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# Road to Employment

## Interim report

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## Words and meanings

Co-design	People with experience are involved as staff or advisors in research or a project like Road to Employment
Community of Practice	Community of Practice are groups of different experts with a shared interest in disability inclusion. Together they aim to collaboratively make an impact in their industry.
Developmental evaluation	Setting up an evaluation within a project as a way of informing change while the project is delivered
DES	Disability Employment Services
EYDN	Enabled Youth Disability Network (previously Julia Farr Youth)
Evaluation	Research to find out what outcomes a project achieved and how they did it (process and activities)
Flinders University	Research team
Mainstream support	Public social support available to all people with and without disability, such as health, education, housing, home care, income support, employment services
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NDIS plan	Funding package allocated to about 10% of people with disability for specialist disability support need
JFA Purple Orange	Social Profit Organisation in South Australia, funder of this research project
Project	A group of people or organisations make a plan, dedicate resources to achieve one or more goals within a specified timeframe
Road to Employment	Road to Employment is a 3-year Department of Social Services (DSS) funded project that takes a lifecourse approach to address barriers to employment
Significant Change Study	A short written summary of a person's or workplace experience of being part of a project
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW
UNSW	UNSW Sydney (University of New South Wales)

## Short summary

Road to Employment is a 3-year Department of Social Services (DSS) funded project run by JFA Purple Orange to address barriers to employment. This interim report is about the project implementation, up until September 2021.

Road to Employment uses a lifecourse approach from childhood to adulthood to change work expectations about people living with disability. The premise of the project is that the way the community thinks about and perceives disability needs to change for people with disability to participate equally in education and work and reach their full potential. The project works with stakeholders – parents, teachers, students in school communities and employers and workplaces - to influence employment expectations.

The project is half-way through its implementation and has established all its activities with employers and most of its activities with school communities. The work with employers in the Community of Practice groups (finance and aged care), and the business inclusion mentoring have progressed well. The first outcomes of the work were evident through the establishment of a traineeship model in aged care, with first trainees starting in 2021, and the launch of an inclusion resource kit for small-medium finance businesses. The development and delivery of co-designed Raising the Bar workshops with audiences in schools (parents, teachers of pre-school aged and year 5, 6 and year 9 students) is well underway. The first workshops to parents of pre-school aged children commenced in May and received positive feedback. The remaining Raising the Bar workshops are being rolled out from October 2021 onwards.

**Key findings:** In the interim report we identify four aspects of the project that appear to be central and important to its success to date, namely: 1) relationships and stakeholder engagement; 2) co-design and leadership of people with disability and lived experience in all parts of the project (from design, implementation to leadership); 3) structured governance and management to maintain oversight and connection of the various Road to Employment activities; and 4) formative research and evaluation and reflective practice that are part of most activities undertaken by the project and staff.

**Future directions:** *First*, the project made strategic decisions to focus on a few industries. This has meant that Road to Employment could concentrate its limited resources, extend the scope of work in particular areas and learn from the process of working with employers in a Community of Practice model. The benefits of focusing on fewer industries mean that the project can capitalise on the progressive lessons and outcomes from the groups. *Second* the project could consider collecting and

aggregating good practice lessons from its co-design work and group moderation, a “how to do it well” guide, and make it accessible to a broader audience (as a fee-for-service or complementary resource). *Third*, consider sustainability and the project legacy, what activities should remain, can some be commercialised or expanded and how should these decisions be made (governance). *Fourth*, continue to connect the separate parts of the project, and invest in promotion and targeted marketing to showcase the outcomes and lessons from the project and influence change beyond the project funding cycle.

## Executive summary

This interim report is about the implementation of the Road to Employment project. The data for this report are from April 2020 to September 2021. The report was written by UNSW Sydney and Flinders University, Adelaide with input from the senior project staff who manage and deliver the project.

### Road to Employment

People with disability of all ages experience many barriers to finding and staying in work. Most people want to and can work when they receive the support and opportunities they need. The 3-year Road to Employment project uses a lifecourse approach from childhood to adulthood to change work expectations about people with disability. The premise of the project is that the way the community thinks about and perceives disability needs to change for people with disability to participate equally in education and work and reach their full potential. The project works with stakeholders in school communities, employers and workplaces to influence employment expectations.

**Raising the Bar Workshops.** Co-designed workshop materials and content are developed for five different audiences: parents, teachers, and young people at key points in their education and lives. Workshops are delivered to parents of pre-school aged children to raise the expectations about pre-schoolers participating in mainstream schools and classrooms. The first workshops to parents of pre-schoolers have been delivered. The workshops for year 5 and 6 and year 9 students, their parents and teachers raise expectations about future employment. A mentoring program for year 9 high-school students will also be developed to connect young people living with disability to training and job opportunities as they transition out of school. Road to Employment will deliver several workshops to the different target groups.

