



Explorability Inc

Individualised advocacy for people with disability

Annual Report 2020-2021



Acknowledgement of Country

Explorability Inc acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past, present and future, and acknowledge the diversity and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.



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Our Vision, Purpose and Values

In 2020-2021, Explorability's vision, purpose and values were updated.

OUR VISION

An inclusive community where all people have the opportunity to flourish

OUR PURPOSE

Empowering people with disability to uphold their rights and live the life they choose

OUR VALUES

Excellence

We strive to be leaders in best practice

We deliver a high-quality service

We are committed to continuous improvement and staff development

Innovation

We seek creative solutions

We are adaptable

We challenge perceptions and encourage change

Accountability

We own our actions

We value and respond to feedback

We are open and transparent

Collaboration

We partner with individuals and their supports

We build strong networks

We communicate effectively and work as a team

Empowerment

We uphold human rights

We value diversity, uniqueness and lived experience

We encourage independence

Explorability's Objectives

The objectives of Explorability are:

→ To ensure that people with disability:

- are encouraged to maximise an independent lifestyle so as to contribute to and be included in the mainstream community; and
- have choice and control in the pursuit of their goals and the planning and delivery of their supports,

by having access to:

- the provision of sustainable, appropriate and flexible services and supports that meet the individual needs of people with a disability and their family and carers; and
- the individualised services, supports and resources they need to optimise their health and well-being and participation in a welcoming community through, but not limited to, community engagement and participation, daily living, family support, systemic and individual advocacy and service planning and coordination;

→ To influence the strategic direction of governments and decision makers through an evidence base including formal research, information, policy development and advocacy

→ To strengthen the capacity of all people living with disability and their families and/or carers in metropolitan, regional and remote communities to have a voice and to exercise choice

→ To build partnerships in the community, business and government sectors.

Chairperson's Report

Firstly I would like to congratulate the fantastic work done by our inaugural CEO, Tracy Foulds. Tracy was a significant driver behind the creation of Explorability, which was formed out of Headwest in 2015.

I would also like to thank all board members and those who have departed during the year, including our former Chair, Alicia Mason.

In a year that has seen COVID-19 continue to challenge the lives and livelihoods of so many, I am proud of the resilience and commitment our people have demonstrated to deliver on our purpose.

The Operational Team have done a tremendous job during a difficult year, including the impact of COVID-19. We started the calendar year looking for a new CEO, and I am delighted to say that we were fortunate to secure an exceptional leader Joanne (Jo) Ende, who previously worked at the Department of Communities and has been working in the sector for many years.

During the year, we supported 815 individuals with 1742 goals. Our year-on-year revenue has grown by 20% to \$1,516k, with a surplus of \$63k. This includes the one-off benefit from the COVID-19 stimulus package of \$38k. Although we enter 2022 with a level of funding uncertainty, we have a clear direction on where we are heading, including building on our capability to assist people with disabilities.

A big thank you to Jo and all the staff.

The Board have updated our strategic priorities for the upcoming financial year through to 2025. This includes a revamp of our values, ensuring we are held to the very highest standard within the sector.

Our Strategic Priorities are;

- strengthening partnerships
- enriching lives through quality service
- being a provider of choice and
- creating financial sustainability

These clearly defined priorities will set the organisation on the path to achieving our purpose by empowering people to uphold their rights and live the life they choose.

Our strategy work has led us to look for other income avenues that are not solely dependent on grant funding. We have recently progressed our application to provide support coordination which is an opportunity that is closely aligned with advocacy. We have also made a concerted effort to realign the board to the strategic direction of the organisation. As part of this recruitment process, we welcome seven new board members including specific skills and experience entailing lived experience, direct involvement in the disability sector including the NDIS, financial, legal & governance, human resources, enabling leaders and most importantly, alignment with the vision, purpose, and values of the organisation.

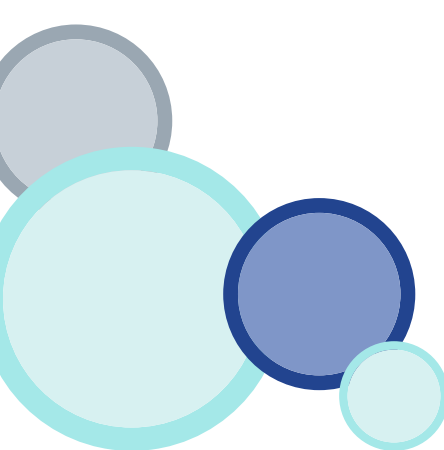
Lastly, as we continue to be challenged with the demands of our work and the ever-changing disability landscape, we will move forward knowing we are making a positive difference to people with disability, the disability sector, and the broader community.



Deane Criddle

Chairperson

Explorability Inc.





