

October 2006.

Dear Everyone,

The work on the Autism State Plan is now completed and the draft plan will be presented to the lead Minister, Minister Lisa Neville in the next few weeks. Hence the partnership between the Dept. of Human Services, Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development and Autism Victoria concluded 7 Oct 2008. Therefore my engagement as Manager – Autism State Plan for Autism Victoria is now complete. Information about the future of the Autism State Plan should be directed to Autism Victoria's CEO, Murray Dawson-Smith ceo@autismvictoria.org.au or the Autism State Plan website <http://autismstateplan.dhs.vic.gov.au>

The Autism Victoria working group was put together through an open process capturing a range of skills and experience. It was important for the working group to be balanced across the life course issues and well as bring parent and service provider perspectives. I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the working group for their work and support during the project.

Amanda Golding Former Exec Officer Autism Victoria (Feb 07-Sept 07). Amanda, a parent of an adult with autism, added to the parent experience, as well as a wealth of experience and expertise from her many years as EO of Autism Victoria.

Murray Dawson-Smith CEO – Autism Victoria who joined Autism Victoria July 08 and had to pick up the thread very quickly at the most difficult end of the process.

Judy Brewer. Judy is a parent of a teenager with autism and travelled from Wodonga to attend working group meetings. Judy has chaired a number of Federal Government Disability Committees and was instrumental in the attainment of the Federal Governments \$190m Helping Children with Autism Package through her meeting and direct advocacy to the former Prime Minister John Howard.

Rosemary Malone, CEO Gateways Support services, Geelong. Gateways provides a range of support services for people with autism and other disabilities ranging from diagnosis, early intervention, adolescent social groups and adult residential units. Situated in Geelong, Rosemary added to our rural and regional perspective.

Tracel Devereux CEO Alpha Autism. Alpha Autism provides autism specific employment services, pre-vocational training, and adult training and support services which built upon our whole of life focus, particularly regarding adult issues. Tracel has brought to the table an extra focus on issues affecting adults with ASD.

I am particularly thankful for the personal support and commitment by Rosemary Malone who despite her workload as CEO of Gateways Support Services and as Vice President of Autism Victoria always made time to provide her valuable expertise and input. I would also like to acknowledge the Honorary advisory work of Judy Brewer who gave her time freely, despite the challenges of managing her own family and other commitments to provide us with the benefit of her vast political knowledge and strategic advice.

The development of the Autism State Plan by the Victoria State Government in partnership with Autism Victoria was a new concept and presented all of us with challenges and rewards. The overall management of the plan was undertaken by the DHS Strategic Projects Branch. Autism Victoria acknowledges the work throughout the process by the Government partners, The Department of Human Services, (Disability Services Division & Mental Health Branch) and The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Office for Government Schools and Office for Children).

We would also like to acknowledge the dedication and work by the DHS Strategic Projects team who carried the burden of the huge workload. This plan would not have been possible without their expertise. The Autism State Plan working group as a whole are now more ASD savvy than when they commenced in February 2007.

Autism Victoria sincerely thank each and every one of you who attended a forum, or made a submission. The development of the plan was only possible because you shared your personal experiences and stories, your pain and achievements and suggestions about good practice models. The Victorian State Government now has a comprehensive report containing priority areas for action for them to consider.

As a parent of a child with autism I am grateful for the privilege to represent the needs and issues of the Victorian Autism Community during this process. This project has not been easy, and has demanded high personal and emotional investment as the issues for individuals with an ASD and families and carers have been vigorously and passionately expressed and defended for the past 18 months.

The delivery of the Autism State Plan signals the beginning of hard lobbying work to ensure the Autism State Plan receives the budget funding it requires to significantly improve the quality of life for individuals with an ASD and their families and carers.

Although no longer engaged by Autism Victoria, I continue my voluntary work with the Autistic Family Support Association. To contact me, and to find out more about our work on behalf of individuals with an ASD and their families and carers please contact me at afsa_aust@bigpond.com or 0400 226 408. Our membership is currently free.

Thank you & kind regards
Meredith Ward