

GdA Annual Report 2023– 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: GdA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognises their continuing connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



Our Vision

An equitable and inclusive society that upholds the rights of all people to be empowered and thrive in life.

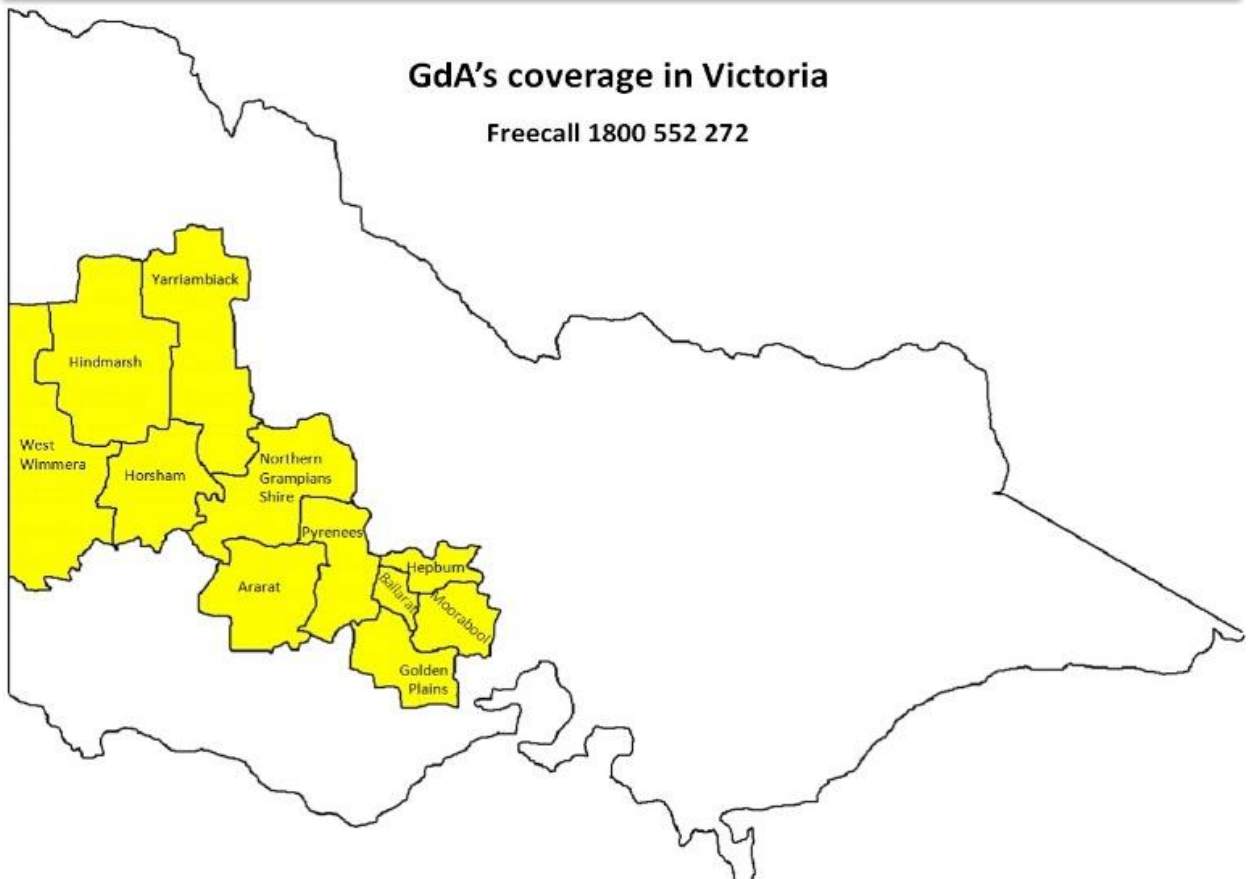
Our Mission

GdA stands beside people with a disability as they:

- Are empowered to live the life they choose
- Understand and act on their human rights
- Connect and build confidence, independence and friendships

Our Values

- Respect
- Integrity
- Loyalty
- Empowerment
- Self-determination
- Inclusion
- Empathy



GdA BOARD OF GOVERNANCE 2032-2024 (including years of service)

CHAIRPERSON
Daylesford



Norm McMurray
10 years

VICE CHAIRPERSONS **Jo Richie & Bernie O'Shannessy**

SECRETARY
Ararat



Jo Richie
4 years

TREASURER
Horsham



Bernie O'Shannessy
8 years

ORDINARY MEMBERS



Craig Townsend
Ballarat 2 years



Carol Okai
Golden Plains 1 year



Helen Roche
Ballarat 1 year



Dale Edwards
Ballarat 1 year

Board Charter

The Board provides effective leadership and collaborates with the Executive Officer to:

- ♦ articulate and exemplify the organisation's Mission, Vision, Values and Strategies
- ♦ develop strategic plans and order strategic priorities
- ♦ maintain open lines of communication between Board and management
- ♦ develop and maintain an organisational structure that supports the achievement of strategic objectives
- ♦ appoint the Executive Officer and monitor her/his performance against agreed performance indicators



Members and staff appreciate the voluntary work the Board does for people with a disability in our region.

GdA Life Members:

Julie McDougall
Jenni Starick
Deb Verdon
Kay Timmins
Mark Thompson

GdA Sub-Committees and Advisory Groups

(all convened by a Board Member)

Central Highlands Regional Advisory Group (CHRAG)

Craig Townsend, Phil Cutts, Kay Timmins, Mark Thompson,
Helene Roche, Rebecca Paton, Dale Edwards, Roy Reekie

Policy Oversight and Review Committee (PORC)

Helene Roche, Bernie O'Shannessy, Jo Richie, Mark Thompson, Kay Timmins, Roy Reekie

Finance Audit and Budget Committee (FAB)

Bernie O'Shannessy, Jo Richie, Kay Timmins, Roy Reekie

Staff Performance and Review Committee (SPARC)

Norm McMurray, Helene Roche, Kay Timmins

Systemic Advocacy Advisory Committee

Carol Okai, Dale Edwards, Mark Thompson, Roy Reekie

Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group

Roy Reekie, Trudy Joyce, Carol Starkey,

**NEVER EVER DEPEND ON GOVERNMENTS OR INSTITUTIONS TO
SOLVE ANY MAJOR PROBLEMS.**

ALL SOCIAL CHANGE COMES FROM THE PASSION OF INDIVIDUALS.

**NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL,
COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.**

INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.

Margaret Mead



Chairperson's Report

Norm McMurray
(Chair since Dec 2020)

On behalf of Grampians disAbility Advocacy Association and its Board of Governance, I commend this entire GdA Annual Report to you and now offer my own observations on 2023-24.

I would first like to acknowledge my fellow Board of Governance members for all their tireless and dedicated efforts this last year, Jo, Bernie, Craig, Helene, Carol, Dale and Matt.

We welcomed Helene, Carol, Dale and Matt as new Board members and they have all brought exceptional skills and unique perspectives to our work as a Board.

Unfortunately, we were sad to farewell our Deputy Chairperson, Carly McKinnis, as she resigned from the Board to tend to all her other numerous commitments.

I would also like to offer special thanks to Jo and Bernie for agreeing to collaborate as Deputy Chairs in addition to their other executive roles.

I have to make a special mention to Bernie who has been our Treasurer since 2018 and has done a stellar job of it, but is now ready to hand the reins to another qualified person.

A lot of work has been done on many policies and procedures, and I would like to particularly extend my gratitude to Helene Roche and the Policy Committee and Finance Committee for the many hours that they have put in and making themselves available to collaborate with each other and the EO on the multitude of important policies.

We are fortunate to have our Central Highlands Regional Advisory Group to continue its campaigning for the much need improvements at the Ballarat Station, and now with the new Systemic Advocacy Advisory Committee, to begin working on other systemic issues

We have both lost and gained great employees during the year.

Longtime disability advocate Sheree Unwin resigned recently and has been replaced in the Ararat/Pyrenees Disability Advocate role by a new worker, Erin McCallum.

Regrettably, due to funding changes and uncertainty, we have also lost our Indigenous Disability Advocate Keiah Meddings-Cooper and three I-PaLS individual capacity building project workers, Matilda Schembri, Sarah Garton and Tadc Quirke.

Our Executive Officer, Roy Reekie, stepped into the role during what can only be described as an extremely challenging year, with the Royal Commission into Disability and the NDIS Review recommendations being responded to by governments in what can most generously be described as a deeply disappointing manner.

There is more on that in Roy's report.

Against this backdrop of uncertainty and change, we held our Strategic Planning Day in August 2024 to review our strategic plans and to adjust them to match the new policy landscape in the disability sector.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan is part of that suite of strategic plans and commitment and, like our other strategic plans, now needs further work to reflect the likely policy settings going forward. Information and

Linkages Capacity Building funds have continued to enable GdA to provide its Independent Pathway and Living and Skills (I-PaLS) program in various locations across our region.

This has seen great collaborative work with neighbourhood houses. Ararat and Stawell Peer Support Groups have continued to meet and provide highly meaningful connections for its participants. Our I-PaLS program manager Carol Starkey and her team Sarah Garton, Tiffany Kenny, Tadc Quirke and Matilda Schembri provided wonderful support to our I-PaLS participants

GdA received pilot funding to provide a fulltime Indigenous Disability Advocate for Ararat, Northern Grampians and the Wimmera, to show what a difference an Indigenous disability advocate can make.

Demand for all of our services remains very high and there is much more for GdA to do as it continues to provide support, wherever and however possible, but this places a lot of pressure on our staff. We can only take on cases within the limits of the resources we have from the funding we receive.

