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Assisting Communities through Direct Connection (ACDC) Project

Capacity Building Project

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CMHA acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional owners of the land as custodians and carers of the land we live, learn and work on, and pays respect to Elders past, present, and emerging. CMHA acknowledges that sovereignty was never ceded. CMHA also acknowledges the lived and living experience of people, and their families and carers, and acknowledges their ongoing commitment and valuable contributions in shaping mental health service delivery and reform.

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Background

The Assisting Communities through Direct Connection (ACDC) Project of Community Mental Health Australia (CMHA) had six intended outcomes, one of them being - *Building the capacity of People Connectors with respect to the knowledge and skills for effective outreach to people in need*. The ACDC Project's Capacity Building Project collected and reported on information provided by a selection of People Connectors and through a review of existing feedback mechanisms, to determine individual capacity building outcomes obtained through engagement with the ACDC Project.

This report is to be read in conjunction with the *ACDC Project Evaluation Report* produced by the ACDC Project researchers, the Centre for Social Impact (CSI) at the University of Western Australia.

Information was sought through this Capacity Building Project to compliment and not overlap the work CSI is undertaking for the project. CSI has a responsibility to evaluate how effective the ACDC Project was in meeting its intended outcomes, including how well the final ACDC Project Kit (including education and training) met the learning outcomes for People Connectors, and the effectiveness and utilisation of the ACDC Project information products.

Benefits and Outcomes

The Benefits and Outcomes were identified as:

- The Project informs of the capacity building journey of People Connectors and how it has impacted on them and their communities.
- Identification of the strengthening within the different cultural groups, while informing future implementation and innovation in the ways of building capacity.
- People Connectors' individual capacity building and empowerment informed their vision of how to deal with the issues in disseminating information effectively.
- Identification of barriers and how they were overcome.
- The personal stories of People Connectors that have worked in culturally and linguistically diverse communities reveals how this has enabled them to increase their capacity to access and disseminate information within their communities.
- Provides an opportunity for the creation of a platform to share the empowerment and strategies of People Connectors within the sector and allow for their voice and knowledge to be at the forefront. This displays the innovativeness of the ACDC Project, placing CMHA as an expert with the enabling of community members to receive information.

The Capacity Building Project captures the individual capacity building of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Connectors which will be invaluable to the ACDC Project and CMHA. However, the project is not specifically focused on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People Connectors but is inclusive of their voice.

I loved being a part of the ACDC project. I feel it has a lot of potential to do some great things for our local community in the future. I also loved listening to householder's stories and connecting householders with services.

People Connector in Exit Survey

Project Strategies

- Define capacity building in relation to People Connectors.
- Review and analyse Exit Survey results, and reflections from the Community of Practice meetings.
- Develop a *People Connector Capacity Building Questionnaire*.
- Prepare and plan for questionnaire distribution or telephone interviews to maximise People Connector engagement. All information collected is deidentified and People Connectors could decline to be interviewed without judgement.
- Contact People Connectors still working with Delivery Partner Organisations (DPOs) and People Connectors who have left the organisation but agreed to follow up and provided their personal contact details.
- Distribute the Capacity Building questionnaire to People Connectors and undertake interviews as requested.
- Analyse information collected and determined common threads.
- Ensure the intended outcome complies with the project goals and supports the CSI evaluation.
- Develop a draft People Connector Capacity Building Project Report for CEO and Project Manager review.
- Finalisation of People Connector Capacity Building Project Report by 20 November 2022.

Definition

Capacity Building is defined as follows:

- At the individual level, capacity building refers to the process of changing attitudes and behaviours-impacting knowledge and developing skills while maximizing the benefits of participation, knowledge exchange and ownership.¹
- In the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) capacity building is the process in which individuals develop their skills and abilities to perform functions, solve problems, set and achieve objectives, and understand and deal with their development needs in a broader context and in a sustainable manner.²

Capacity building in this report is in relation to People Connectors' knowledge and skills gained in effective and proactive outreach particularly when engaging with householders.

¹ The Capacity Building Concept, 4 Oct 2021, http://www.coastalwiki.org/wiki/The_Capacity_Building_Concept

² Five reasons why we believe in NDIS capacity building programs, 15 July 2020, <https://nextt.com.au/what-is-capacity-building-and-why-does-it-matter/>

People Connectors

People Connectors are or were, employees of DPOs (community managed) who elect to complete the ACDC Project at selected sites in their community. The project requires a minimum of two People Connectors to undertake proactive outreach, community engagement and door knocking activities for 13 weeks, working in daylight hours from Monday to Friday and on at least three Saturdays or Sundays.

People Connectors come from a range of lived experiences, culturally diverse backgrounds, qualifications and varying knowledge of mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. DPOs engaged People Connectors from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Arabic, Chinese, Iranian, Nepalese, South American, Ugandan, and Vietnamese.

The ACDC Project *Template Position Description V2 Oct 2020* provided information about essential criteria including relevant qualifications or experience in peer work, mental health, or related field however this was not always possible in recruitment. People Connectors also need the ability to work in a team of two, to be adaptable and flexible and be an effective communicator and listener. For most sites People Connectors worked well together, accepted their own limitations and/or learnings, and grew as individuals and a team. As seen in two sites however the ability to work as a team did not occur. Recruitment of People Connectors needs to be considerate of the available services, population, sociodemographic and cultural groups of each site. As seen in some sites, difficulty was experienced in the recruitment of suitable People Connectors who were willing to undertake the project despite the challenges.

We knew there had been a recent death, so we were able to avoid doorknocking as sorry business and cultural protocols were being conducted and instead door knocked a few weeks later.

