

I'd like to welcome everyone here this afternoon. To our President Dan Toombs, and to our Board in the past year:

Michael Maguire

Kurt Alexander

Justin Searle

Lesley Beams

And more recently

Allison Kennedy

And Dene Creegan

I'd like to pass on my sincere thanks to you all, present and absent.

I'd also like to thank members of staff who have shown such commitment by coming along to witness our AGM; to participate in our governance and also to support me in my role as CEO here this afternoon.

A special thanks to our State and Local Government friends and colleagues who have made the effort to join us. This year TASC celebrates its 35<sup>th</sup> year. Some of our friends here are relatively new, and some of us go (way) back to the earlier years of TASC, and we are honoured by your collective presence.

It took me a little time when trying to find words to describe the past year of TASC. "Exciting" "stimulating" – came to mind. No doubt some of you are thinking "Exhausting" "All consuming?"

My choices are **new** and **exceptional**.

**Why new?** In TASC's 35<sup>th</sup> year this is our first AGM as a Company. We have completed the complex transition from The Advocacy and Support Centre Inc., an incorporated association to TASC National

Limited, a Company limited by Guarantee, with a skills based Board and the addition of two new (and may I say spectacular) female Directors.

TASC has changed in more than name. Our Directors have completed, or are completing, the Australian Institute of Company Directors Directorship Course and have committed themselves to the future development of TASC in alignment with a truly ambitious and innovative Strategic Plan. Our Strategic goals are to diversify our funding; actively grow TASC services and our geographical reach; further develop our internal capabilities and efficiencies and strengthen our TASC profile and reputation. Finding new business and social enterprise opportunities; identifying the TASC culture as a differentiator in our workplace; all of these goals reflect the commitment that we have all made as an organisation to our short, medium and long term future.

Over the past year, the TASC Board has shown its commitment by funding a strategic budget that has contributed to salaried positions from its reserved funds and allocated spending for branding and marketing. From TASC's Social Enterprise activities – including development of new business opportunities of significant long term investment - to the establishment of a fortnightly legal clinic at Kingaroy in response to severe unmet need and absence of legal funding in that geographical location – the TASC Board has shown that it is open to new ideas and is willing to take the chance and make the commitment.

My second word to describe TASC's last year is **exceptional**. Why exceptional? Well, because it *has* been a year like no other. We have faced the inevitability of changes in our current and future service provision and future funding. Our government funded Advocacy Services are finite. TASC will in all likelihood no longer be funded to provide a not-for-profit advocacy service and over the next 2 years must transition to a fee based service – impacting our Disability Advocacy, Regional Advocacy and the Community Managed Mental Health Programs – including our salaried staff positions in those areas of service provision. With the introduction of the National Disability

Insurance Scheme, TASC must now offer commercial advocacy services and compete in a business environment for our former clients' custom and for new clients by providing services – in a far more competitive and commercially focused market place.

Our legal funding base has also been vulnerable in the past year. Following a complex, time consuming but ultimately successful campaign to reverse intended significant funding cuts by the Commonwealth to Community Legal Centres, (a campaign within which TASC played an active role), there was much relief to have 3 year funding reinstated. There have been no increases in funding however, in times where staffing and salary levels, overheads and business expenses have a skyward trajectory. And don't forget we operate 3 separate offices in 3 different locations! As a response to this funding uncertainty, and in line with our Strategic Goal to lessen our dependence on government funding, TASC has taken the exceptional step of making application to the Queensland Law Society to establish its own Incorporated Legal Practice. In the next months, Legal Services that support those in need and complement the work that TASC already does will be established and developed to enhance access to justice and legal services within our communities of Ipswich, Toowoomba, Roma and parts of South West Queensland.

TASC has also taken the exceptional step of commencing its Psychology and Counselling Service, operational in both Toowoomba and Roma. Again, this new social enterprise venture aligns with TASC's strategic objective to diversify its funding base. As a not-for-profit organisation, TASC's primary goal has always been to support people who would otherwise struggle to access services or support. Psychology and counselling are complementary to the legal and advocacy work TASC already does and will benefit our broader work in the communities within which we engage. We are delighted to welcome Ms Tina Blizzard as our first resident Psychologist and thank Tina for the passion and commitment that she has already shown for client care and for this new TASC service.

It **has** been a very busy and productive year for TASC.

