SPRC UNSW
Social Policy
Research Centre

Community for Everyone

Evaluation plan

Prepared for: Side By Side and Hunter Circles

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The Social Policy Research Centre is based in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture at UNSW Sydney. This report is an output of the research project Community for Everyone funded Hunter Circles and Side By Side Advocacy through a grant from the Department of Social Services.

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1 Introduction to Community for Everyone

Hunter Circles and Side By Side Advocacy were funded by the Department of Social Services through an Information, Learning and Capacity (ILC) building grant to deliver the Community for Everyone project. They commissioned a research team from UNSW Sydney and Flinders University to evaluate the project.

This is research plan details for how the evaluation will be conducted. The evaluation plan was developed through a codesign process with Ricky Kremer, Lived Experience Lead at the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability and Health and other project stakeholders, people with lived experience and sector experts.

The plan is a brief overview of the project before describing the evaluation.

Community for Everyone project

Community for Everyone is a 2-year project designed to bridge the gap between 20 profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability and their community. The project uses a range of strategies to enhance the social inclusion, active participation, and sense of belonging of people with disability by connecting them with volunteer social connectors. Social connectors and profoundly isolated people with disability share similar interests and live locally to foster genuine connections in these freely given relationships.

There is a significant gap in evidence about effective strategies for building and maintaining social connections for people with intellectual disability who live without family or informal relationships, aside of paid support. By addressing social isolation and loneliness and promoting inclusive participation, the project aims to demonstrate how to establish social networks for people with disability who are profoundly socially isolated. Understanding the processes and strategies that work for building community connection and social belonging of profoundly isolated people with disability will add to the evidence about increasing social belonging of people with disability and how to reduce the negative impact of social isolation and loneliness.

Project processes

Specifically the Community for Everyone project aims to design, deliver and support a range of processes to achieve its intended objectives.

Community for Everyone is designed to:

- Deliver face to face and online community engagement events (for social connectors and other stakeholders)
- Engage 20 profoundly isolated people with disability (through in-reach and out-reach initiatives)

- Recruit 20 volunteer social connectors
- Deliver a suite of training and capacity building to volunteer social connectors
- Deliver supported decision making training for support networks (informal connections, family, friends of people with disability)
- Codesign of training materials, workshops and other resources with lived experience expertise
- Match social connectors with a focus person to spend time getting to know the participant and other people in their life. Intentionally facilitate opportunities for others to be involved in the person's life through personalised engagement and bridge building with mainstream community activities, meet regularly to deepen relationships, plan and take action together to support inclusive outcomes
- Plan and coordinate socialising events and connections with the broader community for project participants and volunteer social connectors.
- Build communities of practice using an action learning approach to support and connect social connectors with each other, also other stakeholder in the project.
- Work alongside university researchers in an action research learning approach to undertake the evaluation of the project.

Intended project outcomes

Community for Everyone aims to achieve inclusive and social **outcomes for profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability** by enhancing people's:

1. **Social capital** of project participants (e.g., number of informal relationships in a person's life; quality, intensity, and diversity of social networks and people's participation)
2. **Greater awareness of safety and advocacy** (raising connectivity within a person's network; capacity of informal connectors to connect to advocacy, decision making support enhancing a persons' safety)
3. **Community inclusion and sense of belonging** by
   - building relationships with others in the local neighbourhood
   - making meaningful contributions to the community and/or the lives of others
   - people with disability pursuing their interests and passions
   - Building choice and control with support from people who know them well

The focus of the project is on raising social inclusion, belonging and building meaningful social connections for profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability. It will also deliver outcomes for volunteer social connectors. Outcomes for volunteer social connectors and other stakeholders in the project are expected to include:

1. **Raised awareness and understanding** of informal support networks and the importance of relationships and social connections in the lives of people with intellectual disability
2. **Sense of shared learning, personal growth and support** through communities of practice
3. **Increased awareness and understanding of informal networks to support decisions** of people with intellectual disability and confidence to seek out advocacy.

The Community for Everyone project will establish research knowledge, practice guidelines, material and resources on how to build, enhance and maintain social connections for people with intellectual disability who have limited existing social networks.

