



SARU Memo

27th/5/2010

SARU E-MEMO NUMBER:

6

Self Advocacy Resource Unit

Here is our sixth SARU e-memo. It is called an e-memo because it is sent out by email. The memo includes:

- 1. Mapping Self Advocacy in Victoria**
- 2. Group Activity**
- 3. Kerry-anne Speaks Up**
- 4. The SARU crossword**

1. Mapping Self Advocacy in Victoria

On Wednesday 21st of May representatives from 11 self advocacy groups met to find out what is happening in self advocacy in Victoria. The groups that were there included:

- Speaking Up for Ourselves
- Reinforce
- Brain Injury Matters
- WESABI
- Raising Our Voices
- Moe Life Skills
- People First Victoria
- Westernport Speaking Out
- New Horizons
- Victorian Deaf Blind Advocacy Group
- Diversity and Disability
- New Wave

We started the session with people drawing or writing their dreams for the future both for themselves and for people with a disability. People drew or wrote about wanting a good place to live, a good income, holidays, a good job, better services for people with disabilities, more money for self advocacy and more.



Every group then presented on what is happening in their group and the work they were doing. We finished with karaoke sing-a-long to a self advocacy version of the song Respect.

People enjoyed the day and said they would like to come together more often. People said it was empowering to feel you were not alone.



2. Group Activity – Future Dreams

At your next meeting try the activity we did at the mapping forum. Give out textas, pens and paper and get everyone to draw or write their dreams for the future both for yourself and for people with a disability.

After you have done this everyone can take turns presenting their list. Talk about the things self advocacy can do to help people to get these dreams.

Email your list or drawings to the SARU and we will put them in the next e-memo



3. Kerry-anne Speaks up

At the last *Having a Say* conference SARU presented a session called “*Have A Go At Self Advocacy*”. One young woman from South Australia, Kerry-anne Messenger, was so inspired she went back to her room that night and wrote a story to present at our next session.

She stood up and read the story to the room and everyone fell quiet, it was incredibly powerful and moving.

She went on to be awarded the Our Voice prize at the conference. We have published the story in this e-memo for other people to share. It is attached below after the crossword.



SARU DETAILS



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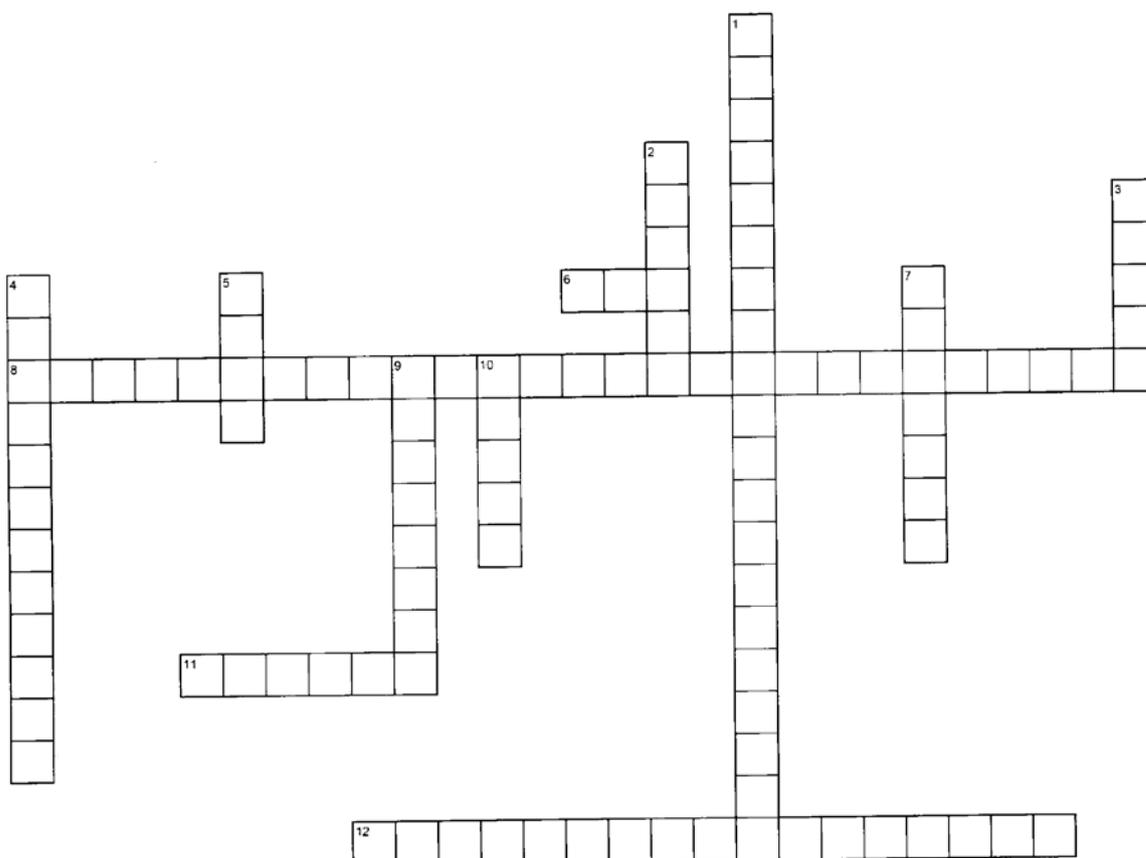


