



Fighting for  
Equality

The Story of ADEC

Meyer Eidelson



ADEC gratefully acknowledges the art works 'Happy Hills' on the front and rear covers which were painted by Easwari Jayasela for ADEC's ArtAbility exhibition in 2006.

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The past twenty-five years of annual general reports and archives were the primary source of information but inevitably there were gaps in the records and we apologise for any errors or omissions, especially contributions by individuals to ADEC's history.

This book is dedicated to the hundreds of staff, volunteers, members, clients and supporters over the past quarter century, many of whom committed 'blood, sweat and tears' to bring into reality their dreams of equality for people with disabilities from ethnic communities.

Meyer Eidelson  
October 2008

## FOREWORD

### A Silver Anniversary

For those of us who have lived through the triumphs and disasters of the disability rights movement over the last quarter-century, Meyer Eidelson's history of ADEC brings it all flooding back. That first march in the International Year of Disabled Persons, the year that brought all that long-repressed anger and idealism to the surface in a torrent of new hope.

The cries of recognition as like-minded people with disabilities got together and found they were planning the same things, and the struggles and squabbles as we all tried to kick into being some organisational forms that could ensure that at least some of the teeming things that we wanted to do would get done – our boiling enthusiasm, our unpracticed administration.

The joy of getting something up, at a time when pilot programs had a chance of catching the eye of a minister rather than being, as now, a sentence of execution with a two year lag time.

The nightmares over funding, the Perils-of-Pauline last-minute reprieves, the gradual accumulation of larger responsibilities and wider ambitions as governments passed over more and more of their core business to anybody who'd take it off them; it's all so familiar, it's the story of the whole sector.

Not everybody made it through, of course. Some groups dwindled away and disappeared. Some groups that started well were split by dissension, or burned out, or were Jeffed. Twenty-five years is a long time to keep the flag flying – and groups like ADEC that have made it through should be properly honoured.

And the people – I started to jot down names of the people Meyer mentions whom I remember fondly, but it got too long to fit in an introduction that you're probably going to skip through as it is to get to the meat of the story. I do have to say, though, that ADEC has been lucky in the many wonderful people who've passed through its staff and its committees.

I mustn't forget, either, ADEC's contribution to the other faces of rights movements in Australia. The idea of multiculturalism, too, has needed defending at times, and so has the idea of having people with disabilities on the committee of management. In these and many other ways, ADEC has been at the forefront, setting the pace for the sector and keeping itself responsive to its constituency.

It's inspiring to see how the determination and commitment of ADEC's staff, volunteers and clients have paid dividends. Today this unique organisation provides a wide variety of successful services including advocacy, education, social support, mental health, carer groups and respite to its constituents from ethnic communities.

Anybody who's been around the disability field in Victoria over the last twenty-five years would want to read this book – and anybody who has to help administer a not-for-profit organisation would wish that it was longer and went into more detail.

But I shouldn't hold you back any longer. Thanks, Meyer. You've done a good job. And so has ADEC.

**Rhonda Galbally**

## Fighting for Equality



Dr Rhonda Galbally AO is the current chief executive of [ourcommunity.com.au](http://ourcommunity.com.au), Chair of the Royal Women's Hospital and founding CEO of VicHealth and a former CEO of the Australian Commission for the Future. Rhonda has recently been appointed as chair of the Disability Advisory Council of Victoria.

## Chapter One

# BEGINNINGS 1981–1982

The traffic in central Melbourne slowed then came to a halt as a large crowd of people made its way up the centre of Collins Street and headed towards Parliament House. Office workers, shoppers and motorists started curiously at the parade. Many of the ‘marchers’ were either sitting in wheelchairs or pushing wheelchairs uphill. They carried banners demanding equal rights for people with disabilities. In 1981 it was a rare event to see people with disabilities on the streets of Melbourne.

One of the demonstrators was Effie Meehan, a young woman from the western suburbs with two children. She had been born with cerebral palsy to parents who emigrated from Greece in 1959. Her career as a protester began early. At eight years of age she had crawled defiantly from her home into the street after she was denied schooling. By 1981 Effie had joined a disability advocacy group in Footscray and was a member

of a committee on ethnicity and disability of the Ethnic Communities Council or ECC.

The demonstration in Collins Street was a dream come true for Effie. People with disabilities were finally emerging from the shadows and taking front stage in public life, with the support of the United Nations no less. A mood of great change was in the air. In Effie's words:

*My life changed in 1981 when I was on a march to the Treasury Gardens celebrating the International Year for Disabled Persons. I saw this guy with a sign that sort of said 'join me if you believe in the rights of people with disabilities from ethnic communities!' That has always been my cause and I went straight over to talk to him.*



*Multicultural family respite participants*

*That was how I met Bernie Leeman. I liked him immediately and found that we shared similar ideas. If I hadn't met Bernie on that day, there may never have been an organisation called 'ADEC'.*

Bernie Leeman was a social worker of Dutch background who worked in rehabilitation services. He, Effie and other supporters joined forces on the Ethnic Communities Council. Almost immediately they began an ambitious research project to prove the need for an ethnic disability service. Over many months the committee volunteers, including Effie and Bernie, ran a total of eighteen workshops for different ethnic communities on weekends at the ECC premises. There was an enormous response. People came from the Vietnamese, Italian, Greek, Chinese, Turkish and other communities to share stories of isolation and discrimination. Their response proved beyond all doubt the urgent need for more services.

With the results of their research, they applied for funding to create a new service that would make a real difference to people's lives. Their first efforts were rejected but in June 1982 Bernie and Effie attended an information meeting about funding held by the Commonwealth Schools Commission. They successfully applied to create a project under the umbrella of the Ethnic Communities Council. The project called itself Action on Disabilities in Ethnic Communities or simply 'ADEC'.

By 1983 the project was employing five or more part-time ethnic liaison workers who supported families with children with disabilities from a range of communities to gain access to the school system and other services. It also provided information and advocacy.

## **From the United Nations to Melbourne**

This radical if tiny project may never have occurred if not for the United Nations. It was no coincidence that the first decade of ADEC coincided with The Decade of Disabled Persons 1983–1992 declared by the United Nations. ADEC formed precisely at the time that attitudes towards people with disabilities in Australia and all over the world were rapidly changing.

During the twentieth century in Australia, thousands of people with disabilities had been confined to institutions, including mental hospitals, nursing homes and congregate care homes. These people were often isolated from the community, sometimes remaining in such institutions for their entire lives.

The United Nations sought to change this by issuing the Declaration of Rights of Disabled Persons in 1974 and then declaring 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons.

Communities all over the world were encouraged to press for equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Human rights and equal opportunity commissions were established in Australia within five years. Pressure from individuals with disabilities, advocates and communities persuaded the Australian Government to commence a review of services for people with disabilities.

This culminated in the Disability Services Act 1986. The Act shifted the focus from institutional care for people with disabilities to care within the community or home. One effect of the UN Decade of Disabled Persons was to give countries a time limit to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The UN even provided specific guidelines to its member countries for the

## The Story of ADEC

changes that were necessary

Changes in Australia included employing people with disabilities within the general community rather than in sheltered workshops. Many people with disabilities also gained opportunities to go to regular schools with support services to assist them rather than attending special schools. Community organisations began to receive funding from the government to help people with disabilities to obtain access to these services.

The ADEC project administered through the ECC was one of these funded projects.



*Family members participate in a multicultural respite activity*

## **EFFIE'S TALE**

Effie Meehan is a former chairperson of ADEC. She helped to establish ADEC as a project in 1982 and as an independent organisation in 1983. She ceased her involvement for some years but is currently employed at ADEC for four days a week as the volunteer recruitment coordinator and facilitator of the Greek support group.

*My name is Efstathia but everybody calls me Effie. I arrived in Australia from Palos, Greece in 1959 with my mother, Anna, and my brother, Nick. My father, Vassili, had arrived three years earlier and sent for us after saving money from his job as a road worker. We left poverty to seek a better life abroad despite the many obstacles involved.*

*My desire for change in the ethnic community is because the Greek community was very fearful of my disability. I wanted to learn Greek language, history and culture, so my parents encouraged me to go to the Greek school on Saturday mornings. But the Greek teacher was not friendly: 'Go home, we don't need you here!' The stares and comments from parents and other kids who were allowed into the school made me want to cry. No one, except my family, seemed to care.*

*After leaving school I was in a sheltered workshop run by the Spastic Society but was very frustrated. Like other young women, I wanted to experience more of life and had a strong desire to learn. I knew life should be rewarding and stimulating. Work means the opportunity to do what others take for granted but which I have had to fight for. Money has never been an important motive. My real interest was in welfare work, and I would have taken any such job available. But*

*who would employ a woman with a disability from a Greek background?*

The opportunity for greater independence came when Effie met her future husband, Patrick Meehan, at a disco for people with disabilities at Flinders Street. Despite opposition from parents and their local church, they were married and eventually had two healthy children. By 1981 Effie had joined several disability advocacy groups. She served for eleven years on the committee of management after she helped to found ADEC.

