



NEWSLETTER — December 2016

“Our Voice, Our Choice”



GdA is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services under the National Disability Advocacy Program and the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services

Grampians disAbility Advocacy

GdA celebrates 20 years of advocacy in October 2016



Above: Exec Officer **Debbie** Verdon (left) celebrates with inaugural coordinator/advocate Dorothy McLaren.

Below: The beautifully decorated 20th birthday cake



AGM and 20th Birthday Celebration
GdA held its Annual General Meeting and birthday celebration at the Ararat Performing Arts Centre on October 17. About 40 members, supporters and guests attended the function. Master of Ceremonies was former board member Adrian Philips and inaugural coordinator/advocate of Ararat/Stawell Advocacy Services Dorothy McLaren was guest speaker. Dorothy was coordinator from 1996 to 2000.

The meeting included the adoption of the Model Rules for Incorporated Associations 2012 and the election of office bearers for the next 12 months.
Chairperson: Jenni Starick
Vice chairperson: Kay Timmins
Secretary: Julie McDougall
Treasurer: Steven Harmer
Non executive members: Mark Thompson, Norm McMurray, Bernadette O'Shannessy



Above: Vice chairperson Kay Timmins (left) and Board member Bernadette O'Shannessy



Above: Daylesford advocate Kaylene Howell (left) and GdA member Jenny Smith at the Annual General Meeting



Above: Horsham advocate Trudy Joyce (left) and Carol Starkey from Grampians Pyrenees PCP.



Providing quality advocacy for 20 years



Lost your job? Can't manage your bills & debts? Can't pay mortgage or rent? Not sure of your entitlements? Need a budget plan or strategies?

MoneyHelp is a not-for profit service supported by Victorian and Australian Governments to provide free, confidential and independent information and financial counselling advice to Victorians who are experiencing financial difficulty. People can access **MoneyHelp** Monday-Friday 9.30am to 5pm on **1800 007 007**

or by email through the MoneyHelp website www.moneyhelp.org.au

The **MoneyHelp** website www.moneyhelp.org.au contains comprehensive information about job loss, debt and housing costs, as well as details about where to go for further help

MoneyHelp provides confidential and free information to assist Victorians with debt problems. You will find information on the website about rent assistance, redundancy payments, and bankruptcy. There are tips and tools to guide you towards better habits to avoid fines. Contact the website for more details.

The Victorian Public Tenants Association

(VPTA) is an incorporated not for profit organisation, recognised as the peak body representing public housing tenants in Victoria. The organisation's original aim of advocacy and representation of public housing tenants across Victoria remains the priority concern of the VPTA today. It is engaged in regular consultation forums with the Department of Human Services to discuss issues that affect tenants, including service provision and delivery. It continues to advocate on behalf of public housing tenants to improve and expand public housing in Victoria.

VPTA Purpose

To provide benevolent relief and social welfare support services including the provision of counselling, advice, referral, representation and advocacy for people, including those who are homeless, or otherwise in significant distress regarding matters related to public housing; and to responsibly advocate for the provision of a viable public housing system for those who need it, including the broad community.

For further information or enquiries contact VPTA in one of the following ways:
Phone: 1800 015 510
Email: admin@vpta.org.au
Website: www.vpta.org.au

How to take part in GdA's quality assurance audit

Each year disability advocacy agencies that receive Government funding have some trained people come to check whether they are doing a good job. This is called an audit. An audit is happening at GdA in February 2017. If you have recently received a service from GdA then you might be invited to participate.

Taking part

You may be contacted by GdA about taking part in the audit. One way to take part is to talk to the audit team and answer some questions. You tell them what you think of the advocacy program at GdA, and whether you were satisfied with the level of service you received. Another way to take part is to let the audit team see your advocacy file. The audit team reads about what GdA has done for you. Clients of GdA can choose to do one of these, both or neither.

It's up to you

It is up to you if you want to take part. You get to decide - yes or no. No one will be upset with you if you decide not to take part and it won't change any advocacy you get. If you want a different advocate from another agency or a support person to help you with this, it's okay.

Find out more

Phone Debbie Verdon at GdA on 1800 552 272 or email asas@netconnect.com.au

Operation Wait snares wheelchair cabbies who stranded passengers (by Adam Carey, The Age Victoria 30/10/16)



Disability advocate Frank Hall-Bentick talks about his experiences of waiting for an accessible taxi for two hours or more. Photo: Chris Hopkins

After seeing a movie with friends, you call a taxi to get home. It's a short journey, just four kilometres from Cinema Nova on Lygon Street to your flat in Richmond. You wait two-and-a-half hours before the cab comes. An able-bodied person could have strolled home in less than half that time. But you are not able-bodied. You have a muscle-wasting disease that confines you to a wheelchair, and wheelchair-accessible taxis are virtually your only means of travelling around Melbourne.