Through the evaluation research the project will contribute to the evidence-base on strategies to broaden opportunities for inclusion and participation for people with complex support requirements with limited existing social networks.

2 Evaluation aims overview

This action research evaluation will measure the effectiveness, process and outcomes for profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability and social connectors in the Community for Everyone project. The study will run from October 2024 to July 2026.

The evaluation research aims to:

1. measure outcomes for profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability and volunteer social connectors
2. assess the effectiveness of strategies and processes for building and maintaining social connections, training and support to social connectors to achieve the intended project outcomes
3. identify strengths and weaknesses of the project, and how these can be addressed
4. identify lessons from the project for policy and practice for extending social inclusion and belonging for profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability.

The UNSW and Flinders research team will closely collaborate with project to undertake the evaluation data collection methods (Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of evaluation data collection methods across life of evaluation

Method	Data	Who collects data	What we measure
1. Program data review	Community for Everyone background and project documents, plans, trainings, minutes, CoP meeting agendas, and other data (videos, outputs)	Researchers	To assess the processes in the project, e.g., engagement of participants, inclusiveness, approach to codesign, changes to process over time
2. Observations	Researchers will attend project meetings (e.g., Community of Practice (CoP), social connector training), and other events to observe the delivery of activities, inclusiveness of the approach, engagement of stakeholders	Researchers **(3 events)**	Observe effectiveness and inclusivity of process and activity
3. Repeat Stories of Most Significant Change (MSC)	Inclusive method to record and collect stories of most significant change. People with disability and social connectors with significant change contribute to stories about their experience in the project through a variety of formats. Repeat stories of MSC in year two of the evaluation. **Stories of change are a core method in the project and evaluation.**	Researchers **(16 Stories**) Project partners (**additional** stories remaining participants)	Measure change over time. Impact of projects on participants social connectedness and belonging. Participants recount in their own means and with support of their social network the little and big changes that occurred in their life (using **written**, **spoken**, **video**, **drawings**, walking along methods).
4. Interviews	Small group (or individual) interviews: collect data about impact and effectiveness of CfE project and its processes. Project stakeholders: managers, peer leaders, social connectors, family, friends, others in life of person with disability, group home staff	Researchers (**3 small group interviews events**) with support from project	Project stakeholders – managers, peer leaders, social connectors, family and friends of people with disability share their experience of the project implementation, learnings, effectiveness and observed outcomes for self and others
5. Social Network Mapping	Method to understand the type of social interactions between individuals and groups of people. Social network mapping is **the second core method in the project**. It will identify where relationships are and where there are gaps, including which social connections a person would like to reignite (family, siblings).	Project partners with support from researchers	Social network mapping, a process to identify social patterns, will measure social outcomes for people with disability e.g. extent of social connections and building of social capital

The next section outlines the evaluation approach, rationale and methodology in more detail, including analysis and the evaluation timeline.

3 Evaluation approach and methodology

The action research evaluation will take a **developmental approach** that incorporates the evaluation within the project. This means that we will draw from research knowledge and iterative knowledge as the evaluation progresses to contribute to project improvements during the evaluation. This will allow for refinements in both the delivery and operation of the project and the evaluation methodology as new knowledge about effective practices or gaps in understanding emerge.

The approach also applies **codesign as a key principle** for designing and delivering evaluation findings that are relevant, meaningful and useful for stakeholders. This requires collaboration and consultation between the university research team, funders and project leadership team, people with lived experience connected to Community for Everyone, and other project stakeholders.

The action research evaluation will adopt a qualitative longitudinal research design using multiple methods. It will measure impact and outcomes for participant with disability, also for social connectors in the project, over time through repeat stories of change and interviews. Allowing us to measure individual participants growth and changes in capacity and social connectivity.

Combining different types of qualitative methods will enable the evaluation to measure impact, outcomes, and effectiveness of project processes. The evaluation design will enable us to identify project strengths, its weaknesses and how to overcome these, with the aim of adding to the evidence base and inform policy and practice on broadening social inclusion and connectedness for profoundly isolated people with disability.