*It was exciting, demanding and important work. Initially the committee was meeting up to three times per week. Setting goals, interviewing, selecting and training new staff were all new experiences for me. I have forgotten how many committee meetings I have attended, and how many times I have voted for or against motions according to my personal life experience as a Greek-born mother. I also gave public talks, and participated in staff development programs. Although I was never paid for any of this work, I enjoyed it immensely, and was glad to be able to share some of my experiences.*

Effie has also worked for and supported many other disability and ethnic organisations. During the year of the Centenary of Federation in 2001, she was one of the women honoured by the Victorian Government for her contribution to community life over the past century.

Today Effie continues to work to achieve justice for people subject to discrimination.



*Effie at the launch of a book about her life on 9 September 2004*

## Chapter Two

# FOUNDATION 1983

*'In those early days we had many big arguments about direction and policies. But they were usually the right sort of arguments, the ones that end in agreement about the way forward.'*

Effie Meehan

On 17 October 1983 a group of twelve people gathered at 139 Bouverie Street in Carlton. Two of the group's leaders were community activists Effie Meehan and Bernie Leeman. Most of those present had personally experienced barriers to full participation in Australian society. They included parents of children with disabilities, persons with disabilities themselves, as well as community workers. All were participants in an innovative project called Action on Disabilities in Ethnic Communities or 'ADEC'.

On that night the group was debating an important decision: whether to establish their project as a fully independent

organisation in its own right. The ADEC participants who gathered at Bouverie Street on 17 October 1983 knew from sometimes painful experiences that it was up to them to take the opportunities to make a greater difference to those marginalised by society.

With little experience or funds, the participants were taking a huge step to create an independent organisation. The responsibility and the workload would be immense and there were no guarantees of success. Their indecision is recorded in the minutes of their previous meeting: *'We launched into another lengthy discussion on whether ADEC should be an independent entity or belong to the ECC.'* They had even sought outside advice from more experienced community activists such as Helen Halliday of the Victorian Council of Social Services and George Papadopoulos of the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

By the 17 October the members had reached consensus. They agreed to take control of their own destiny and create an independent and unique organisation to fight exclusively for the rights of ethnic people with disabilities.

Four positions were elected that evening to an interim committee of management. The first chairperson was Bernie Leeman. The vice president was Maree Raftis. The secretary was Nilufer Yaman. Lena Smarelli was the first treasurer. The elected interim committee of management were Harriet Pliakos, Effie Meehan, Gloria Kupresanin, Sonia Marcus and Marianne Crowe. Alun Jackson later took on the role of researcher. Janet Alewood agreed to draft the principles of the organisation.

In addition three employees were confirmed for twenty hours per week with the hope that they would 'start work as soon as

possible'. Jennifer Bray was appointed administrative officer, Jenny Sharples was program coordinator and Silvana Scibilia was community development officer. Janet Alewood agreed to draft their duty statements.

### **Where to from here?**

There were huge challenges confronting this young organisation. One urgent issue was that their relationship as an independent organisation with both the ECC and their funding body was unclear.

There was no constitution. Bernie Leeman arranged to register the name ADEC under the Associations Act although ADEC would not actually become an incorporated body until 18 June 1985, when the constitution's first principle was to support: *'The rights of ethnic Australians with disabilities to achieve both individually and collectively full access to human rights as defined by the Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3447 on 9 January, 1955.'*

The constitution stipulated that voting members of the board must include ethnic parents or carers of children who have a disability, ethnic people with a disability, and community members with experience or interest in disability and/or ethnicity.

There was little experience in management. As there was no internal structure, committee members Janet Alewood and Marcia Arvanitakis had to be employed for one week to orient and provide direction for the new staff.

There were no permanent premises. Some of the recorded meeting places ADEC used in its earliest years included 139 Bouverie Street in Carlton, 35 Bridge Road in Richmond, 206 Drummond Street in Carlton, and eventually more permanent premises at 123–125 Sydney Road, Brunswick.

There was very little money. The entire income for the 1983 financial year was \$10,777. There was a bank balance of \$174.40. One of the first brave decisions was to purchase six stationary items for the new staff: one Melway, three staff diaries, one minutes book and one communication book. The committee was forced to debate another big decision: whether they could afford to purchase the second-hand typewriter on loan to them. There was, of course, no computer.

What the organisation did not lack in October 1983 was many willing hands on the committee, huge enthusiasm and a passion for social justice. Nor did they lack for ambition. Although advised they were eligible for \$15,000 for the coming three years from the School Commission, they decided to ask for almost six times that amount. Their immediate goal was to increase their program from working with fifty families to 150 and to employ three full-time staff. Over the coming year they would vigorously pursue resources from many other avenues as well.

Chairperson and founder Bernie Leeman resigned in November because of family commitments but wrote to express his confidence that ADEC had a great future.

The ADEC journey had begun.



*Multicultural family respite program at Phillip Island*



*Participants in the Afghan carers group*

## Bernie's Letter

*For eighteen months Bernie Leeman worked tirelessly with other supporters to undertake research, write submissions, establish an ADEC project and then create an independent organisation. He was the first elected chairperson of ADEC in 1983 but resigned shortly afterwards. Below is his letter of resignation in November 1983 from the ADEC files outlining his views. He was honoured with a life membership in 1997.*

ADEC – ACTION ON DISABILITY WITHIN ETHNIC COMMUNITIES 35 Bridge Road, Richmond, 3121.

Dear Friends,

Now that we have an enthusiastic and capable Committee of Management and three effective and skilled staff, perhaps for the first time one can one feel more confident about ADEC's future.

In particular it is clear from the recent discussions with the Ethnic Communities' Council and with representatives of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, and from the current developments that the original objectives of ADEC and thus of the submissions are given due attention.

This does not mean that all problems have been resolved – on the contrary, much needs to be done. It does suggest, however, that the committee and the staff are pulling

together (and in the same direction) to ensure that the client needs are being met in the most effective manner and within the framework of our submissions.

Although I am very much aware that much more needs to be done, I feel confident that the dedicated Ethnic Workers under direction of our talented Staff and supported by the broadly-based experienced Committee of Management can develop ADEC's innovative programmes in a creative and effective manner to ensure that ethnic Australians do not remain doubly disadvantaged.

It is almost 18 months ago since Effie Meehan and I attended a pre-funding information evening of the Commonwealth Schools Commission's Severely Handicapped Children Program and mapped out an educationally oriented support program which became our first submission. It was funded because there is a real need for such a program. This and two subsequent submissions to the Schools Commission were successful, and two or three submissions to other organisations are pending.

Gradually, but increasingly so, it is being realised by funding bodies that for a program such as ADEC's to be effective it needs to be ethnically based, controlled by the consumers, and independent from the traditionally oriented service providers.

## Fighting for Equality

I am glad to have been associated with initiating ADEC's programs and have learned a lot and want to thank sincerely all those who have contributed to it.

The time has come for me to withdraw, and spend more time with my wife and four children. Hence I hereby tender my resignation as Chairperson and Committee member of ADEC knowing that the future of ADEC has been taken up by capable hands.

With best wishes,

Your sincerely,  
Bernard Leeman.

My son is 36 years old and disabled. My husband has died and there is no-one else. ADEC provides me with lots of assistance and help – referrals, information, different services – and has empowered me.  
Thank you ADEC.

Maria

## Chapter Three

# THE HONEYMOON 1984–1985

*'People like us probably have a much deeper understanding because of the direct experience of being disabled, and we have warm feelings towards others. We have both the capacity to care, and to conduct our own affairs. We do not want to be managed or bossed around by so-called able people.'*

Effie Meehan 2004

Every year in Australia hundreds of community groups form to promote a common cause, redress a grievance, lobby for a community benefit or provide services to their members. Few survive, however, to become viable human service providers. The pressures on a new organisation are immense, with a multitude of tasks to be done, many by committee volunteers who have to seize time from their family and working lives. Job descriptions have to be written, grants submissions prepared, incorporation arranged, relationships forged, premises secured, bills paid,

staff hired and trained and supervised, and a thousand small administrative tasks completed. Simultaneously the core tasks of delivering quality services to clients must be completed.

In its first few years all this work had to be completed without any guarantee of ongoing funding, leading to several crises as ADEC sought to maintain its service and find an effective model that worked for its users and members.

Fortunately the founding committee and staff of ADEC were unaware of the trials to come and with great enthusiasm, even euphoria, quickly set about putting the building blocks of a new organisation in place at their first leased premises at 35 Bridge Road, Richmond.

An immediate task was to successfully tackle the issue of ADEC as a new organisation both with the Ethnic Communities Council and the Commonwealth Schools Commission, which gave a commitment to further, if short term, funding. Within four weeks of foundation, ADEC confirmed the appointment of eight ethnic liaison workers for 20 hours per week to work with Italian, Arabic, Greek, Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, and Chinese-Vietnamese communities. The Vietnamese and Turkish positions were still vacant. These workers supported families from different communities by providing advocacy for children with disabilities, integration into the school system and information for parents and providers.

