

Raising our Voices

'3CR doesn't put you down. If you have a disability or you're purple with pink spots, let's say, because their broadcasting licence is about giving people a voice.'

Amanda Milllear, Raising Our Voices Broadcaster

Raising Our Voices commenced in 1987 as a partnership between Reinforce AMIDA and a local community radio station in Melbourne, 3CR. The work of 3CR is legendary in Melbourne – the station and its 400 volunteers are committed to providing a platform for the diverse voices of Melbourne to be heard. So it is only fitting that *Raising Our Voices* has found its place within the rich tapestry of programming on 3CR.

'It is the control of the airwaves. You are the power of the microphone.' *Amanda Milllear, Raising Our Voices Broadcaster*

This powerful statement by one of the founders of *Raising Our Voices*, Amanda Milllear reflects the pride that self-advocates have in their radio program and the belief in its capacity to change lives.

Raising Our Voices shows the potential for partnerships to transform self-advocacy and to enable people with disabilities to get their message and their stories out to a broader audience.



For Pauline Williams Executive Officer of AMIDA the success of the program is *'dependent on collaboration and the varied expertise and knowledge that the different partners bring to the development of the radio show.'*

The monthly radio show also provides an opportunity for self-advocates to refine their message in the context of a 30 minute time slot.

As issues have emerged over the years self-advocates have been able to use the medium of the radio broadcast to engage guests in live or pre-recorded interviews and to develop themes that focus advocacy, community and government attention on these issues.

This has given self-advocates a stronger strategic intent with their work – the radio programming deepens the dialogue around specific issues and has enabled the group to engage the key players in discussions and debate.

Case Study **1**

Raising our Voices

'Raising Our Voices has provided a voice for people to talk about what were essentially hidden lives. Early on people living in institutions were invited on to the show to talk about a part of our community that was segregated and that nobody knew much about.' Pauline Williams, Executive Officer, AMIDA

'It's a kind of communication. It educates people. It shares our problems. Its gives us another door to open'. Amanda Milllear, Raising Our Voices Broadcaster

Raising our Voices is a powerful vehicle for capturing the lived experience of people with intellectual disability. In policy discussions this is often what is missing. Live radio places lived experience front and centre in any discussion the programmers feel strongly about and has been a major force in transforming attitudes to a range of key issues, in particular issues associated with segregated living in the state's major institutions.

There have been many highlights along the way – the focus on tenancy rights in group homes, programs focussing on Royal Commissions into Abuse in Institutions;

opportunities for leading advocates like Daisy Serong, John Harrowell, Terry Slater, Ray Groves and Jane Rosengrave to tell their personal and harrowing stories of life in some of the state's institutions; a program with the Office for the Public Advocate and the former Minister Kaye Setches celebrating 21 Years since the closure of Caloola. It is this type of work that has led to the closure of institutions in Victoria *once and for all*.

Raising Our Voices also adds power to 3CR's agenda and demonstrates the commitment from the radio station to representing all of Melbourne. The sharing of knowledge, skills and resources across the partners is critical to the programs long term success.



Raising Our Voices presenters

Raising our Voices

What is it then that has sustained Raising Our Voices?

As mentioned the partnership is critical. AMIDA plays a critical role as the programs auspice and has successfully negotiated funding on behalf of the program through the National Disability Advocacy Program. This has enabled AMIDA to employ a worker who provides support to self-advocates with programming including identification of issues and themes and selection of guests etc.

Funding also supports technical production costs including payment of a technical producer from 3CR.

This collaboration has enabled self advocates to develop a range of skills and expertise in radio production.

Of course there have been challenges along the way – one of the most critical is the ongoing negotiation of funding for the program in the context of a preference by government for funding of individual advocacy. For Pauline though, the program demonstrates the power of group self advocacy to develop leaders who are well placed to engage with and change government policy and broader community attitudes to disability.

'Group self-advocacy lightens your load – it provides an opportunity for people to take up a passion and to get involved. Raising Our Voices provides an ongoing place to engage in advocacy that improves the lives of others. Many clients of AMIDA received individual advocacy, but once their crisis is over they want to continue to do advocacy; they want to improve the lives of others. Some became part of the management committee, some joined other self advocacy groups like Reinforce.....they have developed a taste for it, now they want to improve the lives of others with intellectual disability. It was this desire for change that led to Raising Our Voices.' Pauline Williams, Executive Officer, AMIDA



And the last word should go to Amanda:

'Having their voices on 3CR gives people strength, power and maturity and the ability to leave their life stories as a legacy. It's given me the confidence to speak to an audience. I've been on air and thought to myself, I could have been talking to 2 million people.....'