People Connector in Community of Practice Meeting

Being a People Connector requires unique skills and capacities to undertake the proactive outreach approach. To door knock each day in all kinds of weather, five days a week for thirteen weeks People Connectors need to:

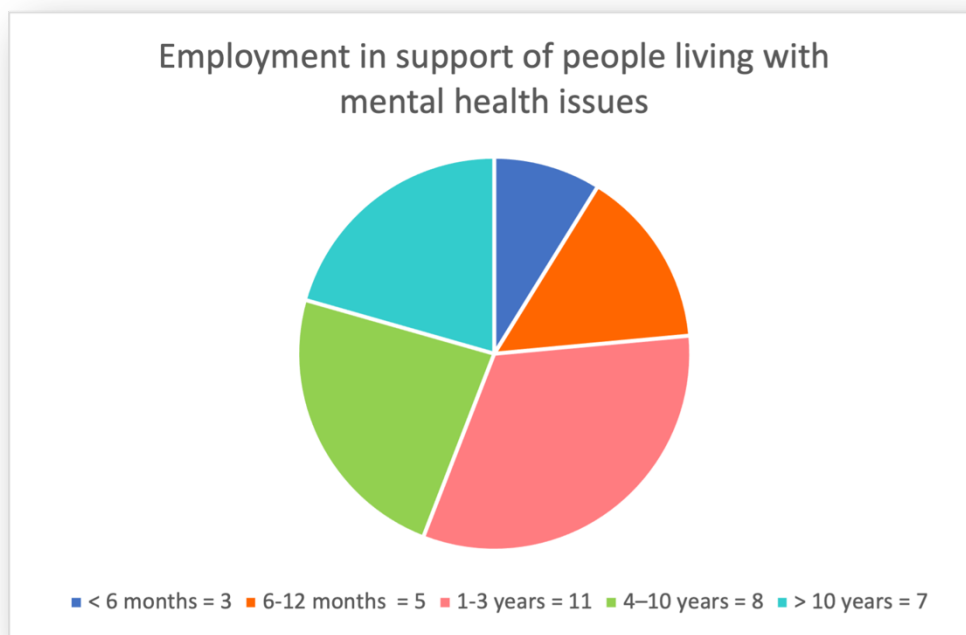
- Be kind and compassionate - to householders, to their colleague and to themselves
- Have effective communication skills with a diverse range of individuals
- Be an active listener
- Be resilient and adaptable to each new situation
- Have determination and grit to undertake the project
- Have a knowledge of the local community and area
- Be able to work with culturally diverse individuals and groups
- Have an understanding about mental health and social and emotional wellbeing, and how that differs within cultures
- Have a level of fitness
- And a sense of humour.

Skills Audit of People Connectors

From October 2021 People Connectors were requested to undertake a skills audit at the commencement of their training. The audit captured information on the length of time in employment in the support of people living with a mental health issue; length of employment with the DPO; qualifications held; professional development or training programs in mental health attended in the past three years; and identified training needs from a list of possible topics.

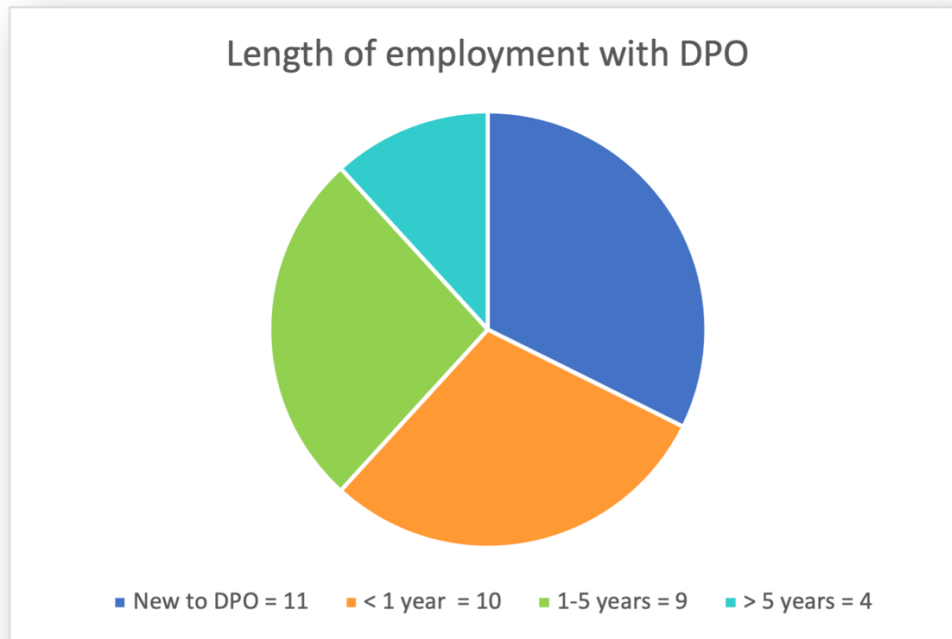
The data from the audits of 34 People Connectors (including casual People Connectors) from 14 sites identifies a diverse range of skills, qualifications, knowledge, and experiences in the support of people living with a mental health issue.

The Skills Audits of People Connectors are shown as follows:



The employment experiences of People Connectors working in support of people living with mental health issues were reported as follows:

- 23.5% had less than one year
- 23.5% had 4–10 years
- 33% had up to 3 years
- 20% had 10 years or more.



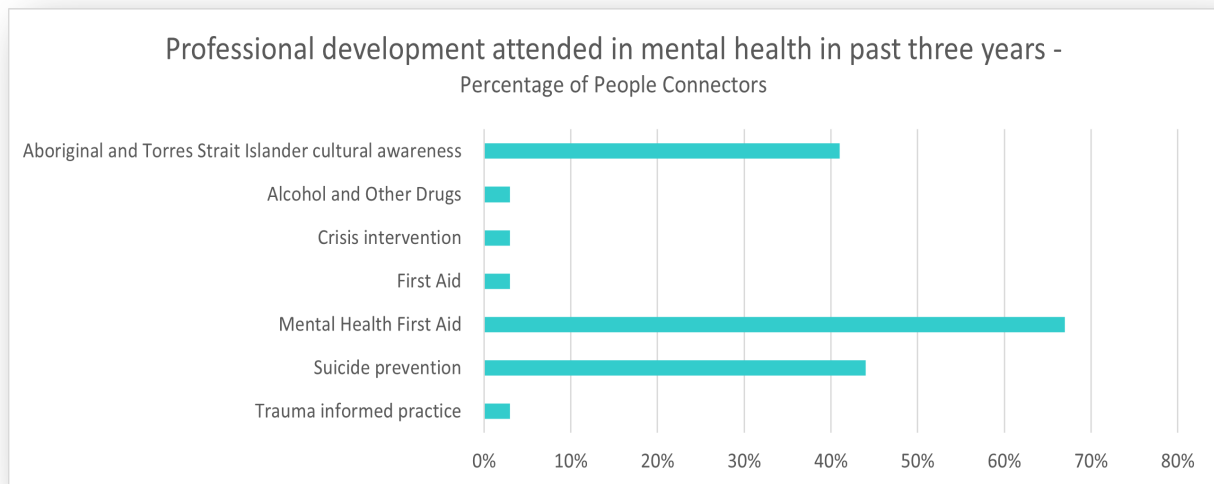
In relation to length of employment with a DPO People Connectors were identified as:

