

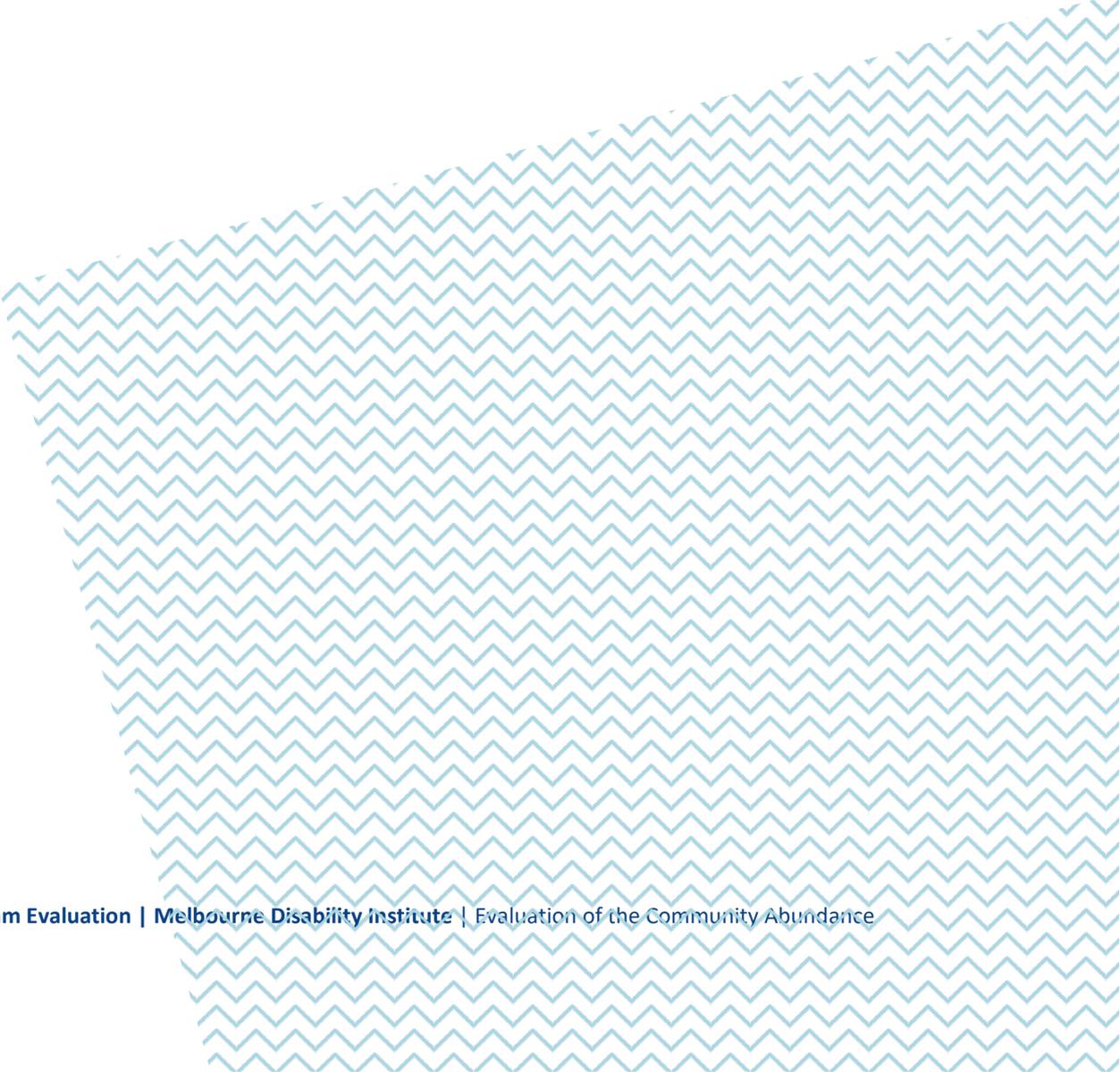


Centre for Program Evaluation | Melbourne Disability Institute

Evaluation of the Community Abundance Workshops

Community Based Research Scheme – Melbourne Disability Institute

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Acknowledgements

The Melbourne Disability Institute would like to acknowledge the assistance given to the researchers in this evaluation by the Sudanese Community and the staff of Community Abundance. Their cooperation was greatly appreciated, as was their great hospitality

The Research Assistance provided by **Emily Qing** and **Mia Chen** was also greatly appreciated.

Executive Summary

The Melbourne Disability Institute (MDI) is an interdisciplinary research institute that was established by the University of Melbourne in 2018 to build a collaborative, interdisciplinary and translational research program to improve the lives of people with disability.