Chief Executive Officer's Report

The financial year of 2020 – 2021 has been an amazing yet challenging year. The ever-increasing demand for disability advocacy continued amidst the impacts of the pandemic. Despite these challenges, Explorability's various teams rallied to provide high quality advocacy services for hundreds of people living with disability, their family and carers, across Western Australia.

My first week at the helm of Explorability began with a lock-down in Perth. Despite this, our dedicated employees seamlessly continued advocacy services, working remotely with the assistance of technology and our existing cloud-based IT systems. This enabled continuity of service whilst ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the people we support, as well as our team members.

Similar to 2019-2020, Explorability received grant funding from the Department of Communities for the Waitlist Project, the Metropolitan Outreach Program and the Wheatbelt Outreach Program. This facilitated the extension of employment contracts for eight team members, who continued to provide person-centred advocacy support for people and families. As a result, waitlist numbers were maintained at lower levels, an information level of service was provided to waitlisted individuals which enabled self-advocacy, and the steady flow through of people to an Individual Advocate was sustained, facilitating more timely service provision.

In addition, the Outreach Teams further cemented their relationships with community and crisis services in the Metropolitan and Wheatbelt regions. Collaboration and partnership with other agencies, such as St Patrick's Community Support Centre, in conjunction with the outstanding knowledge and expertise of our Outreach Advocates, facilitated access to and connection with supports and services for many vulnerable, isolated, and 'at risk' people with disability.

I would like to acknowledge the Department of Communities for providing the grant funding and supporting many individual advocacy projects and programs alongside the 'core' state-funded Individual Advocacy services. The additional projects and programs increased the number of advocates in the sector which enabled a greater number of people with disability, their families and carers, to achieve positive outcomes.

With Explorability's intended diversification into Support Coordination, the end of 2020-2021 was an opportune time to re-evaluate our mission. With the assistance of team members, board members, and people with disability receiving advocacy services, our Vision and Purpose were clarified alongside a revision of our Values. The enthusiasm and commitment of team members in this process was heartening to see and the input from the individuals we support was greatly appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the individuals who shared their most difficult issues and complex life situations with Explorability. Supporting you, your family and carers, resonates within the heart of Explorability and inspires all of us in our work and lives.

Finally, I offer a whole-hearted thank you to all the people who make Explorability an amazing organisation. The board members, team members, our partner organisations, and our individuals, their families and carers. In a demanding, ever-changing time, positive outcomes have been achieved and I am privileged to be part of Explorability. I look forward to leading, together with our people, the future development of the organisation and empowering individuals with disability to uphold their rights and live the life they choose.

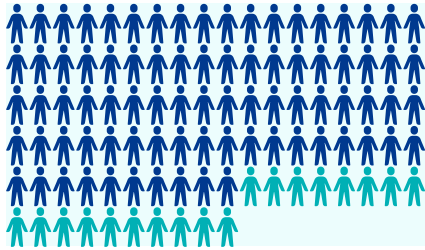


Joanne Ende

Chief Executive Officer

Explorability Inc.

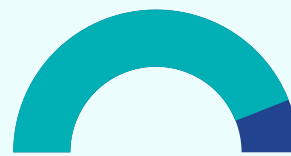
Service Snapshot



Explorability supported a total of 815 Individuals, their families and carers, including 149 anonymous requests for information.