It was the role of the part-time coordinator to supervise the workers, draft guidelines for accepting referrals and identify gaps and needs. The part-time community development position promoted the services to families and community agencies, trained the workers and sought resources.

There were three program areas: Community Education and Development, Direct Service, and Research and Evaluation. Throughout its history ADEC has always maintained a focus on influencing public policy through lobbying, research and evaluation.

### **The community responds**

ADEC's program may have had limited resources but it worked. Struggling ethnic families responded with enthusiasm to a radical model of service that recruited workers from their own communities and respected their culture and choices. By October 1984 there was a huge backlog of referrals to be dealt with, despite the Vietnamese position being vacant. From the beginning the services had no geographic boundaries, and calls for help came from across the city and even rural areas. A workshop was convened in Shepparton with rural ethnic communities, a Greek parent support group was established in Lalor and a Chinese parents' workshop was held at Box Hill. There was a membership drive, and television and radio promotion. Numerous funding submissions were prepared such as a request for Grant-in Aid from the Immigration Department.

ADEC's formation was also greeted enthusiastically by disability and other organisations. By June 1984 ADEC had received funds of over \$8000 from the Ross Trust and Sydney Myer Trust. Other trusts such as the Reichstein Foundation and the Morialta Trust would eventually contribute. In June ADEC was also hugely relieved to receive a grant of \$47,889 from the Commonwealth Employment Program to employ a secretary and community development worker.

By the year's end ADEC was the proud possessor of two telephone lines at 35 Bridge Road in Richmond.

In February 1985 further funding was received from the Commonwealth Employment Program, and Gabrielle Fakhri and Jim Asimakopoulos were employed for six months as disability awareness officers. Effie recalls that Jim often got out of his wheelchair and hoisted himself up stair by stair to the second floor because there was no disability access. In November the first AGM was held at Carringbush library. Alun Jackson was confirmed as chairperson, Jim Asimakopoulos as treasurer and Kevin Fell as secretary.

### **Setbacks**

It was not all smooth sailing. There was turnover due to the demands on people's time and the limitations of part-time employment. Bernie Leeman, Lena Smarelli and some of the ethnic liaison staff resigned during the year. Jenny Sharples resigned from the coordinator's position to take up alternative employment.

Still, by the end of that first year the infant ADEC could look back on its inaugural achievements with justifiable pride. It had created an independent organisation with an enthusiastic staff and committee and was delivering real services to ethnic families in desperate need.

## ALUN'S TALE

*Alun Jackson was elected ADEC's chairperson at the first AGM in 1984. Since September 2007 he has been the director of the new Problem Gambling Research Centre at Melbourne University, and was formerly the Professor of Social Work.*

I first learned about ADEC when my second eldest son joined a kindergarten and I met other parents John Zika and Maree Raftis. They had had a child with very severe asthma. They discovered that I had been actively involved in multiracial issues in the UK including social work in migrant communities. I was also involved in immigrant programs in Melbourne such as the Ecumenical Centre. John convinced me to join the ADEC cause.

My earliest research job had been studying 24-year-olds with intellectual disabilities and I was struck at the time how ethnic parents struggled to cope. Their sense of shame at the disability led them to find simple solutions for causes and they were accessing few services.

When I became chairperson, ADEC was a parent-led organisation with part-time workers. Silvana Scibilia was the driving force. It was part of a resurgence of the self-help movement with the feeling of a small self-help group but it had great aspirations. One thing that stood out to me about ADEC was that it wasn't anti-professional. They embraced professionalism instead of wasting time proving they weren't. At the same time it identified with many other disability organisations that were also strong

advocates for change.

ADEC had started as a demonstration project funded by government who were seeking viable models for delivering services. It proved that ethnic auspices could 'value-add' by designing new models of effective service delivery. Success or failure in projects of this kind usually depends on whether the timing is right. In ADEC's case the timing was definitely right. Multiculturalism, settlement issues, disability reform, advocacy were all topical issues prominent in the mind of government.

It was also the era of de-institutionalisation and the growth of community-based services. ADEC was lucky in the sense that it didn't have to argue for the legitimacy of its cause, rather that it had the solution. The historic partnership model in Victoria between government and the community sector also served ADEC well.

ADEC rode the wave of disability advocacy and the search for the best ways to interpret multiculturalism. It sat within a debate about ethno-specific service provision versus mainstreaming. I was very impressed how ADEC and Silvana were actually setting the boundaries of that debate and not just being reactive. ADEC was able to successfully demonstrate that ethno-specific services can provide a minimalist but necessary service to consumers without being separatist. It changed the meaning of ethno-specific services by creating a pan-community model rather than a separatist model. Government was used to competitiveness and factionalism among ethnic communities but ADEC demonstrated that a service could successfully embrace a

range of communities.

ADEC gained legitimacy very early on in its role as a teacher of others. With its wide range of ethnic consumers we did a lot of work on how to do effective community consultation for government. We made a lot of submissions for funding in my time as chairperson. ADEC was multi-stranded in its lobbying with academic, political advocacy and in-your-face activism.

Jim Asimakopoulos was a great proponent of the latter. He had severe cerebral palsy and his father wouldn't buy him a motorised wheelchair because he didn't want to be embarrassed by Jim's presence on the street. So Jim got his own chair and made a vocation of embarrassing people with in-your-face advocacy for ADEC! Bureaucrats just didn't know how to deal with this guy sitting in a wheelchair outside their offices and refusing to leave. The mix of people on the ADEC board was also multifaceted, with elected representatives of people with disabilities such as Richard Berger, parents and professionals. On occasion this was a source of tension. For example I remember one debate over whether a member of the board had a disability or not. Silvana's view was that any person's claim to a disability should always be accepted.

I departed as chairperson of the board when Effie Meehan successfully stood for the position at the AGM. I was satisfied with leaving, as I believed that we had completed a capacity-building phase and ADEC could run itself from its non-professional base.



*ArtAbility participant*

## Chapter Four

# A CRISIS OR THREE 1985–1987

*'Life has not all been roses but no longer will we have to wonder where the next dollar is coming from.'*

Renee Huish, chairperson 1987

It was an exciting time for its founders to see ADEC fulfil the dream of providing an alternative service to a highly disadvantaged group. As ADEC moved into its second year, however, some harsh realities set in. Few service providers have a viable future without ongoing core funding. Short-term grants provide no security for workers. The constant search for funding is exhausting and drains morale. The fight to survive pulls energy from the priority of delivering a quality service, which may undermine the agency's reputation.

In March 1985 a review report presented to the committee of

management painted a disturbing picture. Several submissions to Federal Government departments had been rejected. Schools Commission's seeding funding would be reduced in the 1985–1986 year. ADEC was approaching a crisis, possibly running out of funds by September 1985, while too much energy was being diverted into submission writing instead of service delivery. ADEC was overstretched in its resources by attempting to deliver services throughout metropolitan Melbourne. Education and advocacy work with ethnic communities as well as policy work was suffering. The report recommended that ADEC narrow its service provision to the Northern region alone, where it had a better chance of attracting funding from the State Government.

The committee rejected the recommendation. Ethnic communities do not package themselves neatly inside bureaucratic boundaries and it was unthinkable to ignore families in crisis. ADEC remained statewide.

### **The search for core funding**

The report, however, was a wake-up call. ADEC decided to focus a single-minded campaign of lobbying and submissions to obtain permanent funding. Silvana Scibilia, who was eventually appointed as director, flew interstate on several occasions to lobby ministers, public servants and politicians.

Dr Gillian Fulcher was hired as a consultant to help work on a range of submissions, while client families were asked to write letters of support. On 20 January 1986 ADEC submitted an application to the Federal Department of Community Services for \$624,000 funding for a 'demonstration project' for 18 months. There were also several other applications to government

and philanthropic agencies

A second grant from the Ross Trust in 1985 of \$4000 was a small but much needed help.

### **The dash to Canberra**

Unfortunately by early 1986 the ADEC budget was again in crisis. There were insufficient funds to last the financial year. With time running out, Silvana Scibilia flew to Canberra to hold emergency talks with Senator Don Grimes, Federal Minister for Community Services. He agreed to hold further discussions with Caroline Hogg, Victorian Minister for Community Services, to look at joint four-year demonstration funding. In the interim period ADEC was allocated nine months' emergency funding from the Commonwealth.

Don Grimes announced that ADEC *'has been providing an important link between ethnic families and agencies providing services. To ensure that disabled people in ethnic communities gain access to available services, it was important that its operations continue to receive support.'*

ADEC had been thrown a temporary lifeline.

### **Champions in times of need**

The year of 1987 started with a different crisis. There was a shortage of integration aides, which were critical to success in integrating children – many of whom were experiencing intellectual disabilities – into school. The staff was consumed

with frustrating negotiations with schools on behalf of families. It was obvious that this systemic injustice if recurring each year would severely undermine ADEC's efforts as well as exhausting staff. ADEC became active in negotiations with government departments and putting policy proposals to the minister to redress this systemic issue.