During the past year, TASC Legal Services have been provided through the Ipswich, Toowoomba and Roma Community Legal Services, in addition to a number of Specialist Programs that focus on social justice and human rights. Our lawyers have been busy with the

Ipswich Community Legal Service

Toowoomba Community Legal Service

Roma Community Legal Service

Ipswich Family Relationship Centre attendances

Toowoomba Family Relationship Centre attendances

The Disability Law Project in Ipswich and Toowoomba

The Regional Women's Outreach Legal Service

The Community Legal Education Program

Ipswich Community Legal Service Wednesday Night Clinics

Toowoomba Community Legal Service Monday Night Clinics

Over the past year, our lawyers have provided 3627 "deliverables" as the Department of Justice likes to refer to them – including legal information, advice and referrals, court and tribunal representations, continuing legal education and contributions to law reform. (This figure has to be give or take a few, considering that Legal Aid's new data management system is yet to become fully functional).

TASC lawyers have participated in a number of clinics in the past year. A Health Justice alliance with Carbal Medical Centre of Toowoomba has resulted in TASC lawyers attending a clinic at Carbal to provide legal advice and support. We have collaborated with the Catholic Archdiocese of Toowoomba Social Justice Commission to support the Dignity Project, to assist asylum seekers complete Save Haven Application Visas with the assistance of interpreters. We have

attended the Kingaroy Clinic at the Kingaroy Court House and operated a Students Clinic at the University of Southern Queensland.

Our **Mission of Social Justice for All** has developed significantly in the past year to extend our focus to Human Rights on a larger scale. A new position has been created – our Human Rights Coordinator – to coordinate, manage and ensure the provision of human rights and services to clients in TASC’s Legal and Advocacy programs and to build the profile of TASC in human rights issues so that we can make a valuable contribution on a national – and perhaps international - platform. We welcome David Manwaring in this role as Human Rights Coordinator and note how delighted we are that he has joined us in contributing to TASC’s future in this extremely important area of practice.

In the past year, our TASC Advocates – general advocates, disability advocates, mental health advocates and tenancy advocates - in addition to members of our Seniors Assistance Service – have provided 3606 occasions of support, advice and assistance to our clients. We have also participated in Advocacy Clinics – our Forms Clinics where we assist clients complete forms of any type or description and also the TASC / QAI Mental Health Clinic, a collaboration with Queensland Advocacy Inc.

TASC continues to focus on the commitment of access to Advocacy for the most vulnerable members of our community. TASC Advocacy focuses on better outcomes for those community members who qualify for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and ensuring that those who do not remain appropriately supported with access to Advocacy Services where required. Meetings, conversations and forums by TASC advocates around the implementation of the NDIS have led to strengthened relationships with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and Local Area Coordinators. The

collaborative work done by TASC Advocates with partners has ensured that prospective NDIS participants diagnosed with a psychosocial disability have full access to the Scheme, including referrals to TASC Advocacy Services for individual advocacy, NDIS reviews and appeals.

As I have mentioned, TASC Disability Advocacy and Community Managed Mental Health funding has not been reflected in the NDIS and continued Government funding is finite. Significant efforts have been made in the past year in identifying, implementing and managing profit-for purpose opportunities and alternative revenue streams for our Advocacy services and models of service delivery. TASC Advocates have also engaged with the Combined Advocacy Groups of Queensland to contribute to a combined lobbying effort led by the Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA), our peak body, to seek reinstatement of Queensland Government funded Advocacy Services.

In addition to meeting compliance and performance requirements of our Advocacy Funding Bodies, TASC Advocates have attended several external engagements during the year. We have engaged in the Toowoomba Coordination of Supports Group to facilitate the coordination of supports or specialised supports under the NDIS in consultation with the NDIA and Local Area Coordinators. TASC Advocates have met with the newly appointed Independent Patients' Rights Advisors, appointed under the *Mental Health Act 2016*, which has led to better working relationships and referral pathways for clients living with a mental illness. TASC Advocates have worked with representatives from Baillie Henderson Hospital to assist residents as they transition to the community with support from the NDIS. We have collaborated with the Acute Mental Health Unit (AMHU) at the Toowoomba Base Hospital to provide Advocacy Advice Sessions to ensure that people who are admitted in the AMHU have access to independent individual mental health rights advocacy. Regular stakeholder engagements attended by TASC Advocates have included the Toowoomba Disability Service Provider Network meetings, The

Older Person's Legal Service meetings, Older Person's Information Group meetings, Local area Coordinator meetings, Multicultural Development Association meetings, Rural Service Providers Network meetings and the Suicide Prevention Network meetings.

I am proud to announce that as from 1 September 2017 TASC's Advocacy and Support Services have merged with TASC's Qld Social Justice Centre. The Queensland Social Justice Centre, originally the Qld Criminal Justice Centre, is TASC's Agent for Social Change. This merger will combine our established role as Advocates with the work being undertaken by TASC in the area of social justice and human rights and is a reflection of TASC's continued approach in innovative service delivery for vulnerable people across many regional, rural and remote communities.

