

# Increased community participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability

## Project Summary



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Communities**  
**Disability Services**

## Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we work, live and breathe on; the Wadjuk Noongar people. We wish to acknowledge and pay respect to their continuing cultures, connections with country, kin and community and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region, recognising the strength, resilience and capacity of the Wadjuk Noongar people of this land.



**Creatures Dancing in the Bush**  
by Mandy White

Amanda (Mandy) White is an Aboriginal artist of Yamatji heritage born in Guildford, Western Australia. Mandy's work explores her fascination with the supernatural beings that exist in the Noongar and Yamatji landscape. For some people, talking about these 'little people' and 'creatures' is taboo, but for Mandy, it is her way of staying connected to her family and culture. Because of her disability, she interprets the morals of these stories differently than intended and finds them playful rather than frightening. Drawing on these stories told to her by her mother and other family members, Mandy brings these bush creatures to life. Mandy's interpretation of these beings is that they are cheeky, naughty, sometimes scary and at other time mischievous and funny. They live in the bush, but sometimes venture into suburbia, usually to cause mayhem, or maybe teach someone a lesson.

## **Project details**

The project aimed to identify and develop strategies to overcome barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability. The project goal was to increase participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in community programs within the south metropolitan region of Perth, Western Australia by increasing the awareness and access to community programs.

The project facilitated yarning groups and workshops, as well as consulted with local Aboriginal elders and community members, using neutral community connectors, to co-design ways to address inclusivity in community programs and services. Engaging with already existing yarning groups, consulting with local government bodies, collaborating with other disability organisation staff and Aboriginal service providers were key engagement tools used to bring about the findings of the project.

## **Outcomes**

The project saw the facilitation of seven yarning groups at local community centres during the span of the community engagement timeline, with 70 individuals participating in these sessions. The number of participants in individual yarning sessions ranged from 4 to 22 people.

More than 125 people participated in the project, including Aboriginal people with disability, family members, Elders and community members, community sector organisations and local governments.

Data from the participant interviews and yarning group conversations were analysed into key themes, and the key barriers stated by community members and service staff were:

- Lack of trust in government services.
- Physical access to venues/events - lack of wheelchair access/ramps/ACROD parking or not stated in event details.
- Shame and stigma around disability in Aboriginal communities – contributes to them not asking for or seeking help.
- Accessing help, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a lengthy process, time consuming and requires a relatively high literacy level.
- Transport to appointments/meetings.
- Lack of knowledge of services available to them, including a lack of knowledge of the NDIS.

The strategies co-designed with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were:

- Word-of-mouth and going out into community with face-to-face interaction is the best and preferred way to engage with Aboriginal communities.
- Employment of Aboriginal workers/working with local Aboriginal elders/community connectors to build trust within the community.
- Wheelchair accessible services with big door frames, ramps, hoists, sliding/automatic doors.
- Meetings/appointments can be held in outdoor settings or at the individual's home if preferred to gain trust/maintain comfort levels of individuals.

- Provide transport options if possible: taxi vouchers, fuel discounts, community transport buses.
- Community education programs on NDIS and disability in Aboriginal communities needed.
- Resources in varied formats need to be available to cater to people with literacy issues e.g., easy read, big font, Noongar language resources, audio and AUSLAN versions which includes accessibility information for venues.
- Consult and work with Aboriginal elders and services – collaborate and work with them as they are already trusted and respected in the community.
- Ensure staff are trained on cultural awareness to provide services in a culturally inclusive manner.

The project findings reflected previous research of trust being a major barrier to accessing services and programs within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and programs and services needed to ensure the above strategies are in place in order to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability.

Future projects in this space should consider:

- Longer term projects – takes time to create trusting relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups.
- Working with neutral community connectors throughout the lifespan of the project.
- Developing community education programs on government schemes (such as NDIS or the Disability Support Pension) that address their beliefs and how to access and should be targeted to local Aboriginal communities.
- Running frequent yarning events and workshops to engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and connect them with local services.

Albeit the many limitations in community engagement during the timeline of the project, the project saw positive outcomes with the establishment of a yarning group at a local community centre that was initially established to consult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability but became a group where community members could connect with local disability service providers. The establishment of this recurring yarning event will be an ongoing outcome beyond the life of the project as it saw positive community education and awareness of local services and programs as well as providing a space for community members to share their stories and experiences.

In addition, the development of the Yarning Circle, in partnership with the South Lake Ottery Family and Community Centre and Explorability, which will continue to be held beyond the life of the project was an outcome not originally considered but is playing an important role in continuing to the aims of the project into the future.

## Event flyers/social media promotion



Posters were used to spread the word on workshops and/or yarning events via email to community connectors and community centres. The flyers were developed keeping readability and literacy in mind. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colours were used to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance at the events. The flyers/social media posts also included accessibility details of the venue, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, images and used easy English.

## Easy read resources

**Explorability Inc**  
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Do you need help with...

- Housing and accommodation?
- Financial?
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- Justice?
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)?
- Education and employment?
- Referral to other services?
- Community participation and inclusion?

Advocates will help you to say how you feel, help fix any issues you might have, access any services, help you participate in the community and build confidence to help you advocate for yourself.

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Based on feedback with community elders, Explorability developed an easy English flyer to promote the service at events and community centres, utilising the colours of the Aboriginal flag as part of its design.