



**Explorability Inc**

Individualised advocacy for people with disability

Annual Report

2018 – 2019

## Table of Contents

Explorability's Values and Objectives .....	3
Chairperson's Report .....	4
Chief Executive Officer's Report .....	5
Explorability Board .....	7
Explorability Staff .....	7
Individual Advocacy .....	8
Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Project .....	15
Acknowledgments .....	16
Contact Information .....	16

## Explorability's Values and Objectives

**Person Centred** – people living with disability, families and carers are central to everything that we do;

**Excellence** – we will lead the way in the development and improvement of best practice;

**Respect** – our actions are guided by a high regard for the inherent dignity and worth of each person;

**Integrity** – we are open, honest, accountable and ethical in all our interactions; and

**Collaboration** – we develop innovative and effective working relationships.

The objectives of Explorability are:

- (a) to ensure that people with disability:
  - (i) are encouraged to maximise an independent lifestyle so as to contribute to and be included in the mainstream community; and
  - (ii) have choice and control in the pursuit of their goals and the planning and delivery of their supports,  
by having access to:
    - (i) 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
    - (ii) 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;
- (b) to influence the strategic direction of governments and decision makers through an evidence base including formal research, information, policy development and advocacy;
- (c) 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; and
- (d) to build partnerships in the community, business and government sectors.

## Chairperson's Report

In my second year as Chair of the Board, I am pleased to share that Explorability have continued to establish their footprint in the disability sector and have become a significant and well regarded advocacy organisation.

Once again, the achievements of Explorability are many with the CEO and staff working well together to exceed all of their individual advocacy service delivery contractual requirements and during this term, they provided over 2,300 more hours of advocacy than in the prior financial year. This was accomplished alongside a review and development of a more effective organisational structure which was assisted by Explorability receiving additional non-recurrent funding from the Department of Communities. This funding enabled the employment of additional advocacy staff to address an increasing waitlist for individual advocacy support services.

Explorability had a number of key achievements which include:

- The development of a new Board Intranet Site.
- Extension of the current individual advocacy contract.
- Development of a new administrative role.
- Enhancement in feedback policies and procedures.

The Board of Explorability went through its final phase of establishment and as part of this welcomed Marina De Kwant, Annette Watkins and Selena Knowles during the 18/19 financial year. These new board members have provided additional expertise to complement and further build the knowledge and skillset of the Explorability Board. The Board commenced the process of strategic planning during the later part of the year and I look forward to this continuing in order to strengthen and then further grow Explorability into the future.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the staff of Explorability and, in particular, the CEO – Tracy Foulds. They have continued to provide an outstanding service to many in our community, which has had immeasurable impact upon the lives of individuals, families and carers. I would also like to thank the Board for their commitment to the governance of Explorability, through the volunteering of their time and their ongoing support to me over the past year.

Alicia Mason  
Chairperson

## Chief Executive Officer's Report

The 2018 – 2019 period proved to be a challenging time for the team at Explorability as the demand for advocacy increased significantly. The team endeavoured to meet this growing demand and provide advocacy to as many people as possible.

The existence of the waitlist for advocacy has never sat comfortably within the organisation. Explorability acknowledges that there are consequences for people with disability, their families and carers if they are not able to access the support when required. Advocacy is often requested as an option of last resort and having to wait for advocacy can often result in delayed outcomes or negative impacts for people with disability.

Explorability, along with other state funded disability advocacy organisations, received additional non-recurrent funding from the Department of Communities, Disability Services (Disability Services) to build the capacity of the advocacy service to meet the growing demand. I would like to acknowledge Disability Services for making this funding available for 2018 - 2019 and I would also like to extend my thanks to the Service Contract and Development Officer for Explorability, Christy Dines, for her support. With this funding, Explorability was able to recruit additional advocates, however the increased capacity of the advocacy team could not keep pace with the growing numbers of referrals for the service.