- New or had worked for less than one year = 62%
- Worked between one and five years = 26%
- Worked for five years or longer = 12%

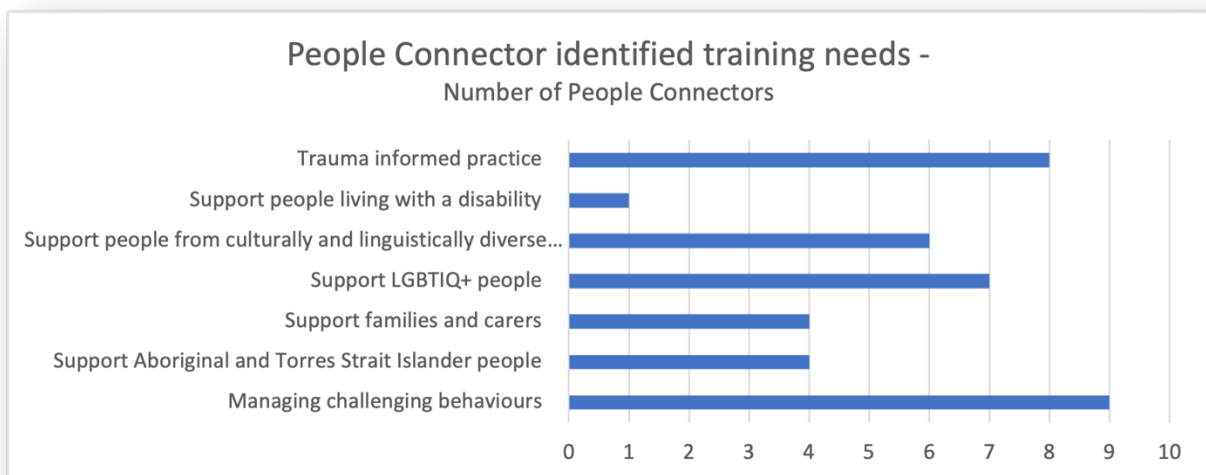


The above graph shows the diverse qualifications of People Connectors. Throughout the training People Connectors reported they were currently undertaking additional qualifications including

Certificate IV in Mental Health; Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work; Bachelor of Psychology and Master of Social Work.



Of interest is 67% of People Connectors had undertaken Mental Health First Aid training, 44% suicide prevention training and 41% had attended Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training in the previous three years.



Training provided to People Connectors included all the above identified training needs. See Appendix A: *ACDC Project Training Subjects* for the full list of training subjects.

Requirements

People Connectors need to quickly gain trust, be respectful and responsive to verbal and non-verbal cues, be communicative, actively listen, be culturally sensitive, and invite householders to speak about personal aspects of their and other people's lives, and their own social and emotional wellbeing.

Supportive decision making and problem-solving skills are essential when working with householders to identify any unmet social and emotional support needs. The use of local agencies information assists to identify services that may provide necessary support.

People Connectors deliver the free brochure and magnet which listed local, national, and online services. The Field Survey is completed at each door, which encompasses the *Householder Survey*, with many using interpreting services to complete surveys with householders.

People Connectors also undertake community engagement and outreach activities to promote the project. To ensure community awareness People Connectors would identify, discuss, and distribute the poster, magnet, and brochure widely to local community and social groups, Police, members of parliament, post office, council, medical centres, pharmacies, employment agencies and providers such as hairdressers, barbers, op shops, supermarkets, and community gardens.



In less than two years, 38 People Connectors from around Australia knocked on nearly 38,000 doors and had over 12,000 conversations with people aged 18 years and over and completed 4,300 Householder Surveys.

Training and Support

Before commencing door knocking activities at a site, People Connectors undertake one day of online module training and four days of face-to-face training (or online depending on COVID-19 related travel restrictions) with the ACDC Project Trainer/Consultant.

Training for People Connectors was comprehensive and covered subjects including safety - the number one priority, risk assessments, safe door knocking practices, COVID-19 infection risk management, engagement techniques, active listening and motivational interviewing, recovery oriented and trauma informed practices, working with cultural diversity, vicarious trauma or triggering for householders or People Connectors, self-care and how to conduct the Householder Survey.

See Appendix A: *ACDC Project Training Subjects* for the full list of training subjects provided.

The *VIA Survey of Character Strengths*³ is completed by People Connectors and discussed on the first day of training. The VIA Survey is a psychometrically validated personality test that measures an individual's character strengths. The survey results are used to consider the compatible and diverse strengths of People Connectors and to support the development of working together daily in a two-person team.

On the fifth day the Trainer role modelled and undertook initial door knocking activities to enhance learning, practice the quick reassurance script at the door and provide support to People Connectors. Visits to local community services with People Connectors to promote the project are also undertaken. These activities were not always possible for the Trainer to undertake at some sites due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions. People Connectors were sent a Certificate of Training once training was completed.

³ VIA Survey of Character Strengths <https://www.viacharacter.org>

I learnt how to be an active listener. Also, I learnt how to connect with people by engaging them in motivational interview and encourage them to talk more about the things that they want to talk about.

People Connector in Questionnaire

It is understood that each site, has its own unique experiences and challenges for People Connectors. In support of People Connector's own mental health and wellbeing regular and ongoing support was provided after the initial training was completed. The Trainer would return to sites if People Connectors and CMHA felt the People Connectors, or the project would benefit from assistance or additional support.

Reflective practice is discussed in the initial training week. It is an expectation of a People Connector's role for reflective practice to be undertaken throughout the door knocking activities. People Connectors with a clinical background or employed in a mental health community managed organisation are familiar with this practice. The ability to reflect on one's own actions, to modify or adapt own attitude and communication styles and to work as part of a two-person team is essential. Many People Connectors were observed in the Community of Practice meetings to undertake reflective practice and to discuss challenges for themselves and to seek input from their peers. A couple of People Connectors however expressed the opinion that seeking help from their peers was a sign of weakness and so did not engage in the opportunity.

