

# Annual Report November 2020



South West Autism Network





## Our Mission

Is to empower autistic people and people with disability in south west WA and beyond 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 all opportunities
- ❖ Building community participation, inclusion and contribution for all people with disabilities, through improved understanding and acceptance



*Most of the SWAN team, volunteering at the SWAN Family Christmas Party, December 2019 at Yallingup Maze.*

## President's Report

History will record 2020 as “The Year of Covid”. The pandemic has affected all of us in different ways. For our members and other people with disabilities, Covid-19 has provided a unique set of challenges. Our amazing SWAN staff have been inundated with requests for information, advocacy and support.

In March our team started working from their homes as we were ushered into quarantine earlier in the year. We all learned to use Zoom, motivate ourselves without our colleagues beside us, and work in our PJ's. Fortunately, for those of us in Western Australia, our lives have been able to return to normal – albeit a new normal – much quicker than those of our eastern state's counterparts. It has been great to see the use of technology improving access to employment, training, information and support for people with disability and their families as a result of our society adjusting to the pandemic, and we hope that this continues into the future.



Our team's hard work has resulted in successfully obtaining a further two Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grants this year, which have enabled us to increase our staff numbers and be able to support more people to access and navigate NDIS and other services. We welcomed Ella and Jodie to our team, as well as former volunteers Kylie and Caris. Nick has also finally accepted her new and well-deserved job title of Chief Executive Officer. As with any not-for-profit organisation, we would be lost without the support of our amazing volunteers, with a special thank you to Tina, who has been volunteering with SWAN for seven years. Thank you to all of those who help in the office, in groups, with fundraising, and my fellow Board members. Your time and dedication is greatly appreciated.

*Ronnie with Santa at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2019.*



Special mention needs to be made of the amazing work our Treasurer, Grant, has done for SWAN this year. His hard work and dedication has benefitted all SWAN personnel, and on behalf of them all I thank him profusely.

The support from Greg and Kathy Walsh to enable SWAN to provide individual and systemic advocacy and increase the support we are able to provide to the community is deeply appreciated, and I know that I speak on behalf of our members as well as our team in thanking them for their continued support.

**Ronnie Madge**  
SWAN President



*Packing up after an awesome day at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2019.*



*Hanging out in the Craft and Sensory Tent at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2019*



*Rest time on the Bouncy Obstacle Course at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2019*





## Treasurer's Report

2019/20 has been a challenging period for many organisations, and SWAN has been forced to tackle a dramatically changed environment. The changes forced upon the organisation due to Covid-19 has meant changes in the services it offers, how it has offered these, and delays in delivery of projects funded by grants.

From a finance perspective, the SWAN Board and its CEO have been diligent in consistently reviewing the financial position. Due to significant changes in funding, and government policy, SWAN has adopted a number of budgets for 2019/20 year, as these changes have occurred. Post June 2020, the Board has adopted two revised budgets due to changes in JobKeeper policy, and we will continue to review as needed.

SWAN was forced to suspend the group programs YES Group and AutStars for a large part of the year, which has an impact financially. It also had an impact for attendees, and it is pleasing these groups are now running again. SWAN has been a recipient of both JobKeeper and ATO Cashflow Boost, which has helped offset loss of income from the suspension of the groups, and also allowed the further investment in staff and technology improvements to allow our staff to be more efficient with their time, which is SWAN's greatest resource.

The philosophy of SWAN has always been to support our community. To achieve this, much of the funding SWAN receives is dedicated to the employment of staff to support the community we serve. 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 been unable 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.



*Grant cooking sausages at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2019.*



2019/20 has seen some good news for SWAN, with it continuing to be successful in obtaining grant funding for its services. We have also been able to enhance relationships with organisations such as Milligan CLRC, which has allowed SWAN to secure a larger office in Bunbury, which will provide a better working environment for staff and enhanced service provision, without impacting SWAN's financial position.

We have continued to receive support through donations from many parties, and as an organisation we are very grateful for those who donate money, resources or time. In particular, I wish to thank Greg and Kathy Walsh for the continued generous support of SWAN. I would also like to thank the Busselton Masters AFL Football Club, Jon Bayley and the Busselton Lions Club for their donations, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Milligan CLRC and The People Place for low-cost use of their facilities.

