



Serena Ovens
Chief Executive Officer

As we approach the end of yet another financial year and prepare to report to our funders and members, it never fails to surprise me the amount of work and successful outcomes a small organisation such as ours can achieve on limited budgets.

Outcomes for the policy team can be hard-fought and are often measured in small, incremental steps, although they are always worthwhile. I know you've read a lot about the policy projects we've worked on, as we report on them regularly in PDCN Live and our monthly email newsletters.

In this issue we'll provide an in-depth report on the successes and lessons from the first year of our major Information Linkages and Capacity Building grant. I'm pleased to say we've surpassed all of the original project deliverables and had some amazing outcomes for the participants in the peer connections and workshop projects.

Having successfully won our *Stand By Me* campaign to secure long-term funding for disability advocacy in NSW, the NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance has been working with the Department of Communities and Justice to implement the NSW Ageing and Disability Commissioner's proposal for a new Advocacy Futures Program.

This is a major undertaking, and there is a lot to figure out in the details of the new structure, however I believe it is a positive step to be involved with the design of the new advocacy program. Whilst I do not wish to rush the process and am keen to ensure we end up with a program that offers the very best advocacy, information and representation for all

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people with disability in NSW, it is frustrating to once again be heading into a new financial year without any formal funding commitment for PDCN, or any of the other 38 organisations that are currently funded.

That said, we understand through informal conversations with the Department that current funding arrangements will roll over for another six months while the final design of the Advocacy Futures Program is agreed, and will be opened for us to apply for funding after July. It's envisioned that the rollout of the new program will happen progressively from January 2022 until full implementation by June 2023.

We also welcome Alister Henskens as the new NSW Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services. We look forward to working with the Minister to bring about our vision of a society where people with a physical disability are equal in every way! It was great to have an initial conversation with him shortly after he took up the mantle in late May, and we'll have another opportunity to discuss our issues and concerns at a face-to-face meeting in early July.

Finally, we will shortly be sending out our yearly Member Survey, and I implore you to take the time to complete it. We truly value knowing that the work we do has meaning for you. You can find more detail on that on the next page.

Cheers,
Serena

Welcome Dr Ian Jackson



We are delighted to report that Dr Ian Jackson has joined the PDCN Policy team as a Senior Policy Officer, bringing our team up to its full capacity once again.

Ian is a registered psychologist and lectures at Australian Catholic University in disability studies. He has a wealth of experience in the disability sector having worked with families of young adults with disability to navigate the NDIS, and as principal of a school for children with disability from 2015 to 2020. He is similarly experienced in navigating the aged care sector through his work as Director of Community Care at Anglicare.

With all this experience across policy and project management, combined with a passion for advocating on behalf of people with disabilities, Ian is a great addition to the PDCN team. Ian will be working across our NDIS, assistive technology and transport portfolios.

Each year the support we receive from PDCN members enables us to represent the views and needs of people with disability as we engage with government on policy and legislation. Membership also provides a channel for you to proactively contact us about systemic issues and problems you may experience; we are often able to provide this feedback to government via the various committees and groups we sit on.

If you are an Associate, Corporate or Organisation member of PDCN it will soon be time to renew your annual membership, and so next week we'll be sending out membership renewal emails with a link that will let you easily make payment and update your details if necessary.

PDCN membership remains free for all people with physical disability and representatives of people with physical disability under 16 years old. So, if that's you, we'll automatically renew your membership and you don't need to do anything. Although if any of your contact details have changed in the last year please let us know by sending a quick email to admin@pdcnsw.org.au or calling us on 1800 688 831.

And it wouldn't be the end of the financial year without an opportunity to make a last-minute donation supporting our work! Every little bit you give helps our small, dedicated team to continue working on your behalf to make New South Wales a more inclusive and equitable society. Head to www.pdcnsw.org.au/donate and let us know you care.

Over the coming weeks all PDCN members will receive an email linking you to our yearly member survey. If you don't have an email address look out for a paper copy arriving in the mail, with a reply-paid envelope to send it back to us!

This survey is our way of knowing that what we do, and the way we communicate with you, truly reflects what you want and need us to do on your behalf.

This is your opportunity to tell us about the issues you believe we should prioritise, whether you feel we are supporting you to the best of our ability, and whether we are providing you with the information you need in order to stay engaged and informed.

The survey also assists us to demonstrate to our funders that we are genuinely producing the outcomes that matter to people with physical disability, so please take the time to give us feedback on the goods and not-so-goods. We value your honesty and will always look to improve the work that we do!