In addition to our website presence, the Queensland Social Justice Centre will incorporate the following TASC services:-

Disability Advocacy and Regional Disability Advocacy Programs

Community Managed Mental Health Program

Queensland State-wide Tenant Advice and Referral Service (QSTARS)

Seniors Legal and Support Service

Psychology and Counselling Service

National Disability Insurance Scheme recognized services - Support Coordination, Assistance with Accommodation and Tenancies, and Therapeutic Support through our new Psychology and Counselling service.

I would like to thank **all** members of TASC for their community engagement over the past year. Members of our Business services

team and Admin teams have also been representative at community events in Ipswich, Toowoomba and Roma – having attended representing TASC at Farmfest, Multicultural Festivals, forums, lectures, community engagements – the list is a long one. One of the most precious things about TASC is the willingness and generosity of our staff to engage - their enthusiasm, readiness to support each other and energy are unparalleled in my experience. My thanks to you all.

This enthusiasm is led by a wonderful management team of coordinators of our various services. Ms Terri-Ann Dwyer leads our A&SS team and as I regularly say, TAD is TASC's conscience. Her experience and knowledge in the Sector is only overshadowed by her gentility, compassion and kind heart, all of which she shows to us daily.

Our Legal Services are coordinated by Ms Katrina Potter, who surely is the legal manager I wish that I had had from my admission way back when until now. Katrina is a legal purist – her respect for the law and ethics shines clear and I am comforted by it. Katrina has created a strong, steady and completely engaging legal team through her gentle personal manner, legal strength and delightful good humour. A very effective combination! Thank you Katrina.

Our Business Services Coordinator, Ms Sib Redfern, is TASC's anchor. In addition to managing an extremely busy Business Services area, with multiple reporting, financial and governance responsibilities, Sib voluntarily took on management of our new Psychology and Counselling Services this year and has shown confidence and expertise in that area in addition to her other duties. I simply would be lost without Sib.

Ms Jess Hughes is our Organisational Development Coordinator, our HR Manager, our Office Manager, our Fleet Manager – the list goes on. Jess constantly surprises me – her organisational skills, her emotional intelligence, her willingness to get the job done, her professionalism

and personal investment in the roles she performs – I look forward to each day I work with Jess and I hope that she grows old with me.

And David Manwaring– I’ve mentioned David – we are all so happy to have David join us and to add his unique male sensibilities to our team. He could not be more welcomed.

I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank Ms Naomi Wilson, of Focus HR, our HR Consultant. Naomi is a daily support to me and I’d like to thank her for all that she has done for TASC, and for me, over the past year.

Now I’m sure that some of the staff members here have had a silent wager on how long it would take me, in my presentation, to mention my long-standing love of country music. Finally the wait is now over.

Last year was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Country Music Awards. To celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup>, many country artists, old and young, recorded a new arrangement medley of John Denver's "*Take Me Home, Country Roads*, and Willie Nelson's "*On the Road Again*". Country music artists that we loved 20 years ago, 10 years ago and today collaborated to bring a new life to a couple of old, basically tired, country songs. The old crooners of “Country and Western” – Willy Nelson, Kenny Rogers, – combined with new Nashville artists – like Thomas Rhett, & Luke Bryan, to create a new, exciting and modern arrangement of a couple of old stories.

The result was brilliant.

How embarrassing is it to have a CEO who can’t resist a single opportunity to talk country music themes and lyrics after all these years? You might ask - how can John Denver and Willie Nelson possibly have anything to do with us?

Well, it is meaningful to us because, this year, as you now all know, TASC celebrates 35 years. We are combining the history of TASC as it commenced in 1982 and presenting it to you today - reinvented, renewed. Just like those country artists putting their all into a new

version of an old song, the alumni of TASC spans so many years that we have now a group of people who, together, *also* represent something new, exciting and modern. We have taken the melody of Social Justice created by the original TASC voices and, to that, we have added the many, varied lyrics and stories of the people who have worked and connected with TASC “through the years”. Over the years, small services have blended to make a larger whole; service programs have been added; funding has been found. TASC’s community has grown – we are present in Ipswich, Toowoomba and Roma, and every day we are ‘on the road again’ to extend our outreach footprint and to provide solutions and outcomes to our most vulnerable and marginalised clients in more of South West Queensland than ever before. Sounds like quite a song to me.

Finally, may I assure us all that TASC will continue to move forward with strong corporate governance and a capable and caring Board of Directors. We have completed or are in the process of completing 3 audits of our advocacy, legal and financial frameworks; we have met all government financial and performance targets and deliverables and have shown innovation in setting new measures for client outcomes, focused on effective client service delivery. We are creating new business and building a secure future for TASC. We continue to challenge ourselves, and to improve outcomes for our clients – ultimately to work for the benefit of the communities within which we have the privilege to serve.

Thank you.