I found the training was really well presented for anyone who is in the role of People Connector. Very well formed and easy to learn.

People Connector in Exit Survey

An *Operations Manual* provided the consistent framework for safe and effective door knocking activities. A monthly stakeholder newsletter is distributed by the ACDC Team to inform about the project and its progress across the sites, and to reduce the isolation of the role.

Community of Practice (COP) meetings

People Connectors were required to attend the mandatory Community of Practice (COP) Zoom meetings. The meetings, held fortnightly, provided People Connectors with regular and structured opportunities to share experiences, discuss issues and strategies, be supported in a peer led virtual environment, and to develop best practice in the proactive outreach approach.

The COP provided a safe space for People Connectors to share information and challenges, gather advice and explore innovative ideas for improvement of the project and the door knocking activities. It provided a supportive platform for People Connectors to combine synergies and share knowledge and experiences of the direct connection process. People Connectors sign the *Community of Practice Agreement* and *Terms of Reference* at the commencement of their sites' project. The COP meetings were facilitated by the Trainer/Consultant with minutes recorded for distribution to members. It was understood that not all People Connectors would actively engage in the meetings but should attend and listen to what their peers were discussing.

Areas of discussion at COP meetings included:

- What is working well?
- Challenges for People Connectors
- Success stories

- Effective and ineffective engagement strategies
- Areas for improvement, resources needed or further development of the Operations Manual.

Further feedback on the value of the COP meetings was recorded in the Exit Survey, with an example of comments by People Connectors reported as follows:

- Safe space to talk and get questions answered.
- Opportunity to interact with people with different backgrounds.
- All People Connectors able to provide feedback and share experiences.
- The community of practice helps with reflection and the sharing of information between teams. It also creates an opportunity for the trainer to provide guidance to critical incidents.
- The sharing of information was helpful. Discussion of various scenarios and helpful guide to how to respond to them.

It was very valuable to meet each fortnight and have a safe place to share our feedback, to feel heard and be encouraged.

People Connector in Exit Survey

- I felt like it was a great supporting network helped with debriefing hearing other people connectors struggles and positive outcomes. Giving each other the support to continue on with the ACDC project. Understanding each other's highs and lows felt like being a part of a team.
- I think they were great for hearing what's going on in each area and it was a chance where we could identify similar speed humps or challenges, and how each team was dealing with it differently. They sometimes felt like they dragged on a bit, but I expect nothing less from a meeting full of People Connectors... it's our job to talk! Haha
- COP was a nice way to check in with other people connectors and the trainer to brainstorm any issues we might have encountered, discuss our findings and just to have a sense of camaraderie that others were doing similar work.
- The COP was both recreational and enabling. People connectors had a time and opportunity to share their issues, pains, and joys during COP. Also, we learned many things from the experiences and ideas of people connectors from other sites.
- Listening to others and being able to reflect on your own positives and negatives for the week. I'm not sure how they can be improved as we generally have the freedom to talk about whatever we like.

There were challenges for People Connectors in regularly attending the COP meetings. For some People Connectors attendance at the COP meetings was initially sporadic due to the relevance of the meetings not being fully understood. Other times People Connectors were not able to attend due to lengthy householder discussions. Two People Connectors were required to sit in a car on one mobile phone as the computers in the office did not have cameras. One People Connector reported they were required to attend the COP meetings in the work environment where they did not always feel comfortable to discuss individual issues as it was an open plan office. Another People Connector wanted the COP meetings to be only solution focused and as a result was reluctant to participate.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workers Circle

At some sites the DPOs engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as People Connectors. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workers Circle* was established to form cultural connection, to reduce cultural isolation and build capacity of People Connectors whilst offering support from an Aboriginal Elder. The Workers Circle also provided a culturally safe space to discuss any matters that required a cultural lens.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Worker's Circle* was facilitated by Ms Sharlene McKenzie OAM, a Wiradjuri woman, and Aboriginal Community Consultant. Four meetings were held in February, April, May, and June 2022 in support of People Connectors and their cultural connection.

As an indigenous person, coming onto country in an outreach role ... and due to the short time frame of the project, there were occasions when opportunity to connect with elders was not established until a few months into the perspective phase ... I think that by actively showing respect, indigenous communities will feel valued & empowered and the projects on a whole may be better received. I am grateful for the inclusion of the Workers Circle to the ACDC Project.

People Connector reflections sent to the ACDC Project in March 2022.

Exit Survey

At the finalisation of each site, People Connectors were requested to complete an Exit Survey. The Exit Survey was introduced to People Connectors in Round 2 of the project, with 28 from a possible 34 responses received. The Exit Surveys received included casual People Connectors who though still valid may not had the opportunity to undertake the project fully or may have only worked intermittently when a People Connector was on sick or other leave.

Exit Survey questions sought information on People Connector's enjoyment of the project, the use and like/dislike of ACDC Project resources and information products, communication with the ACDC Project Team, and quality improvement of the project.

The responses from People Connectors to questions in the Exit Survey have been incorporated throughout this report. Given the late stage in the ACDC Project of this project there was no ability to amend the Exit Survey questions but rather just review their content.

Assisting Householders

People Connectors reported on many occasions a sense of achievement after assisting a householder or a family. Assistance to householders was regularly reported through the Community of Practice meetings as examples of best practice and engagement by People Connectors. Some of the examples discussed included but are not limited to the following:

- Calling an ambulance for a householder who was physically unwell
- Making referrals to mental health, social and support services
- Contacting health services to make appointments on behalf of an injured householder
- Obtaining cleaning and gardening services
- Support of a young person on an international student visa

- Obtaining food parcels for householders
- Using interpreter services to support connection with CALD services
- Calling a women's refuge for a woman and her two small children
- Engaging carer support services
- Calling Police for a welfare check
- Complaint to a Department of Housing about maintenance repairs and a sinkhole in the backyard of a building complex
- Developing the Householder Survey as a word document in a specific community language so People Connectors could leave with householders and collect the next day.
- Developing the *Consent to Share Information* form in three community languages.

