



Report for the 62nd SACOSS AGM for the year 2008-2009

SACOSS Representative: Chris Halsey

Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund

Background

The Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund for Children and Young People was set up in 2003 by the South Australian Government and SACOSS. Its purpose is to make grants available to children and young people who are, or have been, under the guardianship or care of the Minister for Families and Communities (the current name for the Department responsible). The Trust Fund is overseen by an advisory board and funds are administered by the Public Trustee.

In 2007 another Deed was set up, with one million dollars specifically for children and young people with a disability who are, or have been, in state care. This year (2009) there was another deed set up for children and young people who are in financial need.

In the earlier years of the Fund's operation there were three funding rounds per year, but as the capital has decreased (and interest has also declined) the number of funding rounds has been reduced to two per annum – one round in February and another in September.

Board members were aware that this reduction had an unwelcome impact on potential recipients and agreed that work should be done to position the fund to attract and receive donations. Therefore, over the past 12 months staff in the Dept for Families and Communities have assisted in the preparation of documents designed to achieve Deductible Gift Recipient Status so that the life of the Fund may be extended.

Unfortunately the Fund has become a source that is heavily relied on to supplement children's and young people's capacity to access the essentials of life -- whereas initially the hope was that the Fund could provide assistance to access some "icing on the cake" activities to enable young people to participate in experiences they could otherwise not have.

In 2008-09

Much of the funding allocated went towards household items, computers (which are seen as an essential item these days) vehicles and driving lessons; less went to education, business or health expenses, and a very small proportion went towards airfares.

It is impossible to fund 100% of the applications received, so the Board gives careful consideration to the allocation of funds. This task becomes harder with each round. For example, in one round in the last financial year we could only afford to allocate one third of the funds requested. This situation challenges Board members' values and judgements and gives rise to some length discussions.

The Board now works with price guides and has an arrangement for computer purchases, and with TAFE, amongst other things. This has taken some of the angst



Report for the 62nd SACOSS AGM for the year 2008-2009

out of decision making. Of course, applicants' individual circumstances are taken into consideration as much as possible. However, the Public Trustee decides how much funding we have available for allocation each round, and also makes the final decision about the recommendations that are put by the Board re what should be funded.

2009-10

We hope that the application for DGR status will be finalised positively and that will in turn mean looking for other sources of funds and donations.

The Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund has so far greatly assisted hundreds of young people and children and hopefully will continue to do so for a long time yet. I feel privileged to continue to represent SACOSS in this endeavour.