



# South West Autism Network

## Strategic Plan 2015 – 2018

### Background

The South West Autism Network (SWAN) is an established not for profit, registered charitable organisation providing peer support, information, respite, advocacy and targeted programmes to families living with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the South West region of Western Australia. From SWAN's inception in 2009 registered membership numbers have grown at a rapid rate to 800 registered members to date. SWAN family and client support covers both Lower and Upper South West Disability Services Commission (DSC) regions.

Our Board of Management is composed of a mix of local professionals and parents. The Board is assisted by an experienced and passionate Coordinator. In addition to services to members, we seek to provide both the broader community and service providers with information about autism. SWAN's services include:

- Closed Facebook group for parents/carers;
- Friends of SWAN Facebook group (service providers etc);
- Public SWAN Facebook page to inform the wider community of SWAN activities and issues related to autism;
- Newsletter;
- Extensive resource library;
- Provision of up to date information through personal contact and the SWAN website;
- Advocacy;
- Parent/carer respite camps;
- Social get-togethers
- Social skills development groups for children and teens implemented by a Psychologist and trained volunteer mentors.

Currently SWAN is in partnership with the Disability Services Commission (DSC) and Developmental Disability WA (DDWA) working on a project to provide information on the WA NDIS My Way trial in the Lower South West. As part of the project, SWAN is working to identify the information needs of people with disabilities and their families, and provide information via social media, website, newsletter, phone, email and in person.

Our relationship with DSC is now well established, with Local Area Coordinators and My Way Coordinators often referring families to SWAN for support. Families who have a member undergoing the diagnostic assessment process frequently contact SWAN as their first port of call for quality information, support and referral during what is commonly a very complicated and tumultuous time.

Additionally, SWAN is working closely with Curtin University and the Val Lishman Health Research Foundation on the delivery of two autism research projects via dissemination of information to our members and the wider community; participation in the research Project Advisory Committee, and provision of office space and resources to the Curtin Research Assistant.

The rapid growth of SWAN's membership since 2009 is a testament to the efforts of those involved who for the most part are volunteers. The positive response to our expanding range of activities and programs is gratifying, however requests for expansion of these programs highlight the need for increased support within our community.

## Vision

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

## Our Guiding Principles



## Mission

To enhance the lives of individuals and families affected by autism spectrum disorders in their own communities by:

- Providing holistic support to individuals and families
- Applying a strength based approach with a focus on empowerment and instilling confidence
- 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 awareness

Based on dialogue with our members, with regional service providers and regular meetings with the SWAN Board of Management, key strategies as outlined below have been developed to target the needs of our members over the next three years.

## Key Strategies to address our Mission

1. Identify the needs of SWAN families in a holistic sense with particular regard to family functioning.
2. Provide opportunities for families, individuals and other interested parties to meet, interact and support each other.
3. Provide safe, accepting environments for children, young people and adults with ASD to increase socialisation and wellbeing.
4. Empower families and individuals to make informed choices.
5. Advocate on behalf of families and individuals
6. To work in partnership with relevant service providers and other stakeholders in order to improve the lives of individuals and families living with autism.
7. Identify gaps in service provision within the region. Provide programs where appropriate to address these gaps or lobby to facilitate the addition of services that can be provided by other agencies.

## Challenges faced in addressing our Mission

- The need for secure and sustainable funding.
- The need to expand our services in line with the priorities of our members.
- The need to retain and obtain additional, experienced and professional staff in order to progress our support and services to the next level.
- The need to further enlist the support of volunteers and interested members of the general public in the activities of SWAN.

## Strategy One

Identify the needs of SWAN families in a holistic sense with particular regard to family functioning.

### Action

- 1.1 Utilise the SWAN members Facebook page and Friends of SWAN Facebook page to generate 'Hot Topic' discussions. Encourage members to put forward topics they wish to discuss.
- 1.2 Face to face meetings and discussions with members and their families during social get-togethers, functions, respite camps and drop-ins to the SWAN office.
- 1.3 NDIS My Way Project in collaboration with DSC. Collection and analysis of feedback from those who seek information / support and respond to online surveys.

- 1.4 Linked Survey Monkey questions regarding member's needs and perspectives which can be fed back to DSC with de-identified information.

## Strategy Two

Provide opportunities for families, individuals and other interested parties to meet, interact and support each other.

### Action

- 2.1 Organise three catered social events per year for SWAN members and their families as well as other interested parties in the community to attend. One of these events will include the Annual Christmas Party for families. Another event will be organised within Autism Acceptance Month in April each year and a third during a school holiday period where families have more time to get together.
- 2.2 Organise and cater for three respite camps for carers both female and male during each year.
- 2.3 Recruit members to organise casual social get-togethers via social media regularly throughout each year and in varying regions.
- 2.4 Hold regular monthly coffee mornings at the SWAN premises and invite relevant guests to speak and provide information.

## Strategy Three

Provide safe, accepting environments for children, young people and adults with ASD to increase socialisation and wellbeing.

### Action

- 3.1 Continue to provide fortnightly social skills groups for children and young people with autism through the provision of the AutStars and YES programs.
- 3.2 Increase the number of social skills groups in line with demand and waitlist numbers.
- 3.3 Gain expressions of interest for a group for young adults with autism and interested community members with a focus on inclusion and socialisation.
- 3.4 Organise family camps where children and young people with autism, their siblings and parents/carers can interact in a fun, relaxing environment.

## Strategy Four

Empower individuals and families to make informed choices.