Challenges for People Connectors

There were many challenges for People Connectors in undertaking this project around Australia. The following is a list of some but not all challenges that People Connectors reported at the COP Meetings, or through the Exit Survey.

Examples of some of the challenges for People Connectors were identified as:

- The COVID-19 virus being ever present – impacting on People Connectors, their families and colleagues, and householders, with the lockdowns, restrictions and need to isolate disrupting many sites' door knocking activities. Some sites required contract extensions for project completion.
- The extreme weather events, constant rain and multiple flooding incidents in many states and territories, resulted in the loss of one project site, damaged roads, and created delays in the project roll-out. Some sites had previously experienced bushfires and were now facing floods.
- Severe flooding in Northern NSW destroyed many homes and businesses including a DPO's office in Kyogle NSW. As the project was not able to continue People Connectors placed the project magnets around town in support of local people.
- The weather being too hot (one site had daily 30-35c heat and humidity of the wet season) or too cold depending on the time of year, or the combination of rain and cold wind, with few householders wanting to stand at their front door and talk.
- Secured high rise towers and limited access to residents presented problems for one site.
- High cyclone fences and padlocked gates in some suburbs because of increased crime in the area.
- Apartment buildings with security doors and intercom systems that did not work.
- The presence of a cult in one area, with People Connectors reporting initial reluctance with engagement.

Specific Challenges for People Connectors were even greater, as reported:

- Hearing householders' personal stories had the potential to trigger one's own trauma background or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with two People Connectors from different sites withdrawing from the project before the completion due to triggering of their own PTSD symptoms.

- The jumping castle tragedy in December 2021 involving the death of school children in Devonport Tasmania, posed very specific difficulties for People Connectors in that region.
- People Connectors were told about the suicide of international and/or domestic university students, and the negative effects of social media on students especially during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.
- The results of completed paper copies of the Householder Survey raised concerns. As arranged with the householder the survey is often left at the front door for collection the next day. People Connectors became concerned for the householder when the K10 scores were high, or distress is evidenced in other questions. People Connectors at the time advise householders that the survey is private and confidential, and so do not have the authority or consent from the householder to return and discuss the results.
- Talking with householders who are experiencing distress or substance use. Some People Connectors were new to the mental health sector and required additional education and ongoing support.
- People Connectors feeling emotionally drained at the end of each week from hearing householders' stories, and having discussions on loneliness, isolation and illness of householders affecting their capacity for empathy and attentive listening.

A People Connector reported: *It is honestly quite difficult for people connectors to engage for 6 hours out in the field each day - very intense emotionally but also on your voice.*

- People Connectors felt frustration - hearing that services are not available; childcare, or other carer needs not being met; costs for appointments are prohibitive; large distances to travel to get a service; or services having no capacity or long waiting lists.
- People Connectors who were employed by the DPO only for the project were not entitled to sick, compassionate or any other leave. This is of concern given the magnitude of the often-complex needs of householders and resultant fatigue.
- People Connectors needing a break or becoming unwell or experiencing personal loss but not taking any leave as understanding of the impact on the project and work in a two-person team. Alternatively having a third People Connector who could sometimes stand in for one, or two days of sick leave but had their own role and workload and were not available for an extended period.
- People Connectors reported feeling pressure by the DPO to try and obtain 320 completed Householder Surveys for the proposed bonus of \$10,000.

As one People Connector stated: *I believe many leaders took this to be a serious KPI and it had a trickle-down effect in terms of expectations. This messaging was corrected later but I would say the impacts lingered.*

- Many People Connectors complained of the Householder Survey being too long. Engagement with a householder can take up to 1.5 hours to build rapport, discuss unmet needs, determine available services, and then complete the survey. Without any initial discussions it can take over 30 minutes to complete the survey with a householder.
- Translating and adapting the survey questions often proved difficult. When speaking with some Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander householders' completion of the survey took longer due to having to paraphrase, tell stories and/or translate the survey questions. This was due to English being the second, third or fourth language for the householder. Words

like 'community' have different meaning for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, as it means their mob and where they are from.

- For one team suspecting that a householder had died inside a house.
- There was danger from snakes at some sites.
- Dogs not being contained, with three People Connectors at two different sites being bitten by dogs.
- The magnets and brochures were heavy to carry each day, especially the increased sized information products for culturally diverse communities in three sites.
- Some householders' fear of government or having strangers at the door meant being perceived as an intrusion or threat.
- Other householders were often distracted as working from home or undertaking caring duties.
- Householders who were inappropriate in their behaviour or came to the door in their underpants.
- Many older people from a culturally diverse community reported that mental ill-health was a younger person's problem and declined to engage.
- People Connectors reported hearing of an increase in abuse towards people who are homeless or who are begging, believed to be made worse by the increasingly cashless society.

People Connector Questionnaire

To assist with determining the capacity building skills and knowledge of People Connectors the *Capacity Building Questionnaire* was emailed in early October to People Connectors who had worked at the 21 project sites (Round 1 and Round 2). The *Capacity Building Questionnaire* had a ten-day timeframe within which to be completed and returned. People Connectors were asked a series of questions to determine their capacity building outcomes, to support quality improvement and enhance project knowledge. A reminder email was sent two days prior to deadline.

See Appendix B: *Responses to Capacity Building Questionnaire* which shows the questions and responses received from People Connectors.

A total of 13 (38%) completed questionnaires were received. Unfortunately, 32% of emails to People Connectors were returned as no longer at the DPO. It is noted one large mental health organisation ceased operating their NDIS programs in September 2022 with staff either undertaking other roles in the organisation or accepting redundancy.

People Connectors unable to be contacted or were known to have left the organisation with no capacity to contact	10
<i>Capacity Building Questionnaires</i> distributed to known email addresses	34
Emails returned as no longer working at the organisation	11

Total responses received:

- Face to face completion of questionnaires with Trainer/Consultant = 4
- Telephone completion of questionnaire with Trainer/Consultant = 1

- Questionnaires returned by email = 8

13
(38%)

Review of findings

People Connectors have shown great commitment and enthusiasm for the ACDC Project, with a keenness to capture issues for their own community and become local champions of the project's data and findings.

Despite the many challenges as documented People Connectors reported many benefits for themselves. People Connectors recognised that their own communication styles, confidence to speak to strangers and active listening had all improved.