The evaluation is built around the following five methods: program documents and data review, observations, repeat stories of Most Significant Change (MSC), individual and small group interviews, social network mapping.

3.1 Program document and data

The evaluation will review key Community for Everyone project documents and data, written documents (project plans, training documents, easy read guides, codesign protocols, meeting minutes, reports to funding body, team reflections) and project data or outputs (videos, stories written for project website). The document and data review will inform the evaluation in its design phase, to develop the project logic.

Throughout the evaluation, the project data review will add to the effectiveness evidence of project processes in achieving intended outcomes. The review will examine, for example, the level of stakeholder engagement in activities, inclusiveness of approaches (peer leaders, social connector trainings, support for decision making with family and friends), codesign process, and review of outputs delivered by the project. SPRC have set up a secured shared folder and the project funders are responsible for the transfer of data and key relevant documents.

3.2 Observations

The research team will observe select processes in the Community for Everyone project as agreed with the project funders and partners. University researchers will only attend a small number of pre-selected meetings and project activities, seeking permission and consent of the respective group members in advance. The emphasis of the observation is not on any individuals and their contributions, but the project process of delivering activities (meetings, trainings, events, information sessions).

Observations could include trainings to social connectors, peer leaders, select Community of Practice (CoP) meetings to build stakeholders awareness and capabilities (decision support). Observation data will provide supplementary effectiveness data and information about processes used in the project, including the leadership and inclusivity of people with lived experience, codesign, engagement of stakeholders.

Researchers will take written observation notes which will be analysed together with other qualitative data. Across the evaluation we will **observe 3 events across** both locations.

3.3 Repeat stories of significant change

The story of significant change method is an inclusive format, enabling participants to share their experiences and the impact from the project in their own way. Participants can use art and drawings, written and spoken words, short video’s, sharing information by walking along with the person, and involving other people in the person’s life to tell their story. Once the different kinds of information are collected, they are written up into to a summary (story of change) for the evaluation (around half to one page long).

The story of change focus on the outcomes and impact people with disability experience from the Community for Everyone project. While the story of change aims to collect information about people’s outcomes and impact on social life and connectedness, they also record challenges that occurred along the way, and how these were overcome.

Participants with disability in the story of change will be selected by the funders, project partners and researchers. The selection criteria is to include people who experienced the ‘most change’. What change means differs from person to person, taking account of someone’s situational context and circumstances when they joined the project.

The university research team will collect **8 stories of change** with people with disability in **each data collection round** (up to 16 stories of change across the evaluation). The project team, Hunter Circles, Side By Side Advocacy are encouraged and will be supported to collect additional stories of change for the evaluation and project profile.

We aim to collect **repeat stories of change** with the same people with disability in 2025 data collection in 2026, to measure the changes that occur over time in people's lives. Participation in any story of change data is voluntary and participants will receive a financial acknowledgment for their time and contribution to the research.

The story of change data collection will **require sensitivity by the project team** and researchers collecting this information. Being gentle, mindful and attentive to where the person is at, not to cause any harm or upset for the person at the centre of the story.

3.4 Interviews

Small group and individual interviews will provide supplementary outcome and impact data, as well as data information about the effectiveness of project processes and strategies for building social connectedness. The stakeholders in interviews will include lived experience leaders (peer trainers), project managers, staff at group homes, family, friends and other people in a person's life.

The university research team will collect **3 small group interviews** or individual interview data across the duration of the evaluation. Interviews will be conducted to meet the needs of the group of participants involved, they will be either in person or online. Where possible small group interviews will be organised around other project events (before or after a training) to minimise research burden and the impact on participants.

We suggest staggering the group interviews near the beginning, midpoint and end of the evaluation period. This approach has the advantage of capturing group data from the codesign process, training and capacity building with social connectors, and other stakeholders. The approach will also benefit the developmental purpose of the evaluation.

3.5 Social network mapping

Social network mapping is a structured process of identifying social patterns in a person's life or within a group of people. This method will measure social outcomes for people with disability (for example the extent, frequency, reliability) of their social connections and networks.

