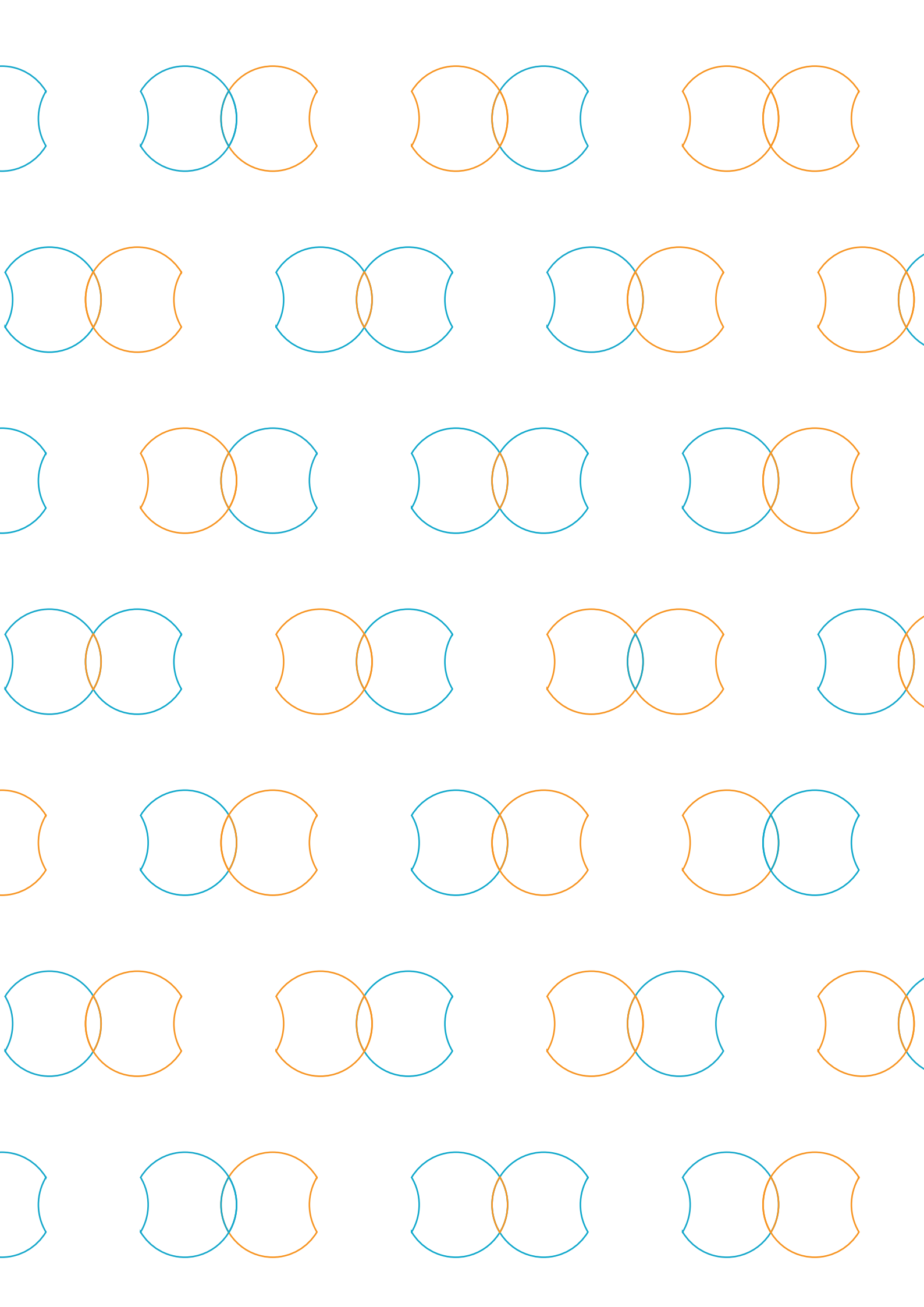


ADACAS

Annual Report

2019-2020





Acknowledgment of Country

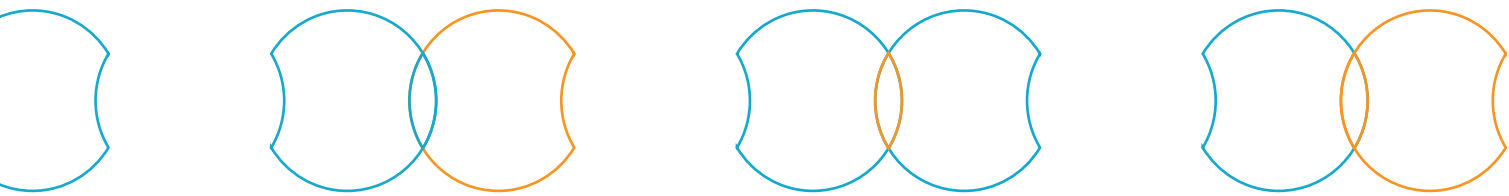
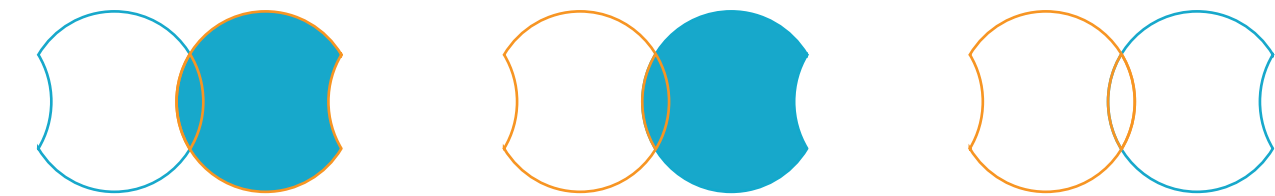
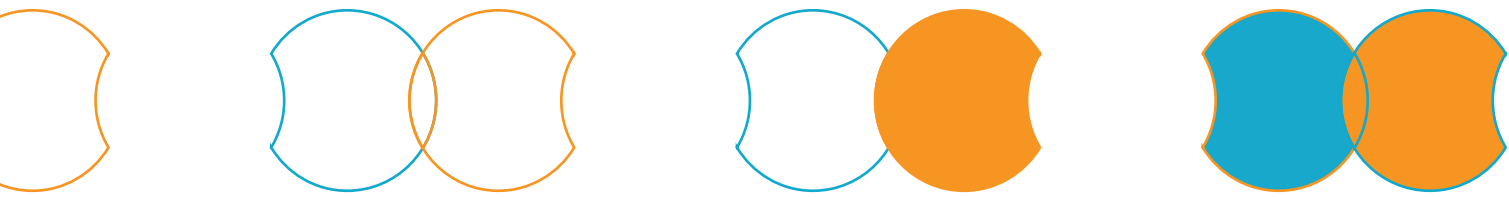
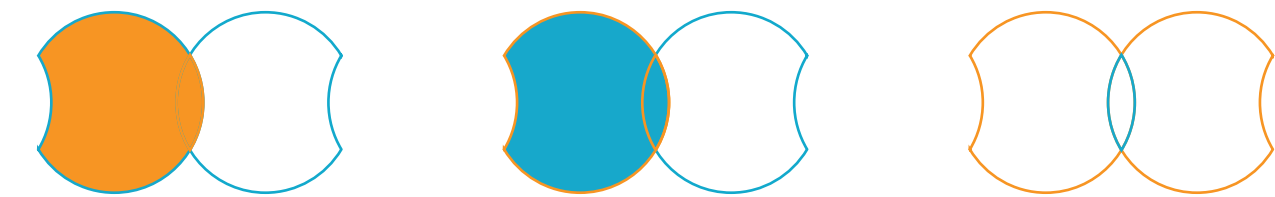
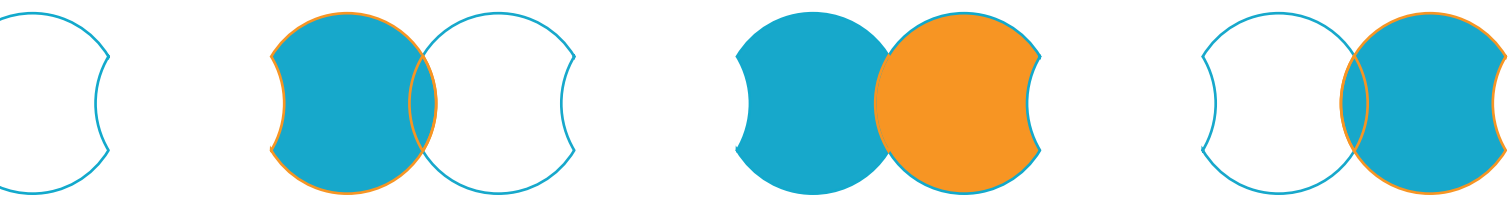
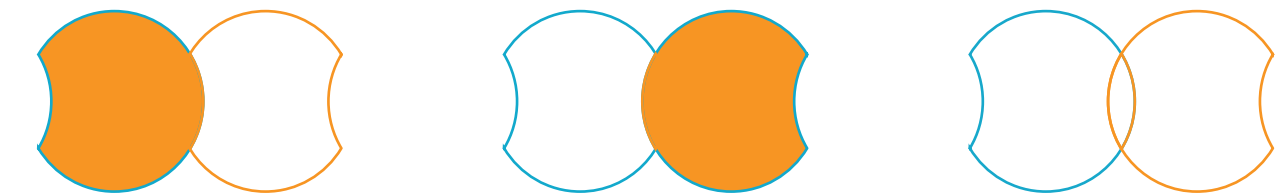
ADACAS acknowledges the many language groups and the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work: the Ngunnawal, Yuin and Dharawal peoples of the Canberra and NSW South Coast regions. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across our communities.

ADACAS extends our gratitude to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia for their continuing resilience and open hearts in the face of historical and present- day human rights violations and the destruction of their sacred sites.

ADACAS would also like to acknowledge, and give thanks for the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this land that enrich all Australians.

Community Acknowledgment

ADACAS acknowledges the diversity of people and communities in Australia including those from LGBTIQ+ background, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and those with lived experience of disability and mental illness.



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About ADACAS

The A.C.T. Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS), is an independent, not-for-profit, advocacy organisation providing support to people with disability, older people, people

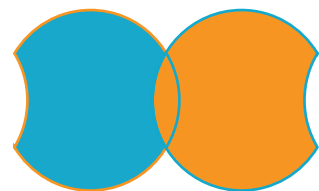
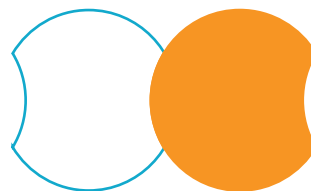
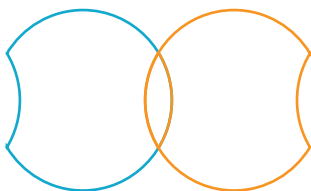
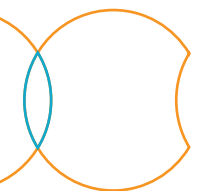
experiencing mental ill-health, and carers. ADACAS provides free individual advocacy, information and support in the ACT and some regions in the south coast of NSW.

