

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA): Operational Funding Grant Report July 1997 – December 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 July 1997- December 1997. Written by Helen Skeat, (then Executive Officer). Copyright WWDA 1997.

Introduction

The period between July and December 1997 has been a very productive one for Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA), and has seen some significant changes in the organisation. Ms Margaret Cooper resigned as Chair at the Annual General Meeting. Ms Cooper had served on the Management Committee since the founding of WWDA, and had been Chair for two years. Ms Vicki Toovey was elected as Chair for 1997/98. Ms Toovey had represented WWDA at the International Leadership Forum for Women With Disabilities in Washington earlier in the year and was welcomed as a woman with a breadth of experience.

WWDA completed a major project regarding access to women's refuges, and held a successful leadership workshop for women with disabilities, following the International Leadership Forum for Women With Disabilities.

Good progress was made on most goals, and some goals were revised to more accurately reflect the needs and capacity of the organisation. This report will address progress on the goals set out in the 1997 Strategic Plan.

GOAL 1: To research, analyse and take action on issues of concern to women with disabilities falling within WWDA's policy priorities -Housing; Links with the women's movement; Leadership.

Housing

WWDA undertook several activities towards achieving this goal. Housing has been of long standing interest to WWDA members. WWDA researched and wrote a submission to the Senate Enquiry into Housing Assistance (attached). Work on access to refuges was also recognised as fitting into this goal (detailed below).

Links with the women's movement

WWDA continued to work closely with the Coalition of Australia Participating Organisations of Women (CAPOW!) to maintain their funding. WWDA actively participated in the Women's Round Table with the Minister for the Status of Women, proposing several resolutions, and participating in pre-Round table caucusing. WWDA also participated the Office of the Status of Women forum to develop a position on an Optional Protocol for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. WWDA facilitated the production of a briefing paper on the Optional Protocol, and distributed it widely among national women's organisations before the Forum.

Leadership

One of the highlights of the early part of the year was sending a representative to the International Leadership Forum for Women With Disabilities in Washington. Following this, and in order to take advantage of the experience of the three members of WWDA who attended the Forum, WWDA held a leadership workshop for women with disabilities in Adelaide, immediately following the National Annual General Meeting. The workshop was a great success. A report of the workshop is attached.

GOAL 2: To initiate systemic change activities in specific areas of concern to WWDA members.

Increase women with disabilities' access to services related to violence, particularly refuges.

WWDA made particularly good progress in this area. The project to develop a DDA Action Plan with a women's refuge, funded by the Office of the Status of Women, was successfully completed. A copy of the report is attached. The project also produced a model for other refuges to use in developing their own Action Plans (attached).

WWDA continued to collaborate with the Women's Emergency Services Network (WESNET), and with funding from the Office of Disability, WESNET was able to fund seven WWDA members to attend their national conference. This was a very effective activity, as WWDA took the opportunity to launch the two project reports discussed above. This created a great deal of interest in the subject, as it became clear that many services did not know of their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act. Neither did they appreciate the barriers which exist for women with disabilities trying to access their services. The large number of women with disabilities attending the conference meant that the interest created by the launch could be followed up in the workshops. This culminated in WWDA proposing a conference resolution which was passed by the participants, that WESNET members would in principle abide by the Disability Discrimination Act in their service delivery.

WWDA also successfully sought funding from Office of the Status of Women to hold a national workshop for women with disabilities on the subject of violence. Preparations for this workshop are well underway; an extensive selection procedure has been undertaken, and a resource kit has been developed for workshop participants (attached). The workshop is expected to take place in February 1998.

WWDA developed a submission (attached) in response to the Discussion Paper on a Model Criminal Code on Sexual Offences Against the Person. As this contained a section specifically dealing with 'persons with mental impairment', this was an important opportunity for WWDA to provide input. Equally importantly, WWDA successfully urged many other individuals and groups from the disability sector to write submissions.

GOAL 3: To continue WWDA's high quality of input into systemic change initiated by other bodies.

