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# ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

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Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)  
 ABN 23 627 650 121  
 PO Box 605  
 Rosny Park TASMANIA 7018  
 AUSTRALIA

Ph: +61 3 6244 8288  
 Fax: +61 3 6244 8255  
 Email: [wwda@wwda.org.au](mailto:wwda@wwda.org.au)  
 Website: [www.wwda.org.au](http://www.wwda.org.au)

Winner Australian Human Rights Award 2001  
 Winner National Violence Prevention Award 1999  
 Nominee, French Republics Human Rights Prize 2003  
 Nominee, UN Millennium Peace Prize for Women 2000

Auditors:  
 Steele Burnett & Nelson Chartered Accountants  
 Level 3, 6 Bayfield Street, Rosny Park TAS 7018

The complete 2007-2008 Annual Report may be viewed and/or downloaded from the WWDA website: [www.wwda.org.au](http://www.wwda.org.au)  
 Alternatively, please contact the WWDA office for a hard copy to be posted.



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WWDA's work importantly promotes the dignity of women with disabilities while at the same time builds the capacity of the Australian community to encompass diversity and deliver social justice...

Dr Leanne Dowse, September 2008

## Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the peak organisation for women with all types of disabilities in Australia. It was formed in 1995 by and for women with disabilities. WWDA operates from a one room office in Tasmania and has two paid staff - a full time Executive Director and a part time administration officer. It is managed by a volunteer Committee of women with disabilities. WWDA is the only organisation of its kind in Australia and one of only a very small number internationally. It operates as a national disability organisation; a national women's organisation; and a national human rights organisation. WWDA is inclusive and does not discriminate against any disability. With more than 2 million disabled women in Australia, WWDA is an organisation that enables their voices to be heard and represents their collective interests, working systemically at a national and international level to promote, protect, maintain and ensure their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

With a committed team of volunteers, and consistently high calibre staff input, WWDA has emerged as a leading and resilient voice in national human rights debates. It is internationally acknowledged as a leader in the growing international disabled women's movement, with groups of disabled women in many different countries seeking to emulate its innovative programs, research and materials. Although primarily a national organisation, WWDA works with emerging groups of disabled women across the globe, particularly those in developing countries.

WWDA's ground-breaking and innovative programs have been critically acclaimed and recognised at national and international levels, with the organisation receiving a number of prestigious awards in its short history in recognition of the extent and quality of its human rights work. WWDA has been, and continues to be at the forefront of important human rights issues for disabled women such as violence prevention and reproductive rights. Whilst WWDA's work is specific to the interests of disabled women, the impact, as with all good social justice activity of this kind, is for the benefit of the whole community.

There are 4 million people in Australia with a disability, making up 20% of the total population. Just over fifty per cent (50.5%) of people with disabilities in Australia are women. Women with disabilities are one of the most socially excluded and neglected groups in Australian society. They experience multiple discriminations which are compounded further by intersections of race and culture. Women with disabilities are less likely to be in paid work than other women, men with disabilities or the population as a whole. When employed, they are likely to be employed for fewer hours and in less secure jobs. They are less likely than their male counterparts to receive vocational rehabilitation or entry to labour market programs, and their rehabilitation training is more likely to be offered only in 'activities of daily living' rather than vocational areas.

Women with disabilities are significantly less likely to receive a senior secondary and/or tertiary education in disciplines of high employability. In the workforce, women with disabilities earn less than disabled men, are in the lowest income earning bracket, yet pay the highest proportion of their gross income on housing, and spend more of their income on medical care and health related expenses.

Women with disabilities are substantially over represented in public housing, are more likely to be institutionalised than their male counterparts and are often forced to live in situations in which they experience, or are at risk of experiencing, violence, abuse and neglect. Women with disabilities are less likely than non-disabled women to receive appropriate health services. Girls and women with disabilities are more likely to be unlawfully sterilised than their male counterparts. Women with disabilities are assaulted, raped and abused at a rate of at least two times greater than non-disabled women.

WWDA's approach recognises that a disabled woman's experience of marginalisation and discrimination is likely to be common to others and that action taken to address such oppression can and should be transmuted into action on behalf of others who share similar experiences. Importantly, WWDA's approach recognises that developing a sense of personal worth and autonomy for women with disabilities is equally as important a function of its advocacy as achieving social inclusion and change.



WWDA is a superb human rights education, information and advocacy organisation. It operates as an inclusive, empowering group – enhancing and supporting women with disabilities Australia-wide... WWDA gives women with disabilities a voice...