At the same time ADEC was under real threat of closure. There was 'great distress to both consumers and staff' as the committee faced the real prospect of closing ADEC down by April when emergency funding was exhausted. It seemed the great experiment was over. The keys would return to the landlord, the staff would seek other work and the families would retreat to suffer an indifferent system.

It never happened. The joint four-year demonstration funding from Federal and State Governments came through just in time. At the 1987 AGM, Renee Huish, the acting chairperson, reported on the past year as one of extreme highs and lows. She praised the patience of the consumers, the agencies and the staff for sticking with ADEC: 'Their dedication has been well above the call of duty and has seen us through a very difficult time'.

Silvana pointed out: 'Fortunately we had many champions who we sought out to assist us in times of need'. They included ministers with a commitment to multiculturalism and social justice such as Don Grimes, and Caroline Hogg. Not surprisingly, Caroline was the guest speaker who addressed a very relieved 1987 annual general meeting.

For the first time in its history ADEC could make concrete plans for the future.

## **SILVANA'S TALE**

*Silvana was one of ADEC's first employees, later becoming its first director. She has had a broad career, including community work, advocacy, teaching and Australian film.*

My own two children have disabilities. I had a positive experience with school with my first child and the support I received. My experience at school with my second child, however, was much less positive. I was articulate and understood how the system worked so I asked myself – if I had so many problems, then how did others cope? My strong empathy with other parents, especially those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, in similar situations was an important drive for my involvement in ADEC.

In those early days the biggest problem we confronted was raising awareness and in putting our issues on the map. We knew that if that didn't happen nothing else would follow. The committee worked very hard and commitment by everyone to this goal was essential to our success. It was a team effort. It was demanding because at the same time as we were supporting and advocating for ADEC we also had to get specialist mainstream services provided to our clients.

We promoted our cause heavily through radio, the print media, word of mouth, even transportable booths at community festivals. We liaised with The Ethnic People With Disabilities Program in Marrickville in NSW, another early ethnic disability organisation.

The Schools Commission only provided seeding funding so we were forced to seek many new and different sources. We were always acutely aware that ADEC might close for lack of funds and were constantly writing submissions to philanthropic trusts and others. No stone was left unturned. Staff like myself worked long hours often unpaid and sometimes I paid my travel costs out of my own pocket.

Intensive political lobbying was also required to get ADEC going. Fortunately we had many champions who we sought out to assist us in times of need. One of these was the Hon Caroline Hogg. Integration had been introduced as a policy by the state and she gave us strong support. We also liaised with Hon Senator Don Grimes in Canberra, advocating for what we believed was a compelling case for social justice. The Federal Government in those days was a strong supporter of advocacy and we became one of the first organisations to receive funding from the first State and Federal funding agreement.

In retrospect I think we developed an amazing constitution at ADEC, for example our committee of management was required to have one-third parents, one-third supporters and one-third people with a disability.

ADEC started as a committee of the ECC with about seventeen members from different sectors. Our original location was Bridge Road in Richmond. When we moved to 206 Drummond Street, we shared a house with a disability group called 'The People's Project'. Our earliest activities were very varied. They included case management, advocacy, systemic issues, sessions for parents, dance

## The Story of ADEC

groups for younger women, parent-led self-advocacy groups of consumers e.g. Arabic, Vietnamese, Greek, Italian and Turkish groups.

Jenny Sharples as coordinator got our seeding funding. Liz Papanicolaou achieved the support of Trusts. I was acting coordinator and then director. Gabrielle Maligeorges as director concentrated on expanding the range of services at ADEC

My husband had an operation and is suffering from bowel cancer. He spends a lot of time in bed and needs frequent medication. It is hard sometimes for me to travel to ADEC but the group is an important break for me.

Catalina 2008



*Susan Moroney,  
ArtAbility Ambassador,  
distributes awards  
to participants at  
Federation Square 2007*

## Chapter Five

# IN SEARCH OF A MODEL 1988–1991

*‘Overall ADEC’s philosophy is based on the principles of access, participation, equity, integration, and cultural relevance. We look forward to a time when organisations operating from this sort of conceptual base will become the norm, not the avant-garde.’*

Alun Jackson, 1987

ADEC’s history suggests that it has been in a constant state of reinvention, seeking the holy grail of a perfect model of service. The search always sought the answer to two questions: how to best deliver services to disadvantaged communities and how at the same time to reform the wider society.

The challenges of 1984 to 1987 brought into focus a third question, which every mature organisation must eventually confront: how to build a stable, quality service with enough

resources to meet these goals?

The 1987 demonstration grant allocated over a quarter of a million dollars annually to complete three stages over four years.

Chairperson Dr Alun Jackson wrote that this was *'an opportunity to demonstrate that a particular model of service delivery is viable – a model which links ethnic communities and mainstream services more effectively, to develop advocacy in ethnic communities and to develop an information capacity from which policy proposals can be developed.'*

Today it is hard to imagine Federal and State Ministers taking such a personal interest in a small provider in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, not to mention investing large sums of money. They were excited by a social experiment attempting to combine important movements such as multiculturalism, advocacy, de-institutionalisation, self-determination, disability and ethno-specific service provision.

ADEC's search for an effective model in the immediate years following 1987 sowed the seeds of its future growth and established many of the programs and sources of funding which sustain ADEC today. It created a comprehensive database to evaluate effectiveness and to lobby government on policy and the creation of culturally relevant programs. It also recognised a role in responding to consumers in rural Victoria.

The 'new-look' ADEC now had nine full-time (and one part-time) staff including Silvana Scibilia as director, an advocacy coordinator, secretary, administrator, and five bilingual workers servicing Italian, Greek, Arabic, Turkish and Vietnamese

communities. With security of funding and more staff, ADEC moved to larger premises in October 1986 at 123–125 Sydney Road. For several weeks there was only one telephone line but eventually nine were installed.

Silvana resigned from ADEC and was appointed to the panel reviewing the Intellectual Disability Services Act. In October 1988 Liz Papanicolau commenced as director under chairperson Nikki Dollis to implement a three-year strategic plan. The ethnic disability workers' duties expanded and the advocacy coordinator became redundant.

The committee of management realised it needed to expand its skill base to meet the challenges of a more professional service. George Lekakis (currently chairman of the Victorian Multicultural Commission) was treasurer of ADEC from about 1986 to 1989. He has recalled advising against committee



*The Chinese carers group enjoys a family outing to a lavender farm near Ballarat*

interest in investing in the Pyramid Building Society that paid high returns. Pyramid collapsed in 1990 with other investors' funds but not with ADEC's.

Sub-committees with portfolios were established eventually, including consumer participation, marketing, planning and evaluation, data and research and staffing.

With a stable structure in place ADEC began to take on new projects, establishing a pattern of growth for the future. In 1988 it received grants for some of its earliest research projects in areas such as leisure, women with disabilities and ethnic families. Over the next ten years it would undertake over fifty discrete service development and research projects, many on a statewide level. It would take another book to detail the range of all these projects.

One of the 1988 grants was for its first Home and Community Care (HACC) project, followed by a longer term HACC Access and Advocacy Project in 1991. The 1985 HACC Act had created a large community-based industry to prevent institutionalisation by responding to the needs of carers and people experiencing frailty or disability in their own homes. This rapidly growing program would eventually result in the ethnic aged and carers of older people becoming a large part of ADEC's mission.

By 1989 ADEC's mental health program had also commenced, which would also expand substantially in future years. ADEC also enthusiastically produced its first community newsletter, which within five years was distributing 6000 copies in nine languages to a mailing list of 2500. There was also a technological revolution – ADEC purchased its first computer and implemented a computer accounts system. This enormously assisted in projects such as data collection, which previously had

been done by hand. Ten years later ADEC would become one of the earliest providers to provide multilingual translations on the Internet.

Gabriel Maligeorges, who had been employed as the psychiatric ethnic access worker, was promoted to director in October 1991, with Maria Cesarello as chairperson. Both would be actively involved in ADEC for the decade. They refined the ADEC model, further outlining key areas: the individual advocacy program, systemic group advocacy (including HACC and mental health), Information, Education, Research and Administration. These roles survive today. One controversial reform was that advocacy ceased to be targeted to specific ethnic communities and was opened up to all in an 'ethno-generic model'.

This carefully planned structure would withstand the challenging economic climate that emerged in Australia for most of the 1990s, including an eleven per cent cut to services after the Kennett Liberal Government came into power in 1992.

ADEC would not only survive but grow.



*Members of the Italian, Vietnamese and Arabic carer groups*

## LIZ'S TALE

Liz Dimitriadis (formerly Papanicolaou) is a former director of ADEC (1988 to 1991) and has been a well-known consultant in the human services field for many years.

