



Strategic Plan

2010 – 2013

Word Version

Additional versions of this Strategic Plan are available in PDF format on the RAPS website, and in audio/
braille format upon request.

1. Aspirations

Vision

The RAPS Vision is the motivation for our work – the aspiration that guides us and drives us

Disability is no barrier to friendship

Our vision is both a statement of belief and a guiding principle. We believe that having a disability should not be a barrier to enjoying the company and support of our peers. We will act in ways that makes this a reality.

Mission

The Mission articulates how, in practical terms, RAPS will realise its vision.

We use recreational and social group activities to enable friendships between members with physical and sensory disabilities

We organise group recreational activities as the best practical way of achieving our vision. These activities are a means to an end – we develop and plan them so that that can provide for our members the shared experiences from which friendships develop and grow. To create a peer support environment our members have shared life experiences – they are adults with low to moderate support needs who have physical and/or sensory disabilities.

Objectives

The Mission is translated into operational action through three primary objectives.

Engaging group activities

RAPS organises the recreational and social group activities requested by its members, ensuring sufficient volume and variety to engage the interests of its members. It manages the logistics of booking, transport, timing and support so that activities are accessible to members and occur without risk to them. RAPS develops partnerships to enrich the range of activities that can be provided.

Support that enables friendship

Through the enjoyment and interaction that occurs on the activities it facilitates, RAPS makes possible companionship, friendship and mutual support. This is at the heart of the work of RAPS. RAPS members support each other, are supported by volunteers, and develop friendship networks that flourish independently of RAPS.

Enduring independence

RAPS provides a wonderful service for its members, a service that carries a cost not always fitting neatly within funding body policy frameworks. The RAPS service is valuable enough to protect through funding challenges. To enable RAPS to provide an enduring, and independence, service, healthy financial reserves are needed so that RAPS can survive a short term loss of funding. The RAPS Management Committee must make informed decisions and scrutinise the work of RAPS for weaknesses and areas for improvement. RAPS operational staff must have robust and comprehensive processes so that operational failings or staff turnover do not lead to organisational crises.

2. Objective - engaging group activities

RAPS has nine strategic goals for the 2010 to 2013 Period. They are described here in terms of the particular challenge(s) RAPS faces, the solutions that will be implemented to address these challenges, and key performance indicators that will measure the RAPS success in overcoming the challenges. Additional information about implementing the solutions is available in the RAPS Strategic Plan Implementation Guide. Specific targets for the KPIs, and a one page Management Committee summary of outcomes against the KPIs, is provided by the Strategic Dashboard.

Goal 1: Sufficient volume and variety of activities

Challenges: The interests and expectations of RAPS members will change from month to month and year to year. This will occur naturally in response to changing membership, changing lifestyles, and changes in the activities available within our society. The actual number of active RAPS members will also fluctuate and, given the benefits of RAPS membership, is likely to grow in the future. As a result, not only must RAPS find ways to adjust the range of activities on offer, it must also find ways to adjust the volume of activities on offer. In addition, RAPS has minimum service hour levels set by funding bodies (ADHC social support hours for instance).

Solutions: **Quarterly Planning Meetings** will be held with members that elicit activity requests and suggestions. Feedback is incorporated into this process, providing insight based on the results of previous similar activities and the personal knowledge of the volunteers, staff and members in attendance. The outcome from these meetings will be **Activity Calendars** based on three month seasons – summer, autumn, spring and winter. This process will be codified into an **Activity Planning Framework** to capture the strategically beneficial expertise involved.

KPI Our goal is to provide RAPS members with a sufficient volume and variety of activities. This will be measured as a set quarterly minimum number of activities per member and a set minimum ratio of new activities each quarter.

Goal 2: Accessible and safe activities

Challenges: RAPS has a duty of care to its members to provide safe activities. The expectation of safe activities is also embedded in funding requirements. RAPS also needs to ensure activity processes such as transport and ticketing happen reliably and as communicated to members. Unreliable activity processes will disengage members, making them less willing to take part in future activities. Cancelled activities cause significant angst. In addition, certain types of activities require substantial additional planning and, if they do not proceed smoothly, can cause what one stakeholder referred to as “total and utter confusion”. RAPS needs to ensure the types of activities that occur are comfortably within its support and organisational capacity.

