



Association for
Children with a
Disability

Annual Report

2023





President's message

This year there have been opportunities for families to have their voices heard through the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review consultations.

The work of our dedicated board, leadership team and staff means ACD continues to be a trusted voice for families of children with disability. This year we reached more families and saw an increase in positive outcomes for children.

I would like to thank former board members Georgina Frost, Nicole Butera and Matthew Holland for the dedication and expertise they gave to ACD over many years. It is my great pleasure to welcome Vignesh Ravi, Ajsela Siskovic and Shannon Burnett to our board. 80% of our board members are parents of children with disability or people with disability.

ACD maintains a strong financial position and secured additional funding to grow our impact:

- The Victorian Government allocated significant funding to ACD in the 2023 state budget, which will allow us to expand our Support Line
- Equity Trustees once again demonstrated their support for ACD through funding to expand our systemic advocacy and to continue our Community Champions program
- ACD continued to receive funding from the Australian Government to deliver our self-advocacy support and capacity building for families from the early years to teens

Catherine Devine
President of ACD

Key achievements

- ★ **Amplified the voices of families in state and federal inquiries to share their insights and expertise. This gave families the opportunity to be heard directly by decision-makers**
- ★ **In consultation with families and children, produced the *Something for everyone* report on inclusive playgrounds**

- ★ **Received increased funding to grow our impact with greater advocacy capacity**
- ★ **Advocated for more inclusive early years and school education at Victorian and national conferences**

A year of highlights



15,000+
Victorian families supported by ACD



\$3million
in the Victorian state budget to expand advocacy support for families



94%
of families said they had a better understanding of their child's rights

Safety of children

Voices of children and families

As an organisation led by and for families of children with disability, we champion the voices of families and acknowledge their expertise.

Through our direct work with thousands of Victorian families, we hear the issues and concerns families experience, and their insights inform all our advocacy.

We hear from hundreds of families through consultations and surveys about the NDIS, early learning, inclusive play and out-of-home care. This year, ACD piloted an online platform called 'What do you think?' to give children with disability a chance to share their thoughts.

Communities of Practice

ACD convenes two Communities of Practice for family services specialist disability practitioners, and the children with complex disability support needs program. We support these state-wide roles with knowledge sharing and professional development.

Future planning webinars

ACD partnered with Duncan Legal to co-host two online webinars to give families information to plan for their child's future. Topics included Wills, powers of attorney and special disability trusts. These workshops were in high demand, with more than 140 participants across both sessions.

Our Support Line



1,419
callers to the
Support Line



181
families provided
with an enhanced
level of advocacy
support



89%
callers who felt more
confident speaking up
for their child after
using our service