Community Abundance is a multicultural centre which provides advocacy and practical support for a number of African Australians, particularly those who are seeking access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Community Abundance received an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant from the National Disability Insurance Agency, for a series of capacity building workshops which take a whole-of-community approach to helping the Sudanese Australian community understand the NDIS, educate them about disability, empower them to advocate for themselves and understand their rights in Australia.

As part of this grant, Community Abundance asked the University of Melbourne, and specifically the Centre for Program Evaluation, to evaluate the project.

The workshops were structured in a similar way with some content variations. Link Health and Community have a focus on children with disability aged less than five years of age; Latrobe Community Health has a focus on people with disability under 65 year of age. The contribution of the NDIS was on the system and how to connect with the service. This report relates to five of those workshops.

This research project aims to evaluate the workshop process and outcomes, to help Community Abundance improve the ongoing workshops, and to understand the impact of workshops in increasing understanding of disability and the NDIS, understanding of advocacy, confidence in speaking up, and access to the NDIS. Approximately 110 people have attended the workshops (five workshops in all so far).

The following methodology was used to undertake the evaluation:

1. The researchers attended five workshops held in locations around Melbourne. Information was collected through:
 - a. Observation notes taken by the researchers during the workshops
 - b. Focus groups held after each workshop
 - c. Sign-on sheets that were provided before the workshops, and participants were asked if they would be willing to be telephoned for further information after the workshop

Informal conversations were conducted with participants during the workshops, and focus groups were conducted after some of the workshops. These focus groups typically had around 6-7 participants in each one. Additionally, a selection of participants, (12 in all) were contacted approximately one month after each workshop and asked a series of questions about their experience of the workshops, what they learned and how effective they thought it was.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section draws some overall conclusions and makes some recommendations.

The workshop program has made a valuable contribution to de-mystifying the NDIS and all service providers worked hard on the days to deliver their messages. The workshops have been successful in sharing information and assuring participants worries about it being a disciplinary system. (this comment came up about three times during the focus groups.) The community-based method of delivery was most beneficial to the Sudanese community as this is central to how they operate and live. Having the

interpreters present was clearly of benefit and they worked hard to ensure they relayed the correct message.

There are a number of recommendations which can be made in terms of future delivery of such workshops.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for Community Abundance:

- Try to adhere to the starting times. This can be difficult in this community but the delay is frustrating for some as some of the workshops commenced 1-2 hours after the advertised time.
- Set up a white board at the entrance to the workshop so that people who are happy to be contacted after the workshop can put their names down.
- In the lunch break each provider could offer to answer questions from a designated spot in the room. The community leaders could help to facilitate this by encouraging the community to ask questions

The following recommendations are suggested to Service Providers:

- develop a common FAQ sheet to distribute to participants prior to the workshop. This fact sheet should be responsive to the questions being asked, for example, how long does the process take? What happens if I am rejected – can I apply again? Why does the assessment process take so long? Etc.
- Consider this model of delivering information related to NDIS in other community groups.

Main Report

Context

The University of Melbourne

The University of Melbourne has over 160 years of history of leadership in research, innovation, teaching and learning. It is the highest-ranked research university in Australia. Our researchers are at the forefront of international scholarship in a diverse range of fields.

Melbourne Disability Institute

The Melbourne Disability Institute (MDI) is an interdisciplinary research institute that was established by the University of Melbourne in 2018 to build a collaborative, interdisciplinary and translational research program to improve the lives of people with disability. Ultimately, the MDI research program aims to capitalise on national reforms and active partnerships with the disability sector to deliver evidence for transformation. The MDI research program is centred around providing much-needed evidence for the disability sector and broader community to address the complex problems facing people with disability, their families and carers.

Centre for Program Evaluation

The Centre for Program Evaluation (CPE) undertakes evaluations and research projects for government departments, non-government organisations and community-based agencies across a wide range of policy and program areas but particularly in the areas of education, health, the arts, social wellbeing and the community. Staff members are skilled in the use of widely known, as well as current, emerging and innovative evaluation theory, techniques, and practice, all of which aim to enhance client and stakeholder collaboration and increase the utilisation of evaluation findings.

Aims and Objectives of the Project

Community Abundance is a multicultural centre which provides advocacy and practical support for a number of African Australians, particularly those who are seeking access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Community Abundance provides social services to CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) and particularly African communities. It is committed to helping those severely affected by family disruption, social disconnection, disability, employment difficulties, violence and challenges presented by cultural differences. They provide a range of services that include face-to-face counselling programs, health promotion programs, and assistance for the rehabilitation of people affected by trauma, domestic violence, and malnutrition. Community Abundance is a not-for-profit, fully-independent charitable organisation and registered NDIS provider.

Community Abundance received an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant from the National Disability Insurance Agency, for a series of capacity building workshops which take a whole-of-community approach to helping the Sudanese Australian community understand the NDIS, educate them about disability, empower them to advocate for themselves and understand their rights in Australia. Ultimately the project aims to improve the wellbeing of people with disability, their families and carers and ensure people understand, and are able to access, the NDIS.