Solutions: Activities will be of a scale and nature that is easily accessible to members, do not involve overnight stays, are affordable, and allow participating members to relate with their peers. RAPS will take a conservative approach in planning out of town activities or activities that are new or unusual in nature. The vision is for member friendships to develop rather than for members to have adventure experiences.

The approach will be incorporated and codified into an **Activity Management Guide**. RAPS will develop and continuously improve this Guide to establish procedures that minimise the risk of harm occurring to members, volunteers and staff on activities. The Guide will

establish appropriate OH&S practices, incorporate activity briefing processes for staff and volunteers, and provide for an activity **Incident Reporting** process that feeds in to the quarterly **Strategic Dashboard**. This process will enable RAPS to manage and minimise risks on future activities by being integrated into a **Risk Management Plan**.

KPI: Our goal is to provide accessible and safe activities. We will know we are achieving this goal if activities happen as planned in the Activity Calendar (excluding weather related cancellations); transport, ticketing and access arrangements run smoothly; and there are no incidents on our activities.

Goal 3: Partnerships that enrich activities

Challenges: There is significant unmet need in the community for our work, but we are not equipped or resourced to raise our profile directly with potential RAPS members. Government funding arrangements will change significantly by 2015, and there is a strong chance that ongoing Government funding will be won by providers who deliver a broad range of services. However, RAPS strength is in the specialist delivery of group activities, and RAPS does not wish to expand into new service areas.

Solutions: RAPS will form **Sector Partnerships** with organisations that can enhance our activities by providing resources and suggestions. The partnerships assist in creating a **High Profile** for RAPS as partner agencies share information about RAPS through their own networks. They can contribute policy experience, methods of overcoming barriers and ideas for activities. These partnerships build trust and compatibility that will make possible joint tendering arrangements if appropriate to meet funding model changes.

Corporate Partnerships will provide resources and professional expertise that makes possible a greater range of activities that can meet more member needs, or simply provide reduced cost or free access to events. RAPS will undertake awareness raising activities of its own in the form of widespread distribution of its newsletter and the development of a website.

KPI: Our Goal is to develop partnerships that enrich our activities. We will know we are achieving this if we gain corporate support (either direct financial support or in kind contributions) for activities. Another indicator of success will be if we gain support for members (either new member referrals or support in access and planning arrangements for activities) from within the sector.

3. Objective - support that enables friendship

Goal 4: Peer Support

Challenges: RAPS purpose is to enable friendships. RAPS does this with limited funding, and with only limited influence – after all, a friendship between members cannot be created by RAPS. Friendships will occur based on compatibility, mutual interest and shared experience. For peers to provide support, there must be sufficient range of members to provide opportunities for all personality types, and processes to enable isolated potential members to become active members. RAPS runs a risk of members treating paid staff as professional servants. This behaviour would destroy the social networking nature of RAPS and behavioural expectations need to be set. The way members treat each other also impacts on the creation of an environment in which friendships can form – certain behaviours can be counter-productive and cause dissent and dispute.

Solutions: A member support plan will be prepared by RAPS staff for each member upon joining RAPS, as part of the **Outreach Program** that encourages potentially isolated adults with physical and sensory disabilities to join. This will identify both the ways in which RAPS staff, members, and volunteers can support the new member and ways in which the new member can contribute to their peers.

Low but enforced annual **Membership Fees** encourages healthy participation in RAPS by providing a powerful feedback mechanism. If members do not feel the RAPS environment is creating chances for them to share experiences with peers, they will cease paying the fee. The payment of a membership fee also encourages members to value their participation and to seek to get value for money from it. The fee also provides a small additional source of funds to support the work of RAPS.

Friendships are less likely to form in an environment in which some behaviours - by other members, staff or volunteers - are offensive or inappropriate. The RAPS **Code of Behaviour** will be provided to all members as part of their annual membership process, and will form part of each activity briefing for staff and volunteers.

KPI: Our goal is to have members, volunteers and staff treat each other as peers and provide support to each other. We will know we are achieving this goal if the number of active members increases, and support extends to the payment of membership fees by members.

