

Tuesday, 30 March 2021

Disability Group Celebrates Achievements

After a year of covid-enforced social isolation, the Gannawarra Disability Reference Group has started meeting again. Almost two years after being formed across the Gannawarra Shire through partnership between Northern District Community Health (NDCH), Cohuna District Hospital, Gannawarra Shire Council and Kerang District Health, the group has celebrated its successes so far.

The group was set up to advise service providers, community members and community leaders on improving services and community life for people in Gannawarra with disabilities.

Already, over twenty people with disability and their carers are involved in meetings in Kerang and Cohuna with new members always encouraged to join.

“The Gannawarra Disability Reference Group thrives on community involvement,” NDCH CEO Mandy Hutchinson said. “Nobody knows more about living with disability than people actually living with disability. Health and community services cannot ensure safe, quality services for everybody every time without listening to what it’s like for people with disability.”

Ms. Hutchinson said the role of the reference group was equally about making change in the community. The reference group has provided feedback to NDCH on promotional and information materials, intake forms, car and scooter parking, NDIS systems, and entry/reception and waiting areas. “This isn’t about services ticking boxes or accreditation,” Ms. Hutchinson said. “This is about making sure we make information, services and buildings as accessible as possible to people living with disability.”

The Cohuna meetings of the Gannawarra Disability Reference Group have helped Cohuna District Hospital with feedback on their parking spaces, scooter parking and their new Disability Action Plan. The voices of people attending meetings feed into the Gannawarra Working Group, made up of NDIS providers throughout the Shire. Through those meetings, services have been able to advocate community concerns to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), which runs the NDIS.

NDCH have proposed many solutions on behalf of the reference group to other organisations, including an all-inclusive, fenced park in Kerang, group activities and disability parking. The Gannawarra Disability Reference Group shares information with people who attend the meetings. This has included information from organisations such as WDEA Works regarding Schools Leavers Employment Supports; Anglicare regarding respite opportunities; and the Rights Information and Advocacy Centre (RIAC) regarding rights, information & advocacy.

“While we’re only just getting started, we’re so excited by what we’ve already been able to achieve through this group,” Ms. Hutchinson said. “We are proud of the people who take time out of their busy days to take part. Even with a year of not being able to meet, there’s so much great work already done.”

“I appreciate the opportunity to discuss issues in a positive environment and work through possible solutions,” Gannawarra Disability Reference Group member Sheryl Russell said. “Discussing different approaches will keep the wider community interested and more aware



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of some of the issues faced by the disabled.” Mrs Russell said many of the community solutions from the reference group would benefit parents with prams who also have to deal with some of the access issues faced every day by people living with disability.

The Gannawarra Disability Reference Group’s goals are to:

- a) Provide a platform and voice for people with disabilities and carers
- b) Advocate for the wellbeing of people with disabilities and carers
- c) Listen to and understand the needs and expectations of people with disabilities
- d) Find or propose solutions to local issues
- e) Monitor progress with local Disability Action Plans
- f) Share information and support group members

Anyone wishing to be involved in the reference group are invited to contact NDCH Health Promotion Worker Kelsey Poole on 5451 0200 or kelsey.poole@ndch.org.au.

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Media Enquiries

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