The work is intense and is becoming more complex and urgent as the rules around access to the NDIS change.

Thanks are due to Advocates Trudy Joyce, Kaylene Howell, Phil Cutts, Sherree Unwin and our NDIS Appeals Support Officer Bernadette Duane for their expertise, commitment and diligence to their clients in 2023-24, a to Tiffany Warren (Project Officer) for stepping up to assist with some advocacy cases.

In the administrative backroom, Angie McKew and Sue Horvath continue to keep the whole organisation running. Angie in particular performs a stellar role as Intake Officer, a job that can be very difficult given the waiting lists we need to use to manage the demand vs our capacity. Angie's care and concern for our clients and our staff is impeccable.

I will continue to support the Board and Staff as well as I can as we head into another year of challenges, as we strive to continue growing the highly valued advocacy service that we are.

So, thank you to everyone involved in helping to make GdA a continuing success story, with growing staff and membership.

I gratefully acknowledge all the hard work and commitment of our staff, Board Members, sub-committee members and members, and our partnership organisations and stakeholders.

Norm McMurray
Chairperson



EO Report

Has it really been over a year since I joined GdA; since I stepped into the 23 year old shoes of the legendary Deb Verdon? It feels like forever, but also like five minutes. I'm still getting to know the culture of GdA and how it ticks but, at the same time, I feel very much 'in with the bricks' here too.

It's been a long, hard year for all of us. A lot has happened but, equally, a lot that could have happened didn't.

I'll have more to say about this strange duality and its impacts later in this report but, right now, I'd like to acknowledge some key people to give credit where credit is due.

In a year of both hope and doubt about possible changes to the NDIS and its review and appeals systems, our disability advocates – Kaylene Howell, Keiah Meddings-Cooper, Phil Cutts, Sherree Unwin and Trudy Joyce and our appeals advocate Bern Duane – demonstrated incredible skill, patience, strength and resilience to deliver services to individuals needing advocacy support. They did this under difficult, uncertain circumstances, still reaching their usual high standards of service and success. I'm in awe of how they've done this and of the results they delivered for our clients. We assist over 300 clients each year so this highly valuable, life-changing work is relentless. Thank you all for what you do and how you do it.

In this current financial year, we've welcomed Erin McCallum into the Ararat/Pyrenees disability advocate role. Erin replaces Sherree who resigned from GdA recently after five years with us. Sherree, we regularly receive feedback from clients about the quality of your service, so on their behalf I'd like to thank you for helping so many people with disability to achieve their life goals. You are a fantastic example of what GdA aspires to be.

Our individual capacity building team – Matilda Schembri, Sarah Garton, Tadc Quirke and Tiffany Kenny, ably managed by Carol Starkey – wound up our Independent Pathways and Living Skills program (I-PaLS) at the end of its Federal funding. Carol and Sarah also maintained our support for the Sister Rocks self-advocacy group in Stawell. And Carol worked hard to secure additional Federal funding for a new three-year peer advocacy program from 2024-25 that will take I-PaLS to a new level.

That project is a partnership project with the Rights Information and Advocacy Centre (Shepparton). Unfortunately, the funding available could not re-employ all of the I-PaLS project officers. You have all done wonderful work in supporting the I-PaLS participants to build their confidence and skills.

The proof of this is that many of those I-PaLS 'graduates' are likely to continue into the peer advocacy program this year. There is a lot of talk about 'foundational supports'. Your work is fundamentally foundational; foundational at a personal level, and sustainable because it fosters the development of new, practical skills and knowledge in a way that creates opportunities – not just now but also into the future – for those you work with. Thank you all.

My deep, personal thanks also go to our Intake and Admin Officer Angie McKew and Finance Officer Sue Horvath who collectively ensure everything runs smoothly in the Ararat office and support our staff. GdA could not operate without you, and I certainly cannot do my job without both of you.

A special thank-you to Angie for her tireless efforts in making sure everything was in place for today's Annual General Meeting.

A crucial group to thank is our members and volunteers. You – and our clients - are the reason GdA exists and the reason we do the work we do.

Our Central Highlands Regional Advisory Group (CHRAG) continues to take on systemic advocacy issues in Ballarat, holding businesses, council and government to account for accessibility and service shortcomings.

Notably, CHRAG has continued its long campaign for access improvements at Ballarat Station. In previous years, members of CHRAG have run and won court cases on the issue, secured \$50 million State Government financial commitment for a major redevelopment and advocated for key improvements to be included in planning for that development.

Recently, we heard that the advanced plans for the project have gained Heritage Victoria approval so – with CHRAG watching closely – it should now be full steam ahead for the Ballarat Station redevelopment. CHRAG persistence and insistent voice is again reaping rewards for people with disability.

I am forever in debt to our Board of Governance and in particular our Chairperson Normie McMurray and retiring Treasurer Bernie O'Shannessy for their support of me over the past year. Our Board is made up of dedicated volunteers with broad and complimentary skills and knowledge.

Many of our Board are new but they have thrown themselves into the fray with vigour and generosity. Those who been with us longer are equally enthusiastic and dedicated. Special thanks to our office bearers who take on extra responsibilities for the organisation. I feel blessed that GdA has such a skilled and engaged Board.

Then there are our partners, too many to mention but I'd like to single out a few. The Victorian Regional Advocacy Network is a network of the six independent disability advocacy organisations providing disability advocacy in regional Victoria.

It's a collaborative group that has provided great support to me and GdA. The Disability Advocacy Resource Unit, Disability Advocacy Network of Australia and Victorian Disability Advocacy Network all provide resources and support which we rely on heavily.

We also lean on Villamanta Disability Rights and Legal Service and Monash University's Law Clinics for expert advice and support on legal aspects of the advocacy work we do.

An acknowledgement must go to those without whose support we wouldn't exist – our funders the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Thank you for the cash. We really need it.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge our clients. You are the reason we exist. We would rather that you didn't need our support but, given that you do, we are honoured to work with you and walk alongside you on your individual quests to access and enact your rights.

GdA is a human rights organisation. We are committed to supporting people with disability – our advocacy clients, the participants in our individual capacity building programs and those seeking systemic improvements in the services they use, the communities they live in and society in general – to speak up and have their say. Our role is to amplify their voices.

This is why what happened (or didn't happen) in 2023-24 has been so disappointing. Further than that, it's been disturbing.

The first half of 2023-24 was a period of promise and hope. The multi-million dollar and many years long Disability Royal Commission released its final report. There was also a report from the Review into the NDIS. Both reports included recommendations which, collectively, represented a blueprint for reform in a very positive way. And the prospect of genuine consultation to include the voice of people with disability lay at the very heart of those recommendations.

What did we then get in the second half of 2023-24?

- New NDIS legislation rushed into Parliament after a perfunctory public comment period and then rammed through.
- Administrative changes being made by the NDIA in anticipation of the new legislation and its (still yet to be developed) regulations, as if somehow they knew what the outcomes of any consultations and political processes might be. Here, I'm talking about changes being made as far back as November last year while the legislation itself didn't pass the parliamentary process until August this year.
- Things like allowed/not allowed expenses lists being developed by bureaucrats to become core tools for deciding what the plans of NDIS participants will be. Some of my sector colleagues who've been around for a long time have told me that this concept wipes out 15 years of advocacy by people with disability for individual needs based assessment and takes disability rights back to well before the Royal Commission. Instead of following the Royal Commission's recommendations for a brighter future, to Government (or at least its bureaucracy) has taken us back in time.

But my fundamental point, and the fundamental problem, is that the voices (and collective voice) of people with disability have been ignored in the process of creating these changes. Their voices have been silenced.

Even the small number of sector representatives invited into the room during the incredibly short consultation process over some of these changes were required to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements. They left those consultations with a gag across their mouth.

It gets a little worse. Our governments failed to respond to 90% of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

here was silence from them on those recommendations.

This – and the extraordinary delays in the governments responding plus their unwillingness to bring people with disability into the tent of their thinking – has created a vacuum of vagueness and uncertainty that has allowed fear and doubt to flourish.

This is the atmosphere we've been working in and continue to work in. It's toxic.

But we'll survive this. I have great hope for 2024-25 and beyond.

And that hope springs from the skills, wisdom, drive and dedication of GdA's staff, Board, members and clients.