● Our Vision

Our vision is to live in a community in which everyone may exercise their rights and responsibilities, lead lives of value and dignity, and pursue their dreams.

● Our Mission

Our mission is to assert, promote and protect the rights and responsibilities of people with disability, people with mental ill health, older people and their carers. Our mission is to assert, promote and protect the rights and responsibilities of people with disability, people with mental ill health, older people and their carers.



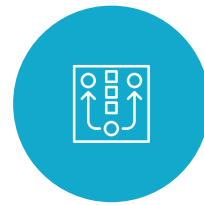
Guiding Principles

The four guiding principles ADACAS stands by



Integrity

Ethical practice and authenticity



Pursuit of Excellence

We understand what we do, why we do it and how we can improve



Reflective Practice

Thoughtful consideration and learning from experience

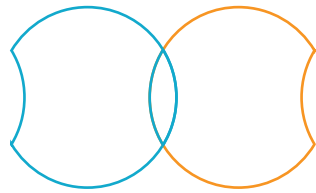


Social Justice

All people have equal opportunity to create better life chances

Chairpersons Report

Helen McDevitt



I was privileged to join the Board of ADACAS as Chair in December 2019. The Board acknowledges the extraordinary work of Stephen Still, the outgoing Chair who took up this role in 2010. Stephen has, and continues, to be a passionate advocate for human rights and the work of ADACAS.

The Board of ADACAS comprises nine very committed individuals. We welcomed Andrew Mathieson and Chris Potter to the Board in June 2020. Board members work together to ensure robust governance and oversight of ADACAS, and the strategies we have in place to meet the needs of our clients, achieve social justice for vulnerable people and improve social inclusion. The Board held a number of extraordinary meetings to understand the challenges and oversight appropriate responses to the changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We acknowledge and applaud the work of our CEO and staff in this most challenging year. In the face of very real challenges,



our staff have exhibited an unwavering commitment to serving our clients' needs. The CEO and staff have demonstrated great innovation and resilience, and we also acknowledge the added stress and pressure this has had for staff and clients.

In 2020, the Board has initiated some strategic changes, including to improve our succession and recruitment planning and to move towards a new corporate structure and Constitution. We have also agreed a new Reserves Policy and are working toward longer-term budgeting to align with our strategic planning.

I want to acknowledge our supporters. The Commonwealth and ACT governments have continued to support our work throughout the bush fires and COVID-19 crises. Our membership of the Older Peoples' Advocacy Network (OPAN) has seen a stronger national voice for older people with the Commonwealth Government and an efficient channelling of resources to national projects and to the local level to allow ADACS to provide aged care advocacy services. Our membership of the Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) means we can reflect our clients' voice to national advocacy and the ongoing fight for improved rights and services for people with disability.

In April 2020, the Board endorsed our initial Reconciliation Action Plan and reviewed our systemic advocacy strategy. ADACAS advocated alongside other advocacy and representative organisations have strengthened our ability to advocate for better client outcomes and systemic change.

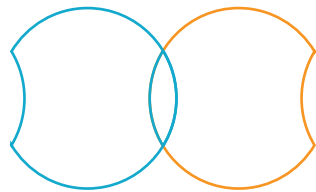
I also want to thank Proximity law firm: Proximity staff have been generous in their

pro bono work with us on a new corporate structure and Constitution. We have engaged with the two Royal Commissions, which offer unique opportunities to present the real stories of our clients, and to press for improvements and systemic reforms to the aged care and disability systems.

I would like to especially thank our CEO, Michael Bleasdale, for his leadership of ADACAS' growth and diversification and effective service delivery and policy advocacy, and in responding to crises. The impact of the bush fires in Canberra was significant and the constraints resulting from COVID-19 meant rapid, effective responses, such as moving staff to remote working arrangements, were required. ADACAS has weathered events relatively well, and the Board has increased its engagement in strategic issues to ensure we can move forward safely and with a clear sense of purpose.

CEO Report

Michael Bleasdale



Like many leaders of community organisations it is hard to avoid the headline of COVID-19 when reflecting on the achievements of the last year. 2019-2020 was certainly a year of two halves – of optimism, growth and progress leading up to the end of 2019, only to be confronted by catastrophic bushfires, fierce storms and then a global pandemic at the dawn of the new decade. All of these impacted significantly on the clients that ADACAS serves, and posed additional challenges to our staff, Board and the community with which we work collaboratively in the ACT and in the south coast of NSW.

The progress of ADACAS during the last financial year has been steady and significant, and it is a testimony to the commitment and ability of our staff and management that we have not only weathered the storm but used it to implement positive change to the way in which we operate. Growth has been achieved in our Advocacy, through the appointment of two additional staff whose focus is on the Disability Royal Commission, specifically assisting people with disability



who wish to engage with the Commission and have their experiences heard and acknowledged. One of these positions is an identified Aboriginal Community Advocate, which has immediately fulfilled a long-term ambition of ADACAS to engage more constructively with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the ACT and the south coast of NSW, and to provide better advocacy more often for people in these groups. The appointment of this Advocate also complements our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), which was commenced and rapidly progressed throughout the year. We have also invested in our Support Coordination service, and rationalised our operations to bring a clearer distinction between those activities and our Advocacy. Demand for our older persons advocacy has increased dramatically, because of the Aged Care Royal Commission and because of the impact on older people of COVID-19.

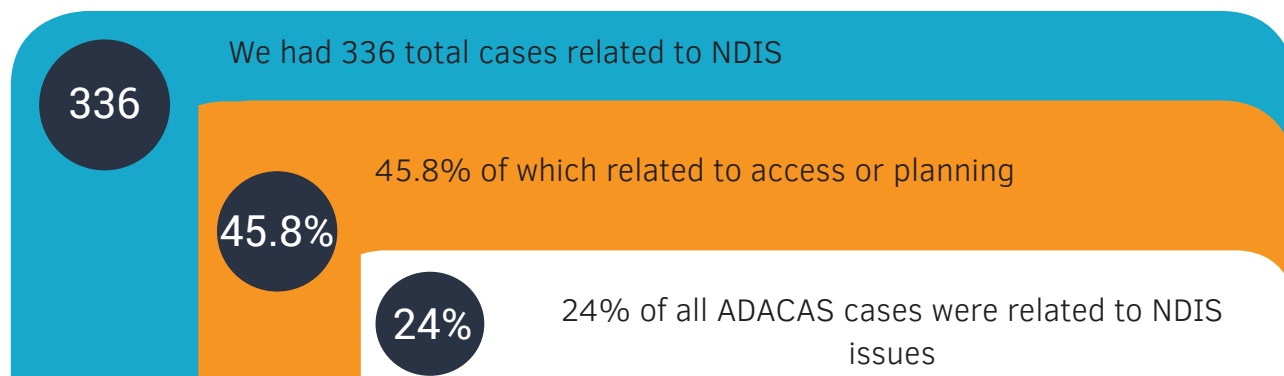
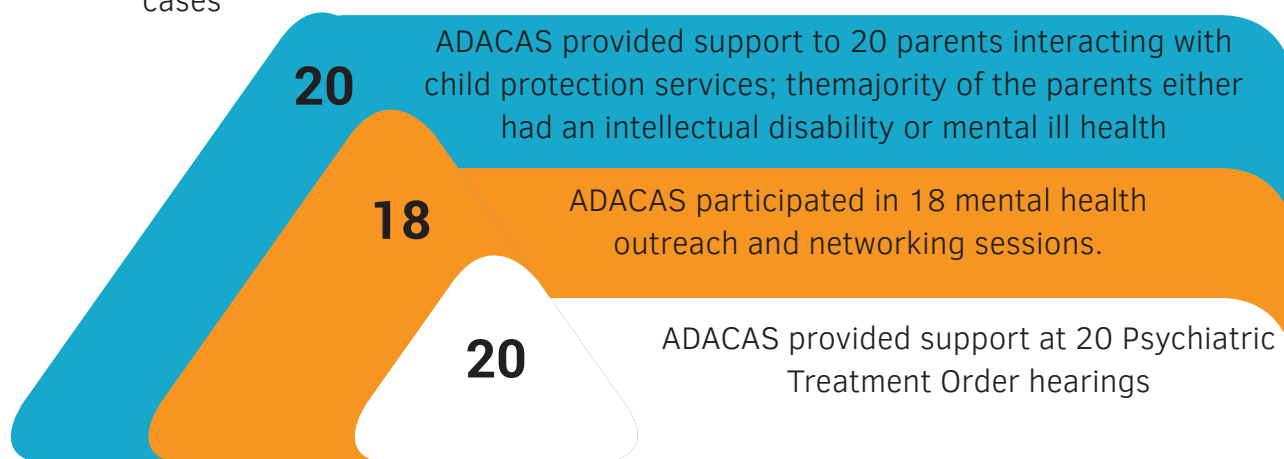
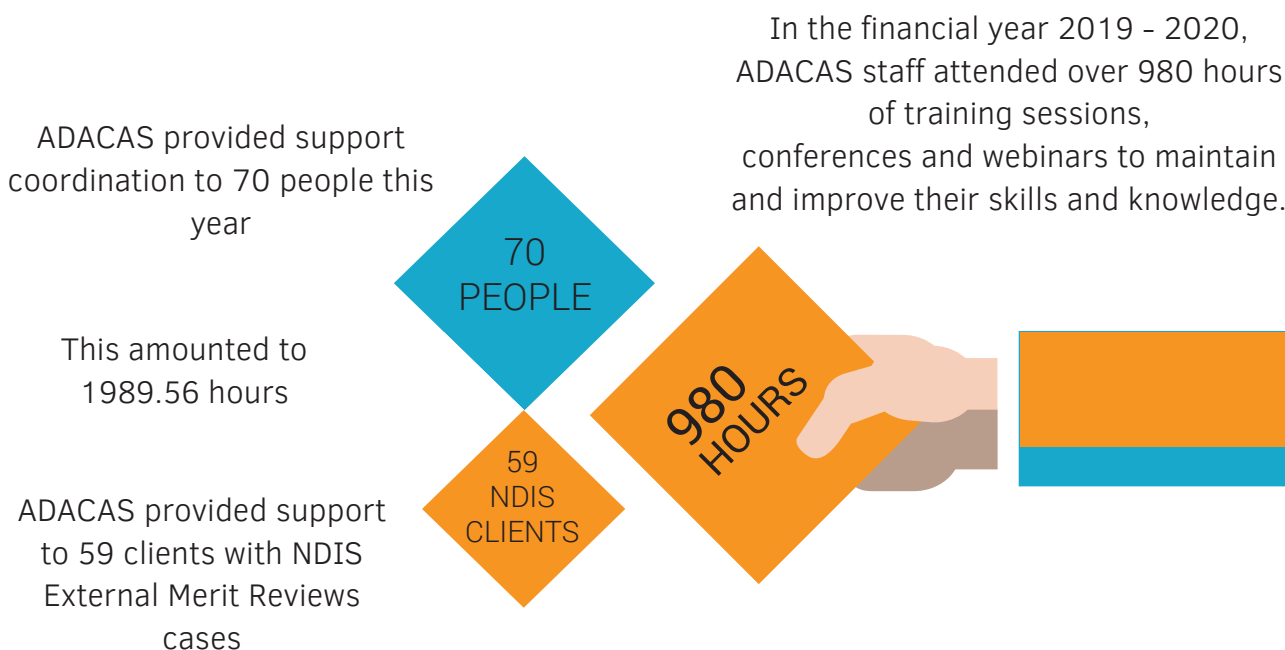
Our growth and diversification has placed pressure on our operations management, which was also faced with the challenge of rapidly developing a capability to enable staff to work from home as COVID-19 struck in March 2020. In a short space of time we were able to move all of our systems to the cloud, including our work database, master the art of video-conferencing, and deliver a communications capability which gave our clients as close an experience to normal when they contacted ADACAS. This is testimony to the skills and dedication of our Business and Administration Team, led by Deshawn Wattanatassi, who at the same time have been grappling with greater contractual reporting requirements, the transition to a new and more functional client database, and the development of a new website.