It is important to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the advocacy team over this time. In acknowledging the negative impacts for people waiting for advocacy, especially if they are vulnerable or isolated, all team members went above and beyond in always ensuring any person who was prioritised for support and needed advocacy urgently had access to the support they required. Staff often volunteered to support additional individuals even when they were at capacity with their workloads. This is not a sustainable solution and has impacts for staff members as they try to manage large workloads. The advocacy team has worked collaboratively and been highly supportive of one another over this difficult period.

A further impact of the waitlist and growing demand was finding a balance between meeting the needs of individuals with urgent or critical issues and meeting the needs of individuals whose issues required progressing but may not have been as urgent or critical. There have been times when, as an organisation, we have struggled with that balance, however I do not believe this is a reflection on the staff's commitment or work ethics, but the result of large workloads across the whole organisation.

Finding the right balance to meet the advocacy needs of all those who access Explorability's service continues to be a work in progress. The Association needs to be flexible to the changing needs of people with disability and to the changes taking place in the sector and broader community. The focus has been (and continues to

be) ensuring that Explorability can adapt to the changes, be responsive and effective in its approach to providing advocacy now and into the future.

At the time of writing this report, Disability Services had advised that the contract for providing Individual Advocacy will be extended until 31 December 2020, which provides some reassurances about the short-term future of the advocacy service. However, it continues to be unclear what the future holds in terms of funding for individual advocacy services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Explorability will continue to liaise with Disability Services about the integral role of advocacy in supporting people with disability, their families and carers in Western Australia.

I would like to thank the Board of Management for their ongoing support and direction during 2018 – 2019 and I look forward to working with the Board over the next 12 months. I would also like to acknowledge the support from Alicia Mason, Chairperson, and Deane Criddle, who was Acting Chairperson while Alicia was away. The contribution of the staff and Board has been highly valued and greatly appreciated. I would like to thank everyone for their commitment and extraordinary efforts throughout the year.

Tracy Foulds  
Chief Executive Officer

## **Explorability Board**

Alicia Mason – Chairperson  
Nick Dawe – Deputy Chair  
Deane Criddle – Treasurer  
Janet Peacock – Secretary  
Kim Law  
Marina De Kwant  
Annette Watkins  
Selena Knowles

## **Explorability Staff**

Tracy Foulds – Chief Executive Officer  
Vicki Bailey – Senior Advocate  
Shelley Jones – Senior Advocate  
Linda Tarbotton – Individual Advocate  
Summa Tarbotton – Individual Advocate  
Vanessa Smith – Individual Advocate, resigned  
Helen Alexander – Individual Advocate  
Kelsie De Haan – Individual Advocate  
Ekta Surji – Project Officer, resigned  
Scott Devenport – Administration Officer

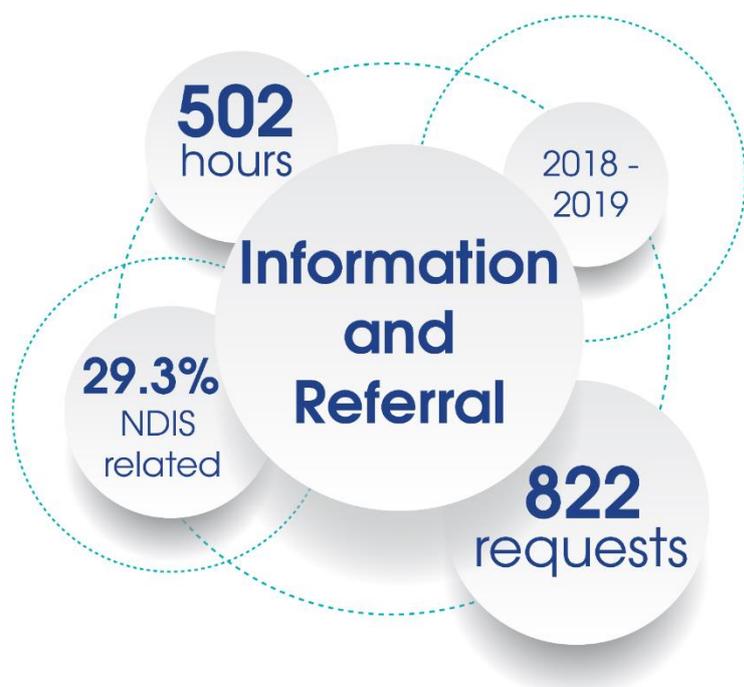
Explorability bid farewell to two staff members who had worked with the Association since its establishment in 2016: Roslind Witham and Raelene York. Explorability would like to recognise their valued contribution and commitment to the vision and mission of the Association and wishes them all the best in their new endeavours.

