



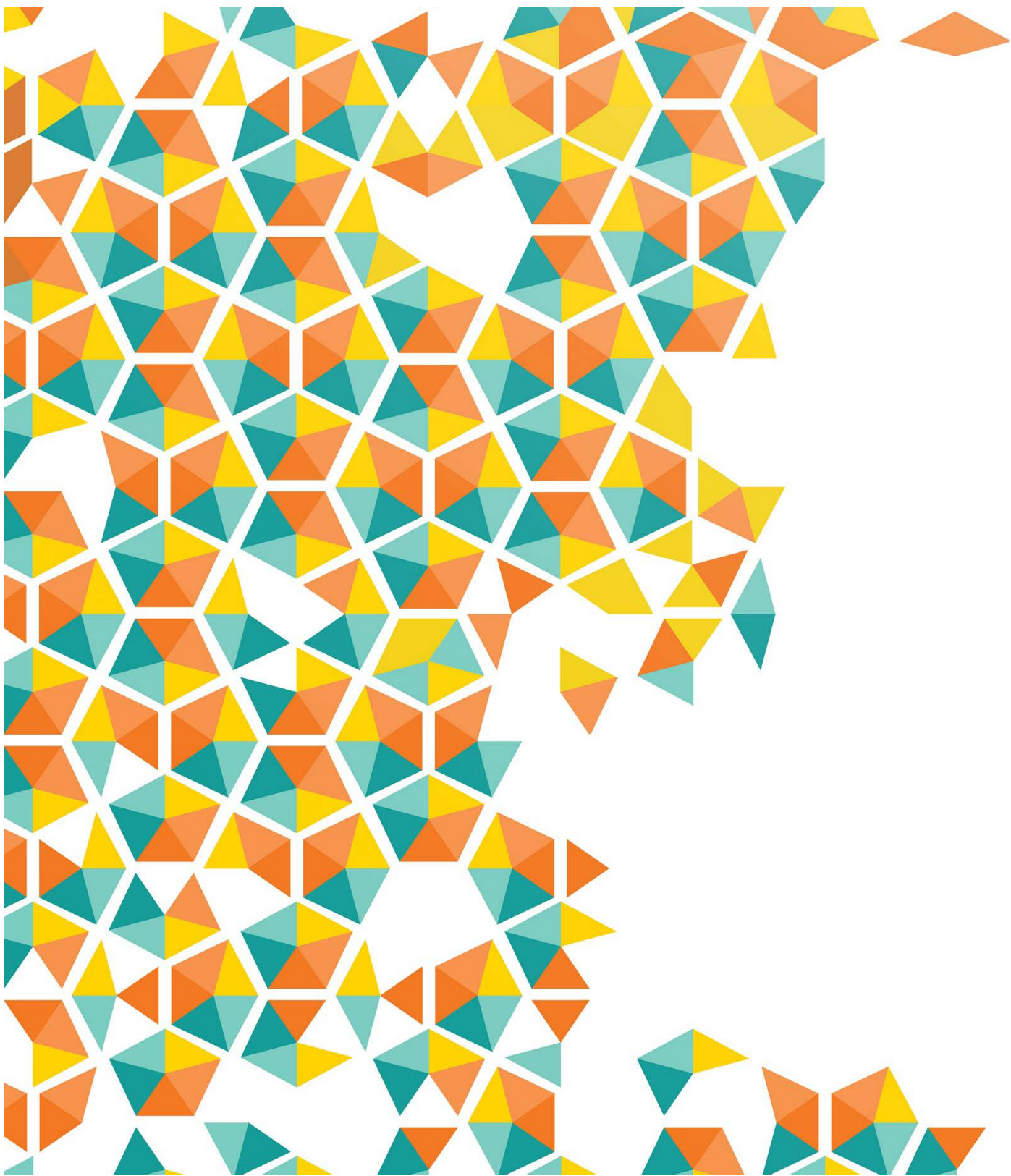
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Intellectual Disability Behaviour
Support Program

Team Up Evaluation Final Report

June 2018



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Executive summary

Peer support involves people with similar life experiences providing mutual support to each other. In Australia, peer support is becoming increasingly important for people with disability, as it can assist in making informed choices about services and supports under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). However, there is not currently the experience and expertise required to support an increasing number of peer support opportunities under the NDIS. Accordingly, the New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW CID), Community Disability Alliance Hunter (CDAH) and the Diversity and Disability Alliance (DDA) received funding to run **Team Up** – a peer support capacity building initiative. The Intellectual Disability Behaviour Support (IDBS) Program at UNSW Sydney was engaged to conduct an evaluation of Team Up. This report details the findings of the evaluation.

About Team Up

Team Up aimed to promote and support inclusive peer support practice with people with disability in NSW. It was designed to build capacity for delivering peer support and to support the development and ongoing delivery of new and existing peer support groups and networks. It had two streams:

1. Training courses in peer support practice, including developing and supporting a community of peer workers – people with disability trained to be leaders in peer support.
2. A grants program to resource new and ongoing peer support groups and networks.

About the evaluation

The evaluation was primarily outcomes-focused, with some insights into process. The primary aim was to assess whether, how and to what extent the Team Up initiative met its proposed outcomes for the first six months of the initiative. Participants included people with disability and family members who had taken part in Team Up as training participants, grantees and peer workers, as well as staff of NSW CID, CDAH and DDA. Participation methods included interviews, focus groups and written feedback.

Outcomes for people with disability and family members

Valuing and using peer information and lived experience was a strong focus of Team Up. People with disability and family members heard and took on the messages about the importance of valuing lived experience. They also shared practical information, and some people made practical changes in their lives as a result. Limits and challenges included that people with disability and family members had different life experiences, which could make it challenging for them to be together in peer support, and that peer support participants could have different thresholds of information and experience they wanted to share.

Exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders was another strong focus of Team Up. People with disability and family members successfully contributed to peer support through training sessions and grant-funded peer support groups. Team Up also built capacity for leadership of peer support by people with disability. It fostered strong leadership by peer workers for leading formal peer support groups, and begun to contribute towards informal and supplementary forms of leadership by other people with disability and family members, including assisting other peer support leaders and providing informal support to friends and personal contacts. Limits and challenges

included having enough opportunities to apply the leadership skills once these were learnt and the requirement for significant resources to support peer support leadership by people with disability, which could limit their leadership in the future if resources are withdrawn.

Having choice, voice and control in running peer support was a key part of the grants stream of Team Up. Grantees gave examples of having choice, voice and control in running their peer support groups/projects, as well as examples of fostering choice for their peer support group members. Staff members emphasised the variety in the scope of funded peer support groups. Limits and challenges included administrative issues that presented restrictions on choice, voice and control. Choice, voice and control may also have been further promoted if the 'Introduction to Peer Support' training had been conducted before the grants round, to help people decide what they wanted for their peer support groups.

Using peer support to be part of communities was another aim of the grants stream of Team Up. Grantees commented that through their funded peer support groups, they used (mainstream) community resources and aimed to impact their community, particularly advocating on physical accessibility and disability awareness. There was also evidence of Team Up contributing to building a stronger peer support and/or disability community, which was valued by participants. The main challenge was in having sufficient data to ascertain the extent of impact made on communities – more information would be beneficial in this area.

Outcomes for peer support

Addressing accessibility, support needs and diversity: Significant attention and effort was put into meeting multiple accessibility and support needs across Team Up, especially Auslan, Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) and cognitive access. Team Up was relatively accessible, although there were a range of areas requiring further improvements. Strategies for enhancing accessibility included organising and planning for it; fostering a culture of accessibility; and using peer support as a strategy to solve accessibility problems. Notably, attaining a high standard of accessibility requires significant and ongoing resourcing. Ensuring responsiveness to people from CALD backgrounds was another significant focus of the Team Up initiative. Significant gains were made, but staff felt there was always more to do and areas they could improve on to reach more CALD communities, including better encouraging and supporting more CALD groups in applying for grants. Further time and resources would be required to establish and fund better practices to foster further CALD participation.

Strengthening peer support through participant feedback: The intention to be responsive to participant feedback was clear in Team Up. Some clear examples of responsiveness to feedback were evident across the training, grants, peer networks and the peer workers' community of practice, however overall, the mechanisms for capturing feedback were not always clear. There is thus scope for Team Up to foster and more actively promote ways to collect and respond to feedback.

Seeing peer support as valid and valued: An overall aim for Team Up was to contribute to peer support being seen as a valid and valued option for all people with disability and family members in NSW. This meant that people with disability and family members would be more likely to turn to peers for support, in addition to receiving advice from paid and/or professional services. People with disability and family members did not often comment directly on seeing peer support as valid and valued, but the strength of their comments about valuing peer information and lived experience and exchanging support as contributors and leaders suggested at least some people did see it this way.

Staff said they felt peer support was on the cusp of becoming more recognised, although also noted that this was a particularly hard area to assess outcomes for.

Resourcing peer support effectively: Team Up contributed to the development of peer support personnel by: (1) professional development of peer workers and (2) encouraging other people to learn about peer support, to potentially become peer support leaders in the future. Notably, peer workers and grantees require ongoing support, which would be at risk without future resources and funding. Team Up also developed new resources for peer support, including training, peer worker and grantee materials. Key limitations were that these were not always available in accessible formats and that further documentation of the approach used is needed to ensure it is sustained and replicable into the future.

Process findings

Overall, Team Up reflected a values-based and practical approach to peer support with good processes in place across all aspects of the initiative, although experienced some challenges mainly related to time constraints imposed by the funding received. Overall process insights include:

- **Training:** Peer support training appears to be implemented best when it is interactive and led by people with disability, with attention to sequencing of the training, accessibility of the materials and having a mix and diversity of participants present together.
- **Grants:** Ongoing flexibility of the administrative arrangements supporting the implementation of grants and peer support groups is important, as well as the need for time and resources to support a high level of accessibility and a process to manage the level of time and energy involved in the grants application process.
- **Peer workers:** Professional development of peer workers is most effective where there is ongoing, flexible and responsive support for their development and opportunities to grow into new roles, which is planned into the timelines and resources of the initiative.
- **Communities of practice:** The communities of practice were useful for peer workers and grantees, but would be most effective with further resources, staffing/leadership and development of the community of practice model to ensure that all participants can get the most out of it.
- **Program administration and collaboration:** Peer support is delivered best where an explicitly values-driven approach is used, and where there is sufficient time, resources, energy and commitment to continuously navigate and learn from challenges and successes. Team Up staff experienced the complexity of administering a complex program with multiple parts within a short timeline, limited funding and whilst establishing a collaboration between new partner organisations.

Implications

The outcomes and process findings from the evaluation have implications for the ongoing development and practice of peer support for people with disability and family members in NSW.

The primary implication is that ongoing time, resources and funding is required to sustain and continue to develop the benefits of the Team Up initiative for peer support capacity.

- Peer support is based on the **development of strong relationships** based on familiarity and trust. To integrate peer support into one's life, there is a need to see peer support in action and to change values and thinking about what supports may be beneficial and about how and where peer support might play a role.
- Developing peer support **leadership capacity** among people with disability requires time and opportunity to practice and develop skills and to learn by doing.
- Many peer support leaders with disability require **significant support and scaffolding**, and without ongoing resources and funding for such support, their capacity to continue to lead peer support is uncertain.
- Additional time is also required to continue to improve on areas that have presented limits and challenges in Team Up so far and to document the lessons from the initiative into a **legacy model** that other similar programs might draw on or adapt in future.

For all of these reasons, time and ongoing resources and funding are required to make the most of the Team Up initiative. In the body of the report, a synthesised summary of more detailed implications from the Team Up initiative is provided, mapped to each of the outcomes areas.

1 Background

Peer support is “a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement of what is beneficial” (Mead et al, 2001:6). It involves people with similar life experiences providing mutual support to each other, potentially including practical assistance, encouragement and/or social and emotional support, with the intention of making individual-level and broader social change in people’s lives (Repper and Carter, 2010, Gartner and Riessman 1982, Dennis 2003, Campos et al, 2016).

For people with disability, research evidences the benefits of peer support across multiple domains. Benefits include enhanced quality of life, self-esteem and wellbeing, positive disability identity, and greater empowerment and choice (Johnson et al, 2014; Mejias et al, 2014; Scott and Doughty, 2012, Silverman et al, 2017). Research also shows that peer support can enhance the inclusion of people with disability in society by enabling participants to share what they have learned in peer support with others, use new skills to advocate for positive change, and engage in greater life opportunities (Mejias et al, 2014).

In Australia, peer support is becoming increasingly important for people with disability, given the current policy and practice context. As people with disability move towards more choice and control under the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), there is greater recognition of a role for peer support to assist in making informed choices about services and supports. In recognition of this expanding role for peer support, the Information Linkages and Capacity arm of the NDIS is expected to fund an increasing number of peer support groups and networks. However, community groups in the disability sector have identified that there is not currently the experience and expertise required to support an increasing number of peer support opportunities. In particular, there is a need to support the development of greater expertise in peer support leadership among people with disability themselves, including ensuring that people with intellectual disability, people with complex communication needs and people who come from a culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) background are actively involved. These Australian peer support capacity building needs also reflect broader international trends, where it is recognised that for peer support to be recognised as an evidence-based practice, there is a need to develop further models, manuals, training curricula, and fidelity measures to better capture and disseminate its positive practices and effects (Davidson et al, 2006).

Reflecting this context, the New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW CID), Community Disability Alliance Hunter (CDAH) and the Diversity and Disability Alliance (DDA) received funding from the National Disability Insurance Agency (via the Department of Family and Community Services NSW) to run **Team Up** – a peer support capacity building initiative for people with disability in NSW. The Intellectual Disability Behaviour Support (IDBS) Program at UNSW Sydney was engaged to conduct an outcomes evaluation of Team Up. The evaluation explored the extent to which Team Up has resulted in capacity building for peer support in NSW and in improvements in the skills, expertise and resourcing needed for people with disability and families to be able to use and engage in peer support. This report details the findings of the evaluation.

2 About Team Up

Team Up is an initiative aimed to promote and support inclusive peer support practice with people with disability in NSW. It is designed to build capacity for delivering peer support and to support the development and ongoing delivery of new and existing peer support groups and networks. Specifically, its aims are to:

- Develop mechanisms for people with disability, including people from diverse backgrounds and complex needs, to participate in and contribute to peer support;
- Create awareness of peer support as a valid and valued option wherever a person is in life;
- Work towards developing a community of practice for peer facilitators;
- Identify the barriers and enablers in fostering inclusive peer support in NSW to inform future work.

Team Up has two interconnected streams of activity:

1. Training in peer support practice.

People with disability and families participated in a series of three courses about peer support, supporting them to extend their understanding of what peer support is, what benefits it can have, and how to engage in and lead it. The training was run by NSW CID, CDAH and DDA, with each organisation taking responsibility for running the training with different target groups and in different geographic localities. The three training courses were:

- a) 'Introduction to Peer Support' – fundamental principles of peer support.
- b) 'Peer Facilitator' training – how to lead a peer support group.
- c) 'Peer Mentor' training – how to provide peer support in a one-on-one mentoring relationship (see Appendix 2 for further details).

Accessibility for a diversity of people with disability was built into the training courses. People with intellectual disability, people with complex communication needs and people from a CALD background were specific groups for which Team Up training was intended to be accessible, although it also aimed to be accessible to people with a range of other types of disability.

- Part of the training program involved developing and supporting a community of **peer workers**. People with disability who completed two or more training courses could self-select to become a 'peer worker'. The peer worker role involved leading peer support for others, including leading further training or leading group or individual peer support. Each peer worker was employed and paid by one of NSW CID, CDAH or DDA. Peer workers also took part in a **community of practice** to support their ongoing learning and development.

2. Grants to support and resource peer support groups and networks.

People with disability and families could apply for grants to support the development of new peer support groups and networks and/or to resource the ongoing delivery of existing groups and networks. \$130,000 worth of grants were distributed (including \$50,000 from My Choice Matters funding) to 27 grantees to run their group or network with support from Team Up. A

community of practice was also established for the ongoing learning and development of grantees.

The evaluation of Team Up includes measures aimed at understanding the experience and outcomes across the two streams of activity. The program logic in Appendix 1 shows the relationship between the two streams of activity and the inputs, participation options, outputs and outcomes sought from Team Up.

3 About the evaluation

3.1 Evaluation aims and research questions

The primary aim of the evaluation was to assess whether, how and to what extent the Team Up initiative has met its proposed outcomes for the first 6 months of the program, as identified in the program logic in Appendix 1. The evaluation also captured recommendations for enhancements or improvements to Team Up. To achieve these aims, the evaluation addressed the questions outlined in Table 1. Each of the supporting evaluation questions (indented in Table 1) map to the outcomes identified for Team Up in the program logic.

Table 1: Evaluation questions

<p>1) How, and to what extent, has Team Up achieved the individual level outcomes it set out to for people with disability and families?</p> <p>How and to what extent do people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Value and use peer information?b) Value and draw on lived experience?c) Give and receive peer support?d) Contribute to and lead peer support?e) Articulate what they want and need to run peer support?f) Have choice, voice and control over how peer support runs?g) Use peer support to access the wider community?
<p>2) How, and to what extent, has Team Up achieved the outcomes it set out to for strengthening peer support processes?</p> <p>How and to what extent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Does peer support address accessibility and diversity?b) Does peer support address support needs?c) Is peer support strengthened through participant feedback?d) Is the peer support grants program an accessible and supported process?
<p>3) How, and to what extent, has Team Up achieved its overall program outcomes?</p> <p>How and to what extent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Is peer support seen as a valid and valued choice for people with disability and families in NSW?b) Do peer support options in NSW have the personnel, experience, skills and resources to facilitate peer support as a form of support that can be widely used?

While the evaluation is primarily an outcomes evaluation, by asking about both how and whether the outcomes have been achieved, the evaluation included both process-focused and outcomes-focused components. This is reflected in the subsequent sections of the report. The focus is on discussing outcomes findings in-depth, with a higher-level synthesis of process findings.

3.2 Participants

Participants in the evaluation included people with disability and family members who had taken part in Team Up as training participants, grantees and peer workers, as well as staff from NSW CID, CDAH and DDA who had been involved in designing, implementing and delivering Team Up. As detailed in Section 3.3, participants could take part in the evaluation via an interview or focus group or by submitting a variety of kinds of written feedback. All methods and participation were approved by the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee, and all participation by people with disability and family members was recompensed with a \$25 gift voucher.