The restructure we put into place in 2019 has proven vital to the support needed to be given to staff during the period of lockdown, and to ensure we maintain our productivity in difficult circumstances.

My thanks to the Team Leaders and my Leadership Team for the guidance provided to staff throughout the year, and it is pleasing to see how this structure is helping ADACAS to consolidate its growth, improve its performance, and increase its reach. Our systemic advocacy in the last year has also increased exponentially, with ADACAS making over 20 submissions, contributing to a large number of ACT and national forums, committees and working groups, and participating in a range of networks and initiatives.

A CEO Report can never adequately express thanks to all who deserve it, and I will leave the Annual Report itself to tell the story of dedication and skill that staff across ADACAS have brought to their work and the legacy of their service. I do, however, wish to thank the whole of the ADACAS team that has pulled together throughout a difficult year, and to acknowledge the enormous support I and the staff have received from our Board of Management, in particular our Chairs, Stephen Still until the end of 2019, and Helen McDevitt PSM since December 2019 until the present. Board Directors give their time voluntarily to ADACAS and have been particularly busy in 2020 re-invigorating our governance processes to match our operational growth and diversification, and preparing ourselves for the challenges of an uncertain future.

Stats at a Glance



ADACAS at work



ADACAS Board

Chair

Helen McDevitt

Treasurer

Andrew Cameron

Public Officer

Michael Bleasdale

Directors

Stephen Still

Kym Duggan

Gregory Mahony

Margot Harker

Alana Fraser

Chris Potter

Dr Andrew Mathieson

Dominic Brookman (resigned July 2019)

ADACAS Staff

Staff

Michael Bleasdale CEO

Sonia Di Mezza Deputy CEO (Until March 2020)

Katie Bulenda Team Leader/Disability Advocate (Until March 2020) and Operations Manager (From March 2020)

Arava Klein NSW South Coast Advocate

Ashleigh Walker Support Coordinator/Advocate (From November 2019)

Caitlin Wann Advocate (until November 2019)

Caitlin Yazidjoglou Advocate (until December 2019)

Claire Mackay Disability Advocate (From November 2018)

Esther Chelimo Royal Commission Advocate (From September 2019)

Genevieve Carey Support Coordinator/Advocate

Grieg Chapman Team Leader/Support Coordinator/Advocate

Gwen Davies Team Leader/Aged Care Advocate

Jen Fisher Support Coordinator/Advocate

Jodie Fisher Aged Care Advocate

Jose Maria Martinez (from June 2019 to November 2018)

Kandice Senturias Intake Officer

Keith Brandy Aboriginal Community Advocate, Disability Royal Commission (from 2020)

Madeleine Rowland External Merits Review Advocate (From December 2019)

Michelle Peruzzi Mental Health and Redress Advocate

Rebecca Dawson Redress Team Leader

Roger Munson Aged Care Advocate

Sarah Berry Advocate (From June 2018 to November 2018)

Sara Stanley Team Leader NDIS Appeals and Disability Royal Commission and Advocate

Nick Gleeson Intake Officer

ADACAS Staff

ADACAS Staff: Administration

Deshawn Wattanatassi Business Manager
Christianne Clementine Receptionist/Administration officer
Daniel Loh Finance Officer
Tina Ryan Receptionist/Administration Officer

Clinical Supervision Consultants

Elizabeth Done
Tamarisk Jakobs
Kandie Allen-Kelly
Jacqui McCabe-Austin
Sonia Fenwick

ADACAS Staff: Policy and Projects

Helen Connolly Manager Projects, Policy and Research (Until November 2019)
Lauren O'Brien Systemic Advocacy Team Leader
Ivette Gonzalez Project Coordinator Supported Decision Making and Acting Projects Team Leader (From November 2019)
Barbara Fisher Project Officer (Until July 2019) and Contractor (From January 2020)
Sarah Sowry Project Officer (Until December 2020)
Damien Venner Project Officer (Until September 2019)
Nicola Reid Project Officer (From November 2019)

Business Consultant

Murray Coates

IT Consultant

OPC IT
Think Technology

Database Consultant

Rohan Mitchell (1024 Pty Ltd)

Year in Review

This year ADACAS has been busy, as ever, but demand for our Advocacy and for other services grew exponentially, and we surpassed 1000 matters for the first time in our history. The data below indicates how much we have increased our support to individuals over the past financial year, exceeding our contractual KPIs and utilising our agility across all areas of specialisation to continue to immediately respond to those whose needs are urgent. The exponential growth in our delivery of advocacy to people with disability (300%) is due only in small part to our outreach response to clients during the first COVID-19 outbreak in the last quarter of the financial year, and attests

to the relentless and systemic nature of the issues which present to our individual clients.

The first half of this financial year was characterised by ADACAS staff speaking about our work at national forums, and contributing to important national discussions and debates. In July 2019 CEO Michael Bleasdale, Deputy CEO Sonia Di Mezza and Manager, Policy, Projects and Research, Helen Connolly attended and presented at the Rock the Boat - National Elder Abuse Conference in Brisbane, with Sonia and Helen talking on panels about abuse of older people from diverse



1

Helen Connolly (centre) speaking at the Rock the Boat conference.



2

Sonia Di Mezza Sonia Di Mezza (on the left) participating in a panel at the Rock the Boat Conference.



3

**Michael Bleasdale
speaking at the Rock
the Boat Conference**

backgrounds and Supported Decision-Making respectively, and Michael launching the SDM older person abuse app (for Android).

Around this time there was a concerted effort to critique the performance of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and ADACAS participated in the local consultations of a national inquiry into “Thin Markets”, focusing on those populations of people with disability who were missing out on accessing the scheme or finding the services and supports they required from what the market offered. ADACAS participated in the consultation and provided some written feedback to the consultation process.

In July 2019 the new Aged Care Standards were declared, with relevance to both residential aged care facilities (RACFs) and home care settings. These Standards were debated and agreed upon by all segments of the aged care sector, and privilege the older person as the centre of all support and care decisions, and being an active agent in the



4

**Michael Bleasdale
speaking at the National
Housing Conference 2019.**

strategies to deliver their “wellness and reablement”. The Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) was at the forefront of the development of the Aged Care Charter of Rights, which was launched at the same time, and which states clearly the rights of consumers in residential and home care settings.

In August 2019 Michael Bleasdale presented two papers at the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), focusing on the difficulty that people with disability have in finding housing that is suitably accessible for them to live in and to visit, and how hard it is to match suitable housing (when found) with the supports that may be required for people to live functionally independent lives. The conference provided a great opportunity to network with experts on housing, within and outside the disability sector, from across Australia, and to share experiences of how limitations to housing is significantly impacting on the ability of people with disability to participate as they would wish in their communities.

August also saw the launch of the ACT's Disability Justice Strategy, with ADACAS and our colleagues at Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI) represented on the Reference Group, and involved in a range of activities, commencing with the development of training to the key departments that administer justice and where reform needs to take place to ensure people with disability enjoy their rights to the same extent as others. The Strategy is something that ADACAS has lobbied for and is very committed to, and will hopefully deliver tangible outcomes to people with disability who have for so long been denied their enjoyment of justice alongside others in their community.

There were more conferences to attend and present at in September 2019, with Katie Bulenda and Claire Mackay representing

ADACAS at the conference workshop jointly held in Melbourne by the Victorian Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU) and the Disability Advocacy Network of Australia (DANA). CEO Michael Bleasdale gave a presentation about rights and the importance of Advocacy at the 4th Future of Aged Care Summit at Novotel in Sydney held 25-27 September, and also spoke on a panel that looked at recruitment strategies that encouraged consumer-directed practices.

The last quarter of 2019 saw ADACAS preparing for its Annual General Meeting, held on 29 October, which was preceded by a forum focused on Connecting, Collaborating, Championing. Designed as a celebration of the power of collaboration the forum invited speakers from partner agencies and schools, including DANA,



5

Michael Bleasdale
(centre)



6

Deshawn Wattanatassi,
ADACAS Business
Manager and Andrew
Cameron, ADACAS Board
Treasurer



7

**Sue Salthouse Chair of
Women with Disabilities
ACT**

8

**Jen Fisher and Jodie
Fisher ADACAS
advocates**

Rights & Inclusion Australia, Health Care Consumers Association the ACT, Office for Disability, and the University of Canberra, to focus on areas of work where working together has proved effective in solving problems for mutual clients.