Roy Reekie
Executive Officer



VALE KATH WOODS 2024



IN MEMORIUM
Kath Woods
Life Member

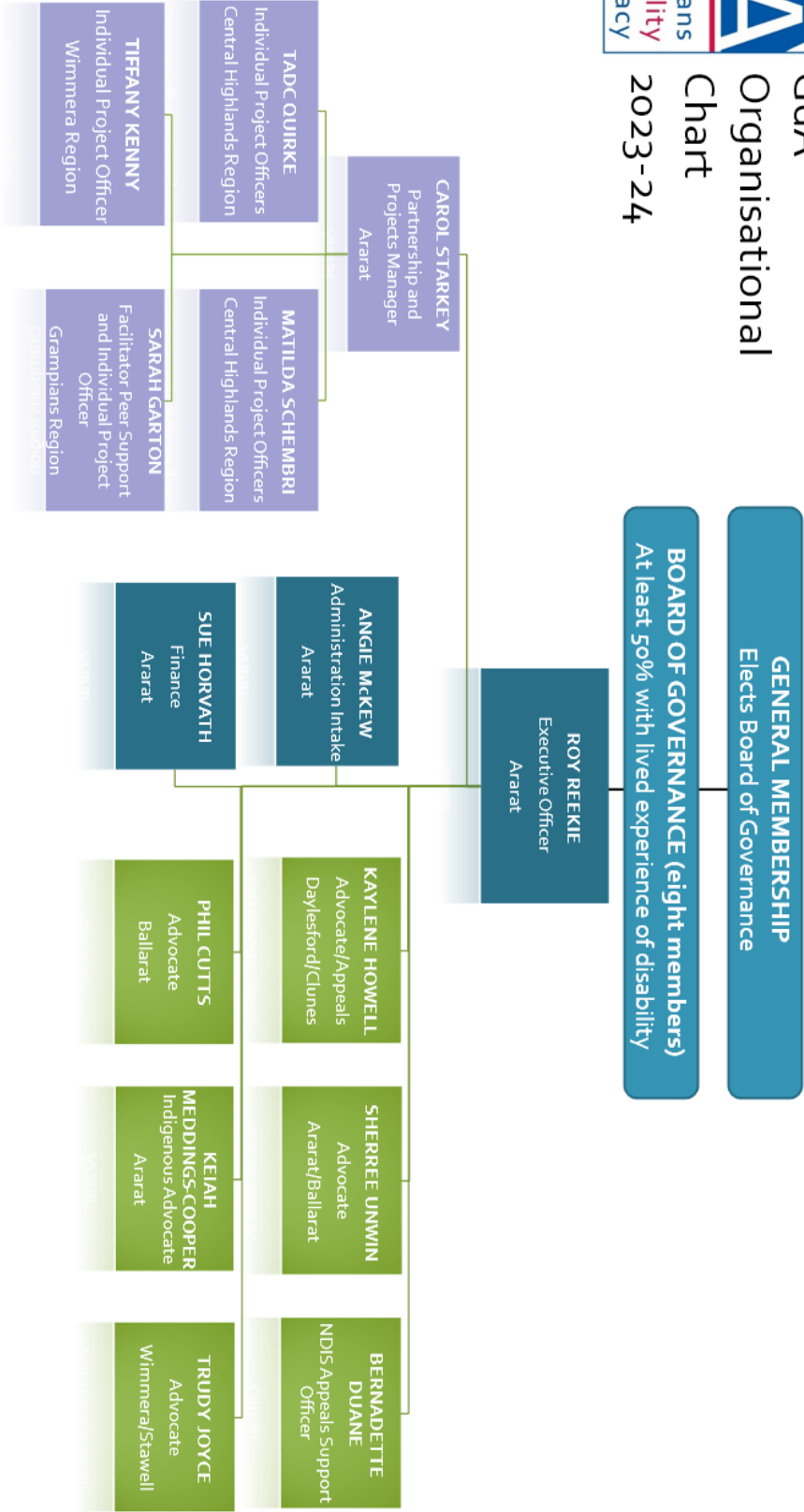


**Kath was a great supporter of GdA for many years, being involved in the Ballarat Disability Advocacy Group and later in the Central Highlands Regional Advisory Group.
Kath became the first Life Member in 2014.**

Past GdA Executive Officer Debbie Verdon described Kath's tireless advocacy for her children and all people with a disability since she moved to Ballarat with her husband John and two sons in 1984. She has served on the parent committees at Yooralla and Ballarat Special School and was a foundation member of the Ballarat Disability Action Group and the community access awards scheme.



GdA Organisational Chart 2023-24



OUR STAFF in 2023-24

EO Roy Reekie



Admin/Intake Officer
Angie McKew



Finance Officer
Sue Horvath



L-R:, Trudy Joyce, Kaylene Howell, Sherree Unwin



L-R: Advocates Bern Duane, Phil Cutts, Keiah Meddings-Cooper



Project Manager
Carol Starkey



Grampians IPaLS & Peer Support
Sarah Garton



L-R: IPaLS Project Officers Tiffany Kenny, Tadc Quirke, Matilda Schembri



Our programs in 2023-24

Advocacy programs

National Disability Advocacy Program

Our advocates assist people applying for NDIS packages or the Disability Support Pension and to exercise their human rights in relation to accessing government services. We ensure that our clients' voices are heard and that their needs are understood and respected. This program and our NDIS appeals work are funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Security.

NDIS Appeals

When things don't go to plan, there are appeal avenues via to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Our Appeals Support Officers support our clients to navigate the often-complex legal processes associated with appeals. The challenges in this are great but the results change lives.

State Advocacy

Access, respect and other human rights issues can often arise in relation to State Government areas of responsibility – education, justice, health, housing and others. So, the Victorian State Government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing funds us to fight for the rights of people with disability who feel discriminated against, overlooked and abused when trying to access and use these services.

Systemic advocacy

Collectively, we identify and act on opportunities to change the way that people, communities and organisations think about and approach disability. Notably, our Central Highlands Region Advisory Group has taken on key disability rights issues in the Ballarat region, with some notable wins including disability access at The Regent Theatre and the Ballarat Railway Station.

Partnership work and projects

I-PaLs (Independent Pathways and Living Skills)

Funded through a Commonwealth Department of Social Security Information Linkages and Capacity Building grant, our individual capacity building program creates and supports groups of people with disability to learn and develop individual life skills and capabilities to improve their lives. Led by our Partnerships and projects Manager, Carol Starkey, our individual capacity building team develops groups to deliver these opportunities right across our region. These groups provide important social opportunities for some of the most isolated people in our communities.

Self-advocacy and Peer Support

We support individuals to self-advocate, in accordance with our organisational commitment to self-determination and empowerment. We run Sister Rocks Self Advocacy Group in Stawell once per month for people with disability. They support one another to make their own choices, help each other with problems and tackle the big issues. We also run a monthly Peer Support Group in Ararat for people who live with disability, and may be socially isolated, to connect with each other.



Partnership and Projects Manager
Carol Starkey
(with GdA since 2019)

Partnerships and Projects Report 2023 – 2024

This last year saw the completion of our 4 years of the ILC capacity building grant. It was certainly inspiring to look through the great outcomes that we have had over the years while putting together the tribute to I-PaLS for the annual report. It was also a chance to reflect on how resilient our participants and staff were during and after the global pandemic. We have an exciting new project starting for our local communities. We will be running this in partnership with RIAC over the next 3 years.

Our Sister Rocks peer support and self-advocacy group is still running and often well attended with new members joining over the last year.

ILC project – Individual and Organisational Capacity Building 2020 – 2024

Firstly, I Would like to thank all our project officers who contributed to I-PaLS over the last 4 years. Thank you for your amazing contributions, achievements and relationships built while working for GdA. So thanks to – Jenny, Jane, Karen, Lisa, Lou, Tiffany, Tadc, Tilly, Sarah and to Emily who worked as our organisational capacity building project officer.

The I-PaLS program successfully empowered and connected participants to their local community through the programs we ran in Ararat, Daylesford, Ballarat, Warracknabeal, Horsham, Hopetoun, Bacchus Marsh (Darley), Haddon, Horsham, Stawell, Nhill, Creswick, Wendouree and Harrow.

As a part of our Organisational Capacity building component of the ILC grant, we developed a Reconciliation Action Plan. GdA will continue to develop this to sustainably and strategically take meaningful action to advance reconciliation based around the core pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities.

As the final part of this project, we are excited to be holding “How to be in Advisory Groups” training presented by Voice At The Table. In both Stawell and Horsham. The training will cover what an advisory group is, how to decide what advisory group to join, tips to get ready for advisory group meetings and tips for when you are in advisory group meetings.

Stawell – Tuesday 22nd October from 12.30pm to 5.30pm at the Stawell Neighbourhood House, 42 Sloane Street.

Horsham – Tuesday 26th November from 10am to 3pm at the Horsham Neighbourhood House, 13 -15 Robin Street.

ILC project – Individual Capacity Building 2024 – 2027

The future looks bright with the newest round of ILC funding for GdA. We submitted a joint application with RIAC for a program to develop and support, in rural and regional areas, local groups of people with disability. Our groups will develop skills and capability for self-advocacy and peer advocacy aimed at improving disability rights, access and inclusion in their local communities.

Our project will bring together local people with disability, particularly people with intellectual disability to create groups in 5 areas of the GdA region. The project will support participants to use their lived experience of disability to co-design the project so that it makes best use of their existing strengths and abilities. The focus will be on participants in our groups identifying the support, mentoring and training that will best assist them to build their self-advocacy skills. The practical focus of self-advocacy by our groups

will be on local issues that are identified by each individual group as important to them. This will allow enable people with disability, who are often excluded from or limited in involvement in their local communities, to make a meaningful contribution to build stronger and more inclusive local communities, with increased capability contributing to their ongoing involvement and lasting community development.

The new project will be called “RAISE your voice”. The word RAISE being an acronym for;
Regional
Action for
Inclusion through
Self – Advocacy and
Empowerment

Peer Support and Self Advocacy

Our Sister Rocks group continues to meet monthly at the Stawell Neighbourhood House. There has been a slight decrease in numbers over the last year, but we have seen a few new people join our group, which is great

Our group time and day has changed to meet the needs of the group participants and currently running as follows; **Sister Rocks** at the Stawell Neighbourhood House on the 3rd Thursday of each month from 4.00pm to 6.00pm



MEETING TIMES

Third Thursday of each month at Stawell Neighbourhood House

At the Powerhouse
42 Sloane St





FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO JOIN US

PHONE
1800 552 272

EMAIL
admin@grampiansadvocacy.org.au



Sister Rocks Peer Support and Self Advocacy Group





ABOUT SISTER ROCKS

We are a group of people with disabilities who -

- **Stand up for ourselves**
- **Support people to make choices**
- **Help with problems**
- **Talk about the big issues**
- **Learn new things**

Why we meet

Sister Rocks Peer Support and Self Advocacy Group is run by people who have a disability.

The group works together to make sure its members have the same rights, choices and opportunities as anyone else.