A difficulty in accounting for the evaluation participant groups is that by virtue of taking up a role as a peer worker, peer workers became employed by NSW CID, CDAH and DDA and are therefore also staff members of these organisations. For the purposes of the evaluation these participants are however accounted for as a separate group to other staff of these organisations, as capacity building of peer workers was an identified outcome of the Team Up initiative. The capacity building of peer workers therefore needs to be measured separately to the experiences of other staff members at NSW CID, CDAH or DDA who did not undergo the same capacity building process as a direct function of the Team Up initiative. Similarly, NSW CID, CDAH and DDA staff members who are also people with disability sometimes shared examples of their own experience of receiving peer support during Team Up, although their contribution to the evaluation is mainly through their insight into designing, implementing and delivering the initiative. Overall, these complexities in accounting for the participant groups highlight the extent of community and shared expertise in peer support that Team Up was involved in building.

3.2.1 Recruitment

Evaluation participants could be recruited for different forms of participation, including interviews, focus groups and written feedback (see further details in Section 3.3). People with disability and family members were recruited to participate in interviews and focus groups via invitations extended by NSW CID, CDAH and DDA staff. The invitation to participate came from staff who had not worked directly with the person, to avoid the potential for coercion to participate. Where a participant agreed to take part, they could either give permission for their contact details to be passed on to the researchers or could organise their participation time through the staff member who had invited them. Opportunities for written feedback on training were distributed directly in training sessions by the training facilitators, who included NSW CID, CDAH and DDA staff and peer workers. Opportunities for written feedback on the grants process were distributed by email to those taking part in the grants program by NSW CID, CDAH and DDA staff. Staff were recruited for interviews through the Team Up Project Lead. All participation across all groups recruited, including staff, was voluntary and all participants provided written consent.

3.2.2 Participant selection

Interview and focus group invitations were extended purposively to people with disability and family members to ensure that people with a range of different experiences and characteristics took part. The interview and focus group sample was determined initially by type of participation in Team Up – whether people took part as a training participant, grantee or peer worker. Attention was also paid to the inclusion of a diversity of participants by selecting people with different life experiences, support needs, cultural backgrounds and/or known positive or difficult experiences of taking part in Team Up. Notably, some people had taken part in Team Up in more than one way (e.g. participating in training and running a grant) and therefore, although recruited for one form of participation, they were able to speak to participation in a range of different parts of the Team Up initiative. Invitations

for participation via written feedback were extended universally to all people taking part in training and the grants programs. Staff interviews were arranged to ensure that at least two staff took part from NSW CID, CDAH and DDA, with some extra interviews added to ensure that people across a variety of different roles in Team Up were included. Discussion between the researchers and Team Up Project Lead occurred throughout the recruitment and data collection period to ensure that the targeted invitations continued to respond to the ongoing development of the sample, ensuring variety across participant experiences and characteristics once it was clear who had agreed to participate.

3.2.3 Sample

A total of 233 instances of data collection were recorded for the evaluation (see Table 2), including all interview, focus group and written feedback participants. This included 226 instances of participation by people with disability and family members and 7 by staff. The demographics of the sample are shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Evaluation participants

Participation type	n
People with disability and family members	
Interviews	18
Focus groups	13
Pre-training feedback form	101
Post-training feedback form	83
Grant reports	11
Staff	
Interviews	7
Total	233

Table 3: Sample demographics

	Interview and focus groups (total n= 31)		Pre-training survey (total n= 101)		Post-training survey (total n= 83)		Grant report (total n= 11)		Total (N= 226)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
People with disability and family members										
Participation										
Training	15	48.4	101	100	83	100	0	0	199	88.1
Grantee	9	29	0	0	0	0	11	100	20	8.8
Peer worker	7	22.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	3.1
Group										
People with disability	27	87.1	86	85.1	69	83.1	0	0	182	80.5
Family	4	12.9	15	14.9	14	16.9	0	0	33	14.6
Missing data	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	100	11	4.9
Gender*										
Female	25	80.6	72	71.3	60	72.3	0	0	157	69.5
Male	6	19.4	29	28.7	23	27.7	0	0	58	25.7
Missing data	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	100	11	4.9
CALD										
Yes	10	32.3	21	20.8	20	24.1	0	0	51	22.6
No	13	41.9	80	79.2	63	75.9	0	0	156	69.0
Missing data	8	25.8	0	0	0	0	11	100	11	4.9
Staff involved in administering Team Up (total n=7)	n	%							n	%
NSW CID	2								2	28.6
CDAH	3								3	42.9
DDA	2								2	28.6

*An option for 'other' was included for gender during data collection, however it was not selected by any participants.

As opportunities for written feedback were distributed at arm's length from the researchers, it is not possible to know in how many instances a participant who took part in an interview or focus group also provided written feedback or how many people completed both the pre- and post-training feedback forms, although it is likely that both occurred in many instances.

3.3 Data collection

Data was collected through a selection of methods to best match the different parts of the Team Up initiative and the aims of the evaluation. Data collection methods are outlined below.

3.3.1 Interviews and focus groups

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with people with disability and family members. As noted in Table 4, 18 people with disability and family members took part in interviews and 13 took part across three focus groups. Interviews were mainly available to people who had taken part as peer workers and grantees, with a few training participants interviewed. Interviews were in-depth, semi-structured and conducted either face-to-face or by phone, depending on what best suited the participant. Three focus groups were conducted with people who took part in the Team Up training courses, as people who had undertaken the training together knew each other and could participate well as a group. The focus groups comprised 2-6 people and were conducted face-to-face either directly following a training session or the following day. In both interviews and focus groups, people with disability and family members were asked about what they liked about the way they had taken part in Team Up, what had been challenging, what they would change, what support they had received to participate and what the impact of participating had been on their lives.

In-depth, semi-structured phone interviews were also conducted with 7 staff from NSW CID, CDAH and DDA. Their interviews focused on implementation processes, successes, challenges, changes to implementation plans and the outcomes they perceived had been gained from Team Up for people with disability and family members and for the status of peer support in NSW.

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim.

3.3.2 Written feedback

The evaluation included written feedback options for people with disability and family members. The written feedback was anonymous and made up of:

- **Training feedback forms:** Two short surveys with a combination of open- and close-ended questions, detailing participants' perceptions and experiences of peer support both prior to and following participating in Team Up training courses. As noted in Table 2, 101 pre-training feedback forms were received and 83 post-training forms (out of a total of 375 training participants – 286 people with disability, 77 family members and 12 others).
- **Grant reports:** A longer survey with a combination of open- and close-ended questions about the process and outcomes of implementing a grant. A grant report could be filled in only by those successful at securing a grant. As noted in Table 2, 11 grant reports were received, out of a total of 27 grantees.

Staff from NSW CID, CDAH and DDA were responsible for administering each of the written feedback options, collecting responses and returning them to the research team.

3.3.3 Training materials review

A desk-based review of the Team Up training materials was conducted to understand the extent to which the materials reflected the intended outcomes of the initiative. All three Team Up programs were reviewed, including PowerPoint slides for each training, supplementary facilitator guides, workbooks, and facilitator 'toolboxes'. The review was conducted by systematically comparing the content of the training materials to the outcomes identified in the Team Up program logic (Appendix 1) via a matrix, with thematic analysis of the frequency and depth of content related to each outcome area. The findings of this analysis are integrated throughout the report and included in full in Appendix 2, which details how each of the training materials supported intended program outcomes.

3.4 Data analysis

All qualitative data from the focus group and interview transcripts and written feedback were coded and thematically analysed in NVivo 11™. The approach to the thematic analysis varied according to the content of the data.

- **Outcomes data:** Given the need to assess whether the Team Up initiative met its intended outcomes, for all data related to outcomes from Team Up, codes were pre-identified, based on the outcomes set for the Team Up initiative in the program logic (Appendix 1). All statements by participants that related to each outcome were then coded at a pre-identified outcome node and the coded data were then assessed to understand the extent to which participants' statements suggested that a particular outcome had or had not been met, including the limits and challenges in reaching that outcome. For ease of reporting, some similar outcome nodes were subsequently collapsed and combined.
- **Process data:** For all data related to the process of administering Team Up, data were first coded to broad pre-identified categories to understand different elements of process. These broad categories included:
 - Best bits / things that went well;
 - Challenges / solutions to challenges;
 - External influences on the program;
 - Other and general reflections.
- Data from within these categories were then analysed into emergent themes based on participants' observations and accounts and described in this report.

Quantitative data was entered into a spreadsheet and descriptive statistics were run using SPSS.

3.4.1 Data limitations

Response rates for interviews, focus groups and training feedback forms were substantive. As such, thorough qualitative data was gained to saturation point and descriptive statistics could be run on the training feedback. The response rate to the grant reports was reasonable for qualitative analysis, but not sufficient for quantitative analysis, and the close-ended questions therefore excluded from the analysis.

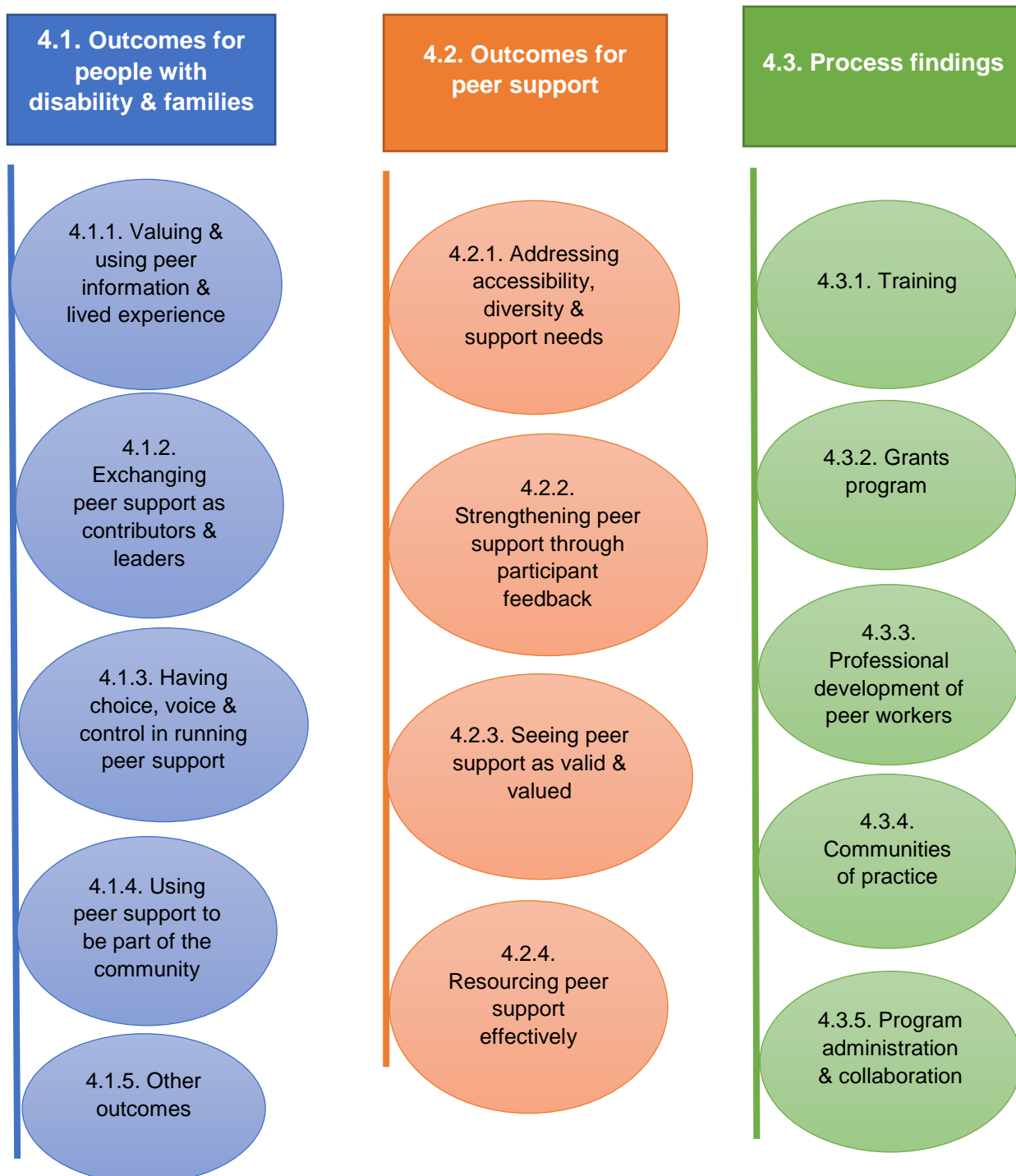
An additional feedback form was originally planned. This was a grants feedback form – a short survey with a combination of open- and close-ended questions about the process of applying for a grant. The grants feedback form could be filled in by anyone who applied for a grant, irrespective of the success of their application. This form was however not completed in many cases and was therefore excluded from the analysis. It is expected that response rates to the grants feedback form were so low for two reasons: (1) successful grantees were also requested to fill in the grant report

described above, and two written reports may have been too great an administrative burden; and (2) because information was in part requested from people who did not receive a grant and therefore were no longer engaged with the Team Up initiative, they may not have been inclined to participate.

4 Evaluation findings

The findings of the evaluation are divided into three sections (Figure 1). The first and second sections discuss the outcomes of the Team Up initiative for people with disability and family members and for the status of peer support. These sections cover the outcomes component of the evaluation. The final section examines the process findings of the evaluation, highlighting successes, challenges and lessons.

Figure 1: Evaluation findings sections



4.1 Outcomes for people with disability and families

This section reports on the outcomes gained from the Team Up initiative for people with disability and family members. The sub-sections are organised by outcome area. Data were analysed against the Team Up outcomes listed in the program logic (Appendix 1). Given the similarity of some of the listed outcomes to each other, the outcomes were collapsed into thematic areas, which comprise each of the sub-sections that follow. Table 5 maps which outcomes from the program logic are covered in each sub-section. Each sub-section is structured to first explain how Team Up focused on the outcome area in question, then account for the extent to which it met that outcome area and how it did so, and to finally end by explaining any limits and challenges in meeting that outcome area. Throughout, verbatim quotes are used from participants to illustrate the findings.

Table 4: Outcomes for people with disability and families by report section

<p>Report Section 4.1.1. Valuing and using peer information and lived experience</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People value and use peer information. • People value and draw on lived experience
<p>Report Section 4.1.2. Exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People give and receive peer support. • People contribute to and lead peer support
<p>Report Section 4.1.3. Having choice, voice and control in running peer support</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People articulate what they want and need to run peer support. • People have choice, voice and control over how peer support runs
<p>Report Section 4.1.4. Using peer support to be part of communities</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People use peer support to access the wider community

4.1.1 Valuing and using peer information and lived experience

“Whatever I need, I know that with Team Up, with the gang of the peers, I will find an answer, because they’re the ones who’ve done the hard yards to find a way to – they found the path. Or if they haven’t found the path, they know there is a path and they know that together you will find a path” (person with disability, training participant).

Team Up focus on peer information and lived experience

Valuing and using peer information and lived experience was a strong focus across the Team Up initiative. The value of peer information and lived experience was a foundational message of the 'Introduction to Peer Support' course. A significant proportion of course content was dedicated to defining peers as 'people who are equals and have shared experiences' and as experts in their own lives. Practical course activities were then designed to demonstrate that peers have expertise that can be shared in a range of areas where people might have traditionally sought formal supports – such as how to employ support workers, fill in a tax return, plan for NDIS participation or prepare for a job interview – and to encourage individuals to think about where they might be able to draw on their own lived experience or others' in giving and receiving peer support. In this respect, messaging around valuing and using peer information and lived experience was evident throughout the introductory training materials.

Valuing peer information and lived experience

Comments from evaluation participants highlighted that people with disability and family members heard and took on the messages about the importance of valuing lived experience. Evaluation participants noted increasing recognition among those taking part in Team Up that "all have something different to contribute", and that there could be a "life-changing" value in recognising the possibilities that peer support could offer:

"It is so important this peer support, because it just opens up your mind to the possibilities that are right there in front of you, but you never saw them, because you've not met the people who've showed it to you. And that's why I'm saying it's life changing. It's completely life changing" (person with disability, training participant).

Training participants expressed the enjoyment and value they found in "hearing about other people's experiences and expressing my experiences", "sharing ideas, knowledge and experience with each other" and seeing "how I could support people with disabilities using my own life experience". One person noted at the end of one of the training courses that "I'm still impacted by the statement that we are experts in our own lives". Of those who completed a Team Up training course, 97.6% felt that the people present at the training cared about what they thought and 96.3% said that other people at the training listened to them a lot, suggesting that the majority felt heard during the training sessions (see Appendix 5). Overall, by the end of the training, approximately 7% more training participants felt that their own life experiences could help others than at the beginning, rising from 77.1% to 83.8% (see Appendix 5).

Beyond the training experience, others also commented on valuing peer information and lived experience. For example, a grantee noted the benefits of using their grant-funded peer support group to talk about very difficult or traumatic experiences that "most of us can't or don't talk about... in public". A peer worker commented on the benefits of learning from what others were doing, stating the "best part is that you meet people with different disabilities doing different things from different areas... so it's really interesting to see how people work and just learn from each other". Overall, many people commented on their surprise at finding commonalities with others, particularly across disability types. In this respect, Team Up appeared to be successful in fostering a deep sense of value in hearing about, exchanging and reflecting on lived experience together with others.

Using peer information and lived experience

Evaluation participants noted a range of examples of people with disability and family members sharing practical information in both training sessions and the grant-funded peer support groups. This included sharing information about nutrition, exercise, strategies for being organised, housing, employment, how to engage in self-advocacy, tips for engaging in community activities, including booking accessible concert tickets, and advice about travelling overseas with a disability. Peer workers in particular commonly shared their own experiences; one peer worker noted, for example, that he actively told people who he was training or supporting about issues he had had in organising housing and in participating in open employment in order to encourage others to speak up about their experiences.

Two of the most concrete examples of people with disability reporting first-hand that they had made clear practical changes in their lives based on peer information came from a peer worker and a Team Up staff member with disability. The peer worker, for example, noted changing her approach to how she engaged in drama classes:

“[I] go to a... drama theatre for people with disabilities and I think I used to go to people who weren't my peers in terms of having support for learning my lines or tips on acting... but through peer support I've learnt to go to my peers who are at the school that have disabilities that have had lots of past experiences with drama, they've been doing it for a long time, how they remember their lines and acting tips and such and just knowing how to suss them out” (person with disability, peer worker).

Grantees and staff also reported having heard of several peer support group members and training participants having made life changes based on peer information, noting that they were seeing more examples of this over time. For example, a grantee who ran a peer support group for autistic adults to talk and share their lived experiences with parents of autistic children noted the changes some parents had made in response:

“One mum spoke to us at the end of a recent session to say that since she began coming to [our peer support group], she has changed her parenting style to take into consideration her autistic son's happiness and reported how much more enjoyable her – and his – life has become. One couple were ecstatic to understand finally some of their son's sensory needs and were so appreciative of the opportunity to hear from someone who gave them better access to their son's sensory processing” (person with disability, grantee).

