs. All did a remarkable job in guiding the development of an easy-to-navigate resource full of practical information directed specifically at teachers, to better enable them to proactively support their students with little or no speech. The resource is designed to help bridge the gap in understanding of the issues these students face, and the steps to be taken to ensure their needs and abilities are identified and supported. We have had a lot of interest in the resource already, and much positive feedback. The resource has just been updated with content that reflects all Australian states and territories (initially began as Victoria-specific).

Issues in supported accommodation also continue to make up a large proportion of our cases, with access to a means to communicate, appropriate care and activities all common concerns.

Within the justice sector, we welcome the commencement of the intermediaries pilot project as a first step towards addressing the gaps that people with communication disabilities are faced with when interacting with the justice system. The pilot project is necessarily limited in scope but we have high hopes that it paves the way for intermediaries or communication support workers to be made available throughout the justice system, via a similar model to LOTE and AUSLAN translators, to ensure people with no speech do not have their voices excluded at such important points in their life, namely when interacting with police or the courts.

New Staff Reflections

I commenced employment at Communication Rights Australia in May 2018, as a Human Rights Advocate. I am very passionate about human rights, the law and social justice.

My tertiary background includes undergraduate and postgraduate studies. I am a Lawyer, having been admitted to practice law in 2015. However I am currently not practicing as a Lawyer.

I have previously held positions in a private law firm, the community legal sector, and government departments. I have also worked extensively for not-for-profit organisations in the social work, welfare, housing and disability sectors.

Since starting at Communication Rights Australia, I have found staff and management to be very supportive. It is a wonderful working environment. I find it very rewarding advocating for people who are extremely vulnerable and who have little or no speech. I recently participated in the collaborative Communication Access Project between Scope (Aust) and Victoria Police.

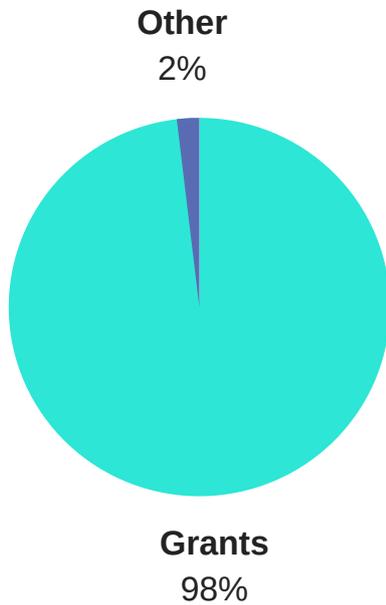
I have also recently become a participant in the VicDAN network, with Victoria Legal Aid and other Disability Advocacy Services in relation to the NDIS.

In the past three months I have seen the systemic problems people face in navigating the NDIS; and in relation to a participant's NDIS plan. It is also very disheartening to see the magnitude of issues which students and families are experiencing in the education system.

Vanessa Saunders

Financial Overview

Income



Balance Sheet

Assets

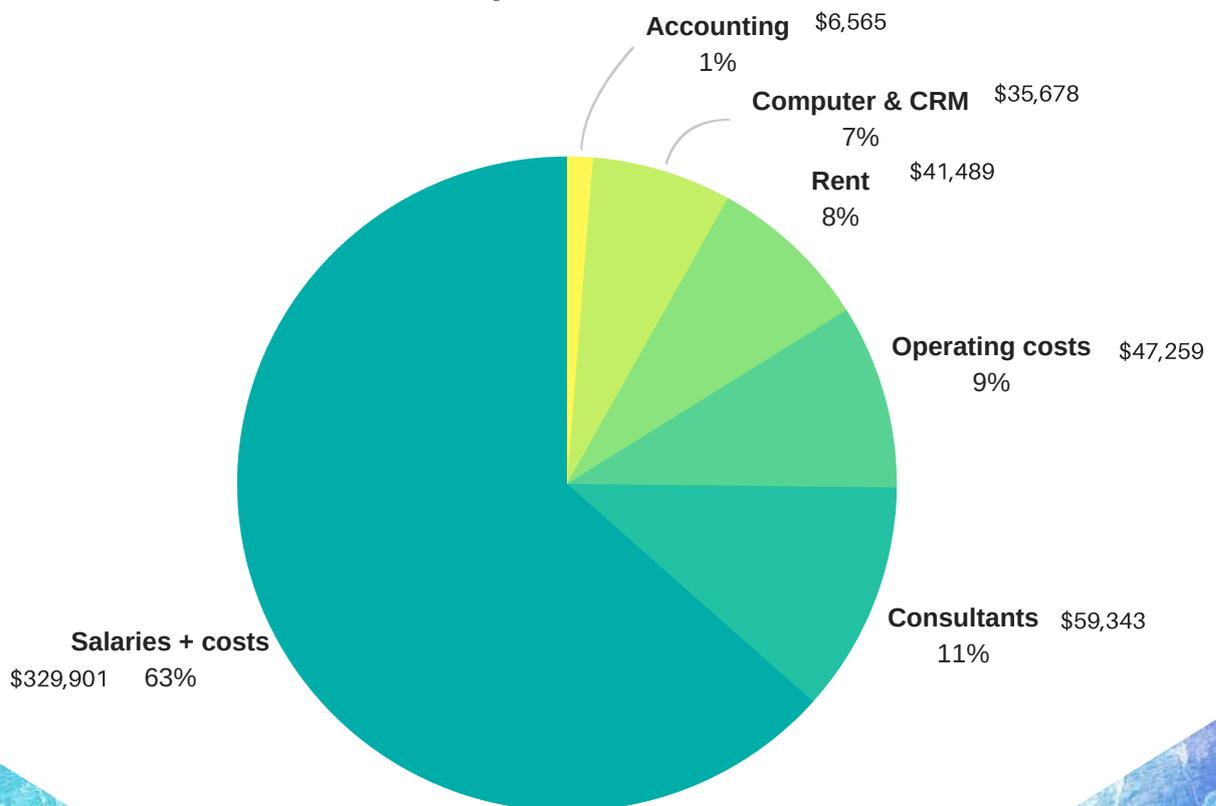
Current assets	\$507,873
Non-current assets	\$37,831
Total Assets	\$545,704

Liabilities

Current liabilities	\$260,765
Non-current liabilities	\$62,353
Total liabilities	\$323,118

Total Equity \$222,586

Expenses



Special thanks to:

The Department of Health and Human Services for their ongoing support of people with communication support needs through the funding of Communication Rights Australia.



National Disability Insurance Agency for funding of the Flip Cards and Resource Manual for pre-planning and planning meetings.

Members, friends and families of people with communication support needs for their donations.



10

Annual Report
2017 - 2018



Communication Rights Australia

For people with little or no speech but plenty to say



1300 666 604



info@communicationrights.org.au



Shop 4, 3 Tuck Street
Moorabbin Vic 3189



www.communicationrights.org.au



DHSS

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ABN: 25 120 926 829