ILC Team Report

In February 2020 PDCN was awarded National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Information, Linkages and Capacity building (ILC) funding to develop and manage a project that would continue and expand on the work we had previously done in the peer connections and learning and development space.

Engaging a team of people to work on the project

Being awarded the ILC funding has meant we were able to employ Adrian O'Malley and Heidi Haydon, two peer facilitator/mentors who are living with disability. Stuart Greenfield was employed as the project officer to manage the administration of the project, and Wendy Banfield continued in her Education Management role as the project manager, co-facilitator and peer mentor.



*Peer Facilitators and Mentors Heidi Haydon & Adrian O'Malley (left and right)
with PDCN Member Julie Magill (centre)*

External partnerships were also continued or created to ensure the benefits of the ILC funding were maximised. PDCN would like to thank Noah's Inclusion Services and Muscular Dystrophy NSW (MDNSW) for the work they are doing with peer groups. Thanks also goes to the Stroke Foundation for promoting two of our workshops and partnering in our peer mentoring. We value these partnerships and understand change does not occur in silos. We will continue to build on our partnerships.

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Selecting useful peer connection and learning activities

In applying for the funding, we reviewed our existing capacity building activities, consulted with members, facilitators, and past participants, and considered what else may be of benefit to our members and the wider community. We also needed to ensure we aligned with the ILC outcomes.

We discovered that the connection and learning achieved via peer groups was still of use and needed to continue. We also discovered the many benefits of peer mentoring and decided to expand on this.

We saw benefits in offering a suite of workshops that would complement each other. The NDIS Self-Management workshop was redeveloped as there is an ongoing need. A workshop on Self Advocacy was developed to assist individuals in building skills to independently advocate for their rights and increase their confidence to do so. Finally, our prior experiences and our recognition of the importance of wellbeing, prompted our decision to develop a resilience workshop. Little did we realise the project would start during a pandemic which would heighten the need for this type of workshop.



Education & ILC Project Manager Wendy Banfield with ILC Project Officer Stuart Greenfield

Project commencement and impact

The project team commenced work in April 2020 and delivery of project activities started in July 2020. Workshops were developed and adjustments have been made to workshops to ensure the content and approach to delivery is continuously improved. These improvements would not be possible without the insight and feedback of those who attended.

We are pleased to say the project expectations for the past year have been exceeded:

Intended Delivery

9 workshops
8 peer groups
132 peer mentoring sessions
520 attendances

Actual Delivery

37 workshops
9 peer groups
214 peer mentoring sessions
2000 attendances

We've received encouraging feedback from participants

- *'I have limited opportunities to get out and the monthly peer group feels like Christmas every month. I love it. The peer group has also increased my confidence in the community.'*
- PDCN peer group participant
- *'The speaker was engaging and adapted to meet the preferences of the audience. Everybody was given the opportunity to contribute, and everyone was very welcoming. It was good to hear questions and ideas from other people and I would recommend these types of meetings to others.'*
- MDNSW peer groups participant
- *'I know where to start to ensure the best interests of my child are being met now and in the future regarding health/lifestyle and financial. Every time I attend Noah's everyone is great, friendly helpful supportive. Keep up all the great work.'*
- Noah's peer group participant
- *'Overall a positive attitude by presenters which is encouraging rather than dwelling on the shortcomings of the system. Also enjoyed hearing about the software & apps available & firsthand experience of their use. Nothing beats user experience! This workshop was brilliant.'*
- NDIS Self-Management workshop participant
- *'The workshop went into detail and helped me learn to be clearer about my needs when speaking up. This training has helped me to be a better self-advocate and I believe I can approach things differently in the future. Fantastic workshop.'*
- Self Advocacy/Speaking up workshop participant
- *'I thought the workshop was excellent. It had a lot of useful and research-based practice in easy to digest and comprehensible format. The information was interesting but easily applicable to real situations, and I enjoyed listening to other people's experiences as well.'*
- Resilience workshop participant
- *'The individual support has been so valuable. Before attending individual support, I felt isolated and misunderstood. I have been working with a mentor to build my skills to confidently communicate in all areas of my life. I've been able to make significant improvement in my life and shared what I have learnt with other people I know with disability.'*
- Peer-to-peer mentoring participant

We would like to thank the dedication and work of everyone who is involved in the project and all the members who have made great use of the activities on offer. We encourage more members to attend activities, to provide feedback and to ensure we are all working together to build a collective of people who will continue to speak up, grow and remain resilient.