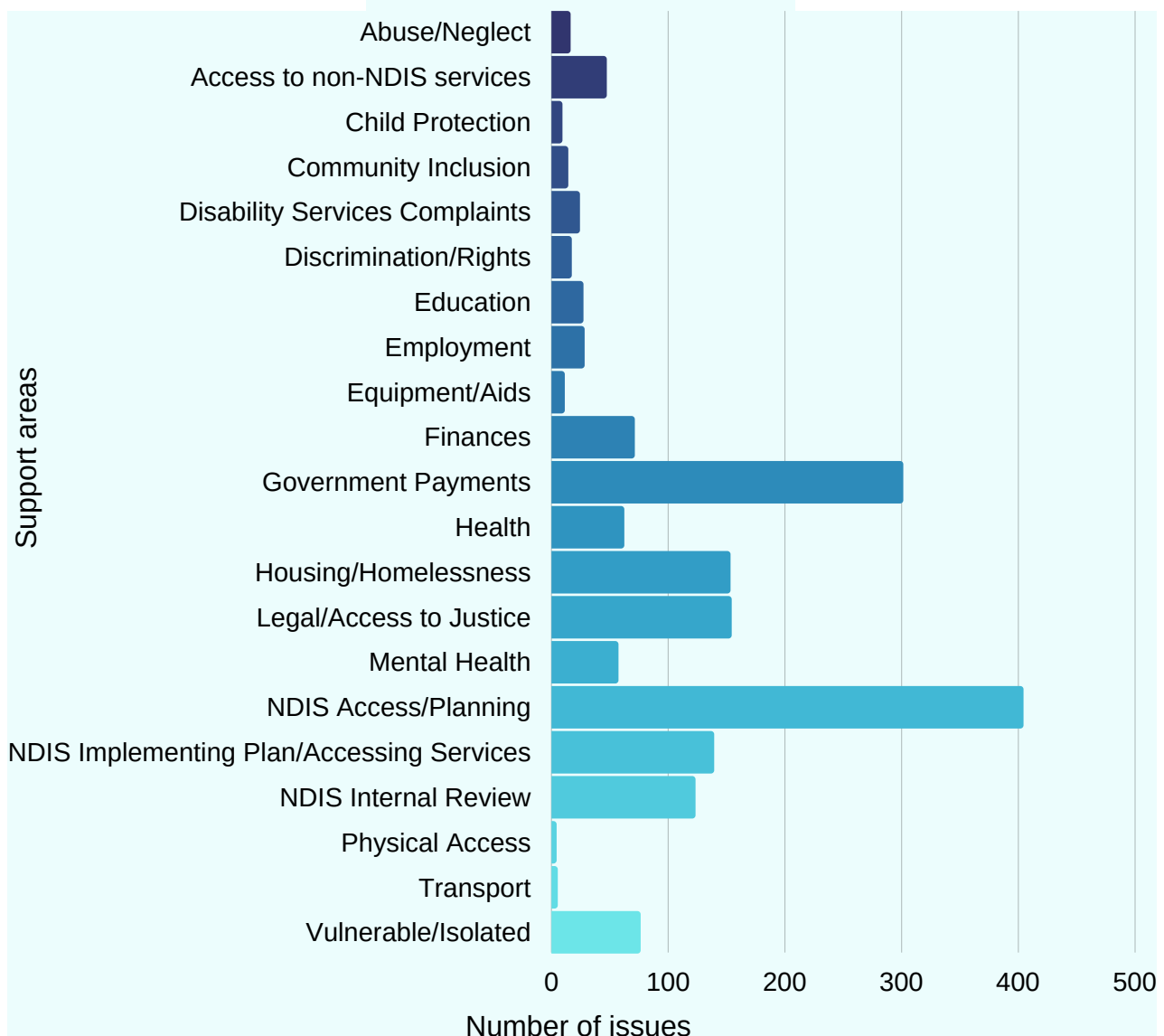
1742
Goals

1742 goals were identified



87.8% of measurable goals achieved a positive outcome.

Areas of support for 2020-2021



Our Board of Directors

Deane Criddle	Chairperson
Selena Knowles	Deputy Chair
Katie McIntyre	Treasurer
Rahul Madan	Secretary
Dr Kim Law	General Board Member
Alicia Mason	General Board Member
Marina de Kwant	General Board Member

Our Staff

The heart and soul of Explorability is our people.

Explorability employed on average 14 team members from various backgrounds with a wide-ranging skillset.

The roles within Explorability in 2020-2021 included CEO, Team Leader, Senior Advocate, Administrative Assistant, Individual Advocate, Outreach Advocate and Intake Advocate. We are very grateful to all our staff.

All team members contributed, in their own way, to our purpose of “empowering people with disability to uphold their rights and live the life they choose.”

Our Year in Review



Throughout the year, Explorability attended numerous forums within the Disability Sector, providing support and information on our services and the Disability Royal Commission.



4 November 2020

Explorability's staff completed the Moorditj Koort Cultural Awareness Training in November 2020.



19 November 2020

Explorability held an event in Northam for the International Day of People with Disability, in conjunction with Central Regional TAFE, APM, Essential Personnel and My Supports.



27 April 2021

Explorability welcomed their new CEO, Joanne (Jo) Ende. Jo has a background in Occupational Therapy and experience in managing person-centred services and adapting supports to meet the needs of each individual.



June 2021

Explorability's Wheatbelt Outreach Advocate, Tricia, was nominated in the categories of "Excellence in Regional Support" and "Excellence in Rights Promotion - Supporting Choice, Control and Capacity Building" in the WA Disability Support Awards 2021.

