



Communication Rights Australia

ABN: 25120 926 829

# Annual Report 2016 – 2017



## Introduction

We are pleased to present Communication Rights Australia's Annual Report for 2016-17. This report describes our performance during the 2016-2017 financial year against the strategic plan, its objectives and priority areas.

Our priority areas include:

- Protection and promotion of the human rights of people we represent;
- Development of a framework for a 'National Centre of Excellence for Information'
- Best practice service delivery in the area of human rights information;
- Operational excellence;
- Provide services that have an integrated quality framework that is aligned to National Disability Standards.

The report is also designed to meet our obligations to our community members, stakeholders and funding bodies.

Communication Rights has obtained the external assurance for the financial and quality standards as required for our registration as a charity, 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: [info@communicationrights.org.au](mailto:info@communicationrights.org.au)

Write to us at:

Communication Rights Australia,  
4/3 Tuck Street, Moorabbin, 3189

Speak to our office staff on 1300 666 604.

## Chairperson's Report

As Communication Rights Australia (Communication Rights) endeavours to embrace the new disability market environment, many challenges and opportunities for growth are being directed towards the agency. What is certain is that the future will not look like the present or the past, and therefore we need to plan as an organisation to manage these changes and to ensure we can still provide a quality response to what our community members require, without losing sight of our mission and vision.

In response, the Board have made some changes and attracted new skills needed to ensure the organisation is sustainable and viable into the future.

I want to thank my fellow Board members for their contributions over the last twelve months. These busy people, with both their own careers and life commitments, are dedicated to Communication Rights' overarching objective for a more equal and inclusive society.

I wish to thank our community members for their support during this time of change. Their assistance in maintaining the organisation's direction is invaluable.

I want to acknowledge Jan Ashford, our CEO, for her leadership and ongoing commitment

to managing and growing the organisation. I thank Jan, Jai, Monique, Jade, Serena, Isabel and our volunteers who all provide the quality responses to our community members, families and key stakeholders. For those staff that have moved on, I want to thank them for being part of the Communication Rights story of this year.

Our staff demonstrate our values on a daily basis through their work. Passion and drive is an ever-present component of each staff member's work, and it is an honour to have them as part of our team. Despite being hard and exhausting work at times, their commitment to the rights of people with communication support needs is ever pervasive. Discrimination-free schools, access to the justice system and inclusion at all levels provide their aspirational goals for change.

I wish to acknowledge the funding we have received over the last twelve months from the Department of Health and Human Services, donations from parents and supporters of the organisation and National Disability Insurance Agency.

I look forward to a strong and vibrant Communication Rights Australia in the year to come.

**Julie Phillips, Chairperson**





## Our Team

### Board Members

Julie Phillips

Corrine Collins

Rosemary Crossley (leave  
March 2017)

Hanife Ymer

Kathleen Latage

Evelyn Moseley

Ashley Steegstra

### Staff

Jan Ashford

Jai Phillips (maternity leave)

Monique Sweetland

Serena Hansen

Heather Renton (project)

Jade Vriend

Jennifer Powell (left January 2017)

Isabel Redman (started February 2017)

### Volunteers

Karrina DeKauwe

Devi Dash

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Communication Rights Australia

## CEO's Report

Organisations across the disability sector are in the process of transforming themselves to meet the new market environment, and at the same time providing support to clients who face the biggest change to their funding in their history.

Organisations big and small are being asked to do more with fewer resources. In this time of change and uncertainty, stress arises at all levels of the sector, and we see it playing out in the daily lives of our members and their families. The pace that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is rolling out plans is causing a huge amount of uncertainty for individuals, many of whom have complex care needs. Items traditionally covered under their disability packages are not being included in their new plans. Communication Rights staff are having to understand the new system as well as support people requesting assistance. We remain unsure as to how advocacy will be funded into the future, as it remains outside the NDIA funding program. Our specialist information funding stream also remains uncertain. The State Government, our present funding body, has identified that all information dollars will be transferred to NDIA as part of their agreed contributions to the costs under the Commonwealth and State Agreement. Early indications are that it will

be directed to the Information, Linkages, and Capacity Building (ILC) arm of NDIS.