Mike* recently attended one of PDCN's Speaking Up For Yourself workshops. Effective communication is discussed in the workshop, and Mike said that he got frustrated because he didn't think he got his message across well. He asked for some help with how he communicated. At the end of the workshop Adrian, PDCN Peer Facilitator and Mentor, spoke with Mike about our peer mentoring and individual support.

Mike said that because of his disability he had become used to feeling like he hadn't been heard. He wanted the people around him - clinicians, support workers, and co-workers - to hear him, so that he didn't feel 'fobbed off'. Adrian and Mike agreed to work together on helping Mike to be more assertive and effective in his communication, so he gets heard and understood without getting frustrated.

Over several online sessions Mike and Adrian explored ways to help Mike in areas such as effectively using small talk to make communication easier. In one email Mike said, 'You have helped me understand small talk a lot more, and I appreciate the need for it. It feels more valid now that we have discussed it in person.'

Recently Adrian received an email from Mike that really made his day and demonstrates what peer mentoring can achieve.

The email read, 'This morning I was just reflecting on how busy my week has been at work and have recognised how my behaviour has shifted. My supervisor has been away for the last seven days leaving me in charge of our department. I have noticed my communication and behaviour with my work colleagues and customers has shifted to a more assertive manner, which is a first for me as I am usually most comfortable working in the background.'

I believe the discussions you and

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**Name changed for privacy reasons.*



PDCN Peer Facilitator and Mentor Adrian O'Malley

I have had over the past several months have finally sunk in, as I am beginning to see most of my requests and replies are genuinely reasonable, constructive, informative, to the point, and do not appear biased. Six months ago, my mindset would have struggled with this concept, feeling it to be too confrontational. But this morning I can see that in the last few weeks there has been a change... I am communicating my needs!'

Adrian says, 'It's wonderful to know that the mentoring sessions made such a difference. I'd like to thank Mike for the opportunity to work together and make some changes that mattered to him. I learnt a lot too, and Mike deserves huge credit for being open to discussing his issue, and for putting into action the skills we worked on in our mentoring sessions.'

If you feel you'd like to work one-on-one with a PDCN Mentor to develop a new skill or achieve a personal goal, please contact us on admin@pdcnsw.org.au or 1800 688 831 to see if our mentoring would suit your needs.

Our CEO Serena Ovens and Senior Policy Officer Hayley Stone recently attended a joint parliamentary inquiry into the *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment (Plastics Reduction) Bill 2021*.

Under the proposed bill, single-use plastics would be phased out over six months as part of a broader agenda to reduce community consumption, with provisions for retained supply, distribution, and sale in limited circumstances.

While PDCN appreciates that single-use plastics represent a major form of environmental pollution and that it is important to reduce overall reliance, one type of single-use plastic in the form of plastic straws is vitally important for some people with physical disability, who need them to eat and drink.

The reality is that there are several unique features of plastic straws that bamboo, glass, paper, metal, or even latex equivalents cannot currently match. Plastic straws are cheap, flexible, and able to withstand both hot and cold liquids. They do not deteriorate on use and are safer than rigid straws which can cause damage.

PDCN is recommending that plastic straws be considered in isolation, given their importance for some in the physical disability community. It is vital that the people who need plastic straws for hydration and nutrition can continue to access them easily until viable alternatives can be used.



Senior Policy Officer Hayley Stone and CEO Serena Ovens giving evidence at NSW Parliament

It is also important that, if exemptions are incorporated into the Act, that these exemptions don't create a burden for people with disability. Other states and territories are looking at a permit system, for instance, or allowing the distribution of plastic straws through selected distributors such as chemists.

Both options are less than ideal.

We have proposed a common-sense approach, recommending that public venues which serve food and drinks be allowed to purchase and supply plastic straws for use by customers that might reasonably be expected to need them. This would include people with temporary or ongoing disabilities.

We believe that this would provide a workable solution to the twin priorities of disability accessibility and environmental sustainability.

'You wouldn't expect a person to supply their own glass every time they needed a cup of water,' says our CEO, Ms Ovens.

'But the risk is that this bill could require people with physical disability to do that to eat or drink in public. This would be a reminder, yet again, that the rights of people with physical disability are viewed as secondary priorities to broader public policy initiatives.'

We look forward to the conclusion of the Joint Committee's deliberations and thank the Committee for the opportunity to present on this important issue.



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