## Action

- 4.1 Expand , catalogue and organise the SWAN Resource Library. To utilise volunteers to help promote resources available via the SWAN website and Facebook page and to administer the loan system.
- 4.2 Continuing web based newsletter and Facebook media flow involving the dissemination of relevant events, training opportunities and other information and evidence based strategies.
- 4.3 Provide face to face, phone or social media responses to queries of SWAN members and other interested parties (e.g. service providers, extended family members, researchers).
- 4.4 Provide targeted information to all interested parties regarding the NDIS and My Way plans through the current DSC funded project.

## Strategy Five

Advocate on behalf of individuals and families.

## Action

- 5.1 Provide individual support and advocacy.
- 5.2 To further explore the views and experiences of families living with autism to better direct such advocacy.
- 5.3 Explore the possibility of obtaining funding to deliver a dedicated advocacy service within SWAN.
- 5.4 Explore the specific advocacy needs of families negotiating supports and education plans with schools for their child / young person with autism.
- 5.5 To provide up to date, practical and evidence based information to service providers and community groups to dispel myths about autism and improve the support on offer.

## Strategy Six

To work in partnership with relevant service providers and other stakeholders in order to improve the lives of individuals and families living with autism.

## Action

- 6.1 Network with other service providers in the region to share information about SWAN and gain an understanding of how other services can assist our members.
- 6.2 To work in partnership with relevant service providers and community groups by sharing information, expertise and resources to provide better services and support to people with autism and other disabilities.

## Strategy Seven

Identify gaps in service provision and programs in the region. Provide programs where appropriate to address these gaps and lobby to facilitate the addition of services that can be provided by other agencies.

### Action

Current identified gaps in program and service provision:

- Social skills groups for children with ASD in lower primary school and pre-primary
- Family camps
- Camps for Teenagers with ASD
- Young adult programmes and services
- Siblings camp and other services
- Early Intervention therapy services
- School holiday programs

- 7.1 Explore ways in which the above gaps in program provision may be addressed. While we have a team of dedicated volunteers who can assist, it is clear that in order to maintain our current premises and to obtain the resources needed to commence these programs, SWAN is in considerable need of funding. Sourcing appropriate funding grants will be a major focus of our work over the next three years.
- 7.2 As is currently the case, SWAN will consider fee for service for some programs under development as a way of contributing to running costs.
- 7.3 Work in partnership with other agencies to share information regarding gaps in service provision and strategies to address these.

Key priorities for 2015	Key priorities for 2016	Key priorities for 2017
Submission of funding grant applications.	Secure sufficient funding for the continuation of the SWAN premises as well as current and new programs over the next two years.	Continue and focus on stability for SWAN.
Identify the needs of SWAN families - through NDIS My Way project; social media; online survey's; hot topics posted on Facebook page; social get-togethers.	Continue as previous year. Collate unidentifiable information to guide planning.	Continue as previous year. Respond to the needs of SWAN families whenever possible.
Provide safe, inclusive environments for children, young people and adults with ASD to increase socialisation and wellbeing –Continuation of YES and Autstars groups - expand on current programs offered in response to demand.	Continue programs, expand as needed. Focus on quality and stability. Fee for Service charged to cover costs of programs.	Continue as previous year.
Promote empowerment of families and individuals through the provision of information so that they can make informed choices – NDIS project; resource library; morning tea at the SWAN office; via social media; newsletter.	Continue to provide quality, up to date information to all interested parties through a variety of mediums. Focus on strategies for easy access to information.	Continue as previous year. Focus on self-reliance of members to access information provided and to consult other members for assistance.



<p>Provide opportunities for families, individuals and other interested parties to meet, interact and support each other – <a href="#">parent/carer camps</a>; <a href="#">catered function – Christmas Party</a>; <a href="#">morning tea at the SWAN office (monthly)</a>; <a href="#">casual get-togethers in different regions</a>.</p>	<p>Continue and expand on catered functions this year to a minimum of three. Continue to encourage member organisation of casual get-togethers in different regions. Organise guests of interest to members to attend morning tea at the SWAN office.</p>	<p>Continue as previous year.</p>
<p>Work in partnership with relevant service providers and other stakeholders in order to improve the lives of individuals and families living with Autism – <a href="#">DSC and the NDIS My Way project</a>; <a href="#">Curtin University VLHRF – research project</a>; <a href="#">Autism West</a>; <a href="#">DDWA</a>;</p>	<p>Continue to embrace opportunities to work in partnership with services and community groups with a focus on broadening service provision choice and opportunities for individuals with Autism.</p>	<p>Continue as previous year.</p>
<p>Provide advocacy to families and individuals as needed on a case by case basis and systemically – <a href="#">Individual/family advocacy support based on strengthening capacity</a>.</p>	<p>Continue as previous year and explore funding opportunities for the creation of a dedicated advocacy role in SWAN.</p>	<p>Continue as previous years. Establishment of a dedicated advocacy position within SWAN dependent on funding.</p>
<p>Identify gaps in service provision and programs in the region. Provide programs where appropriate. <a href="#">Some gaps in program provision have been identified</a>. SWAN is consulting how best to address those. Securing of funding will be a major focus this year.</p>	<p>Gradual development of additional programs to address gaps in service provision dependent on funding. These may include: <a href="#">Social skills groups for children with ASD in lower primary school and pre-primary</a>; <a href="#">Family camps</a>; <a href="#">Camps for Teenagers with ASD</a>; <a href="#">Young adult programmes</a>; <a href="#">Siblings camp</a>; <a href="#">Early Intervention service</a>.</p>	<p>Continue as previous year.</p>