



ANNUAL REPORT

2011

This report contains the details of the activities of the Autistic Family Support Association Inc for the 2010 year, as presented to the members at the Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 13th October 2011.

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AUTISTIC FAMILY SUPPORT ASSOCIATION INC

ABN 27 369 160 573
Inc. No. A0007531T



2011 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thursday 13th October 2011 in the meeting room at Outside the Square Psychology, upstairs at 1368 Toorak Road Burwood, commencing at 7:30 pm.

AGENDA

1. Welcome by the outgoing President, Meredith Ward
2. Apologies
3. Confirmation of the minutes of the previous AGM held on 14th November 2010
4. Presentation of the 2011 Annual Report, including Financial Statements
5. Confirmation of AFSA Committee Members for the coming year
6. Time for a chat and supper – "Moving AFSA forward".

Copies of the Annual Report are available at the meeting. The Autistic Family Support Association needs more committee members to help strengthen the association and reach more families – see below for the objectives identified by the current committee. New committee members are most welcome to assist in the advancing of these objectives. If you are interested please complete the Nomination Form available at this meeting or from our website – www.afsconnect.org.au

MOVING AFSA FORWARD

- ❖ Maintaining and further developing AFSA's systemic advocacy role focussing on statewide issues across the whole of life
- ❖ Strengthening the AFSA committee membership and skills base
- ❖ Updating the association's constitution
- ❖ Strengthening AFSA's relationships with relevant peak bodies and local support groups
- ❖ Enhancing and extending AFSA's capacity to provide parent to parent support and individual advocacy

IN APPRECIATION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MEREDITH WARD - AFSA PRESIDENT FROM 2002 TO 2011



The achievements of the Autistic Family Support Association since it was formed in the mid 1980's is significant given that it is a small association managed by volunteers – most of whom are parents or carers of individuals with an ASD. Perhaps the most enduring achievement was the production of the highly regarded video 'Autism The Early Signs' and the establishment of a family support model that became the Family Counselling Service now run by Autism Victoria. AFSA families have benefited from the opportunity to speak with other families, and many lifelong friendships have been formed.

In the past decade AFSA has focussed on systemic and individual advocacy and has forged strong linkages with the Victorian government through its various 'reinventions'. Regular meetings with Ministers, Ministerial Advisors and Senior Bureaucrats have raised a range of issues of relevance across the state and across the age span. AFSA has played a key role in putting Autism

Spectrum Disorders on the map including increased early intervention funding, significant input into the Disability Act 2006 and the Program for Students with Disabilities and of course the development and implementation of the Autism State Plan.

These significant outcomes have been due in large part to one amazing person – Meredith Ward, the outgoing AFSA President. Many families in the Victorian ASD community have benefited directly and indirectly from Meredith's advocacy and campaigning efforts over the past decade – and will continue to do so into the future.

As 2011 draws to a close Meredith has decided it is time to scale back her commitments just a little so after nine years she will be standing down as the President of AFSA. All members of AFSA – past, present and future, join with the current committee in saying a huge "thank you Meredith for everything you have done for us". If you would like to send a personal note of appreciation to Meredith you can email her at advocacy@afsaconnect.org.au !

The good news is that Meredith will remain involved with AFSA and continue to drive AFSA's advocacy activities as well as assist in the establishment and mentoring of a team of advocates. This will ensure that the foundations laid by Meredith and the AFSA committees she has led is maintained and built upon into the future. Meredith has shown us all what can be achieved and in so doing has given a most amazing gift to the ASD community in Victoria.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well, the day and the school holidays are over as I sit to write my final President's report. It's a bit late at night, having helped to finally get most of the home work done and the boys off to bed. We're hoping for a better school term to end the year!

So, all that aside, I'd firstly like to thank my committee of management for their support for the past year. Amanda Golding has kept things humming as Secretary. Chris Ford as Treasurer has prepared all the accounts and in the past done an incredible amount of work during our strategic planning process, much of which is relevant for moving AFSA into the next decade with a new President to drive it on. My thanks also to the general committee members - Paula Balsamo, Rosalie Cotter, Nick Harvey, Jane Hancock, Richard Joseph and Phil Lipshut our Public Officer.

I'm also thankful for the support from committee members in past years. Things have changed since I first became involved in AFSA in about 2002. Back then Liz Wilks used to prepare the content of the newsletter and put it onto disk which was then taken to the printers, downloaded, and hard copies of the newsletter printed out. Labels were laboriously put onto envelopes and eventually newsletters were posted to our members.

These days it's all electronic, with the ability to send updates more frequently. In recent years we've seen the invention of social media networking like Facebook and of course our own website. Having the addition of other methods of sharing information means news items can be posted on our website and on Facebook, the benefit being your inbox is less cluttered and you pretty much know about what happens when it happens.