This was Frank Hall-Bentick's appalling experience, one of so many examples of unreliable service that means the 63-year-old disability advocate and former public servant no longer has the confidence to use a taxi, unless a carer travels with him. "If I can't get a carer to go with me I don't go out, because I am that anxious, particularly with feeling abandoned when you want to get home," he said. "The taxi not coming and you're by yourself. You ring ring ring ring ring - nothing on the way. It's a very awful experience."

"The TSC has run this operation on a number of occasions," TSC chief executive Aaron de Rozario said, "and the data indicates that the operation is very effective in reducing the number of drivers offending by not prioritising WAT bookings.

"A related inspection blitz of wheelchair-accessible taxis also turned up a startlingly high number of breaches of standards: of 112 vehicles inspected, 64 required rectification and seven had defects that led to an infringement notice being issued. Twenty-four of the inspected taxis did not even have proper wheelchair restraint systems fitted, while some drivers did not understand how to correctly fit and use the systems, nor where they could be purchased. Mr de Rozario said this was "most definitely" a safety problem in need of urgent attention. "Passenger and driver safety is paramount for everyone, and additional steps need to be taken to ensure wheelchairs are secured correctly," he said.

Mr Hall-Bentick has braved this problem also, sometimes resigning to travelling in an insecure cab. On a recent trip, a driver fumbled around for 20 minutes trying to strap him across the waist, before an exasperated Mr Hall-Bentick lost patience and told him to "just go slow and get me home". Details of Operation Wait were revealed in the TSC's 2015-16 annual report, published last week. According to the 2015-16 state budget, wheelchair passengers wait 29 minutes on average for a taxi, compared to a nine minute wait for conventional taxi passengers.

HOW ANIMALS LEND A HELPING PAW TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

(FROM "HOUSE WITH NO STEPS" WEBSITE 17/11/16)

There are a great many service animals that can help people with a disability live their day-to-day lives to the fullest. Here are a few of them!

Service animals

Service animals can assist people with physical disabilities, autism, mental illness, or other types of disabilities. These animals can complete tasks like opening and closing doors, turning off the light, or making a noise to indicate that attention is needed in some shape or form. They can also provide physical support with balance and stability, retrieve medication, as well as pull wheelchairs. Service dogs can also assist individuals should they have a seizure by raising the alarm or lying next to them to prevent injury, and even alert susceptible people to the presence of allergens.

Therapy and companion animals

Animals aren't limited to helping us in only physical ways. They can also help soothe and improve our mental wellbeing, and almost any animal can be used for this purpose, from fish to birds, rabbits and cats.

For children with autism, studies have found that when animals such as dogs, cats, and even guinea pigs are present, they can experience less anxiety. Part of this lies in the fact that animals are non-judgmental, accept us for the way we are, and provide unconditional love. Children are also less likely to withdraw from social situations when their companion animal is with them. For adults who have autism, animals can also provide similar benefits and can often help calm someone in moments of anxiety – petting, hugging, or having a dog put pressure on the person by using their paw or lying on them creates a calming effect.

Horse riding

Therapeutic horse riding is another way our furry friends can be of assistance. Designed for people with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis and others with a lessened motor function, it has been shown to help improve balance, posture and mobility over time, on top of lending emotional benefits.

DO YOU HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS?

In order to manage the rising cost of postage, and to minimize our environmental footprint, GdA would prefer to email future newsletters.

If you have an email address please let us know by writing to us at asas@netconnect.com.au with "member email" in the subject line.

Thanks from GdA!

If you would like to include an item of interest in our newsletter, please contact the Ararat Office by email or by phoning 1800 552 272

The Xmas/New Year break at GdA

All GdA outlets and offices will be closed between Xmas and New Year.

For other arrangements at the office closest to you please phone that office for details.

Ararat 1800 552 272
Ballarat 5333 7344
Daylesford 5348 3350
Horsham 5381 2400



For urgent advocacy assistance over the holiday break please contact the Office of the Public Advocate on 1300 309 337

GdA wishes all our members and associates a **happy & safe** Christmas and New Year