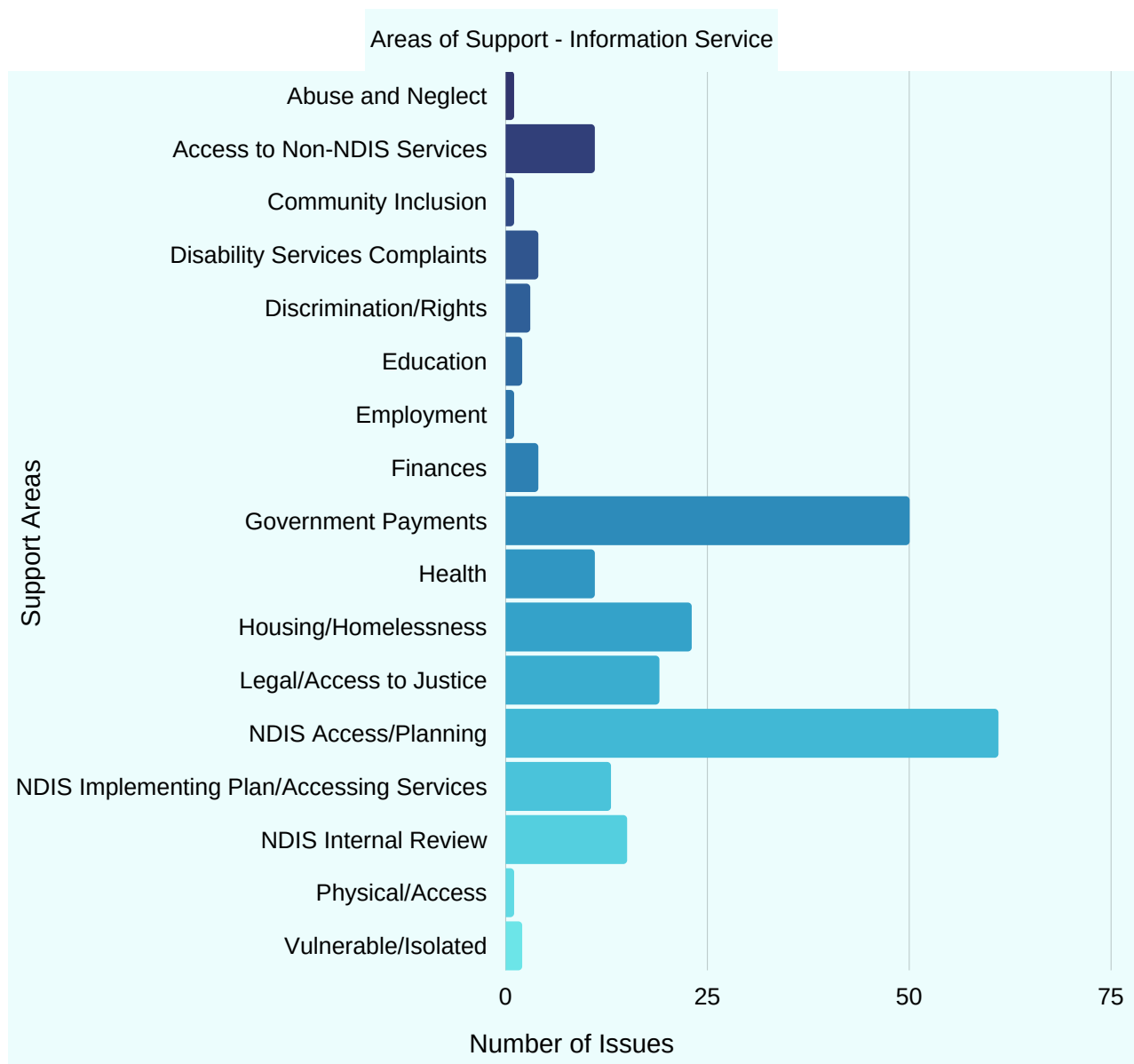
Individual Advocacy Service

Information Service

Explorability provides an information service to people with disability, their families and carers. Information and resources are provided in relation to a person's individual advocacy issues, with a view to building capacity and enabling self-advocacy.

Community services, disability sector organisations, mainstream services and the broader community also utilise our information service in relation to people with disability, their families and carers.

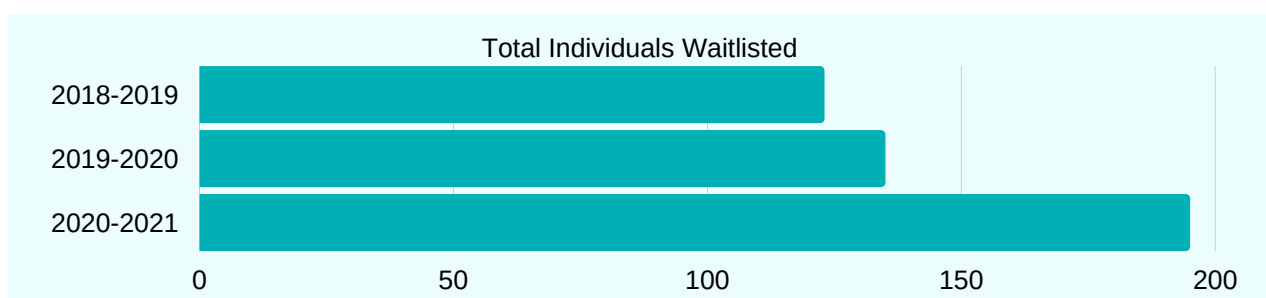
In 2020-2021, Explorability responded to 223 requests for information. 89 request or 39.9% of related to NDIS matters and 50 requests or 22.4% related to government payments.



Referrals and Waitlist

Explorability continues to receive a significant number of referrals for advocacy. Community sector organisations, and individuals or their family members, are the primary sources of referral.