Social network mapping allows us to understand,

- the number, strength, and interconnectedness of a person's social ties (relationships)
- patterns and changes in interactions (over time)

- the value (or benefits) a person gets from their social interactions
- information about the sustainability of the social interactions and network.

Social network theory assumes that where a social network is balanced, interactions are mutually beneficial and mostly positive, and actors (people in a network) are interconnected through positive ties, the social network is more sustainable. The nature of relationships between people are more likely to last.

The university research team will provide guidance and tool to Side By Side Advocacy and to Hunter Circles to support the project team to collected social network mapping for the participants with disability in the project.

The social networking maps are central to the evaluation. The maps will capture,

- relationships a person already has
- relationship gaps, where a person wants more connections (including with family)
- changes to relationships over the course of the project (frequency and quality of contact).

3.6 Analysis

We will combine the data from the review of project documents and data, transcriptions from interviews, written stories of change, observations notes, and social network mapping to answer the evaluation questions and aims: what outcomes and impact the project has on people with disability and social connectors, and what processes in the project are effective, and any lessons for policy, practice and program improvement.

First the data will be coded thematically against the evaluation questions, designed with lived experience leadership, the emerging findings from the analysis will be discussed in an inclusive iterative team approach, before drawing out central findings for the evaluation of the Community for Everyone project.

Research partners and other project stakeholders will be invited to contribute and review draft reports to allow for an iterative and collaborative writing process of interim and final reports, and other outputs from the project, easy read and short summaries for wider dissemination.

Table 2: Methods and data sources, by evaluation question

Evaluation aim	Data source
Outcomes and impact, effectiveness of process	
• Measure 1) social outcomes for profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability, and 2) outcomes for social connectors connected to Community for Everyone	• Interviews • Stories of change • Social network mapping
• Determine the overall effectiveness of the project in achieving its intended outcomes	• Interviews • Observations
• Assess the effectiveness of strategies and processes to build social connections, as well as support to volunteer social connectors to achieve the intended project outcomes	• Interviews • Observations
• Identify strengths and weaknesses of the project, including areas for improvement and how these can be addressed	• Interviews • Program data
• Identify lessons from the project for policy and practice on broadening social inclusion	• Interviews
Indicators of project success	
• Number of people with disability and social connectors who participate in the project.	• Program data
• Number of participants who report social connections	• Interviews • Stories of change • Social network mapping
• Participating social connectors show an increase in confidence in advancing the social connections with people with disability.	• Interviews • Observations

3.7 Ethics

The evaluation study, including data collection tools, interview questions, consent forms and recruitment material will be submitted to the UNSW Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

The final research methods and tools (interview guides, questions), after codesign with project stakeholders under lived experience leadership, will be submitted for notification once they are finalised to ensure they are relevant and embed lived experience expertise.

Once UNSW HREC approval has been received, the team will send approvals to Flinders University for notification.

4 Evaluation tasks, timeline and deliverables

The evaluation has three stages.

1: Design and planning

September-December 2024

Research plan and co-design methods, refining research approach and questions, methods. Seek ethics approval UNSW (Dec-Jan 2024) once codesign is completed.

2: Collect first round of data: stories, interviews, observations, progress report

February-August 2025

Review history program data and documentation, develop and plan fieldwork logistics.

Regular progress meetings to inform change.

Visits in each organisation and location; commence with inclusive interviews and stories of change collection; small group interviews with other project stakeholders, peer trainers, project leaders, social connectors, family and friends, partnering organisations.

Commence social network mapping for all 20 people with disability. SPRC/Flinders support project team with task.

University researchers observe select project activities.

Transfer remaining project data any additional stories of change collected with support from the project staff (Side By Side Advocacy and Hunter Circles) by end of June.

Analysis of all data collected/available to date for **progress report**: June to July.

Deliver short report September 2025.

Reflection meeting – implications for Community for Everyone project from progress findings.

3: Repeat data collection, measure change over time, final reporting

October 2025 – June 2026

Regular monthly or more frequent project team meetings with funders and key stakeholders.