## Individual Advocacy

### Information and Referral

Explorability's 'Information and Referral' service provides information to people with disability, their families and carers to assist with self-advocacy or family advocacy relating to their particular issue.

In addition, disability sector organisations, community services organisations, mainstream services and the broader community are able to access information relevant to people with disability, families and carers.



In 2018 - 2019, Explorability received 822 requests for information through the Information and Referral service, totalling 502.5 hours. The three main areas of support in the Information and Referral service were for assistance with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), government payments and housing.

### ISABELLA

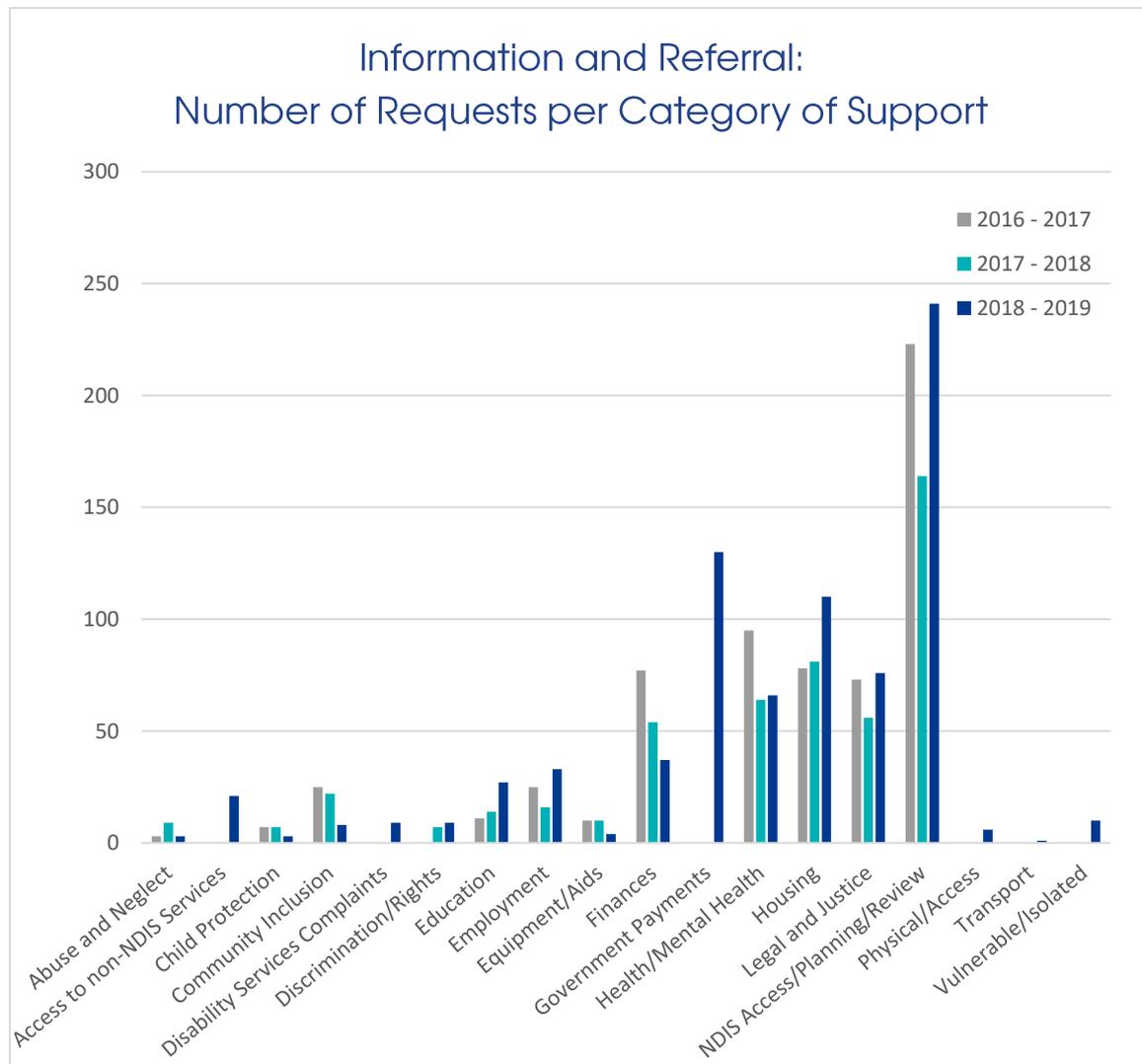
Isabella has a brain injury as a result of having leukemia and the associated medical treatment. Her mother was concerned that Isabella would not be eligible for the NDIS and had been advised of this by other parties.