83%
callers who reported
an improvement in
their child's situation
with our help



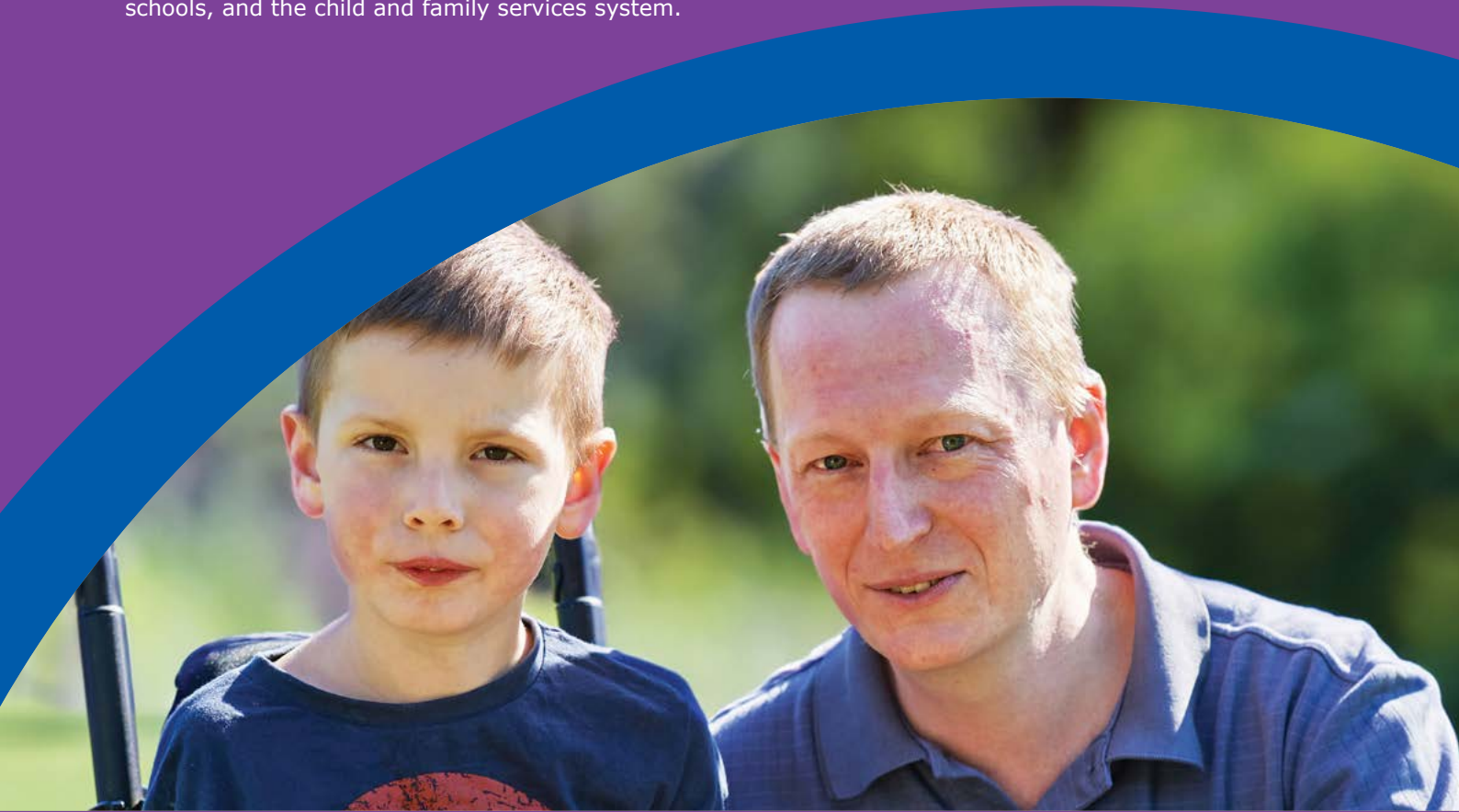
NDIS

NDIS Review

ACD ran consultations with families about the NDIS to hear what was working and what needed to change. We amplified the voices of families in our submissions to the NDIS Review to advocate for an NDIS that works for children and their families. ACD shared these submissions with other decision-makers to highlight the experiences of families. We advocated for better collaboration between the NDIS and early learning services, schools, and the child and family services system.

Working directly with families in the NDIS

ACD developed four new online resource guides, delivered 20 workshops, and ran seven consultations. We also supported almost 300 families through our Support Line to assist with navigating, understanding, and resolving challenges with the NDIS.



Workshops



117
workshops
delivered



2,531
workshop
attendees



92%
attendees who felt
more confident speaking
up for their child after
our workshops



99%
workshop attendees
who said the
information was
easy to understand

Education

Giving families a voice on school education

The Minister for Education Natalie Hutchins MP met with ACD and families of children with disability to hear about their school experiences.

More inclusive early learning

As Victoria rolls out three-year-old kinder and moves to 30 hours of Pre-Prep, ACD advocated for more inclusive early learning as a member of the Best Start, Best Life Task Force Advisory Group.

