# Chairperson’s report, August 2023

Conference year is always a big one for the DGHA Committee and 2023 was no exception.

As well as planning the biggest conference we’ve ever had with over 70 attendees, presenters and volunteers, DGHA collected much needed data on Dog Guide refusals as a first step in eliminating the seemingly worsening refusal problem we are seeing across the country.

As well as collecting data, we also revealed the significant problem of reporting fatigue and immense frustration felt by members at the lack of positive outcomes in response to reporting refusals to businesses, services, schools and authorities. Not only is there a refusal problem, there is also a significant problem in being able to prove breeches of law and in enforcing the laws that already exist.

We have evidence over many years to show that our individual education, awareness and advocacy efforts, including media reports and formal complaints to authorities isn’t helping, the problem continues and appears to be getting worse.

DGHA member and founder of Travel Paws, Nina Smith initiated the creation of a committee called Assistance Dog Advisory Committee – Taxi and Rideshare Services (AACTRS, pronounced Actors) in response to having attracted the ear of the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) with her advocacy work around taxi and rideshare refusals. The purpose of this committee is to deliver a united approach in all initiatives focussed on preventing and eliminating refusals. The Committee will work on behalf of all Dog Guide and Assistance Dog Handlers. They will be co-designing with a joint working group comprised of Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, Department of Transport & Planning and the Regulator, Safe Transport Victoria. It is intended that a successful pilot in Victoria will provide guidance to other states in the future. The AACTRS committee is made up of representatives from the following organisations:

* Annette Ferguson – Chairperson - Dog Guide Handlers Australia
* Sarah Emery - Chief Operating Officer - Assistance Dogs Australia
* Jeremy Anderson - National Policy & Government Relations Advisor - Guide Dogs Australia
* Jackson Reynolds-Ryan - Team Leader, Policy and Advocacy - Blind Citizens Australia
* Nina Smith - Founder & Director - TravelPaws.

The committee are in the very early stages of setting their terms of reference, defining their mission and goals and will be able to share more on their progress in the near future.

Our Facebook group continues to be a place for robust conversation and supportive connection between members. We’ve gained 69 new Facebook group members since November 2022 and our Lifetime membership list is nearing 200.

We ran two Members’ teleconferences within the last year, both well attended and with great discussion from attendees. The topics were pedestrian safety and how to collect evidence of taxi and rideshare refusals.

Looking to the next 12 months as you’ll see from our conference program, we’re focusing on collaborative and durable solutions to the taxi and rideshare refusal situation. It’s time to shift the onus of responsibility for reporting refusals and seeking justice from victim to perpetrator. Collecting data on refusals from our membership is still important and we encourage members to continue to report refusals via our [online form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd6Uq7CvPrFnq3kgx76HznGGKvN-WxahOQq2AfBI5QpPfQOyw/viewform?usp=sf_link). As well as working with the AACTRS committee, we’re working toward a collaborative partnership with Dr Amanda Muller who is building a national reporting database to make reporting a whole lot easier and be one source of truth for all states and Assistance Dogs as well.

We currently have some vacant committee positions and we’d like to encourage members with a passion for collaboration, brainstorming, problem solving and making a difference to step up and join us. Our current committee are a great group of people, very diverse in age, experience as Handlers and in governance. Our meetings are casual and enjoyable and we welcome new blood and new ideas.

In our upcoming non-conference year we’re planning to engage our membership with some governance housekeeping. We’ll be conducting some data cleansing on our membership database, so expect some communication to confirm your current details. We’ll be reviewing and implementing some policies and procedures, defining more clearly what we are here to achieve, reviewing our website and creating a communications plan. This list may not sound too exciting, but it will set us up for success in the future. We’d like to know what you’d like to talk and hear about at our Members’ teleconferences and what matters to you.

I took over the Chairperson’s role mid 2022 and have thoroughly enjoyed working with everyone on our committee: Kirsten Busby, Vice Chair with her fierce passion for advocacy; Greg Madson, Secretary with his years of experience on boards and in the blindness community and wicked sense of humour; John Hardie, Treasurer, one of the most committed and passionate people I’ve ever met who goes above and beyond in everything he does; Francois Jacobs, whose attention to detail has saved my butt many times; Ros Matthews, loves to make everything a good and fair experience for everyone; Murray Stone, a quiet achiever and always a great support; Margaret Booth, always has a good solution to any problem; Stacey Hipwell, task oriented get stuff done girl with a knack for bringing in donations; Bronwyn Drew provided us with many a good read over the last three years with some colossal editions of the DGHA Newsletter; Stephanie Mitchel our newest committee member and newsletter editor with a passion for writing; and last but in no way least, Erika Webb who is technically not a committee member, but a very committed contributor to DGHA who attends all meetings, is a very fair (blonde) and fair admin of our Facebook group, social media manager and master of many other behind the scenes activities that keep DGHA ticking along nicely. You’re a great bunch of people and thank you for all your time, your hard work and support.

Annette Ferguson

Chairperson, DGHA.

Treasurer Report: on behalf of John Hardie

**DGHA Financial Statement 1 July 2022 - 30 June 2023**

**ANZ ACCOUNT**

Balance of ANZ Account as of 1 July 2022: $9,844.38

**ANZ Account Incoming since 1 July 2022:**

Memberships: $320.00

Guide Dogs Victoria Conference Grant: $1,000.00

Vision Australia Conference Grant: $3,000.00

Conference Registrations: $11,825.00

Donations $10.00

Total Income into ANZ Account: $16,155.00

**Outgoing from ANZ Account since 1 July 2022:**

Website & Domain Fees: $293.85

1password subscription: $168.99

Funds to participants for Conference: $5,000.00

Royal on the Park Conference Venue: $8,500.00

Dropbox: $184.67

Zoom: $230.89

Total Outgoing from ANZ: $14,378.40

Balance of ANZ Account as of 30 June 2023: $11,189.73

**PAYPAL ACCOUNT**

PayPal Account Balance as of 1 July 2022: $3,937.45

**Incoming into PayPal Account since 1 July 2022:**

Memberships: $100.00

Total Income into PayPal: $100.00

**Outgoing from PayPal Account since 1 July 2022:**

PayPal Fees: $4.10

Total Outgoing from PayPal: $4.10

PayPal Account Balance as of 30 June 2023: $4,033.35

**Total Balances for Accounts as of 30 June 2023:**

ANZ Account: $11,189.73

PayPal Account: $4,033.35

Total Balances: $15,223.08