SWAN has operated at a profit for 2019/20, in part from the receipt of Covid-19 supplements from the Government. 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 provide services during times of income interruptions. We must maintain strong financial performance, to facilitate a long-term commitment to our members.

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

**Grant Avery**  
SWAN Treasurer



*Santa with elves, Ella and Genevieve at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 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 1637 registered SWAN members (up from 1450 registered SWAN members in 2019) living throughout the south west region, 782 members of our Facebook peer support group for individuals and families, and 1935 people following the SWAN public Facebook page. Such growth is a continuing testament to the efforts of the SWAN team and the need for support within our community.



*Coordinators Mel and Holly, December 2019*

On behalf of SWAN members, we would like to sincerely thank our major sponsors, Greg and Kathy Walsh; and 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 seven years. Tina manages the administration of the organisation, and looks after the whole team. A big thank you also to Genevieve Day, Veronica, Carl, James and Ewan Madge, Kylie Robinson, Kathryn Shackleton, William Joyce, Alexandria Phillis,

Blake Baruffi, Tony Guest, Giselle and Greg Elson, Liz Martin, Jasmine Geddes, Grant, Mitchell and Declan Avery, Charlie, Mackenzie and Ben Wintle, Annabel Jacobson and many more.

In 2020 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. Our staff are providing information, resources, referral and advocacy to an average of 200 individuals and families each week, via phone, email, Facebook, face to face and Zoom video conferencing.

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 continues to provide a high standard of Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) support to people with disability and their families throughout the south west. 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

SWAN recently completed our 12 month Disabled Persons and Families Organisations (DPFO) grant project, and were commended by the NDIA on the following achievements:

- Provision of information and support to 3,485 individuals, families and professionals in the south west of Western Australia throughout the duration of the project, and ongoing support during the Covid-19 restrictions;
- Delivery of workshops in association with DDWA;
- Operating peer support groups via Facebook;
- Working with other organisations such as The Growing Space to assist people living with disability to build their capacity and confidence to self-manage their NDIS plans; and
- Improving organisational systems and processes to be more accessible to members, staff and volunteers

We currently have two further ILC Individual Capacity Building projects underway, focused 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, face to face and Zoom video-conferencing. Our latest ILC project will involve employing young adults with disability to create information videos, so stay tuned for that in 2021.

**Nick Avery**

CEO

**Holly Wintle**

Coordinator

**Mel Jacobson**

Coordinator

**Kylie Robinson**

Groups Coordinator

**Tina Williams**

Admin Volunteer

**Ella Criddle**

Admin Assistant

**Jodie McGuinness**

Finance & Payroll

**Caris Walsh**

Website & Admin



*Ella, Mel, Tina, Nick and Annabel at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2019*



*Mid Ropes Obstacle Course at the SWAN Family Christmas Party 2019*





South West Autism Network



*Panoramic view of the new SWAN Bunbury office at Milligan, 2020.*





## Feedback from our members and community

"Thank you so much. You have no idea what it means to me to talk to someone like you. Everywhere I go, I get the wrong information, or they send us somewhere else."

"You are the first person who has followed up and done what you said you would do. You are both wonderful. Thank you."

"I just wanted to thank you for the meeting I had in regards to my Centrelink Carer Allowance and payment claim. We put the claim in and it has been approved already for BOTH! I was in tears with relief. So thank you for your help with that application. It made a huge difference. xx"

"Thank you for all that very valuable information, it is extremely helpful and insightful. I appreciate the time you took to help me out yet again"

"... provided very helpful information to me through the diagnosis process - details on who to contact for an assessment, a phone call to talk through my mixed feelings about the diagnosis, messages with reassurance as well as practical numbers and contacts for where to seek extra help when I have been struggling."

"Thank you and thank you for always being a sound board and giving me the strength to fight their injustices ♡"

"Wow! One stop shop! Thank you so much for all the information - didn't know these things were available."

"Thanks so much. I spoke with \*\*\*\*\* and she said thank you for the information as it is really helpful and your information and advice was a lot more helpful than school and she is less stressed out now. Thank you."





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## **South West Autism Network Inc**

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