

## Executive Director's Report – George Owen

The past three months have been very busy for us at Step Ahead Australia. The first three year period of funding from the Federal Government, Department of Health and Aging has past and a final report had to be prepared. As part of that process a new business plan was written. This was a major exercise but redefined what we are aiming to do over the coming three years. That report has been submitted to the Department. We have been allocated funding for a further three years which you have been told in previous newsletters, so I don't think we have any fear of that funding not coming forth it is just that the new business plan is subject to their approval and review. In terms of the VNI projects, they are still progressing according to the time frame and we are happy with their progress. They are both coming up to their final stages and the final report on those should be due at the end of next year.

Some significant fundraising activities have occurred in the last quarter, in particular, the annual race day at Flemington held on Turnbull Stakes Day which was an outstanding success due to the unflinching efforts of the Franklin family, Alan and Jenny in particular put in a huge effort to make this the most successful and enjoyable day for those who attend. It was a sell out this year and we had to turn people away. We are hoping for bigger and better next year. The funds raised from that activity were in excess of \$26,000.00. The \$25,000.00 raised from the Lions General Motors Holden raffle has finally been forwarded and a further \$24,000.00 was raised by the Melbourne Chinese Lions Club dinner and ball. It was a most entertaining evening full of fun and vitality. It was capped off with some exciting auction items and all told a very successful and entertaining evening. The Lions and District Conventions are just about completed and a number of these have been attended. Lions have still remained the stalwart to our funding activities with the total Lions funds raised this year approaching \$150,000.00.

Our big news of course is the Spinal Cord Awareness Week Conference. This is being held on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of November at St.Vincents Hospital, Melbourne. Members are welcome to attend and if you haven't already made a booking you best do so because numbers are limited and there has been a lot of interest. This is an outstanding program with the theme of "Towards a Cure". We are bringing out international guests who have been engaged in actual clinical trials to give a very strong clinical flavour to this meeting. We are hoping for some press exposure and we are also hoping for opportunities to forge further links and cooperative programs with our visitors.

The website which has been down for some time is close to being launched and I think you will find it very exciting , easy to navigate and informative. Your feedback on the website would be appreciated.

George Owen  
Executive Director, SAA