Self Advocacy Groups support people to:

- Speak up for their rights and help others to do the same
- Think about options and tell our leaders what they think and need
- Learn and share information, ideas and skills
- Plan and work together for more inclusive communities
- Meet new people and make friends
- Tell governments and the community about their rights, needs and issues

HOW IT WORKS

A facilitator from Grampians disAbility Advocacy assists with the running of the group.

The facilitator's role is to guide the meeting or give advice if the group decides to invite speakers or other organisations.

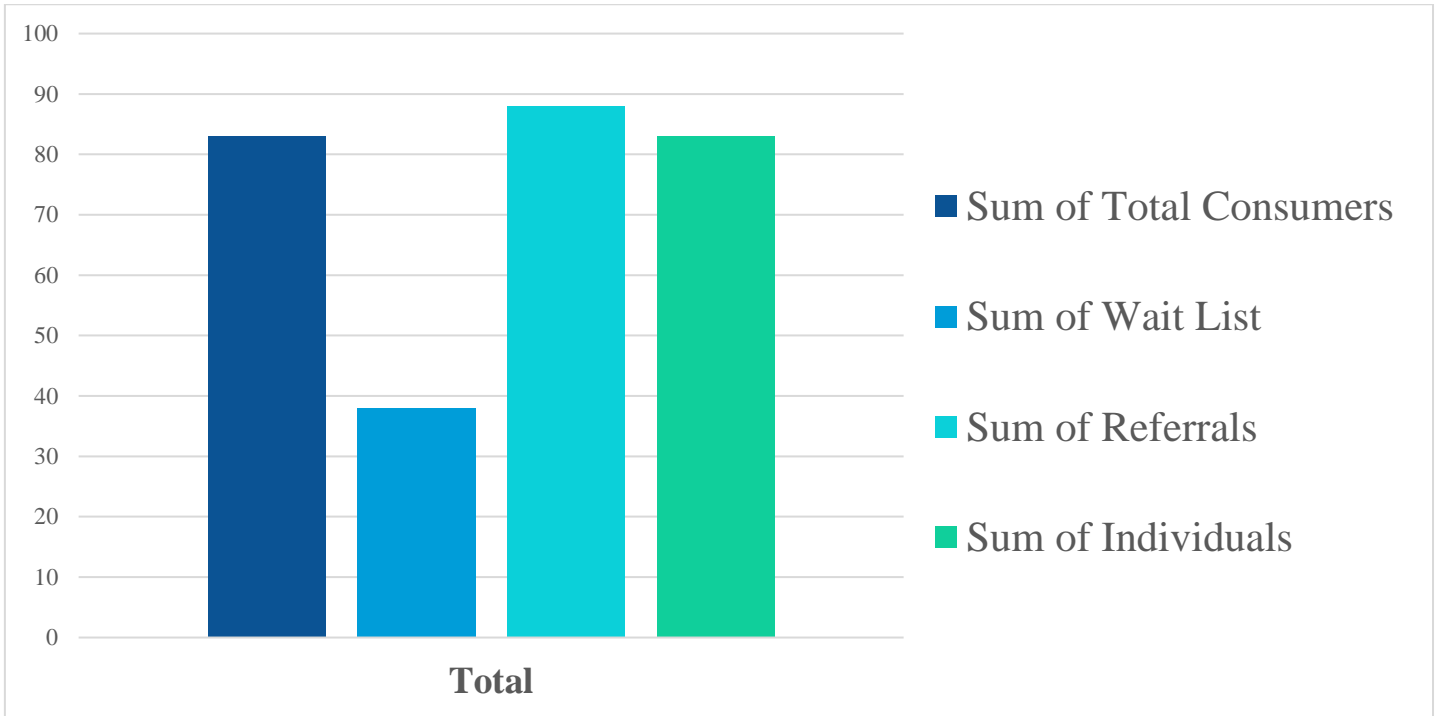
The group is supported to be as independent as possible to reach its goals by working together.

At the start of each year a planning session is held to set the program for the year.