As part of this grant, Community Abundance asked the University of Melbourne to evaluate the project.

Introduction to the Workshops

The South Sudanese Australian community is a diverse and vibrant yet vulnerable community. After migrating in early 2000's to escape the civil war in Sudan, the events of that time in Sudan in 2013 fractured the community here too and it is still healing. The impacts of the refugee journey continue to be felt within the community. It is not therefore surprising that the concept of community is very dear to the hearts of most of the Sudanese population. The general approach to the workshops was to build the community capacity by offering forums to build community knowledge and take that knowledge back to the community. A number of community leaders were present at all workshops to ensure that this happened. The workshops were seen as a way for the community to engage with each other and with key people who can provide support to people with disability, such as local area coordinators, early childhood specialists and representatives from the NDIS. As there are a number of languages spoken by the Sudanese, 3-4 interpreters were always present at the workshop.

The workshops were structured in a similar way with some content variations. Link Health and Community have a focus on children with disability aged less than five years of age; Latrobe Community Health has a focus on people with disability under 65 year of age. The contribution of the NDIS was on the system and how to connect with the service. At most of the workshops there was Sudanese music and singing, and a beautiful lunch was prepared. The atmosphere was relaxed, and people moved freely around the area. Five to six workshops were planned across Melbourne. This report relates to five of those workshops.

This research project aims to evaluate the workshop process and outcomes, to help Community Abundance improve the ongoing workshops, and to understand the impact of workshops in increasing understanding of disability and the NDIS, understanding of advocacy, confidence in speaking up, and access to the NDIS. Approximately 110 people have attended the workshops (five workshops in all so far).

Key Questions

The key questions for this evaluation were:

- What benefits do the stakeholders believe is obtained from the Community Abundance workshops?
- To what extent have workshops impacted participant understanding of disability, the NDIS, and advocacy?
- What changes can be made to improve workshops?
- To what extent have workshops impacted participant confidence?
- What are the key factors that make the workshop attractive to the participants?

Methodology

The following methodology was used to undertake the evaluation:

2. The researchers attended five workshops held in locations around Melbourne. Information was collected through:
 - a. Observation notes taken by the researchers during the workshops
 - b. Focus groups held after each workshop
 - c. Sign-on sheets that were provided before the workshops, and participants were asked if they would be willing to be telephoned for further information after the workshop

Data Collection

Stakeholders at the workshops included:

- Sudanese People with disability; their families and carers
- Members of the Broader Sudanese community
- Representatives from Link Health, Ethnic Community Council Victoria, Latrobe Community Health Service, National Insurance Disability Service, and the Discrimination Legal Service
- Interpreters

Informal conversations were conducted with participants during the workshops, and focus groups were conducted after some of the workshops. These focus groups typically had around 6-7 participants in each one. Additionally, a selection of participants, (12 in all) were contacted approximately one month after each workshop and asked a series of questions about their experience of the workshops, what they learned and how effective they thought it was.

Data analysis

The data obtained from the workshops and the interviews was analysed using qualitative methods. A matrix was developed for the focus group data as well as the interview data and main themes identified.

Results

The section discusses the answers to the key evaluation questions based on data collected during the workshops, the focus groups and stakeholder interviews.

Question 1: What benefits do the stakeholders believe is obtained from the Community Abundance workshops?

Stakeholders identified the following benefits:

- **Community Members** – the workshop offered an opportunity to discuss concerns, to learn about a complex system and to ask questions. During the lunch breaks people were asking further questions of the presenters and of the regional NDIS provider. The majority of the participants had been to more than one workshop, particularly the community leaders, so they were a good resource for the Sudanese community.
- **Carers of People with Disability** – they were able to ask direct questions to the service providers or get the regional provider to ask their questions. Questions were mainly focused on the application logistics for NDIS funding and the selection criteria, which could be used to support the NDIS application for their family members.
- **Providers of Services** – providers of services (Link, LaTrobe and NDIS) were able to witness firsthand whether their messages were getting through to the community and consider other ways to provide information in the future.

Question 2: To what extent have workshops impacted participant understanding of disability, the NDIS, and advocacy?

- Judging by the responses to the focus groups and the feedback from the phone interview sessions, the community gained a lot from attending the workshops. Several participants said that repeated exposure to the workshops had given them a bigger picture of the whole Disability system, and they were better able to understand it. Some of the workshop participants had not fully understood the NDIS and the way in which it funds support to those with disability. A common feeling was that the NDIS should provide payment for family members to support the

person with disability; instead of providing funding for necessary supports. Although this misconception was cleared up during the workshop, it came up again at other workshops, so there is a degree of uncertainty whether this issue has in fact been resolved. Other people commented that the workshops enabled them to understand that there is not just one type of disability, but many. A number of people commented that disability is not talked about in their community because it is a stigma and brings shame on the family. Education sessions like this should help change that perception. Several participants mentioned the discrimination legal services information and felt the information given then was very worthwhile. Indeed, most people were very happy with the sessions with one person asking the hard to answer question: *“How do we know we are going to get what we want?”*

Question 3. What are the key factors that make the Program attractive to participants?