As such, Team Up has promoted a strong *value* on peer information and lived experience, with some examples of people with disability and family members then *using* the information and experience to make practical changes in their lives over time. This suggests the importance of Team Up in creating an opportunity to experience peer support in action and in turn change one's thinking about peer information and lived experience. It also shows the importance of Team Up in providing the chance to think and reflect in order to translate changes in values into practical actions in people's lives. Importantly, such changes need dedicated space and time to develop.

Limits and challenges in valuing and using peer information and lived experience

Participants noted some limits and challenges in valuing and using peer information and experience. One challenging area was reconciling different life experiences. Across the training and grant-funded peer support groups, participants noted that it could be difficult for people with disability and family members be in peer support group meetings together, as they had different life experiences

and perspectives and not only were they not always in agreement, but sometimes the presence of one could act to silence the other. One peer worker, for example, noted:

“It’s really hard to get people [with disability] to speak up, especially when they have parents there or supporters there...it’s so hard to run those groups when someone’s speaking on behalf of that person” (person with disability, peer worker).

While some people noted the benefits of sharing peer information and lived experience across people with disability and family members, there were also numerous instances where it was framed as challenging. It raises a question about who different people recognise as their peers, and who may be usefully participate together in peer support groups.

Another challenge in sharing peer information and lived experience was where participants in peer support wanted to discuss issues with varying levels of gravity or sensitivity. One training participant noted that sometimes not everything one individual wanted or expected to raise for discussion was considered appropriate by or for the group:

“I was really frustrated the last two days when – you know how individuals might have wanted to explore something? ... you know how we were told if people bring things up, you just put a bow on it or you put it in the parking lot? I was at the point of nearly using four-letter words inside my head, because it’s like there is really serious stuff happening to people, life and death stuff... I understand it’s not the place or the time, but that’s the problem. Whenever people with disabilities meet, why isn’t it? ... It’s just if not now, when?” (person with disability, training participant).

Part of the issue is that the people taking part in peer support had a range of lived experiences and this translated to also a range of different potential triggers to past traumatic experiences or issues. Understanding how to enable an educative context in which people with disability are not unduly shielded from discussing new, complex and difficult subject matter in peer support, whilst still simultaneously providing a safe environment for everyone where they are not exposed to issues that they are unprepared or unequipped to deal with, is therefore a complex component of sharing peer information and lived experience, and one that presented some limits and challenges in Team Up. It implies the need balance education, exposure and safety in such conversations, in order to build people’s capacity to understand the experience of others, but with emotional wellbeing always in mind as well.

4.1.2 Exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders

“When I did the Facilitator training and the Peer Mentoring training, it was so great to see in both cases two strong disabled women running the course. I’ve never seen that ever. I’m in so many able-bodied spaces all the time that it was the most amazing feeling to be in a room surrounded by my peers” (person with disability, training participant).

Team Up focus on contributing to and leading peer support

Facilitating opportunities for people with disability and family members to exchange peer support as contributors and leaders was another strong focus of the Team Up initiative. The structure of the

three Team Up training courses appeared to be that the foundational messages about peer information and lived experience in the 'Introduction to Peer Support' course were designed to foster a basis for *contribution* to peer support, while the 'Peer Facilitator' and 'Peer Mentor' courses were designed to build the skills needed to *lead* peer support, either in a group or individual context. In this respect, the courses complement each other, together providing the training needed to exchange peer support as both contributors and leaders. Content in the 'Peer Facilitator' and 'Peer Mentor' courses focused on allowing participants to practice skills such as leading and managing group discussions, engaging in 'reflective listening' and identifying where they could lead peer support using their hands (practical support), heart (emotional support) and head (logical thinking) – thus building skills for leading peer support.

Contributing to peer support

The Team Up initiative fostered two types of sites for contribution to peer support. First, staff noted that training participants were encouraged to treat the training sessions as a site at which to enact peer support, even while skills for it were being taught. In this respect, the training itself was an opportunity to contribute to peer support:

“In a Team Up training, [we’re] encouraging people to feel that this is already a peer support community. [We say,] ‘You might only come together for one day today, but... we want you to start acting and identifying and being with each other, as a good peer support community would. Look out for each other at morning tea breaks and notice if someone needs a hand to get a cuppa, or might need a hand to get their lunch’... We’re actually kind of setting it up that everything that Team Up does is embodying all those values and expectations that make peer support work really well... humility, accountability, paying it forward. I think the training is embodying that capacity building” (staff member).

Following this approach, some people with disability and family members commented on experiencing peer support during the training sessions. They commented on the welcoming and non-judgemental nature of the training groups, on the relief they felt in the group attitude that “it’s okay to get it wrong” and on the benefits and learning they gained from sharing experiences in the training sessions. One peer worker noted that the participants in her training group had stayed back of their own accord after a training session to have a conversation about disability awareness in CALD communities and that in itself “was an example of peer support”. Notably, the peer support exchanged during the training sessions appeared to be strongest where at least some of the training group already knew each other prior to the training. One staff member acknowledged this by saying, “The reality of peer support, as I have experienced it, [is] it takes weeks of being together and getting to know each other, so there is a sense in which the training is a taster”. This suggests the level of familiarity and the time needed to develop trusting relationships for exchanging peer support.

Second, Team Up also fostered opportunities for contributing to peer support through the grant-funded peer support groups and by supporting the development of two peer networks. A range of groups and networks with different focuses were funded, giving people with disability and family members the opportunity to contribute to peer support centred on a range of different areas. This included groups based on disability type (intellectual disability, autism, deaf/blind etc.), place (local community), an interest (employment, creative arts, computer games, self-advocacy, socialising etc.) or a particular characteristic (Aboriginal and other culturally-diverse communities).

The reports from grantees/peer group leaders and those leading the peer networks suggested that people with disability and family members were contributing to peer support through these

groups/networks. A peer network leader gave the example of how multiple network members had worked together to ensure that a new member was welcomed and well-included in an event on an occasion when all the usual peer support network leaders were unable to attend. Peer group leaders also commented more generally on “a real sense of support and comradery” developing, “moments of genuine social connection” and “peers coming together in a new, exciting and ultimately productive way”, suggesting that they were seeing the exchange of peer support occurring in their groups. Some groups appeared to develop a stronger basis for contributing to peer support than others. This appeared to be influenced by the extent to which the group had a strong and well-supported leader and by how long the group had been running – groups that had started running (or at least started planning) prior to applying for their Team Up grant appeared to have developed a stronger culture of contributing to peer support than those who had first commenced with the grant, again suggesting the time needed to translate peer support into practice in people’s lives.

Leading peer support

Fostering capacity for leadership in peer support was a central element to Team Up. The Team Up initiative fostered several avenues for people with disability and family members to become more involved in leading peer support. Opportunities for leadership were fostered through the grants program, as the grants gave the infrastructure required for people with disability and family members to lead peer support groups. Beyond this, there were also two more active ways that Team Up fostered leadership in peer support.

First, Team Up upskilled peer workers in peer support leadership. Peer workers who went through two or more Team Up training courses as participants and then ran the courses themselves demonstrated their new capacity to lead peer support as a result, with 69.9% of feedback form respondents stating they were trained by a peer worker. Many demonstrated skills as facilitators and peer support group leaders, undertaking roles in group facilitation, active listening, organising the logistics of training and peer support groups/networks, encouraging participants to attend and having difficult conversations with training participants/group members, where required. One peer worker noted some of the skills he can now use:

“Some of the time it’s just, as I said, really listening and empathy as well. So, let’s them in to open up and say what they want to say, to sit back and have a conversation with you. Don’t be a doer, don’t be an actioner, just sit there [and listen], yeah” (person with disability, peer worker).

Another peer worker commented on the confidence she had gained from honing her skills and developing her own unique style as a peer support leader:

“I’m really confident to do facilitation and do it my way. It took me a couple of sessions to realise that I can make it my own, make it work... So, I guess confidence for me and also being able to do some of those difficult conversations as well. I had an instance where in our first session there was a lady and she wasn’t there for the right reasons... I had to talk to her... make it clear what peer support is... [I] just had that conversation, a hard conversation, and [I had to] learn how to kind of do that” (person with disability, peer worker).

Similarly, other peer workers also commented that leading peer support had “built [their] confidence” and that it had opened them up to more leadership opportunities. For example, one noted that following his experience in Team Up he was thinking of other leadership opportunities he could now take up with the same skills, including running workshops for other organisations, working as a

public speaker and working with his local council. As such, Team Up appeared to have fostered the peer support leadership skills of peer workers so that they could take up leadership roles with confidence. Several appeared to be thinking about how they could extend these skills into other roles into the future, for example, other facilitation roles or roles in the broader community.

Notably, seeing the leadership of the peer workers and of Team Up staff with disability also motivated other people with disability to want to take up leading roles in peer support. For some people, it was the first time they had seen another person with disability in a leadership role – and this gave them confidence that they too might be able to take up such a role in the future. Others commented on observing the practicalities of how peer workers and staff members managed their support needs while facilitating training, gaining ideas about how they might also do so in future. In this respect, the leadership of peer workers was important not only for fostering current leadership of peer support, but also for motivating others in thinking about taking up similar roles in future.

Second, through the training courses, Team Up also provided the motivation and baseline skills and resources for people with disability and family members to think about leading peer support in the future. Several people attended the training either because they wanted to start their own peer support group or came away from the training saying that, because of participating, they wanted to start their own group. Only some of these people, however, said definitively that they felt they had gained the knowledge, experience skills or resources that they would need to do so, whereas others appeared to rather have strengthened in their aspiration or intention to run peer support in the future. One of those who mentioned gaining the skills and resources to run a group spoke about emulating the qualities of her training facilitators and drawing on the resources provided to her in the training:

“Before I went to the Team Up training days, I kind of had no idea how I was going to start my [peer support] group... Sitting in [the training] and hearing other people’s stories and hearing other facilitators and how they work and what they do and what helps them, it kind of gave me an insight as well as... the content... Now after having the two weeks of training, I now know exactly what I want to do. I picked my favourite parts from other facilitators and what they do and how they work and I’ve taken them on board. Having the tool boxes and having the contents, electronic and a print copy of the content, I’m able to look back and say, ‘Well, I have all this information on how to run my group and things that might help me’, so I find that extremely helpful” (person with disability, training participant).

Another person similarly commented:

“I found the training really useful... I found a lot of value in it and it reinforced a lot of things and it kind of has given me the tools I think to be a good facilitator and to know what to do and how to manage a group and understand what the whole thing is about... I am co-facilitating a workshop in a couple of weeks, which is my first ever big kind of group facilitation. And I know that I’ll be going back and going through reading my notes on the [training] notes that I have and the booklets or whatever that I have, because they’re a valuable resource” (person with disability, training participant).

Notably, the results from the feedback forms suggested that by being trained in peer support leadership, some people may have been better able to assess the skills and requirements involved. While the number of people who wanted to get support from others and give support to others remained relatively consistent pre- and post-training (get: 62.0% pre cf. 64.2% post; give: 85.9% pre cf. 86.4% post), the number of people wanting to help someone else run peer support increased the most substantially following the training (50.0% re cf. 56.8% post) and the number of people wanting to be a leader of peer support themselves reduced (59.8% pre cf. 52.4% post) (see Appendix 5).

One interpretation of these results is that, as a consequence of the training, participants learnt more about what is involved in being a responsible leader of peer support and re-assessed their desire to be the overall leader of a group, rather opting to maintain a partial leadership position. Further, rather than leading formal peer support groups, multiple people noted that at a more informal one-to-one or inter-personal level, they felt better equipped as a result of the training to help friends and peers with advice and sharing lessons from their experience. Together these findings suggest the multiple levels at which people were interested in leading in peer support – for many people, it was not only about running formally organised peer support groups themselves, but also about skills for helping others in peer support leadership positions and providing peer support in informal situations in their everyday lives. Overall, Team Up therefore appears to have fostered strong leadership in formal peer support among the defined group of peer workers who engaged in extensive capacity building during the initiative, and then begun to contribute towards a spectrum of forms of leadership by other people with disability and family members across multiple sites and relationships in their lives.

Limits and challenges in contributing to and leading peer support

Two key limits and challenges were evident in supporting people with disability and family members to contribute to and lead peer support through Team Up.

First, while the Team Up initiative focused on developing skills for people to use in contributing to and leading peer support, there were not always enough sites or opportunities for people to apply these skills. Staff involved in running the initial training for peer workers noted that there could be a time-lag between peer workers developing their skills and then having the opportunity to apply what they had learnt by leading their own training sessions. This presented challenges in cementing their professional development:

“There are some [peer workers] who have come on board as facilitators in the program... who also because of the timeline issue that I spoke about earlier, who haven't yet actually delivered a training with us. Some have gone through a lot of training themselves, and have gone through a lot of preparation, but actually haven't done any work with us yet, and actually running any training. So, for them, they would probably say it's probably more frustration... one person [said] that they don't really feel like they have very much to contribute, because they haven't really done anything yet” (staff member).

Staff involved in administering Team Up also noted that there were not always sufficient peer support groups for people to participate in and contribute to after they had done their training in the foundational principles of peer support. While the grants program aimed to improve this situation by directly funding peer support groups, it could not fund all peer support groups/projects that were applied for. For some of the Team Up organisations, this issue was more acute than for others, depending on the scope of their other programming:

“It's about the follow up and I know that's a bit of a challenge for some organisations. It's not so bad for [our organisation], because we have other [activities and groups] that we can invite people into. I know that that is one of [the other organisations'] challenges because they don't necessarily [have that]—they might do training with people that are further away, for example... it's quite challenging to find ways that those peers in training can actually take some active concrete actions. At [our organisation], we can say, 'Would you like to come to this event or would you like to come and help us out at this next thing that we're doing?'” (staff member).

The challenge of finding peer support groups to participate in highlights the key importance of the grants program to the Team Up initiative, in that it funds peer support opportunities. Without opportunities to apply their newly-learned skills, there could be limits on how people with disability and family members contributed to and led peer support. The implication is of the need to further extend and fund new peer support opportunities in a consistent and ongoing manner.

Second, peer workers received significant support for preparing for and enacting their roles in leading peer support. This included, for example, time to go through and/or practice the training material with a lead facilitator before a training session, time to pre-record contributions, co-facilitating together with a lead facilitator, de-briefing afterwards and receiving materials in accessible formats. One Team Up staff member called this support ‘scaffolding’ and explained it by saying:

“It’s more than [support and access]. It is support and access plus. It’s like a belief system that values the contribution of each peer worker, and understands each peer worker’s aspirations for the role, and addresses the different requirements and supports that people need to get to that next level” (staff member).

The same staff member went on to explain the significant amount of resourcing required for scaffolding:

“What I think has gone really well is just, I think, being very, very clear about the level of resourcing that is required to provide that scaffolding to a peer workforce ... [It’s] a significant amount of resourcing. At [our organisation], we engage a support worker for the Team Up peer workers, so their role is to facilitate the leadership and role of the peer workers for the Team Up project, over the duration of this project... interpreters, large print, accessible documents for people who use screen readers... participation support for people with intellectual disability” (staff member).

The implication of the significant resourcing required is a potential limit on peer workers’ leadership of peer support if this scaffolding were to be withdrawn – such as at the end of the funded period of the Team Up initiative. It suggests that while Team Up has been successful in fostering the leadership of peer workers, this is an area which requires significant and ongoing resources. One Team Up staff member felt that with sufficient time, peer workers might be able to take over some areas of peer support administration currently done by Team Up administrative staff, but there was a general consensus that appropriate resourcing for scaffolding was an ongoing requirement, but one dependent on sufficient and continuing funding support.

4.1.3 Having choice, voice and control in running peer support

“I watched a really lovely consensus decision-making process happening. So, it wasn’t just one person making a decision about what [the peer support project] would look like, everyone gathered together and... got the chance to say actually even though we come together at [this peer support group] and we talk about things that are really hard and often really sad... people decided that the music video was going to be heaps of fun and really positive” (staff member).

Team Up focus on choice, voice and control in running peer support

Having choice, voice and control in how to run peer support was a key part of the grants stream of the Team Up initiative, including that people with disability and family members should be able to articulate what they want and need to run peer support. By allowing grantees to propose their own peer support group or project, and then having grant assessment criteria which encouraged selection of a range of ideas, the Team Up initiative was set up to foster choice, voice and control by those applying for grants. Notably, the grants process ran simultaneously with the first training courses, meaning that grantees needed to make choices about what peer support they wanted to run and apply for prior to having done training in peer support practice and leadership. They could however participate in training after receiving their grant and a planning/training day was run by Team Up for successful grantees.

Having choice, voice and control in running peer support

Grantees gave examples of having choice, voice and control in running their peer support groups and projects, including:

- Choosing the focus and goals of their peer support group or project;
- Setting their own tone for their peer support group, varying from serious to light-hearted;
- Choosing a variety of items to spend their grant funds on (e.g. room hire, food, support personnel, technological access, filming services etc);
- Choosing new facilitators throughout the funded period of their peer support groups, based on the needs of the group, including:
 - Moving from a family member to a person with disability as facilitator;
 - Finding a facilitator whose outlook better matched the views of the group.
- Establishing partnerships with other like-minded groups or organisations;
- Finding their own ways to solve challenges and problems in running the group;
- Adjusting how they would use the budget supplied by their Team Up grant.

Several grantees also commented on fostering choice, voice and control for their peer support group members over time, shifting from a model where the group was run by the grantee or defined group leader to a model where group members made decisions about the running of the group together:

“Over the period of the grant... the steps, resources and vision has become much clearer and is owned by the whole group and not just me” (person with disability, grantee).

“[We promoted] choice by encouraging group members to decide which topics are covered in the video [we made together]” (person with disability, grantee).

“[The women participating] were a bit nervous at the beginning of the meeting, but... after the first 20 minutes... they'd settled right in and they were all really comfortable obviously with the conversation... it was only a couple of hours... [and we went] away with a list of things that they wanted to talk about and that we can help them to pursue. It's just when you imagine just how restricted their lives are generally, to be able to put them into a situation where that's flipped on its head and they're in charge and at no point was anybody saying 'We will do this, we will do that' to them. It was like 'What do you want?' That's really satisfying” (family member, grantee).

Beyond these areas, grantees did not often comment explicitly on having choice, voice and control in running peer support – however, the variety of their reported plans and approaches to peer support suggest that they did have choice, voice and control, at least to some degree. With an overarching view of the Team Up grants program as a whole and the variety of the funded groups/projects, the extent of choice, voice and control was something that staff commented on:

“I think there has been an overall learning that has emerged, particularly for the grants program, about the diversity of peer support... We received such a huge range of different types of applications, from different types of groups, and a lot of those came from the ground up. Came from people saying, ‘Hey, this is who I am, this is who my community is, and this is how we want to get together, and this is what we want to do’. So... you create structures that provide a space, but let the people who are in that space define what that space looks like, because they’re the only ones who are going to be able to say what works for them” (staff member).