Opportunities arose as National Readiness and Jurisdictional grants were rolled out under NDIA ILC. Communication Rights was fortunate to receive an allocation of funds in the first round of grants. We will develop a national digital guide for teachers to assist them to support students with communication support needs in education settings. This will allow us to respond to our national concerns.

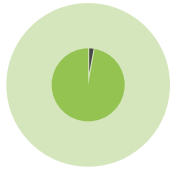
Short term project work is an excellent response to identified gaps, however provides no ongoing certainty for the maintenance of responsive quality staff; staff who have the necessary knowledge and skills to respond to the urgent needs of clients' requests. Information and advocacy provided to our community are of a specialist nature and require constant updating and researching to ensure we can provide the most up-to-date response.

Communication Rights is hopeful the market-driven approach to human services can provide a quality outcome, with the necessary safeguards to the most vulnerable and isolated members of our community.

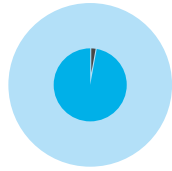
**Jan Ashford, CEO**

# Advocacy Cases

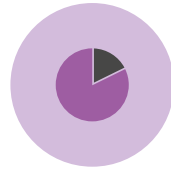
Reporting Period: 01/07/2016 to 30/06/2017



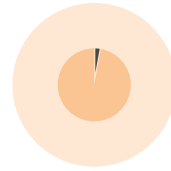
Financial 1%



Human rights abuse 1%



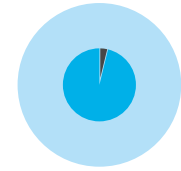
Freedom of expression, opinion, information and access 17%



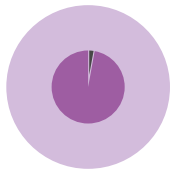
Personal mobility 1%



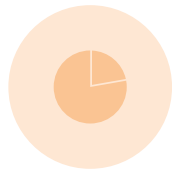
Protecting the integrity - housing 11%



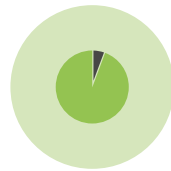
Independent living & community inclusion 2%



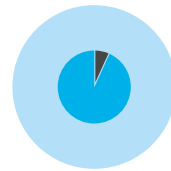
Respect for home, family 1%



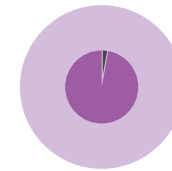
Education access 23%



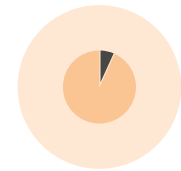
Health 4%



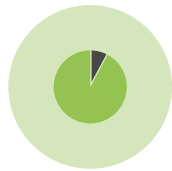
Living, social protection 5%



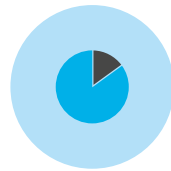
Equality & non-discrimination 1%



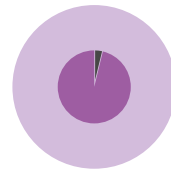
Accessibility 5%



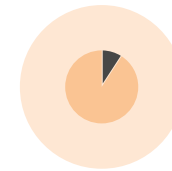
Independent living & community inclusion 6%



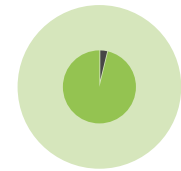
Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment - abuse 11%



Freedom of movement 2%



Freedom of expression - communication 7%



Recognition & equity before the law 2%

TOTAL 84 CASES

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Communication Rights Australia

## Developing a Quality State and National Information Centre

To keep abreast of the changes within the sector we work with a range of organisations and networks to gather key information on behalf of our client group. Communication Rights Australia has partnered and worked with Disability Discrimination Legal Service to ensure we have a two way streamlined referral system where we can receive advocacy referrals and obtain advice on discrimination matters.

