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Short summary

Our Voice SA is a peer-led self-advocacy group for adults living with intellectual disability. The group wants to broaden the reach so that new people can learn about their rights. The group is currently seeking funding of \$10,000 per year to support its activities.

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1 Our Voice SA Reaching Out

Our Voice SA is a peer-led self-advocacy group for adults living with intellectual disability in South Australia. The group was founded and is run by and for adults living with intellectual disability.

Our Voice SA supports its members in different ways to

- feel connected to peers and part of a group that have a voice (respected and listened to by the community)
- know their rights, grow skills and confidence to speak out about the things that matter to the person and the group
- become leaders and peer mentors; to build rights awareness among people with and without disability, by sharing stories and speaking in public.

The peer-led group has over 80 active members living with disability and associated

1.3 Activities and processes in Our Voice SA

Our Voice SA organises and delivers activities and uses processes (Figure 2, Project Logic) to achieve the projects goals. Here we briefly discuss each of these activities delivered, and processes used in the project, before we look at what worked well, and what can be done differently in the future.

1.4 Our Voice SA activities

Peer support network meetings

Our Voice SA organise peer networks or groups in six locations. The peer support networks are held in a place of accommodation or a service, and some are held in the community, like a library. The aim of the peer support networks is to connect people with intellectual disability in a local area or within a service who may not yet be linked. Some peer support groups existed before Our Voice SA got involved; other groups were started by Our Voice SA.

Our Voice SA monthly meetings

Our Voice SA meet monthly as a group to discuss plans for the future, how the group wants to organise themselves, how to reach their stated goals (i.e., planning of the conference, co-design of workshop material), and put forward proposals and ideas to the Our Voice SA board.

Community consultations

Members of Our Voice SA are regularly invited and seek out opportunities to have a say in things that matter to them and their peers. Examples include consultations with the government, like the NDIA, the Taskforce on Restrictive Practices, and with private and state-run organisations like SA Water or the Australia National University. OVSA also held private and public sessions with the Royal Commission into the Violence and abuse of people with disability at home.

Workshops

Our Voice SA runs a series of 7 workshops with the same group of people. In the workshops people with intellectual disability can grow their knowledge, learn more about rights, learn from each other, and gain confidence and skills to make decisions, and speak out about things that matter to them.

Figure 2: Our Voice SA Reaching Out project logic

<p>Outcomes</p> <p>People with intellectual disability in urban and regional areas in the community and closed systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the community • Experience equal rights and opportunities • Have connections, friendship and support with peers • Have a voice and speak up • Gain confidence, knowledge and skills to advocate for self and peers <p>Community and people in decision-making positions (government, services, research) value, respect and listen to advice from people with intellectual disability</p>
<p>Outputs</p> <p>Opportunities for people with intellectual disability to participate are available</p> <p>Policies and practices are inclusive, and implementation is monitored</p> <p>Services, government, and allies change their expectations and practices working with and supporting people with intellectual disability</p>
<p>Processes</p> <p>People with intellectual disability self-advocate for rights in own lives and build rights awareness with peers and the broader community through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership roles • Board membership • Peer mentoring • Peer support • Expand into regional areas and closed systems
<p>Activities</p> <p>People with intellectual disability, staff, Our Voice SA and JFA Purple Orange organise and deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support network meetings • Our Voice SA monthly meetings • Community consultations • Workshops • Conference

Conference

Peer support

2 Methods

The information for this report about Our Voice SA was collected by the staff in Our Voice SA, university researchers and peer-community researchers. The study has university ethics approval.

2.1 Co-design approach

The research team includes a community researcher with lived experience. The

Interviews with people and staff

We interviewed two people with intellectual disability and two staff members in Our Voice SA. The interviewers used inclusive techniques so that the interview questions were flexible and tailored to the person and their experiences.

Program data

The staff in Our Voice SA collect information about the self-advocacy work they deliver. The program data included numbers of people attending workshops and meetings; workshop notes and other material; videos about the work and impact of Our Voice SA; feedback surveys; written project and program documents. The staff de-identified the documents (removed people's names) and shared selected information with the researchers.

2.3 Analysis

The researchers discussed the key themes arising from the research and analysed the data using a thematic coding framework and qualitative data software (Nvivo12). The themes came from the research questions.

All the researchers contributed to writing this report.