Liz first developed a relationship with ADEC while working at the Mental Retardation Division at the Victorian Health Department that later became the Department of Human Services (DHS). She was, at the time, the only officer with an ethnic portfolio across the numerous public service regions.

*I actively assisted ADEC to start up because I knew it was impossible within government to achieve change by ourselves and that it was essential we had community organisations out there to advocate and provide services.*

Eventually Liz obtained a six-month secondment at ADEC as coordinator. When the secondment finished she travelled overseas and Silvana Scibilia took over her role. Upon her return to Australia Liz was rung by Silvana who offered her a job at ADEC. Liz agreed to act as executive director initially for twelve months.

Liz has particular memories of the some of the staff:

*Alun Jackson, who later became a professor of social work at Melbourne University, was a founding member. He had outstanding skills in writing submissions and developed a business case that persuaded government to provide us with long-term funding. Jim Asimakopoulos was a vigorous*

*lobbyist almost chaining himself to the door of politicians. Gabby Fakhri was also a tireless advocate. Silvana was a very visionary and tireless worker although outsiders didn't always appreciate her frankness. My job was building bridges with other ethnic organisations and particularly with DHS and the Federal Government, with whom I had a constructive relationship.*

*Gabriel Maligeorges started originally as a psychiatric access worker. He had a good grasp of strategic development and we worked together on a number of projects. I recommended him as executive director when I left. Unlike previous directors he had a much longer term commitment to the organisation and initiated restructuring of ADEC despite some opposition.*

Liz believes that restructuring was necessary to make ADEC sustainable in the long term.

*Advantage had to be taken of the new opportunities that were arising such as Home and Community Care, education and training and a move to new premises. It was very exciting to see the organisation begin to grow and expand in new directions.*

## **KRIS'S TALE**

*Kris Pavlidis was formerly a staff member of ADEC from 1996 to 1998. At the time of her interview in 2007 she was the Mayor of Whittlesea, one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria with one of the largest ethnic populations.*

When I started ADEC my employment was incredibly varied. My first project was checking language translations. I was then given the task of developing the manual for the individual advocacy program to give it a framework and consolidate its early structure. For a short period I became coordinator of the program itself. Later I shared the job of policy coordinator with Vicky Mancini. We responded to ministerial policies from an ADEC perspective and also developed internal policies for ADEC.

With Gabriel Maligeorges as director it was exciting to see the social support groups and other activities expanded. These consumers were a great way to consult on policies proposed by government. ADEC at that time did lots of consultancies. Gabriel kept a pool of excellent workers to do different projects.

We worked initially in an old double shop front in Sydney Road that had a strong community feel to it. The office had a relaxed atmosphere, there was a great camaraderie between colleagues and we enjoyed ourselves. We shared great feasts at lunchtime with many of the consumers that seemed to go on forever. I made many good friendships that I still retain such as Angela Oroumis and Rosemary Iera. Rosemary was the training director of ADEC's new registered Training Unit. We outgrew our building in Brunswick Street. After searching many sites for a new building we eventually selected 13 Munro Street in Coburg. The Munro Street venue had more of a corporate look. Gabriel even started to wear a suit and tie, which said it all.

Disability was a new field for me and ADEC was the first

place that gave me an understanding of the barriers faced by people with disabilities, including culture and language. It had in my opinion a unique and recognised mandate, free of great competition from others, to undertake social action.

I have tried to bring my learning at ADEC into every facet of my personal and public life. For example I took my children to ADEC and I remember it was the first time my son had contact with people with disabilities.

I left ADEC in 1998 and travelled overseas to several countries including Greece from where my family originates. After returning I worked for Whittlesea Council and later became a councillor. In 2007 I was elected Mayor of Whittlesea.

Whittlesea has the third largest population of ethnic residents in Victoria. I have tried to pass on the learnings here that I gained at ADEC. My experience there gave me a sensitivity which today as a decision maker and budget allocator helps me to make better decisions.

For example we recently launched a mentoring program in the disability sector. I will be a mentor for a person who will work with me in my role as mayor. She has multiple sclerosis and has a good understanding of the impact of disability. I'm looking forward to listening and learning many good ideas from her.

## The Story of ADEC

My daughter is in her forties and is developmentally delayed since she suffered an unexpected illness as a child. She attends a government-funded facility during the day. She cannot go anywhere without me. Where she goes, mum goes! The group at ADEC helps me personally and to get me out of the house.

Nancy 2008

I come to ADEC and receive knowledge, practical assistance and mutual support. My sister is blind and I have been her carer for seven years. My husband's health is also poor – he suffers from prostate cancer and leukaemia. What I need is not money but psychological support. Thank you ADEC.

Giuesspina 2008



*Multicultural family respite excursion*

## Chapter Six

# GETTING DOWN TO IT 1992–1999

*'We worked long and hard as a team to professionalise every aspect of ADEC, including governance structures, communications, image, logo, location, constitution, membership, data collection and board structure.'*

Gabriel Maligeorges

ADEC had established a rigorous database that recorded every contact with consumers and organisations, including phone calls. It proved to government that requests from consumers and providers were growing steadily from the early nineties onwards. ADEC's enthusiasm for working with mainstream providers to achieve systemic reform, regardless of their location in Victoria, also attracted support from funding bodies.

In 1992 a two-year consultancy attempted to perfect a new

model of creating cultural change within generic agencies. Its steering committee included Ben Bodna, the Public Advocate. By 1993 annual income had risen to almost \$363,000.

### **Defying recession**

In 1994 Australia was officially in economic recession. Yet ADEC's membership doubled in the year to 1995. Requests from consumers rose to 800, up from 326 in 1993. There were over 1800 request from service providers. By the end of the decade there were over 100 new clients a year raising 1130 distinct issues requiring resolution. For two years ADEC also ran an advocacy program for victims of torture and trauma.

Another milestone in 1994 was the funding by aged and disability services (HACC) of a social support group for Turkish carers of people with disabilities. The ADEC model used facilitators employed from within ethnic communities and was highly successful. The program would grow dramatically as governments recognised the enormous contributions made by carers in Australia. By the end of the decade there were four ethnic carers groups: Turkish, Italian, Vietnamese and Arabic. There were also two new HACC systemic advocacy projects implementing cultural planning both Victoria-wide and in the Northern region.

In 1994 ADEC also became one of the earliest ethnic organisations to develop cultural training as a business activity that serviced mainstream organisations and government. This promoted ADEC across Victoria, helped improve services in a practical way, and attracted badly needed funds. By 1999 it was running twelve separate courses with 1100 participants and was a registered training organisation. Consultancies through the

business unit were also bringing in a regular income stream.

### **The bigger picture**

With ADEC now set firmly on a program of growth, it turned its attention to the national stage. In 1993 it hosted in Melbourne the first national conference of its kind, called *The Impact of Disability in Ethnic Communities: Meeting the Challenge*.

The conference was successful and generated enthusiasm for a national body. A funding proposal to the Federal Government in April 1994 was successful. A consultant was engaged to assist in the establishment and operation of a National Ethnic Disability Alliance or 'NEDA'.

Four founding members directed the project: ADEC, the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association in NSW, MALSSA in South Australia and the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre in Western Australia. The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia also contributed greatly.

NEDA was launched on 12 August 1994 by Dr Andrew Theophanous, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister for Human Services and Health. In 1995 ADEC supported the infant NEDA in Melbourne and coordinated its transition to Canberra. The first annual general meeting was held in Parliament House, Canberra on 20 September 1996. ADEC also became a member of the National Ethnic Disability Committee.

In 1995 the Home and Community Care industry was developing a program to implement cultural planning throughout the state. ADEC developed most of the manuals,

tools and resources for this industry and piloted them in different parts of Victoria. This resulted in over five hundred agencies developing annual plans to improve their services to consumers.

## **Off to Coburg**

ADEC was outgrowing its home in Sydney Road. In 1996 the committee agreed to relocate to larger premises for its twenty-one staff and after some searching found new premises at 13 Munro Street near the Coburg shopping centre. The new office included an ethnic library and a specially fitted training room.

*I have been a member of the Italian Carers for close to twenty years starting when we were in Sydney Road in Brunswick. My daughters were without any illness at all in their childhood. Suddenly at fifteen years and twenty years of age respectively they became disabled because of a genetic inheritance. ADEC gave me lots of help including helping us obtain scooters for both of them. My husband's health is also poor. As a family we participated in many fun-filled days and numerous gatherings and special functions. Throughout the years joining in the groups has been a rewarding experience. The support, understanding and guidance is of a high standard. I look forward to continuing my association with ADEC.*

Emilia 2008

## **GABRIEL'S TALE**

*Gabriel Maligeorges was ADEC's longest serving director, from 1991 to 2000. Since leaving ADEC he has worked at the Legal Aid Commission.*

I started as the psychiatric project worker at Sydney Road before becoming director. My role with the board, under the leadership of Maria Cesarello and George Bisas, was to restructure ADEC and build its capacity to ensure its survival in the long term. We worked long and hard as a team to professionalise every aspect of ADEC, including governance structures, communications, image, logo, location, constitution, membership, data collection and board structure.