Our Project Officer Sarah Sowry presented a paper on The Place of Supported Decision Making in Responding to Mental Health Issues with Younger People, at the 5th International Association of Youth Mental Health 2019: United for Global Change conference held from 26-28 October in Brisbane. The information stimulated an excellent discussion about the importance of supporting young people to learn skills and build their identity as decision makers. It also linked to one of the key themes of the conference (The importance of engaging with young people and sharing lived experience) and highlighted the need to keep the young person's voice, values and rights at the centre of all aspects of mental health supports.

In October Deputy CEO Sonia Di Mezza presented at the Annual ACT Law Society's Wills and Estates Conference, raising the awareness of older persons abuse to the legal profession.

To celebrate International Older Persons Day 2019 ADACAS hosted a morning tea attended by Minister Gordon Ramsay and a range of guests, including Craig Gear, CEO of OPAN. Auntie Janette Phillips gave a Welcome to Country, with Deputy CEO Sonia Di Mezza giving a presentation on The Rights of Older Persons and the Prevention of Abuse of Older Persons, and Ivette Gonzalez and Sarah Sowry introduced our Supported Decision Making toolkits and phone app, demonstrating how they can be used to assist to mitigate the risk of abuse of Older Persons.

On 19 November 2019 the Policy and Projects team hosted a forum to explore supported decision making in healthcare for young people. This was part of an NDIA funded ILC jurisdictional grant exploring supported decision making in health for persons with disabilities. People from the ACT community including those with lived experience of disability and mental ill health, health professionals, educators, advocates, and ACT Government representatives came together to explore the opportunities and challenges for young people who want to make decisions about their healthcare.

December can sometimes be a quieter time, certainly in terms of the front-facing events that ADACAS is involved in, but with the onset of the bushfires, and the Canberra Hearings of the Aged Care Royal Commission it turned out to be

busy right up until the Christmas break. The Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme held hearings at Parliament House regarding issues and problems participants were having with the planning process, and the lack of transparency in the way in which decisions were made by the National Disability Insurance Agency, often resulting in significant hardship for participants. ADACAS supported a participant to give powerful testimony to the Committee, which received local and national media attention.

Just prior to Christmas Michael Bleasdale appeared in an interview where he recalls the hopes people held for individualised funding, the chasm between vision and implementation, lessons for aspirational advocacy and some possible ways back in 2020. Update Journal, ACTCOSS, Issue 90,



9

**Sarah Sowry ADACAS
Project Officer**



10

**Sonia Di Mezza
ADACAS Deputy CEO
speaking as part of a
panel discussion**



11

Older Persons Advocacy Network, CEO Craig Gear, ADACAS CEO, Michael Bleasdale and Attorney General and Minister for Seniors and Veterans Gordon Ramsay.

From left to right



12

Ivette Gonzalez, ADACAS Project Coordinator and Sarah Sowry, ADACAS Project Officer.

From left to right

Summer 2019-20: 2020 is on the horizon - is it the view we imagined?

The hopes for 2020 were immense, but the sense of dread that accompanied the smoke and haze of the first days of January was compounded by the anxiety felt throughout the community, more particularly by the clients we see, many of whom we contacted as part of the ACT's Declaration of Emergency relating to the bushfires.

Advocates and ADACAS staff contacted all of our clients to check on their welfare during the period that Canberra was affected by the smoke from the fires in NSW. When ACT Government officials announced the proximity of the fires to Canberra suburbs, we worked closely with the ACT Government identifying clients who needed evacuation in the event of the fire reaching Canberra properties.

On January 20, 2020 a severe hail storm caused extensive damage to properties and vehicles across Canberra. Two ADACAS cars were amongst those affected by the storm. Our advocates made sure that our clients were receiving the help needed in case the storm caused damage to their homes or vehicles.

On 16 March 2020, the ACT Government declared a public health emergency and shortly after the lock down began. With the lock down came many restrictions that affected the way that we engaged with our clients. On a number of occasions, it was necessary for advocates to visit clients who were unable to communicate over the phone or use other communication devices. Personal Protective Equipment became mandatory for all client meetings to ensure the safety of clients and staff. Only a skeleton of essential workers remained at the office abiding by strict COVID hygiene rules as well as social

distancing. Other staff gradually returned back to the office on a rostered basis as the restrictions eased. During the pandemic we heavily rely on online communication platforms.

As part of our own COVID 19 response, ADACAS advocates maintained regular contact with clients to make sure they had everything they needed for everyday life: such as care, food and appropriate access to health services.

ADACAS once more lent its support to Mental Health Week by having a stall at the Mental Health Expo at Garema Place.



13

Esther Chelimo, ADACAS advocate and Sarah Sowry, ADACAS Project Officer.



15

View of ADACAS' office: air quality affected by smoke during the bushfires.



14

Panellists: Mandy Donley, ACT Senior Practitioner; Loretta Wholley, Principal of Merici College; Bella, Youth Mind Pilot with MIEACT; Jodie Griffiths-Cook, Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner at the ACT Human Rights Commission; Angus Crowe, Representative of Australia for Special Olympics and young person with lived experience of disability; Vanessa Crowe, Carer of young person with disability and advocate. MC and Facilitator: Michael Bleasdale, CEO ADACAS.



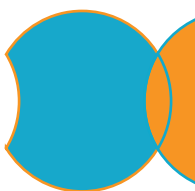
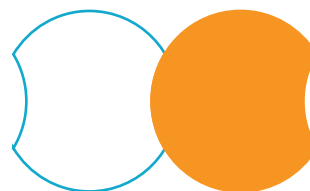
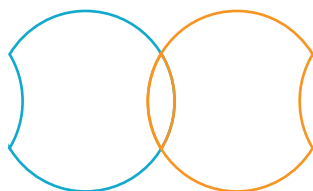
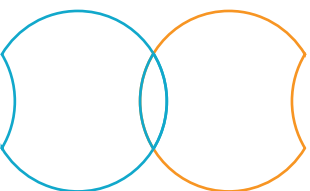
17

Esther Chelimo wearing
Personal Protective
Equipment without mask to
smile for the photo.



16

ADACAS car with rear
window smashed by hail
during the Canberra storm.



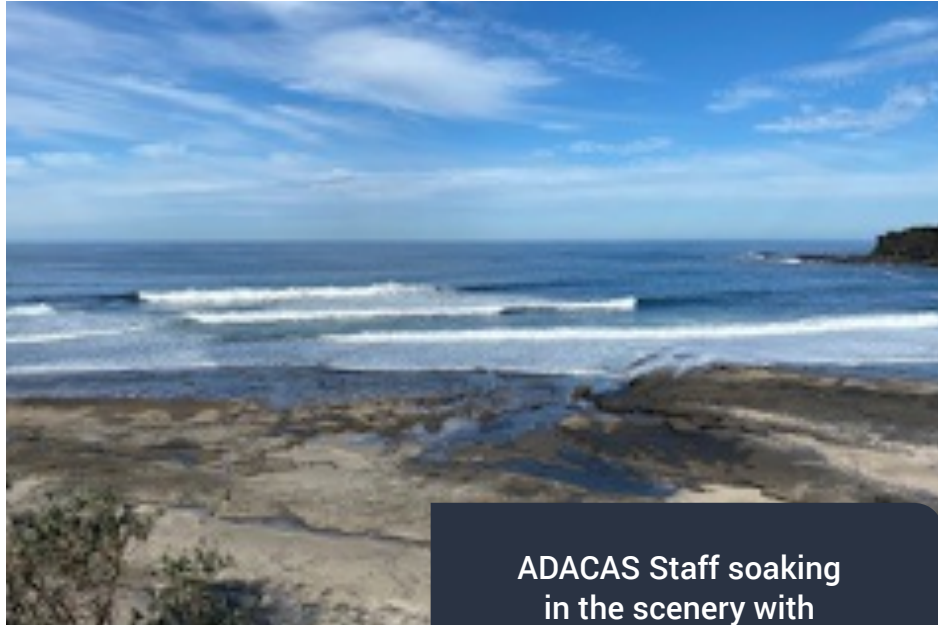
ADACAS' commitment to working more closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the ACT and the south coast of NSW, and to improve and increase our service delivery to people from these communities, was prioritised in our 2019-2022 Strategic Plan.

ADACAS Highlight 2019-2020 – Reconciliation Action Plan

First and foremost for the Board and staff was the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), to guide our activities into the future. Throughout 2019/2020, a Reconciliation Action Plan working group (a committee that includes two Aboriginal cultural mentors, six to seven ADACAS staff (including the CEO) and an ADACAS board member), have been meeting regularly and working towards preparing an ADACAS Reconciliation Action Plan. This plan is expected to be launched in the second half of 2020.

During NAIDOC week 2019, ADACAS staff attended a range of community events, forums and activities. We were pleased in October 2019, to have a visit and presentation from Gudan- Gulwan staff who spoke with us about how ADACAS could support them and their clients in their work. In the second half of 2019, all ADACAS staff participated in a day of Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training delivered by Julie Moore from Koorimunication.

ADACAS staff attended a screening to mark the 12th anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations in February 2020.



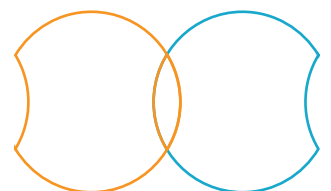
ADACAS Staff soaking
in the scenery with
south coast sunshine

ADACAS staff also attended activities in Reconciliation Day and Week, and marked National Sorry Day. ADACAS was represented at the Black Lives Matter protest in Canberra in June 2020. We continue to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through both our individual and systemic advocacy efforts.

Towards the end of May 2020 ADACAS was very excited to receive advice that the First Persons' Disability Network (FPDN) would be providing funding such that ADACAS can employ an Aboriginal Community Advocate,

to assist people who might wish to lodge a submission with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

We look forward to continuing to reflect and to learn, to further expanding our networks and to seeking to advocate with and in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities both in Canberra, and across in the areas that ADACAS works in the NSW South Coast.



My name is Keith Brandy and I am a proud Wiradjuri man originally from central NSW and I have just completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Wollongong. My double major was in areas of my interest such as Indigenous studies and history with a passion for social justice issues, fitness, travel, personal development and travel.

Aboriginal Community Advocate Profile

I have just returned back home to Canberra after securing an employment position with ADACAS within the ACT Community Sector. I was just recently appointed the Aboriginal Community Advocate for ADACAS who in 2020 was approached by the First Nations Disability Network of Australia (FPDN) to employ an additional Aboriginal Community Advocate to work directly with people with disability and their families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds for the duration of the Royal Commission.

