

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA): Operational Funding Grant Report January 1997 – June 1997

Prior to June 1998, Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) was funded on a six-monthly basis by the Office of Disability, Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, and was required to submit a mid-term and end of grant report. This is WWDA's end of grant report for the period January 1997 – June 1997. Written by Helen Skeat, (then Executive Officer). Copyright WWDA 1997.

Introduction

WWDA is very pleased to provide this report on activities and progress during the grant period January 1 – June 30 1997. This period has seen a great deal of growth for the organisation in many areas.

Violence Issues

Since starting work in this area, WWDA has made a great deal of progress in alerting the providers of services for women who experience violence to the needs of women with disabilities. WWDA has chosen for the time being to focus on improving service provision, rather than prevention of violence. This has been a strategic decision, based on the lack of research and information about women with disabilities who experience violence. WWDA has identified that the 'cycle of invisibility' which women with disabilities experience, whereby access to services is so limited that they are not even represented in any review of services or client needs, and therefore are assumed not to need them, is one of the greatest barriers to effective service provision relating to the prevention of violence. WWDA hopes that by increasing the profile of women with disabilities in the women's services sector, opportunities for further research and prevention activities will arise.

The WWDA Violence Reference Group, reported on in the mid-term report, has continued to meet regularly. Activities to date include the following.

DDA Action Plan – SAAP funded women's refuge

WWDA obtained funding from the Office of the Status of Women to develop an Action Plan under the Disability Discrimination Act with one SAAP funded women's refuge. In addition to the Action Plan, a model for the development of Action Plans by other refuges will be developed. This will be distributed to all SAAP funded women's refuges around Australia. This project has created a great deal of interest in the refuge sector around Australia, and we expect significant results in improving access to services for women with disabilities. Work on this project has begun, a consultancy firm has been appointed to carry out the work.

Model Criminal Code on Sexual Offences Against the Person

WWDA was instrumental in ensuring that a great many disability organisations and individuals

provided responses to the Model Criminal Code on Sexual Offences Against the Person. WWDA has contacted over 40 people and organisations with potential interest in the issue. An 'issues paper' was circulated, detailing the parts of the Code most relevant to people with disabilities. This was particularly important, because the discussion paper contained sections specifically dealing with 'mentally impaired persons', and included some provisions which differ markedly from current practice in most States. WWDA participated in consultations on the issue, including consultations in the disability sector hosted by the Disability Council of NSW.

Feedback from the secretariat of the Standing Committee of Attorney's General, Model Criminal Code Committee, indicated that the response from the Disability Community was far in excess of that expected. The report from the Committee based on Community Consultation is expected later this year.

National Network

The response to our reference group has been so high that we have decided to set up a national 'network' of interested women, including women with disabilities, legal advocates and workers in the violence area. This will allow a small group to keep working at a more intense level, but a larger group of people will be able to access information (and give information) as well as work on specific issues.

Liaison with other key disability groups

WWDA has broadened our approach in this area by formally liaising with the National Federation of Blind Citizens of Australia, the Disability Council of NSxW, the Mental Health Legal Centre and the Discrimination Law Centre of Tasmania.

International Leadership Forum for Women With Disabilities, Washington, June 1997.

After a vigorous search, WWDA obtained funding to send a delegate to this Forum from the Global Fund for Women, located in the USA. Every member was notified of a funded place at the Forum and invited to apply. Over 30 applications were received, and a thorough selection procedure was followed. The selection panel included members of the National Executive Committee of WWDA, the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Participating Organisations of Women, and staff from the WWDA Office.

Ms Vicki Toovey was selected to represent WWDA, and a report will be supplied on her return. One of the reasons for her selection was the broad reaching activities she committed to carrying out on her return, and WWDA looks forward to reporting on these later this year.

In addition, WWDA worked with the Office of Disability to select an NGO representative for the government delegation. This also included advertising widely, and a selection procedure including representatives from the Office of Disability, National Executive Committee of WWDA and WWDA staff. Glenda Lee was appointed as the delegate, and a copy of her report is attached.

Family Court Network Conference – Disputing Families

WWDA was represented at the Family Court Network Conference by Kali Wilde, who delivered a paper on people with disabilities and the family. The paper was very well received, and has resulted in a great deal of interest by workers in the field. We are currently negotiating to provide some training to workers in Victoria as a result of the conference paper.

