



Dear A4 Member

I hope that somehow you are all managing to keep positive in the face of such difficult times. Between the savage drought, the bushfires, terrorism and the War, and the anticipation of the economic consequences of all these, 2003 has certainly not been a good one so far. It makes our challenge even harder, but we are determined that the needs of our ASD families will not be lost amidst all the gloom.

My personal goal for this week has been to try to turn disappointment into opportunity..... By this I refer to the decision taken earlier this week to defer our "Walk with Parliament" event from June to later in the year, when we hope that the political and security climate is more positive. This gives us a little more time to get our act together and to ensure that this is indeed a significant breakthrough in building new relationships with our national leaders and decision makers.

We are currently working on organising a new date for the Canberra WWP, probably in September, and also on a plan to organise visits to every Federal Member of Parliament and some Senators to brief them and involve them *before* the event. As soon as we have some certainty about timings and approvals, we will be asking you to participate directly in these local delegations and we will be providing you with some of the information and tools you need to make sure these contact visits are focussed and purposeful.

From now on, these A4 updates will not so much be on a monthly basis, they will be whenever we have something important to announce, and/or a lot of information to get out to our membership. So keep checking your inboxes and keep sending in ideas for distribution.

As you will see from this update there is much to be positive about as A4 continues to grow and evolve. There will be news shortly on our new website and promotional videos that are currently 'under construction'. The A4 committee has been working on a draft constitution for the organisation and ongoing structural issues. Soon, we will be circulating our draft National Plan of Action for your input and the various Parliamentary submissions continue to be developed. On behalf of A4 I have addressed a number of different community groupings of late, and the invitations keep coming I can assure you that there is a lot of genuine support in our communities for what we are attempting, and that means that there are many opportunities for us to make a real difference. So, read on.....

To Parliament and Beyond!

Following some great feedback from the last update suggesting that A4 should start marketing ourselves and our new logo more prominently, we have decided to jump in and do just that.

Announcing our very own A4 merchandise.

The Steering Committee agreed that the sale of promotional material to members, friends, organisations would be a great way to promote A4, and provide extra funds for our activities without charging excessive costs to members. If you support this effort, it is a win/win/win/win for us. We promote our cause to the community, we supply you with practical goods, we create a “corporate identity”, and we raise a small amount per item to help with our expenses. .

Six items have been selected for sale at this stage all badged with the A4 logo. The items are all high quality and durable.

Polar Fleece Sleeveless Vest 320gm antipill fleece – Unisex style (Navy Blue with Navy Piping trim to sleeve edges). available in sizes XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL Embroidered logo - **\$25 each plus P & H**

Umbrellas - (large golf style - 76cm wide) blue/white – 1 colour printing on two panels - **\$25 each plus P&H.**
The umbrellas we are hoping to use in Canberra (not because of rain!!!) but rather for a photo of the group for publicity.

Polar Fleece Beanies - Unisex - One size fits all. Embroidered logo. Assorted colours – black, navy, & royal blue.
- **\$10 each plus P&H**

Plastic Water Bottles - 1 colour printing (white bottle/black sports bottle lid)
- **\$8 each plus P&H**

Waist Bag with Mesh Bottle Holder - 1 colour printing. (Black) Pouch with waist belt and stores most sports drinking bottles.
- **\$15 each plus P&H**

Cap – Heavy Brushed Cotton (Navy with Orange trim) One size fits all – adjustable. Latest design. Embroidered logo.
- **\$10 each plus P&H**

For all sample pictures, enquiries or suggestions on future products contact A4 Committee Member Cathy Ryan (email 'lwryan@bigpond.net.au' – please make email subject heading 'Promotional Gear').

Post orders to **A4 Promotions, P.O. Box 762, Hawthorn 3122 Vic.**
Payment by Cheque or Money order only –to 'Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia'.
Please include \$10.00 per order for postage and handling
and allow 3-4 weeks for delivery from time of order.

Promotional Merchandise

Order Form:

Item	Size	Colour	Quantity	Price	Total
Polar Fleece Sleeveless Vest 320 gm antipill fleece	XS S M L XL XXL	Navy with Navy trim		\$25 each	\$
Umbrella – golf style	76cm wide	Blue & White		\$25 each	\$
Polar Fleece Beanies – Unisex	One size fits all	Navy Black Royal Blue		\$10 each	\$
Plastic Water Bottles	Sports bottle	White bottle with black drinking lid		\$8 each	\$
Waist Bag with Mesh Bottle Holder	One size fits most	Black with Black mesh bottle holder		\$15 each	\$
Cap – Heavy Brushed Cotton	One size fits all	Navy with Orange trim		\$10 each	\$
Postage & Handling					\$ 10.00
					\$

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Direct queries to ‘lwryan@bigpond.net.au’ – subject heading ‘Promotional Gear’

WHILE ON THE SUBJECT OF MONEY.....

I have had a number of very welcome enquiries as to how you or supportive groups in your area can donate directly to our cause. We need donations to help with the cost of our promotional activities. Be assured that all donations go directly to this and that the Committee receive no reimbursement for their time, travel or commitment.