Our membership base continues to grow with a mixture of service providers, parents, people with an ASD and parent support groups as well as access to nearly 3000 people on our Autism Stop the Robbery facebook cause page. Between the use of social media sites and networking with other support groups around the state, it's impossible to know for certain how many individuals we reach. Networking also means we can support and respond quickly to issues raised by others within our community. Integrity of information is paramount in all we do and we also try to correct misinformation when we come across it.

AFSA's strong representation to policy makers also continues. A change of government is not a problem as long term relationships have been formed with both Government and opposition MP's as well as departmental personnel which remain fairly constant in the face of a change of Government. Policy makers appreciate the integrity of our information and conduct, especially because as a non-funded not for profit we have no vested interest in the policies we consult on.

Our parent to parent phone support continues. Most enquiries come directly via the website or email with some very urgent cases coming to my mobile phone. As a committee we continue to share the support, and on occasions supporting people from interstate and overseas with their enquiries. Usually they are relocating to Melbourne and want to chat about service provision here and are always keen to talk with another parent. Our committee is made up of parents of children of all ages from primary school age to adult – so we have the lifespan covered.

In closing, thanks everyone for supporting me in my role as President and I look forward to supporting and working with a new President to continue to work of AFSA.

Advocacy Report

AFSA is concerned for people with an ASD and the parents, carers and families around them, as well as the organizations who provide them with services. Despite our rather outdated name our focus is whole of life, whole of the spectrum. Through our activities we aim to improve the outcomes of all people with an ASD and their families and carers.

Though we generalize these activities by calling them 'advocacy', they can be defined more specifically as:-

Systemic Advocacy – where we engage in ongoing consultation with Members of Parliament and Government Departments to ensure they have reliable information about the life issues concerning our community.

We are able to provide this advice based on information from our community. At times this information is gained from the parent to parent support we provide to families and other times it is targeted consultation such as surveys conducted regarding a specific issue.

The aim of systemic advocacy is to assist policy makers to develop good policy and to ensure that adequate funds are invested in such policies. We prepare a budget submission each year, and election submissions when appropriate.

Personal advocacy, guidance, and support – where we respond personally to an issue affecting a family. Typically it involves an education issue, but we do respond regardless of the service sector which may be involved. On some occasions when approached we also support a parent based interest group, such as the parents from Moomba Park Primary who sought our help in 2010 to assist them retain funding for 2011. We also provide advice, guidance and support to other parent 'advocacy' groups, especially any knowledge and expertise we have gained.

These activities are carried out free to those who ask, regardless of where the family lives, or whether or not they are a member of AFSA.

Our relationships with families, policy makers and service providers, enables us to network with the national body, the Australian Advisory Board on ASD's and other state Autism organizations.

In the 2010 calendar year we were 'lucky' enough to encounter two elections. We restrict most of our systemic advocacy to the State Government and issues under their jurisdiction, however on a federal level we have added our support to the NDIS – National Disability Insurance Scheme. At this stage it is unknown whether or not Autism Spectrum Disorders will be covered by the NDIS, and it will be some years before any decisions are made, but it's definitely a 'watch this space' development.

On a State level, we continue to be involved in the implementation of the Autism State Plan. In the lead up to the Victorian state election late last year we pursued both the opposition and government for policy commitments to our community. As a matter of standard practice we build relationships with MP's on all sides of the house and have been advising the coalition on issues for many years making for a smooth transition to liaising with the new government.

A number of families each year find their way to us in desperate search for help with their situation, mostly in the education system. I'm pleased to say that a positive outcome has been the result in each case we have been involved with. Whilst we don't help hundreds of people, we do help those who come to us, regardless of their postcode. Such support, guidance and advocacy

can at times be intense, often requiring discussion with Senior Education Department personnel and almost daily support to a family. Ongoing support is provided to families if required and some families have continued to receive some support for a number of years. This is because as families ourselves we have a natural affinity with the lives of those who contact AFSA.

Here are some funded advocacy organizations who are able to assist and provide excellent information:-

The Office of the Public Advocate - 1300 309 337 - www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au

VALID – Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability – 9416 4003 or 1800 655 570 (Rural Victorians) – www.valid.org.au

ACD – Association for Children with a Disability – 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013 (Rural Victorians) – www.acd.org.au

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze – Information Line 1300 308 699 – www.autismvictoria.org.au or www.amaze.org.au

Committee Membership:

The **outgoing** Committee comprises

Meredith Ward, President

Amanda Golding, Secretary

Chris Ford, Treasurer

Phil Lipshut, Public Officer

... and committee members Jane Hancock, Nick Harvey, Rosalie Cotter, Richard Joseph, Paula Balsamo

Six committee meetings were held since the 2010 AGM and several other AFSA committee matters were managed via electronic communication/voting.