Other staff also commented on how they perceived the relationship of choice, voice and control to the need for accountability in peer support. This included commenting on the need for those running peer support to articulate what they want and need to run it and trust that what they need will be supported:

“You need to step back and let people do [peer support for themselves]. So, I learnt that if you trust people and let them know that you trust them, they’ll step up... You just need to make the space for them. So, by making the space for them I mean by making it accessible; ask, you know; giving them the opportunity to tell you what they need to be successful and acting on it. And acting on it continuously... It needs to be a constant check in” (staff member).

As such, grantees gave some indication of having choice, voice and control in running peer support, although staff members were more often able to reflect on the bigger picture of choice, voice and control and how it happened across grants and peer support groups. More information would be beneficial to understand the extent and depth of that choice, voice and control, especially from the perspective of people with disability and family members themselves.

Limits and challenges in choice, voice and control in running peer support

Grantees mentioned some limits and challenges in having choice, voice and control in running their peer support groups/projects, including:

- Difficulty matching the theory of what they had learnt about running peer support in Team Up training with the practice of implementing it with their peer support group;
- Difficulty finding appropriate co-facilitators of peer support groups and/or replacement facilitators, especially where a facilitator did not suit the group or experienced personal issues, such as ill-health, which limited their input;
- Needing to change their original plans due to delays in the grants being awarded (and therefore a shorter timeframe for running their peer support groups/projects), including difficulty and stress in coming to and managing new arrangements;
- Not being in as frequent contact with Team Up support staff as they had expected or indicated they would have liked;
- Not being able to afford some things they would have chosen, even with the grant – e.g. an office or other space to work from;

- Inconsistent arrangements for accessing grant funding, with at least one grantee needing payment via invoicing, while others had direct access to their grant via direct deposit to their bank account;
- Missing some of the introductory sessions to plan their choice, voice and control in running their grant, due to work commitments and/or geographical distance.

Some grantees mentioned Team Up staff assisting them with these challenges; for example, one person mentioned Team Up paying a mentor to help guide her in establishing better co-facilitation practices in her peer support group. This appeared to be outside the original plan and budget of her grant. In this respect, grantees did experience some limits and challenges in having choice, voice and control in running peer support, although sometimes received support from Team Up to assist.

Further, with an overarching view of the whole Team Up initiative, one staff member commented that for some people – especially those from CALD communities who may not have been previously familiar with peer support – it would have been beneficial to have run some of the ‘Introduction to Peer Support’ training prior to opening the grants round. This staff member commented that running the training first would have helped people think about how peer support might apply to their community and may have potentially encouraged more people to apply. The implication is about how the Team Up initiative can best develop choice, voice and control, including by sequencing its activities to build these areas over time. Notably, in order to do this, the timeline for the initiative set by funders would need to be lengthy and flexible in order to iteratively develop choice, voice and control over time.

4.1.4 Using peer support to be part of communities

“I think [being a peer worker] really puts me at the grass roots level of change and actually helping establish communities that will do their own thing. You’re starting the ground work that you’re trying to train people to be able to take that into their own communities and do something” (person with disability, peer worker).

Team Up focus on using peer support to be part of communities

Using peer support to access the wider community was a stated aim for the grants stream of the Team Up initiative. Those applying for a grant were asked how their funded peer support group would make a difference in the community and how they would share their experience and lessons with other groups or organisations. The intended focus was on identifying communities to be part of, building connections and sharing their skills within the community. It was intended that grantees would use their peer support projects to be part of the wider (mainstream) community. As an assessed question in the grant application, the focus on accessing the community was clear.

Being part of the wider (mainstream) community

Consistent with the aim of using the grants stream of Team Up to access the wider community, some grantees commented on using their funded peer support groups to take part in the community around them. For some, this was achieved by using community resources, such as exercising in local parks; going to cafes, coffee shops and/or the pub together; and attending community facilities (such as art galleries, arts centres, libraries, swimming pools and technology stores). In one peer

support group, the members attended the Mardi Gras together, and in another group members engaged with local writing and arts performance groups. A grantee commented on how by simply being present in such spaces, people with disability could contribute knowledge of disability within their community:

“We are working from a studio in [the arts centre]. We meet there as often as we can get the booking. When we’re not there, we go to a gallery or an outside space and draw and communicate with the art world. I also see us as an advocacy group, in that I take the guys out into the gallery, and people see that these people with disabilities are not so stupid. They might have a brain injury, but they can still engage with the artwork and they’re not annoying the other patrons and they can speak normally to the other patrons” (person with disability, grantee).

Beyond using community resources and facilities, others commented on trying to make an impact on the community around them. They spoke about engaging with local businesses, local councils (and representatives such as mayors and local councillors – including writing submissions and letters to a local member) and other community groups, such as libraries, arts and sports clubs, often for the purpose of advocating on physical accessibility and disability awareness. One grantee commented on how the contact person from the local business which they had partnered with on their peer support project, identified benefits in helping their employees to engage with people with disability in the future:

“The [local business] team have also received something tangible from helping us to run the program. As [our contact there] commented: the... team working with us is being taught actively and practically how to engage with the autistic community respectfully and is being educated in neurodiversity and autism acceptance. These factors will set [us] up to facilitate more such programs into the future” (person with disability, grantee).

Another grantee commented on the tangible impact their group had made with local arts organisations they had collaborated with:

“[Our peer support group] gave support, but also brought out the need for the group and acted as an advocate for the access benefits to mainstream organisations. Organisations have changed to accommodate us, and we have gained new members and get them referred in now from groups and events we targeted” (person with disability, grantee).

Another grantee commented on the impact he *hoped* to make in the community by making a film in his peer support group, noting dual benefits where raising community awareness of disability not only helped the community, but also people with disability themselves:

“The benefits are definitely there, and I think that they’re going to continue to come. I think once the film is actually done, edited and on YouTube, I think it’s going to really raise awareness in the general community about deaf/blind people, and I think that that’s actually going to allow deaf/blind people to navigate the community more confidently” (person with disability, grantee).

Overall, it was most common that people with disability and family members used the grant-funded peer support groups to access the community by using community resources and facilities. The instances in which people actively sought to make a contribution to the community and then were able to identify clear changes in the community as a result were fewer, but still important where they occurred.

Building a peer support and/or disability community

While a stated aim of the Team Up initiative was that participants use peer support to access the wider (mainstream) community, evidence emerged of Team Up also providing the opportunity to build a peer support and/or disability community. As people with disability shared peer information and lived experience and exchanged peer support as contributors and leaders, a sense of community developed between participants based on shared value of mutual experience and commonalities across experiences of disability. In this respect, as much as Team Up identified accessing the *wider* (mainstream) community as an aim, an area which appeared to be just as important to participants was establishing or building a stronger peer support and/or disability community.

Building a peer support and/or disability community was evident through both the grants and training streams of Team Up. In some of the training sessions where the training group formed a cohesive bond, a sense of community was evident. Some grantees also commented on establishing a sense of community between their peer support group participants. One grantee framed this as “comradeship between the children [participating]”, while another said more explicitly, “We can see that we are fostering a community in our local area of people who accept and respect neurodiversity and autistic identity”. This grantee went on to say:

“... it allowed us to have a hand in more than simply taking part in the community, because we are actively making our community... it allowed us to interact personally with those we seek to influence and impact. This has allowed for a very powerful community building experience” (person with disability, grantee).

In one geographic region, where there is a large residential institution for people with intellectual disability, both grantees and peer workers commented on trying to bring this sense of the broader disability community to those living in the institution. They described engaging residents of the institution in some peer support activities and visiting them in the institution to give more of a sense of the community beyond. One grantee commented:

“It opened a huge door for them because they just live in this - they just live in isolated [sic]. They don't go out. They just sit in their rooms... We've really helped them open a lot of doors” (person with disability, grantee).

Those involved noted some of the planning that was involved in bringing the sense of community to this group: for example, planning peer support events of a social nature to be most accessible to residents of the institution; investing time in learning new communication support skills; and supporting peer workers with the emotional toll of visiting the institution.

People with disability also spoke more broadly about the value to them of being part of a peer support and/or disability community. One person said:

“Most of my friends are able-bodied, 99% of my friends are able-bodied, but to be a part of a group and to be around people all the time now that understand me and I understand them and we can share our experience and learn from each other and that kind of thing, yeah I'm finding so much value and empowerment and pride really in our community. It's really awesome” (person with disability, training participant).

Another person put the development of a peer support and/or disability community through Team Up in the context of histories of inclusion and segregation for people with disability more broadly,

and cycled back to how engaging with a peer support and/or disability community could in turn help people with disability access the wider (mainstream) community:

“So, I think with the whole idea of people going to mainstream schools and integration and inclusion in the wider, broader community – which is absolutely what we want for people – I think, somewhere along the way we’ve actually lost the idea that people with disabilities connecting with each other is really, really, really powerful... it’s almost about authenticity. You understand what people’s life is like because you also live with some of those things... For a very long time, people were against people with disabilities congregating together or meeting. People were like ‘Oh no, you should be in your mainstream community with people without disabilities’. So much to the fact that, you know what? I’ve lost all those connections. Peer support is back on the agenda. It’s not meant to be there to replace people’s general relationships with the mainstream community, it’s there as an add-on, to add value to people’s lives and to actually support people to access mainstream communities. A lot of what we talk about in peer support is how did you go about resolving that problem? When people treat you like shit at the gym, how do you go back to the gym...?” (staff member).

This last point highlights the overall experience of community fostered by Team Up: by providing the potential for accessing both the wider community and being part of a peer support and/or disability community, the initiative holds the potential to strengthen people with disability’s experience of community overall.

Limits and challenges in using peer support to be part of communities

Evaluation participants did not talk about many challenges or limits in using peer support to be part of communities. The main challenge or limit is in understanding the extent to which people impacted their communities. The Team Up grants application criteria asked how funded peer support groups would make a difference in the community and how they would share their experience and lessons with other groups or organisations. However, beyond the few examples of making a difference in their communities cited earlier, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of impact made and whether this was as intended. Further information would be needed from community members themselves to assess this more thoroughly.

4.1.5 Other outcomes for people with disability and families

Other outcomes beyond those identified as the purpose of Team Up were also mentioned by evaluation participants.

Improved individual wellbeing

“I’ve noticed that personally I’m having really great texts with my daughter [since I’ve done the Team Up training]... I’m wording it differently now and she’s responding really well... From the training, I’ve received [ideas of what to say]... instead of saying ‘How are you going?’ or something like that, you know, same as I would say a hundred times, I’ll say, ‘What have you been doing in your day today?’ or [news like]... ‘My neighbour had a problem with his neighbour’ and I just get this huge text back. I know I’m saying the right thing” (person with disability, training participant).

Evaluation participants mentioned a range of ways in which people with disability had made gains in their individual wellbeing as a result of taking part in Team Up. This included increasing self-esteem, confidence, speaking up and speaking well, and improving relationships, friendships and communication, both with people in peer support and with other people in their family and life in general. People with disability noted the impact of this for them, saying that it made them feel good about themselves and about what was happening in their lives.

Staff running Team Up also mentioned that they had observed changes in the skills and attention that some people with disability had for personal wellbeing, for instance, skills for time management, teamwork and self-care. One staff member, for example, commented that she has witnessed training participants and peer workers improving their level of self-care throughout their participation in Team Up, focusing more on coming to Team Up events well-groomed, well-dressed and well-slept as they became more involved in the initiative.

Making a difference

“[When I play a mentor role through peer support, I can] to go to bed at night being the reason why somebody has bettered their life in a certain way... it’s fulfilling for me. That’s what it is for me” (person with disability, training participant).

Many people with disability and family members explained that participation in Team Up allowed them to make a difference in the lives of friends, family and other people they care about and to contribute or ‘give back’ to others. This was a common theme across training participants, grantees and peer workers. Some people focused on contributing to the lives of friends or peers who they had met through Team Up or who they knew through their own friendship groups and/or personal networks. As noted in Section 4.1.4, other people focused on making a difference to particular issues in their community, such as advocating for greater physical accessibility of the built environment for peers in their local community or advocating for peers who live in institutions or who otherwise had less rights or freedoms than themselves. One person, for example, noted: “I wanted to share that as a direct result of [this peer support event] instead of grumbling to myself, I’ve gone and written to my local member for the first time”. Others had spoken to the mayor in their town about accessibility. In this respect, the capacity to contribute to good outcomes for others – rather than only receive support – appeared to be profoundly important to many people.

Employment

“We gave our peer workers contracts – it’s the first time some of them had had a paid job or a job in mainstream employment. So, them just knowing the importance of turning up on time, knowing the importance of filling out their timesheet, how to report to Centrelink” (staff member)

Team Up resulted in increased employment opportunities for a range of people with disability. For several peer workers, being employed in Team Up was the first time they had had paid work; for others, it was not their first paid work, but added to an otherwise-thin casual workload. Occasionally,

people with disability found other employment opportunities as a result of Team Up, for example, where one person was paid to help convert the Team Up training material into accessible formats. Where people with disability were employed through Team Up, they received award-based wages (under the *Social and Community Services Award*).

Staff emphasised that Team Up not only provided paid work, but also provided professional development to support people with disability to perform well in employment. They explained that employment in Team Up was the first time some peer workers had been expected to arrive at work on time, fill in a time sheet, meet deadlines, prepare for their work tasks or know how to report changes in their work status to Centrelink (where they were receiving the Disability Support Pension). Staff noted that having clear and high (but reasonable) expectations with appropriate supports in place helped to develop peer workers’ skills in these areas and to develop their capacity for employment, by breaking through a history of previously low expectations.

4.2 Outcomes for peer support

This section reports on the outcomes gained from the Team Up initiative for the status and administration of peer support in NSW. As with Section 4.1, the sub-sections are organised by outcome area, with the outcomes from program logic collapsed (Appendix 1). Table 6 maps which outcomes from the program logic are covered in each sub-section. Each sub-section is structured to first explain how Team Up focused on the outcome area in question, then account for the extent to which it met that outcome area, how it did so and any limits and challenges in meeting that outcome area. Throughout, verbatim participant quotes are used to illustrate the findings.

Table 5: Outcomes for peer support by report section

<p>Report Section 4.2.1. Addressing accessibility, support needs and diversity</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support addresses accessibility and diversity Peer support addresses support needs Peer supports grants program is accessible and supported
<p>Report Section 4.2.2. Strengthening peer support through participant feedback</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support is strengthened through participant feedback
<p>Report Section 4.2.3. Seeing peer support as valid and valued</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive peer support is seen as a valid and valued choice
<p>Report Section 4.2.4. Resourcing peer support effectively</p> <p>Outcomes covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive peer support has personnel, experience, skills and resources

4.2.1 Addressing accessibility, support needs and diversity

“What’s gone well [is] being able to include so many different types of people with different levels of experience and people with different disabilities that affect their ability to facilitate. I think it’s really inclusive... we have people with all different disabilities, not just intellectual disabilities. We have people with physical disabilities, people with sensory disability, people who communicate via Alternative and Augmentative Communication. I’m really proud of the fact that we work across disability and don’t exclude anyone” (staff member).

Team up focus on accessibility, support needs and diversity

The focus on meeting accessibility, support needs and diversity requirements was clear throughout the Team Up initiative, especially in the outcomes listed in the program logic (Appendix 1). Efforts to meet accessibility, support needs and diversity requirements were in place through: (a) focus on explaining and modelling considerations on these fronts in the Team Up training courses, especially the Peer Facilitator course; and (b) support to the grant-funded peer support groups to be accessible and diverse. In the Peer Facilitator course, a significant amount of course content was devoted to educating future peer facilitators about different accessibility requirements and support needs and how to manage a group in which people with different support needs are present. Course content covered different disability types and associated support considerations, different ways of delivering material to be accessible, and language and cultural considerations.

Meeting accessibility and support needs, including limits and challenges

Significant attention was paid during the Team Up initiative to meeting a range of accessibility and disability-related support needs. Appendix 3 provides detailed (including verbatim) evidence for both the training and grants process/peer networks, noting the extent to which accessibility and support needs were met with respect to vision, Auslan/hearing, Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC), physical support, cognitive access, autism and mental health. In summary, the main findings are:

- Very significant attention and effort was put into meeting multiple accessibility and support needs across the Team Up training, grants process and peer networks. Key areas of focus were accessibility with respect to Auslan, AAC and cognitive access.
- Team Up was successful in including a range of people in training, running grants and in peer networks – including those using Auslan or AAC and who have an intellectual disability – and the Team Up programming appears to have been relatively accessible to these groups. Of those who completed a training course, 87.8% said the training was ‘very easy’ to understand and a further 11% said it was ‘a little easy’ to understand (see Appendix 5).
- Key areas where further improvements in accessibility and meeting support needs are still required include: better accessibility of the training materials and grant application forms to screen readers; greater access to grant application forms in Auslan; further consideration of the complexity of some key terms in the training; more interactive and creative options for engaging with people with intellectual disability during training; and evaluation of the length and amount of work involved in grant applications, with consideration of whether and how it might be possible to shorten the process to increase cognitive access and ease the level of

energy and anxiety involved in applying for and managing a grant. While most people (72.5%) who completed a training course said they got all of the help they needed during the course, 26.6% said they only got some of the help they needed and 1.3% said they got none of the help they needed (see Appendix 5). Similarly, most people (82.5%) found the training building accessible to get around in, but 17.5% found it only partially accessible (see Appendix 5).

A key challenge in meeting accessibility and support needs was that the Team Up initiative was designed to meet multiple accessibility requirements simultaneously. In this respect, some of the limits in meeting accessibility and support needs came from the large task of trying to address multiple areas at once and the reality that sometimes different accessibility and support needs could be in conflict with each other:

“I think sometimes just trying to make the training accessible and engaging for people, that’s a constant challenge. It might work for one group of participants with one disability background, but in the room you have got [different groups of] people—sometimes [their] needs kind of compete with each other. For people who are blind or vision impaired, we need the images described and for a person maybe with a cognitive disability, or who is deaf, that’s just more words that aren’t helpful” (staff member).