Participants in the workshops and peer network meetings reported a range of significant changes to their life, including setting boundaries in relationships (with employers, family, paid carers, housemates), making daily life choices, and speaking up when they were unsatisfied in their employment, living situation or with their relationships. Shane's story (Story of Change 1) shows the powerful impact of becoming a peer mentor, what it means to gain confidence and help break down low expectations. Peer mentorship has provided the opportunity for Shane to "do what's right for you and take the next step in your life" (Shane).

Figure 3: Story of change 1: Our voice SA peer mentor

Story of change – Our voice SA peer mentor

Shane (not his real name) has been a part of Our Voice SA for almost 3 years. He has a paid role as a Peer Mentor and a volunteer role and is a board member. Shane likes being part of Our Voice SA because "people tell their stories". He explains, "we are all allowed to put our point across" and discuss how to make things better. "The peer group support each other to be happy, safe, and do what's right for them".

Shane says that being a part of Our Voice SA has made a huge difference in his life. Before he joined, he worked in jobs where he felt less respected. Being part of Our Voice SA "gave me confidence to speak up... It gave me a voice". He says this helped him to move to a new and more exciting job that he loves. Shane is also working in systemic advocacy at state and national levels.

Shane is very busy and active in his work and private life; he has hopes and dreams for the future. He is passionate about continuing his education and wants to attend university. Shane believes in the right of people with intellectual disability to have the same rights and opportunities as people without disability. When the NDIA did not support one of his goals, he decided to appeal their decision. Shane explains that an important step in his journey was to find his voice and to have confidence to speak up. He "was learning public speaking skills".

A few years back, he joined a public speaking group so he could learn "to know what to say and how to say it." This has taught him how talk to people, anyone "even the

Premier of SA”, how to put your point across and have people listen to you. This confidence to speak up also helped him to apply successfully for jobs.

3.2 Experience equal rights and opportunities

Participants in the workshops learnt about their rights and how to apply these ideas

Voice SA facilitators found it increasingly easier to involve participants in conversations and collect critical ideas about how their employer could improve the working conditions, social and safety aspects of their working environment.

Towards the end of the workshops, people reported statements like, "I don't let anyone put me down" and "I like being able to speak up". Many of them said they had changed in the process. One person noted, "I think we have changed. I

Making connections, new friendships and building on existing relationships, learning from the stories and experiences of peers, and helping each other out, during and after Our Voice SA activities and meetings, were an important part why people wanted to continue being involved in the groups, meetings and activities.

3.4 Have a voice and speak up

Being part of Our Voice SA provided people with intellectual disability with opportunities to share experiences, life stories and ideas, to feel listened to and heard by their peers and the community.

Sense of connection in a group

In the interviews people said that there are many ways people with intellectual disability benefit from the Our Voice SA groups, monthly member meetings, and peer support networks: people can tell their stories, listen to other people, and support each other. Together, they “work as a team” and can come up with a new way of thinking. One person in the group said: “It’s electrifying. It’s powerful. Having a voice, all as one” (Our Voice SA member).

Sense of identity

Our Voice SA provides opportunities to share stories and experiences. Speaking up and being listened to by others, in small peer network groups or at larger events, like the conference, provided members with a stronger sense of self and identity (who I am and what I can do).

Sharing the “stereotypes” and challenges one faces [as a person with intellectual disability], and who I am today, “makes me strong inside... It’s like a beacon of light getting brighter and brighter, every time you say it. It makes me strong inside”. (Conference presenter).

3.5 Gain confidence, knowledge, skills to advocate for self and peers

Our Voice SA undertake regular evaluation of the workshops they deliver. They administer a survey known as the Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS) to

Our Voice SA Reaching Out Report:

Our Voice SA Reaching Out Report:

Over time, Our Voice SA members appear to have become more knowledgeable and confident about what it means to speak up and apply changes to their lives, and to advocate for the rights of people with intellectual disability in the community more broadly. Our Voice SA has a greater impact on members who have been part of the group and activities for longer or have been more strongly involved in the core group. They attend monthly meetings and take on central leadership roles in the project. The repeated engagement of a core group of members helps people to develop complex ideas and take initiative. One example of this is that a longstanding Our Voice SA member took the initiative to seek out funding for the conference.

4 What activities work, what are the challenges

4.1 Peer support networks

People with intellectual disability take part in peer support networks to meet their peers who live in the same accommodation, service or local area. The OVSA board come together from a broader metro area. Together they speak up about things that matter to them in their life, learn and share ideas about their place(s) of work, accommodation, and local community, see Story of Change 3

Building trust and relationships with local services and organisations that are less familiar with autonomy and self-advocacy of people with intellectual disability takes time and persistence. Earning trust and respect with some organisations over time through shared activities aligned with the organisations' programs is a strategic approach.