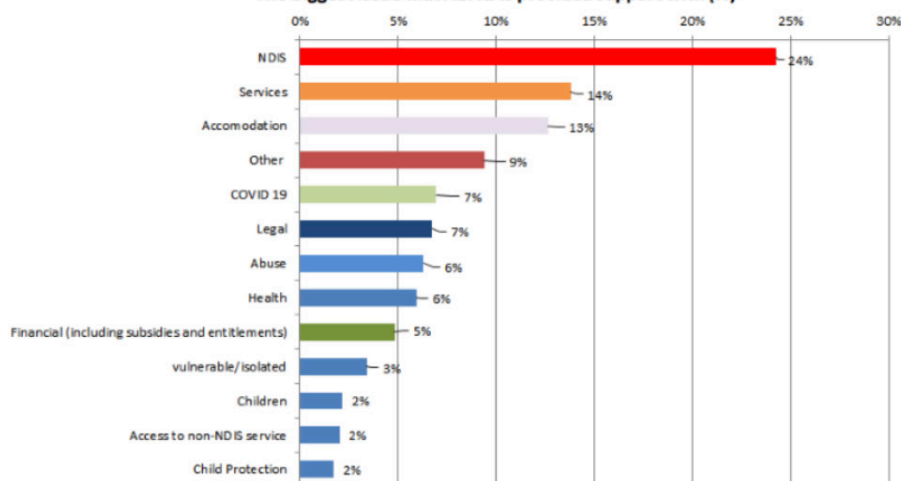
This position has been developed to achieve that purpose and FPDN will work alongside ADACAS, and the Advocate, throughout the Disability Royal Commission to establish connections with local communities, provide additional coaching and mentoring to the Advocate, and work with ADACAS to ensure a culturally safe and healthy workplace.

Milestone: One thousand matters in a financial year

As if to illustrate the growing demand for Advocacy ADACAS surpassed 1000 matters/issues in the last financial year, despite an initial lull in demand as everyone came to terms with lockdown during the first wave of COVID-19. A significant proportion of this demand continues to come from people who have various difficulties with accessing or utilising the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). But concerns about human rights violations, and outright abuse, have been much more in the public's mind with the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Aged Care Royal Commission) that continued throughout the year,

and with the commencement of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission). The bushfire emergency and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have served to highlight the vulnerable positions of our clients, none more so that older people living in residential aged care facilities. In light of this and in this environment, the value of Advocacy is asserting itself, and the argument for better and more secure funding for our work and that of our colleagues nationally is gaining momentum.

The biggest issue that ADACAS provided support with (%)



NB: 'Other' includes the following issues which range from 0-1% in Government payment, Discrimination, Employment, Recreation/social or family, Disability services complaints, Education (Adult), Equipment and aids, Community Inclusion, Transport, Physical Access and Administrative Tribunal.



Older Persons Advocacy

ADACAS provides Advocacy to older people: people over the age of 65 years or for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people, over 50 years. ADACAS is the ACT service delivery organisation of the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), under a single contract to the Australia Government, administered by the Department of Health.

This year ADACAS once more exceeded its key performance indicators with regard to the number of individual advocacy matters we responded to, with the main issues for older people continuing to be difficulties with Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPoA) arrangements, challenges faced by older people in aged care getting access to the medical treatment they require, housing maintenance issues and potential evictions, and problems with provider fees and charges.

To a large extent the Aged Care Royal Commission has served to highlight all of these problems and bring them to the public's attention, and it is not likely that there will be any significant let up in demand for advocacy about these topics until the final report of the Commission is handed down and the recommendations for serious reform in the sector put into effect.

An important part of our Advocacy is outreach to older people in aged care, which we have traditionally managed through the delivery of community education presentations in residential aged care facilities (RACFs) and in other settings so

that we reach those who receive their aged care services at home. We also provide education sessions about rights and the abuse of older people, to raise awareness and to give older people information about whom they can contact if they experience abuse or neglect. For the first half of the year our community education continued as usual, but 2020 and its shocking events has led to a significant decline in access to deliver these sessions, and ADACAS, like its OPAN partners, is developing new methods by which to deliver the kind of information that older people, and their families, need to hear about how to uphold their rights.

During lockdown Advocates checked in regularly with clients who might be isolated. We made phone calls regularly to make sure they were safe, had their services in place, and had access to food and medical treatment. We organised food deliveries to the most vulnerable by finding services who would guarantee a regular delivery, and we also organised the delivery of vital medication by their pharmacies to ensure a constant supply.

This outreach strategy proved beneficial not only in ensuring the delivery of vital supplies, but also as a way of keeping in touch with the mental and emotional health of clients, and seeking assistance if problems arose.

Vince

ADACAS was contacted by the carer of a 67 year old gentleman (Vince – not his real name) with terminal cancer and a diagnosis of schizophrenia. The carer was concerned about the care Vince was receiving in an aged care facility and what she saw as the failure of the facility to provide him with access to the treatment for his cancer. There were temporary housing (respite care) arrangement and there was no certainty regarding his ongoing housing arrangements.

Over the next couple of weeks the ADACAS Advocate worked with Vince and his carer to access supports (Carers ACT) and with his permission, provided suggestions to his carer regarding courses of action they could take including: asking for a meeting of the care team (including palliative staff, facility staff and his treating doctor) which she said she found very effective and helpful. Vince was admitted to hospital for treatment for an infection associated with his cancer. In hospital his medical needs increased and was advised that he would have a limited time to live. With his consent the Advocate worked with the hospital treatment team on his behalf, with a focus on supporting him with decision making regarding where he would live post hospital. This enabled Vince's carer to focus on providing him with the care and support he needed, and on her own health. Unfortunately, Vince passed away before he could be discharged, but his carer told the Advocate that having an advocate working with him had provided her with confidence and reassurance that his wishes would be respected.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

ADACAS was very involved in the Aged Care Royal Commission, both in terms of the support advocates provided to individuals who wished to make submissions, or to make their views known to the Commission at hearings or through other means; and through the submissions that we wrote on our own behalf and for the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN). The following submissions are available on the ADACAS website:

- Response to the Aged Care Royal Commission – Capacity, Guardianship and Supported Decision Making
- Letter to Aged Care Royal Commission – interface between the aged care and health systems
- ADACAS Final Submission to the Aged Care Royal Commission

In December 2019 the Commission held a hearing in Canberra, with the focus on the interface between the Aged Care and Health systems. ADACAS was involved in publicising this hearing, and the preliminary public meeting, through our own networks and on ABC Radio.

Working with individuals to tell their stories can be complex and does not always result in submissions being made. The experience of reliving the events about which people had contacted ADACAS with a view to informing the Commission in many instances proved too difficult and in many ways traumatising for those individuals, who found it hard to stay the course and have their stories heard. Our Advocates worked patiently and with great skill and empathy in assisting people through this process to whatever extent they wished, as the following account from an Advocate illustrates.

I supported three people with submissions to the Aged Care Quality and Safeguards Royal Commission.

Two were not submitted to my knowledge by the clients. One was submitted right on the deadline after approximately 6 months of advocacy.

My role in the writing of this submission was quite different to the other 2 in that I did very little writing.

Although I did provide guidance in relation to format. It took my client several months before she felt she had the energy to start talking about her mother and her own six year ordeal with the aged care system (from in home care via My Aged Care, respite care involving numerous facilities and palliative care). Reliving these experiences was extremely traumatising for my client and many tears were shed.

My client's daughter was also involved and together we worked as a team.

I encouraged my client to tell her story as she experienced it and to include as much detail as she thought needed. We did a lot of brainstorming and eventually a comprehensive and detailed submission was completed and submitted by my client.

Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

OPAN was formed by the 9 members, including ADACAS, to respond to the Department of Health's tender for the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) in 2017, which required a single entity to run the contract in contrast to the previous arrangements which had been with the organisations in each jurisdiction contracting directly with the Australian Government.

Throughout the past year OPAN has continued to grow and strengthen not only its own influence with the aged care sector and Government, but that also of Advocacy itself, which has emerged as a critical part of a sector that is firmly in the spotlight and ripe for reform. Older persons Advocacy is increasing its prominence as an authentic voice of older people in care, and the role of OPAN and its member organisations has become critical in dealing with the current COVID-19 crisis. It will remain a crucial part of the reform process that will follow the handing down of the report of the Aged Care Royal Commission.

The past year was important for OPAN, not only because of the prominent role it took with the Royal Commission and in the response to COVID-19, but also its leadership around the development of the Aged Care Charter of Rights, which came into effect in July 2019, and also education about rights and client-centred care and support which are central to the new Aged Care Standards which were released at the

same time. ADACAS CEO Michael Bleasdale and Board Director Margot Harker were involved in the development of the Charter. Michael was also involved, through OPAN, in the development of the differentiated performance rating for RACFs, an online tool which uses the performance of facilities against the Standards, to provide a rating that can guide prospective residents and their families as to their quality. Michael serves on the Board of OPAN, and is the Chair of the Finance and Risk Committee, as well as a member of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee, and along with Helen McDevitt is ADACAS' Member delegate.

OPAN continues to increase the prominence of the rights of older people, and to emphasise the importance of Advocacy in promoting the voices of older people, and, importantly, in persuading the aged care industry and Government of the importance of these voices to the improvement of quality in the sector.

Advocacy to people with disability and people with mental ill health

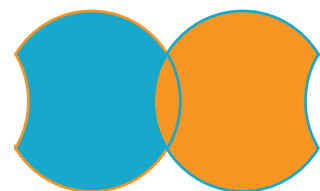
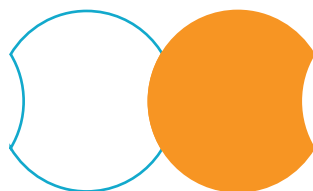
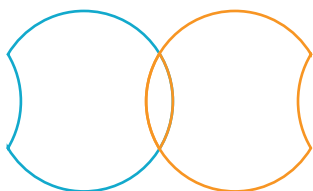
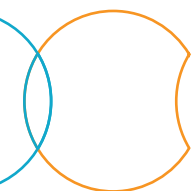
It is clear that ADACAS is diversifying its supports to people, partly in response to demand but also due to the increasing differentiation of contracts and grant opportunities that have emerged from government to deal with, in the ACT, local issues such as COVID-19 and the Disability Justice Strategy, and nationally the Disability Royal Commission. In addition to managing this diversification ADACAS still has individual Advocacy to people with disability and people with mental ill health as one of its core functions, and this is the area where we have seen the most increase in demand in the past year, resulting in more than 250% increase in the provision of support.

Advocacy is a critical support to people with disability and people with mental ill health, who everyday experience disadvantage, discrimination and exploitation in the community. It has always been about much more than just specialist services and support, and our work in the past year continues to address the needs of clients who faces problems and challenges in a whole range of areas.