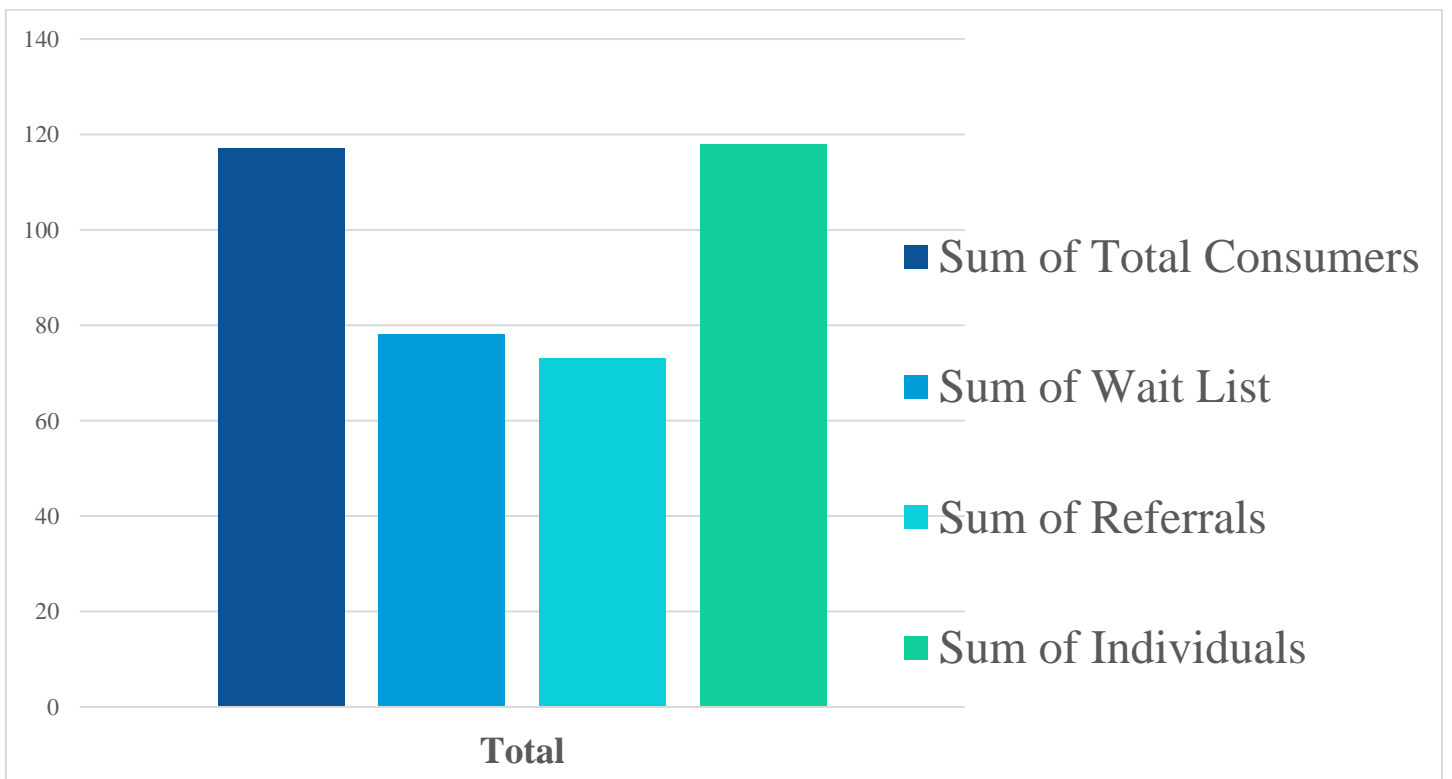
ADVOCACY PROGRAM STATISTICS

NDAP Consumers

2022-23



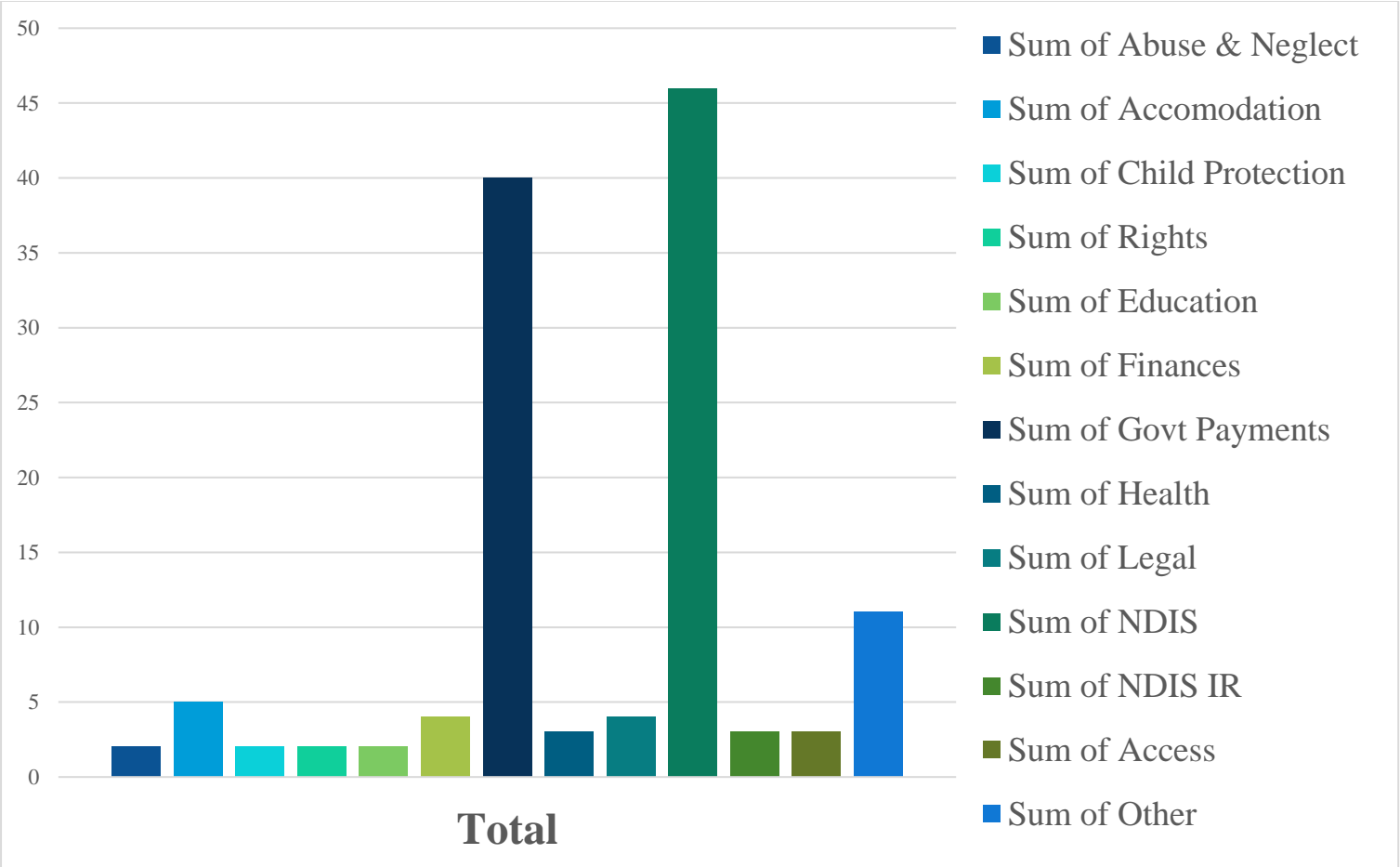
2023-24



NDAP

CLIENT ISSUE

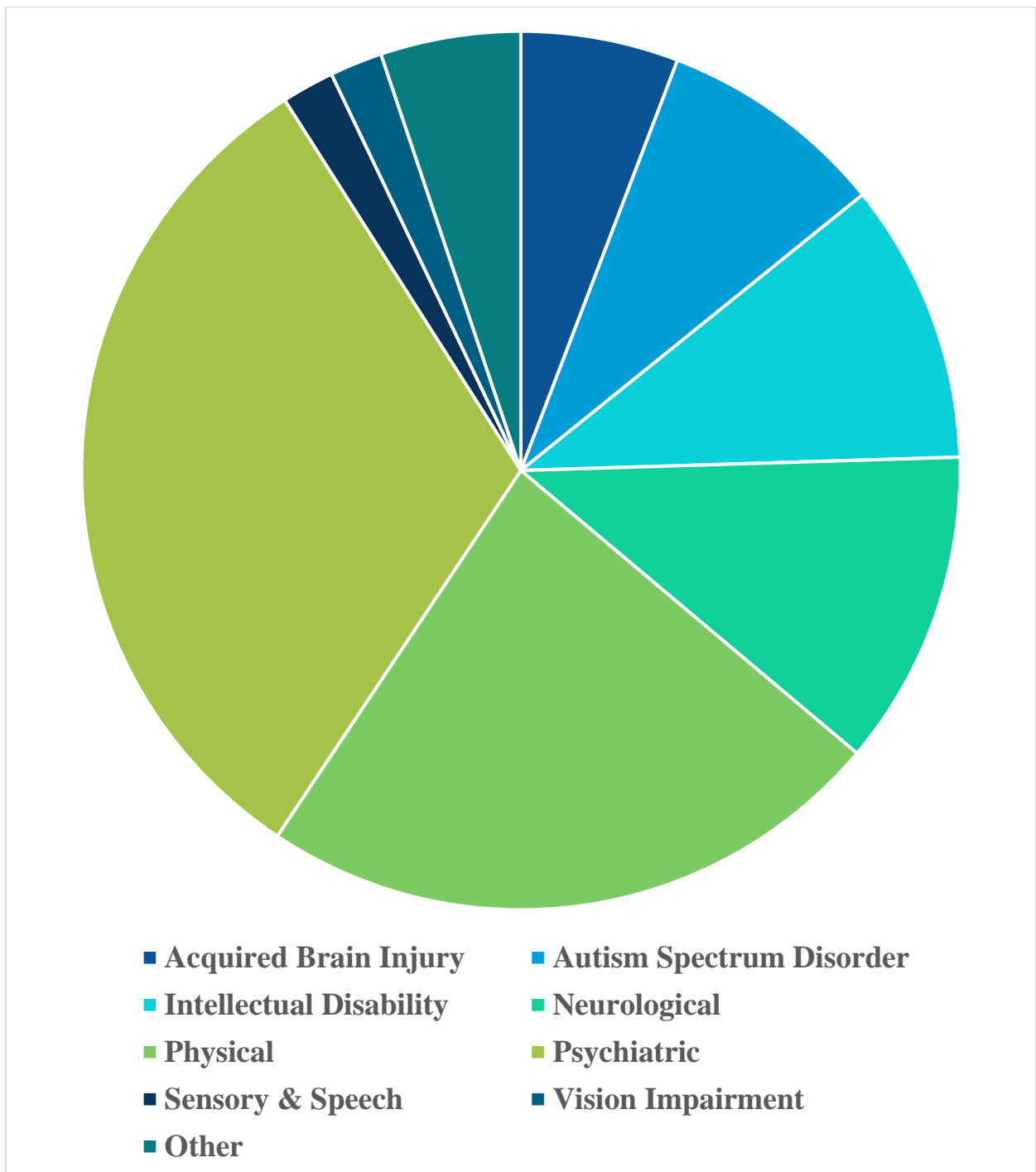
2023-24



NDAP

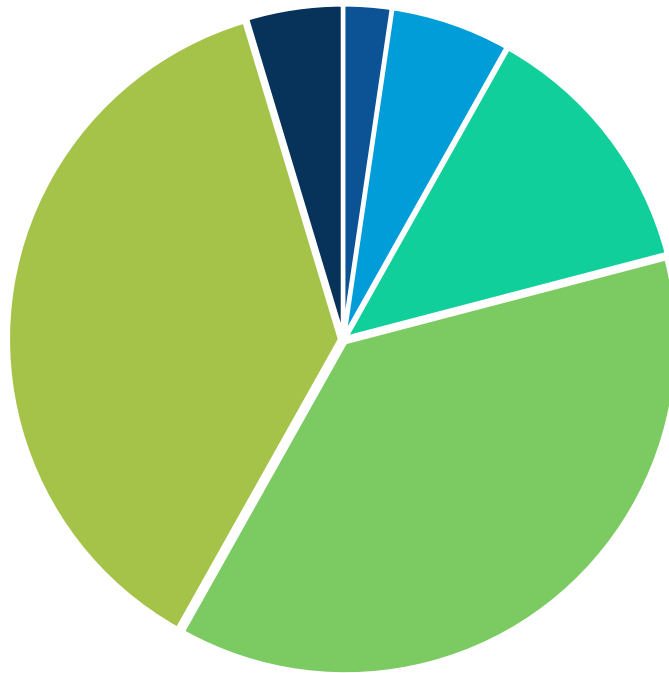
DISABILITY ISSUE