Prior to seeking advocacy support, her mother applied for Early Intervention as she believed this was the only option for support. The application was not successful as Isabella was nine years old.

When meeting with the advocate, it was agreed that further medical evidence from the neurologist, demonstrating the impact of the brain injury on Isabella's daily life, would be helpful in applying for the NDIS.

A new application was submitted with the additional supporting evidence. The new application was successful and Isabella received a plan which included therapy services, supports for community inclusion and school holiday programs.

The below graph shows a comparison of the number of requests across the categories of support in 2016 – 2017, 2017 – 2018 and 2018 - 2019.



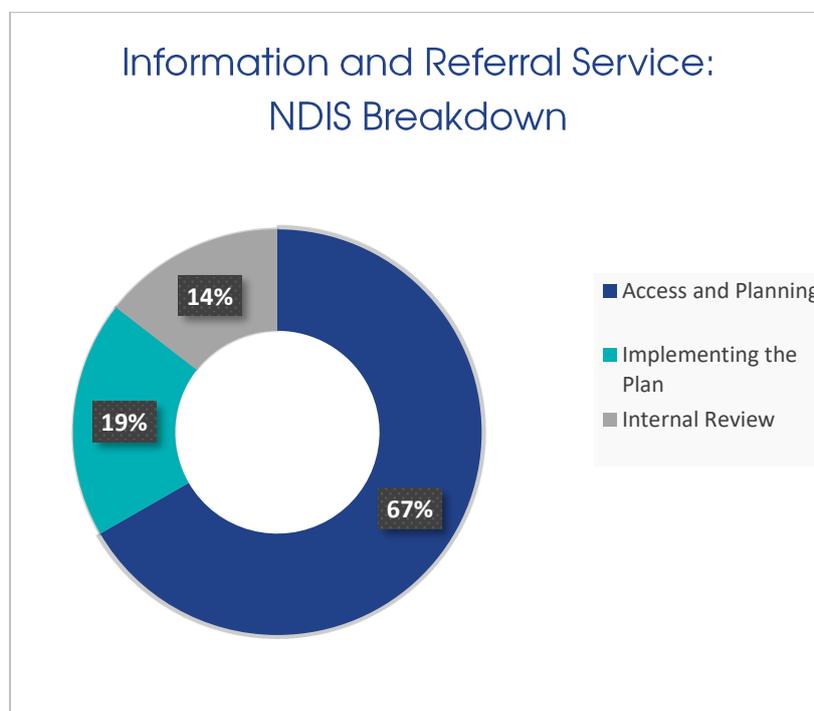
The categories of supports, as agreed as part of the Association’s reporting requirements, have changed over the past three years and it included the introduction of a number of new categories at the beginning of 2018 – 2019. In the graph above, these categories of support do not contain any data for the previous years. The new categories of support included: access to non-NDIS services, disability services complaints, government payments, physical/access, transport and vulnerable/isolated.

