

# **Disability Justice Advocacy Inc. 16th ANNUAL REPORT 2006**

**DJA's Board of Management  
Sue Whiting – Chairperson Denis De  
Pianto – Treasurer  
Billy Gann Glen Lott Graeme  
Richards**

## **Mission Statement**

**To provide quality advocacy to people  
having higher support needs  
who are in greater need, in order to  
protect and advance their  
well-being, rights and interests, both  
individually and collectively.**

**Disability Justice Advocacy Inc. RN: A0019927B  
15th Annual General Meeting. 9th November 2005. Annual Report**

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## **CHAIRPERSONS REPORT**

**By Susan Whiting**

**Welcome to the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting for Disability Justice Advocacy.**

**I am happy to inform all members and supporters of DJA that we're continuing to do what we do best. That is, to give advocacy support to enhance people's lives with attendant care and accommodation issues, as well as employment, education, transport, health, aids and equipment and recreation issues.**

Just before the Annual General Meeting started last year Gillian Meldrum pulled me aside and handed in her resignation. I accepted it with great sorrow as Gillian had been a terrific Executive Officer to work with. I wish her well in the new adventure.

The Board needed to employ a new Executive Officer, following interviewing a number of applicants Kerry Potter was appointed in March 2006.

Kerry has taken on the EO position professionally and during a time of changes. With a whole new team of advocates. Also FACSIA put a cat among the pigeons by looking at the way advocacy will be delivered in the future. It has been a testing and a trying time for all. Instead of throwing in the towel and stopping supporting people DJA continues to deliver a high quality service.

Thanks to Kerry for her leadership, time, sense of humour enthusiasm and support to the team and Board. Many thanks to the advocates, Troy, Rachelle, Richard and Geoffrey who have given their 110%. A big thanks to Chris for his admin support

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throughout this year.

I would like to thank the members of the Board, Graeme Richards, Glenn Lott, Billy Gann and Dennis Di Pianto for their work and support.

All the best for 2007

Sue Whiting  
Chairperson

### **EXECUTIVE OFFICERS REPORT** **By KERRY POTTER**

2005 – 2006 saw many changes at DJA. Not only did DJA loose Niki Sheldon in July last year after 10 Years with the organisation, we were to also loose Ray Javen our Administration worker due to ill health in November 05. Gillian Meldrum then left in December after 8 years at DJA to work back in the community sector.

It was difficult to imagine a place without all of the known faces, but the newly appointed staff stepped up to the base admirably.

Troy Johnson took over a full-time advocacy role in July last year and has worked conscientiously on his individual advocacy ever since, having achieved some amazing outcomes for the people he works with.

Richard Sherman began in August last year as a casual providing advocacy support whilst we managed the staffing changes, and has continued to provide wise and considered advice as a team member and managed his advocacy role admirably.

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Chris Spanidis our Administration worker began his life at DJA as a student on placement and moved from a casual role to a permanent position in January this year. Chris keeps the office running very smoothly and is a great support, attending to all of the necessary details.

Rachelle Porter has brought her skills in working with people with a mental illness and her expertise in work done in other areas of the sector to the organization, and applies a very focused and supportive role to the individuals she works with and to the team at DJA.

In March this year I was appointed as the new Executive Officer at DJA and was then able to employ our casual employees on a more permanent basis.

Thanks to the support of the Board members including Sue Whiting, Graeme Richards, Glenn Lott, Dennis Di Pianto and Billy Gann it was decided that as an organization we should look at our Strategic direction and also spend time updating the Policies and Procedures at DJA. Our tasks had only just begun when we were launched into a state of instability when we were notified in June this year that we would be funded until 31<sup>st</sup> December awaiting the results of the National Disability Advocacy Review.

In June we created a small training unit at Disability Justice Advocacy Inc. and have employed both Sue Whiting and David Brant as casual trainers. Their role is to provide information to people requesting a presentation in relation to our roles at DJA and when requested the role of self-advocacy.