4.2 Our Voice SA monthly meetings

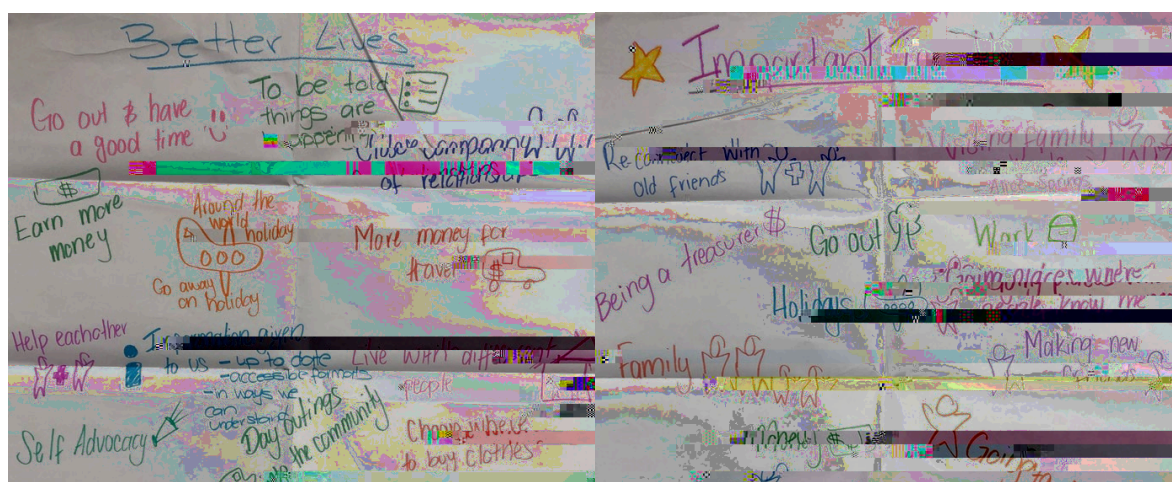
4.4 Workshops

The workshops, a series of at least 7 successive meetings, are specifically designed to learn about rights and how to speak up and make decisions about things that matter to the person in all areas of their life.

The workshop content for all workshops was co-produced with people with intellectual disability, which ensures that the content is relevant to the self-advocacy needs of participants in the workshops. Peer mentors also co-facilitate the delivery of parts of the workshop sessions (Section 3.5). For example, lived-experience stories of learning about rights and applying them to their own life, makes the workshop content more relevant to workshop participants. Involving presenters with lived experience also makes it easier for participants to ask questions and share their reflections and own stories.

The other staff who deliver the workshops and peer networks are experienced in engaging diverse audiences. They use techniques such as scaffolding and repetition in the delivery, visual material (including videos and take home booklets), providing take home material (resources and planning documents) to assist participants to make best use of the training after the workshop. They use engaging training delivery skills, for example, summarising content, using images, colours and pictures to highlight messages. They represent the discussions in visible, accessible and large formats.

Figure 9: Our Voice SA workshop material provider 2A



Online events have not been as successful for Our Voice SA workshops. Sharing successful ways of engaging people with intellectual disability in online activities from other advocacy organisations may be a way to overcome this accessibility barrier.

As peer mentors build confidence and experience, opportunities for them to increase the amount of workshop content they deliver and be actively involved in discussions with participants about workshop topics with part of ntTw .012(e)10 (d 9)6 (t(d 9)6d[4.6 ((ot)14.6 (1

members with disability contributed to the organisation and helped to facilitate at the conference. They held keynote

5.3 Peer mentorship

Our Voice SA engages three paid peer mentors. The role of the peer mentors is to become leaders and support the delivery of the workshops and other project activities. One peer mentor explained their role as, “to guide [newer people] on the way to find out about making decisions, about education, housing or safety, things in the world”, anything that the person is interested in.

Peer mentors viewed becoming a paid mentor in Our Voice SA a valued opportunity and responsibility, a way to build new relationships, refine skills and keep learning.

advocacy groups, also into regional areas. This is a positive and relevant development. The numbers of workshops, peer support network and other meetings in 2021, and participant numbers in each, are listed in Appendix A.

This expansion is still in its early stages. It is too early to say what the full impact of Reaching Out will be on people with intellectual disability living in regional areas and in closed systems who were not part of the original Our Voice SA membership.