Previously, any support provided in relation to government payments, such as the Disability Support Pension and Carer’s Payment, was categorised under the ‘Finances’ category, which also included accessing financial counselling, accessing subsidies and assisting with other financial issues being experienced by individuals.

In 2018 – 2019, support with government payments has been categorised separately to provide a more comprehensive picture of the amount of support provided to people in this area. As shown in the graph above, there was a significant increase in the number of queries in this area over the past financial year.

In the previous graph illustrating the number of requests for the Information and Referral Service, the contact from people with queries relating to the NDIS were grouped under one heading to illustrate the significant levels of service provided by Explorability for people accessing the NDIS and associated supports and services.

In the chart below, the breakdown of support for the NDIS provided in 2018 – 2019 is provided in the following three categories: a) access and planning, b) implementing the plan and accessing services and c) internal review. As shown below, two-thirds of the information requests for NDIS were for accessing the scheme and the planning process, which includes people requesting information about the annual review process.



## JENNY

Jenny frequently presented at the emergency department due to her mental health and chronic health conditions. Due to a history of intermittent drug use, the hospital was reluctant to admit her and she would be sent home again.

The situation deteriorated quickly and Jenny was presenting at the hospital almost weekly and was being turned away. This was placing her at further risk.

On one presentation to the hospital, the advocate attended emergency. The hospital advised that they were not going to admit her and the advocate ensured the involvement of the Head of Social Work in reviewing any possible discharge.

Jenny was admitted to hospital and discharge planning was undertaken to ensure she had a range of services in place which would support her with maintaining her health and well-being.

## Individual Advocacy

### HARRY

Harry and his mother were seeking advocacy for an application for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and the NDIS and approached Explorability at a community forum for assistance.

Harry had a rare genetic disorder that resulted in cognitive and physical impacts for Harry's daily living.

Harry had attended a mainstream school, but his mother informed the advocate that she had always completed his school work and now felt that she had done a disservice to him and was impacting on him now that school had finished.

Explorability supported Harry's mother to arrange assessments to have a better understanding of Harry's needs and the impacts of his disability.

With the completed assessments, Harry's applications were successful. Harry is now supported with volunteer work with animals, which is one of his great loves.



Explorability supported 212 individuals in the Individual Advocacy service in 2018 – 2019, providing 10,294 hours of advocacy for 751 issues. On the 1 July 2018, Explorability had 118 active individuals receiving a service with 94 new individuals accessing advocacy throughout the year.

The number of referrals for individual advocacy continued to grow in line with the trend from the previous year and Explorability maintained an extensive waitlist throughout the period, with an average wait time of approximately three months. The Association had received additional non-recurrent funding from the Disability Services to build the capacity of the service, however the growing demand for advocacy continued to exceed the increased capacity.

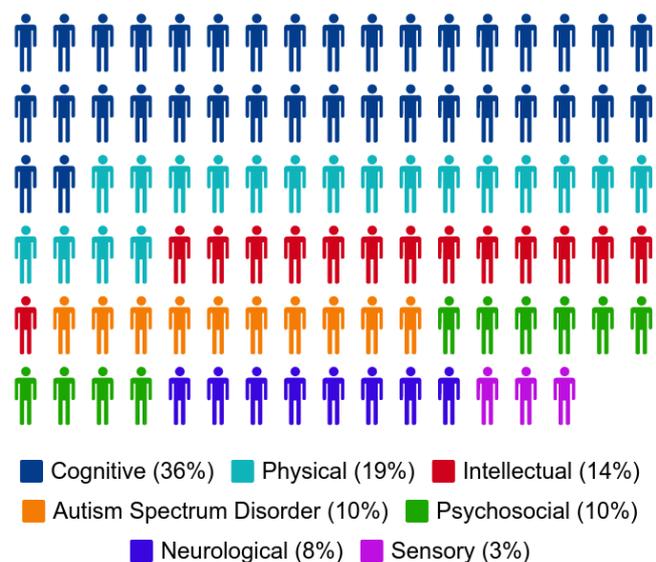
On 1 July 2018, there were 14 individuals on the waitlist with an average waiting time of 35 days. 118 individuals were added to the waitlist over the 12 months and on 30 June 2019, there were 31 individuals on the waitlist, with

an average waiting time of 107 days, with an additional 41 referrals in progress.

