
SEPTEMBER 2023



GdA EO Deb Verdon retires

Deb Verdon has literally left the building after 23 years of nurturing Grampians disAbility Advocacy. Deb started with GdA in December 1999 when GdA was known as Ararat & Stawell Advocacy Services, knowing nothing about the role but taking to it like a duck to water.

Under Deb's care, GdA went from being a one office service to having four regional offices and two outreach offices, covering 11 local government areas - a very large slice of Victoria. Deb secured ongoing and stable funding for GdA and ensured that GdA had the best advocates. She led through hard work, dedication and almighty passion. Deb has been the backbone to so many improvements for many, many people with disabilities, ensuring their rights have been met whenever, wherever and however possible. Accessibility & inclusion, two of the most important issues, have been fought for and boldly campaigned for as constant crusades.

Deb was our tireless leader in those campaigns. There is not enough room in this newsletter to pay homage to the long list of contributions that Deb has made across her 23 years with GdA. But one thing that shows in all the GdA staff is the confidence in every person she has nurtured, encouraged and mentored. Deb will be missed on many levels, but her long chapter here is complete and she can now enjoy her well-earned retirement .



Back L - R: Jo Richie, Tavis Starick, retiring GdA EO Deb Verdon, Martin Starick, Julie McDougall, Front L-R: Jenni Starick, Kay Timmins, GdA Board Chairperson Norm McMurray



Advocates (L-R) (Moorabool Hepburn) Kaylene Howell, (NDIS Appeals Officer) Bern Duane, (Ararat Pyrenees) Sherree Unwin, (Retiring GdA EO) Deb Verdon, (Indigenous Advocate) Fiona Tipping, (Horsham Wimmera, NGS) Trudy Joyce, (Ballarat) Phil Cutts

The GdA Board of Governance & Staff all wish Deb a wonderful new chapter in her life and thank her for her extraordinary commitment. She will always be our Deb.

GdA Welcomes New EO

The GdA Board of Governance is happy to introduce Roy Reekie as the new Executive Officer. Roy's previous working experience includes being the EO at Borderline Personality Disorder Community (Vic) and many years working in the community legal centres sector, including as program manager of Victoria Legal Aid's funding program for CLCs.

Roy has also managed Lambeth Law Centre in London, worked on anti-social behaviour in Glasgow (including setting up a community mediation service) and managed an environmental charity in Scotland. He established and managed a Local Learning and Employment Network and a community legal service in South West Victoria and was a Community Engagement Facilitator with Warrnambool City Council. He's done lots of stuff.

Roy is an amateur radio DJ, having co-founded CREW FM/3WAY community radio station in Warrnambool. He's also active in the communities he lives in, co-founding a reconciliation group that brought First Nations and non-indigenous people together to develop and run a cultural festival (music and art) and provide employment for First Nations young people and co-founding Warrnambool's Community Garden. Roy also ran for election to State Parliament a number of times.

We all welcome Roy and wish him the best for his new role of captaining the GdA for many years to come. Welcome aboard 😊



Roy Reekie



Cardinia Cultural Centre is holding a FREE exhibition featuring art created by people with disability – **Friday 4 August to Sunday 24 September.**

The *Expression* exhibition is an opportunity for artists with disability to showcase their creative talent and express themselves. **For more information, call Cardinia Cultural Centre on 1300 887 624.**



Carer Gateway is an Australian Government program providing free [services and support](#) for carers. If you care for a family member or friend with disability, a medical condition, mental illness, or who is frail due to age, then Carer Gateway can help you. The Australian Government works with a range of health and carer organisations across Australia, known as [Carer Gateway service providers](#), to deliver services to carers no matter where they live in Australia. Carer Gateway provides many services to support carers in their caring role, including: [in-person and online peer support groups](#) / [tailored support packages](#) to help with accessing planned respite, transport services, and more / [in-person and phone counselling](#) / [in-person and online self-guided coaching](#) / [online skills courses](#) to support your wellbeing and understanding of legal responsibilities relating to the caring role / [access to emergency respite](#) if you suddenly become ill or injured.

Call **1800 422 737**



Our amazing female Aussie athletes that are not letting their hearing loss stop them from participating in the sports they are passionate about

- Matildas goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold shared on social media the day she received a hearing aid
- The Australian Women's Deaf Football team could not raise enough money to play in its World Cup
- Players and officials hope Arnold sharing her journey will help increase awareness around the sport

Mackenzie Arnold has won millions of fans across the country thanks to her star turn as the Matildas goalkeeper at the Women's World Cup. But what many new fans might not know is that Arnold lives with hearing loss. It has helped thrust the Deaf and hard of hearing community into the spotlight and provided a high profile role model for many. That includes 21-year-old Breanna Doncovski, who has qualified for the Australian Women's Deaf Football team. "Football is just fun, and a team-based sport is definitely my forte," Doncovski said. "The team is an amazing bunch of girls and I can't believe I finally found my Deaf community." (article extract & photos taken from ABC News)



Be a good sport yourself!

Stawell Bowls Club (5 Napier St Stawell) will host the Wimmera and Mallee Sports Assemblies'

Regional All-Abilities Bowls tournament on **14th September** 10.30 until 2pm. Everyone is welcome. **Cost \$10. BBQ lunch provided. Bring** your hat, sunscreen & drink bottle. **Wear** flat shoes & football colours. **Enquiries:** Rhonda Allan 0427 780 109



Paralympian Gerrard Gosens first totally blind person to attempt 20km swim around Woppa-Great Keppel Island

From ABC News



For Gerrard Gosens, taking part in a gruelling ocean marathon swim is more than a physical test of endurance. Gerrard is aiming to become the first person to swim completely blind in the 20km swim event Swim Around Keppel in central Queensland. There will also be a disability relay for the first time at the event. Mr Gosens will use the central Queensland swim to train for the English Channel. "Other people can see the buoy ... they're aiming for the horizon. [For me] it's much more challenging because mentally you have no idea how far you've actually swum," he said. The triathlete, who is blind, will participate in a 20-kilometre open water swim around Woppa-Great Keppel Island in central Queensland on Saturday. If successful, he will be the first totally blind person to do so. Mr Gosens said to make sure he stayed on track, he would swim with four different guides with a short tether attached to his thigh.



Got some spare time?

The Independent and Pathways Living Skills Program is a free service that helps bring people with a disability together.

In a safe, fun and caring environment, the GdA Project Officers tailor a program that many can benefit from.

These programs generally run for around for one to two terms in various locations, meeting weekly.

In Stawell and Ararat, Peer Support Groups also meet monthly for a catch up or to do something of interest to those who wish to be involved.

Contact our Ararat Office via our Central Intake for more information.

1800 552 272



What does GdA do?

- *Help you write a letter or submission to represent your interests
- *Make a telephone call with/for you or help get info to resolve a concern
- *Find information about another agency that may be able to assist
- *Provide information on disability issues
- *Support people to advocate for themselves

GdA Office Locations

- ❖ Ararat
- ❖ Horsham
- ❖ Daylesford
- ❖ Ballarat
- ❖ Clunes

Central Intake 1800 552 272

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