Due to the high demand for advocacy, a waitlist was in place for the 2020-2021. On 1 July 2020, 58 people were waiting for advocacy with an average waiting time of 75.71 days. Over the course of the financial year, a total of 195 individuals were waitlisted with an average wait of 116.36 days. The end of the year saw a reduction in the average waiting to 50.40 days, with 43 individuals on the waitlist.



Non-recurrent funding was received from Department of Communities during 2020-2021 for the Waitlist Project. This funding greatly assisted Explorability in maintaining waitlist numbers at lower levels and enabled a steady flow through of individuals from the waitlist to an advocate.

As part of this Waitlist Project, Explorability advocates held capacity building information sessions for individuals with disability, their families and carers, and the wider community. Several sessions were delivered via Zoom and in the community. Topics related to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) access, NDIS internal reviews and Disability Support Pension (DSP) applications.

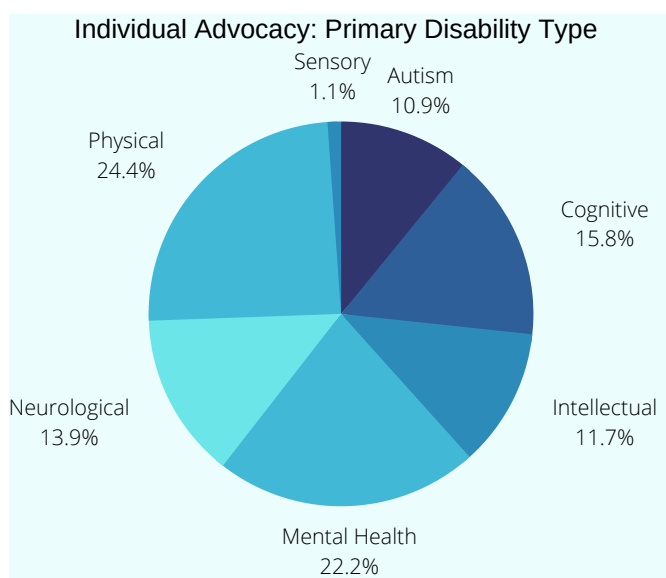
The Advocates also held one-hour in-office appointments for people on our waitlist to encourage and support self-advocacy. Information level support was also provided to individuals waiting for an Individual Advocate. Resources developed by the Waitlist Project Team regarding NDIS access, DSP applications and mental health services have been well utilised.

A total of 433 goals were identified by individuals in the referral and waitlist stage. 92.42% of goals that were finalised, and could be measured, were achieved with a positive outcome whilst individuals were on the waitlist.

Individual Advocacy

Explorability supported 266 individuals in our Individual Advocacy Service during 2020-2021 and 97 of these individuals were new to the service.

Of the 266 individuals, 146 were female, 118 were male and 2 individuals identified as non-binary. The Individuals supported ranged from the age of 9 months to 71 years of age.



A large percentage of individuals who accessed the Individual Advocacy Service identified a physical disability as their primary disability type. Psychosocial and cognitive disabilities were also highly represented.

146 individuals also identified a secondary disability, with 53 people or 36% confirming a psychosocial disability and a further 37 individuals or 25% indicating a physical disability.

The Individual Advocacy Service supported people with disability, their families and carers, with 806 issues over the course of the year. On average, individuals presented with 3.03 issues which required 9.2 hours of support per issue.

NDIS difficulties were the most prevalent area of support. 285 or 35% of goals related to the three areas of NDIS access, plan implementation and internal reviews, compared to 30% in 2019-2020.

Support around government payments also increased from 9% in 2019-2020 to 12% in 2020-2021. Other areas of support included legal issues or access to justice (9%), housing (9%) and finances (6%).

Of the 445 goals closed during the year where outcomes could be measured, 87.42% achieved a positive outcome. Goal closure without a measurable outcome occurred in instances where a change in goal was requested, the individual transferred to another service, the goal was no longer relevant, or Explorability was unable to contact the person.

Explorability has also introduced a new Advocacy model to enable a greater flow through of individuals from the waitlist to an Advocate. Feedback from individuals and staff is currently being compiled which will further inform our continuous quality improvement.

A Spotlight on Individual Advocacy

Kelly is a strong and highly motivated young woman who has overcome many challenges following a diagnosis of Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 2 when she was born. Kelly has always maintained that she does not want her disability to define her and strongly advocates for her right to live the life she chooses.

When Kelly became pregnant, constantly self-advocating for her right to be a mother, whilst navigating the complexity of our healthcare system, became very overwhelming. Following a family referral, Kelly began accessing Explorability's Individual Advocacy Service, and also welcomed her son Max into the world.

Kelly's initial advocacy goals were to remain living at home, to fulfil her role as a mother, and to care for Max at home with appropriate support. Following extensive negotiation with NDIS, Kelly and her advocate obtained a suitable plan with approval for the necessary services. With 24-hour support in place, Kelly was able to continue living at home and care for her son in their home environment.