We work closely with Disability Advocacy Victoria (DAV), the peak body for independent advocacy organisations within Victoria, and regularly meet to discuss key issues of concern within the sector. DAV makes representation to Government inquiries, discussion papers, reviews and NDIA/S key papers. As a group of 16 members, we strive to break down the walls for people with disability by working with key stakeholders to achieve positive, systemic change in the disability sector. With one united voice, we have a much greater influence on policymakers on issues that affect people with disability.

For a national perspective, we work with Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA), an organisation that supports and strengthens independent disability advocacy

organisations. It provides members with an understanding of what is happening on a national level as well as across each state.

To inform our practice, we have developed a research partnership with Federation University in Ballarat. The research is looking at the support and communication requirements of people with little or no speech when interacting with the criminal and civil justice system. Our community members are assisting the research team through interviews where they discuss the barriers they faced while accessing the justice system.

The National Disability Insurance Agency and Service (NDIA/S) is a massive changing space, and to inform the advocacy sector of its developments we are an active member of the Victorian Disability Advocacy Network (VicDAN). It is a network of legal services and advocacy groups involved in monitoring and sharing of NDIS information and experiences to better enable us to assist clients. We work closely with NDIS to ensure a more responsive understanding of client needs.

Communication Rights also maintains its connection with the wider sector through its relationship with Victorian Council of Social Services and their Australian equivalent.

Our work on the National Relay Service (NRS) has involved a coalition of members from the Deaf, hearing impaired and deaf/blind community. The federal government has announced cuts to the outreach and training program, which was an essential element to complement the support and success of the NRS.



## Advocacy Report

High demand for advocacy support from our community has continued this year, in particular with a significant rise in requests for assistance in addressing barriers to education for students with little or no speech. It has been a busy and productive twelve months, made all the more eventful with our senior advocate Jai going on maternity leave. A new advocate, Serena, has also joined the team this year, and is already making significant progress towards improving the lives of the many people with little or no speech she is advocating for.

This year we have been focusing on professional development and developing our networks, to ensure we have the skills and resources to achieve outcomes for our community. We have been involved in positive discussions with the Department of Education around the particular challenges facing students with complex communication needs. While there is still a long way to go, we are buoyed by the potential for ongoing discussions which reflect a raised awareness in the education sector of the vital importance

of separating out questions about cognitive ability from questions of communication ability. We have also this year spent a great deal of time learning about and discussing the NDIS. Unfortunately we have already dealt with a number of problematic situations arising during people's transition to the NDIS, and given the many well-publicised issues with the Scheme, we are anticipating an increase in cases of this sort.

The need for independent Communication Support Workers is another issue that has been highlighted once again during this year. Unlike Auslan interpreters for the Deaf Community and translators for people who only speak a language other than English, there is no system for providing Communication Support Workers for people who have no speech and need an independent communication partner/facilitator to help them communicate with people they are not familiar with, such as those working in the justice system. This is a critical need that we have raised repeatedly and will continue to push for a result



## New Staff Reflections

I joined Communication Rights as part of my student placement for my Community Services Work Diploma. On completion of my placement, I was delighted to be offered a contract position as a Research Assistant and Advocacy Intake Officer. I have a background in psychology and have enrolled to complete my Masters in Social Work.

The varied and extensive work undertaken by Communication Rights has allowed me to broaden my knowledge and understanding of the issues being faced by people with communication support needs.

I have recently been working alongside Dr. Marg. Camilleri from Federation University on a research project to examine the experiences of people with complex communication needs when interacting with the justice system. This has been an eye-opening experience for me and has further developed my interest in human rights and social justice.

I look forward to the future continuing to work with Communication Rights to advance my knowledge of a human rights-based approach to advocacy while completing my study.

**Isabel Redman**

While I joined Communication Rights Australia in April this year, and it has been such a pleasure to become part of such a supportive, knowledgeable and professional team. Being new to the disability advocacy sector and coming from large not-for-profit organisations, it has been an enormous learning curve and change for me, both in terms of professional development and in workplace culture. I would have found it much more challenging if I did not feel so supported and encouraged by my wonderful colleagues and in particular, Jan.