Dr Rhonda Galbally, September 2008



# WWDA PRESIDENT'S REPORT SUMMARY ANNIE PARKINSON

As always this has been a busy year for Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA), made busier by the election of a new Federal Labour Government in November 2007. We have continued working on our main areas with a lot of resources going into raising violence issues. This has very recently involved our Vice President Sue Salthouse presenting on behalf of WWDA at three international conferences held in Canada.

WWDA had lobbied strongly for the National Council on Violence to have a disability representative on it and though that hasn't yet happened, we were pleased to be invited to speak to them about the issues we had outlined in our written submission. We received a very positive response from them so we'll be keen to keep up that contact. Thanks to everyone who supported our position that the National Council must have disability representation.

In the area of sterilisation, there are still things left to do. Although SCAG (the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General) has abandoned the draft uniform legislation '*Children with Intellectual Disabilities (Regulation of Sterilisation) Bill 2006*' (which set out the procedures that jurisdictions could adopt in authorising the sterilisation of children who have an intellectual disability), there is still a lot of inconsistency between the States and Territories about the circumstances in which a sterilisation can be obtained. We are hopeful that the Commonwealth may use existing precedents (such as when it overruled Tasmania on the Franklin Dam) to bring in a ban on non-therapeutic sterilisation that is Australia wide. This is something we are following up with Attorney-General Robert McClelland.

Another significant reproductive rights issue is the state's removal of new babies from women with mild intellectual disability, despite studies showing that with a bit of support, these women become very good mothers. Other disability groups with clients who have intellectual disability indicate that this is a growing trend. We want state resources to support these women as mothers rather than to punish them.

As well as discussing violence against women and reproductive rights, we also talked about the difficulties that arise when people with disabilities figure in public discourse only in the context of 'the burden of care'. This has been a shift over the last few years in the government's approach and it is a matter of concern throughout the disability movement. At WWDA, we strongly believe that the more resources are directed to people with disability, the more carers and the whole community benefit.

As always, I would like to thank the committee for their support this year; our Vice-President Sue Salthouse for being so available for constructive discussion and of course Carolyn and Shirley for their dedication and hard work. Carolyn has now been with WWDA for ten years and under her indefatigable watch, our profile and reach has grown enormously.

Finally, I thank the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) for providing WWDA's annual operational funding through their National Secretariat Program; and the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) for WWDA's telecommunications representation grant.





## WWDA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT SUMMARY CAROLYN FROHMADER

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) has had a very busy but rewarding 12 months. The change of Government at a federal level in late 2007 has seen us particularly active and focused on developing considered policy responses to a number of government inquiries and reviews. Our policy work has covered a number of issue areas, including for example, housing and homelessness; violence; employment; income support; models of disability advocacy; overseas aid and development; and sterilisation of minors. WWDA's policy work has also seen considerable systemic advocacy around the promotion of human rights. This has included a strong focus on advocating for the promotion, ratification and implementation of a number of international human rights treaties and instruments to which Australia is a signatory.

During the past year, WWDA completed its ground-breaking and innovative national project which focused on the development and production of accessible information, education and training resources about violence against disabled women. The project culminated in the WWDA Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities, published in December 2007, and to date, purchased by more than 1700 organisations and individuals worldwide. The Project has been a major success for WWDA, and its application as an instrument for positive change both for individuals and in service delivery systems, has been exciting and diverse.

The past 12 months have seen some changes for WWDA. In February 2008, we were very fortunate to welcome Shirley Raspin to the position of Finance & Office Manager, which had become vacant in late 2007. Shirley has brought a range of new skills to WWDA, and the organisation is already greatly benefiting from her efficiency and proficiency.

Our national office has seen a major IT hardware and software upgrade which has brought WWDA up to a standard that many small businesses and organisations strive to achieve. Based on proven Microsoft products for email, data storage and database handling, the current infrastructure will provide a stable and secure platform that can easily grow with the organisation over the next 5 years and possibly longer.

As Executive Director, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Annie Parkinson (WWDA President) and Sue Salthouse (WWDA Vice President), for their commitment and dedication to their roles. My thanks go to the WWDA Management Committee members for your support over the past 12 months. I would like also to acknowledge those WWDA members who have undertaken representative work on behalf of WWDA over the past year. I would particularly like to pay tribute to Associate Professor Helen Meekosha and Dr. Leanne Dowse for their valuable contributions to the work of WWDA. A big thanks too, to Shirley Raspin, WWDA's Office & Finance Manager for her assiduous and committed work in the WWDA Office.