It is vital to trust your gut. Sometimes people are distressed but don't know how to say it.

People Connector in Exit Survey

There was growth in understanding that a person's perception of mental health and wellbeing is important; that each person has their own ways of identifying what is a need or not and considering a person's cultural, social, and environmental backgrounds helps to make the topic of mental health and wellbeing more approachable.

The project added value to People Connector's resilience and personal growth and their future work experiences and added to their understanding of their own culture or community. Some People Connectors spoke about their fitness improving and having lost weight.

The project gave an opportunity for People Connectors to explore issues in more depth. The discussions with householders supported decision-making, including choice and control over the support and assistance required. The information resources identified as a good tool for engagement and to support householders in help seeking behaviours.

People Connectors who door knocked in Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities were able to discuss and share specific issues for their communities. The project has enabled them to increase their capacity to access and disseminate information within their communities.

There was an overall increased knowledge by People Connectors and the diverse DPOs about the challenges in mental health and wellbeing and consideration of services required for their community.



I'm going back to being a case manager, but it will be different, from my learning. I will treat people in a different way, will listen more and think about a person more broadly. A really good experience.

People Connector in Questionnaire.

Based on the learnings from People Connectors one DPO managed to successfully steer federal funds into a youth activities project, a gap that was identified during door knocking activities.

Several People Connectors who were employed specifically for the ACDC Project obtained ongoing employment through the DPO, whilst others returned to their substantive positions with enhanced knowledge and experience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are summarised from the content of this report and from discussions with many People Connectors by the Trainer/Consultant over the duration of the project.

1. Funding be provided for the recruitment of more than two People Connectors at each site. This would share the workload and reduce the impact of hearing householder stories daily and the resultant fatigue of door knocking activities.
2. Project funding consider that People Connectors may need to take sick, compassionate or other types of leave.
3. Before door knocking activities commence People Connectors be included in community meetings with local service providers to obtain first-hand knowledge of key partnerships, referral pathways and a wider range of community services.
4. People Connectors meet with Elders, leaders, and local agencies, determine available community and social groups, resources, develop a database of services and their criteria, referral processes and any waiting list, and promote the project.
5. The ACDC Project must ensure adequate preparation time for People Connectors to connect and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and agencies to show respect for walking through their land. This is especially important for People Connectors who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need to acknowledge the Elders' place in society and their custodianship of the land and waters and give thanks to ancestors for allowing meetings to take place on the land.
6. People Connectors spend time undertaking community engagement with Elders and leaders of all culturally and linguistically diverse communities at each site to promote and strengthen the project's success.
7. People Connectors be provided with additional face to face training by the Trainer in the first month of the project and mid project to consolidate learning, provide support and ensure consistency with door knocking activities and data collection.
8. All People Connectors at a site be provided with an iPad for discussions and survey completion with householders. This will assist with the capturing of longer stories and door knocking data and the transfer of information from paper surveys.
9. The length of the Householder Survey be substantially reduced, as its current format takes a minimum 30 minutes to complete with a householder.
10. The data and information collected through the ACDC Project be used to inform the creation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Engagement Plan. This will support and empower the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in the CMHA landscape and may begin to align the ACDC Project and organisation with the Closing the Gap targets.

In conclusion, the ACDC Project was extremely successful due to the determination, enthusiasm, and capacity of the People Connectors, despite the many challenges they faced. People Connectors all recognised that they had grown in confidence and communication skills from undertaking the ACDC Project.

People Connectors were able to navigate the complexity of people's lives, provide valuable information and data, assist householders to connect with much needed services or identify unmet needs of individuals, families, carers, population groups and communities.

At the end of the ACDC project, I realised that listening to people actively, by connecting with them genuinely, fills me with joy and satisfaction.

People Connector in Questionnaire

Appendix A: ACDC Project Training Subjects

The following is a list of subjects covered in the training of People Connectors and Line Managers before commencement of the ACDC Project at each site. This is not a comprehensive list as the training is flexible and adaptive and tries to meet the knowledge and training needs of People Connectors depending on their experience, skills, and knowledge base. For example, what is empathy versus sympathy, or the role of GPs and mental health care plans, may be discussed if it is of benefit or need.

ACDC Project Training Subjects are -

- Safety – number one priority for all
- Delivery Partner Organisation role and responsibilities
- People Connector role and responsibilities
- Own strengths and working in a team
- Project research and evaluation goals
- Operationalizing the project
- Work health and safety
- Site Briefings
- Equipment, resources, and information products for each site
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Stigma and discrimination
- Risk assessments and management of risks
- COVID management
- Incident management
- Project documentation, incl. People Connector Activity Plan and fortnightly Line Managers Report
- Mapping the site
- Community engagement requirements and promotion of the project in each site
- Safe door knocking practices and activities
- Practice of activities and scenarios
- Engagement guidelines and techniques and script at the door
- Building rapport
- Active listening
- Motivational interviewing
- Strengths based approach
- Stigma and discrimination
- Recovery oriented and trauma informed practice
- Engagement with specific population groups

- Cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity
- Use of interpreter services and translated surveys
- Procedures for different dwellings
- Delivery in rural and remote locations
- Responses to specific situations – for example, householders who may be at risk of harm; family and domestic violence; children or young people under 18 years; an individual who is experiencing acute emotional distress or states they are feeling suicidal; concern for an individual's physical health or an emergency, or householders with experience of hoarding and/or squalor.
- Challenging situations and strategies to manage
- Vicarious trauma and triggering for householders or People Connectors
- How to respond to signs on doors or letterboxes, e.g., do not disturb
- Capturing data and information and recording on the Tally Sheet
- Resolving data or technology issues
- Completing the Field Survey
- Different ways for the householder to complete the Householder Survey
- Identifying with householders what are their unmet needs
- Privacy, confidentiality, and consent - written and verbal
- Assisting a householder to connect with a service
- Referrals and follow up visits with householders
- Making connections to support and other services
- Responding to telephone contact from householders
- Defusing and debriefing
- Support of People Connectors
- Reflective practice
- Community of Practice meetings and Aboriginal Workers Circles
- Self-care
- Stakeholders' newsletter
- Resources for Householders and Self-education
- CSI focus groups
- Post door knocking activities
- Project exit activities

Appendix B: Responses to Capacity Building Questionnaire

Responses from People Connectors to the *Capacity Building Questionnaire* are recorded as received. However, any references to specific sites or cultures were removed as the questionnaire was distributed with the undertaking it would be confidential and therefore not able to identify the People Connector, the cultural identity of the People Connector, or the project location.