<u>Repeat data collection (round 2)</u> – October 2025 to April 2026

UNSW/ Flinders visits in each organisation; collection of stories of change in an inclusive method/ interview with participants with disability; individual and small group interviews with project staff, partners, social connectors, other stakeholders.

Continuation of social network mapping for all 20 people with disability (project staff).

Select observations of project activities.

Transfer of evaluation data (stories of change, social network mapping, program data) to SPRC for analysis. (April 2026)

<u>Data analysis and reporting final report</u>: April-May 2025

Synthesis of all data sources findings, analysis meetings with lived experience leadership to refine findings, writing and reporting.

Draft final and final evaluation reporting June 2026.

Draft final and final report due June 2026.

Draft report will be sent for comment for feedback to project leaders and leaders with lived experience, once received, the research team will prepare a final evaluation report including comments and feedback.

<u>Knowledge transfer</u> (June 2026) – inclusive video sharing learnings with project stakeholders and community; workshops and presentation; easy read summary of findings.

Table 3: Evaluation deliverables and timeline

Action	Deliverables	SPRC/Flinders	Project team (SBS,HC)	Timeline
Stage 1. Design and planning	Start up meeting, research design and planning, draft research plan	Draft research plan for discussion	Comment	Oct 2024
	Inclusive codesign to tailor, amend plan	organise codesign meeting and documentation	Support, attend	November
	Finalise research plan	Finalise		November
	UNSW ethics	Prepare ethics		Dec 2024
	February to September 2025			
Stage 2. Data collection Round 1	Ethics approval	make amendments		Jan 2025
	Organise fieldwork documentation and logistics, once ethics granted	Prepare	comment	Feb-March 2025
	Commence site visits, stories of change collection with person with disability, social connector		support recruitment	Feb-May 2025
	Collect other evaluation data– observation of events, small group interview	Collect	Support recruitment, organise meeting	March-May 2025
	Support project partners (Side By Side, Hunter Circles) collect additional stories of change, social network mapping	Provide guidance and templates	Collect additional information on impact/outcomes	Feb-May 2025
	Transfer evaluation data and program data for review		transfer	May/June
	Analysis with lived experience leadership	seek guidance	help plan/organise	May/June
	Analysis of all available evaluation data, including program data review	undertake first level analysis		June
	Reporting	write report		July
	Eval progress report (first round data)	Prepare report	comment and feedback	Aug
	Final progress report (10-13 page).	finalise comments, prepare easy read	accept	Sept 2025
	October 2025 to June 2026			

Action	Deliverables	SPRC/Flinders	Project team (SBS,HC)	Timeline
Stage 3. Repeat data collection, measure change over time.	Repeat longitudinal data collection – site visits, stories of change with focus person and social connector, observation of events, small group interviews others	Collect longitudinal data	assist with planning and organising	Oct-25 mid-April 2026
	Support project partners (Side By Side, Hunter Circles) collect additional stories of change, social network mapping	Provide guidance and templates	Collect additional impact/outcome data	Oct-25 April 2026
	Transfer additional evaluation data (stories of change, social network mapping, program data)		Transfer data in secure folder	April 2026
	Analysis with lived experience leadership	undertake inclusive analysis	Support inclusive meeting	May
	Write draft final evaluation report	write, prepare report and dissemination material	comment, review report	June
	Translation of evidence (e.g., video, easy read, workshop to stakeholders)	prepare dissemination material	support and assist with dissemination	June-July
	Project close			1 July 2026

5 Evaluation Team

Prof Karen Fisher
(she/her)
BA/LLB(Hons),
MEcon, PhD
Chief investigator

Karen will lead the project. Karen is a disability policy and mental health policy researchers. Her research area is the organisation of social services in Australia and China, including disability and mental health community services; inclusive research and evaluation methodology; and social policy process. Karen applies inclusive research methods with people with disability, families and disability policy officials and service providers. Karen leads the SPRC Disability Research Program. She has researched many ILC grants using similar approaches to the evaluation of the Community for Everyone project.