Presidents' meeting

WWDA was represented at the meetings of Presidents of Caucus members by Margaret Cooper, Chair of WWDA. Feedback from the meeting was very positive, and it has already resulted in a more active National Caucus.

Coalition of Participating Organisations of Women (CAPOW!)

The Executive Officer of WWDA is a member of the Steering Committee of CAPOW!. WWDA has been an active participant in developing the CAPOW! tender for networking women's organisations.

WWDA has participated in this process because of the valuable links CAPOW! has provided between women with disabilities and the broader women's community.

DDA Transport Standards

Using the CAPOW! network, WWDA has briefed national women's organisations regarding the DDA Transport Standard. This has resulted in many women's organisations, including Nursing Mother, the Maternity Alliance and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom writing to members of Federal Parliament in support of DDA Transport Standards. This has also been a valuable exercise in alerting women's organisations to the universal benefits of accessibility. It has also been a strategic move in broadening support for the Standards to include people and organisations outside the disability sector.

Review of the Building Code of Australia

WWDA has been an active participant in the Review of the Building Code of Australia, with respect to its compliance with the DDA. Terry Fletcher represents WWDA on the Building Policy Technical Committee, and the National Coalition for the Development of DDA Standards. She represents the National Coalition on the Building Access Policy Committee.

Other consultative activities

WWDA provided advice to Phoenix Projects regarding women with disabilities and domestic violence. This firm is developing materials for rural women who experience domestic violence.

WWDA attended consultations regarding the 'Costs of Disability Study', held by the Shane Thomas and associates who carried out the study. WWDA provided written material co-ordinated by the Physical Disability Council of Australia.

WWDA assisted the Consumer's Health Forum in finding a person with a psychiatric disability to represent mental health issues on their General Committee.

WWDA provided a submission to the "Senate Community Affairs Inquiry into the funding of aged care institutions".

WWDA provided a submission to the Minister for Family Services regarding the Aged Care Bill.

WWDA lobbied the Women's Emergency Services Network to include a disability representative. We are awaiting the outcomes of a working group on Committee membership. WWDA provided a submission to the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women regarding the 20 issues of top priority for women with disabilities.

WWDA provided a nomination to the Constitutional Convention, and lobbied Senator Nick Minchin regarding the lack of disability representation at the convention once the successful applicants were announced.

WWDA national networks

Two new networks have been established, the lesbian network and the mothers network. Initial work in instigating these networks revolved around contacting women within the existing WWDA network who had expressed interest in developing a network to respond to specific issues and to connect with other women with common experiences and concerns. Following press releases to the gay and lesbian media (for the lesbian network), and notices in the WWDA newsletter (for the mothers network), response to the idea of establishing the networks was immediate and quite overwhelming. Many women contacted the WWDA office, eager to find out more information about how they could become involved, offering support and skills to help with getting things underway. The mother's network has already expressed interest in starting a support network similar to the support and advice service coordinated by the Nursing Mothers Association. Two networks that are currently in initial phases of development are young women and Aboriginal women.

State group development

New groups have now been formally established in South Australia and Tasmania. Work has begun on developing groups in Brisbane, Darwin, Townsville and Alice Springs. This process is at the stage of consulting with interested women in these centres, to be followed by visits in July and August to consolidate links and objectives for the groups discussed over the phone, to have planning sessions to collate ideas for responses to local issues and the needs of the women in the groups, and to formally launch each group.

Project funding submissions

WWDA wrote funding submissions to the following organisations:

- Office of the Status of Women – regarding developing a model DDA Action Plan with a women’s refuge (successful)
- Office of the Status of Women – regarding holding a national workshop on violence against women with disabilities (successful)
- The US Embassy Women’s Association, for general fundraising (successful)
- BHP, for support for a WWDA group in Newcastle
- Department of Family Services and Health – Healthy Seniors Initiative regarding opening an ‘Older Women’s Wellness Centre’ in Melbourne, with a focus on women with disabilities.
- ANZ bank
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services – Supported Assistance Accommodation Program – regarding developing a model DDA Action Plan with a women’s refuge
- Office of the Status of Women – regarding a series of support workshops for women with disabilities who have experienced violence.

Conclusion

In all, WWDA achieved a great deal in this six-month grant period, with the potential for real change in the lives of women with disabilities, particularly in the area of violence. One challenge will be keeping up the momentum for State groups and issues-based networks. WWDA takes this opportunity to thank the Office of Disability for their support of WWDA, and through the organisation, women with disabilities themselves.