Initially we sub-let the upstairs area to a disability self-help group but they departed after a year, which was a good thing because by then we had expanded and needed the space for new programs. We eventually moved to Munro Street near the Coburg shopping area, which gave us more space, a shop-front and a training room.

When I started, there were four full-time individual advocates with a focus on school integration based on four key language groups with little systemic focus. Susan Fitch played a role in the early intervention program integrating kids into the school system, which was a traditional aspect of ADEC service.

However, I believe it was hypocritical to espouse the principle of open access to services when we ourselves

were limiting our access to specific ethnic groups. We restructured internally, changing from an ethno-specific model to one of the earliest multicultural (and statewide) services addressing both the wider ethnic community and the service system where 95% of all resources were located.

We specialised our positions, devoting two to intellectual disability, one to systemic change and one to training. We broadened ADEC's focus from schools and intellectual disability to include other areas such as mental health, and Home and Community Care. Our constitution was also re-modelled to include the ADEC mission and improve participation by board members with the skills to run a professional organisation.

Our core mission, like the wider disability field, was to improve access to services. We saw systemic change as means of achieving this but our definition was much broader than the government's. We engaged in a huge range of projects to improve policy and resources for service providers. I think we did sixty or seventy projects, including developing the cross-cultural training as well as the disability training packages for the HACC industry. We also designed the cultural planning tool used to reform HACC services statewide.

Because of the great volume of projects we employed a regular pool of consultants such as Katherine Wositzky and Josie Prioletti. This gave us greater quality control, ensuring our projects came in on time and on budget. At one stage we were doing about a dozen projects simultaneously.

These projects often only paid for themselves but they got ADEC's name and reputation out into the field.

We began to receive requests to assist in the actual implementation of organisational change. The field had developed to the point where many services were enthusiastic and had the right policies in place but lacked the skills to actually reform their organisations. We realised that there was a niche in the training sector that could improve access to services and as a result launched our accredited training and business unit. We were also desperate for funds and the fee-for-service structure of training enabled greater economic independence from government at a time when the state budget was slashed by the new Kennett Liberal Government that came into power in October 1992.

We did, however, successfully win support for ADEC's mandate from the new government. As we had with the Labor Government, we achieved strong working relationships with ministers such as Michael John, Dennis Napthine and Robert Doyle. In fact we were about the only group to meet with Michael John while in opposition although it was patently obvious the Liberals would win the election. When John became Minister for Community Services, his first public event was a launch at ADEC.

We believed ADEC's role was to be in the vanguard of change and achieved a reputation for innovation especially in information provision. After a concerted effort we expanded the membership base to 400, one of the largest in the state. Our regular newsletters had a distribution of

up to 6000 people. Our database recorded every contact made by the agency, even phone calls. We distributed a huge range of multilingual resources and were one of the first agencies to provide multilingual resources on the Internet, a seminal project funded by the Commonwealth. We even established a comprehensive ethnic library with its own catalogue. We used evidence of membership, statistics and mailing lists as a powerful case to tender to government for funds to carry out projects.

In one of our most innovative projects, we expanded nationwide to create the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA). The Commonwealth gave us funds as they saw the value of consultation with a national body. ADEC initially hosted a national ethnic disability conference in Melbourne with 300 participants that created the impetus for change. We wrote the proposal, obtained funds, developed a national policy, established an alliance with ethnic disability organisations in other states, chose Canberra as a base, set up NEDA and then transferred our funding to it. NEDA provided the stimulus for other ethnic disability organisations to be created in NSW and WA.

When I started in 1991 ADEC had an annual budget of about \$250,000 with a reserve of \$20,000. When I left in 2000 to take up a position at the Legal Aid Commission, the board had achieved a turnover almost four times that with a reserve of about \$200,000.



*Young artists display their creations at ArtAbility launch at Gasworks Park*

## Chapter Seven

# A NEW MILLENNIUM 2000–2008

*'It remains the mission of ADEC to improve the knowledge about the rights and the ability to access services for people with a disability and their carers. Each one of us must choose to understand one another's differences and choose to participate in the community.'*  
Patrick Testa (chairperson) and Jan Ginis (president) 2002

The new millennium at ADEC started with many changes. Gabriel Maligeorges took up a position at the Legal Aid Commission and was replaced at the helm by Licia Kokocinski. President Maria Cesarello retired from the committee after many years of contribution. Chairperson George Bisas also retired to eventually take up a position at the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

The new Labor Government elected in 1999 had a strong

platform to support people experiencing disabilities, carers and also ethnic communities, and would preside over a period of unprecedented growth. In 2001 the Bracks government passed the landmark Racial and Religious Tolerance Act. A year later ADEC was actively involved in organising focus groups with its ethnic consumers for the government's ten-year State Disability Plan including a review of the Disability Services Act 1986.

ADEC's service provision was also adversely affected at times by changes in government policy. ADEC campaigned against a government decision to reduce subsidised taxi services to the disability community. The long-standing individual advocacy program came under threat of reduction by a Federal Government review. The State Government froze growth in social support in 2004.

I came to ADEC after my husband, who works at another ethnic organisation, heard about it. Others also said that ADEC could help me support my son. My son had meningitis when young. A year later he also developed schizophrenia.

Aurora 2008

## **Unchaining the agency**

It was obvious from ADEC's history that funds from government made the organisation vulnerable to the changing politics of the day. The board initiated preparations for a five-year strategic plan (2005–2010), including a strategy to seek more independent sources of funding. The plan also revamped

## The Story of ADEC

the mission and goals, and restructured services into three teams of Client Services; Administration and Education Equity and Access.

By 2003 the number of social support groups had more than doubled, with eleven carers groups from six different ethnic communities meeting across metropolitan Melbourne and providing mutual support, information exchange, self-advocacy, health promotion and excursions. New groups included Afghan, Chinese and Greek. Mental health self-advocacy groups of clients also expanded, with four groups – Turkish, Vietnamese and two Chinese – meeting across three regions.

A new multicultural family respite service was added using volunteers matched to specific families. One of ADEC's



*Multicultural family respite excursion to the footy.*

founding members, Effie Meehan, returned to work at ADEC; she facilitated a community reference group to promote self-advocacy and provided feedback to the ADEC board.

### **Stormy times**

Growth again put strain on ADEC's accommodation. A storm in December 2003 also severely damaged the Coburg building and eight months later ADEC relocated to larger premises in Bell Street, Preston.

The implementation of ADEC's strategic plan in 2005 preceded a rapid expansion of services. The mental health team expanded to create greater community awareness. In 2007 the team organised a statewide conference on ethnicity, ageing and mental health to highlight this neglected welfare area.

The Education and Training Unit in partnership with a private provider expanded to deliver training for workers in areas such as aged and disability industries, English as a second language, occupational health, personal care, and childcare qualifications for women from the Horn of Africa.

The long-standing individual advocacy program survived the threat of reduction and even expanded to allocate a new full-time worker to the western suburbs. As always, issues raised by clients attending ADEC were used to respond to larger systemic issues. A program of language-specific play groups was piloted for preschoolers aged up to six years old, experiencing autism spectrum disorder and other disabilities but has struggled to find permanent funds.

## **Artistic license**

In 2005 ADEC hosted the first of its annual ArtAbility exhibitions at Gasworks Arts Park, selling visual works of art by people with a disability from ethnic communities. Susan Maroney is one of history's greatest long-distance swimmers despite experiencing cerebral palsy at birth. As ArtAbility Ambassador she launched the ArtAbility exhibition at Federation Square in 2007.

ADEC prepared for further expansion in 2007 after it won a very substantial grant from the Federal Government to implement a long-term respite initiative for older ethnic consumers with disabilities.

In 2008 The North West Partnership was launched at the Melbourne Zoo, representing a huge range of ethnic service providers in the north and west of Melbourne in research, training peer support and policy. ADEC coordinates the network with a position won at tender in 1996.

I came in contact with ADEC through word of mouth five years ago. My son has schizophrenia. I have issues with mental health providers who have not been helpful. I am passed from one worker to another and have to explain everything all over again. ADEC has been of much more practical assistance.

Antonio 2008

## Today and tomorrow

Most of the 250 or so staff and committee members that have served ADEC over the past quarter century have moved on to take their passion and enthusiasm into an extraordinary range of fields including public service, politics, local government, providers, academia and the arts. Many were reunited when an anniversary celebration was held at Coburg Town Hall on 17 October 2008, exactly twenty-five years after ADEC's founders had gathered in Carlton and taken the courageous step to create an independent service.

Since its foundation, ADEC services have been in a constant state of evolution which will, no doubt, continue for the foreseeable future. Its service culture has been a reflection of



*Staff Christmas party splash*

the ever-changing needs, aspirations and creativity of its ever-changing clients, staff, members and volunteers. In 1983 it was a small self-help group with a budget of less than \$11,000. By 2008 it had achieved revenue of \$1.67 million and a staff of 35.