Explorability also assisted Kelly to obtain parenting support through Wanslea, and to engage a suitable daycare for Max. One of the difficulties associated with 24-hour in-home support is very limited privacy or time to oneself. For a few hours a week, Max attends daycare and Kelly is able to regroup and re-energise for the ongoing task of managing her support workers, which includes rostering and training. Kelly reports that having time to herself has been instrumental in maintaining her mental health and wellbeing and she often uses the time to engage in her favourite pastime of gaming.

In addition to facilitating access to appropriate supports and services, Explorability also supported Kelly to develop a welcome pack for support workers that encourages a greater understanding of who she is, the challenges she faces, and her expectations of the support worker role. As a result, Kelly has been able to build a team of support workers who understand her individual needs.

Through a combination of self-advocacy and support from Explorability's Individual Advocate, Kelly has successfully achieved her goals.



Outreach Advocacy Services

The Metropolitan Outreach Program provides advocacy and information services for people with disability who experience additional barriers in accessing services and supports. Often people are experiencing homelessness or are generally isolated and at risk. People who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+, and youth are key areas of focus for Outreach services.

Metropolitan Outreach

The Metropolitan Outreach Program, which was initially funded for 1 year to the 31st January 2021, received an extension to continue service provision until 31st January 2022.

The Outreach Team has focused on strengthening their presence in the community and extending their reach to engage with the most vulnerable people with disability. This has been achieved through the establishment of strong partnerships with community organisations, including St. Patrick's in Fremantle, Ruah in Northbridge, and the South Lake Ottey Family and Neighbourhood Centre in South Lake. The team have continued to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, with the aim of increasing community knowledge and capacity in supporting vulnerable people with disability to address common issues.

The lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in Perth has seen a significant increase in the number of people engaging with the Metropolitan Outreach Program. Since 1st July 2020, the number of people supported by the Program has risen steadily to reach a total of 118 supported across the year. Of these individuals, 17 or 14% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 5 or 4% were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds. 46 individuals or 39% identified psychosocial disability as their primary disability type. Other disability types included neurological conditions, Autism Spectrum Disorders, cognitive, and physical disabilities. Individuals accessing the Outreach program were supported with a total of 197 issues, with a positive outcome achieved in 83% of the issues addressed.

NDIS access was the most prevalent issue experienced by many individuals supported by the Outreach Service, who commonly experience additional barriers to completing access requests. These barriers include a lack of connection to mainstream health services, difficulty obtaining diagnoses and supporting evidence of disability (in particular, psychosocial disability), and a lack of formal and informal supports.

Government payments was the second most prevalent issue, with housing issues also identified as a significant issue for people accessing the Metropolitan Outreach Program.

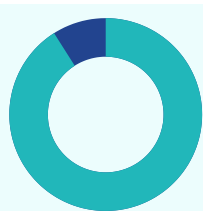
Wheatbelt Outreach

The Wheatbelt Outreach Program also provides an advocacy and information service for vulnerable people with disability, their families and carers throughout the Wheatbelt region. A locally based Outreach Advocate commenced employment in July 2020, with an office space at Avon Community Services in Northam.

Similar to the Metropolitan Outreach Program, the Wheatbelt Outreach Program was initially funded for 1 year to 31st January 2021, and received a 12 month extension to continue service provision until 31st January 2022.

The Wheatbelt Outreach Advocate has developed and maintained strong relationships with local services, including the Department of Education, the Department of Child Protection and Family Services, Holyoake, and the regional health services. These partnerships have encouraged a high number of referrals to the Program. The Outreach Advocate has also engaged in capacity building activities via several local networks, including regular information sessions at a Disability Employment Service provider in Narrogin.

With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, and the employment of a locally based advocate, 75 individuals were able to be supported through the Wheatbelt Outreach Program in 2020-2021. 17 people or 23% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 8 individuals or 10% were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds. Physical disability was the most common, with 27 people or 36% identifying this as their primary disability, while psychosocial, intellectual and cognitive disabilities were also prevalent at 20%, 14%, and 12% respectively. A total of 83 issues were addressed, with a positive outcome achieved for 91% of the issues.



91% of Wheatbelt Outreach Advocacy goals closed were achieved with a positive outcome

In the Wheatbelt Outreach Program, NDIS issues were prevalent, with 19 individuals or 25% requesting support with NDIS Access. A shortage of NDIS service providers in the Wheatbelt region, combined with regional service delivery issues such as transport, also saw 20 people request support to implement their NDIS plan. Government payments were also a common issue, followed by education.

A Spotlight on Outreach Advocacy

“John”, an individual with complex psychosocial issues, accessed advocacy support from the Metropolitan Outreach Service. John experienced hallucinations, delusions, and severe paranoia and reported that he was extremely isolated and lonely, as his psychosis caused behaviour that people often associated with illicit drug usage. John also experienced difficulty engaging with General Practitioners (GPs) and had attempted to establish a relationship with multiple GPs. He indicated that he did not feel understood or adequately listened to, and was either dismissed with a prescription for medication that caused significant side effects, or was refused services due to the misinterpretation of his behaviour as resulting from the use of illicit drugs.