ACD ran consultations with families on behalf of the Department of Education to make the most of the Best Start, Best Life reforms. We prepared a follow-up snapshot report that summarised issues raised by families.

Working directly with families in education

ACD developed two new online resource guides, delivered 30 workshops, and ran two consultations. We also supported more than 600 hundred families through our Support Line to empower them to advocate for their child's rights in education.

"You can feel as though you're drowning. There are so many things you're trying to do, and so much you need to know to stand up for your child's rights. The ACD Support Line was a life raft – it helped me keep my head above water."

– Parent

Our information resources



100%

of families said the information provided by ACD was easy to understand



172,000+

Facebook reach



14,706

newsletter subscribers



86,759

website visitors

Support for families



Community Champions

ACD Community Champion volunteers are all parents of children with disability. They have contributed more than 400 volunteer hours to boost community awareness of ACD workshops and webinars; participated in advisory groups, research projects and consultations; and met with decision-makers to highlight the experiences of families of children with disability.

Early years to teens

With the support of the Australian Government, we delivered capacity building workshops for families. For those new to the world of raising a child with disability, we provided clear, practical information on the support available. For parents entering the teenage years, we focused on how to support their teenager's growing independence.

Inclusive playgrounds

ACD partnered with Play Australia to help create more inclusive play spaces for children with disability.

We consulted with more than 120 families and 10 children via our online platform 'What do you think?'. This informed Play Australia's online training program for professionals who plan and design play spaces, and increased their understanding of what works for children with disability and their families.

Strengthening Parent Support Network

ACD facilitated a professional network for the Strengthening Parent Support Program, which links families of children with disability or developmental delay into local support. This can include access to peer support groups, information and individual support.

Families we supported

2%

children in out-of-home care

69%

have a child aged 5 to 14 years

56%

have an autistic child

16%

live in rural and regional areas

3%

have a child who has a physical disability

2.3%

identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

11%

have a child who has an intellectual disability

27%

are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background

Speaking up for children

ACD asked families of children with disability about the important issues that affect them. We listened, gave voice to their concerns, and advocated for change.

Key meetings	Advisory groups
<p>Minister for Education Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Minister for Health Minister for Local Government NDIA Children's Taskforce NDIS Review Co-Chair Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Commissioner for Children and Young People Victorian Disability Worker Commissioner Disability Discrimination Commissioner Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution</p>	<p>Autism Education Strategy Best Start, Best Life Taskforce Disability Act Review Disability Inclusion eSafety Health Trajectories Secondary School Reforms State Autism Plan Roadmap to Reform Implementation Victorian NDIS Community</p>
Contributions	Submissions
<p>Department of Education Review into Alternative Flexible Settings Department of Education Attendance Policy Department of Education Behaviour Support Policy Department of Education Complaints Process Impact of COVID-19 on students with disability Inclusion Support Program review Senior school reforms Roundtable with the Minister for the NDIS NDIS Navigators in schools NDIS Review National Early Childhood Workshop</p>	<p>ACD prepared over 12 submissions, snapshots and election platforms, including: A better education for students with disability - 2022 Victorian election platform Submission to the Disability Royal Commission Submissions to the NDIS Review</p> <p>A full list of ACD submissions is available here: www.acd.org.au/advocacy</p>

About ACD

ACD is the Victorian advocacy service for children with disability and their families.

We are a not-for-profit organisation led by and for families of children with disability. For over 40 years we have supported families across Victoria and advocated for children with all types of disabilities.

We help families gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to advocate for their children. We support families with children from birth to 18 and the professionals working with them.

Our services are free and include:

- Information resources
- Workshops and peer support
- The ACD Support Line – a telephone advocacy service

Our work means we hear directly from thousands of families every year. We amplify their voices and experiences through systemic advocacy to improve the lives of children with disability.

www.acd.org.au

Information about the ACD Board is available at: <https://www.acd.org.au/about-us/our-people/>

Our financial report is available at: www.acnc.gov.au