Meredith Ward – PRESIDENT

FROM THE SECRETARY

The AFSA committee has continued to advance the association's objective of providing an effective support network for Victorian families and carers of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

AFSA committee meetings not only manage the business of the association, but are also an opportunity to explore issues and situations raised by those present. For example, Phil Lipshut has attended a number of meetings on behalf of AFSA, as well as bringing to our own meetings issues and information he has gathered from other groups. Rosalie Cotter has also kept the committee well informed about housing and research issues. Members also outline personal experiences and it is often difficult to contain discussions to our two hour meeting time limit!

The association has again been granted a Victorian Government Disability Self Help Group grant and along with our interest earnings has covered the costs of running the association without having to charge membership fees. The majority of our expenses relate to our website, public liability insurance, meeting room costs and out of pocket costs incurred by committee members.

A review of AFSA's Rules of Association has taken place in the context of recent changes to the Victorian Association Incorporation Act and the fact that our document is 25 years old. The revised Rules of Association will be based on the recently released Model Rules of Association, and whilst the association objectives will remain the same, the language and operational aspects covered in the document will reflect the way things are done in the 21st century!

In this context, the committee has spent some time discussing the activities undertaken by AFSA and developing a plan of action to take the association forward in the next year and beyond. In part this will be possible following the receipt of two very generous donations from Gospel Resources Limited. These donations were made in appreciation of the advocacy work undertaken so effectively by our President Meredith Ward.

Before closing I would like to record my vote appreciation to Meredith Ward. During my recent years on the AFSA committee, in my 'role' as a parent and during my time with Autism Victoria Meredith has been an inspiration, support and beacon of light. Her doggedness, energy and insight have resulted in an extensive portfolio of connections, influences and achievements and we all owe her a great debt of gratitude for her leadership of AFSA over the past decade.

I look forward to welcoming new faces to the AFSA committee and assisting Meredith in the task of establishing a team of AFSA advocates.

Amanda Golding - SECRETARY

FROM THE TREASURER

Much of the energies and efforts of the AFSA team continued to be focused on securing government support, enhancing the awareness of the plight of families affected by ASD, and maintaining the Web Site to extend the presence and reach of AFSA across the state of Victoria. Full operations are still not underway, as the long term strategy and aims of AFSA are yet to be finalised and funded.

This year the expenditure incurred in running the scaled down operations came to \$6,118.32 which was 14% below last year. The saving in costs primarily came by not having to further develop the Web Site. Income for year of \$7,981.95 was derived from interest on Bank Accounts, and a government grants. The net trading result was a small profit of \$1,505.96.

Finally I would like to thank and to give my appreciation to the AFSA committee for all their support and assistance through the year.

Chris Ford – TREASURER

AFSA FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

BALANCE SHEET

As at 31st December 2010

	Notes	\$
<u>Trust Funds</u>		
Opening Balance		48,515.52
Operating Loss		1,505.96
<u>Trust Funds</u>		<u>50,021.48</u>
Current Assets		
Cash on Hand		1,324.09
Savings Funds	2	47,573.28
<u>Total Current Assets</u>		<u>48,897.37</u>
<u>Non-current Assets</u>		
Property & Equipment		1839.45
Accumulated Depreciation	3	715.34
<u>Total Non-current Assets</u>		<u>1,124.11</u>
<u>Total Assets</u>		<u>50,021.48</u>
<u>Total Liabilities</u>		<u>0.00</u>
<u>Net Assets</u>		<u>50,021.48</u>

PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENT

For the period ending 31st December 2010

	Notes	\$
INCOME		
Government Grants		5,555.00
Interest Received		2,326.95
Other		100.00
TOTAL INCOME		7,981.95
LESS OPERATING EXPENSES		
Committee Expenses		2,616.74
Insurance		630.00
Web Site Maintenance		705.79
Depreciation Expenses		357.67
Rent & Room Hire		666.00
Travel		1026.80
Other Costs		472.99
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES		6,475.99
NET PROFIT/(LOSS)		1,505.96



NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2010

Note 1: Accounting Matters

Income Tax

Autistic Family Support Association is exempt from tax as per Section 23 (e) of the Income Assessment Act.

GST

Autistic Family Support Association is not a registered GST entity.

Note 2: Cash & Investments

	\$
WBC 2663	1,324.09
WBC 8639	47,573.28
Total Cash on Hand	<u>48,897.37</u>

Note 3: Depreciation

Equipment refers to a Laptop which is being depreciated using the straight line method over three years (year two).