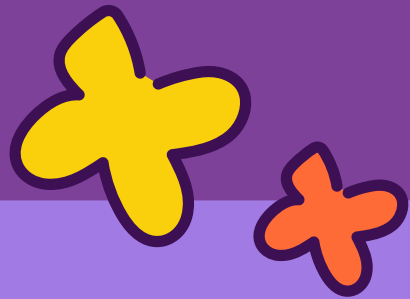




Advocating  
for children  
with disability

# Annual Report

2025



# President's message



**This year, ACD has strengthened our voice and impact through collaboration, advocacy, and family leadership. Three key highlights stand out.**

## **Victorian Committee for Families of Children with Disability**

We're proud to support the new Victorian Committee for Families of Children with Disability, an initiative of the Premier and established by the Victorian Government to give parents and carers a formal voice in shaping policies and services. The Committee brings together families from across Victoria – reflecting our state's diversity – to share lived experience and help make systems more inclusive. ACD leads family engagement in the Committee.

## **Child and Family Disability Alliance (CAFDA)**

This year also saw exciting progress through the Child and Family Disability Alliance, a national partnership between ACD, Kiind and Belongside Families. Together we support over 30,000 families raising children with disability and developmental delay.

Our shared vision is to empower parents and carers with the knowledge, skills and connections they need so their children and families can thrive. We have worked together to include the voice of families in national consultations, including the review of best practice in early childhood intervention and in the development of foundational supports.

## **Farewell and thanks**

Finally, we thank Mikel Dean and Anita McKenzie for their outstanding contributions as Board members over the past four years. Mikel brought business acumen and clear-sighted governance to our work, while Anita's leadership in systemic advocacy has expanded ACD's impact. We wish them and their families all the very best for the future.

Catherine Devine  
President, ACD



# How we work

**Our focus is families raising children with disability or developmental delay in Victoria, from birth to 18 years old. We work with families because children do best when their families are supported. We also work in partnership with professionals who support children and families.**

### **Resource Hub**

Our website and fact sheets provide clear, practical, and up-to-date information to help families navigate the journey of raising a child with disability or developmental delay.

### **Workshops**

ACD delivers more than 100 free online workshops each year for families of children with developmental delay or disability. All workshops are facilitated by parents of children with disability and provide practical information and insights to strengthen families' knowledge, skills, and confidence to advocate for their children across a range of topics and life stages.

## Peer support

Through Virtual MyTime, we provide opportunities for families to connect with others who understand their experiences. These online peer groups provide a safe and inclusive space to share ideas, learn from one another, and develop self-advocacy skills. Facilitated by trained parent peers, they help reduce isolation and strengthen families' sense of community.

## Support Line

The ACD Support Line is a free telephone advocacy service that helps Victorian families understand their rights and speak up for their children. Our qualified Support Advisors assist families to identify goals and build the knowledge and confidence to self-advocate.

## Community Champions

Our volunteer Community Champions are parents of children with disability who share their lived experience to inform and inspire others. They raise awareness of ACD's services, represent family voices in consultations and research, and help shape more inclusive communities.

## Professional training

We build the capacity of professionals who work with families of children with disability. Through workshops, information sessions and Communities of Practice, we strengthen knowledge, collaboration and shared understanding – ensuring families are supported by informed, responsive services.

## Systemic advocacy and change

We amplify the voices of families and influence the sector and all levels of government to advance the rights, needs and interests of children with disability.

## We support

**15,000+**  
families throughout  
Victoria across all  
**79** Local Gov. Areas



## ACD families at a glance

**72%**

have a child aged  
5 to 14 years

**32%**

are from a culturally  
and linguistically  
diverse background

**3%**

of children are in  
out-of-home care

**6%**

have a child who  
has an intellectual  
disability

**55%**

have an autistic child

**3.4%**

identify as Aboriginal  
and/or Torres Strait  
Islander

**18%**

live in rural and  
regional areas



# Family voice



## In our DNA

**ACD was founded in 1980 by a group of parents who came together to successfully stop the closure of their children's respite facility. They realised that they understood better than anyone the lack of support for children with disability and their families.**

They continued to meet and to advocate for change on issues, provided information to other families and set up a parent help line.

Four decades on, the power of family voice and connection continues to underpin our ethos, mission and our everyday practice.

### **Embedded in our structure**

Family voice is embedded at every level of ACD. ACD is led and staffed by people with lived experience of caring and disability. Our constitution ensures that at least 60% of Board members have lived experience. In 2024-25, 30% of Board members were people with disability and 70% were parents. Across our workforce, 65% of staff were parents of children with disability and 15% were people with disability.

### **Victorian Committee for Families of Children with Disability**

ACD provides support to the Victorian Committee for Families of Children with Disability, a committee of parents and carers who provide feedback to the Victorian Government on policies, programs, and services to improve outcomes for children with disability. The committee is an initiative of the Premier and Victorian Government.