Participants in the evaluation spoke about some of the strategies that had been used to maximise meeting accessibility and support needs in Team Up, including in this context of multiple and sometimes competing requirements:

1. A primary strategy was organising and planning for accessibility. Across the Team Up initiative, the best outcomes in meeting accessibility and support needs were achieved where staff, peer workers and grantees organised and planned for accessibility, including by preparing and printing accessible resources in advance; having practice, preparation and reflection sessions with peer workers; identifying pairs of co-facilitators who would work together, with the intention that they would complement each other’s needs and abilities; and asking peer workers and training participants to identify and plan for their support needs in advance, so that supports could be set up early. Staff involved in Team Up emphasised the time and resources involved in this kind of organising and planning, noting that it could be a very time-consuming and detailed task and that it needed to be factored into the model of the initiative in order to achieve the best results. One organisation employed a staff member specifically to be a support worker for Team Up and providing accessibility support to Team Up participants was the entirety of her role with the organisation. Some of the gaps in meeting accessibility and support needs occurred where the organising and planning had not taken place effectively, for example, where the facilitators in one training course did not get the training material until the day before the course ran and therefore did not realise that it was not accessible to screen readers with sufficient time to still make arrangements to translate it to be accessible prior to the training.
2. Another strategy was fostering a culture of accessibility. One staff member spoke in detail about how they set up the training and other peer support opportunities available through Team Up so that these would be run from the beginning to foster an attitude of catering to what everyone needs to participate:

“We start out with some really clear ground rules, that everyone has different ways of communicating, and some people take more time than others, and that in this space, we support each other. We ask people to be respectful of each other’s

learning styles and the time it takes for everyone to be equally included... it's something that we've been really clear about, that we think we've been able to develop an effective kind of culture and infrastructure around" (staff member).

A culture of accessibility was also built by Team Up developing the capacity of peer workers and other training participants to understand more about the variety of each other's potential accessibility and support needs. Multiple peer workers and training participants mentioned learning more about how to meet different types of accessibility requirements, including learning about audio-description, using music and other multimedia formats in peer support, learning how to work effectively with Auslan interpreters and becoming aware of the importance of using Easy Read/Easy English phrasings. In this respect, the culture of accessibility extended to building the capacity of multiple people to meet accessibility and support needs, rather than Team Up only aiming to meet these in their own training. Overall, the culture of accessibility was also intended to keep open a place for discussion when access problems did arise, so that they could be discussed, and solutions found later or for next time. One person described this as about "instilling an attitude of openness and honesty" regarding accessibility.

3. Finally, peer support was used as a strategy in itself to solve accessibility problems. A key example of this was where peers stepped in during training to describe to the facilitators with a vision impairment a video that did not use audio-descriptions. This had benefits for the facilitators with vision impairment receiving the audio-description from peers, but also helped the peers to engage with the video and training as well:

"Because it was two visually-impaired facilitators, they made sure that if the clips didn't have audio-description already, they'd ask for another [person in the group to do it]... Everyone was more than happy to do it and even looking at images on the screen, sometimes [the facilitators] wouldn't even ask and someone would describe it so people who had vision impairments did understand it and it was kind of an easy thing to pick up. I found that we all engaged more with images and video" (person with disability, training participant).

Other similar examples were given where a training facilitator who was blind built rapport during training by asking participants to read out the slides and where co-facilitators complemented each other's needs and abilities and worked together to deliver peer support. In each of these cases, enacting peer support was itself the solution to some accessibility problems.

The implication of these findings is that with considerable effort, organisation and planning, Team Up has been able to address accessibility and support needs in a sustained way, generating benefits for those participating in the initiative and embedding accessibility and support needs considerations within the practice of peer support. There are still however limitations, where further planning, resources and modifications to some materials would be beneficial. Notably, attaining a high standard of accessibility was shown to be an area that requires significant and ongoing resourcing, and without continuing funding, the gains made may not be able to be maintained.

Meeting diversity requirements, including limits and challenges

Ensuring accessibility and responsiveness to people from a range of CALD backgrounds and other aspects of diversity was another significant focus of the Team Up initiative. Appendix 4 details evidence (including verbatim) for training and the grants process/peer networks, focusing on the

extent to which the Team Up initiative met diversity requirements for CALD and regional communities. In summary, the main findings are:

- Significant attention was paid to catering to cultural and linguistic diversity during Team Up, especially with regard to delivering training in community languages and facilitating the work of CALD groups which received grants. Of the training participants, 164 out of 375 were from an Aboriginal or CALD background.
- Staff were pleased with the gains made to include CALD communities, including changes in CALD participants' thinking about the applicability of peer support to a range of communities and greater understanding among CALD participants of the concept of peer support.
- Staff also however felt there was always more to do to include CALD communities, as well as areas they could improve on to reach these communities. This was especially the case in encouraging and supporting more CALD groups to apply for and successfully receive grants. Barriers to CALD communities applying for and receiving grants stemmed from lack of time and funding for translating the grant application forms into community languages, and limited opportunity to do the 'Introduction to Peer Support' course prior to applying for a grant, to foster more informed thought among CALD community groups about how peer support might apply to their own communities. Staff also felt that there were perhaps more strategies they could have learnt about and implemented to support CALD communities to access Team Up, but that they did not do so.
- The 'Introduction to Peer Support' course was run in some regional communities and several regionally-based peer support groups were funded through the grants process. Those participating noted the benefits to the local flavour of peer support that resulted. One participant suggested that video-conferencing would offer an opportunity to include more regional participants in Team Up training in future.

As noted above, a key challenge in ensuring the accessibility and responsiveness of the Team Up initiative to CALD communities was the time and resources involved in translating materials – such as the grant application forms – into community languages. One staff member explained some of the practicalities involved:

“Having [the grant] application forms translated would have also been really useful for participants... it's about practicalities... It's... a process... you send flyers and documents to be translated, and they come back and they're not good quality. So... what we've found to be really useful was to have them translated, come back to us and we actually hold focus groups with people who speak and read the language, and they go through the translation and look at the readability of it, and then suggest any changes and recommendations. Then we send that back to the interpreters for them to re-edit” (staff member).

She then went on to explain the implications for the timeline and budget of this process for a project such as Team Up:

“[It] is a process. We did not have time to practically do that [in Team Up]... It could take two months... It's time consuming, but it's just so important... there's limited time and [funding schemes] don't take into consideration the practicalities involved in really engaging CALD communities. When it comes to the funders, they need to understand that it really takes time to meaningfully provide information, meaningfully engage, meaningfully ensure that people can participate” (staff member).

The implication is that to further improve the accessibility and appropriateness of the Team Up initiative for people from CALD communities, further time and resources would be required to

establish and fund better practices to foster their participation. Further time and resources would enable a timeline where the ‘Introduction to Peer Support’ training could be run before the grants process and a larger collection of culturally appropriate resources could be developed to foster greater participation. It might also allow Team Up staff more time to learn about and implement further strategies to support CALD communities to access Team Up. Similarly, further resources would likely be required to engage with regional communities through video-conferencing.

4.2.2 Strengthening peer support through participant feedback

“I had feedback from a person who was interpreting Auslan sign language. She came up to us one day... and she said whenever you ask a question don’t make the person with the hearing impairment go first... because people with hearing impairment like to hear other people’s opinions on what the question is. So, from there, we were able to, I guess, not fix our mistakes, but we knew for next time not to do that” (person with disability, peer worker).

Team Up focus on participant feedback

By listing an outcome in the program logic about responding to participant feedback, the intention to be responsive was clear in the Team Up initiative. What was not clear were the mechanisms in place to capture participant feedback for the purpose of making changes. Some feedback could be captured from peer workers (who were most engaged in running the initiative) through reflection and debriefing sessions and their community of practice meetings, and from ongoing contact with grantees. It was less clear however whether there were comprehensive mechanisms for gathering feedback from training participants.

Notably, the importance of peer support being responsive to feedback featured in the Peer Facilitator training, where training participants were encouraged to think about collecting feedback on any future peer support initiatives they might lead – the importance of feedback was framed in this training as about seeing “how things are going and whether we are shooting goals and hitting targets”.

Responding to participant feedback

Some clear examples were given of Team Up being responsive to participant feedback. Notably, these examples cross all parts of the initiative, including training, grants, peer networks and the peer workers’ community of practice. The examples are:

- Responding to feedback on the quality and repetition of some slides in the Team Up training courses and making continuous changes to the material until a version that most people liked was determined;
- Making changes to the training arrangements to respond to facilitators’ and participants’ requests to improve accessibility – for example, arranging for a screen-reader friendly translation of some training materials and working with Auslan interpreters to better understand how to make the most of the interpreting process;

- Being responsive to learning that grant-funded peer support groups should be modelled from “the bottom up”, in the sense of responding to the peer support needs articulated by different communities with different identities, rather than prescribing one-peer support group model;
- Setting up a purely social peer network (e.g. rather than a network based on advocacy and/or leadership development) in response to feedback from people with disability about feeling lonely and needing a structure for socialising;
- Setting up a Facebook group for the peer workers’ community of practice, in response to requests for this from peer workers.

Beyond these few direct examples, evaluation participants did not directly mention the Team Up initiative responding to participant feedback. The general attitude however of the staff involved was that people with disability and family members should be the drivers of peer support. In this respect, the philosophy of the program was to be as responsive as possible and, as such, instances of responding to participant feedback may have gone beyond those directly mentioned by participants in data collection for the evaluation. This is also suggested by 96.3% of training participants answering that the training staff listened to what they had to say (see Appendix 5).

Limits and challenges in responding to participant feedback

A few participants mentioned limits and challenges in Team Up responding to participant feedback. One peer worker spoke about how, as she became more experienced in facilitation and got to know better the training group she was leading, she had wanted to make some changes to the way she led the group, but was told that she was not allowed to do this:

“I was told ‘Oh, you’re just going to have a difficult conversation with [that training participant], rather than being able to change the structure a little differently to work with the audience’. So, support in terms of them giving me the okay to be able to change that up a little, that would have been good... [being] more able to have different ideas of running things” (person with disability, peer worker).

In another instance, a training participant noted that she felt that some of the language in the training could have been less “technical” and “more practical”, but when asked if she had given feedback to the facilitator about this, she said:

“Not really, because I thought it’s already the content, the common one for everybody. I don’t know whether the facilitators, they make their own content or a common one” (person with disability, training participant).

These examples highlight some of the limits and challenges in Team Up being responsive to participant feedback. Coupled with the lack of clarity about the mechanisms through which to collect participant feedback, they suggest that there is scope for Team Up to foster and more actively promote ways to collect and respond to feedback to strengthen the initiative. It is noted that by including the data collection mechanisms for the evaluation (i.e. feedback forms prior to and after training, grant reports and interviews and focus groups), this may have limited the capacity of Team Up to implement other sustained feedback mechanisms, as participants’ time and capacity for providing their views may already have been exhausted.

4.2.3 Seeing peer support as valid and valued

“I feel anecdotally like people... feel like peer support is being really validated, as an option that can change your life. It’s not just something that you do every now and again, it’s really giving value and saying that this is something that you can contribute to and we want you to contribute to” (staff member).

Team Up focus on peer support as valid and valued

An overall aim for Team Up was for the initiative to contribute to peer support being seen as a valid and valued option for all people with disability and family members in NSW. In practice, this meant that there was the intention that, as a result of participating in Team Up, people with disability and family members would be more likely to turn to peer information and lived experience for support, in addition to receiving advice from paid and/or professional services. This aim was embedded across the initiative, rather than a focus of any one particular component. The training was designed to give people knowledge and skills in peer support in order to value it and see it as valid, while the grants program was designed to give people opportunities to run and participate in peer support, thereby learning from experience how it might be a valuable option for their lives. In this respect, this aim of Team Up was closely related to some other outcome areas already discussed in earlier sections of the report – for example, Section 4.1.1 about valuing and using peer information and lived experience and Section 4.1.2 about exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders. This section consolidates these insights and provides additional information, where available.

Seeing peer support as valid and valued

People with disability and family members who were training participants and grantees did not necessarily state explicitly that Team Up had an influence on whether or how they saw peer support as a valid and valued option in their lives. However, the strength of their comments about valuing peer information and lived experience (Section 4.1.1) and exchanging support as contributors and leaders (Section 4.1.2) suggest that peer support had become a valid and valuable option in at least some people’s lives. By talking about the benefits they saw in peer support and giving examples of practical changes they had made in their lives as a result of engaging in it, people with disability and family members evidenced, in a practical way, their view of peer support being valid and valued. Further, examples given by peer workers and staff about people with disability and family members from CALD and Auslan-speaking communities coming to engage with/in and benefit from peer support for the first time also suggests that peer support may be reaching a wider range of people than it did prior to the Team Up initiative, thus extending its scope to more diverse people in NSW.

Staff were more likely to talk directly about the extent to which they thought peer support was now seen as a valid and valued option. Staff were generally careful about what they claimed in this regard. Several noted that they felt like peer support was on the cusp of change – slowly becoming more recognised by people with disability and family members as a powerful and important option for their lives. One staff member described this by saying:

“I cannot [over]estimate how good I feel about peer support at the moment, both in terms of not just the training that we’re doing, but actually seeing peer support on the agenda” (staff member).

Another noted:

“I think people feel like peer support is being really validated, as an option that can change your life... It's something about really saying, ‘This isn't just an added extra in your life. It's not just something that you sometimes get from a service provider, it's something that we as people with a disability can give to each other and do for each other’” (staff member).

Overall, there was a sense from staff that positive acknowledgement of peer support was growing and would continue to grow over time:

“I think we are at just the beginning of really knowing the power of peer support for people with disability, so I feel like there is a lot more than we can learn and explore to keep making it stronger and more powerful and building the potential to make changes happen” (staff member).

As such, while evaluation participants often did not talk directly about seeing peer support as a valid and valued option, evidence available suggests that progress is being made in this area. As highlighted earlier in the report, time is needed to change in thinking about how peer support can be valued and used in one's life and to translate changes in values and thinking about peer support into practical actions. The available evidence suggests that this development is underway.

Limits and challenges in seeing peer support as valid and valued

Some staff members noted that it was particularly hard to judge the extent to which peer support was now seen as a valid and valued option in the lives of people with disability and family members. One person noted simply that this was not an area that people generally provide direct feedback on:

“I'm not as clear about [whether people see peer support as a valid way of getting information]. That's not something that people have said back to me, as something that they've gotten out of the training yet... Some people said, after the training, ‘Hey, look, I'd really like to go to a peer support group or I'd really like to set up a peer support group’. So, for those people who want to go to a peer support group, I guess that's an indication that they are seeing peer support as a more valid option for themselves, in terms of their own support structures in their life. But in terms of, yes, specifically around, ‘I'm more likely to turn to my peers for information now because of this’, I'm not as clear about that. I haven't had as much feedback about that” (staff member).

Another staff member noted that because she was exposed mainly to the people who had participated in Team Up, who were now very involved in peer support, it was hard for her to judge the extent to which peer support was seen as valid and valued more broadly among other people in NSW:

“I think in NSW, from my perspective, I don't know that [peer support is] a widely known about phenomenon yet. I feel like I live in this very, like, I'm around a group of people that know it really well... It's a beginning for sure... [but overall], it needs more promotion” (staff member).

These comments highlight some of the challenges of understanding the extent to which peer support is seen as a valid and valued option across NSW. Due to limits in the information provided and limits in equal access to the opinions and experiences of those who have and have not taken part in peer support, it is difficult to assess the full extent of progress on this outcome area.

4.2.4 Resourcing peer support effectively

“The capacity building initiatives are very, very clear, I think, and that’s been building up that pool of skilled facilitators, people with disability, providing the scaffolding, the correct amount of scaffolding and resourcing and support that’s required for people to succeed in their roles across a range of different support requirements” (staff member).

Team Up focus on resourcing peer support

Each stream of the Team Up initiative was designed to help resource peer support effectively. By teaching and upskilling more people about peer support, including fostering the skills and professional development of peer workers, Team Up’s training program was designed to build the pool of personnel with appropriate experience, skills and support for contributing to and leading peer support. Simultaneously, by providing funding for running peer support groups, the Team Up’s grants program was designed to provide the practical resources needed to service peer support. In this respect, the two streams of the initiative worked together to resource peer support effectively, each focusing on different areas.

Having personnel with experience and skills for peer support

A particular focus of the training program was that peer support should have appropriate and sufficient personnel with experience, skills and support to lead peer support. This area was addressed through both the professional development of peer workers and the training and development of people in other parts of the Team Up initiative.

The Team Up initiative was successful in training 20 peer workers. As noted earlier in the report, through the initiative, peer workers learnt and demonstrated significant skills in peer support leadership, including undertaking roles in group facilitation, active listening, organising the logistics of training and peer support groups/networks, encouraging participants to attend and having difficult conversations with training participants/group members, where required. Several noted that they hoped to apply their skills in other leadership roles in the future, for example, in other facilitation roles and in taking up roles in their community, such as with their local council. One staff member noted the extent to which these new peer workers built the capacity for peer support in NSW, including highlighting that their skills can extend beyond the context of the Team Up initiative itself:

“We have so far trained up 20... peer workers. So, people who we feel [are] much more confident about being able to take their skills and their philosophy back to their communities, regardless of what the [future] funding direction for this particular [Team Up] project looks like and embed some of those skills and philosophies with the people that they are already involved with, and already working with” (staff member).

Notably, the peer workers were encouraged to work flexibly and use their resources across NSW. Although peer workers may have had a sustained role in one particular community, several travelled to provide training in different parts of the state. This was beneficial for spreading the impact of new personnel across different locations and communities. Staff noted that they would have liked to have reached even more communities but were pleased with the number that they were able to reach.

Beyond the development of direct peer workers, the Team Up initiative also contributed to the development of more personnel with experience and skills for peer support through the wider training program and development of people's skills as they ran grants. One staff member noted the detail in how this had happened:

“People [will] be more interested and engaged and wanting to do [peer support] and enthusiastic about peer support, but they'll also have the skills and the knowledge of how to do it. In the training program, and in the grant program to a lesser degree, people have been giving some really good tools of how to go about setting up peer support and how to run groups; how to facilitate and have conversations happen; how to include people from different areas into a group; how to make a group function and to set up that group agreement. Those practical skills about running groups are being taught and are being replicated across different areas and being taken in as good practice. So, yes, there will be more capacity, not only enthusiasm and excitement about peer support, but actually learning about how to do good peer support” (staff member)

In this respect, Team Up has contributed at two levels to the development of personnel for peer support. The in-depth professional development of peer workers is the most substantive way that the initiative has contributed to this area. At a second level, by encouraging other people to learn about peer support and practice some skills in leading it, this may become a further group of people with capacity for peer support in the future. As noted earlier in the report, some of this second group felt they had gained the direct knowledge and skills they needed to lead peer support, whereas for others it sharpened their ambition and motivation to lead peer support in the future but did not necessarily translate into direct skills.

Contributing to the personnel for peer support in these dual layers is important for resourcing and sustaining peer support leadership over time. Staff noted that the philosophy of the initiative was that, through peer support, there would be ongoing development of a range of people:

“[It's] more about supporting one another to grow... about listening to one another, and asking questions, and being interested in the development of other people within the group; not just your own development within the group. So, I think that there will be leadership that comes out of this project, and that that leadership will be focused on how you... what are the skills and practical ways that you can help to ensure that you grow, but other people grow, too. Other people grow with you” (staff member)

As such, by the very nature of the initiative, the intention is that more and more people will continue to be developed for leadership roles in peer support over time, passing skills from one to another. Thus far, the Team Up initiative has not been running long enough to know whether and how this will occur, however the comments from staff suggest that it has been built into the way that the current group of peer workers and other participants have been trained.

