

# “Having a Say” conference

by *Sheridan Forster PhD*



Every February more than 1000 people with intellectual disabilities descend upon Geelong, Victoria, and for the past 10 years I've joined them as a volunteer for the Having A Say conference. Having A Say is a conference run by VALID for and by self advocates.

From Wednesday to Friday delegates go to the Waterfront campus of Deakin University to hear speakers, speak themselves, join Come and Try activities, and attend the much love Red Faces and conference disco.

Every year is a different twist on the theme of Having A Say, with this year, the 18th annual conference being Lead Your Life. The conference focused on the Six Powers of Strong Self Advocacy: Self Expression, Self Determination, Self Confidence, Self Reliance, Self Development, and Self Esteem.

As a volunteer, I get the buzz of seeing new and familiar faces. I get to stand beside people as they try new or loved activities. As a volunteer group leader, I enjoy

handing over the clipboard of names of people attending the activity to support the delegates to take the lead of their groups.

I also get to listen to the amazing keynotes such as people from the Sandhurst Centre talking about its closure, and the passionate forum speakers considering future housing and accommodation options. The awarding of the Pentland-Banfield Self Advocacy Award and the Robert Martin Awards are always moving and inspiring.

I'd strongly encourage going to the Having A Say conference for self-advocates and volunteers.

See you February 2018 in Geelong!

<http://www.valid.org.au/conference/>