One of the key factors was the ambience of the day. Whole families came to the day so husbands and wives could participate along with their children. There were interpreters there so the messages could be understood. There was also safety and familiarity for the participants as they were in their community.

There was a concern among organisers that the people who would most benefit from the workshops were often the ones who were too frightened to attend. Their fear could have risen from their fear of bureaucracy and of Government, as in their country of origin, these are bodies to fear. Community Abundance is looking at ways to get the message to those people.

Question 4. What changes can be made to improve the workshops?

A number of observations were made by the research team who had attended the workshops. (These were from the researchers perspective.) Sometimes people are not confident in speaking at a workshop. So perhaps in the lunch break each provider could offer to answer questions from a designated spot in the room. The community leaders could help to facilitate this by encouraging the community to ask questions. Another suggestion from the researchers, is to have a whiteboard set up at the conference where participants could put their contact details if they are happy to be contacted for feedback after the workshop.

The service teams who participated in the workshop could be encouraged to develop a common FAQ sheet to distribute to participants prior to the workshop. This fact sheet should be responsive to the questions being asked, for example, how long does the process take? What happens if I am rejected – can I apply again? Why does the assessment process take so long? Etc.

Another observation is that the concept of time would appear to be different in the Sudanese community, but there was one workshop which commenced nearly two hours after the advertised time, so stricter timelines could be established.

KEQ4 To what extent have workshops impacted participant confidence?

Feedback from the Focus Groups and the phone interviews would suggest that the confidence levels of the participants involved in the workshops had improved. From comments made by the Focus Group participants and by anecdotal comments from the community leaders after the sessions, there appeared to be a greater confidence by the community to take the messages and information back to their community. The NDIS is a complex system but it was clear that the workshops had empowered a large section of the participants to internalise those key messages and then be able to relay them back to the Sudanese community. The workshops encouraged people to talk about disability in their families thereby making it a normal part of family life, rather than something for families to be ashamed of. Moreover, the participants also mentioned that being able to participate in multiple workshops was beneficial as this allowed them to consolidate the learning and to ask follow-up questions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section draws some overall conclusions and makes some recommendations.

The workshop program has made a valuable contribution to de-mystifying the NDIS and all service providers worked hard on the days to deliver their messages. The workshops have been successful in sharing information and assuring participants worries about it being a disciplinary system. (this comment came up about three times during the focus groups.) The community-based method of delivery was most beneficial to the Sudanese community as this is central to how they operate and live. Having the interpreters present was clearly of benefit and they worked hard to ensure they relayed the correct message.

However it was mentioned by a number of participants at the workshops that the ones who would benefit most from these workshops are often those who were too frightened to come along. It was agreed by Community Abundance that they would develop ways to encourage such people to attend workshops.

There are a number of recommendations which can be made in terms of future delivery of such workshops.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for Community Abundance:

- Try to adhere to the starting times. This can be difficult in this community, but the delay is frustrating for some as some of the workshops commenced 1-2 hours after the advertised time.
- Set up a white board at the entrance to the workshop so that people who are happy to be contacted after the workshop can put their names down.
- In the lunch break each provider could offer to answer questions from a designated spot in the room. The community leaders could help to facilitate this by encouraging the community to ask questions
- Further resourcing could enable Community Abundance to reach those in the Sudanese community who are hard to attract but could benefit from the information.

The following recommendations are suggested to Service Providers:

- develop a common FAQ sheet to distribute to participants prior to the workshop. This fact sheet should be responsive to the questions being asked, for example, how long does the process take? What happens if I am rejected – can I apply again? Why does the assessment process take so long? Etc.
- Consider this model of delivering information related to NDIS in other community groups.

Appendix 1. Interview Questions (Telephone)

NDIS INFORMATION SESSIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Date:

Name: (Optional).....

Connection to the NDIS:.....

1. What is the main reason you came along to the workshops?

.....

2. Were your questions been answered by this session? No/Yes

3. If no, what else were you hoping for?

.....

.....

4. Was this day been worthwhile for you? Yes/No

5. If no, what else could have been included?

.....

6. Do you think your understanding of disability, the NDIS and advocacy has increased by the workshop?

.....

7. How confident do you feel now about accessing resources or the website?

.....

8. Is there anything else that you want to tell me?

.....

Thank you for your time