In early 2019, it was acknowledged that coordinating the growing numbers of referrals and the waitlist was impacting on the capacity of the advocacy team and a part-time position for this specific role was created. As part of the creation and development of this position, a review was undertaken of the referral, intake and waitlisting procedures which resulted in changes to streamline the process which improved communication and support for people requesting advocacy from the Association.

Explorability supported individuals ranging in age from three to 71 years. 125 individuals (59%) identified as male and 87 individuals (41%) identified as female. More than a third of the individuals supported by Explorability had a cognitive disability as the primary disability. The percentage of people who received advocacy from Explorability based on the primary disability were cognitive (36%), physical (19%), intellectual (14%), psychosocial (10%), Autism Spectrum Disorder (10%), neurological (8%) and sensory (3%).

Percentage Per Disability Types



74 individuals reported having a secondary disability with psychosocial disability (34%) and physical disability (33%) being the most prevalent.

As part of Explorability's focus on continuous service improvement and ensuring that the organisation provides an advocacy service which meets the advocacy needs of people with disability, their families and carers, the service uses an outcomes approach by which people are supported to achieve their advocacy goals.

Of the 751 goals supported through the Individual Advocacy service in 2018 – 2019, 526 goals were finalised and the remaining 225 goals were continuing to be supported beyond the end of the financial year. The advocacy goal of the individual was achieved in 425 (80%) of the 526 finalised goals. Please see the bar graph on the following page for a breakdown of the outcomes for the advocacy goals.

Explorability has made changes to how outcomes are measured for the new financial year in order to measure the impact of the advocacy provided, aligning with the

outcomes measures proposed by the Department of Human Services: positive impact, no impact and negative impact.

