



# **Annual Report October 2019**



**Celebrating 10 years**





## Vision

A community where everyone living with Autism is able to live the life they choose.

## Mission Statement

To enhance the lives of individuals and families affected by Autism Spectrum Conditions in their own communities by:

- ❖ Providing holistic support to individuals and families
- ❖ Partnering, aligning and collaborating with existing organisations with similar values
- ❖ Sharing our success with other support networks, and pioneering positive change and improved regional services through these meaningful partnerships
- ❖ Creating and improving choice and control in social and respite opportunities
- ❖ Building community participation, inclusion and contribution for all people with disabilities, through improved understanding and acceptance





## President's Report

The past 12 months has seen many ground-level changes for SWAN. My predecessor, Dr Stephen Cohen, resigned his presidency after three years at the helm. I am so honoured and privileged to take over this role, but I've had some big shoes to fill. The year has been a great learning journey for me and one that I hope to continue.

We welcomed our newest staff member, Ella Criddle, to our team this year. She has joined Nick, Holly and Mel in the Busselton office, along with our volunteers Tina Williams and Chris Park. We said goodbye to our volunteers Bryn Guthro and Caris Walsh this year. They are greatly missed but we wish them all the very best as they embark on their next adventures. We were able to extend our hours in Bunbury recently also, with Holly available Tuesdays now as well as Wednesdays, at the Milligan Community Learning & Resource Centre. During the year, three Board members attended a governance workshop, and our Treasurer provided financial literacy training to the Board, as part of our continuous improvement.

The biggest change for the SWAN family this year would have to be the move into our new offices. With the continued support of Greg and Kathy Walsh, along with the Seventh Day Adventist Church, our new home provides a peaceful and functional space for our team to work, as well as a private meeting room and space for our resource library. I cannot thank Nick and Grant Avery enough for the two years that they managed SWAN from the living room in their home.

The transition from state system to federal NDIS, and subsequent changes, has left many of us confused and bewildered. This has subsequently increased the need for information, advice and advocacy. Our amazing staff at SWAN have been tireless in their service to our community during the turbulent transfer period, and continue to support us all through reviews, disputes and the day-to-day experiences that life throws our way.





Behind the scenes our team are also busy securing grant funding and donations to keep SWAN afloat. This year's Bunnings Sausage Sizzle was a great success – and great fun! We also received huge donations from the Leo Alpha Club of Busselton, Dunsborough Lions' Club, Busselton Lions' Club, Jon Bayley and Kerry Morrison. Our eternal gratitude must again be given to Greg and Kathy Walsh for their incredible generosity over the last few years.

Thank you to our group psychologists, Jo Edmonds, Heidi Walsh, Liz Jennings and Nadja Blythe, and we wish Dionne Herisson the best of luck in her next adventure in the UK. Our social groups would not be able to run without those who generously give their time to volunteer; Grant Avery, Kylie Robinson, Genevieve Day, Liz Martin, Jim Kamchevski and Mel Jacobson.

Finally, thanks must be given to my fellow Board members – Jasmine Geddes, Grant Avery, Claire Phillips, Catherine Gibb, Jonelle Fraser, and last but certainly not least, Giselle Elson. Our Board members hail from Binninup all the way down to Margaret River, which led us to implement online board meetings this year. Time to start planning the Christmas Party!

**Ronnie (Veronica) Madge**  
SWAN President



*YES Program participants playing one of several games at an end of term session 2019.*



*Santa giving out gifts to kids at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2018.*



*Volunteer, James Madge with Batman at the Family Christmas Party 2018*



## Treasurer's Report

The management of cashflow is an ongoing task, as it is for every small not for profit. The funds received by SWAN and how these are managed, is an area in which the Board has spent time to gain greater understanding of their responsibilities, to work towards a sustainable future.

Previously, much of the income of SWAN was derived through the running of programs, such as AutStars and YES Program, which along with funds raised by volunteers helped keep SWAN running, just. However, in the last few years SWAN has significantly benefited through the generous support of benefactors, specifically Greg and Kathy Walsh, and through the successful grant applications undertaken by staff. SWAN has also increased its revenue base by having staff training in services which we are able to charge for, such as Youth Mental Health First Aid. While currently only a small income area, it has potential for expansion and is linked to the values of the organisation. Having a greater income base and one that is consistent and reliable has allowed SWAN to expand its services with a greater level of security.



The philosophy of SWAN has always been an investment in people. To support this investment, much of the funding SWAN receives is dedicated to the employment of staff. This is SWAN's largest cost, but our staff are SWAN's greatest resource. The work they undertake in supporting the community, who have often failed to find support elsewhere, is the core reason SWAN exists. The Board acknowledges the work by our staff, and the need to resource them to enable SWAN to be sustainable long-term.

Expenditure for facility hire and contractors has increased in 2018/19. This is directly linked to SWAN's significantly increased office hours and locations, being Bunbury and Busselton. The opening of two offices comes at a cost, but the benefit to our community and staff work environment greatly outweighs any cost. Costs for contractors directly relates to the operation of our programs YES and AutStars.

This was previously grouped as a single cost in the Profit and Loss but has been reported separately this year for greater transparency. Its cost is for the psychologists to attend these programs, which mostly run outside of normal working hours, and working well beyond the hours they charge for. The service is a valuable resource for attendees and their carers.

SWAN has operated at a significant profit for 2018/19. It must be noted that over \$15,000 of this profit directly relates to donations received that were used in the renovations of the new SWAN office in Busselton, and as such is not spare money. Additionally, the surplus generated this year is funding that will be retained by SWAN, to continue to provide front-line services for our community. All not for profits must look to maintain a buffer, to enable them to continue providing services during times of income interruptions. Those that have not done so have consistently folded. This has always been to the detriment to their members and the community.