The best way to donate to Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4) is to send a cheque made out to 'Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia' to:

Honorary Treasurer A4
P.O. Box 2225,
Brighton North, Vic. 3186

GREAT NEWS FROM THE AUTISM COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

On 28 March, the Autism Council of Australia (ACA) adopted its new Constitution. The new Constitution provides for a national, inclusive organisation that will be a national peak body. The ACA now will be able to bring together people who have an ASD, parents, parent organisations, teachers, professionals and policy makers.

The ACA will have a number of goals over the next few years.

These include:

1. Establish a national secretariat to provide information and advice to the community and policy makers and to work for policy changes;
2. Promote research
3. Create a national forum, a national voice for raising awareness of the autism spectrum conditions.

Membership of the ACA is now open to individuals, groups and organisations. There will be a national forum in which issues can be debated.

The first meeting of the ACA under its new constitution, and a meeting of any person wishing to be involved with the ACA, will be held on 31 May, 2003, in Canberra. This meeting will coincide with the 25th anniversary conference of Autism ACT. Every one is welcome to attend and more details will be available shortly.

From: Andrew Brien
President — Autism Council of Australia
President — Autism ACT Inc

ASD SPOUSE SUPPORT GROUP TO BE ESTABLISHED IN SYDNEY

Firm plans are in place for a monthly support group commencing in June 2003 for those whose partners (or ex-partners) have Aspergers Syndrome or are suspected of having Aspergers Syndrome. The aim of the group will be to provide a safe & positive environment for non-AS partners who are seeking validation, information, contacts & support for themselves and their families.

An informal group has already been meeting and growing over the last two years and the formalisation of this is an exciting new venture for all.

We regret that this group is not able to provide support for parents who have a child with a diagnosis of ASD. There are already a number of good parent support groups in Sydney that cater for these specific needs (contact details are available).

Specific details of the Spouse Support Group will be announced and circulated in May, at the conclusion of Autism Awareness Week. Any enquiries or expressions of interest are welcome.

Email: Carol Grigg at cfgrigg@bigpond.net.au

Websites of interest.

Here at A4 we are always on the look out for international websites that might contain new and interesting information on ASD and on advocacy. Three that have been recommended recently by committee members are:

www.actionasd.org.uk which is the site for a new UK ASD advocacy group

Also there are some great articles on ASD starting to appear on the Yale University Website at <http://info.med.yale.edu/chldstdy/plomdevelop/>

These article cover such things as the genetics, diagnosis and neurobiology of autism and are being published in the Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, with one article coming out each month. They are currently up to article 6.

My only gripe is that the information here, as in most journal articles, seems to not be aimed at lay people but at people with science or medicine degrees at the very least. But it is very up to date information and well worth a look.

Closer to home, check out the West Australia Autism Register. www.autismwa.org.au This is a great project that has been running since 1999, and is dedicated to promoting research into ASD and to collecting data and outcomes. Well done Emma and team!

THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT (DDA) & THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (HREOC)

On the 1st of March the Federal Government celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the DDA with the following (edited) statements from a Media Release by the Attorney General, The Hon Daryl Williams QC MP

This Act represented an enormous advance for people with disabilities. In the decade since we have seen a direct improvement in the quality of life for thousands of Australians. ... HREOC has made an important contribution in this area by encouraging compliance with the DDA, raising awareness of disability discrimination issues and promoting education.

Amid HREOC's celebration of the DDA, the Attorney General announced significant changes to the way that HREOC is to function

AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION BILL

The human rights of all Australians will be strengthened under a Bill introduced to Parliament today.

The Australian Human Rights Commission Legislation Bill 2003 is the result of a detailed examination by the Government of the structure of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and past efforts at reform.

The reforms will better equip the Commission to take on new areas of responsibility, such as age discrimination, and manage the increasing incidence of issues which cross human rights boundaries, such as matters relating to women with disabilities.

Under the Bill, HREOC will be renamed the Australian Human Rights Commission. The name change will focus attention on the need for our society to respect human rights and is consistent with other human rights institutions in the region. A new executive structure will provide the Commission with greater flexibility to reach the entire community.

The Bill provides for three Human Rights Commissioners to replace the existing portfolio-specific commissioners. With the President, they will have the responsibility of protecting and promoting human rights for all Australians.

Education plays a vital role in maintaining and promoting human rights. These reforms will be used to emphasise the message that human rights are everyone's responsibility.

An important part of the education process will continue to be the distribution of human rights information to all Australians, with a particular focus on preventing discriminatory behaviour rather than reacting after it has occurred.....

*I intend to refer the provisions of the Bill to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee **to give all interested parties an opportunity to comment on the reforms..***

In response, the HREOC website (<http://www.hreoc.gov.au/>) says:

Human Rights Bill Threatens Human Rights Commission's Independence 27 March 2003

The Commonwealth Government has today introduced into Parliament the *Australian Human Rights Commission Legislation Bill 2003* to amend the legislation under which the Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission performs its functions.