Goal 5: Engaged and energetic volunteers

Challenges: By its inherent social nature, variety of activities, and the obvious benefit and enjoyment gained by members, RAPS should be able to attract and retain a valuable pool of volunteers. However, RAPS' relatively low profile means that limited numbers of volunteers are offering to assist. A larger and more stable volunteer pool would allow RAPS to invest in training, for instance, to increase the number of volunteers who can finger spell. Volunteers need to feel that their time matters, which means selecting the right number for each activity based on the number of members attending, their support plan, and the type of activity.

Solutions: RAPS will develop a **Volunteer Handbook** that provides a useful welcome guide for potential volunteers, an induction process for new volunteers, and establishes expectations for the ongoing learning and development of volunteers that will be provided by RAPS. Where suitable and reliable volunteers are identified, RAPS will create **Senior Volunteer** roles, and provide these roles with additional training and mentoring to enable them to lead other volunteers and assist the **Activity Support Workers**. RAPS will value volunteers by carefully assigning their skills and time using ratios established in the **Activity Management Guide**. By gaining a **High Profile** more volunteers will be enticed to assist our members.

KPI: Our goal is that we have engaged and energetic volunteers. The best indication that volunteers are being supported, encouraged and engaged is that they commit their time to assisting RAPS members on activities and that there are sufficient available to ensure RAPS can meet its required support ratios for all activities.

Goal 6: Active and autonomous networks of friends

Challenges: If they have an active network of friends, RAPS members will be in regular contact with each other to share stories, reflect and plan future events. A member in regular contact with peers has a much reduced risk of isolation.

If RAPS is to truly support social networking, it should be prepared for its networks to decline or fall apart. This is a frequent event for social networks, as people change and develop. Tensions can form within groups. If RAPS is prepared for this challenge ahead of time it will be able to respond healthily when it occurs. The biggest strategic challenges appear to come from RAPS' own success. It is considered to be almost full, and if it does become full it will lose the "family feeling" and become "unwieldy". If RAPS is to grow, it should only grow in a way that retains the family feel.

Activities should be of a size and nature that allows participating members to engage with each other because members "want to know everyone in the group". To achieve this without adding staff will require more autonomy amongst members, operating through peer support and volunteers within an overall framework established and maintained by paid staff. The social networks in which friendships develop change both in size and scope in response to the changing experiences and hopes of their members. The more members are dependent on RAPS paid staff, the less fluid and the less effective the social networks between members will be.

Solutions: RAPS' activities are designed to enable friendships. We will create an environment that is as close as possible to barrier-free development of friendships between our members. We will develop an **Activity Planning Framework**, that enables members to prepare their own **Activity Calendars** through **Quarterly Planning Meetings**.

We will work closely with members to ensure they create networks initially through the **Outreach Program** and then through **Volunteer-Member Partnership** support. Members and Volunteers will be partnered up, with volunteers contacting members on a monthly basis to find out how they are going, whether they've had any recent conversations either electronic or verbal with other RAPS members, to listen to any feedback they have about recent activities and to provide support in the development of friendships and networks between members. These partnership activities will be documented and collated, provided a useful source of information for the Management Committee via the **Strategic Dashboard**

KPI Our goal is that active and autonomous networks of friends form out of the peer support of our members. We will know if this has been achieved through responses provided by members in their monthly feedback to their volunteer partner.

4. Objective - enduring independence

Goal 7: Informed and independent governance

Challenges: RAPS is a small, community based organisation with limited resources, but it faces similar governance challenges to those of larger organisations. As a result, it needs the expertise, information and support available to the governing bodies of larger agencies. RAPS historically has encountered difficult, potentially service-ceasing challenges, but has overcome them. The governing body needs sufficient information to be able to identify

similar challenges arising in the future, and needs to have sufficient oversight of the operations of the organisation to prevent issues from arising.

The Management Committee has strengths in that it has strong member representation but, as with all member based governing bodies, this raises issues about the ability of the Management Committee to act independently from the staff and independently from the personal impacts of decisions. While some governance issues might be solved by RAPS becoming part of a larger entity in some formal manner, this would take away RAPS independence and the solution would cause more problems than the cure.