John’s negative experiences with doctors had developed into an immense hesitation to re-engage with the health system, despite his desire for a diagnosis and appropriate support. The Outreach Advocate worked with John to build his skills and capacity to self-advocate. John expressed that the Outreach Advocate was the first person he felt he could talk to, openly, about what he had been experiencing and not feel judged.

The Outreach Advocate successfully supported John to reengage with a GP and to advocate for appropriate supports. John’s GP referred him to a Mental Health Service where he is now receiving holistic support from a multidisciplinary specialist team. This is the first time John has received professional treatment in years, and the specialist mental health team have agreed to work collaboratively with John and the Outreach Advocate to achieve long-term outcomes.

Accessible public toilets in a Wheatbelt town were initially closed due to a COVID-19 lockdown, and were not reopened when restrictions eased. This prevented access for all people with disability. A locally based individual therefore approached the Outreach Advocate for advocacy support.

The Wheatbelt Outreach Advocate supported the individual to explore their options and contact the local shire. When initially the person did not get an outcome, the advocate supported the individual to seek out other community members with disability, to form a small advocacy group for this issue. Each member of this group contacted the local shire to advocate for the toilets to be reopened. The Outreach Advocate also supported the individual to contact their local MP to enlist their support.

The local shire agreed to reopen the toilets from 08.30am to 4.30pm daily. The individual and her group continued to advocate for access to be increased to 24 hours a day. The local shire agreed to place a security camera to monitor the toilet space and, after 4 weeks of monitoring, opened the toilets 24 hours a day.

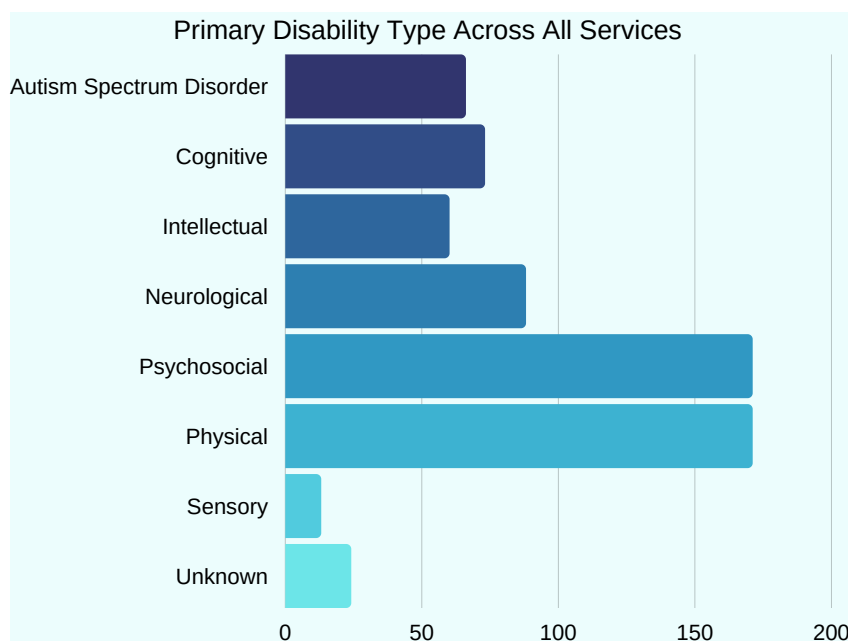
With the support of the Outreach Advocate, the individual was able to connect with other community members to advocate together. As a result, the individual, and the other community members, were more informed of their rights, which enabled self-advocacy. In addition, knowledge of the rights of people with disability within the local shire was also enhanced.

Demographic Information of Service Users

In 2020-2021, Explorability supported 815 people across all service areas. 666 people were formal services users, while 149 people who chose not to provide their demographic information, received 'information level support'.

Explorability supported people ranging from the age of 9 months to 71 years old. 52% of individuals identified as female, 47% as male, and 1% identified as another gender. Of the individuals supported by Explorability, 61 individuals were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background and 46 individuals were from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background.

Physical and psychosocial disabilities were most identified by people as their primary disability type. 171 individuals or 26% of people confirmed a physical disability, and the same number of people confirmed a psychosocial disability. Neurological disability followed, with 88 individuals identifying this as their primary disability type.



A secondary disability was also reported by 275 people, with psychosocial and physical disabilities being the most common. 113 individuals or 41% confirmed a psychosocial disability while 82 people or 30% confirmed a physical disability.

In addition, 105 individuals or 16% of people supported by Explorability were known to be in receipt of NDIS funding at the time of their referral.

Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Project

The Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Project, in partnership with Ignite Community Network, was completed in 2020-2021.