...WWDA is the most informative medium for the policy and research work I do in the area of disability. It's a credit to WWDA. Keep up the good work, and many thanks.

Gabrielle Rose PhD, Cerebral Palsy League of Qld, April 2008

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) has undertaken an extensive amount of systemic advocacy work over the past year in efforts to address the epidemic of violence against women with disabilities. During 2007-2008, WWDA completed its national project which focused on the development and production of accessible information, education and training resources about violence against disabled women. The project culminated in the WWDA Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities, published in December 2007. In early 2008, WWDA undertook an extensive, labour intensive promotional campaign which involved distribution of the Manual's Promotional Flyer & Order Form to more than 10,000 targeted stakeholders throughout Australia. WWDA completed the Final Project Report to the Office for Women (OfW) in October 2007. This report 'Development of a Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities Project' Final Report (2007) details all aspects of the Project and is available on WWDA's website in both Word and PDF formats (see: <http://www.wwda.org.au/viol.htm>).

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

## STERILISATION OF MINORS WITH DISABILITIES

Over the past year, WWDA's work in the area of sterilisation has been focused on continuation of our targeted and sustained systemic advocacy campaign around the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) draft 'Children with Intellectual Disabilities (Regulation of Sterilisation) Bill 2006' which set out the procedures that jurisdictions could adopt in authorising the sterilisation of children who have an intellectual disability. WWDA did not support the draft Bill, and argued, amongst other things, that sterilisation is a question for adulthood not childhood; and that such legislation would not be compatible with the objects and purposes of a number of international human rights treaties to which Australia is a signatory. WWDA's far-reaching campaign called on all Australian Governments to work together to develop universal legislation which prohibits sterilisation of any child unless there is a serious threat to health or life. As part of the targeted campaign, WWDA continued to promote and disseminate our Position Paper entitled: 'The Development of Legislation to Authorise Procedures for the Sterilisation of Children with Intellectual Disabilities' (2007).

WWDA's campaign deliberately identified and targeted stakeholders both within Australia and internationally, including for example: every politician in Australia; human rights organisations & activists; child rights organisations; government departments; lawyers and doctors groups; organisations in the disability, women's, health and legal sectors, and many, many more (all information relating to WWDA's campaign is available at: [www.wwda.org.au/sterilise.htm](http://www.wwda.org.au/sterilise.htm)). Our work in the area has been recognised, encouraged and endorsed by many, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; UNICEF; and the International Child Rights Information Network (CRIN).

Most importantly, WWDA's strong and unflinching advocacy campaign contributed to the recent decision (April 2008) of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) to abandon development of the draft legislation to authorise the sterilisation of children who have an intellectual disability.



# UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD)

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) has been a key player throughout the development of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD), taking on a leadership role for and with women with disabilities from around the world. Much of our systemic advocacy over the past couple of years has revolved around urging the Australian Government to ratify both the CRPD and its Optional Protocol. In July 2007, WWDA wrote formally to the members of the Standing Committee of Attorney's General (SCAG), calling on SCAG to establish a timeframe for completing the necessary procedures to enable ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by December 2008. WWDA participated in a number of forums and workshops related to the CRPD, including involvement in the National Interest Analysis (NIA) undertaken as part of the treaty ratification process. WWDA was delighted to see our efforts rewarded in July 2008, when the Rudd Labour Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), making Australia one of the first Western countries to ratify the Convention.

WWDA has widely distributed educational materials and resources relating to the CRPD and kept its membership and other stakeholders updated on all aspects of the treaty making process. WWDA's website now includes an extensive amount of resource materials on the CRPD for a wide range of users. WWDA is now promoting the CRPD as a potentially powerful tool in addressing violations of disabled women's human rights, and as a potent framework to inform and guide domestic legislation, policy, programs and services that impact on women with disabilities. As part of this, WWDA is working with groups of disabled women from around the world on the development of mechanisms to assist in the implementation of the CRPD.



...As a Director of many agencies including statewide services responding to violence against women I have found WWDA's products, publications and newsletters to be riveting and consistently deliver a standard of professionalism and intellectual rigour that few match... In particular their Strategic Plan can be seen as a human rights blueprint...

Donna Justo, September 2008

...The WWDA website has been an invaluable and crucial tool utilised by myself and many of my colleagues in the teaching of social and community services and education programs...