Advocacy for people needing support with the National Disability Insurance Scheme

ADACAS continues to advocate for clients who are impacted in some way by the National Disability Advocacy Scheme (NDIS). This includes providing support with NDIS access requests, internal reviews and attending the AAT with clients for appeals conferences.

ADACAS has observed an increase in the difficulty for clients with psychosocial disabilities trying to access the NDIS. Advocates work hard to bridge the gap for those with psychosocial disabilities who fall between the gaps and cannot access the NDIS. Many of these clients have complex psychosocial disabilities yet they are not recognised as meeting the NDIS criteria. Advocates have worked hard to provide support to meet that need.



Advocacy around Health

People with disability and mental ill health can find it difficult to access support services and agencies that are available to them without the assistance of an advocate. This need has been more pronounced during this reporting period coinciding with the COVID-19 with people feeling more vulnerable through isolation and anxiety in these unprecedented and uncertain times. ADACAS provides assistance and support to ensure what is often an overwhelming process becomes manageable with the provision of effective advocacy. Health advocacy has also resulted in our presence at hospitals around Canberra, working to support clients to communicate with their treating teams particularly when there are communication difficulties or previously negative experiences in the healthcare system. ADACAS has also worked hard in the area of health to provide advocacy for clients who fall between the cracks in the healthcare system. There is a blurry line between health and disability supports and who should be providing the support to the client.

ADACAS is increasing its systemic advocacy and reach into the health system, given the ongoing problems that persist across all categories clients who seek Advocacy support from us. In February 2020 Michael Bleasdale attended a consultation session with ACT Health and other community organisation representatives to comment

on and provide input into the ACT Health's Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Michael also sits on the Capital Health Network's Community Advisory Committee.

Supported Decision Making: Calvary Project

The pilot project 'Nothing about me without me' developed by the Respect, Know, Act Project and funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency, Information Linkages and Capacity Building jurisdictional grant enabled the project team to provide specialised case consultation to professionals working with consumers with disability, neurodegenerative disorders and/or mental ill health to enable them to actively participate in their healthcare decisions to improve their health outcomes. The project affirmed that there is great value in providing information and advice about supported decision making to staff at Calvary hospital where and when it is needed.

Advocacy for Children, Young People and Families

Parents who have an intellectual disability and/or mental health issue are more likely to come to the attention of CYPS. The interactions with CYPS can be very confronting and conflicting due to the situation. We have advocated in different areas of CYPS involvement, some parents are being supervised due to child concern reports, others have had emergency action taken and children removed, restoration process, going through the courts where CYPS may be seeking 12 month, 2 year or 18 year orders and a client is needing to seek legal representation.

Working in the area around CYPS presents many challenges and we need to engage with many services to support our clients in this area. We attend case conferences and meetings at the house with our clients and CYPS to help support engagement and for the client to be heard, we do this by building a working relationship with the client and CYPS caseworkers. Depending on the situation CYPS will often give a client paperwork which may be a care plan the client needs to follow to move towards restoration or increased contact with their child where it is safe to do so. Encouraging a client to follow a care plan presents its own challenges, they may not understand what is involved, denial, not ready to take responsibility or have challenging behaviours that may prevent them from engaging.

Sometimes there may be service gaps in regards to supporting the parent/s. We can support clients to gain access or resolve

issues with their NDIS plan and advocate for it to be used to support them so they are able to parent. There may be some advocacy with their CYPS worker to ensure all the right referrals are made to give the parents a good chance of improving their parenting.

Reform in the child and youth protection services has long been on the agenda in the ACT, and ADACAS has been in dialogue directly with the Community Services Directorate about our recommendations for how improvements can be made for parents with disability. In January 2020 Michael Bleasdale and Katie Bulenda gave evidence at the ACT Legislative Assembly's Inquiry into Child and Youth Protection Services, with recommendations in the Final Report (August 2020) reflecting our proposal to allocate individual Advocates to assist parents with disability.

Fred has an intellectual disability, and has a 9 year old son who was placed under 18 year orders under the kinship care of his sister and brother in law due to not having the capacity to parent. Fred has a rare arrangement that he lives with his son and kinship carers. While Fred was living in the same house he got a chance to learn about routines and parenting skills from the kinship carers around caring for his son. About a year ago they approached CYPS to undergo an assessment of Fred's parenting capacity so he would be able to eventually have full parenting responsibility.

Advocacy around Housing

CYPS made a referral to ADACAS to support Fred with the assessment process. The assessment came back as Fred would be able to have full parental responsibility and a gradual restoration would occur. ADACAS helped Fred to get a NDIS package, a housing application and with ongoing meetings with CYPS and other services involved while the gradual restoration process is occurring.

ACT. At this meeting mutual clients are discussed to resolve issues and increase efficiency for both Housing ACT and ADACAS client outcomes. Advocacy around housing has also seen a lot of work with supporting clients to transfer to appropriate properties within the Housing ACT space. Advocacy around accessible housing has also been an area of ADACAS' advocacy support (see Year in Review).



Advocacy around Housing

I was asked to support a young family with Government housing issues, a couple with five 5 children under 5, 2 of whom live with significant disability and need their own rooms. There is also a new baby on the way in a few months' time. The family have been on the ACT Housing Priority list for almost a year, waiting for a disability modified, 5 bedroom home. Currently they are squeezed into a smaller 3 bedroom home in Tuggeranong. Dad is couch surfing between the family's home, his mother's and father's houses. Communications and attempts to talk to ACT Housing had become fractious, and the family had been informed that Housing ACT had stopped taking their calls. I met with the family at their home, they were warm and welcoming and saw firsthand the challenges and difficulties they face every day.

The children will require wheelchairs, hospital beds and a hoist in the future. After reading the supporting documents and being satisfied that there was adequate evidence to support the request for a 5-bedroom house, I wrote to ACT Housing' Allocation Team and informed them that it was unreasonable to continue to make the family wait any longer, that they desperately needed support now. I emphasised that the family deserves the opportunity to raise their growing family in a safe, appropriate home, for the whole family including their sons living with disability. I suggested ACT Housing "spot purchase" a suitable property that would support this family's needs. Following this, under three weeks later they were offered a lovely and very suitable property. The family's reaction speaks volumes, in an email to the Advocate:

"I sign up Monday ... [The property] has 2 reverse cycle air conditioners, 2 bathrooms, no lips anywhere so no risk for child 1 or child 2. The walkways are bit wider plenty of storage and I honestly couldn't expect anything more. It's absolutely gorgeous. Thank you so much, thank you".

A significant issue in the ACT is the lack of supply of suitably accessible housing for people with disability, and

for those people with disability eligible for the NDIS, even then there are real problems with finding housing and matching the relevant support to it. Throughout the year ADACAS was very involved with initiatives at the local and national level to increase the supply of accessible housing, and to make it easier for people with disability and their families to realise their preferred housing and support options.

The Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) has been consulting nationally since October 2018 about whether or not to mandate accessibility in the National Construction Code (NCC), effectively requiring all new housing to be built with some level of accessibility, and the extent of the accessibility that should be regulated. ADACAS, as part of the Australian Network on Universal Housing Design (ANUHD), and separately, has been involved in taking a lead across the ACT to ensure that people understand the significance of this consultation process and what it may deliver, and to lobby local and federal politicians, and their senior departmental officials, about the benefits to the whole community of this move. The Consultation Regulation Impact Statement (C-RIS) which was eventually released for public comment in early July 2020, was sent in draft form to CEO Michael Bleasdale amongst a handful of others in December 2019 for editorial comment.

ADACAS has also provided logistical support in setting up the Housing Solutions Innovations project initiated by Michael and the late Sue Salthouse through the DPO Rights & Inclusion Australia.

Through a combination of our Advocacy and Support Coordination work ADACAS has helped to create housing for young people who were otherwise destined to remain living inappropriately in hospital. The story of Alex's house has this year resulted in people moving into a purpose-built home in the suburbs of Canberra, with the story of the young people's lives who reside beginning a new and exciting chapter.

Alex's House

2019/2020 saw the completion of the SDA property in the ACT, and eventual discharge of the long-stay patients who had been residing in the Canberra Hospital. They were finally able to move into their purpose-built home.

This had been a venture that took over four years to come to fruition and not without a number of hurdles along the way. There was no precedent to go on, no blueprint from a similar project which we could pick up and use – this was done on a strong motivation of what was right for the young people, and involved seeking partners and those willing to take a calculated risk. It was a huge task taken up by a team of likeminded people from ADACAS, ACT Health, National Community Care and Disability Housing Solutions wanting the same outcome.

As I reported late last year there was a way to go with the completion of this property in the ACT. What eventuated on March 27th, 2020 was a moment I will never forget.

The hospital was now to make ready wards 6 and 7 (where our people had lived) for Covid-19. With Supported Independent Living (SIL) funding (from the NDIS) still awaiting approval and the property not signed off by the builder, we were instructed to discharge our three residents.

Following a swift handover from the Canberra Hospital and a blessing by the discharge team, the three residents were transported to their new home which was staffed by National Community Care, who continue to support them. It was such a proud moment watching the first resident coming down the street after living in hospital for the past 5 years in hospital,

suddenly free in her community and moving into her own home. There weren't many dry eyes that morning in Stirling.

Support Coordination played a huge part in having this play out and the ability to put in the most appropriate services that play a part in providing quality living and above all, independence. The families often comment how well their loved ones are looking and seeing them all socialise.

ACT Disability Justice Strategy

This year was significant for the launch of the ACT Disability Strategy, which had been worked on by the ACT Office for Disability in partnership with key justice departments and community organisations, including ADACAS, for a number of years prior. Our Policy, Projects and Research Manager, Helen Connolly had contributed much to this strategy through the promotion of supported decision-making as a key tool for empowerment, and CEO Michael Bleasdale now sits on the Disability Justice Strategy Reference Group.

COVID-19 and Justice

COVID-19 and the subsequent restrictions/ lockdowns had an inevitable impact on access to justice, many people awaiting court or justice processes strongly impacted

by courts and tribunals having to delay hearings and then move to remote hearings. For some, remote hearings or delayed justice created logistical issues, for others it caused profound issues around access to and denial of justice. ADACAS advocates work regularly in support of people in situations where the justice sectors and systems are involved. We applaud the efforts across the justice sector to address concerns and to seek to minimise negative impacts however note the ongoing and shared effort needed (both during and after COVID-19) to ensure that everyone has equitable access to justice and just outcomes.

