

# President's report

**Dr Angus Buchanan**



I am writing my Presidents report just having spent a week travelling and working in Vietnam. I was in Ho Chi Min City for a week of teaching to a group of therapy assistants from two rural provinces near the Cambodian border. The students took time to share the recent history of their provinces which includes significant trauma but also a strong sense of resilience and hope. Both areas are still impacted by the legacy Agent Orange and its associated causal impact on disability. During a workshop session we explored what are fundamental human rights. It was a great conversation and the group very quickly generated a long list of what they considered to be human rights. What was pleasing and not surprising is what these students identified as human rights were exactly the same that I would identify with. We then went further to explore if people with disabilities shared these same rights in their rural provinces. Not surprisingly and sadly they universally expressed that people with disabilities who they were aware of, did not experience basic human rights describing circumstances that we perhaps would find very unacceptable. It has however been great working with people who want to make a difference in what are very challenging and under resourced environments. On my recent visits to the two provinces I was confronted by the level of unmet need for people with disabilities for issues that we now hopefully assume no longer exists in Australia and New Zealand. I was incredibly impressed by the energy and focus of a group of people who on learning about new ways of thinking and action left the course with a belief they can start to make a real difference.

Experiencing countries like Vietnam is always a timely reminder of how far Australia and New Zealand have come developing contemporary responses for

people with intellectual disabilities. It is however, very easy and a risk after a visiting a location like rural Vietnam to view the current circumstances in Australia and New Zealand with a degree of complacency and satisfaction. However we still have far to go to ensure people with intellectual disabilities are having their citizenship and human rights met. As part of the training I spent a considerable time with the group exploring in detail the United Nations Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). It was a good and timely reminder for me to revisit the Convention - what it says, means and the need to continue to strive to see its intent come to full life in Australia and New Zealand. I encourage you, if you have not read the convention recently, to take the time to explore its content, meaning and the enormity of its intention for people with intellectual disability. The reality is that the human rights I experience within my life are not necessarily the same for people with intellectual disabilities in Australia and New Zealand and it is essential we strive towards bringing this gap.

ASID's vision – to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disability is very much about the ongoing improvement of the quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. This is embodied in our logo Research to Practice and seen in action through regional forums and events, the Australasian Conference, the publications and contributions to policy. ASID's strength is in the connection of its membership so please try to be part of the events that take place. I encourage you to think about attending the next ASID conference in Tasmania in November with the highly relevant theme of Pushing the Boundaries. It is an opportunity to see ASID in action – engage and network with research-

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**Back row: Samuel Arnold, Dee Siddhu ( EO) Debbie Espinier Ben Crothers, Mark DiMarco, Angus Buchanan, Laura Hogan , Sharon Brandford  
Mid row: Allyson Thomson, Bernadette Curryer, Adrian Higgins, Paul O’Dea, Darryleen Wiggins, Sue Salisbury Richard O’loughlin, Maurice O’Connor, Hilary Johnson**



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ers, providers and practioners, families and people with disabilities. ASID conferences are unique events and participation is always well rewarded by the experiences.

The Board have recently held a two day face to face meeting in Melbourne. This was a highly productive meeting and signed off the Committee work plan priorities, formalised a new committee structure, allowed exploration of the role of the new Executive Officer and the Secretariat, and commenced the implementation of a new risk management plan. A recent decision was made to reduce the size of the Board, which currently has 21 Directors (3 from

each division) 14. Over the next election cycle each Division will now only have 2 Directors on the Board. This decision is consistent with modern governance trends and with the committee structure it is expected to streamline decision making processes. As I often comment all Board members give their time as volunteers and I thank each one of them for the contributions that they each make to the organisation. We are now fortunate to have Dee Siddhu, our Executive officer who will bring considerable operational capacity to the Board and ASID. As an ASID member you will start seeing evidence of this capacity in the near future. ●