Dr Paul Levett, September 2008

## HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION, EDUCATION & AWARENESS

During the past 12 months, WWDA has played an active and pivotal role in informing and educating the community about human rights generally, and the human rights of women with disabilities in particular. We are able to do this in several ways, including for example, through: our extensive website; production of our bi-monthly Update Report; our email list-server ([wwda-discuss](mailto:wwda-discuss)); the development of policy submissions and publications; and, presentations at Conferences and forums. The high standard and effectiveness of our work in this area has been recognised at state/local, national and international levels, and we consistently receive feedback from around the world on our work. Examples of this feedback are included in the Annual Report.

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

## REPRESENTATION & LEADERSHIP

The meaningful participation of women with disabilities and their communities in decision-making processes that shape policies and programs that affect them is a key and critical component of WWDA's work. WWDA actively seeks out opportunities to pursue its human rights systemic advocacy work by contributing to government, non-government and industry processes, reviews, inquiries, and consultations. The organisation also builds its capacity to undertake representative work by providing opportunities for its members to build their confidence and acquire new knowledge and skills.

Over the past 12 months, WWDA has contributed more than 19 Policy Submissions and responses to a number of reviews and inquiries at both a national and State/Territory level. WWDA's formal submissions demonstrate the breadth and scope of the organisation's work, with submissions developed across a diverse range of issue areas, including for example: sterilisation; domestic violence law reform; national disability policy & programs; employment & income support; development and implementation of international human rights treaties; housing and accommodation; models of disability advocacy; information and communications technology; and more. WWDA's Submissions have been widely disseminated and made available in accessible formats on the WWDA website. We have regularly received acknowledgement for the impact, quality and standard of our policy submissions.

Three of the Australian Government's 2008 enquiries/policy reviews were considered to be particularly important to women with disabilities, and therefore critical that WWDA provide detailed input. These were: the Green Paper on Homelessness; the development of an Action Plan to reduce violence against women and children; and the parliamentary inquiry into increasing female participation in the workforce.

## NETWORKING & PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

Through our work, our publications, and our website, WWDA's profile continues to grow both within Australia and overseas. Our Resource Manual on Violence Against Women With Disabilities has been purchased by organisations and individuals from a diverse range of countries, and has been the catalyst for the development of new relationships with emerging groups of women with disabilities around the world. Our strong advocacy and leadership on the issue of sterilisation of minors has also led to the formation of new relationships – with international child rights agencies, and also with the Romani women who are waging their own campaign for redress and compensation for abuse of their reproductive rights through forced sterilisation.

During 2007-2008, WWDA worked in a mentoring role with the Palestinian Network of Women With Disabilities, an emerging group of disabled women in Palestine auspiced by the Stars of Hope Society in Ramallah. WWDA was able to provide practical assistance to the Network, through for example, teaching the group how to write funding applications; developing a Leadership Workshop program; sourcing funding opportunities for the Network; providing referee reports; and providing complimentary copies of WWDA publications and organisational development materials. WWDA was instrumental in the Network receiving a seeding grant of \$10,000 (US) from the Global Fund for Women in late 2007.

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In late 2008, WWDA was a key player in the development of the agenda and program outline for the Global Summit for Women With Disabilities, conducted as an adjunct to the 21st Rehabilitation International World Congress. One of the major outcomes of the Summit was the resolution to develop an International Network of Women With Disabilities. WWDA now has a key leadership role in this work, and is currently a member of the International Steering Committee which has been set up to plan and develop the Global Network of Women With Disabilities. WWDA is also involved in establishing an Asia-Pacific sub branch of the Global Network.



...WWDA is to be commended for its steadfast leadership by and for women with disabilities. WWDA's work has made Australia one of the places to be for disability rights in the 21st century...

Amber Smock, FRIDA USA, Sept 2008

...WWDA consistently and effectively works with women with disabilities at the grassroots, hearing and analysing their issues and concerns, developing research and position papers, and ensuring their voices are heard publicly...

Dinah Radtke, Chair, DPI International Women's Committee Sept 2008

## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

In mid 2007, WWDA undertook a mid term review of our five year Strategic Plan 2004-2009, which was documented in the report 'WWDA Strategic Plan Review July 2007' ([www.wwda.org.au/stratplan.htm](http://www.wwda.org.au/stratplan.htm)). In 2008, WWDA applied for one-off funding from the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to conduct a Strategic Planning Forum in 2009. This funding application was successful, and WWDA has commenced planning and organising the Forum which will be held over 4 days in Hobart in late February 2009.

As part of our contract requirements, in early 2008, WWDA completed our Mid-Term Progress Report for the contract period up to 31st December 2007. This Report provided detailed information against the required contract deliverables under specified objectives. WWDA's Mid-Term Progress Report was widely disseminated including formal copies to relevant Ministers.