The Board will continue to work to ensure we can resource SWAN to support our community.

**Grant Avery**  
SWAN Treasurer



*AutStars participants building with spaghetti and marshmallows 2019.*





*Manjimup Youth Mental Health First Aiders 2019*



*Bunbury Youth Mental Health First Aiders 2019*

## Staff Report

At our first AGM in 2013, SWAN had 57 families formally registered as members, with 176 people subscribed to our newsletter, 228 members of our closed Facebook group, and 236 people following the SWAN public Facebook page. Today we have 1450 registered SWAN members (up from 1301 registered SWAN members in 2018) living throughout the south west region, 536 people subscribed to our newsletter, 630 members of our closed Facebook group for individuals and families, and 1514 people following the SWAN public Facebook page. Such growth is a continuing testament to the efforts of SWAN volunteers and the need for support within our community.



On behalf of SWAN members, we would like to sincerely thank our major sponsors, Greg and Kathy Walsh; and would like to thank the following people and organisations for their donations to SWAN:

- Jon Bayley
- Kerry Morrison
- Dunsborough Lions Club
- Busselton Lions Club
- Australian Beer Can Collectors Association of WA
- Eaton Community College
- Busselton Ice Supply
- Murray and Claire Philipps
- Lisa Engstrom
- Bettenay's Margaret River
- Bunbury Farmer's Market
- University of the Third Age

We would also like to thank our incredible volunteers, without whom SWAN projects would simply not happen. Our sincere gratitude to Tina Williams, who has now been volunteering with SWAN two days per week for six years.

Tina handles the administration of the organisation, and we would be lost without her! A big thank you also to Bryn Guthro, Caris Walsh, Chris Park, Genevieve Day, Jim Kamchevski, Veronica, Carl, James and Ewan Madge, Kylie Robinson, Brittany Howlett, Jonelle Fraser, Giselle and Greg Elson, Liz Martin, Jasmine Geddes, Grant, Mitchell and Declan Avery, Dionne Herisson, Claire Philipps, Charlie and Mackenzie Wintle and many more.

In 2019 SWAN are providing three YES Program groups for teens and young adults aged 13-25yrs, and two AutStars groups for children in grades 1-7. We reopened an office in Busselton, and opened a satellite office in Bunbury at Milligan CLRC. Our staff are providing information, resources, referral and advocacy to an average of 200 individuals and families each week.



While the majority of people supported by SWAN are either autistic or the family member of someone who is autistic, this support is available to anyone in the disability community in need.

SWAN’s reputation in the south west community for providing a high standard of Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) support has led to referrals from the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), LAC Partners, ECEI Partners, allied health providers, schools, mental health, disability and community services. Our staff are able to provide practical information and support at all stages of the disability journey, including:

- Seeking diagnosis
- Recently diagnosed
- Accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- NDIS pre-planning, advocacy and plan implementation
- Accessing mainstream and disability services



In partnership with South West Community Alcohol & Drug Service (SWCADS) Suicide Prevention Coordinators, Mel and Nick have delivered two Youth Mental Health First Aid Training sessions in 2019, in Manjimup and Bunbury, with more planned in the near future.

SWAN were a successful recipient of the Disabled Persons and Families Organisations (DPFO) grants from NDIA, and commenced a second ILC project in June 2019. The focus of this project is on building individual capacity to self-advocate, engage with NDIS processes, access mainstream and disability services, and self-manage NDIS funding. We are planning workshops in the coming months, and are currently providing individualised support via phone, email, social media and face to face.

Our Staff and volunteers continue to work to develop new services and programs to be introduced in 2020, as part of our efforts to fill service gaps for our members. We continue to grow to meet the needs of our members; and look forward to a bright future for autistic people and their families living in the south west region of Western Australia.

<b>Nick Avery</b>	<b>Holly Wintle</b>	<b>Mel Jacobson</b>	<b>Tina Williams</b>	<b>Ella Criddle</b>
Programs Manager	Coordinator	Coordinator	Admin Volunteer	Admin Assistant





*Climbing the wall at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2018*



*Arts and crafts at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2018*

## Feedback from our members and community

"Support provided by SWAN is extremely valuable for people with autism and their families. They actually listen to issues I had, took the time to understand the persons circumstances. There is no judgement from SWAN staff and volunteers and they consistently foster a safe environment for people with Autism. Their knowledge and support is outstanding."

"SWAN helped me so much I was very lost they were so supportive."

"Immediately felt welcomed, understood, and I had the opportunity to chat, ask questions, and borrow some resources to start on the journey and gain understanding so we can work with and for our son to assist him to be the best he can be."

"SWAN are a truly valuable service in the south west, they work hard to help everyone they can and are truly a remarkable support network."

"Thank you for your support for moving my daughter from ed support to mainstream. It was very overwhelming and having you advocate at case meetings meant I had someone in my corner who understood the system and what my daughter needed."

"Thank you for your support around the implementation of the NDIS. Would be lost completely without you!"

"I had no idea there were so many supports available, nobody told us, just gave us the diagnosis and left us to it. Wish I had found SWAN a year ago, thank you, thank you, thank you."

"The staff at SWAN are compassionate and understanding. They are very knowledgeable and always willing to help. There have been many times I have messaged for advice and they are quick to respond even after hours. I love the way they are always attending courses to be up skilled. Such a valuable under paid resource. I'm not sure they realise the positive effect they have on our community just because they care."





## **South West Autism Network Inc**

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