Limits and challenges in personnel for peer support

Evaluation participants noted some limits and challenges in developing personnel for peer support. Some limits and challenges were around the considerations covered earlier in the report about the amount of resources and time required to properly support peer workers in their leadership roles. While Team Up was able to support peer workers and other participants in training and grants well during the initiative, the amount of time and resources required means that it may be hard to sustain this level of support past the end of the funded period of the initiative. This raises questions about

the sustainability of the group of personnel developed, and whether they would lead peer support with the same success without a framework of scaffolding and supports in place. It suggests that for the personnel to be maintained, resources and funding for Team Up also needs to be maintained.

Other limits and challenges in having personnel with the skills and experience for peer support also stem from sustainability issues. One staff member noted that, at present, staff at NSW CID, CDAH and DDA were involved in a lot of administrative support, and while peer workers or others involved in peer support might be able to take up this role in future, it was not clear whether this would be the case. A further staff member noted that the current peer workers and training participants had been trained mainly in a relatively formal model of peer support and that it would be beneficial to highlight more informal options for peer support to assist its sustainability, particularly if funding did not continue. She noted:

“The[re is a] need to let them be more informal in some ways or provide avenues for a more informal option. So, the skills we provided with Team Up to facilitators are quite good. But we don't really talk about just, ‘Hey, what if you just got a group of people together and did this on your own?’ We don't really tell them that that's, like, a real possibility really... We say that ‘Oh, you need to maybe get a grant or you need to come along to this group of ours’... But I think, like, getting a bit more creative with that brainstorming around... if you had a peer support group, what would it look like?... I think people just need to know that... you don't have to pay for a venue and stuff. You can all just meet at the pub or the beach or at the pub or a coffee shop... or it could look like a book club, or it could look like a something else club. Just as long as it's people with, like, a similar interest coming together” (staff member).

As such, while the intention for sustainability and the ongoing development of new personnel for peer support is present in the Team Up initiative, some of the limits and challenges appear to be around a practical approach to sustainability and the extent to which peer support personnel will be able to continue in their roles and leadership of peer support beyond the funded period of the Team Up initiative.

Having resources for peer support

Staff noted that through the Team Up initiative additional resources had been developed for running peer support. One staff member spoke about now having a “formalised framework” for capacity building in peer support, where the values Team Up had highlighted – paying it forward, accountability and humility – could be looked at in “a bit more of a sustained, systematic and graduated kind of way”. The same staff member also noted that new practical resources had been developed as well, including the training materials, materials for peer workers and support materials for grantees:

“I think that certainly the Team Up project has enhanced the infrastructure around peer support significantly, with the resources that are now available. The trainer, the facilitator manuals and guides – I know that they're not publicly accessible now, but for that to be available to a group of people once the project ceases, that in itself is something that we were crying out for here... when we were first getting started” (staff member)

Staff also noted having developed significant resources for support to peer workers. Some examples included training session running sheets, debriefing mechanisms and training materials in accessible formats. Each of these areas contribute to capacity and resources for peer support.

As noted earlier in the report, there were some limitations in the extent to which some of the Team Up materials were available in accessible formats, with screen-reader accessible training materials and Auslan grants materials being key areas in this regard. Notably however, while unavailable at particular points when needed during the delivery of Team Up, some of these resources had been developed through the course of the initiative, such as training materials accessible to screen-readers. As such, by the end of the initiative, while not all of the necessary accessible resources were available, significantly more were available than at the beginning of the program delivery.

Limits and challenges in resources for peer support

Staff noted some limits and challenges in developing resources for peer support. One key limit, as noted earlier in the report, was that not all accessible materials required were available. Beyond this, other limits and challenges related to sustainability of use of the resources and application of lessons from the project into the future.

Several staff noted that there was a lack of time in the project to produce versions of the materials that could be published online (or in another easily accessible format) for other peers to access in future – this was something that multiple staff noted they intended to do once the program was over, and that they saw as important for the sustainability of peer support capacity into the future. One person said:

“I think we still need to do some more work around how we share that with the wider community... How do we share what we've learnt, about what it takes to resource and build peer support? I don't think that we've got that in an easily accessible format. If there was a person who was really keen to set up the peer movement, and there were a bunch of peers in Griffith, that says we really want to set up peer support here, we've got a bunch of resources. We've got a bunch of resources that people can pick up and go with, but in terms of maintaining the movement, sustaining the movement, dealing with difficulties, dealing with conflict, managing conflict, moving on from conflict, resourcing, complex and diverse requirements, so that the diverse population of people with disability can be included in the peer support movement, but I don't think that we've got easily accessible information” (staff member).

The same staff member also noted limits in the extent to which all lessons from the initiative had been documented for use by others in future. She noted that in particular it would be useful to be able to further document the practices used for including people with high and complex support needs in peer support, so that successful practices could be replicated by others over time. This would ensure that the culture and capacity that had been built through Team Up for accessibility could extend sustainably to others in the future. Another staff member noted that sustainability might be increased by running complementary training for service providers and allies in peer support, so that other organisations could play a role in supporting the peer support culture and community into the future. That staff member's organisation was planning some complementary training for these groups once the program was over. As such the sustainability of the progress made and the legacy of the Team Up program into the future were key concerns in terms of limits and challenges in resourcing peer support effectively, but these were also areas that the staff from the initiative were aware of and thinking about how to work on.

4.3 Process findings

This section of the report details the process findings of the evaluation – it focuses on what happened during the Team Up initiative and insights into the processes by which the outcomes in the previous sections were achieved. The section is divided into sub-sections about each of the parts of the Team Up initiative: training, the grants program, professional development of peer workers, communities of practice, and program administration and collaboration between NSW CID, CDAH and DDA. Each sub-section lists successes, challenges and lessons from the process of achieving outcomes in each of these areas.

The purpose of this section is to provide a synthesis to inform program design in future projects. As such, the following sections contain a high-level summary of successes, challenges and lessons, rather than the in-depth discussion as was included in the previous sections on outcomes. The intention is for this synthesis to guide future work and be easily and quickly accessible by future peer support leaders.

Overall, Team Up reflected a values-based and practical approach to peer support with good processes in place across all aspects of the initiative. The processes were established based on the three organisations' previous experiences in peer support and working in their local communities. The process challenges which arose in implementing the Team Up initiative were largely due to the time constraints imposed on the initiative by the funding received, which particularly restricted the lead in time to set up the initiative, the development of resources, and the ability to fully tailor the content and delivery of training to meet the diverse needs of the people with disability and CALD communities who were involved. The process lessons learnt through the Team Up initiative are related to these challenges, highlighting the necessity of having the time and resources to develop accessible materials and provide ongoing support to peer workers and grantees so they continue to develop skills, expertise and confidence thus ensuring sustainability of the peer support model.

4.3.1 Training

“[The aim of the] training [was] to address the gap in skills and attitudes around how to do peer support in a way that’s mutually supportive” (staff member).

The training was central to the Team Up initiative, designed to train people with disability and family members in the concepts of and leadership in peer support. Successes, challenges and lessons from the training are highlighted below. Overall, peer support training appears to be implemented best when it is interactive and led by people with disability, with attention to sequencing of the training, accessibility of the materials and having a mix and diversity of participants present together.

Successes

- Active learning approach using discussion, group work, role plays and multi-media;
- Content informed by experience of peer support organisations;
- Presenters who are people with disability;
- Well-structured, simple, clear and well-paced;
- Good notes – focused attention; space to add own notes;

- Good group engagement – asked questions; drew people out; developed people’s confidence;
- Time between sessions allowed for reflection;
- Created a safe learning space;
- Created a “human library” – pool of people trained to present on peer support.

Challenges

- Too much content, making it hard for some people to focus;
- Some content too complex for some participants;
- Too much reading to do in between sessions;
- Auslan interpreters not always available, which limited the involvement of people from the Deaf community in some training.

Lessons

- Making sure everyone has completed the ‘Introduction to Peer Support’ course prior to other training courses;
- Providing more opportunities to practice skills learnt;
- Giving more input on how to plan and present training;
- Slowing the pace of training and simplifying complex content, especially for those needing help to process information (e.g. people with intellectual disability) and those requiring interpretation (e.g. people from the Deaf community);
- Addressing accessibility of training materials (e.g. translated into Auslan, captioning of videos, suitable for screen readers/large print, multiple languages);
- Considering the balance of people with different disabilities and different cultural groups in each training group, so no one feels isolated or singled out.

4.3.2 Grants program

“I consider that the response to the Team Up grant process was just an indication of how keen so many communities are for more opportunities for peer support. I think that the grant process just really tapped into what we assumed was a very, very big desire, that people want to get more information from each other, from people who have been before them, from lived experience, from others who have been in the game” (staff member).

The grants program was another central element of the Team Up initiative, designed not only to support new and ongoing peer support groups, but also to provide a space for those who had completed the training to then continue to engage in peer support in action. Successes, challenges and lessons from the grants program are highlighted below. Overall, the findings suggest the importance of ongoing flexibility in the administrative arrangements supporting the implementation of grants and peer support groups, as well as the need for time and resources to support a high level of accessibility and a process to manage the level of time and energy involved in the grants application process.

Successes

- Assistance to complete grant application forms;
- Easy Read version of application form;
- Grass roots focus of grants – pitched at the needs/wants of the group;
- Professionalism of Team Up staff assisting grantees;
- Diversity of grant aims (support groups; film/DVD making; training; social media);
- Opportunity, finances and infrastructure to support, establish or build on peer support groups;
- Ability to be creative with use of grant funds.

Challenges

- Difficult to foresee everything that may be needed when completing grant application and budget;
- Grant application was a large and complex process;
- Lack of skills to manage group dynamics and personalities;
- Lack of ongoing input, training and support to manage budgets;
- Time limited nature of funding – unsure of what will happen with peer support groups after funding ceases;
- Limited time and funding to translate the grant application forms into community languages.

Lessons

- Providing continued support for small, grass roots organisations;
- Need for an office/space/hub for group;
- Considering sustainability of groups, so skills developed are maintained and grown;
- Providing training to grantees on how to manage budgets;
- Being clearer and more consistent about whether funding is accessed directly by grantees or via Team Up administrative staff;
- Importance of providing application form in multiple languages;
- Supporting the diversity of peer support models.

4.3.3 Professional development of peer workers

“I have noticed the development of confidence and skills and capacity...it’s been quite nice to have a process to follow that just puts words around some of the stuff that I have probably felt instinctively are intuitive. But I think for my peers...really noticing them get more confident in delivering, in presenting the material and really making it their own” (staff member).

The professional development of peer workers was contained within the Team Up training program, but was also a distinct element within the initiative, designed to foster the ongoing leadership of peer support by people with disability themselves. Successes, challenges and lessons in developing peer workers are highlighted below. Together the findings suggest that the professional development of peer workers is most effective where there is ongoing, flexible and responsive support for their development and opportunities to grow into new roles, which is planned into the timelines and resources of the initiative.

Successes

- Built on previous peer support training delivered by partner organisations;
- Identification of people who could see the potential of becoming a peer worker;
- Provision of peer worker training with support and opportunities to learn from each other, offer moral support, complement each other's skills and develop co-facilitator partnerships;
- Dedicated resources for support and 'scaffolding' of peer workers, including accessibility but also inter-personal support;
- Payment as a peer worker and travel costs covered;
- Peer worker role perceived as an opportunity to develop confidence, skills and organisational ability;
- Opportunity to 'pay it forward' to other people with disability;
- Ready-made PowerPoint slides and materials to use in training.

Challenges

- Time lag for peer workers between training and facilitation work;
- Lack of sufficient time and/or inclination for all reflection sessions with co-facilitators post-training;
- Knowing how to work with interpreters – pace and clarity;
- Challenges in communication between some co-facilitators;
- Difficulty understanding complex content by some peer workers with intellectual disability, which peer workers were then expected to facilitate themselves;
- Allocating and matching co-facilitators (geographic area, skills, interests);
- Achieving a balance between facilitation and counselling.

Lessons

- Feeling confident to draw on personal experience as a way of getting group members to open up;
- Reducing the number of facilitators per session to two once training skills are learnt – opportunities to grow in skills by practice;
- Learning skills in how to include everyone in the group and manage group dynamics;
- Ensuring presenters know and understand the content;
- Being open to receiving constructive feedback to improve skills, with ongoing professional development over time;
- Being clear about support and 'scaffolding' requirements as early as possible, with dedicated resources set aside;
- Providing more opportunities for facilitators to present and receive feedback one-on-one and within a group.

4.3.4 Communities of practice

“The purpose of the community practice day is to bring people together around this common purpose of supporting peer support, and building the peer movement in NSW, and delivering these trainings, and how as peers that group wanted to support one another in what they were doing” (staff member).

Two communities of practice were established in the Team Up initiative – one for peer workers and one for grantees. The purpose of the communities of practice was to provide a context and structure for ongoing development of skills in peer support. Successes, challenges and lessons regarding the communities of practice are highlighted below. Overall, the findings suggest the usefulness of the community of practice structure, but the need for further resources, staffing/leadership and development of the community of practice delivery model to ensure that all participants could get the most out of it.

Successes

- Two communities of practice – one for peer workers and one for grantees;
- Provide forums for those working together to achieve a common purpose/goal of peer support;
- Opportunity to share what was learnt, ask questions and provide suggestions;
- Identified community of practice leaders in each organisation;
- Meet regularly via face-to-face meetings and on dedicated Facebook pages;
- Provides an encouraging and supportive environment.

Challenges

- Not everyone likes Facebook – some people prefer face-to-face meetings or phone calls;
- Complexity of understanding the purpose and content of the communities of practice – may not have been accessible to all participants with intellectual disability;
- Some peer workers are still to deliver training and these people are not as active in their community of practice;
- To maintain communities of practice, an ongoing investment in people, resources and back up is required.

Lessons

- Making more effort to include and support people with intellectual disability in communities of practice;
- Having dedicated resources and staffing/leadership allocated to communities of practice from the beginning of the peer support work;
- Ensuring communities of practice are led by people with disability.

4.3.5 Program administration and collaboration

“Team Up and participants gel together, so Team Up doesn't drive it, they administer it. [The staff] just sit in the background running some administration stuff. That's like saying we can do some of that rubbish stuff...pay bills and stuff, but you guys [people with disability] go out there and run the program and...that's a brilliant thing” (staff member).

Program administration and the collaboration between the three partner organisations, NSW CID, CDAH and DDA, were both central to the effective delivery of all of the other parts of Team Up. Successes, challenges and lessons in these areas are noted below. Overall, the findings suggest the complexity of administering a complex program with multiple parts within a short timeline, limited

funding and whilst establishing a collaboration between new partner organisations. The findings also suggest that peer support may be delivered best where an explicitly values-driven approach is used, and where there is sufficient time, resources, energy and commitment to continuously navigate and learn from challenges and successes.

Successes

- Established peer support as a philosophy and practice with clear principles;
- Developed trust between partner organisations;
- Designated manager in each organisation with a team of project officers to assist with administration, community development support and individual coaching of people with disability;
- Built roles on existing structures and partnerships, and integrated Team Up initiative with other existing programs;
- Developed clear expectations around roles within and across partner organisations;
- Lead- (organising and logistics planning; mentoring and support) and co-facilitator for each training session;
- Having external evaluation of the initiative, with the need to provide information to a third party acting as a unifier for the collaborating organisations.

Challenges

- Longer than anticipated set up time for Team Up funding (approximately 6 months);
- Extended set up time limited time for the program roll out and to see outcomes from the initiative (approximately 6 months);
- Extensive preparation time and resources required to tailor content to groups;
- Greater level of accessibility required than anticipated, affecting the materials and delivery of some training courses;
- Large amount of time and resources required to ensure accessible training and grant application materials;
- Bringing together three very different organisations in terms of needs, capacity/staffing, other funding, responses and approaches to their work;
- Coordinating partner organisations to ensure their needs are met;
- State-wide scope of largest partner;
- How to support peer workers in areas without existing structures and partnerships;
- Working out best way to pay peer workers and effect of payment on Disability Support Pension;
- Mechanisms for following up with people after training to see how people are using the training;
- Developing variety of communication methods to suit diversity of groups.

Lessons

- Developing and modelling an explicitly values-driven, ethical peer support approach;
- Embedding this approach takes time and cannot be rushed;
- Ensuring this approach is led by people with disability – need to “step back and let people do it”;
- Providing adequate scaffolding of structures and supports to ensure this approach;
- Understanding of the diversity of people with disability and respecting peoples’ differences;
- Developing good partnerships takes time, energy, commitment, flexibility and open communication;
- Developing mechanisms to navigate disagreements between partners;

- Putting in place strong accountability structures to keep projects on track in terms of time, cost, deliverables and outcomes;
- Developing resources which can be accessed online;
- Building in external evaluation from the outset;
- Ensuing education of wider service sector and community regarding value of peer support.

5 Implications

The outcomes and process findings from the evaluation have implications for the ongoing development and practice of peer support for people with disability and family members in NSW.

The primary implication is that ongoing time, resources and funding is required to sustain and continue to develop the benefits of the Team Up initiative for peer support capacity.

- Peer support is based on the **development of strong relationships** based on familiarity and trust. To integrate peer support into one's life, there is a need to see peer support in action and to change values and thinking about what supports may be beneficial and about how and where peer support might play a role.
- Developing peer support **leadership capacity** among people with disability requires time and opportunity to practice and develop skills and to learn by doing.
- Many peer support leaders with disability require **significant support and scaffolding**, and without ongoing resources and funding for such support, their capacity to continue to lead peer support is uncertain.
- Additional time is also required to continue to improve on areas that have presented limits and challenges in Team Up so far and to document the lessons from the initiative into a **legacy model** that other similar programs might draw on or adapt in future.

For all of these reasons, time and ongoing resources and funding are required to make the most of the Team Up initiative. Below, there is a synthesised summary of more detailed implications from the Team Up initiative, mapped to each of the outcomes areas discussed in the report so far. The points listed cover insights from the Team Up model about the key lessons, strengths and areas for improvement in this initiative, which might also become a basis for planning other similar peer support projects or capacity building initiatives into the future.

Outcomes for people with disability and families

Valuing and using peer information and lived experience

- Allow time to change in personal values about using peer information and lived experience and to translate changes in thinking into changes in actions.
- Consider how to balance education and exposure to new and potentially complex or difficult issues with maintaining safety and wellbeing while sharing experiences in peer support.

Exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders

- Allow time to develop familiarity and trusting relationships for contributing to and exchanging peer support.
- Build on peer support opportunities developed over time, to develop a strong culture of peer support.
- Understand and foster different types of leadership in peer support.
- Complement training in peer support with opportunities to apply new knowledge and leadership skills in practice.