## Community Champions

Our volunteer Community Champions are parents of children with disability who share their lived experience to inform and inspire others. They raise awareness of ACD's services, represent family voices in consultations and research, and help shape more inclusive communities.

## Driving our systemic advocacy

Insights from our direct work with families and professionals shape our policy positions and systemic advocacy. Through Have Your Say consultation sessions, we listen directly to families about what's working, what isn't, and what needs to change to better support children with disability.

## Connecting families to meaningful opportunities to be heard

ACD empowers families to build their storytelling and advocacy skills, and connects them with advisory groups, consultations, and research opportunities where their experiences and insights influence policy and practice.

In 2024-25, ACD also delivered consultations with families on behalf of government, including:

- Review of Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention – Department of Social Services (DSS)
- National Carer Strategy – DSS
- Foundational Supports – DSS
- Roundtable conversation with the Victorian Minister for Children on supports for families in the early years
- Kindergarten Inclusion Profile – Victorian Department of Education



**I am not alone!  
There are places where  
I can get support to  
action all the things  
I can do for my family.**



# Resource Hub



## Guiding families with clear, independent information

Navigating complex service systems can often feel overwhelming. ACD provides families with clear, independent information to help them understand their children's rights, available supports, and their options.

Our resources cover key stages and topics, including:

- Early years
- Teenage years
- School
- NDIS
- Support for families

Our resources are developed by staff with lived experience of raising children with disability, making them practical and relevant. They are widely used by families and professionals across Victoria. Our website also offers translation into the most spoken languages in Victoria, and information is continuously updated in response to family feedback, emerging need, and changes in services and programs.



I gained insights into pathways and possibilities for my child to live a good life.

In the past year there were many changes in supports and services, particularly with the NDIS. We kept families informed through our e-newsletter and social media channels, helping them stay up to date and understand what the changes mean for them.

Our blog highlights inclusive activities across Victoria and shares practical guidance to navigate family life and challenges, and support carer wellbeing.

97%

of families said the information from ACD was easy to understand

142,000+

website visitors

16,000+

NB readers

545,000+

social media reach

# Workshops

## Group learning and peer connection

ACD delivers more than 100 free online workshops each year. We provide practical information and insights to give families the knowledge, skills, and confidence to advocate for their children.

Our workshops cover different ages, life stages and service systems, with topics families can apply in daily life. Based on adult learning principles, our program of workshops is embedded in the rights of children with disability and empowering families with practical steps they can take to support their child and family.

Content is refined and delivered by professional facilitators who are parents of children with disability, ensuring it is practical, relevant and grounded in real life.

Our workshops connect families with similar experiences in a supportive setting where they learn together, share strategies, ask questions, and apply the learning to their own situation.



I found the content to be just the right level of depth to make the information accessible and not too overwhelming.



126

workshops delivered



2,396

workshop attendees



97%

of attendees would recommend ACD to someone



90%

of attendees felt more confident to speak up for their child



The best part was being able to speak and also listen to other dads in similar situations. No need to explain so many things as we are all in the same boat.

## Program spotlight – Working Out Dads

In 2025, ACD delivered Working Out Dads, a six-week online program for fathers of children aged 0-9 years.

Led by two male facilitators, the evidence-based program addressed a gap in support for fathers and provided a supportive space to connect, share experiences and build practical strategies. The program also included a group session with a certified personal trainer focused on building movement and activity into daily life.

### Dads reported:

- Feeling more positive and less alone
- Being better equipped to deal with daily struggles and stresses
- An improvement in mental health, parenting and relationships

Working Out Dads was delivered in partnership with Tweddle Child and Family Health and funded by the Australian Government's Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program.

# Support Line



Assisting families to know their rights and advocate

Our Support Line is a free advocacy service for families of children aged 0-18 with any type of disability or developmental delay in Victoria. It helps families understand their children's rights and supports them to advocate for their children and families.

The service is guided by a practice framework developed and refined over decades. Our strengths-based, family-centred approach focuses on empowerment and coaching, helping families build the skills, knowledge, and confidence to self-advocate and achieve their goals.

Professionals who work with children with disability and their families also use the Support Line as a trusted source of information and referrals.

## Program spotlight – Support Line case study

Joe is 12 and he has started secondary school this year. He has a learning disability and low vision. Joe lives with his dad Steve.

Joe told Steve he didn't have any friends at school because he was kept inside at lunchtime to finish his class work. Steve knew about the ACD Support Line from a friend and rang to find out what he should do.

ACD talked through what reasonable adjustments the school should be putting in place to support Joe's learning. This included modifying the learning activities to match his learning needs.