Justice Reform Committee / Healthy Prison Review

Sara Stanley from ADACAS participates in the ACTCOSS-led Justice Reform Committee, which brings together organisations from across the territory to seek to progress justice reform. ADACAS also participated in the Healthy Prison Review of the Alexander Maconochie Centre: both in the consultation, and also by providing a submission emphasising the importance of ensuring that the human rights and international obligations towards people with disability, people with mental ill health, older people and carers are being upheld.

Training for the Justice Sector

As part of the Disability Justice Strategy launched in August 2019, ADACAS and Advocacy for Inclusion were engaged to develop an eLearning training package to be rolled out across all ACT Government Agencies. It will be delivered in the next financial year.

Victims Advisory Board

On the very last day of the 2019/2020 financial year, an ADACAS staff member was appointed to the Victims Advisory Board: a board which provides advice to the ACT Minister for Justice on topics of importance to people who have been adversely impacted by crime. We look forward to the opportunities that arise to influence better outcomes for people with disability/ people with mental ill health/ older people and carers over the three year term of this appointment.

Advocacy in NSW

During 2019-2020 ADACAS Advocacy dealt with 81 issues in the South Coast of NSW, almost a 400% increase on the previous year. Our Advocate Arava Klein has established strong networks across the region that ADACAS supports, with the focal points being in Nowra and Batemans Bay, with our contacts now including 45 service providers in the region. Arava has managed to visit the region in person or

virtually on a regular basis, although this has been reduced in 2020 due firstly to the catastrophic bushfires which impacted this region directly, and then by the restrictions imposed upon travel due to COVID-19. This has not reduced demand for Advocacy, and while our communication strategies appear to be working we will be focusing on increased reach to the community in the future.

Applying for the NDIS

Gina is a 64-year-old woman who lives alone in her home on the South Coast of NSW. She has 2 sons, whom she hardly sees, and a few friends, but is generally quite isolated as she doesn't drive. Gina experience anxiety and has emphysema for which she required oxygen throughout the day and night, including when she showers and sleeps. When she leaves the house, she uses a portable oxygen canister, and at home if there is a power outage she might have access to no more than 5 hours of oxygen via this portable canister. When I met Gina she was too ill and weak to clean the house and maintain her garden, and the 1.5 hours she received from a local support program is not adequate, and the reduction of support due to COVID-19 led to her becoming frail and in poor health.

We tried again to apply for the NDIS, but were unsuccessful, so endeavoured to get a suitable package instead from My Aged Care (MAC). Although assessed as eligible this package would take up to 2 years to be allocated to Gina, so again we tried for the NDIS. This time we highlighted Gina's psychosocial disability, rather than her

physical disability, following consultation with some local providers and allied health professionals. I called the NDIS and completed on her behalf the Access Request over the phone. I later completed another Access Request, Supportive Document Form and updated my support letter, and contacted her specialists to update them that we were going to try again. This time Gina was successful in achieving entry into the Scheme. We received the happy news 2 weeks after the submission, and within 2 days later we were already in a planning meeting over the phone.

Advocacy related to the NDIS

ADACAS is funded to provide advice, information and support to people who have had an unfavourable decision made by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and want to appeal that decision through to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

Some of the ways that ADACAS has supported clients this financial year at the Tribunal have been by:

- Helping to fill out and submit the application for an External Merits Review on their behalf through the online function of the AAT
- Helping to fill out and submit the application for Legal Aid via email so that they can be assigned a lawyer
- Explain how the Appeals process works at each stage and what they can expect
- Support clients when they meet with their lawyer
- Attend case conferences with them and support them to make

- informed decisions about the process
- Be present with them when they undergo functional assessments
- Be available to clients so that they can debrief about the process with us
- Make referrals to other services for support if requested by the client
- Upholding the 'model litigant guidelines' so that people with disability are not adversely affected by the power imbalance within the tribunal
- Upholding and amplifying the rights of people with disability

This financial year, our team supported many clients with appeals about their level of funding for supports or about gaining Access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Some of the reasons the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) gave for declining Access to the NDIS were to do with whether the primary disability was permanent and/or whether the level of impairment was substantial enough to meet the criteria of the NDIS Act 2013. This was also the case when appeals were made about an NDIA decision to reduce the level of funding in a plan; most reasons given by the NDIA were to do with the NDIA's assessment that the person no longer required that level of funding due to their needs no longer being substantial enough. For example, this could be because the NDIA determined that the participant had built their capacity in that area and no longer required that support funded at that level. Every decision the NDIA makes is as individual as the participants of the NDIS and is not always a true reflection of the real requirement of the person with disability. That's why the External Merits

review at the AAT exists so that a person called a Registrar who has nothing to do with the NDIA, can hear both sides and reasons and that hopefully a fair agreement can be reached.

When the bushfires occurred, quickly followed by the crisis of the pandemic we saw fewer matters reach the AAT NDIS Appeals stage, and those that we had were suspended, but as a team, and as the whole of ADACAS staff did, we kept in touch with our clients to check in on their wellbeing while their matters were on hold. The AAT has continued to operate wholly via teleconference due to the pandemic and so the need for an advocate to be present is even more pressing given the nature of some people's disability which either precludes them from attending a conference call with five people, or because of the lack of availability of digital technology and/or literacy.

The ADACAS NDIS Appeals team regularly participates in a nationwide teleconference with other disability organisations to brainstorm issues, compare notes about the process and track how the NDIA are responding to requests for reviews. This way we can keep up to date with current themes and issues facing people with disability across Australia and contribute feedback to the Agency to help improve the Scheme for all.

This past year of ecological disaster and viral pandemic has highlighted to us how needed we are as disability advocates in this space and the exceptional value we bring to our clients as they navigate the path of appealing a decision of the NDIA.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

In 2019 the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability was established by the Australian Federal Government. The Royal Commission has been set up to investigate how people with disability have been negatively impacted in a whole range of settings and institutions across the country and over a long period of time, and is due to hand down its report to Government on 29 April 2022. Because ADACAS is under contract to deliver Advocacy under the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) we, and other NDPA-funded agencies, have been provided with additional funding to enable us to support individuals with disability to have their stories and experiences heard and considered as part of the Commission's duty to hear from people with disability who have been negatively impacted.

In September 2019 we employed our first Advocate dedicated to this task, Esther Chelimo, who has been busy assisting people with disability and their unpaid carers, such as family members, to make a submission to the Royal Commission. The team welcomed ADACAS' first Aboriginal Community Advocate in July 2020 and we feel most privileged to have Keith Brandy on our DRC team working at the frontline supporting our First Nation's Peoples with disability to make submissions to the

commission. As a proud Wiradjuri man Keith brings a wealth of experience to ADACAS for which we are grateful. Keith will begin outreach to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT but also down into the South Coast NSW to support and inform people about the DRC. Due to the global pandemic the Disability Royal Commission had to suspend taking and hearing submissions in person, and instead developed mechanisms to use technology in such a ways as to hear public and private testimony through video links. In turn this created both a challenge and an opportunity for our ADACAS team, under the leadership of Sara Stanley, to assist clients to make their submissions as a voice or video recording rather than just by the written word and email. We have invested in two voice recorders, with a video recorder to be purchased shortly, so that people can choose the way in which they want to make their submission to the Royal Commission. All our team members are experienced in trauma informed care in practice so that our clients are supported in a therapeutic way. Retelling painful memories and experiences is hard and we aim to reduce any further trauma when a person with disability makes a submission. Some of the ways we have helped people with disability to make a submission has been by taking down notes from what they tell us and then reading back to them what we have written so that the submission truly reflects their experience/s. We have helped by submitting their testimony through the Royal Commission's online portal or arranging for a private meeting with the Commissioners. This process can take a long time, so we make sure that the person has counselling support if they want it and, if they need it, we link them to legal advice.

Redress Scheme

In 2018, The Commonwealth Government launched the National Redress Scheme in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Redress Scheme aims to provide some recompense to survivors in the form of monetary payments, funded counselling and apologies from the institutions held responsible. It is intended to be a less traumatic path to justice than through the law courts. In 2019 ADACAS was funded to provide practical application support to survivors in the ACT. Redress is very new to ADACAS, and we have just passed our first full year of providing Redress Support. In the first half, focus was put on understanding the Scheme and the requirements, reaching out to organisations around the ACT to provide information about the Scheme and ADACAS involvement. We also began taking in our first Redress clients and commenced our work in putting together their stories.

In January 2020, Redress support welcomed a new Team Leader, Rebekah Dawson. Rebekah had previously worked as a Team Leader in the Operations Section of the National Redress Scheme. Her first goal was to grow the client base of Redress Support, and a renewed focus was put on engaging with the community.

Networks within Redress Support Services have been created on several fronts, with various Disability focussed Redress support Services meeting regularly to discuss Redress in the Disability Advocacy space, and to share our barriers and successes.

Outreach has been conducted with a number of local government / community organisations: Meridian ACT (formerly Aids Action Council), a number of health and mental health units within the ACT health department, community orgs supporting vulnerable people within the ACT, like YWCA, St Vinnies, AFI, and Care financial. Our outreach sessions have been well received, and prior to Covid-19 had been beginning to see some result in bringing in new Redress clients. By the end of June 2020, the Redress Team had submitted 9 applications to the Redress Scheme on behalf of clients, supported 5 people who have engaged with Knowmore (legal service) and have supported 2 applicants to receive outcomes from the Scheme. Three clients have chosen to pursue civil or criminal litigation instead of participating in the Redress Scheme.

ADACAS has also been active in providing feedback to the Redress Scheme on a number of matters, including new informational material being produced by the Scheme, and new forms being used. Much of the feedback related to the accessibility of the existing forms, looking at things such as the layout, the choice of language and whether it was in plain or easy English, and the choice of any pictures included in the materials.

In June the Redress team reviewed and developed new Brochures to promote ADACAS support for the Redress Scheme. The purpose of this was to ensure that all of the required information about ADACAS and the Scheme was included in simple language – plain English where this was possible. Feedback on the new brochure has indicated that the information is set out in an easily understood way, and response from clients and service providers has been positive.

ADACAS Support Coordination

This year has been like no other, looking back at the end of 2019, through Xmas, new year and the bushfire development, it's impact on the Support Coordination has been immense. The ongoing nature of the relationships that we forge with our Support Coordination clients means that we live with the highs and lows they experience as they navigate a difficult world where some struggle to be included. This means that we also need to have a strong focus on the protection and wellbeing of our staff, because if we are damaged then we lose our effectiveness to the people who need our support

Through the fires and the smoke, we remained vigilant, that our client base was safe, and supports were maintained to create a business as usual environment. It was evident that the strength we saw in community partners prior to any disaster was there through the smoke to maintain supports.