In June we also employed Geoffrey Burnett on a casual basis to spend time gathering independent information from service users, staff and the Board to be included in our Annual Service Self Assessment.

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We moved into the new financial year with many questions in relation to the organisation's future and the future of advocacy, but decided that we would carry out business as usual and make some hard decisions in September this year if we were still unclear about our future.

## **ADVOCATES REPORT**

### **Rachelle Porter**

I have now been at Disability Justice Advocacy Inc. since December casually, and April as a permanent part-time advocate. In that time I have learned a great deal about the issues faced by people with a disability and the challenges of trying to address those issues. I have been able to complement my skills and knowledge of mental health with a growing knowledge of the disability sector. Some of the issues in both sectors are very similar, such as insufficient funding, insufficient services, and the need for advocacy.

I have been disappointed with the lack of resources in the sector provided by government and frustrated in my efforts to try and assist people to access what resources there are. I am certain I am not the only one to feel this way or have such an experience.

On a positive note though, I have really enjoyed meeting and working with many of the people I support. Their resilience and spirit is inspiring.

Housing is a huge area of frustration and concern. I have a number of people who I support who need supported accommodation that does not place them in a nursing home with dementia patients. The lack of options for people needing high levels of care is astonishing. I have written letters to DHS to advocate for accommodation only to receive responses saying there is little they can do and my people will just have to

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wait until something becomes available. I find this unacceptable.

The work I have done since beginning at DJA. includes assisting people sort out paperwork and make requests for services and support from places such as the TAC and councils. I have also assisted people to have their opinions heard by DHS via letters and phone calls. In one case, I have been working with a team of people, case manager, service coordinator and DHS to assist an individual to receive the best combination of services for the money that they are allotted. A complex plan has been developed for them that I hope will have positive future implications for this persons development and move towards independence as a young adult.

I have also been assisting a person in getting their finances organized as they have had a run of unfortunate events and ended up in a terrible position financially. We have put systems in place that will mean they are able to stay in their accommodation and have sought financial assistance from the community to help towards some of the debt. I have also assisted this person to set up a better banking system so they can purchase the things they need from bed, as they cannot get out of bed.

I have found the work I am doing at DJA interesting and challenging, but also rewarding when I am able to assist people in working toward solutions to their problems. I really enjoy working with the team of DJA staff, they are supportive, hardworking, and fun.

**Advocates Report**  
**By Troy Johnson**

My first year working at DJA has been an extremely rewarding and fulfilling time. The working environment at DJA has given

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me the freedom and opportunity to use my skills and enthusiasm to achieve some great results for service users of DJA. It has also given me direct insight into the difficulties people with physical disabilities and their primary carers face in their daily life.

I feel I am very lucky to have the opportunity to work with and along side service users and make connections with those in need of assistance. Working with these people brings great integrity to the role an advocate plays and gives strength and courage to persist when issues become complicated and an outcome seems a long way off. The strength and will of service users helps take away the frustration when dealing with bureaucratic bodies such as the Department of Human Services.

There has been a vast variety of issues that I have attended to over the past year. Some are more complicated than others. The lives of people with disabilities can incur many problems; some are in their homes, at their day centres and others out in the community. Some issues are clearly visible, but it is common for these issues to be ignored by those contributing to the problems. When services users identify and bring issues to attention, they are generally dismissed and denied and the voice of a service user is not heard.

I feel it is important that people know that someone is willing to listen to them, even when positive results aren't reached. The lack of communication appears to be a common problem and if only service users were to heard from the start, there may not be a role for me to play.

There are many hurdles that an advocate and the service user need to overcome, but it is all worth while when you see the difference it can make in peoples lives. Everyone deserves a chance to be treated equally.

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## **Advocates Report** **By Richard Sherman**

Hi. This time last year I attended my first DJA Annual General Meeting, very new to this workplace and still somewhat unsure what the job entailed. I continued working as a casual advocate until April this year when my employment at DJA became permanent, although I continue to work part-time.