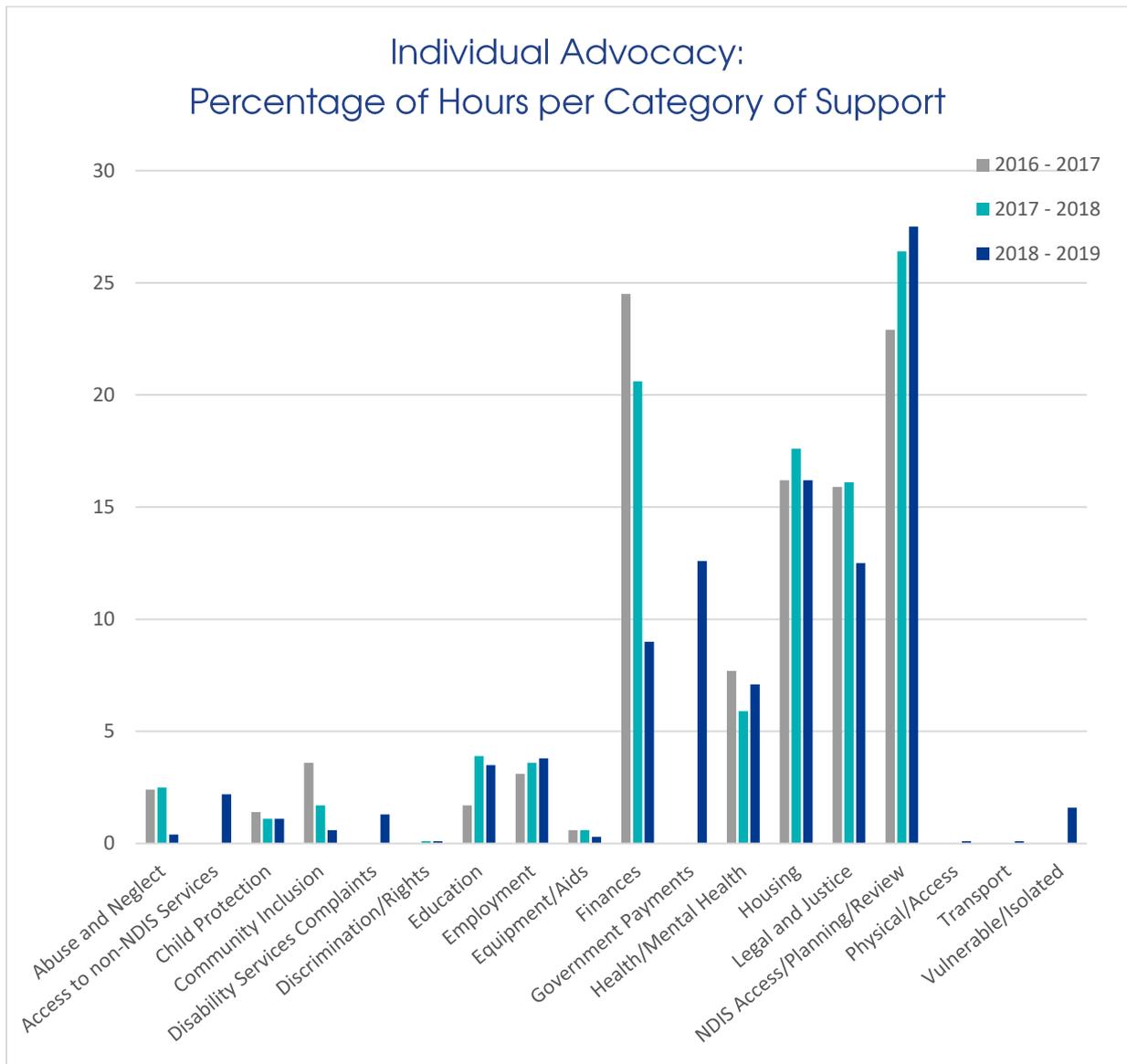


While some people may only request advocacy from Explorability for one issue, on average, people are supported for more than three issues. It is not unusual for issues to be connected and the advocates assist people to navigate a number of goals at the same time.

For example, Explorability was supporting Anna who was unable to complete the practical part of her course due to an injury which required surgery. Centrelink determined that the study was not completed and required her to apply for Newstart even though the injury prevented her from searching for employment. The individual was supported through the Newstart application process and was granted a medical exemption. She had previously been denied the Disability Support Pension (DSP) on the basis of insufficient evidence to demonstrate she had a psychosocial disability. Following the success with the exemption with Newstart, she indicated that she felt better equipped to try to apply for the DSP again. This goal is still in progress with support from the advocate.

One of the frequent issues raised by people with disability who are on Newstart is that the low payment adds financial stress to their situation, as was the case with Anna. She had fallen behind with paying her utility bills, so she requested support from the advocate to negotiate a payment plan with the provider and then apply for the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS).

NDIS was the primary presenting issue for people seeking advocacy through Explorability, with a quarter of all goals directly related to applying for the NDIS, implementing the plan, accessing services and internal reviews. Housing (14%), legal and justice (11%) and government payments (12%) continued to be the other main areas of support, as with previous years.



## Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Project

Explorability, in partnership with Ignite Community Network, was successful in a grant application under the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building funding through Disability Services to increase the awareness and inclusion of people with disability from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in the community.

The project has four main objectives:

- To Identify barriers to participation in community programs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.
- To engage and build trusting relationships with stakeholders to enable co-design to increase participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability in community programs.
- To see an increased awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disability.
- To see an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability access community programs.

Explorability recruited an experienced Project Officer who completed the first stage of the project plan. At the end of June, the Project Officer resigned to take a new position interstate. The project will continue to progress with the recruitment of a new project officer and is expected to be completed by July 2020.

## Acknowledgements

Explorability wishes to acknowledge the Department of Communities, Disability Services for funding the Individual Advocacy Program and the support of the Service Contract and Development Officer, Ms Christy Dines.



**Explorability Inc**  
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