2023-24



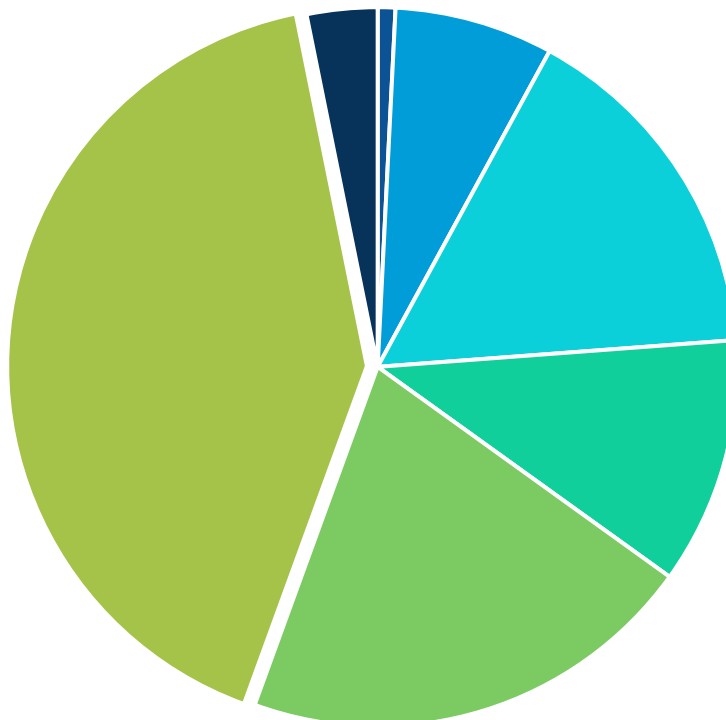
STATE DISABILITY ISSUE TYPE

2022-23



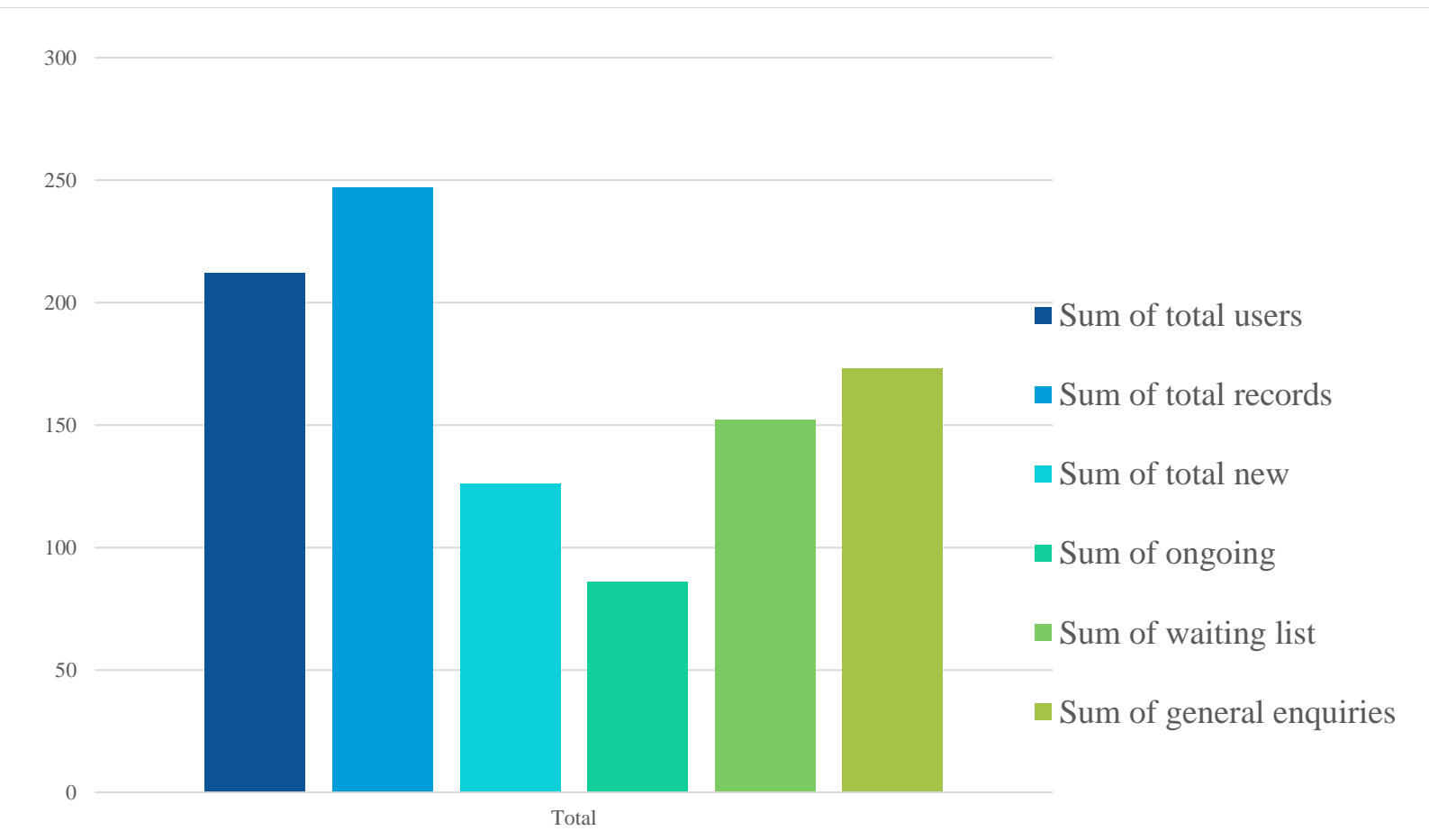
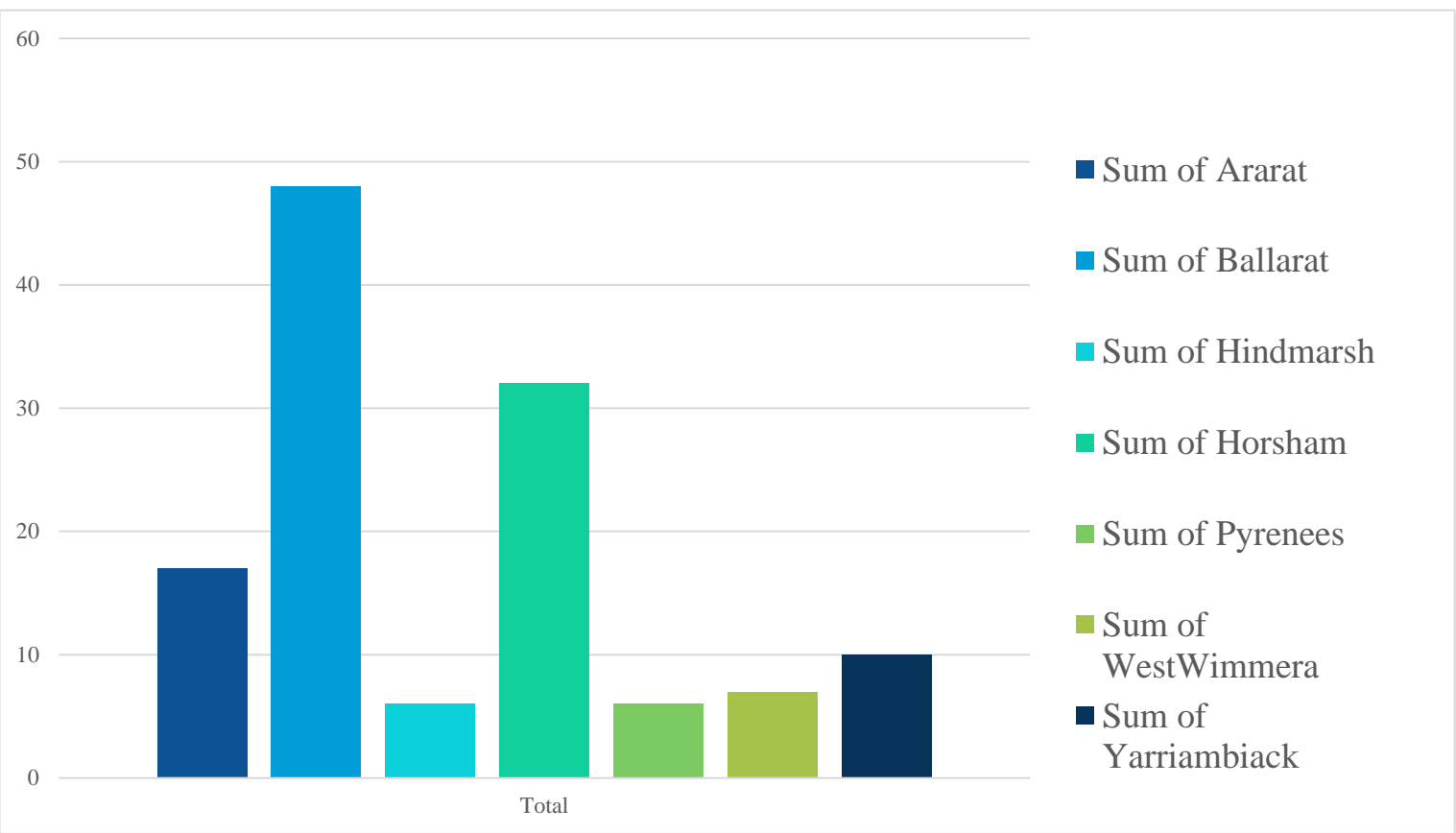
■ Acquired Brain Injury ■ Autism Spectrum Disorder ■ Intellectual Disability
■ Neurological ■ Physical ■ Psychiatric