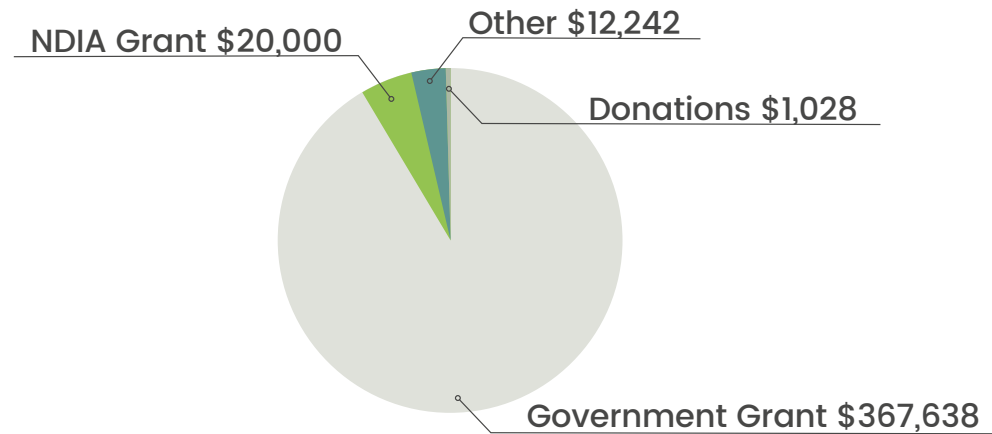
It has been a real eye-opener to learn about the challenges and obstacles that individuals with little or no speech continue to face and of the inappropriate or inadequate systemic processes and services which create an ongoing battle for so many people and their families. It is clear that there is still much more work which will need to be done moving forward, for individuals to enjoy the same participation and opportunities in all aspects of life as everyone else. I look forward to being part of creating some of those changes, alongside the rest of the our team.

**Serena Hansen**

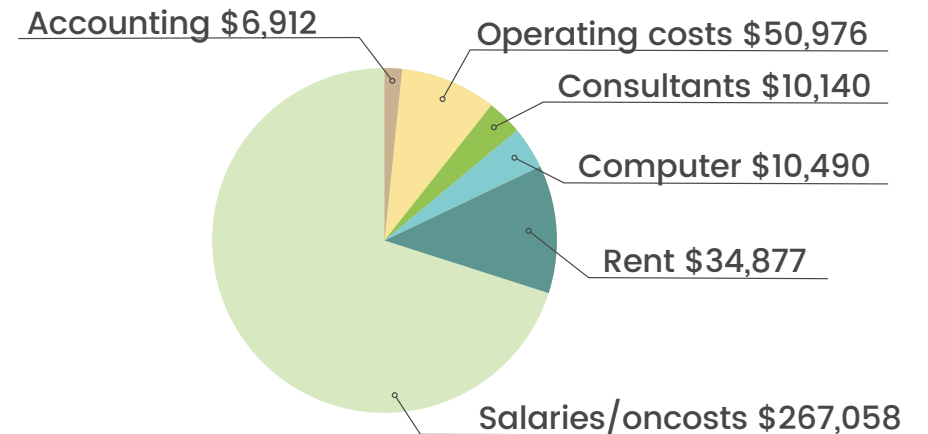


# Financial Overview

## Income



## Expenses



## Balance Sheet

Assets		Liabilities	
Current assets	\$637,620	Current liabilities	\$426,718
Non-current assets	\$24,989	Non-current liabilities	\$57,797
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>\$662,609</b>	<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>\$484,515</b>

Total equity: \$178,093

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

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## Special thanks to:

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



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

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





Communication Rights Australia

ABN: 25120 926 829

## Communication Rights Australia



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03 9555 8948

Advice and intake: 1300 666 604



[www.communicationrights.org.au](http://www.communicationrights.org.au)

Email: [info@communicationrights.org.au](mailto: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 9280 1955



SAI GLOBAL

DHSS