ACD recommended Steve ask for a Student Support Group meeting and that he and Joe should bring a list of things that would help Joe with his learning. At the Student Support Group meeting the school agreed to most of the suggestions.

### Outcome

Joe is now finishing his work in class and spending time with friends at break times.

The Support Line is funded by the Victorian Government Disability Advocacy Program.



**1,606**

individuals called



**97%**

of callers felt more confident speaking up for their child



**86%**

of callers reported an improvement in their child's situation with our help



**97%**

of callers said they had a better understanding of their children's rights

# Building the capacity of professionals

**ACD delivers training, convenes professional networks and runs Communities of Practice to build capability in working with children with disability and their families. We work with professionals across the child, family, education and disability sectors.**

## **Key 2024-25 programs and outputs include:**

- Delivered the NDIS Navigator Networks, strengthening professional connections and sharing practical approaches among the Navigator workforce based in all Victorian Government specialist schools.

These practitioners support parents and carers to understand, navigate and access the supports available to their children under the NDIS.

- Delivered the Strengthening Parent Support Coordinator Network, supporting peer learning and practice improvement.
- Jointly delivered Navigating the NDIS, a two-part training course for child and family sector professionals who support NDIS participants and carers.
- Convened three separate Communities of Practice on behalf of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing for practitioner cohorts including Family Services Disability Specialist Practitioners and Parenting Children with Complex Disability Practitioners.
- Co-developed the Strengthening Parent Support Coordinator Practice Framework.

**1,442**

professionals attended our training sessions and presentations

**90%**

value the time to discuss case studies

**141**

professionals were supported through our networks and Communities of Practice

**98%**

found the resources shared valuable

**91%**

value opportunities to network



# Systemic advocacy

**ACD advocates for an inclusive community where children with disability and their families can thrive.**

**We influence public policy to uphold and advance the rights of children with disability and their families.**

Our systemic advocacy is driven by the voices and experiences of families. These insights are gathered through our direct engagement with the community via the Support Line, family workshops, targeted projects, consultations, and surveys.

We engage with government to ensure families are represented at the table, particularly in discussions where their voices might otherwise go unheard.

ACD also builds and maintains partnerships with like-minded organisations and allies to strengthen our influence, share knowledge of best practice, and advance our advocacy priorities.

**ACD continues to represent families on a range of advisory groups:**

Autism Education Strategy Advisory Group

Autism Plan Advisory Group

Best Start, Best Life Taskforce membership

Disability Inclusion Advisory Group

Healthy Trajectories Advisory Group

Kindergarten Inclusion Reform Reference Group

Victorian NDIS Community Advisory Group

**Key 2024-25 outputs include:**

- Led family engagement in the Victorian Committee for Families of Children with Disability
- Member of the University of Melbourne-led consortium reviewing best practice in early childhood intervention and developing the new National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention
- Advocated for inclusive communities as part of the 2024 Local Government Elections Action Plan
- Something for all: Creating inclusive play spaces report
- Contributed to the refresh of the Victorian Carer Strategy
- 2025 Federal Election Platform: Enabling children with disability to thrive



ACD heard from

**800+**

families through consultation and surveys



**10**

submissions



**4**

snapshot reports amplifying family voice



**12**

meetings with Government Ministers and advisors



**7**

advisory committees

# ACD brand refresh

In 2025, following extensive consultation with our Board, staff and the community we support, we made the decision to shorten our name from Association for Children with Disability to ACD and change our look.

This change reflects the professional, contemporary organisation we are today and makes it easier for families and professionals to connect with us.

Many in the community already referred to us as ACD, which is why we chose a name that's familiar and that builds on the existing trust and confidence in who we are. It also acknowledges the trailblazing work of the families who started our organisation over 45 years ago.

To enhance our shortened name, we have developed the tagline "Advocating for children with disability". This clearly shows that children are at the heart of what we do.

ACD is reaching and helping more families than ever, and our refreshed brand will help us tell this story. It reflects who we are today and what we want to achieve.



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with disability



## Dream Day

We are delighted to have been the community partner for the wonderful Zoos Victoria annual Dream Day event for the seventh year in a row. Each Dream Day, Melbourne Zoo closes their doors to the public and opens their hearts to children with disability and their families. Hundreds of families enjoy a magical day and families report they feel more confident to enjoy a family day at the zoo following Dream Day.



# Thank you



We thank our government and philanthropic funders for their ongoing support, which enables ACD to continue advocating for and supporting children with disability and their families.

#### **Australian Government**

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing  
Department of Social Services

#### **Victorian Government**

Department of Education  
Department of Families, Fairness and Housing  
Victorian Disability Advocacy Program

#### **Philanthropic and community partners**

Equity Trustees  
Parenting Research Centre  
Zoos Victoria

[acd.org.au](http://acd.org.au)