Responses are:

Q1. Thinking back to the beginning of the ACDC Project and then to who you are today - what did you learn about yourself from working as a People Connector?

- I learnt I am capable of improvising and adapting to social situations. I learnt this speaking with hundreds of householders
- I was more innocent before, learnt how to work with people as I did not trust anyone as they want things and think you are doing wrong. Working in a team of two all day was good, and we learnt from each other.
- How to listen to people. How to refer to what they need e.g., community or another service. Need to be positive at each door. Learnt how to work with a team, it's not easy. Learnt about the different cultures, about mental health and people's different needs. Learnt how to do fortnightly reports. And how to explain about project and talk about mental health and what householders need. My confidence grew.
- Self-confidence improved. I'm used to talking with clients but not lots of people in the community. I'm now saying hi to people when I never did before. Listening has improved, I give more attention when people talk. I learned new things; it was a good experience.
- Not so much about myself but more about the hidden issues within communities.
- That I am much more confident than I realised.
- At the end of the ACDC project, I realised that listening to people actively by connecting with them genuinely fills me with joy and satisfaction.
- I have learnt how to communicate more better with different people from different backgrounds. It has helped me in my current role as well to be able to be more resourceful in my efforts to assist people even through everyday activities.
- I learnt real picture of the social and emotional wellbeing of the community and felt more informed regarding community services available in the area. The gap in the region was, from my opinion, the connectivity among the services and the community, therefore, lack of inability to channel resources in the right direction. As a People Connector the best thing I learnt about myself was I must be selective of my language and better communicator.
- I doubted myself at the beginning, but it made me realise my value, as I do know stuff. I'm resilient and stronger than I thought.
- Great experience for People Connectors, engagement in our Community, learning a new way of connecting with our people as well others who live [here]
- I am a lot more resilient than what I give myself credit for! I also gained a lot more self-esteem and confidence. I also learnt how to work alongside people that I don't necessarily share the same ideas as.

Q2. What new skills did you learn from the door knocking activities?

- My language skills have improved in discussing mental health and wellbeing, and I feel better equipped to provide support for people.
- Learnt and improved my skills, been a bilingual worker for many years. I learnt to say no and not give more than I should.
- Communication skills improved, a better listener now. Work within a team as everyone is different.
- I can now talk in a meeting, used to not talk, or wait till last. Now I give my opinion, and everyone listens to me. I'm so proud of myself.
- Different techniques around creating a relationship in a 30 second spiel.
- Confidence, expanding social and professional networks, the ability to inform and promote information regarding mental health and services that are provided in our community
- I learnt how to be an active listener. Also, I learnt how to connect with people by engaging them in motivational interview and encourage them to talk more about the things that they want to talk about.
- Communication and how to be more approachable when meeting new people. Being more understanding of people's different needs and diversity of different backgrounds. Confidence building by sometimes being taken out of your comfort zone.
- How to approach unknown people and be safe.
- It helped with time management, conflict resolution and listening. Thinking on your feet and being flexible.
- The door knocking was a great experience, new skills of engaging anyone and being able to connect immediately with someone answering the door, as well being able to continue that connection.
- I have learnt to increase my listening skills and how to gently guide a discussion to allow people to feel confident in talking to me about their Mental Health conditions

Q3. What helped you to talk with householders about mental health and wellbeing?

- Understanding a person's perception of mental health and wellbeing; and learning their identifying background helps to make the topic of mental health and wellbeing approachable when it relates to their experiences.
- I had to push myself to ask questions as usually don't like to ask hard questions as none of my business, but I learnt to ask questions and go a bit deeper.
- Speaking the householder's language. If there was a problem asking whether the problem affected their mental health or wellbeing.
- The ACDC training and the Trainer was very good and helped me because I hadn't read the manual. Good knowledge was given and learnt. I had not talked about mental health and wellbeing before the project. Telling people its confidential gets their trust. Talking the same language with people helps, but some women won't talk or do the survey without checking with their husband, others more independent.
- My knowledge of MH services. How to gauge whether the householder was up to opening up.

- Having a supportive co-worker, a good line manager and a friendly, engaging personality.
- The connecting skill I learnt during my training and my genuine passion to engage with householders by actively listening to them and validating their worldview supported me to talk with householders.
- Being a part of an amazing team and having an even more confident partner to fulfill the role better always helps.
- Preparation and training.
- Background research and looking into the services available and so could talk about them. Reading local news and on the radio and keeping up to date with what was happening in the community.
- Being part of community health, having the experience, and knowledge demographically of the area, we live here and know the public health system and local system well, due to working many years. Over 5yrs experiences in an organisation partnering with key programs of the Local Health District area.
- First-hand knowledge of lived experience as well as working with Mental Health clients.

Q4 A. Do you think your knowledge of proactive outreach (community outreach) improved?

Q4 B. If yes, in what way?

- I feel more confident in solution focused techniques and have grown to understand more about stakeholders in the community, and the services/programs that support them.
- Every day I learnt, meeting lots of people. Don't give advice but tell people about the services e.g., aged care services. Then they can talk to and get the right information.
- Door knocking helps people. Some householders did not know about aged care services or NDIS. You can assist with a call to a service to make sure the householder was referred. The services on the brochure and magnet were useful.
- It was all new information that I had not heard before. It was good to help 2 people get aged care services.
- The consistency in discussions on a daily basis but mainly how to build trust in a short period of time to form a relationship that would allow the householder to open up.
- Most definitely! After initial hesitation and nervousness, it quickly became less daunting as the community slowly became aware of who we are and what we were doing. It became apparent that the community wanted to listen to what we had to say and assisted our confidence in promoting mental health support. I believe that essential perspectives, journeys and information were both gathered and passed on during the ACDC Project and without the project this would not have been made possible.
- My knowledge of proactive outreach improved after doing the ACDC project. First, the project provided me an opportunity to reach among households and ask them about 'what's working well and what's not working well' in their community. While doing this, I developed skills to talk with them confidently, respond to their queries respectfully, and drag them in conversation gradually by handing over power to them.
- I learnt so many different things from community members, even learnt about different services available in our community that I did not know off. Being able to take away new knowledge every day is such a bonus of this role.