While the nature of Commonwealth legislation is obviously a matter for the Federal Parliament, the Commission does not support the bill which stands to have a detrimental impact upon the work of the Commission.

Click on the links below to access:

- [HREOC's media release on the Australian Human Rights Commission Legislation Bill 2003](#)
- [HREOC's Submissions to the Senate Legal And Constitutional Legislation Committee](#)
- [The Senate Legal And Constitutional Legislation Committee's report](#)

This is clearly something with which we at A4 want to be involved with. We want to have our say in these reforms and to show where the DDA is working for our families and where it is not. I know that some of you have already had experiences with the DDA and HREOC and we want to catalogue these so that we can use this information in our representations.

Committee member, Bob Buckley, has been following this issue and attended the recent DDA Forum in Canberra for A4 and also in his role as President of Action for Autism (**AfA**). **AfA** has released a comprehensive media statement outlining concerns with the lack of progress attaining equity on a range of issues affecting people with ASD. For further information and if you have any personal experiences to share in this regard, please email Bob directly on bbuckley@ozemail.com.au and we will keep you informed as to developments in this critical area.

If you want to know more about how you may be able to access conciliation through HREOC, the HREOC website (in particular, the page www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/decisions/conciliation.html) contains stories of the success with conciliation processes in ASD-related matters.

2002: Disciplinary procedures reviewed

A parent of an autistic child complained that the child was being discriminated against when his school used suspension as a means of disciplining the child for his behaviour. The complainant alleged suspension was inappropriate given the child's behaviours were a manifestation of his disability and that the child could not comprehend that suspension was a punishment designed to improve his behaviour. The complaint was settled when the school agreed to trial revised procedures based on an independent report and to consult with the parents on the implementation process.

2001: Responding to bullying

A mother complained that her son who has an autistic disorder had been discriminated against when he was suspended from school. She said her son was constantly bullied at school and reacted to bullying by being aggressive, and that the school had taken action only against her son and not the bullies. After a conciliation conference and further negotiations an agreement was reached for the boy to return to school with the support of an intervention plan, additional teacher aide time and individual education program, as well as for review of the school's suspension policy and strategies for dealing with bullying.

2000: Autistic child at special school

The complainants alleged that a special school attended by their son had failed to accommodate his disabilities, which include intellectual disability, autism and epilepsy, when he was expelled after serious behavioural problems. The complaint was resolved when the school undertook a series of initiatives including procedures to be set in place to ensure a greater level of consultation between teachers and parents, development of more specific individual education plans for each child to accommodate the different levels of disability among the students, more appropriate accommodation to be made for children with multiple disabilities such as this child, and attendance for all teaching staff at a two-day staff training course in autism.

School enrolment secured

A mother complained that after the family moved to a rural centre, she had been unsuccessfully seeking for two months to have her son, who has a number of disabilities including autism and an intellectual disability, enrolled in a local school. Within two days of the Commission contacting the student services team of the relevant education authority, an enrolment in a special education class within a local school had been secured on a trial basis, and the complaint was withdrawn when the trial was successful to the satisfaction of all parties.

Autism Awareness Week 11 – 17 May 2003

Already I am aware of many activities being planned for Autism Awareness Week this year and no doubt there are many more, big and small, in the pipeline. I wondered if we might put together a national listing of events to circulate, not only to promote the individual events but to show what various groups are doing and to share ideas.

Action: If you are involved in organising an event for Autism Week this year, could you please send in to aaadvocacy@bigpond.com a brief outline of the event (max 200 words) and an email contact person for the event. IF we have sufficient response before 12 April 2003, we will try to put together a comprehensive listing. Even if your event has been previously notified to us, please send in fresh details and confirmation that it is to proceed.

April is Autism Awareness Month in the USA and if you want to see what the Autism Society of America has put together this year, please click here:

<http://asa.convio.net/site/Calendar?view=MonthGrid&AddInterest=1065&JServSessionIdro10=uzb35se4t8.app5b>

Finally

One of our members reports that after many years they finally managed to get away on a holiday with their family to Queensland, and they passed on this advice : *“We discovered that you can purchase a “3 Park Super Pass” Ticket at a great discount for both Health Care Card Holders & their Carer’s. Hence, my husband & I were deemed the Carer’s for our 2 sons, who each hold a Health Care Card, (tickets that would have normally cost \$482 were only \$335 saving us a total of \$147)!*

The Ticket Information is on the following internet site:

www.wetnwild.com.au/tickets/tickets.cfm

By visiting the 3 Parks you also get a BONUS 4th day to revisit the park of your choice. All parks are Disability Friendly and suitable for all ages. Wet’n’Wild Water World even has a very large & shallow fun pool for non-swimmers”

Thanks Vicki for sharing this with us, and I hope that some more of our members get a well earned break at some stage soon.

Kindest regards

Judy Brewer Fischer
Convenor A4

April 2003