With the onset of COVID-19 we did not experience any drop-off in productivity, and Support Coordination became increasingly busy as the financial year drew to a close. We were able to achieve some positive outcomes for and with our participants: people were housed after long instances of homelessness; people achieved access to funding and the NDIS; equipment continued to be supplied; supports continued to maintain as much normality as possible to alleviate as best as possible the anxiety that comes with such events. During the bushfire and COVID-19 pandemic, the Support

Coordination team, was involved in sourcing 60 different assistive technology and health related equipment (some examples are: hoists, specialised wheelchairs, communication devices, humidifiers, air purifiers, C pen readers and pressure relieving mattresses) from Brisbane and NSW and made sure these were delivered in a timely manner.

Support Coordination Story

Twelve months ago, I met with a young woman who was faced with homelessness. Her main goal in life was to live independently in her own home so she could spend more time with her children. She had been staying in a refuge house through the Mental Health Foundation when I received her request for Support Coordination through the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Her funding for temporary/short term accommodation had run out and she needed something more permanent where she could be supported to relearn and regain life skills.

The client is managed under the PTG and financial management, has children under the care of CYPS and has previously struggled with AOD addiction. Upon receiving the client's plan, it was evident that a good deal of time and effort was needed on my part to build a rapport with the client, in order for her to be able to reach her NDIS goals. The failure of other stakeholders in the past to build this mutual understanding had seen her go backwards in terms of reaching her goals, and had led to her showing signs of resistance when it came to receiving help. She had truly fallen through the cracks of the system.

Once rapport and trust were established I was able to find her medium-term accommodation which provided low-care support in a home environment, a place where she was able to be supported to build some life skills. This included managing her medication, attending appointments, maintaining her room and participating in community activities including going to the gym. The NDIS review allowed for Support Coordination to continue through the provision of funding, and as a result the client was successful in getting onto the NDIS Complex Needs Pathway, ensuring there was one NDIA contact to report and deal with through the planning process. The funding enabled me as the client's Support Coordinator to collaborate and build a team of supports through the Integrated Service Response Program (ACT Office of Disability), who assisted with identifying the need for her housing application to be moved to priority. Three weeks after getting her on the Housing ACT priority list, she received a call to let her know that there was a place available for her. She went to visit the house and fell in love with it straight away. The joy in her voice was incomparable to anything I had witnessed before.

The support coordination provided to this young woman has given her opportunity to build rapport and trust in people again. Throughout the past 12 months there have been set backs and challenges, but despite these, there have been significant wins including extended and more frequent visits with her children, regular attendance of appointments, and sitting for her driver's licence. Support Coordination has enabled the incorporation of specialist services into the client's daily life and routine, building up her capacity and resilience. Twelve

months ago, I met a young woman who was desperate and homeless. Today, I see a young woman full of hope with a happy and dignified life ahead of her.

Systemic Advocacy

Although individual advocacy, achieving outcomes with and for individual clients, is ADACAS' priority area of focus, systemic advocacy efforts are ever important. In systemic advocacy, we seek instead to influence broader policy and service outcomes to improve the lives of more people with disability, more people who experience mental ill health, more people who are older, and more carers than we would otherwise be able to assist via direct individual advocacy work.

For much of 2019, we conducted systemic advocacy via submissions and consultations: on a very broad range of topics: NDIS Planning, a Serious Incident Response Scheme in Aged Care, Mental Health structures and systems, reforms needed to the Child Protection systems, the Healthy Prison review, Housing/Homelessness and many, many more). Many of these submissions are published on our website. Towards the end of 2019, we were reading, researching and writing about human rights and social justice, innovations and change as part of the Australian Human Rights Commission led efforts "Free and Equal: an Australian Conversation on Human Rights". During this period, we were also responding to a paper by the ACT Government proposing to seek increased social impact by change the ways that services are commissioned, and changing how power and decision-making are shared outside government.

From late 2019 as we moved into 2020, it became clear would be an extraordinary year. Bushfires, hail storms, COVID-19. And throughout: two royal commissions and a productivity commission review all in progress with the opportunities that they bring for reform: the Aged Care Quality and Safety Royal Commission, the Disability Royal Commission (Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability), the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Mental Health.

In addition to ongoing work on submissions and consultations, from March and April onwards a Disability and Carers Policy Group was formed between advocacy and representative organisations: part of an effective community collaboration able to engage and respond in a coordinated way and advocate together as needed. Members of this group include: ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS), Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT), People with Disabilities ACT (PWD ACT), Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI), Carers ACT, Mental Health Community Coalition (MHCC), National Disability Services (NDS) and others. During this period – ADACAS and others have been actively advocating around the need to embed human rights and non-discrimination into medical decision-making around COVID. We continue to work together in support of improved emergency preparedness and prevention. We continue to lobby for better supports and structures in support of people with disability, people with mental ill health, older people and carers during COVID times. We have welcomed early discussions, collaborations and requests for feedback from government departments and other organisations who are seeking to ensure that rights are upheld, and that circumstances for people

with disability, people with mental ill health, older people and carers are improved. Over the months, we achieved incremental (and sometimes significant) changes along the way. There continues however to be so much more to achieve.

As the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) service delivery agent in the ACT, ADACAS was also engaged in lobbying specifically around the rights of older people, including around visitor rights at residential aged care (both at an individual level), and in contributing via OPAN to the national conversation re the same.

Earlier in 2020, ADACAS also developed a systemic advocacy priorities plan to guide the focus of our systemic advocacy efforts through until the end of 2021. This plan seeks to ensure we are targeting systemic advocacy efforts on the issues that people with disability, people with mental ill health, older people and carers are telling us were the key issues where change was needed. Reflecting the nature of systemic advocacy where opportunities arise (sometimes without notice) for advocacy, change and reform – it is a living document, which does however guide the topics we intend to focus on, some of these topics including:

- Abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect of people with disability
- Aged Care Quality and Safety
- COVID 19: Emergency Responses as they affect people with disability, people with mental ill Health, older people and carers
- Equitable experiences of the healthcare system for people with disability, people with mental ill health and older people

- Improved child protection practices and outcomes for parents (or children) with disability and/or mental ill health
- The need for more accessible housing / universal design
- Disability Justice
- Reducing Homelessness of People with Disability/ People with Mental Ill Health
- Bushfires: Emergency Responses as they affect People with Disability, People with Mental Ill Health, Older People and Carers
- Improved supports and pathways for women (and other people) with disability, and older people experiencing family or domestic violence
- Improving the experience for NDIS participants engaging in NDIS AAT appeals

We envisage that in the coming 2020/2021 year there will continue to be an especial and continued focus on the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

ADACAS seeks to be mindful of the escalating and intersectional impacts of the discrimination/ bias/ prejudice that people with disability and/or mental ill health and/or carer status from the following populations all too often face: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from LGBTIQI communities, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people who have experienced abuse, veterans, people who are homeless etc and to advocate for changes accordingly.

ADACAS is happy to hear from individuals or organisations about systemic advocacy topics of concern and/or from those who wish to contribute to ADACAS' systemic advocacy.

Please contact us at:

adacas@adacas.org.au

or call on **6242 5060** and ask to speak with the Systemic Advocacy Team Leader.

Projects Team

In 2019-2020 the Projects and Policy area saw the departure of its Manager, Helen Connolly, to take up a senior ACT Government role. Helen made a significant contribution towards the consolidation of the Projects Team during her time at ADACAS. In her place Ivette Gonzalez has stepped into the role of Team Leader, who has overseen the completion of one government contract (RKA) and the continuation of another (DSP), whilst at the same time managing projects and contracts which we anticipate will increase the suite of resources and products we can offer on a commercial basis. The highlights for the year, in terms of our contract and project deliverables, were:

Embracing Disability Inclusion training

In 2020 ADACAS provided our disability awareness training "Embracing Inclusion" via Zoom meetings to staff of Relationships Australia. We developed the training as a general disability inclusion conversation to be provided over 2 half days and an additional half day to discuss case

studies. The training was targeted towards community services where their workforce needed a refresher on the main topics that affect people with disability as well as Supported Decision Making. We are exploring other opportunities to roll this training out to other community service and private sector organisations.

Supported Decision Making Training to Organisations

The Projects Team has continued to provide Supported Decision Making training to organisations across the Canberra community with the aim of improving outcomes for their clients by increasing client participation in decision making in relation to the care and support they receive.

Easy and Plain English translations

This year ADACAS has recommenced providing Easy and Plain English translation services to the Canberra community.

Decision Support Pilot (DSP)

This project is funded by the Department of Social Services and has been extended for a third time for a further 3 years. It was designed to support people who need to engage with the National Disability Insurance Agency because they have limited decision support making in place and are unable to implement and utilise their NDIA plan and their supporters are unwilling or unable to help them. We have continued to use the Network Model of SDM to identify gaps and build capacity for those experiencing barriers to accessing or participating in the scheme.

- Respect Know Act (RKA) - This project ended in December 2019 and was funded by National Disability Insurance Agency Information Linkages and Capacity Building jurisdictional grant. It successfully met all the key outcomes. One of the highlights of the project was the work undertaken by the Projects Team in Supported Decision Making in Healthcare settings. A survey collected feedback from patients and staff across disability services, tertiary health settings through Allied Health Services, General Practitioners and Mental Health Services in the Territory. The results were telling and guided the work carried out by the project team in Canberra's healthcare setting to build capacity and reduce barriers.

Master Social Work Student Placement

We hosted a Master Social Work student for their final year placement last year. The main project allocated to the student was to study the Police, Ambulance and Clinical Early Response (PACER) project which was proposed to be implemented in the ACT and its compatibility with the ADACAS supported decision making model.

Over the years ADACAS received a significant number of advocacy referrals relating to crisis responses involving people with mental ill health. We wished to find out more about the PACER program and its benefits achieved in other jurisdictions nationally and internationally. The student's study satisfactorily reported that the PACER program was effective and efficient in resolving mental health crises by reducing escalations and connecting people to mental health services in the community. The study also found that the PACER is

compatible with supported decision making because of the way the program manages crises through de-escalation, assessment, transport and referral actions that reduce restrictive approaches thus improving the outcome for individuals.

Individual Supported Decision Making Consultation

We provided Supported Decision Making consultations to individuals with SDM supports in their NDIS packages. To do this we provided tailored training in the use of SDM to people in the individual's support network, including paid staff. This training enabled them to provide assistance to the person with disability to help them achieve their goals and receive the right level of supports. We will continue providing these consultations to people in the community with NDIS packages as requested.

Financials

Below is a summary of the financial performance of ADACAS

For a full version of the audited financial statements please visit the ADACAS website adacas.org.au

