

Sunraysia Hostels for the Mentally Retarded was formed in 1976 by a group of people concerned with the lack of services for people with an intellectual disability. After a concerted community fundraising effort, involving all the Service Clubs in the district, the first house to provide residential care for people with an intellectual disability was opened in October 1978.

Sunraysia Residential Services for the intellectually Disabled Inc was the second name change and then in 1986, finally became Sunraysia Residential Services Inc.

In 2002, abbreviation to 'SRS' became the marketing focus and through this, is widely recognised by staff and consumers. SRS is a not for profit organization governed by a board of management. The board today comprises of established community business people and consumer representatives. This results in a service which is in touch with the local community and reactive to consumer needs.

Sunraysia Residential Services offers a variety of services, providing accommodation, both permanent and residential respite care, an independent living program, in-home-respite care and holiday and recreation programs.

These services provide support for people challenged by disabilities, such as intellectual, physical, sensory, multiple, psychiatric problems, and acquired brain damage.

SRS primary aim is to provide a broad range of service options, enabling clients to move away from acute services to less restrictive options, with minimum intervention and the fostering of independence and autonomy. Services are provided with an emphasis on community inclusiveness, with programs designed to maximize consumer use of ordinary community facilities and generic services and agencies.

Sunraysia Residential Services has a proven track record in the provision of care and support for consumers who experience difficulties with integration, education, accommodation, behavioral and social issues that impact on their lives.

Today SRS is well established as a viable community-based business with over 28 years service to the communities of Sunraysia, the Millewa, the Mallee and far South-Western New South Wales. Operating on a not-for-profit basis, SRS continues to evolve and achieve.

In 2002, SRS opened the new respite facility – SRS Respite at 4 Johns Street Mildura at a cost of \$700,000. The State Government Capacity building fund donated \$220,000 towards the building.

In 2004 SRS won the Powercor /Prime Business Excellence Award ' Good Access is Good Business Award and received a Merit of Service – Professional. In 2005 SRS also Won the Award for "Not for Profit" Category. In 2006, SRS received a Merit for Not for Profit category including SRS CEO winning the 2006 'Outstanding Contribution by

an Individual' award. In June 2008, SRS was awarded the 2008 Business Excellence Award for Not-for-Profit organisation.

In 2006, SRS replaced Sunshine House with a \$1.2M complex on 15<sup>th</sup> Street Mildura, known as TICA Transitional Independence into **C**ollective **A**ccommodation. SRS applied to the Federal and State governments to match dollar for dollar – both rejected the proposal. Therefore, SRS self funded this complex by fundraising, and transference of equity from SRS assets and securing a loan for half of the funding.

SRS supports over 300 consumers in Sunraysia every year and can guarantee that every dollar donated is put back into services to support consumers. To maintain low costs to the consumers, SRS relies on donations for upgrades to furniture and equipment and also repairs and maintenance.

#### The current disability climate

- Victorian State Plan is not about building homes for people with disabilities - SRS will be relying on community support to continue providing suitable accommodation options.
- The cost of living is rising, resulting in SRS trying to balance fee for service without putting added pressure on the families. SRS continues to explore and adopt energy efficient measure to reduce the over heads.
- Fleet management – maintaining suitable transport options – SRS supports many consumers with very special needs who rely on transport to enjoy being part of the community.
- Disability services are not generally high on the political agenda like with education, aged care and youth services. Disability is the sector that unless you 'feel' the pain and 'see' first hand the challenges often it is over looked.
- Disability is not a profitable industry. Unlike Aged care which has boomed, child care services and education and hospitals – there are no other privately owned and operated disability support services that SRS is aware of. The business sector 'knows' that disability is not a viable industry.

The challenge for SRS is to juggle their social commitment towards supporting people with disabilities and their survival as a business in an industry which is needs more but receiving less.

SRS is owned and operated by Sunraysia community; SRS supports local industries and business. We are the quiet achievers who do so much with so little.