**Employers and workplaces.** Road to Employment established two industry-based Communities of Practice in finance and accounting, and in the aged care industry. These groups of people with lived experience, employers and project staff meet regularly to drive change in their industry, workplaces and organisations. The goal of the Community of Practice groups is to increase the capacity of employers to address barriers in their work practices and to create work opportunities and inclusive cultures. Employers in the Communities of Practice also have access to tailored business mentoring from JFA Purple Orange. Four employers and organisations have participated in disability inclusive mentoring and training.

## **Impact of Road to Employment to date**

Road to Employment is half-way through the project. All planned project activities are established. The activities with employers and school communities are progressing. Key relationships with partners and stakeholders have been identified and strengthened since the project establishment. The first impacts on employment opportunities are emerging for people with disability, arising from the activities with employers in the mentoring and the Communities of Practice. Employers are making changes to their recruitment practices and have employed people living with disability. Employers in each sector (aged care and finance) are working collaboratively to address employment barriers and build the awareness and confidence of employers. The Raising the Bar workshops are changing parent expectations.

People living with disability are central to the governance and leadership of the project. For example, people with disability co-chair the Community of Practice groups and parents with lived experience are involved in the design and delivery of the Raising the Bar workshops. Staff living with disability take on leadership roles in the projects' governance, delivery of workshops and other activities. The co-design approach and leadership of people living with disability are models of good practice and how to make changes. The external organisations that the project works with learn from participating in these good practices.

## **Important parts of Road to Employment**

Four aspects of the project are critical to its success, ongoing implementation and impact: relationships and stakeholder engagement; co-design and leadership of people with disability; structured governance and management; and formative research.

### ***1. Relationships and stakeholder engagement***

The activities with school communities and with employers rely on relationships. Building on existing relationships, establishing new ones and maintaining relationships has meant that Road to Employment can continue to expand, deliver its objectives and expand its services by engaging external partners.

The Community of Practice groups of experts with a shared interest in disability inclusion come together to collaboratively make an impact in their industry. Relationships have been important to identify relevant partners and external funding, which facilitated this component of the project to be effective. Inclusive facilitation, that prioritises the voices of people with disability and creates safe spaces for interactions, has been essential to maintain the cohesion and focus of the groups. Good working relationships with employers in the Community of Practice have



facilitated the project to recruit and support businesses through the disability inclusion mentoring.

The impact of the Raising the Bar workshops has relied on engagement from school leaders and interest from stakeholders such as parents, teachers and students to take part in workshops and mentoring. Maintaining and managing relationships has been a central part of the co-design process where sometimes large groups of up to 14 people with lived experience and from different professional backgrounds work together to design cohesive workshop materials. The Raising the Bar co-design group are investigating how to increase the impact of the workshops in the future, reach more parents and teachers and continue aspects of the workshops that are sustainable for the future.

## ***2. Co-design and leadership of people with disability***

Community of Practice groups and the Raising the Bar workshops are built on the principles of co-design and leadership of people with disability. The Road to Employment project employs staff living with disability and creates opportunities for leadership of people with disability across its management and governance groups. Maintaining the input and voices of parents, teachers, young people and project staff with disability has ensured that the project and its activities remain aligned with their objectives. Community stakeholders perceived that the co-design and leadership of people with disability added to the credibility and effectiveness of Road to Employment.

## ***3. Structured governance and management***

The project has a Steering Committee that provides advice to the project. It also has an internal project team that meets fortnightly and reports to the CEO quarterly. The team engages all staff connected to the project. This includes the Enabled Youth Disability Network who are involved in co-designing the Raising the Bar Workshops and delivering the mentoring program in schools.

Maintaining central lines of communication within and across the different parts of the project has been critical to the project's success. The project management and governance structures have connected the individual parts of the project to the whole; stakeholders feel informed and can have meaningful input; the project is linked to external resources or funding where relevant; and activities are linked to other Purple Orange programs to avoid duplication or unintended overlap (e.g., school mentoring for year 9 students).

#### **4. Formative research**

Research is an important part of Road to Employment. Together, JFA Purple Orange and the stakeholders are delivering the project, while they and the researchers document and learn from changes to the processes and stories of significant change. This formative research means that future projects can learn from the process and outcomes of this project.

##### **Future directions**

The project could consider collecting and aggregating good practice lessons from its co-design work and group moderation - how to do it well, and make it accessible to a broader audience.

It could consider how to address sustainability and the project legacy. Questions include what activities should remain, can some activities be commercialised or expanded and how should these decisions be made (governance).

The project will need to continue to connect the separate parts of the project, and invest in promotion and targeted marketing to showcase the outcomes and lessons from the project and influence change beyond the project funding cycle.

Strengthening the project governance and management processes is important in the second half of the project. Key elements will be to ensure stakeholders maintain a sense of the whole and are informed about the various activities; to inform the Steering Committee so that it can advise and seek opportunities for sustaining the activities (e.g. commercialise aspects of the project, seek new funding and partnerships); and to make decisions about the legacy of the project and how these will be shared and made accessible for a broader public and future similar projects (workshop content, guide to implementing co-design workshops).