Some things, however, have not changed.

In 1983 chairperson Alun Jackson wrote: ‘The commitment to self-determination for our non-English-speaking consumers with disabilities is the cornerstone of ADEC’s operations.’

In 2000 chairperson George Bisas wrote that ADEC had overcome a difficult and hostile environment to be ‘recognised as the leading advocacy organisation in Australia for people with disabilities from non-English-speaking backgrounds and one which has initiated innovative, original and highly professional responses to the issues facing its constituents’.

In 2008 chairperson Antoinette Khalil wrote: ‘I continue to be dismayed at the continued marginalisation of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and of people with a disability.’

The fight for equality goes on.

## LICIA'S TALE

*Licia Kokocinski joined ADEC in 2000 after a varied career including consultancy and policy work in aged care. She is a former Labor Member of Parliament who represented Melbourne West province between 1988 and 1996.*

When I started at ADEC, most of the staff and board had been here for some time. Within six months many of the board retired and most of the staff had left for other opportunities – not unusual when there is a change of leadership. I faced the daunting task of hiring a new staff group and recruiting new members of the board. There was also a change to Labor Government setting a different political and social agenda for Victoria. All these challenges were, however, a great opportunity to look at the past and plan for the future.

There were three main things that the new board and I wanted to achieve. Firstly we were very excited about the possibilities of expanding the work of our education unit to organisations, families and individuals.

We believed very strongly that working with organisations, families and individuals would lead to real social change. Education creates opportunities, reduces barriers and improves self-esteem. For organisations education provides the grounding they need to be able to respond better to the needs of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Since I started as director, our Education Unit has probably tripled its output including many more formal education

courses. The education sectors such as TAFE have changed hugely over the decade and we have moved to fill the gaps they have left behind them.

Secondly we wanted to create an evidence base for the advocacy we do. Advocacy is a cornerstone of ADEC and our consumers' experiences and lives tell us the truth about the needs of ethnic communities and the changes needed in society. It is a false premise that advocacy conflicts with being a service provider and we have aimed to grow the number of direct services we deliver. Our consumers' experiences provide evidence and a powerful tool to influence politicians about the services that ethnic communities and organisations really need.

The third area has always been planning for a long-term sustainable future for ADEC. In 2001 I was very enthusiastic about planning for the next ten years. Today I am thinking of the next twenty-five years! No doubt ADEC will always exist but in a state of constant change because the needs of our constituents are always going to be changing. I want ADEC to always be constituency-based. Our clients' needs must always come first.

Government policies are always changing. At government and community levels, there is growing support for not-for-profit organisations but at the same time, I believe government always wants to have more control over community providers. It will always be imperative to maintain our autonomy despite pressure from government to conform, and to remain true to the needs of our consumers, our values and our vision.

The model we always use at ADEC is that ultimately we don't really spend too much time dwelling on a person's disability – what we do is work with individuals to see how we can support them to get on with their lives as full Australian citizens. It is the person we are working with.

The staff is an incredible resource and one of my challenging roles is to find staff with the pre-existing skills, the ability to communicate well and, of course, empathy with culturally and linguistically diverse consumers. Our staff is highly motivated but we don't want to burn them out either!

Recent research has shown that ADEC as an organisation is unique in the world with a unique mandate. In the past, ADEC helped set up similar, but smaller organisations in other capital cities. One of my roles is to create an intersection between ethnicity/multiculturalism and disability.

Internationally no other organisation does this. My role every day is to be constantly thinking about ways to maintain that place in the world for at least the next quarter century.

## ADEC MILESTONES

- 1981 Bernie Leeman and Effie Meehan meet at an International Year of Disabled Persons event. They and others of the Committee of Ethnicity and Disability undertake a research project through the Ethnic Communities Council to determine the needs of communities.
- 1982 Funds are received from the Commonwealth Schools Commission Severely Handicapped Children's Program to commence an ADEC project.
- 1983, October 17, ADEC project becomes an independent organisation.
- 1984, November, first AGM at Carringbush Library.
- 1984–1985 ADEC survives on seed funding from Schools Commission, grants from trusts and Commonwealth Employment Program funding.
- 1986 ADEC in financial crisis. Director Silvana Scibilia secures emergency funding from Federal Government for nine months.
- 1987 ADEC secures funding from Commonwealth and State Governments for a four-year demonstration project.
- 1987 ADEC relocates with ten staff to 123–125 Sydney Road, Brunswick.
- 1988 Director Liz Papanicolaou commences to implement restructure and three-year plan.
- 1989 First ADEC newsletter produced; first computer purchased. First Home and Community Care project commences.
- ADEC's mental health program begins as the ethnic access psychiatric project.
- 1992 ADEC restructures. Adopts generalist advocacy model.

## Fighting for Equality

- 1993 Tenth anniversary celebration.  
Hosts the first national conference of its kind in Melbourne, *The Impact of Disability in Ethnic Communities: Meeting the Challenge*.  
Education and Training Unit is formed.  
New State Government (1992) reduces funding to agencies.
- 1995 Constitution reviewed.  
ADEC membership doubles.
- 1994 First HACC social support group for carers commences.
- 1994–1996 ADEC facilitates the establishment of the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA).
- 1996 ADEC relocates from Brunswick to 13 Munro Street, Coburg.
- 1997 Two HACC Equity and Access Projects: Statewide and Northern Region are now operating.
- 1999 ADEC has completed over fifty research and service development projects since 1989.  
Maria Cesarello, Effie Meehan and Bernie Leeman awarded life memberships.
- 2000 Licia Kokocinski commences as director with Patrick Testa as chairperson.
- 2002 HACC Social Support Program increases to 11 carers groups across three regions.  
Multicultural Family Respite service commences.  
Community reference group established.
- 2004 ADEC relocates to Preston after Coburg building is damaged in storm.
- 2005 ADEC launches five-year strategic plan 2005–2010.  
First annual ArtAbility Exhibition held at Gasworks Park.
- 2006 ADEC receives funding for Northern region network coordinator.

## The Story of ADEC

Education and Training Unit programs expand in partnership with Mediquest.

Mental health program expands with new community development program. There are now four mental health support groups.

2007 Statewide conference on ethnicity, ageing and mental health is held.

Individual advocacy program expands to western suburbs.

Carer and mental health self-help groups expand to sixteen in number.

2008 ADEC receives federal funding for respite service.

25th anniversary celebration at Coburg Town Hall.

North West Partnership launched.

History of ADEC published.

**STAFF AND BOARD  
MEMBERS OF ADEC  
1983–2008**

**STAFF MEMBERS**

Ahmed Zeed  
Alanya van de Wiel  
Anastasia Meimeteas  
Angela Nesci  
Angela Oroumis  
Anita Buczkowsky  
Arthur Constantinos  
Barry Petrovski  
Barry Strmelj  
Ben Isley  
Bernarda Radovanovich  
Brenda Harrington  
Carlo Carli  
Chau Tran  
Chris Dunk  
Chris O'Conner  
Christina Borg-Bono  
Clare Hickman  
Dam Tran  
Damien Pitts  
Daniella Sammartino  
Denise Dawson  
Diane McGilvray  
Dominic Balliro  
Dr Hua Cao  
Effie Meehan  
Elisa Power

Elizabeth Gardiner  
Elizabeth Ignys  
Elizabeth Papanicolaou  
Ellen Dimitrijevic  
Eve Eidelson  
Fatma Gude  
Filiz Eleveli  
Fiona Seymour  
Gabriel Maligeorges, E/director  
1991 -2000  
Gail Abbot  
Gianni Bonacina  
Hacer Tuncel  
Hadra Mustefa  
Hai Nguyen  
Halime Duzen  
Hanh Nguyen  
Helen Evert  
Helen Lin  
Helen Noble  
Helen Vergados  
Hong Nguyen  
Hua Cao  
Huong Viet Nguyen  
Isil Yucesaz  
Jenny Cheng  
Jenny Kovacic  
Jenny Sharples  
Jenny Zagroon  
Jim Asimakopoulos  
Joan Cooney  
Joan Lloyd  
Joan McClure

## The Story of ADEC

Jonno Morris	Maria Papadimitriou
Josie Prioletti	Maria Tascone
Julia Zanin	Marie Uyen Nguyen-Carrington
Kalli Lontos	Marina Edmond
Karen Fok	Mary Couchlan
Karina Tsang	Mary-ann Liethof
Kath McKay	Maurice Almdawar
Katherine Wositzky	Melanie Guiney
Kathy Nicolas	Melanie Leung
Katie Mackenzie	Meyer Eidelson
Kemal Cevikoglu	Michael Longo
Kim Hoang	Michelle Towers
Kim Nguyen	Nadia Younes
Kim van Nguyen	Nam Doan
Kostas Kondelias	Nancy Vanin
Kris Pavlidis	Natalija Nesvadba
Laurice Demian	Nevia Kalcic
Leila Alloush	Nevia Petch
Leisa Emberson	Nicole Braniff
Leonie Davey	Nilufer Yaman
Leyla Besiroglu	Nuran Ozdemir
Licia Kokocinski, E/director 2000-2008	Peggy Alexandropoulos
Lieselotte Ingrassia	Peter Jasonides
Lily Sukovski	Ramon Sherlock
Lissa Kennedy	Rosemarie Iera
Liz Papanicolaou/Dimitriades, E/director 1988-1991	Ross Goodwin
Lucy Bloomfield	Rosy Kos
Lynne Antcliffe	Sally Camilleri
Madeleine Havyatt	Samia Mina
Malena Stankovski	Sarah Jane King
Maria Morena	Semra Tirli
	Shaima Shahbaz
	Shirley Tong