Emerging feedback from the new peer networks and the organisations and services involved in the capacity building work was positive. Important to the success of the groups and meetings was to have “someone independent”, like the Our Voice SA facilitators and peer mentors come into the organisations to work with a group of people with disability. Organisations and new members said that the independent facilitation created a “safe space” to speak up about things that matter to people, especially things that were sensitive to speak about.

5.6 Cultural diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Members from cultural and Aboriginal backgrounds are underrepresented in Our Voice SA. There are currently clear no plans or strategies to engage and reach into these communities. This is something the project could explore into the future.

6 Lessons for self-advocacy

6.1 Strengths of the OVSA model

The Our Voice SA model aims to build self-advocacy, rights awareness and connection offers different levels of engagement. People with intellectual disability can take part in a wide range of activities and leadership responsibilities and roles.

This model of self-advocacy allows new and existing members, who have a strong interest or develop confidence and interest over time to participate and connect with other parts of Our Voice SA. Examples of this cross-over occurred when new participants in the peer network and workshops attended the conference.

The Reaching Out project has provided resources for Our Voice SA to expand its reach and activities, engage in more community consultations, and become known and respected in the broader community. The growth of the groups has also translated into individual growth of members' confidence and skills. They are making changes in their own lives.

The Reaching Out project has allowed Our Voice SA to hire dedicated experienced staff to co-design and develop the workshop material, deliver capacity and skills building activities with peer mentors, engage with large services and closed systems, revisit the groups' constitution and build leadership capacity, undertake project management

Parts of Our Voice SA are reliant on host organisations and services (in closed systems) to provide space and assist in the recruitment of participants. Host organisations need to embed self-advocacy in the organisations policies, management and work culture. Some organisations function as gate-keepers and winning trust and interest in rights awareness is difficult as it requires a culture change for some.

People with intellectual disability rely on support, transport and funding for 1:1 support and capacity development in their support plan to attend Our Voice SA activities. Not all new members and potentially interested people have these resources allocated or are aware they can add them to their NDIS plan.

The small group processes are effective, but they are resource intensive, and it takes a long time and regular contact to gain trust and establish relationships with people, services and communities. Questions remain about how sustainable the current approach is for a wider group of people.

Governance and sustainability of the group

Succession planning, how to engage and retain younger members in Our Voice SA remains, remains important for the long-term sustainability of the group. Our Voice SA could think of strategies to engage and support younger members to step into more leadership roles in the group.

Our Voice SA is currently hosted by JFA Purple Orange. T

Appendix A: Our Voice SA in numbers

Project Data* for 2021

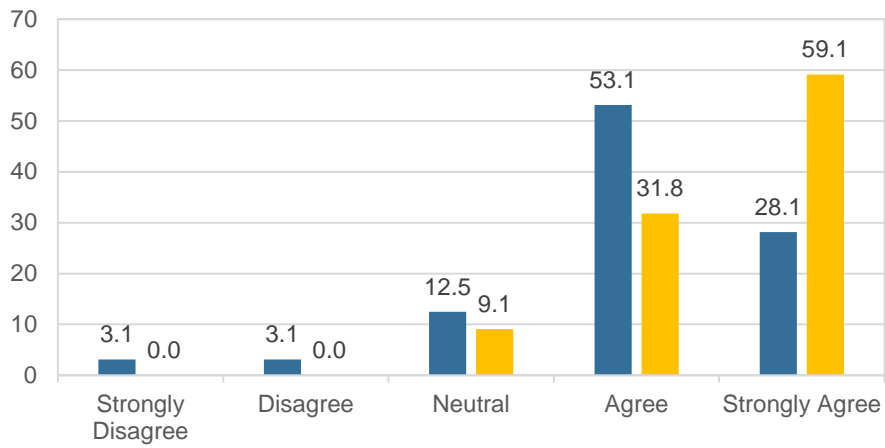
	No. of meetings	People attending
Our Voice SA	8	64
Provider 1	9	45
Provider 2	6	47
Region 1	10	29
Region 2	9	12
Region 3	1	13

	10	40
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Provider 1	7	34
Region 3A	9	60
Region 3B	9	60
Provider 2A	8	22
Provider 2B	8	45

NDIS		11
Restrictive Practices		4
PO Strategic Planning		5
SA government		4
DRC		1
University advisory 1		4
University advisory 2		4
Business consultancy		3
DRC		2
IDPWD 2021		3

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