Sandra Gendera
(she/her)
BA, MA Soc Sci
Investigator

Sandra will manage the project and analyse fieldwork data. Her research focuses on the lived experience of people and the support and services they receive, including disability services, mental health, drug and alcohol, and housing support. Sandra’s background is in social and cultural anthropology and social sciences. Her work encompasses qualitative in-depth methodologies; inclusive and participatory research methods; and mixed methods social and health program evaluation. Sandra’s expertise is working alongside lived experience researchers.

Prof Sally Robinson
(she/her)
BA USYD, MA, MPol &Soc Res PhD
Chief Investigator

Sally’s work is focused on opportunities and barriers to flourishing lives for people with disability. Most of Sally’s research is co-produced with people with disability. She works collaboratively across disciplines, with government and in community organisations to address key social concerns such as safety and abuse, wellbeing, participation, and funding and organisation of community services. Sally leads the Flinders Disability and Community Inclusion discipline, a large and diverse undergraduate and postgraduate teaching program and priority research area of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. Sally is a Chief Investigator and leader of the Flinders University research team on this project.

	Dr Eric Badu (he/him) BA, MSc Rehab, PhD Nursing Senior Researcher	Eric's expertise is in mental health research and disability studies. Eric holds a PhD in Nursing (Mental Health) from the University of Newcastle, Australia. His research focuses on mental health, disability, quality improvement, resilience, psychometric testing and research methodologies. Eric has several years of teaching and research experience in mental health research, research methodologies, psychometric testing, disability studies, consumer outcome research, systematic reviews. Eric will lead the data collection in the hunter area and continue to all parts of research design, conduct, analysis and writing.
	Ricky Kremer (he/him) Lived Experience Lead the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability	Ricky is passionate about the social inclusion of people with disability. Ricky worked as a capacity building officer and leader with the Council for Intellectual Disability delivering supported decision-making awareness training to people with disability living in group housing. Since 2024, Ricky is the Inclusion Lead at the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability (UNSW). The National Centre's aim is to make sure people with intellectual disability get better health care. Ricky leads and informs all aspects of inclusive design and codesign at the National Centre. Ricky is the lived experience advisor and leader on the Community for Everyone project, he will work alongside other lived experience researcher on the project.
TBC	Flinders community researcher	

Appendix A Project logic

Rationale/aim	Stakeholders	Inputs	Processes	Activities	Output	Outcomes (short term)
To achieve social inclusion and belonging for profoundly isolated people with intellectual disability the project aims to enhance, • Social networks, relationships • Safety and advocacy support • Community inclusion and sense of belonging	Profoundly isolated people with disability Volunteer social connectors Family, friends, neighbours, other people in persons' life Group home stakeholders Project team SBSA and Hunter Circles Evaluation team Funders - DSS	DSS/ ILC funding Lived-experience expertise embedded in project Information, resources, existing relationships (group homes) Peer leaders/leadership training Matching and support to focus person and social connectors Capacity building training to social connectors Community of practice network of support Action research evaluation process	Codesign with lived experience leadership and expertise Community engagement events Coordination of socialising events and connections with the broader community for project participants and volunteer social connectors Capacity building events and activities for social connectors, other stakeholders, and peer leaders Community of practice of support for family, friends, social connectors to build shared learning and shared purpose	Recruit participants with disability Engage volunteer social connectors Develop and run tailored trainings and capacity building Provide organisation support –matching of pairs, socialising events, host and facilitate community of practice Reflective practice as part of the action learning approach, amend and change project based on feedback Document outcomes and work with evaluation team	10 Information sessions **20 profoundly isolated people with disability are** matched with volunteer connectors **20 people with disability experience** increased belonging, identity, agency, through the establishment of freely given relationships **20 volunteer social connectors** are trained and actively engaged in the focus person's life **Community of Practice meetings** are held regularly to engage and build capacity of social networks of people with disability	**Increased social connection** and relationships for people with disability who were profoundly isolated **Relationships btw connectors and people** are built on shared interests and values **Community of Practice** that creates a culture of person centered thinking, builds local knowledge, shares connections, tools, resources **Increased awareness and understanding** of the benefits of Circles of Support (people have more choice and decision support)