This project aimed to identify and develop strategies to overcome barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. The goal of the project was to increase participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in community programs by increasing awareness and access to these programs.

Throughout the life of the project, seven yarning groups were facilitated at local community centres with 70 participants attending the sessions. 125 people participated in the project, including Aboriginal people with disability, family members, Elders, community members, community sector organisations and local government agencies.

The project achieved a positive outcome via the establishment of an ongoing yarning group, the Yarning Circle, at the South Lake Ottey Family and Neighbourhood Centre.

Whilst the Yarning Circle was initially established to consult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, it became a reoccurring group where community members could connect with local disability service providers. The continuation of the Yarning Circle, beyond the life of the project, will facilitate ongoing community education and awareness of local services and programs, and provides a space for community members to share their stories and experiences.

Explorability has published a project summary outlining the key themes, co-designed strategies and recommendations. This can be found on our website.

Disability Royal Commission

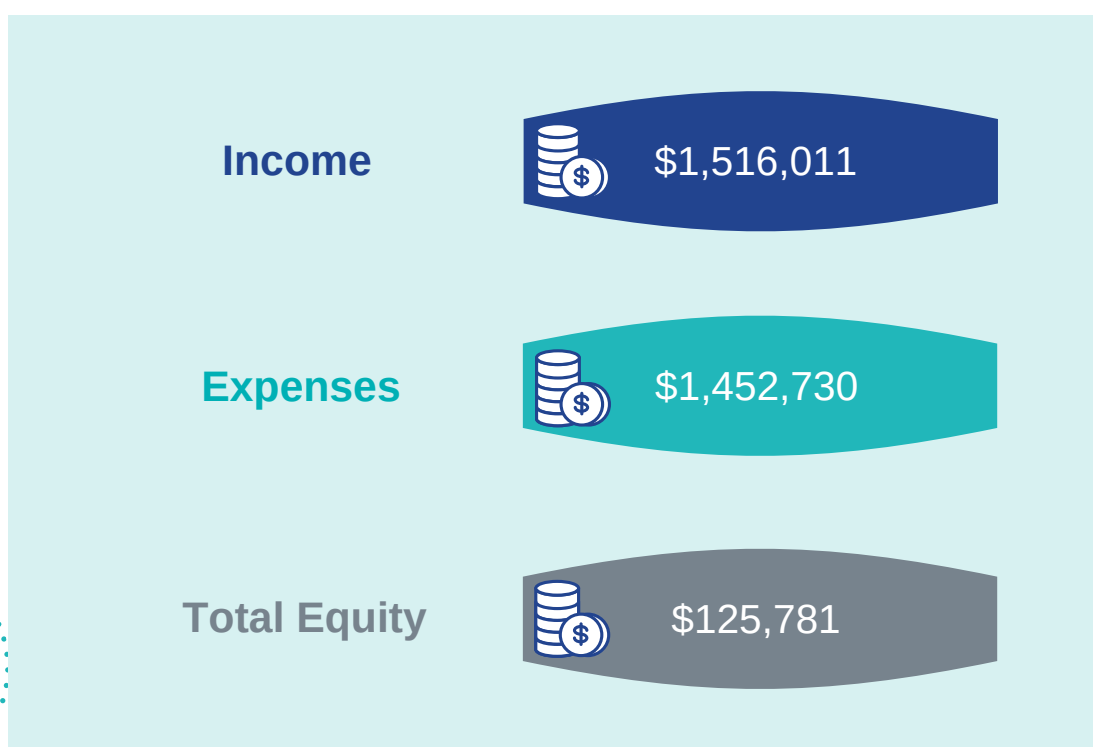
As per 2019-2020, Explorability received Disability Royal Commission Small Grants funding. This was distributed by the Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA), on behalf of the Department of Social Services, to share information and increase engagement of people with disability with the Disability Royal Commission (DRC).

In the first half of 2020-2021, Explorability provided training to staff on the Disability Royal Commission, and disseminated information at various forums and expos, such as the Abilities Expo in Perth.

In the remaining half of 2020-2021, Explorability disseminated Disability Royal Commission information at two forums, in our newsletter and via Explorability's social media page.

People who enquired regarding support services available to assist with a Disability Royal Commission submission, were also provided with the relevant information.

Financial Summary



Acknowledgements



Explorability wishes to acknowledge the Department of Communities for funding our advocacy programs and projects, as well as the Department of Social Services and Disability Advocacy Network Australia for the small grant funding.

Explorability also acknowledges the support of Kim Proctor (Service Contracting and Development Officers), Claire Dolling (Senior Sector Development Officer) and Glen Porter (Senior Sector Development Officer) from the Department of Communities.

Contact Details

Explorability Inc.

Address: Unit 1/9 Parkes Street, Cockburn Central, WA 6164

Telephone: (08) 6361 6001

Facsimile: (08) 6361 6002

Email: admin@explorability.org.au

Website: www.explorability.org.au