Like most people, I am often asked, "what do you do for a job?" When I answer I work as an advocate, inevitably they follow up with "what does that mean?" In my effort to offer some great enlightening answer I consulted the Oxford one day and found the following definition: "advocate n. one who pleads for another, one who speaks in favour of (proposal etc.) (DEVILS advocate); professional pleader in the courts of justice..." The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines advocate as " advocate n.

**1** : one that pleads the cause of another;  
*specifically* : one that pleads the cause of another before a tribunal or judicial court

**2** : one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal

**3** : one that supports or promotes the interests of another". Both sound reasonable but something was still missing. I stumbled upon the definition I like most in an article I was reading ( I forget where) – "standing by someone, or speaking out for someone's rights, or 'going into bat' for another person – being 'on their side', especially when the chips are down." Whichever definition one adopts, they only describe a small part of what we do and express nothing about the dilemmas we often encounter. Sometimes the work is simple and satisfying – someone contacts DJA in despair wanting

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information or a service that is easily obtained and the only barrier is the person's lack of knowledge. But how does one feel when delivering news of unsuccessful claims or outcomes to people with a valid grievance, or who are desperately in need of a particular service.

Most of us would have heard of "Home First" and "Support and Choice" packages and read the glossy brochures, but how many people do you know who actually have one? Many of us know of people with disabilities living in nursing homes. Everyone agrees it's inappropriate, including DHS, yet there they live with their name on the "urgent" list for accommodation in more appropriate settings.

No definition puts a human face to the sometimes seemingly insurmountable challenges people who contact our service face. Not to mention the countless others who are voiceless or battle on alone. We all dream of a day when there is no need for a service such as DJA, but until then I'm confident all staff, board members and ordinary members will continue to work to make a difference.

**OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS REPORT**  
**BY**  
**CHRIS SPANIDIS**

I joined the team at DJA in November 2005 as a casual and became permanent part time in January 2006 as the Administration Officer. My employment here came as a surprise to me as I originally came here as a student on placement, studying and completing the diploma of Welfare Development at NMIT.

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I came across DJA from a Google search for a subject I was studying at the time, Systems Advocacy. I arrived here without even calling and was glad to receive some advice from the then EO Gillian Meldrum. I asked Gillian if I could do my student placement here and she agreed. During my placement I was asked to help the administration person Ray and when Ray decided to leave I was asked to stay on.

Here is a little about my activities at DJA:

I work 3 days a week in administration which includes answering the phone, taking messages, working on quickbooks with our accounts; checking the accounts and submitting them to our financial institution, writing out and mailing cheques; invoicing debtors and at times trying to get better deals with our phone gas and electrical accounts.

I organise the Board/Annual General meetings, taking minutes; organise articles and prepare "The Broadcaster".

I maintain the cars, update the data bases, help with a number of computer clinches, and arrange for IT support.

I have also written letters requesting donations. Our executive officer Kerry Potter has given me an opportunity to do some advocacy, this work combined with administration has been very fulfilling and rewarding for me and I am grateful to work in such a relaxed atmosphere at DJA.

## Some statistics on the number of people contacting DJA during the 2005-2006 financial year

**Total number of people supported with advocacy - 99**

**Gender:** Males—61 Females - 38

**Age groups:**

16-19 = 1	20-24 = 9	25-29 =9	30-39 =17
40-49 =23	50-59 = 30	60-64 = 5	65& over =5

**New — 94 Continuing — 5**

**Cultural Background**

Culturally & Linguistically Diverse—15

English Speaking Background——84

**Accommodation**

**Institutional:**

Nursing home ——10

Other institutional accommodation — 7

No usual residence — 0

**Community:**

Lives alone——22

Lives with family and/or spouse——30

Special purpose (supported) community accommodation——26

Hospital——4

**Information & referral:**

2005-2006 financial year DJA received 144 requests for information and referral. Of the 144 people there were:

Individuals——58

Family/friend——26

Advocacy agencies——7

Disability agencies——1

Government agencies——35

Non government agencies——17

Local government agencies-0

Phonebook——0

**Below is a breakdown of the advocacy issues. Sometimes people we support have more than one issue. The number of issues in Accommodation and Health again reflect the need for more appropriate housing and support services.**

<i>Issue presenting</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Issue presenting</i>	<i>Number</i>
Abuse	5	Physical access	0
Aids/equipment	13	Recreation/social	0
Accommodation	48	Reduction in services	0
Crisis situation	4	Respite	2
Employment	2	Rights	1
Discrimination	1	Service access	0
Family/social support	10	Service gaps	0
Financial	0	Service provider policy/practice	2
Health	10	Subsidies/entitlements	0
Independent living	9	Transport	1
Lack of information	0	Vulnerable and/or isolated	0
Legal issues	5	Waiting list/urgent needs	10
Neglect	2	Other	35
Personal care	30	<b>Total issues 2005-2006</b>	<b>190</b>

***Case Resolution:***

Fully Resolved	54
Partially Resolved	30
Not Resolved	15

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## **SPECIAL THANKS**

**Lease Plan** for their continued generosity in providing two vehicles for DJA to use in their advocacy role.

**Goodcompany** for their assistance in providing solutions to a wide range of issues here at DJA.

**Elaine Gan** for developing our new logo. Elaine is a graphic artist who replied to our wish on the Goodcompany site. Elaine has devoted her spare time on this project free of charge and has also designed the front cover of our AGM report and we appreciate her continued support.

**Airlie Morris** for his assistance in relation to legal matters concerning DJA. Airlie is a solicitor who has replied to our wish on the Goodcompany web site and has devoted his spare time to these matters free of charge, and we appreciate his continued support.

**The Reichstein Foundation** for their support in funding systemic advocacy projects

**The Helen Macpherson-Smith Fund** for their support in funding systemic advocacy projects

**Angleton's Office Supplies** for their continued discounted prices

**Harriet Radermacher** for her research undertaking.

**Safeway Fitzroy** for their \$25 donation toward the AGM

**Coles-Myer** for their \$20 donation toward the AGM

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Disability Justice Advocacy Inc is an independent advocacy organisation that represents people with disability. DJA advocacy is done in accordance with the DJA mission, organisational policy and objectives, and the rights, interests and advocacy needs of the persons and groups who are provided with support.

**DJA is funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Advocacy Program of the Department of Family & Community Services Indigenous Affairs.**

The views and practices of DJA expressed in DJA publications, position statements, policies and advocacy are not necessarily the views of the Commonwealth Government.

## **DJA ADVOCACY DEFINITION**

Advocacy involves acting, speaking and/or writing, with Minimum conflict of interest, on behalf of people having higher support needs associated with physical disability.

### **Mission Statement**

To provide advocacy to people having higher support needs associated with a physical disability in order to protect and advance, their well being, rights and interests both individually and collectively.

DJA is an incorporated association registered with the office of fair trading and business affairs. The registered number is A0019972B. The Address is **266 JOHNSTON STREET ABBOTSFORD VIC 3067** Email: **info@justadvocacy.com**

The Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR), Income Tax Charity (ITEC) and Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status of DJA is registered with the Australian Taxation Office. Donations of \$2.00 or more are an allowable income tax deduction.

<b>WHO'S WHO 2005 - 2006</b>
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### DJA STAFF MEMBERS

Kerry Potter	Executive officer
Gillian Meldrum	Executive Officer (until 9/12/05)
Troy Johnson	Advocate
Richard Sherman	Advocate
Rachelle Porter	Advocate
Chris Spanidis	Administration Officer (from November 2005)
Ray Javen	Administration Officer (Until October 2005)

### DJA BOARD MEMBERS

<b>Susan Whiting</b>	Chairperson
<b>Denis De Pianto</b>	Treasurer
<b>Graham Richards</b>	Board Member
<b>Glenn Lott</b>	Board Member
<b>Billy Gann</b>	Board Member
<b>Graeme Richards</b>	Board Member (Elected 14/09/05)