RAPS will obtain funding and in kind support from a variety of sources. Each provider of support will have their own expectations of our service and the work that we undertake. If we do not meet these expectations we may lose the support. Funder expectations that require RAPS to deliver services outside its core expertise can cost the organisation its character and unique strength.

Solutions: RAPS will ensure it meets and exceeds any service delivery KPIs established by funders and therefore agreed to by RAPS. This is part of a **Firewalled Funding** strategy that seeks to prevent funders taking a forensic interest in the operations of RAPS, with potential directives to change behaviour if this occurs. The Management Committee will be presented with a report of performance against these KPIs at each meeting. RAPS will not accept funding that does not broadly align with its strengths – organising social and recreational activities for people with disabilities. This also supports a **Firewalled Funding** strategy in that RAPS will not change its essential nature to maintain funding. Activities must be safe and not bring the funders into disrepute.

To maintain governance control over organisational activity that is informed and independent from the operations, the Committee will **Realign the Service Coordinator Role** to focus on strategic directions and reporting, and will ensure **Service Coordinator Accountability**. This will occur through a revised Job Description aligned with the Strategic Plan, quarterly **Strategic Dashboard** reports and through annual performance reviews against the expectations established in the Job Description.

The Committee will review its own performance through the establishment of, and comparison with, **Governance Benchmarks**. Initially, this will be the ADHC “Its your Business” governance checklist. The Committee will seek over time to raise the standards, eventually developing a specific RAPS Governance Charter that will provide the governance benchmark.

KPI Our goal is that we will have informed and independent governance. This will be self assessed against a Committee approved benchmark.

Goal 8: Comprehensive and robust operating processes

Challenges: RAPS is heavily dependent upon the knowledge and expertise of its Service Coordinator, an unavoidable situation in any small community agency. Standard succession planning approaches - identifying and preparing internal staff for promotion - do not work for the RAPS type of agency. Rather, any new or replacement staff will primarily be drawn from the much wider HACC or community sectors. Funding body requirements can be complex and administratively difficult, and processes need to be in place to cover these requirements and ensure compliance with triennial HACC audit.

RAPS runs a complex, high risk operation that takes members, staff and volunteers into new and challenging external spaces. Should preventable injuries or other incidents occur, RAPS runs the risk of legal implications that could cripple the service.

Solutions: **Succession Planning** will be based on the ability to quickly spread awareness of a RAPS vacancy through **Sector Partnerships**, a sufficiently **High Profile** such that potential candidates with expertise will want to apply for the vacant position; and a comprehensive set of procedures that codify the Service Coordinator's critical knowledge. This will include the Strategic Plan and the Job Description (position priorities and directions); the **Code of Behaviour**, an **Activity Planning Framework** and **Activity Management Guide** outlining how the work is undertaken, a **Volunteer Handbook** that shapes the work with and support of volunteers, and a **Risk Management Plan** outlining key risks and prevention strategies.

The **Risk Management Plan** will guide the development and continuous improvement of a set of comprehensive and robust operating processes. Using ADHC's "Its Your Business" standards, the plan will be regularly reviewed by the Management Committee and will prioritise and focus RAPS internal capacity building processes.

KPI: Our goal is that RAPS will have comprehensive and robust operating processes. We will know we have achieved this if risks that are identified in our Risk Management Plan are treated and prevented.

Goal 9: Long term financial viability

Challenges: RAPS has had financial challenges, and may experience them again in the future. Income is obtained from one primary source, and this funding source will be revamped by 2015 due to a decision to split the Ageing and Disability funding streams between the Federal and State governments.

Solutions: We will develop strong **Sector Partnerships** so that if funding arrangements change, we can form partnerships or provide auspiced services in an environment in which large, multi-program services are funded preferentially. We will develop **Corporate Partnerships** to offset the costs of our activities. We will set an annual budget that allows retention of 3% of earnings, as part of a **Funding Firewall** that allows us to cover a short period of transition between one funding source and another if required. **Membership Fees** will be collected to provide further small offsets of the costs of planning days and newsletters. Our **Risk Management Plan** will identify risks with our internal financial processes and identify mitigating processes that will be implemented.

KPI: Our goal is that RAPS has long term financial viability that can survive funding arrangement changes. We will have achieved this goal if we maintain a net current asset ratio of at least 2:1.