WWDA made a strategic policy decision to increase the coordination of policy input by, and the support for, WWDA representatives on a range national committees and working groups (detailed below). This has been addressed through the creation of a 'Policy Representative' position on the National Executive Committee of WWDA. The role of the 'policy representative' is to ensure that the WWDA representatives on various committees understand what WWDA representatives on other committees are doing, can provide support, and can assist each other in consultation with WWDA members. WWDA's input into the work of other organisations includes the following:

- WWDA wrote a submitted a comprehensive response to the Review of the Advocacy Program.
- WWDA participated in a study of women who experience domestic violence but who do not report it. WWDA not only supplied information, but sought out suitable women to participate in the interviews.
- WWDA participated in a United Nations survey regarding access to public transport and the views of people with disabilities.
- WWDA wrote a tender brief to the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, to carry out research regarding developing information for women with disabilities on violence.
- WWDA participated in a Department of Social Security Women's Forum to highlight issues for women with disabilities in dealing with the Social Security System.
- WWDA provided information to the NSW Attorney General's Department network of domestic violence coordinators.
- WWDA has participated in round table meetings with the Minister for the Status of Women in each capital city in Australia.

Representation

WWDA representatives are members of the following committees:

- Round Table (with Minister for the Status of Women) – WWDA Chair
- Attorney General's Working Group on DDA Standards – Helen Skeat
- DDA Standards Project Deputy Convenor – Helen Skeat
- DDA Standards Project – Terry Fletcher
- National Caucus of Disability Consumer Organisations – WWDA EO and Chair
- Building and Access Technical Committee – Terry Fletcher
- Building and Access Policy Committee – Terry Fletcher
- Ministerial Committee on Employment, Education Training and Youth Affairs, Task Force on DDA Education Standards – Joan Hume
- Australian National Training Authority Disability Forum – Pamela Menere
- AUSTEL Consumer Consultative Forum – Robin Wilkinson
- Consumer Telecommunications Network – Robin Wilkinson
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Data Reference Group – Di Temby
- Attorney General's Human Rights Forum – Helen Meekosha

GOAL 4: To continue to establish and support WWDA state bodies and groups around the country.

WWDA continued regular contact with State groups. However, after much discussion, it was recognised that the funding level which WWDA currently works at does not allow enough resources for a worker to provide all or most of the support for State WWDA groups. It was therefore decided that a leadership workshop could fulfil some of the role that a development worker would. It may also be possible to provide some leadership training on a state by state basis, and this is currently being investigated.

It was also decided to assist State groups to assist each other by more regular contact focused specifically on group development. This will be closely monitored and evaluated, with the option to have increased involvement by the WWDA Executive Officer in the future if it is thought to be appropriate.

GOAL 5: To increase the membership and public profile of WWDA.

The launch of the reports ‘Woorarra Women’s Refuge Disability Action Plan,’ and ‘More than just a ramp’ at the WESNET National Conference was very successful in raising the profile of WWDA, with the result that many more women’s organisations have joined WWDA as associate members. WWDA also actively participated in the WESNET conference, which was very useful in raising our profile in women’s services.

Two WWDA State groups participated in ‘Reclaim the Night’ events in October. There is considerable enthusiasm from State groups for more of them to take part next year.

WWDA has sent promotional articles about our activities with particularly emphasis on the workshop on violence against women with disabilities to more than 20 relevant newsletters and periodicals (including Disability News). This has reaped benefits in increasing our profile and the number of enquiries we receive on a range of issues has increased noticeably.

GOAL 6: To further improve the organisational system and structure so as to best serve WWDA’s membership and its aims and objectives.

WWDA implemented a number of strategies over the past six months to achieve this goal. WWDA took the opportunity at the National Annual General Meeting of intruding a new position on the National Executive Committee. This was the position of ‘policy representative’ and it was introduced in response to the recognition of the many different roles of WWDA and its National Executive Committee. It was

felt it would increase efficiency and accountability to have one member of the NEC who responsible for co-ordinating and communication with the NEC about policy development.

In addition to this, the role of the Office Bearers on the NEC is to be strengthened by regular separate meetings to carry out more of the planning and organisational development work. More frequent teleconferencing has been made easier for WWDA due to falling costs in telecommunications. This will improve the strategic planning process for WWDA: by developing and applying and more 'streamlined' approach. Much of the initial work will be carried out by a small team of NEC members and staff, with other NEC and organisational members having input at strategic points.

The model which WWDA has used in its work on violence is currently being examined by the Office Bearers of the NEC, to determine how to use this approach in other areas. It has been most successful in involving a large number of interested people and assisting them to increase their expertise. Most importantly, it has reaped results for women with disabilities in increasing their access to services related to violence.

In the coming six months, WWDA intends to focus on clarifying the roles and responsibilities of NEC members and State group convenors, to maximise their contribution to the organisation.

Conclusion

In all, the six months between July and December 1997 has seen some significant developments in WWDA particularly in policy development and systemic advocacy activities,. WWDA intends to focus on organisational development, particularly the role of the NEC, and the development of the State groups in the coming six months.