- Ensure ongoing time, resources and funding for peer support, including scaffolding and other forms of support to participate in and lead peer support.

Having choice, voice and control in running peer support

- Sequence peer support capacity building activities to build on each other – training in peer support concepts and practice should come prior to funding to implement peer support groups and projects.
- Encourage funders of peer support groups and peer support capacity building initiatives to support lengthy and flexible timelines to allow sequencing of peer support capacity building.

Using peer support to be part of communities

- Understand how participation in wider (mainstream) and peer support/disability communities can complement each other, with peer support a mechanism to support both.
- Consider further evaluation of the extent of impact of peer support on the wider (mainstream) community.

Outcomes for peer support

Addressing accessibility, support needs and diversity

- Recognise that addressing accessibility, support needs and diversity requires significant and ongoing resourcing and funding, and fund peer support projects accordingly.
- Further address accessibility and diversity, particularly screen-reader and Auslan access to materials, materials in community languages and further ways of participating for people in rural/regional communities.

Strengthening peer support through participant feedback

- Design and implement clear mechanisms to collect and respond to participant feedback from all peer support participants.

Seeing peer support as valid and valued

- Allow time for people to adapt to peer support and to see it as a valid and valued option in their lives.
- Continue to support messaging on the value of peer support in an ongoing manner, including practical opportunities to participate in and gain from peer support groups.

Resourcing peer support effectively

- Consider the ongoing sustainability of personnel and resources for peer support into the future, including how to document lessons and methods into a legacy model that can be used and implemented by others.
- Provide opportunities to draw the lessons from and successful methods used in Team Up into other peer support and peer support capacity building initiatives.
- Provide ongoing time, resources and funding for peer support capacity building and for opportunities to participate in peer support groups, including ongoing support to address accessibility, support needs and diversity.

- Consider how to draw other organisations and allies into building and maintaining capacity building for peer support.
- Consider how to build capacity for peer support options that are less dependent on formal resources and funding.

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Appendix 1: Program logic

Team Up Program Logic							
Context		Inputs	Participation	Outputs	Outcomes	Overall program outcomes	
<p>Early ILC grant rounds indicate that there will be an increasing number of peer support projects funded through the ILC over the next 12 months.</p> <p>However, there is insufficient capacity for inclusive peer support for people with disability in NSW, including people from CALD backgrounds and people with complex support needs.</p>	Training	<p>Some of the identified needs for capacity building include: limited peer support facilitators, mentors and collaborators; limited facilitation and mentor skills; limited awareness of and opportunities for peer support.</p> <p>This indicates a need for training.</p>	<p>Funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$898,291 grant from NDIA <p>Agency involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values based partnership between 3 user led organisations, CID (lead), DDA, CDAH External consultants <p>Project staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 project manager 3 project coordinators 3 project officers 3 facilitation staff <p>Expertise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-designed with people with disability Expertise in supporting inclusive peer support Established training partnerships and expertise 	<p>Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with disability, including intellectual disability, complex communication needs and people from CALD backgrounds Family members and supporters <p>Most people will initially access the training arm of Team Up as course participants in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intro course Train the Trainer course Mentor course <p>Through these courses, Team Up aims to support ongoing opportunities for people with disability to participate in some or all of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer worker roles Peer support groups A community of practice 	<p>Resource development outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines developed for participation support Training materials developed for the Team Up courses Review of training materials by participants and peer workers, with amendments made <p>Training outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver 3 x Intro course Deliver 1 x Train the Trainer course Deliver 2 x Mentor course <p>Peer worker outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train 20 peer workers Trainings delivered by peer workers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 x Intro course 1 x Mentor course 3 x Train the Trainer course Community organising course delivered for peer workers <p>Peer support group outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 peer networks for people with high / complex support needs 3 activities in 5 language groups <p>Community of practice outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Community of Practice meetings held for peer workers Ongoing and intensive participation support, coaching and peer catch-ups 	<p>For people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People value and use peer information People value and draw on lived experience People give and receive peer support People contribute to and lead peer support <p>For peer support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support addresses accessibility and diversity Peer support addresses support needs Peer support is strengthened through participant feedback 	<p>Inclusive peer support is seen as a valid and valued choice for people with disability and families in NSW.</p> <p>Inclusive peer support options in NSW have the personnel, experience, skills and resources to facilitate peer support as a form of support that can be widely used.</p>
	Grants	<p>Another identified capacity building need is the limited funding available to support new and existing peer support groups.</p> <p>This indicates the need for an accessible peer support grants program.</p>	<p>Funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$80,000 for grants Additional \$50,000 for grants from My Choice Matters (MCM) <p>Agency involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values based partnership between 3 user led partner organisations, CID (lead), DDA, CDAH CID involvement includes My Choice Matters staff <p>Project staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.2 FTE project coordinator 1 FTE project officer <p>Expertise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-designed with people with disability Lessons learned from previous My Choice Matters grants project Administrative support 	<p>People will access the grants arm of Team Up as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant applicants Peer workers who have received grants Successful grantees who have not attended Team Up training Members of peer groups receiving grants 	<p>Outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed support plans for peer groups implementing grants, including over the phone and face-to-face coaching, peer mentoring, links to peer-training Receive 20-30 grant applications, including 5 in accessible formats Distribute \$80,000 worth of grants Support 10-20 peer support groups to achieve their goals through grant funding 	<p>For people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People articulate what they want and need to run peer support People have choice, voice and control over how peer support runs People use peer support to access the wider community <p>For peer support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support grants program is an accessible and supported 	

Supporting information		
Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project partners have expertise in supporting inclusive peer support Project partners are committed to the efficacy of peer support Project partners are committed to learning from doing People with disability and families will be interested in attending peer support training Targeted language communities will be interested in attending peer support training Peer networks will be interested in applying for grants Peer networks will have the capacity to apply for grants The resources developed do not duplicate other work in the peer support space Peer support initiatives will increase over the next 12 months with the first NSW ILC grant round Demand for peer support will increase as awareness of peer support increases and more peer networks become available 	Team Up believes that inclusive peer support includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with disability and families as experts in their own lives Accessibility for people from CALD backgrounds and for people with complex support needs Mutual support and respect Reciprocity Learning from one another and willingness to share what you know No one person holding all the answers Problem solving as a collective Everyone able to participate and contribute Peer-led facilitation Starting where people are at Trusting and valuing peers 	External Factors <p>There are several other peer support initiatives in NSW, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organisations and peer support networks funded by the NDIA through the DSO project The Peer Connect website and resources delivered by JFA through the DSO project Family and carers groups, including those delivered by Carers NSW, Siblings Australia, Autism Community Network Local initiatives funded by NSW government, such as those delivered through Ability Links and Neighbourhood Centres St Vincent de Paul's Local Area Coordinator peer support project Future ILC funded peer support projects <p>The implications are potential confusion in the community about what peer support is and competition for resources amongst different stakeholders</p>

Short-, medium- and long-term outcomes				
	Short term outcomes 0-6 months	Medium term outcomes 6-12 months	Long term outcomes 1-3 years	Overall program outcomes
People value and use peer information	People feel more confident that peers are a source of information	People know that peer support is a valued option for helping to solve a problem	People choose peer support to help solve a problem	Inclusive peer support is seen as a valid and valued choice for people with disability and families in NSW.
People value and draw on lived experience	People know that their lived experience may be valuable for other people	People have greater confidence that they are experts in their own lives	People know that they are experts in their own lives and do self-advocacy	
People give and receive peer support	People know about different ways for giving and receiving peer support	People have the opportunity to practice the skills of giving and receiving peer support	People feel more confident giving and receiving peer support	
People contribute to and lead peer support	People know about different ways to contribute to and lead peer support networks	People have more opportunities to contribute to and lead peer support	People have more skills and confidence to contribute to and lead peer support networks	
Peer support addresses accessibility and diversity	People from diverse backgrounds have access to accessible and culturally appropriate training material	People from diverse backgrounds are supported to connect as peers	Peer networks are supported to be more inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds	
Peer support addresses support needs	People are supported to identify the support they need to participate in peer support	People are supported to participate in peer support	Peer networks are inclusive and resourced to achieve their own goals	
Peer support is strengthened through participant feedback	People provide feedback on how to improve training packages	Training packages are improved based on feedback from participants and peer workers	Training packages are recognised as informed by peer support experience	
People in peer networks say what they want and need for peer support to succeed	People in peer networks say what they want and need to run peer support	People in peer networks plan and coordinate peer-led activities	People in peer networks have more skills and confidence to contribute to and lead peer support networks	
People have choice, voice and control over how peer support runs	People in peer networks think about how to have choice, voice and control over peer support	People in peer networks practice choice, voice and control in their peer groups	People in peer networks have greater choice, voice and control over peer support	
People use peer support to access the wider community	People in peer networks identify supports and opportunities within their community in their grant application	People in peer networks build more connections within their community	People in peer networks share their skills within their community	
	MCM Peer Only Mainstream peer networks identify barriers and supports for people with disability	MCM Peer Only Mainstream peer networks address barriers and provide supports for people with disability	MCM Peer Only Mainstream peer networks are more accessible for people with disability	
Peer support grants program is an accessible and supported	Grant application process is accessible and supported	Peer networks are supported to work towards their own goals	Peer networks are more resourced to achieve their own goals	

Appendix 2: Training materials analysis

Key to symbols

✓✓ = The training course met this outcome very well.

✓ = The training course partially met this outcome.

X = The training course did not meet this outcome at all.

? = Evidence on whether the training course met this outcome is inconclusive.

1. Introduction to Peer Support

'Introduction to Peer Support' is a 3-session course designed to introduce participants to the 'idea of peer support'. This included informing participants of the definition of peer support and detailing the history of the disability movement. In addition to providing a broad overview of important concepts, participants were also given the opportunity to practice key skills for peer support.

Valuing and using peer information and lived experience

✓✓

This outcome was achieved by encouraging participants to perceive their peers' experiences and knowledge as a valuable resource. Activities throughout the training encouraged participants to practice using their peers as sources of information and support. Participants were also encouraged to reflect on their own strengths and expertise, such as reflecting on instances in their own lives where they had provided or received this type of support. Facilitators were reminded to guide conversations away from 'traditional, paid or medical supports'. This helped to reinforce the thinking that peers are experts in their own right.

Exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders

✓✓

Many examples were provided in the training of the different ways to contribute to peer support and the impact this can make. Group members were encouraged early on to think about how the concepts discussed in the sessions could be applied to their own goals of contributing to or leading peer support. The sessions also provided different examples of how collective action could achieve widespread change. This demonstrated the multitude ways participants could contribute to peer support. Group members were also encouraged to think about starting and leading their own groups and given guidance on how to achieve this using some of the skills learnt in the training.

Addressing accessibility, diversity and support needs

✓

Training highlighted that social movements relate to diverse groups of people and needs through discussion of the Aboriginal rights movements. Additionally, disability advocates were often

referenced to exemplify the concepts of peer support. The materials provided limited examples of guidance for facilitators to recognise or respond to the support needs of group members.

Strengthening peer support through participant feedback

✓✓

Pre- and post-surveys were handed out at the beginning and end of each session. Asking for feedback after each session (especially as the course was short) allowed the facilitators to gauge whether the training resonated with group members and provided the opportunity to respond to issues early on. As well as allowing for timely responses to concerns, the feedback captured the extent to which participants' awareness of peer support had increased and whether their needs were met by the focus of the training overall.

2. Peer Facilitator

'Peer Facilitator' or 'Train the Trainer/Facilitator' is a two-day course designed to equip participants with the skills and confidence to run the 'Introduction to Peer Support' Team Up training. The days were divided by focus, with the first session devoted to a general overview of the principles and concepts of being a facilitator such as integrity, generosity and boundaries. The second day prioritised participants taking turns to facilitate different activities of the 'Introduction to Peer Support' training. The objective of each activity was discussed to help trainees comprehend its significance.

Valuing and using peer information and lived experience

✓✓

In multiple activities trainees were asked to reflect on their strengths and capacities as facilitators. Group members were encouraged to work in pairs to workshop how they would enact the principles of facilitating. This provided them with opportunities to reflect on their own practice and draw on their peers as a source of different strategies and techniques. This was designed to build trainees' confidence in their ability to act as a facilitator, while reinforcing that the relationship should be lateral.

Exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders

✓✓

As this course's aim is to equip trainees with the skills to facilitate the 'Introduction to Peer Support' course, much of the training was devoted to providing participants with opportunities to lead peer support activities and practice running sessions. These objectives were strengthened by also discussing the reasons/purpose behind the activities included in the training. The course also addressed this outcome by encouraging trainee facilitators to consistently look for occasions to provide their future group members with the opportunity to lead or contribute to peer support.

Addressing accessibility, diversity and support needs

✓✓

Much of the training was devoted to conveying to trainee facilitators the importance of accessibility and their responsibility to ensure that peer support groups are supportive and representative of the diversity within the disability community. This was strengthened by giving concrete examples of the

different ways in which accessibility can be supported. It was reiterated that the best way to ensure this happens is by asking their peers. This reiterates the understanding that individuals with disability are the best people to express their needs and allows the course to be a space in which these needs are recognised and responded to. Additionally, the training gave practical instructions to ensure support needs were met, such as setting up the room, working with translators, and providing materials in different formats.

Strengthening peer support through participant feedback

?

The importance of evaluation is discussed in the context of running Team Up programs and for participants deciding to establish their own groups. However, it is not clear if trainee facilitators were given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of this training.

3. Peer Mentor

'Peer Mentor' is a 4-session course designed to equip peers with the skills and knowledge to become mentors in the disability movement. This included opportunities to reflect upon their strengths and capacities as mentors, how to deal with difficult situations that may arise during mentoring relationships, and also the skills to promote themselves as mentors and initiate these relationships.

Valuing and using peer information and lived experience

✓✓

The training focused primarily on encouraging participants to reflect upon their strengths and skills and how these could be applied to the role of mentoring. These continual reflections and discussions of their own and their peers' capacities served multiple purposes including building participants' confidence in their expertise and ability to act as mentors, recognising their peers' skills and expertise and their legitimacy to act as mentors, and providing opportunities to practice the skill of helping others recognise their strengths. Additionally, by encouraging participants to see themselves and their peers as experts in their own lives (often through role playing activities and reflections), the training challenged often held misconceptions that the role of mentor can only be filled by 'experts'.

Exchanging peer support as contributors and leaders

✓

There was limited evidence to suggest this outcome was met within the context of the 'peer mentor' materials. It was predominately achieved by describing attributes of the role of a peer mentor (e.g. an equal relationship between peers rather than one expert dictating to another). There were some concrete examples to help participants conceptualise how to enact mentoring, though more could have been done to demonstrate how to apply the principles of peer mentoring into practice. The complementary workbook encouraged people to consider which particular group of people (e.g. based on interest, disability, region or issue) they would like to work with and mentor when writing their 'pitch'. While this helped participants recognise the different ways to contribute to peer mentoring, it would arguably be more beneficial to encourage this type of thinking earlier or more frequently throughout the sessions.

Addressing accessibility, diversity and support needs

✓✓

This outcome is achieved through various means including activities both specific to disability and more generally (e.g. Welcome to Country to show respect to Aboriginal people) and the session discussing the importance of acknowledging the different impairments and support needs of people. Practical advice was given on how to address communication needs to ensure that peer support is accessible and facilitators were consistently reminded to adapt the training to meet the needs of group members.

Strengthening peer support through participant feedback

✓

Pre- and post-surveys were handed out in the first and last sessions of the training. This captured whether participants' awareness of peer support had increased and whether their needs were met by the focus of the training. It is unclear whether informal feedback was collected throughout the sessions to ensure that the needs of the current participants were being met.

Appendix 3: Accessibility and support needs

1. Vision

Training and peer networks

Training facilitators commonly read out the training material and content and fostered participation through discussion. Sometimes large-print training materials were made available to participants, although mainly where particular staff were given the responsibility to arrange this. In some other cases, training participants commented that the writing on slides was too small, with the writing being especially hard to read where light reflected off the screen at particular training sessions.

Accessibility of training materials to screen readers was identified as a major problem – screen reader accessible documents were not initially available and were very time consuming to produce:

“I have just finished completely rewriting the handwritten [training] manual and it was the most revolting thing I’ve seen in my entire life... there were parts of the text [where] I was wondering why it was only half a line or half a word, parts of it were image, parts of it were text” (person with disability, training participant).

“The accessibility for screen readers and stuff like that was quite another thing that's sort of been time consuming for me. It would have been good if it was just formatted in the first place in a screen reader friendly format” (staff member).

People with disability sometimes commented that more audio-description of videos would be beneficial. This was offset by the way some training participants talked through video descriptions for other group members, which was described in itself as a good way to foster peer support and to encourage engagement with the material.

Grants process

Like for the training materials, problems with the accessibility of the grant application forms to screen readers were also noted:

“The feedback that we received from one of the unsuccessful applicants was that the application form wasn’t accessible via screen reader” (staff member).

While this was reported by one person, staff thought that difficulty accessing the forms may have potentially prevented other groups from applying for grants.

2. Auslan/hearing

Training and peer networks

Significant effort was put into ensuring the training was accessible to Auslan speakers. One staff member explained:

“Definitely providing the training for the Deaf community was an unexpected challenge. Just so much of the vocabulary doesn't translate that well into Auslan, so that just took actually a lot of time; a lot of more hours explaining, interpreting, getting interpreters too...which is why

they ended up getting the Team Up grant to actually develop it [for] the Deaf community... The word peer doesn't translate very well... the three ways of being doesn't translate at all... there's no word for humility in Auslan... We had amazing interpreters. We just workshoped them. Every word we would just workshop them...between the interpreters and they would feed back what they thought it meant and we would then clarify" (staff member).

The use of skilled interpreters was a key facilitator of access for Auslan speakers in Team Up. Interpreters facilitated a much greater degree of access than would otherwise have been possible, however they were not able to capture everything that was said, due to the group context of the training:

"The training was great but there was a lot of stuff that I wasn't sure that we may have missed out or because interpreters can only access so much. If you've got a lot of people speaking at one time in the room the interpreter finds that very difficult" (person with disability, training participant).

Some people noted the significant complexities and costs of booking interpreters as an ongoing challenge throughout Team Up. Interpreters also were not always available, which led to some missed training opportunities:

"Sometimes we feel a little bit behind in the training... because there have been occasions where we haven't been able to get an interpreter. So, there's been some training opportunities that we've missed out on simply because an interpreter wasn't available" (person with disability, training participant).

In this respect, accessibility for Auslan speakers was a significant focus of Team Up, although there were also some areas where full access could still not be facilitated.

Grants process

Team Up used the grants process to fund a peer support group to translate the training into Auslan – this is one of the ways that the previously-described training challenges were addressed. This was a successful strategy for creating training (through the grants process) that was more accessible to Auslan speakers:

"So, the documents that were given to us, we have adapted and we've made an Auslan translation if you like. Not everything has been changed. There's only been a few modifications where we thought some things would be very difficult for Deaf people to understand" (person with disability, grantee).