## Fighting for Equality

Siang Jeffries  
Silvana Scibilia, Director 1984  
- 1988  
Silvia Borrelli  
Simon Freidin  
Stephanie Kondos  
Stephanie Merazzi  
Stephen Ziguras  
Sue Spence  
Susan Fitch  
Tamara Mitchell  
Tracey Stewart  
Valdina La Terra  
Vicki Mckay  
Vittoria Mancini  
Vivian Simonelli  
Wallace Leung  
Wesa Chau

## The Story of ADEC

### BOARD MEMBERS

Adua Merola	Gerard Mansour
Alun Jackson, Chairperson 1984-1987	Gloria Kupresanin
Anastasia Katelanis	Habeeb Shabo
Andrea Fogarty-Young	Harvey Ritchie
Anice Sadatmehr	Helen Bryant
Annette Sassano	Helen Patsikatheodorou
Antoinette Khalil, Chairperson 2006-2008	Sir James Gobbo (former patron)
Bernie Leeman, Chairperson 1983	Jacqui Almack
Colleen Dixon	Jan Ginis, President 2001-2
Con Tsingas	Jann Milic
Cynthia Fan	Jenny Sharples, chairperson
Dalal Elkhawand	Jim Asimakopoulos
Dominic Balliro	Joan McClure
Edward Sciberras, President 1996-1998	John Woodward
Effie Meehan, Chairperson 1987-1988	Joyce Apap
Emmy Elbaum	Julie Kostrevski
Erik Lloga	Kamal Ishak
Fran Draycott	Kathy Licciardo
Frances Mckay	Kevin Fell
Gabrielle Fakhri	Laila Elguindy
Gaby Kabbas	Lucio Naccarella
Gary Bush	Luigi Papaleo
George Bisas, Chairperson 1995-2000	Luisa Havyatt
George Lekakis	Marcia Arvanitakis
George Manoussakis	Maree Ivey
	Maree Raftis
	Margherita Coppolino
	Maria Barone
	Maria Carmusciano
	Maria Cesarello, Chairperson 1991- 1995, President 1995-6 & 1998-2000
	Maria Dimopoulos

## Fighting for Equality

Marina Ruivivar  
Nell White  
Nick Kongas  
Nikki Dollis, Chairperson 1988-  
1999  
Orlando Mascitti  
Papatya Hanyal  
Patrick Testa, Chairperson 2001-  
2005  
Peggy Alexandropoulos  
Rene Huish, A/chairperson 1988  
Richard Berger  
Robert Chen  
Romeo Bianchin  
Rosa Colosimo  
Sathurma Oruk  
Sema Budak  
Sergio Giurina  
Serme Erdogan  
Sevda Cetmeyilmaz  
Sevim Sagdic  
Sia Leventis  
Simon Payne  
Sophie Holmes  
Sophie Nguyen  
Sue Spence  
Sultan Sinar  
Susan Mina  
Susan Porter  
Sylvia Dardaganis  
Voula Katsianis  
Waleeh Mina

The Story of ADEC



*Chinese self-help group*



*Horn of Africa childcare group. ADEC organised childcare while training their mothers to achieve certificate 11 in community services work*

*ADEC premises: 1983-2008*



*35 Bridge Road, Richmond 1983-1986*

The Story of ADEC



*206 Drummond Street, Carlton 1986-1987*



*123-5 Sydney Road, Brunswick 1987-1996*

Fighting for Equality



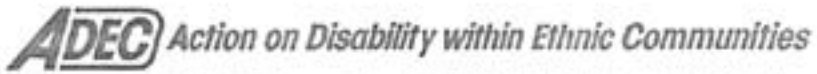
*13 Munro Street, Coburg 1996-2004*



*175 Plenty Road, Preston 2004-2008*

The Story of ADEC

## ADEC Logos 1983- 2008



123-125 Sydney Road, BRUNSVICK, 3056 Telephone: 387-2108



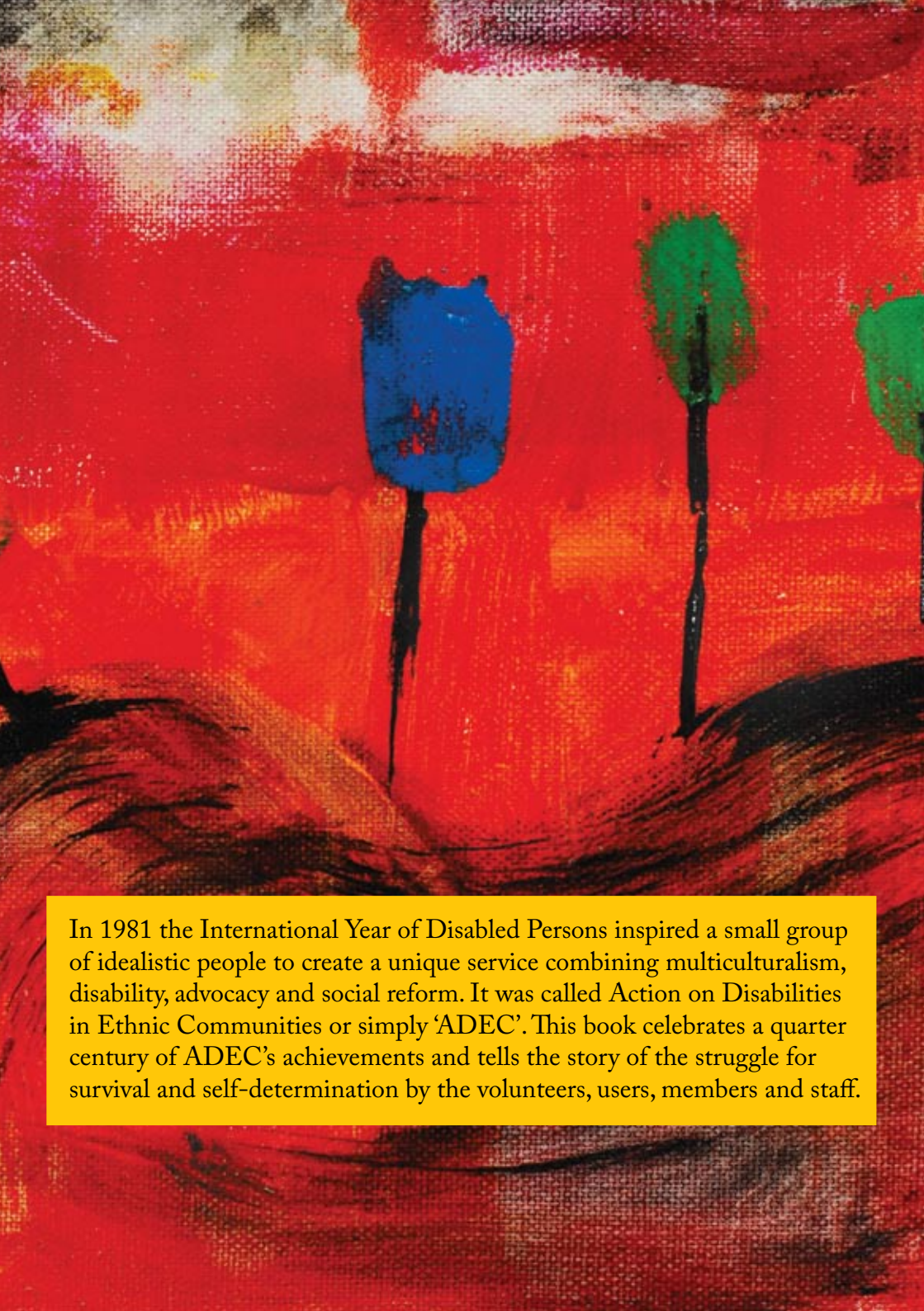
***Vision:***

*To empower people with disabilities from ethnic backgrounds, their carers and families to fully participate as members of the community*



***Mission:***

*To assist people with disabilities from ethnic backgrounds, their carers and families to access services and ensure that service systems are inclusive and responsive to their needs*



In 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons inspired a small group of idealistic people to create a unique service combining multiculturalism, disability, advocacy and social reform. It was called Action on Disabilities in Ethnic Communities or simply 'ADEC'. This book celebrates a quarter century of ADEC's achievements and tells the story of the struggle for survival and self-determination by the volunteers, users, members and staff.