- Gained more knowledge around assisting individuals to connect with relevant services, not general available services. ACDC's purpose was spot on for me to talk to people, the idea of taking the information of mental health to the door, before falling off the cliff scenario, not to wait for people to come to services after they have a social and emotional wellbeing challenges. People understood this well, can appreciate the effort. The project was also right timing, people were more isolated due to COVID-19 hit.
- I found out about more services and what the community needed and were worried about.
- I have learnt a lot more about programs in the community that are not widely advertised, unless working in that field.

Q4 C. If no, why not?

- No, as areas of participants and other services we know the area well and have lived & worked more than 40yrs.

Q5 A. Did the project give you a better understanding of your community?

Q5 B. If yes, in what way?

- Although I am aware of the cultural challenges involved in discussing mental health with people, I learnt more about the values people have and how they express those values.
- It increased my understanding of my community. I became aware of people and streets that were dangerous, saw locked gates and cameras on all the houses in one street. But people like to talk and to strangers, they are more respectful and welcoming. People are growing their own vegetables and look after their gardens.
- Learnt that older people are living alone and need services, others need help from Council because of the floods, others need financial support to attend and pay for health appointments.
- Got to work with people from other cultures and to speak to people from different cultures and learnt how they accept information. To speak quietly, as people want help with their lives. Lots of householders give you bottles of water.
- Understanding what the issues were, communicating options to householders, Seeing the different demographics and how they co locate
- The project highlighted areas of need, concern and positivity that I otherwise would not have been aware of. The collectiveness of people's thoughts and experiences showed that mental health does not discriminate and affects many people in many ways.
- I had an opportunity to understand that people want to share their experiences and issues in community through yarnning. They are respectful to people who really want to listen to them by connecting with them respectfully and culturally.
- This project certainly shone a big light on what our community lacks and needs most off. It gave me a better understanding of the diversity and hardships that community members faced no matter what colour, age, gender, working or not working etc. I learnt a lot about my community.
- Yes, I wouldn't know the community had such a large scale of theft, and anxiety issues, and large scale of isolation among older citizens.

- I feel like I understand the struggles people are going through and all the different factors affecting their mental health. It's like Pandora's box, the more you talked to people the more issues you heard.
- Yes definitely, now knowledgeable of the need of services for the community high needs.
- I can see that a lot more people are living with Mental Health conditions than what I thought would be. A lot of those people are also isolated and do not have knowledge of where to get help or just think they have to struggle and live with it

Q5 C. If no, why not?

No responses received.

Q6 A. What was helpful to you in attending the Community of Practice meetings?

- Having a team that regularly supports me, was vital to my learnings of the work but also to feel assured and confident in my role.
- People Connectors only focus on main problem for their own area. Sometimes we would agree on one solution. It was better to hear from others about project and door knocking.
- Discuss what we did and update information for past 2 weeks. Talking about any problem in the field, to share information and talk about an issue, like dogs.
- I liked the meetings as could talk about experiences even if not had experience myself. Listening and learning and was able to talk at the meetings which increased my confidence.
- It was like a debrief around what we were experiencing as well as it gave a measurement of where we were at with our individual project.
- It was great to hear from others and their journey's, learning from each other and feeling supported through the harder days.
- I had an opportunity to hear the experiences of people connectors working in other states/sites. I got chance to learn creative strategies to work with households from the other people connectors. Next, the Community of Practice meetings provided me a space to share my experiences, pleasures, and pains.
- Just learning about different areas in Aust and their issues in their communities was an interesting topic at most C.O.P meetings. Being able to also share a bit about our community as well. Also, the data that was shared and being able to talk about our achievements as well.
- Sharing stories, good & bad, challenges of the People Connectors of different regions.
- I liked that everyone was at different phases in the project. We could think about things we hadn't considered yet from those who started earlier, and others learnt from us. It helped with not feeling so isolated and so far away. I really appreciated the COP.
- Connection with the Care Team and others very important. A MUST!
- It was great to hear what other teams were doing and swap ideas for engagement. Living in a rural town it was also interesting to hear the stories from the cities.

Q6 B. *People Connectors who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people - What was helpful to you in attending the Aboriginal Workers Circle?*

- I was only able to attend two meetings, though I believe that this is essential to achieving more participation from our people. Every Mob is different, as is every community, learning different strategies, hearing the joy and also the frustrations and sadness from brothers and sisters is inspiring and assisted me in continuing my own journey and self-belief.
- Being able to sit and talk on a cultural level I felt was important as I feel like there are some issues that would only be understood on a cultural level rather than a general insight when meeting with non-indigenous.
- Connection of knowledge and it's important for reconciliation of the peoples.

Q7 A. *Has your experience as a People Connector influenced your future work/career choice?*

Q7 B. *If yes, in what way?*

- Working as a team.
- I'm going back to being a case manager, but it will be different, from my learning. I will treat people in a different way, will listen more and think about a person more broadly. A really good experience.
- I believe that I have gained much more confidence, as well as experience, to begin the path of following my dreams.
- The experience as a People Connector supported me to grow into a confident, proactive, and skilful professional.
- I communicate better with people from different industries. I'm not as shy as I once was when communicating. If the opportunity came around for a second round doing people connecting in a similar area, I would definitely like to do it again.
- Yes, because I had the opportunity of learning the community very closely and feels that I am better informed, and it's related to my current job. The project has helped us by providing vital data of gaps in mental health services for future service planning.
- I think it has influenced me to stay working in mental health and feel a connection to the community.
- Yes, for sure. We both working now as Mental Health Peer Workers, working in our community.

Q7 C. *If no, why not?*

- Although the People Connector role has not influenced my career or plans for future work it has given me great experience and wisdom in providing support, of which I will surely utilise in my personal and professional life.
- I will return to my case manager work so project very different, and none like it.
- I had a clear career path prior to the project, and it has just reinforced this.
- I am already working in NDIS/Mental Health.

The experience as a People Connector supported me to grow into a confident, proactive, and skilful professional.

People Connector in Questionnaire

