

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

WAG ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1 November 1994

On the occasion of our first AGM, we should congratulate ourselves on our remarkable achievements over the past year. From our first meeting of only twelve whistleblowers just over a year ago, we've grown into a strong and viable group of over 100 whistleblowers and associate members, all united in our common goal of challenging and eliminating wrongdoing in the workplace. We became an incorporated body in January, and have now achieved tax exempt status.

Since our election in early February, your Executive have worked non-stop to achieve WAG's goals, and to get across to those in power in Queensland the message that some radical changes are needed in the legislation and in the workplace.

In spite of our efforts, we still have not yet managed to achieve our goal of giving our invaluable input into the Queensland Whistleblowers Protection Bill. Nevertheless, there is no question that the government is well aware of our existence. While we may not be able to influence the whistleblower legislation in this State, we will strive to ensure that the legislative principles developed by your Executive will receive recognition and have an impact on future whistleblower protection legislation which is yet to be formulated by the Federal Government and the Parliaments of the other States.

However, even though the voice of WAG has been ignored by the Goss Government, that of our individual whistleblowers has not. Kerrie Campbell's courageous acts are now enshrined in the Queensland Whistleblower Protection legislation. Clause 19 of the Bill will be known as the "Kerrie Campbell Clause".

Clause 19(1)

This section applies if anybody has information about -

- (a) a substantial and specific danger to the health or safety of a person with a disability;

Since February your Executive have met at least fortnightly, and more often as special meetings were needed to deal with various whistleblowing emergencies. I would like to highlight some of the activities your Executive has undertaken in the past eight months.

- \* We have presented written submissions and/or personal delegations to the following bodies:
  1. The Senate Select Committee of Inquiry into Public Interest Whistleblowing (March 94)
  2. The CJC (May 94)
  3. The full Shadow Cabinet of the Qld Government (August 94)
  4. The PCJC Triennial Review of the CJC (June and August 94)
- \* We forced the Government into making the CJC provide legal representation for Kerrie Campbell at their hearing into the Basil Stafford Centre.
- \* We developed a Mission Statement and Strategic Plan for WAG in June, with the help of facilitator, Ian Godbold.
- \* Throughout the year, your Executive has worked non-stop on an extensive fund-raising campaign for WAG. Hundreds of letters, applications and submissions have gone out to dozens of community organizations. To date this

effort has been largely unsuccessful, but we have no intentions of giving up.

- \* Since the beginning of the year your Executive has been involved in an extensive on-going media campaign to focus public attention on whistleblowing issues.
- \* We have developed a "Second Reading Campaign" for the Whistleblower Protection legislation, and part of that strategy has been the development of a detailed critique of the Bill presented by the Premier to the Parliament on the 19th October. Over 200 copies of this report have been sent to all Queensland MLAs, Federal Senators, various legal professional bodies, and selected media representatives. Media releases on the topic are being issued continually.
- \* The Executive have developed adequate Whistleblower Protection legislative principles, as well as the necessary strategies to implement these principles. This information will be presented to the Federal Senate and the other State Governments to assist in their preparation of realistic Whistleblower Protection legislation.
- \* A Whistleblower Conference: "When the Whistle Blows: from Damaged Systems to Damaged Lives" has been planned for 23rd November 1994, and speakers have been organized from the CJC, the PSMC, Medical and Legal professions, the Federal Senate, Workers Compensation Board, Universities, Unions and WAG.

Other milestones for WAG during 1994 have been the inclusion of a WAG float in the Labour Day parade, organized by the Sunshine Coast members; and the publication of the first two reports of the Queensland Whistleblower Study. This research by Dr William De Maria and Cyrelle Jan has not only validated our whistleblower experiences, isolated the employers' pattern of reprisals, and identified the whistleblower stress syndrome, but it has also given the

weight of objective academic research to our growing understanding of what is really going on in the Queensland public service workplace. Verified by this research, the whistleblowers' voice can no longer be ignored. The first 100 copies of the report, Unshielding the Shadow Culture sold out, and it has now been reprinted; and the second report, Wounded Workers has already sold in excess of 60 copies in the first few weeks of publication. All proceeds of these sales go to WAG.

WAG has many people to thank, whose donation of time, energy and expertise has enabled us to keep functioning and to realize our many achievements this year. . Firstly I'd like to express my sincere thanks to my fellow Executive members for their enormous effort and personal sacrifice in devoting an exceptional amount of unpaid hours to WAG. It is people of this calibre and fighting spirit that bring about vital social changes. There is no doubt that their names belong in whistleblowing history.

Through their continued efforts on WAG's behalf, both Bill De Maria and Cyrelle have demonstrated a commitment to WAG which is as personal as it is professional. Cyrelle's mother, Nell Birt has cheerfully answered the phone all year and helped greatly with secretarial work. Deidre Bellis and Debbie Shaw have also put in many voluntary typing and photocopying hours. Our thanks go to all these people.

Our thanks are also due to a few media representatives who have shown commitment to our cause. While most of the

media in Queensland have run for cover when we have approached them with a whistleblowing story, a few exceptional people have stuck their necks out to support whistleblowers and WAG. Paula Doneman has not only published many insightful articles in The Weekend Independent, but has taken a personal interest in WAG, attending many of our meetings, and getting to know most of our members personally. Hadyn Sargent, both on his talk-back radio show on 4QR and in his column in City News has spared no effort in publicising our message. Other media people who deserve our sincere thanks are: Chris Griffiths, Ken Blanch, Kay Dibbon and Pat Gillespie of the Sunday Mail, Pamela Bornhorst, first of 4BH, now of Brisbane News, Matthew Franklin of the Courier Mail, Carolyn Sherwood and Nick Adler of Titus Films, Julia Kalytis of Compass, Greg Roberts of The Bulletin, Ken Edwards of Time Australia, and the ABC 7.30 Report.

From January to June this year the QJA funded Cyrelle's position as Resource Coordinator, and since then, the QJA have continued to provide photocopying and postage facilities, for which we are very grateful. They have also helped to spread the word about whistleblowing throughout Queensland both through their series of QJA-sponsored public lectures and through the media.

As this report clearly demonstrates WAG's accomplishments over the past year have been quite remarkable, but perhaps the most significant achievement of all is that WAG has survived its first twelve months against overwhelming odds. I take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your solidarity and your loyal support of WAG.