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self advocacy crossword no.4



EclipseCrossword.com

Across

6. Self Advocacy groups in Victorian came together in April to ... self advocacy
8. An organisation that helps self advocacy groups
11. The number of self advocacy groups that came to the mapping forum
12. If you have a problem your service should have one of these

Down

1. The SARU resources these.
2. You label jars not ...?
3. We are people ...
4. The Shut In campaign wants all of these to close in Australia
5. The name of the Senior Practitioner is Jeffrey ... ?
7. The HAVING A SAY Conference is held here
9. It is OK to ...
10. The first name of the President of Reinforce

For the first time in my life I felt totally accepted

By Kerri-ann Messenger

Hello everyone. My name is Kerri-ann Messenger and I want to tell you about myself, and the some of the things I have experienced in thirty-seven years, with Down syndrome as my disability.

My education started at the Christie Downs Kindergarten where I remember lots of fun times. Especially when we would have a treasure hunt for my lost glasses. I would take them off but not remember where I left them. Good fun!

From there I went to the Christie Downs Primary School, where everyone thought I was cute, and tried to do everything for me. Mum was against that and wanted me to be as independent as I could be. Reading and writing came to me after a time and it is what I do a lot of today. My passion now is writing short stories and poetry. Some have been published. Over the following years I went to Marion High School, and then to TAFE SA to learn computing skills, literacy, numeracy, typing and living skills. These skills have helped me in a big way.

In 1998 we travelled Australia for a year, with our F 1 00 truck pulling our caravan behind us. It gave me a different kind of education by seeing many interesting places and meeting so many travellers. When that was over, I had to go to school again.

I started at the age of sixteen at Ashford Special School, until I was able to go into the Annexe at Marion High School where I did very well. I was teased at high school because I had a disability. I had lots of friends there but the mainstream students could be very cruel to me, and others who had disability. Even though I coped with my school life, I did not like the way I was treated me differently. At the time, I just thought English was my favourite subject, but later I began seeing I could perhaps help someone who had a disability to read and write.

I often think: that being picked on was because I was so good at mainstream English for most of that year. Other mainstream students picked on me, and sometimes threw stones at me. Fortunately, because I had played basketball, I was able to duck out of the way. I was a pretty good ducker! They also used to form a circle around me, and physically pushed me, while they chanted the word 'spastic'.

In the Marion High School building, students were lifting me to dangle me over the balustrade, from the second level of the stairwell. Thankfully, another student who had a brother with a disability saved me. Afterwards, they told me the reason for harassing me was that I had Down syndrome. When I finished high school, I finally got the courage to tell my parents what had happened to me. Before I told them though, I went to the doctor without my parents' knowledge, and he diagnosed me with depression.

I want people to realise that just because we have a disability, it does not mean we do not understand what is being said or done against us. We have emotions and feelings deep inside. That is why I want to share my story with you today. They just can't take away our right to live like everyone else, and, to the best of our ability.

Christmas was coming up, and I have to tell everyone what an amazing experience I had. And the healing began.

Some people we meet might not make good friends if they do not understand disabilities. You feel different to them and they sometimes tease you, sometimes they don't. Don't worry about life and people that choose to be that way, there is a place where you can block out all those hurtful things.

My parents gave me a big surprise. I was going to have my biggest wish come true! I was going to swim with dolphins!! It is a different world when you are around dolphins. I was so excited as we waited to get into the water, I just wanted to get in there and make friends. I had to put on a 'wet suit' to keep warm in the cold water, put on goggles and snorkel, and wait until the dolphins came close to the catamaran. When the time was right, you jumped into the water while holding onto a thick rope that trailed behind the boat. Boy, the adrenalin was pumping! The dolphins were swimming around and the instructor said to sing to them because it makes them come to you. When I was singing some dolphins made noises back to me, just like they were talking.

Dolphins move as though they don't have a care in the world, they seem so affectionate, sensitive and loving. You just sense they have feelings you can see it in their eyes. It is almost like you can see into their souls, and it feels tremendous when they brush against you. A whole heap of them were beneath and around me. It felt like we had a connection. I was so glad that they accepted me into their territory.

For the first time in my life I felt totally accepted. They came to me just the way they went to the other people there and it made me feel very emotional. One dolphin looked me straight in the eye and brushed against my leg, and I wanted to wrap my arms around it and hold it close. I have heard that swimming with dolphins has been a life saving experience for some people; now I believe it. I hope you have enjoyed my true-life story and that one day you can experience what I did - it will change your life too!