During early 2008, WWDA upgraded its IT hardware and software which have brought WWDA up to a standard that many small businesses and organisations strive to achieve. Based on proven Microsoft products for email, data storage and database handling, the current infrastructure will provide a stable and secure platform that can easily grow with the organisation over the next 5 years and possibly longer.

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2007-2008

|                  |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| PRESIDENT        | Annie Parkinson       |
| VICE PRESIDENT   | Sue Salthouse         |
| SECRETARY        | Margie Charlesworth   |
| TREASURER        | Pamela Menere         |
| HUMAN RIGHTS REP | Helen Meekosha        |
|                  | Rayna Lamb            |
|                  | Vicki Alipasinopoulos |
|                  | Kate List             |
|                  | Sheila King           |
|                  | Josephine Dixon       |

### WWDA STAFF

|                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR       | Carolyn Frohmader |
| OFFICE & FINANCE MANAGER | Shirley Raspin    |

# TESTIMONIES & FEEDBACK

...WWDA has been a consistent source of reliable and up-to-date information on women and disability and the issues they experience... QDHC is also impressed with the depth and breadth of important issues that WWDA has been able to effectively lobby on both the national and world stage... we are amazed at the work of WWDA's secretariat and wider membership, in that they are able to comment so widely on many important social issues...

**Mike Duggan, President,  
Queensland Disability Housing  
Coalition**

Hi Carolyn,  
We just opened the 3 boxes of books you sent us for our Leadership Training Workshop later this year. They are stunning! What great work you have done in these resource books! Your support is very, very much appreciated! Thanking you and WWDA again for your generosity.

**Bronwyn Moye, NSW Network of  
Women with Disability**

Dear WWDA,  
Hi from Mauritius! I met some of your women with disabilities in Sydney. We discussed a lot of things regarding disabilities. I must say I am very proud of you, you have done a good job in Australia. I receive your reports regularly and from your reports I have learned a lot.

**Zohra Rajah**

I commend WWDA on its continued success in raising the awareness of, and addressing issues faced by, women with disabilities throughout Australia.

**Katy Gallagher, Minister for  
Disability and Community Services  
ACT**

...WWDA demonstrates enthusiasm and willingness to collaborate with community organisations and government departments in order to further the human rights of women with disabilities... Women's Centre for Health Matters (WCHM) truly values the support and expertise that it receives from WWDA in working with disabilities in the ACT...

**Kiki Korpinen, Executive Director,  
Women's Centre for Health  
Matters (WCHM)**

...Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) serves an invaluable function as an independent advocate. The organisation is most impressive with regard to its broad scope and vision and its involvement in a wide range of areas that impact directly on the lives of women with a disability: for example in the areas of health, education, housing, employment and violence against women. I am an academic and researcher in the area of disability and WWDA material helps to keep me well informed about important policy and practical issues.

**Carmel Laragy, PhD, Lecturer,  
School of Social Work and Social  
Policy, La Trobe University**

Hi Carolyn,  
Thanks for the WWDA Update Report July/August 2008 - such excellent information you put together and send to us. Thank-you so much and keep up the good work.

**Lorri Mackness, New Zealand  
Network of Stopping Violence  
Services**

Hello WWDA,  
I received WWDA's paper 'The Role of Advocacy in Advancing the Human Rights of Women with Disabilities in Australia' and I am so relieved and satisfied. As a disability worker I have been involved with two situations where women with intellectual disabilities have had babies... the discrimination and bias from the Child Protection Unit based on lack of knowledge and understanding was alarming... so thank you and all the best.

**Karen**

WWDA is to be commended for the great advocacy work it is doing for women with disabilities.

**Yours sincerely,  
Rachel Siewert**

Dear Carolyn,  
I find my copy of 'Taking the Lead' invaluable. I am currently involved in project regarding female mental illness issues.

**Kind regards, Sue Armstrong**

Hi WWDA,  
I am so impressed with your work. This was a wonderful Newsletter. I would like to become a member and a future sponsor. Thanks for all your efforts towards this important and valuable work. Keep up the good work!

**Warm regards, Debra Ruh,  
President & Founder, TecAccess,  
Rockville, Virginia USA**

The work of WWDA in addressing the issues that face women with disabilities has played a large role in bringing the issues that face these women onto the national agenda. This report is yet another example of the excellent work of WWDA...  
**Jon Stanhope, Chief Minister ACT**