2023-24

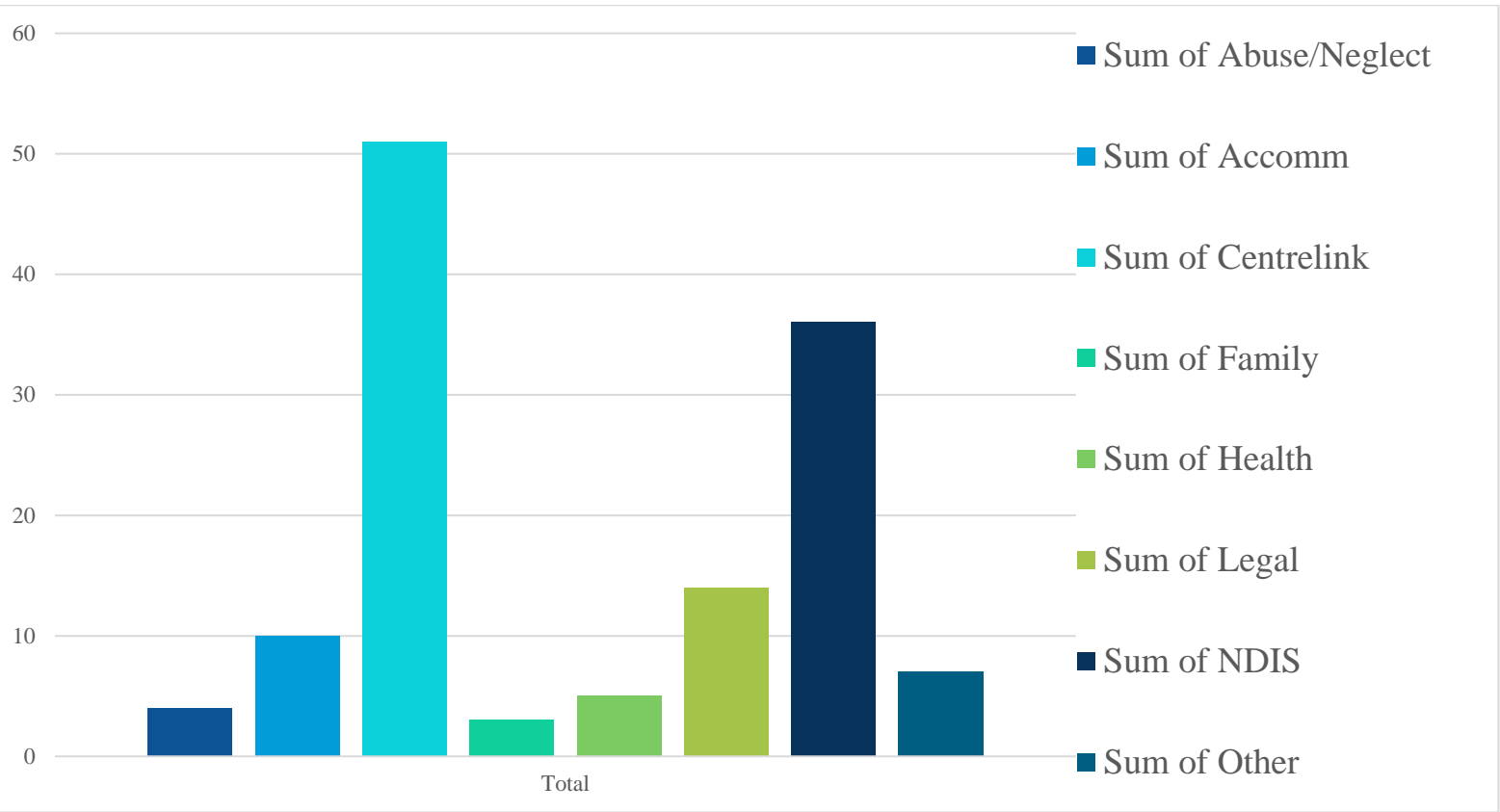


■ Acquired Brain Injury ■ Autism Spectrum Disorder ■ Intellectual Disability
■ Neurological ■ Physical ■ Psychiatric

STATE 2023-24



CLIENT ISSUES



Summary of GdA Advocacy activities in 2023-2024

Funding type	Number of individuals assisted
General advocacy	329
NDIS Appeals	47
Total	376
Most common disability types (advocacy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">PsychosocialPhysicalIntellectualNeurologicalAutism Spectrum Disorder
Most common issues (advocacy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Government payments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">NDIS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Accommodation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LegalHealth

Staff farewelled 2023-24

Sarah Garton
Keiah Meddings-Cooper
Sherree Unwin
Tadc Quirke
Matilda Schembri

Staff Reflections

The future of disability advocacy is centred on inclusivity, technology, and intersectionality. With technology advancing at an unbelievable rate, the impact of this will create greater representation, self-advocacy and universal design. Supporting people with disability in our communities to be autonomous is an empowering model of advocacy, of which I am proud to promote and create, with my fellow advocates at GdA. We show this by supporting the people we work with by encouraging them to actively participate in decision-making, providing the tools and knowledge for people to advocate for themselves, and respecting the individuals unique voice and experiences always. We use person-centred approaches so that individuals are supported to shape their own lives and futures. I look forward to a future focusing on inclusivity and advocating for universal design in all areas.

Trudy Joyce

It's a hard time in the disability advocacy field. With the disappointing response to the DRC, with the evidence of the lack of safety that numerous people are experiencing, and the changes being imposed on the NDIS, affecting many participants, these topics seem to be the surrounding discussions. My thoughts on this are that we are entering a time where many people in the disability sector, be it people with a disability or allies, are facing high levels of exhaustion from their voice not being heard. As an advocacy organisation it seems to me that we need to be a spark, we need to push for the space to hold our clients' voices, and for those voices to be heard.

"If disabled people want equality, if we want to be in the rooms with people of power in making decisions for our lives, we must recognise power, own it and start using it." – Christina Ryan, CEO Disability Leadership Institute, at SDAC24

This space is something we are working towards with our future programs, promoting self-advocacy and systemic advocacy where our communities feel it is most needed.

Tiffany Warren

My reflection about this last year is mixed with many emotions. So much has happened in a big year of new anticipation about the betterment of things for people with disability. And yet it all is still riddled with uncertainty and more than ever, a need for advocates to be available for all the ongoing issues people are faced with. They already work beyond belief and give endless amounts of dedication to their clients and their caseloads continue to mount and pile up. The advocates do an incredible job and it is a sheer privilege to work for an organisation that has such gifted, skilled, passionate human rights people on the ground. It has been a change for us all with a new EO, whom has settled in well, and giving 100% to the role. He continues the flag raising for people with a disability which would make his predecessor happy to know that someone is striving to keep the important work of GdA front and centre of everything he can. Sadly Sherree left the Ararat office, and left a hole that the new Advocate is going leaps and bounds in. It is my 13th year in this role and I have been very fortunate to work in a great place, with caring colleagues, and enjoy the any moments when I feel I have helped someone in need, in my admin role. The Board of Governance Chairperson is a very kind & genuine ally, & I feel very supported here at GdA.

Angie McKew



SDAC Melb- Pic L-R: Advocates Phil Cutts, Bern Duane, Trudy Joyce, Tiffany Warren, Kaylene Howells



(Sister Rocks Self Advocacy Group) Pic L-R Becky Rose (SARU), Jill Cameron(SARU), Roy Reekie, Louise Mountford (SNH Coordinator), Peter Milley, Kay Matthews, Jess Sabbo Deb Mason, Evelyn Henderson



Ballarat Expo with IPaLS PO Matilda Schembri and Ballarat Advocate Phil Cutts



At the opening of the new Ararat Inclusive Playground Pic L-R: Roy Reekie, Jo Richie & MP Martha Haylett



Victorian Rural Advocacy Network (VicRAN) members in Geelong February



IDAHOBIT Day L-R: Roy Reekie, Ararat Mayor Sanders & Father Andrew (St Mary's Catholic Church)

The 4 years of I-PaLS

Grampians disAbility Advocacy (GdA) knew the huge possibilities that existed for our many members living across the Grampians region, so in 2019, we applied for funding to create a program of skill development, connection and partnerships with regional Neighbourhood Houses.

This was new and bold but also based on the inevitable benefits that we knew would flow to hundreds of people who participated. We named the program Independent Pathways and Life Skills program (I-PaLS).

It focussed is on bringing people together to connect, learn and contribute within their local community through social, educational, recreational and support activities, using a community development approach.

The application was successful and set to begin in February 2020. Only two weeks after starting, what should have been a three-year program, in 11 local government, Australia and the world faced the unknown impacts of a global pandemic.

COVID 19 would not only isolate people with disabilities, but all residents, who endured nearly two years of lockdowns and restricted movement.

Despite these challenges I-PaLS began with a pilot program in late 2020 and commenced its first full program in January 2021 and continued until June 2024.

The years of 2021 and to a lesser degree 2022 were marked with lengthy lockdowns, restrictions on movement and a requirement for staff and participants to all be vaccinated and wear masks.

At a time of great fear and uncertainty it provided a safe place for people who had been isolated, to meet, learn, makes friends and find their voices.

We know that I-PaLS made a difference to lots of people with a disability living in the Wimmera, Central Highlands, Pyrenees, Golden Plains and Daylesford regions.



What did I-PaLS achieve?

1. More than 26 modules were offer in a program designed for flexibility based on local needs, the placed-based requirements and participant feedback.
2. I-PaLS successfully established peer support activities which, in several locations, has endured beyond the funded program, with groups independently continuing the peer support meetings.
3. MOUs were established with three neighbourhood houses - Warracknabeal, Stawell and Horsham - and 15 houses engaged as venues throughout the program.
4. The regional steering group was not established as originally planned but this role was taken on by the GdA board, which now has 62 per cent membership of people with a disability and has become more active and skilled because of I-PaLS.
5. Participants have successfully pursued involvement in volunteering, study and leadership roles; they have gained employment and greater independence through better understanding their rights and their opportunities for independent living. Others pursued and received a diagnosis after I-PaLS or came to better understand and accept their disability.
6. While the original target numbers changed because of COVID 19, I- PaLS touched the lives of 262 participants living with disability. This represented more than 2700 hours of community connection and learning across 11 shires and 15 Neighbourhood Houses. It also provided rewarding jobs for the project team who all have lived experience of disability.
7. Discussions were held throughout the project with project officers and participants alike, contributing to reviews in such areas as processes, content and the promotional aspects.
8. GdA Governance has changed with a new constitution, greater Board member input and a higher number of Board members who have a disability. The Board's current self-rating of performance sits at an impressive nine out of 10

I-PALS @ A GLANCE



THE NUMBERS

262 Participants
70 % with NDIS Plan
26 topics
100s of lives changed
15 venues
11 shires
2700 connection hours

- 88% better understood their rights
- 86 % have improved communications
- 91 % learned ways to help reach goals
- 80% gained budgeting skills

ACTIONS & LEARNINGS

Friendships; cooking, budgeting, talking, confidence, belief, assertiveness, rights, reading aloud and peer support

THE IMPACTS

New Connections
Work found
Independence
New Direction
Safe place to be
Seeing new Possibilities

THE BOARD

New structure
more participation
Better outcomes

People with disability make up nearly 2/3 of GdA board

A COUPLE OF HAPPY GdA FACES YOU CAN ALWAYS RELY ON



"I liked meeting other community members and understanding people's rights"



"I'm now confident doing things by myself"



"having a place to come where I felt listened to and welcome without fear of bullying"



"learning my rights"



"I like coming every week"



"I feel happier knowing people will listen and make me welcome"





Above: Tiffany Warren always wearing her cheery face and up for a friendly chat



Above: Sherree Unwin, always an open door to help others



Above: Tiffany held many IPaLS and Peer Support Group Information sessions over the year and always making everyone aware of what supports are available.