"We've made a few short videos and a couple of changes to some videos... There'll be quite a bit of role playing involved in our stuff and activities which helps our Deaf audience feel much more engaged, hands-on. When it's hands-on it helps Deaf people...feel connected. If they're just looking at someone presenting or they're handed English forms we don't learn well that way. We do tend to learn very differently than the general community" (person with disability, grantee).

However, for these grantees and others who used Auslan, the grant application forms were not easy to access, as they relied on a fluent understanding of written English:

“There was a lot of reading to be done for me, I’m not a fluent English user, and there’s other people in the group who are able to access English in different ways. For me, accessing English in its written form is not easy. So that’s probably one of the more difficult things for me. So sometimes I require an interpreter to actually translate documents” (person with disability, grantee).

“See for us reading English is a problem. We’re fluent Auslan users. It’s our primary language and so English paperwork is very difficult for us to access” (person with disability, grantee).

As such, the grants process provided significant resources to enable greater use of Auslan in Team Up, however the grants process itself was difficult to access for those who used Auslan.

3. Alternative and Augmentative Communication

Training and peer networks

There were significant efforts to ensure that people who use Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) could participate in training and peer networks. Peer workers and staff running the training and peer networks commented on using strategies such as pre-recording contributions with AAC users, fostering a culture among the group of waiting for people to type out their responses and, in one case, the leadership of a peer network especially underwent training in Talking Mats (an AAC system) to better engage with one participant who used AAC. The peer worker involved in this peer network commented on the connection he was able to make with this participant as a result:

“We both strongly connected and we are both just friends and mates, yeah he loves having conversations with me, I love having conversations with him” (person with disability, peer worker).

Another staff member commented on success in including a person who uses AAC as part of a training facilitation team:

“There’s one particular person I can think of who is non-verbal, who uses a communication device. If he spends time with his support person before the training, he can actually do a little story to illustrate something, and he can get that typed in and then press a button and that can play when he wants it to in the training. It’s obviously limited in how much he can facilitate a group, because a lot of facilitating groups is on the fly and responding to people and things like that... We wouldn’t have him as a lead or senior facilitator facilitating the whole program, like I would. But, he would be able to do certain slides or certain parts of the training. He would be able to read out the story... That’s pretty cool. There’s not many places, I’d imagine, that support people to have a role as a co-facilitator when they’re non-verbal. That’s full inclusion if you ask me. That’s what we’re aiming for” (staff member).

While there was not opportunity to collect data for the evaluation directly from a person who used ACC to participate in Team Up, these stories suggest that efforts to include this group were seen as successful by those running the initiative.

Grants process

(No comments made on the accessibility of the grants process to AAC users).

4. Physical support needs

Training and peer networks

Physical support needs appeared to be generally well-catered for during Team Up training. Support workers were often available to help with physical access needs, and training facilitators also assisted in some cases:

“I can't write, so [a peer worker] did all my writing. I can't get my cup of tea and stuff. I didn't bring a carer, because I thought the carer would be bored, and it's NDIS money that I will be using, so I wasn't so prepared to use it. There was never an issue of her getting me a cup of tea or anything I needed or writing for me” (person with disability, training participant).

Participants noted that the physical accessibility of training locations (often held in clubs) was reasonable, although sometimes noted that training rooms on the ground floor, bathrooms on the same floor as the training room and entries/exits with wider doorways and better ramps would be improvements. Team Up appeared to go to significant lengths to assist some people's transport and travel arrangements, for example, providing cab-charges to one participant who uses a wheelchair, so that she did not have to travel by train to attend. One person noted that an earlier break during training would have been beneficial.

Grants process

(No comments made about the accessibility of the grants process for physical support needs).

5. Cognitive access

Training and peer networks

Cognitive accessibility was another particular focus of Team Up training. Several people noted that cognitive accessibility was assisted by simple explanations, use of images on the slides, practices of co-facilitation of sessions, discussion of the material, a mix of activities, use of videos and assistance from supporters. People with intellectual disability confirmed that clear explanations – both through discussion and slides – helped:

“I understood most things... The way they explained themselves first [was good], what it was about... they didn't only explain, but they explained everything well... They used [the projector]” (person with disability, training participant).

“I liked [the slides]... I like how this area explains some things, [so] that I didn't have trouble learning about that, because they asked us questions first and explained it” (person with disability, training participant).

They also noted that a mix between listening and practical activities also helped:

“The balance is right [between talking and practical activities], just when you're talking for a long period of time, like half an hour or 40 minutes, you're trying to stay focused but it's really hard to stay focused when you're trying to listen as well” (person with disability, training participant).

There were however still limitations in cognitive accessibility. Some people noted that the training sessions were too full or rushed, while others noted that some of the language and concepts were too complicated. Some of the complex language included terms key to the training, such as 'reflect', 'attributes', 'accountability', 'humility', 'empathy' and the concept of 'peer movements'. One peer worker with intellectual disability noted that these concepts could be difficult both for her to understand as a leader of peer support and for the people she was teaching during the training:

"I found that some of the content was very understandable, but some of it I did struggle with and it was picked up I did. They did try to find a way for me to be able to understand it a bit more and how to explain it to people that I run the sessions with... [like] explaining about peer movements and about things in history, which to me I didn't know much about or I didn't comprehend it enough to explain it effectively or, yeah, just things like that, where it got a bit tricky at times" (person with disability, peer worker).

"Some of the training sessions we did, there were... people with intellectual disabilities that were struggling as well with some of that content, the peer movement stuff and I'd ask them about it and they'd look a bit confused and they wanted it more explained to them" (person with disability, peer worker).

Peer workers and staff noted that significant supports were in place to help people with intellectual disability understand the content, and that often with attention paid to rephrasing and explaining the complex language and concepts, people with intellectual disability did grasp the meaning. One staff member who was responsible for a significant amount of this support queried whether the training material needed to be as complex as it was, and whether it went "a little too deep" and was "a bit content heavy". This staff member suggested that some more creative and interactive ways to address the same content might be beneficial. Notably, some people with other types of disability said they appreciated the clarity of the training, while a couple felt it was too simplified.

Grants process

People with intellectual disability commented on the cognitive accessibility of the grants program with respect to the options between the Easy Read and standard application forms. One grantee with an intellectual disability noted:

"We [used the] Easy Read [form]... I didn't understand the other version at all – it was like pages long. [The Easy Read version] was easy [to understand]... it's better than being bombarded with all the complication" (person with disability, grantee).

People with intellectual disability also commented on getting assistance from Team Up staff and other supporters to fill in their application forms. Some noted however that the paperwork involved was still quite long and complex:

"I think that the paper length work, the paperwork could be smaller, than bigger" (person with disability, grantee).

"It was challenging. I needed help completing the - the format - the forms... [my supporter] helped me through most of it... filling in all the forms and the paperwork and sending it away and all that sort of thing" (person with disability, grantee).

With an Easy Read format and support, the grants application process appeared to be feasible for people with intellectual disability, however there is perhaps scope for it to be more cognitively accessible.

6. Other – mental health and autism

Training and peer networks

A few people commented on other types of support needed during the Team Up training and other peer events. One person commented on support needs related to mental health.

“I was so impressed by the fact that there was never any fussing [about my mental health], but one of [the facilitators] would just come up every now and then and just touch me on the shoulder to check that I was all right. I was really struggling because I wasn't feeling well... But they were just there and I knew if I needed someone that they were there... Just I felt supported... that someone would catch me” (person with disability, training participant).

Another person commented on accommodation of sensory support needs related to autism during a training session for grantees:

“I did like how many were accommodating of my needs... One example was that clapping was too hard on me sensory-wise, I had someone ask that people not clap and they came up with a solution which was to do clapping in sign language ('jazz hands'). That made it easier to for me to stay” (person with disability, grantee).

It would be beneficial to know more about how other people in Team Up perceived support related to these areas.

Grants process

One person commented on the grants application process from the perspective of support needs related to autism. She highlighted the energy involved in applying and the anxiety involved in then changing her budget once successful in her application:

“The application process was very large. I think that is potentially intimidating to a lot of people who have great ideas but aren't sure that putting all their time and effort into applying will result in a grant. I'm not sure what better ways there are about going about this. It takes 'spoons'¹ to do an extensive application before you are even chosen, so if I had not been chosen, I think I would have been devastated” (person with disability, grantee).

“I think that there are some things in the application that you can't foresee and account for. My budget has changed a bit, but changing it gives me anxiety, which is part and parcel of being autistic” (person with disability, grantee).

¹ “Spoons” refers to Christine Miserandino’s Spoon Theory, which is used to describe the discrete amount of energy that people with disability or chronic illness must divide between all of their daily tasks: <https://butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/>

The same person however also commented that the grants process enabled her to offer a venue for peer support that was chosen to be especially accessible for people with sensory support needs related to autism:

“I think the grant allowed me to set up what I thought would suit autistics. I was able to pay for an accessible space, whereas other autism groups have made do with whatever they could find, especially for free... Features: physically accessible so on ground floor, in a library - chose the meeting room that was more or less soundproofed and there was a couple [of] choices of lighting (was being pressured by the library to move to a loud space close to children, but I resisted), close to public transport and parking (parking lot next door plus next to a shopping centre)” (person with disability, grantee).

This person’s dual experiences highlight that there were both gains and limitations to accessibility related to autism in the grants process. Beyond this, there were no further comments about the accessibility of the grants process for other sensory or mental health-related support needs.

Appendix 4: Diversity

1. CALD

Training and peer networks

Cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD) was a focus of the Team Up initiative. Of the training participants, 164 out of 375 were from an Aboriginal or CALD background, with many being among those who took part in the training run by DDA. Several peer workers were also from a CALD background, including an Indigenous peer worker. When asked whether Team Up was culturally inclusive, one of these peer workers commented “Yes, definitely. Yes, always. Always”.

The Team Up training curriculum demonstrated cultural awareness and appropriateness, for example, through:

- An Acknowledgement of Country.
- Examples of other peer movements, including Indigenous.
- Teaching skills for cultural appropriateness, such as educating about whether to make eye contact with Indigenous people during peer support.
- Using videos in training that originate from other cultures and languages (with subtitles).

At the time of data collection for the evaluation (part way through the Team Up initiative), there were also plans to translate the training materials into community languages, evidencing ongoing attention to continuing to develop further CALD appropriateness over the life of the initiative:

“So, they are going to be translating the PowerPoint presentations into specific languages. We’ve also ensured that we support the promotion of the Team Up activities and the Team Up work [to CALD communities]. We’d advise on the best way to develop flyers, and the best way to promote the training” (staff member).

A peer worker reported that she knew of the training being delivered in Cantonese in one location and a staff member noted running training with the Korean community. Where training was delivered to CALD communities, some staff cited examples of changes in thinking among those communities as a result. One staff member spoke about beginning to overcome the ongoing challenge of family over-protectiveness of some CALD people with disability as a result of participation. Another staff member recounted a story about peer support entering the Korean community:

“I think the training has really influenced [capacity for peer support], particularly with the CALD community. It’s really hard to define peer support. There’s no such word as peer support in many languages, and, I guess, something like ‘Introduction to Peer Support’ is something tangible that we can take to community and really articulate well what peer support means. I think that’s where the magic happens... We did an ‘Introduction to Peer Support’ in the Korean speaking community, and there was one gentleman who was a little bit doubtful about what this whole peer support was all about. But as we went through the content, you could see the gentleman’s lightbulb moments. At the end of it he said: ‘I really see how this could work and how we could make it work.’ It’s those kinds of shifts that are so important in community and getting as many people to come along is so important. So, I think that definitely, the training has been really useful for that” (staff member).

In this respect, delivering training in CALD communities was an ongoing endeavour throughout Team Up, but one where, when delivered, significant change could result.

Grants process

Three CALD peer groups were funded through the Team Up grants. Staff noted that they would have preferred to encourage and support more CALD groups to apply for and receive grants, and that the major limitations in this regard were:

- (1) limited time and funding for translating the grant application forms into community languages;
- (2) limited previous experience in some CALD communities of peer support, and therefore difficulty thinking about how peer support might be applied in their community;
- (3) limited time for grant applications to be submitted and limited opportunity to do the 'Introduction to Peer Support' training to learn more about peer support before submitting a grant application;
- (4) Team Up staff not learning about and implementing all strategies that they might have done to support CALD communities to access Team Up.

Staff noted that more time, resources and more opportunity to do training in peer support before the grant application process may have been beneficial in encouraging more CALD groups to apply and in staff learning more strategies to reach CALD communities. They commented that while they were happy with the engagement that Team Up had had with CALD communities, there was always more to be done:

“How well do I think CALD communities have been supported? Look, I feel that they've been supported well, however, there's so much more to be done. For us to be satisfied with how we've done, we'd need more time to be able to really meaningfully engage with communities, and to be able to provide those useful resources that actually will help to accelerate the understanding around peer support. That would be really useful and would improve the way that Team Up works with CALD communities” (staff member).

In terms of outcomes from funded CALD peer support groups, one of the CALD groups which was funded had significant success in providing peer support in community languages:

“The group was also so successful that we were invited to offer sessions translated into Vietnamese for our local Vietnamese parents of autistic children. We gave one workshop in March to ten Vietnamese Mums (presented in English, translated into Vietnamese, with a translator on hand to ask and answer questions), and we have a second group scheduled for April. This opportunity has given us access to a hard-to-reach CALD community, and we hope to expand to other CALD communities (Mandarin and Arabic) in the future” (person with disability, grantee).

In another peer support group, grantees had already successfully provided peer support to people with one particular type of disability and spoke about one of their next steps being to expand to providing support specifically to Indigenous people with that type of disability. While experiencing challenges in starting up their peer support group, another grantee noted building significant relationships with Indigenous organisations in order to prepare for providing peer support within the Indigenous community. These examples highlight that, although the application process could be difficult and not everyone was facilitated to apply, where they were funded, some CALD grantees were able to use the Team Up grants process to significantly engage with (or prepare to engage with) CALD communities.

2. People living in regional areas

Training and peer networks

Team Up training was delivered in both metro and regional areas, with NSW CID and CDAH primarily responsible for delivery in regional communities. Some people travelled a significant distance from rural or other satellite communities to be able to participate. Where training was delivered in regional locations, people commented on the benefits of having a training delivery that could take on a local character, with additional comments that they would like to see more people from their community involved in the leadership of the training.

One person who travelled from a rural community to a regional location for the training commented that it would be beneficial to be able to join some other training sessions by video-conference:

“Because I’m regional...it’s hard for me. So maybe being able to link in through video-conferencing would be a good idea, because I do that with [another service] anyway and I would love to be able to do all these workshops, but it’s really hard because of where I’m located geographically. So being able to provide that I can still attend but not physically would be a really, really good idea. Even though I can’t do the practical things, it’s nice to be able to kind of call in and be able to get the content” (person with disability, training participant).

The same person also commented that increased accessibility of the training to regional communities through video-conferencing might also have benefits for other people who could not attend the training in person for other reasons:

“[One woman] was saying that she wanted to do a course in Sydney but she just wasn’t able to go and it was financial issues and then it was her children. So, there’s a lot of factors that do play [into the need for video-conferencing], because if you do have that option to be able to link in, there might be a lot more people that are interested in taking part in the training and being able to engage with everybody” (person with disability, training participant).

The expansion to video-conferencing represents an option that similar programs to Team Up could adopt in future to increase the groups that training can be available to.

Grants process

Eight peer support groups were funded in Newcastle and/or Wollongong, and a further eight peer support groups were funded in other rural or regional communities – highlighting that supporting regional areas was a significant focus of the grants program. Grantees in regional areas received significant support from Team Up to attend grantee training in Sydney, although at least one grantee mentioned that the distance and resulting time away from work was not possible for her.

Some other peer support groups also noted a growing awareness of the peer support needs of people in regional communities and a desire to expand their peer support to those communities, where possible. For example, one noted:

“[We want to provide peer support] not just [in] Sydney. I think it’s more about exploring regional areas like Dubbo and Singleton where we know that Deaf people exist... I think it’s really important for people living in regional areas. Deaf people do tend to live in isolation, particularly in those very small towns and we sort of run these things here, but we mustn’t forget about our friends that live in these regional areas” (person with disability, grantee).

In this respect, participants in Team Up demonstrated an awareness of peer support needs in regional communities, and through the grants program, were able to provide peer support in some of these locations, with ambitions to expand into others in the future.

Appendix 5: Results of training feedback forms

Participants' perceptions of peer support pre- and post-training

	Before training (n=101)		After training (n=83)	
	n	%	n	%
What do you think about getting information from you peers?				
Good idea	87	90.6	76	95.0
Part good idea, part bad idea	9	9.4	3	3.8
Bad idea	0	0.0	1	1.3
Total	96	100	80	100
Missing respondents	5		3	
How much do you think your own life experiences can help other people?				
A lot	74	77.1	67	83.8
A little	22	22.9	13	16.3
Not at all	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	96	100	80	100
Missing respondents	5		3	
What do you want to do in peer support in the future?*				
Get support from others	57	62.0	52	64.2
Give support to others	79	85.9	70	86.4
Help someone else run peer support	46	50.0	46	56.8
Be a leader of peer support myself	55	59.8	43	52.4

*Could choose more than one response.

Participants' perceptions post-training

After training (n=83)		
Was the training easy to understand?	<i>n</i>	%
Very easy	72	87.8
A little easy	9	11.0
Not easy at all	1	1.2
Total	82	100.0
Missing respondents	1	
Did you get the help you needed at the training?		
All of the help I needed	58	72.5
Some of the help I needed	21	26.3
None of the help I needed	1	1.3
Total	80	100.0
Missing respondents	3	
Was the training building easy to get around in?		
Very easy	66	82.5
A little easy	14	17.5
Not easy at all	0	0.0
Total	80	100.0
Missing respondents	3	
Did the people at the training care about what you thought?		
They cared a lot	80	97.6
They cared a little	2	2.4
They didn't care at all	0	0.0
Total	82	100.0
Missing respondents	1	
Did the people at the training listen to what you had to say?		
They listened a lot	79	96.3
They listened a little	3	3.7
They didn't listen at all	0	0.0
Total	82	100.0
Missing respondents	1	

Training participation statistics

After training (n=83)		
What type of training did you do?	n	%
Introduction to Peer Support	54	69.2
Peer Facilitator	14	17.9
Peer Mentor	10	12.8
Total	78	100.0
Missing respondents	5	
Who was the trainer?		
Team Up Staff Member	22	30.1
Peer Worker	51	69.9
Total	73	100.0
Missing respondents	10	
Where was the training held?		
Urban	31	43.1
Regional/rural	41	56.9
Total	72	100.0
Missing respondents	11	