Thankyou ladies



Board Member Reflection

Dale Edwards – GdA Board member; a person with disability who also owns and runs a disability support business. Dale has current and direct experience of the NDIS, including as an advocate for his clients' rights and needs

The 2024 SDAC conference emphasised the challenges and uncertainty ahead for people with disability and the disability sector more generally, arising from recent and ongoing changes to the NDIS.

With the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with a disability and the governments' responses now complete, speakers expressed a sense of disappointment by the official responses with only a small portion of the Royal Commission's recommendations being adopted by government.

The Federal Government's lack of appropriate engagement with the sector when considering its response to the Royal Commission and the design of the Government's new NDIS legislation was widely condemned.

[Professor Darren O'Donovan](#) of La Trobe Law School noted that **independent needs assessments are a feature of the new legislation**. These assessments could lead to people being removed from the NDIS and put on foundational supports or result in decreased funding for individual support packages.

Professor O'Donovan also said that under the new rules, the NDIA can dictate the particular features that aids should have and participants will need to demonstrate why their preferred aid is better than the agency preferred aid.

However, the agency will only need to consider the participants view. There is no requirement for the agency to follow or respect the views of the participant. Determinations of the NDIS and the independent assessor will no longer be able to be overturned through appeal, unless the applicant can demonstrate that the incorrect assessment tool was used in the individual assessment.

Foundational supports are the responsibility of State Government and although the Victorian Government representative indicated that the views of people with a disability will be incorporated into the design of the Foundation Supports system, nothing at all is yet known about what Foundational Supports are, what they are supposed to achieve, who they are for and who would be eligible to use them, or how these supports will be staffed and funded or how they will work.

Impact for participants and GdA.

Unfortunately, this means more bureaucrats making decisions for people with disability. It can be reasonably expected that this will greatly increase demand for advocates and, with the increased uncertainty over funding, GdA and other advocacy services will likely become overwhelmed.

In this context, it is possible that people with a disability will become overwhelmed and risk becoming railroaded by the system designed to assist them.

If this were to happen people with disability risk of having their basic needs neglected and their rights dismissed.

It is imperative that organisations like GdA continue to demand that the rights of people with disability are respected based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability.

Raising public awareness of disability is part of this and can change outcomes for the disability community and for individual people with disability.



TREASURER

Bernie O'Shannessy
(*Treasurer since 2019*)

2023-24 Treasurer's Report

Our funding continues to come from the Federal Department of Social Services (DSS) for Advocacy and NDIS Appeals and the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) for Advocacy services.

We continue advocating on our own behalf to funding bodies and members of parliament to get increases to our funding to help match wage rises and cost of living.

Luckily Grampians disAbility Advocacy (GdA) has reserves to help with budget shortfalls, but this is always a temporary solution and without proper indexing of funding our valued services could suffer.

The Board and our EO Roy continue to focus on ways to broaden our income streams so we can continue to provide our essential services.

Thank you to Roy and my fellow Finance Committee members, Jo and Kay for their support over the last 12 months.

Also thank you to our Bookkeeper Sue Horvath for the management of our finances and salaries and to our Accountants Sertori and Co for compiling our reports and taking care of our audit requirements.

This will be my last report as Treasurer as I will be stepping away from this position.

Grampians disAbility Advocacy Treasurer
Bernie O'Shannessy

2023-24 Audited Financial Statements

Our 2023-24 audit has been completed but the report is yet to be finalised.

Our Board, EO and auditor are working together to finalise that report.

The report will be provided to GdA members and other when that process is complete.

GdA Strategic Intent 2025-2028

Vision: An equitable and inclusive society that upholds the rights of people
to be empowered and thrive in life

Mission: GdA stands beside people with disability as they:

- understand and act on their human rights
- connect and build confidence, independence and friendships
- are empowered to live the life they choose.

Values: Self-determination Empowerment **Inclusion Integrity Respect** Empathy Loyalty

Strategic Objectives	Strategic goals
Build a team with the skills and resources to effectively support the community	1.1 Work with the community using a community development lens
	1.2 Respond to the needs of the individuals and communities we work with
	1.3 Build our capacity in advocacy and self-help/capability-building
	1.4 Strengthen our skills through training, including with our partner organisations and within our networks
Strengthen our networks and our resilience through collaboration and diversification	2,1 Explore options for business and funding diversification
	2.2 Strengthen and extend our connections with allied agencies
Promote disability rights and interests and the impact of our work	3.1 Actively promote our vision and work/impact to the community
	3.2 Strengthen our presence, image and impact through social media, video and storytelling
Nurture ourselves, our working relationships and our wellbeing through reflection, respect, rapport and training/professional development for resilience	4.1 Develop our ability to adapt and deal with change and disruptive events
	4.2 Develop and enhance staff and Board member wellbeing through support, supervision, monitoring (for wellbeing) and enhanced engagement and collaboration across teams
	4.3 Create succession plans for the Board and the staff team
	4.4 Continually review, reflect on and improve our plans and direction

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



1 We are All Born Free and Equal



2 Freedom from Discrimination



3 Right to Life and Safety



4 Freedom from Slavery



5 Freedom from Torture



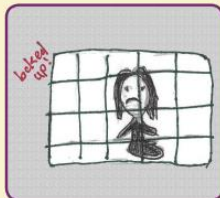
6 We have Rights no matter Where we Go



7 We are All Equal before the Law



8 Our Rights are Protected by Law



9 No Unfair Detainment or Arrest



10 Right to a Fair Trial



11 We are Innocent until Proven Guilty



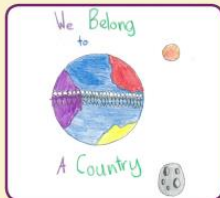
12 Right to Privacy



13 Right to Free Movement within Borders



14 Right to Seek a Safe Place to Live



15 Right to a Nationality



16 Right to Marriage and a Family



17 Right to Your Own Things



18 Freedom of Belief and Religion



19 Freedom of Opinion and Expression



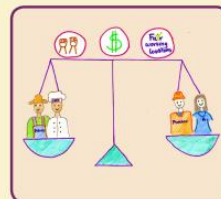
20 Right to Peaceful Public Assembly and Association



21 Right to Political Participation and Free Elections



22 Right to Social Security



23 Right to Fair and Safe Work



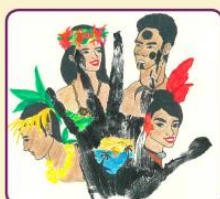
24 Right to Play and Rest



25 Right to Food, Water, Shelter and Healthcare



26 Right to Education



27 Right to Participation in Cultural Life



28 Right to a Fair and Free World



29 Responsibility to the Community



30 No One Can Take Away our Rights



EUROPEAN UNION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FOR ARTWORK

Article 1: Kalena Mae, Article 2: Gia Relang-Soram, Article 3: Aditi Singh, Article 4: Samuela Wainiqolo, Article 5: Ahana Gounder, Article 6: Nidia Singh, Article 7: Bojan Lucky Riklon, Article 8: Ayaan Nizarat, Article 9: Ahana Gounder, Article 10: Aroni Kaberias Rasch, Article 11: Khloe Lenuu, Article 12: Uelese Jason Tau Misilei, Article 13: Inaya Gounder, Article 14: Francisca Joe, Article 15: Valerie Baleirara, Article 16: Joyline Kalsuak, Article 17: Papaa Naomi Seluka, Article 18: Miliama Apisai, Article 19: Lilla Young, Article 20: Lilla Young, Article 21: Grace Talei Misilei, Article 22: Miliama Apisai, Article 23: Joyline Kalsuak, Article 24: Junior Kalsuak, Article 25: Jayden Singh, Article 26: Ryan Kalsuak, Article 27: Sullana Sulai Seluka, Article 28: Aryah Whippy, Article 29: Aarari Pollard, Article 30: Valerie Baleirara



Pacific Community
Communauté
du Pacifique

Thank you to the organisations that have supported GdA over the past year

- ACSO Ballarat
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Ararat Neighbourhood House
- Barwon Disability Resource Council
- Axis Employment
- Ballarat Business Centre
- Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative
- Ballarat City Council
- Ballarat and Grampians Community Legal Centre
- Berrill & Watson Superannuation Lawyers
- Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative
- Ian and Jocelyn Chegwin
- Commonwealth Department of Social Services
- Consumer Action Law Centre
- Creswick Neighbourhood Centre
- Daylesford Neighbourhood Centre
- Daylesford Foundation
- Disability Advocacy Network Australia, including the National Centre for Disability Advocacy
- Disability Advocacy Resource Unit
- Disability Advocacy Victoria
- Eastwood Leisure Centre
- Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative
- Grampians Community Health
- Health Services Commissioner
- Hopetoun Neighbourhood House
- Horsham Neighbourhood House
- Rural Northwest Health – Daylesford campus
- Moorabool Shire Council
- National Disability Insurance Agency
- Nhill Learning Centre
- Office for Disability (DFFH)
- One Red Tree Resource Centre Ararat
- Orange Door
- Pinarc
- Pinnacle Inc.
- Save Our Station Ballarat
- Public Transport Users Association – Ballarat branch
- Self-Advocacy Resource Unit
- Nigel Keating of Sertori and Co, Accountants and Auditors
- Sport Central
- Stawell Health and Community Centre
- VALiD
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Victorian Disability Advocacy Network
- Victorian Rural Advocacy Network
- Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service
- VMIAC
- Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House
- Women's Health Grampians – CORE

Essential contact information

**Central intake/enquiries
1800 552 272
admin@grampiansadvocacy.org.au**

**Membership forms, Annual Reports, GdA Referral
forms, newsletters and other resources available
on our website**

www.grampiansadvocacy.org.au

Find us on the socials