##### **Research team and project website**

The research is conducted by researchers at UNSW Sydney and Flinders University, Adelaide in partnership with the team at JFA Purple Orange who are implementing the project. For more information about the research team and project please visit the website: [www.arts.unsw.edu.au/sprc/our-projects/road-employment-evaluation](http://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/sprc/our-projects/road-employment-evaluation)

# 1 Road to Employment

## Structure of the report

This interim report presents findings about the implementation of the Road to Employment project in its second year; it discusses what Road to Employment is (Section 1) and how it is achieving its goals (Section 2); and outlines questions about the possible challenges and how they can be addressed (Section 3). Section 4 summarises the research framework and methods to evaluate Road to Employment. The appendix contains summaries of the project activities and data that support the findings in this report.

## The project

Road to Employment is a 3-year Department of Social Services (DSS) funded project that takes a lifecourse approach to address barriers to employment. It commenced in April 2020. The project recognises that attitudes towards and of people with disability can have influence during childhood and adulthood. Action to support workforce participation can start with supporters during childhood and extend to support in workplaces during high school and adulthood to influence long term change. Road to Employment applies several processes to increase employment opportunities, improve employment practices, and influence work expectations for people with disability.

Road to Employment project				
Activities with employers		Activities with schools		
Changing employment expectations with employers and workplaces ↓		Changing employment expectations in schools and with families ↓		
Community of Practice aged care	Business mentoring to aged care employers	Raising the Bar co-design group ↓		
Community of Practice finance	Business mentoring to finance and accounting companies	Working party parents of pre-school aged children ↓	Working party year 5 & 6 parents, teachers ↓	Working party year 9 parents, teachers ↓
Community of Practice – future possibility		Deliver Raising the Bar co-designed workshops to parents, teachers and students in schools		
		Year 9 student mentoring program		

### **Community of Practice model and business mentoring to employers**

The project works with employers in Communities of Practice and business mentoring. The goal is to influence change in the sectors of finance and accounting and aged care to increase employer capacity to support the employment of people with disability. Community of Practice members can receive one-on-one support, modelled on the Business Inclusion and Diversity Services program designed by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. The business mentoring provides advice and recommendations to the organisation about changes to make their workplace more inclusive of people living with disability.

### **Changing attitudes and expectations about future employment**

The project works with school communities to deliver workshops to families, teachers, and young people at key points in their lives. The goal is to raise employment expectations and increase awareness of employment pathways by supporters and people with disability involved in decisions about work. The project is establishing a mentoring program to support individual year 9 students as they explore their employment options. It is considering how to link students with employers for internships, work experience and potentially casual work and work placements.

**Raising the Bar workshops.** Co-designed workshop materials and content is developed for five different audiences

- Parents of pre-school aged children
- Year 5 and 6 students
- Year 9 students
- parents and teachers of year 6 students
- parents and teachers of year 9 school students.

**A student mentoring program** will be co-designed, developed and delivered to Year 9 students in up to four schools. The aim of the mentoring activities is to inspire students, and to think about their interests and strengths, their future employment goals, and make plans how to achieve them. The Enabled Youth Disability Network (EYDN) will provide fortnightly group mentoring sessions for students living with disability. The people with disability who are mentors will connect with employers involved in the capacity-building program, supporting young people to explore their goals and guiding them towards experiences of employment.

### **Project governance – staff, management group and Steering Committee**

The project has five staff members involved across the industry and school parts of the initiative. They have expertise and lived experience in disability employment and education. During the implementation phase the project established an internal project team that involves all staff on the project and senior leaders from JFA Purple Orange. This group is responsible for the day to day project decisions and communication to the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee originally met quarterly and now bi-annually. The group includes about 15 members. The Committee has diversity and representation from high policy levels, advocacy, and employment services. It includes a government representative of the SA Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family businesses; a representative of the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Disability Royal Commission, and representatives from employment services and national employer associations; as well as members of the Purple Orange team. Some members are people with disability. The Committee's priority for Road to Employment is to focus on attitudinal and systemic change by identifying change processes that are effective in schools, workplaces and across industries.

### **Project outcomes**

The intended outcomes from the project are to change expectations about the employment of people with disability, starting with the decisions parents make about inclusive education for their pre-schoolers, through the expectations of students and people with disability and employers. In the long term beyond the project, increases in the number of people with disability employed may be observed. The project logic, the rationale underlying Road to Employment are in Section 5 Research Design.

## 2 Impact of the project

This report is about the project from April 2020 to September 2021. The planned project activities have now all been established. Activities with employers have progressed and the impact on employment opportunities are emerging for people with disability. The co-design activities in schools are well underway. One of the five Raising the Bar workshop modules is fully developed. The first two workshops to parents of pre-school children were positive. Details about the activities are in Section 3. A summary of the impact is below.

### Impact on employer expectations

The project has completed most of its design phase with employers and the established two **Community of Practice (COP)** groups. Each Community of Practice has determined a goal for the group that aligns with the project objective to change expectations and create employment opportunities.

The **Finance Community of Practice** group developed a disability inclusion resource kit for small to medium size employers and launched the kit at an educational event in October 2021. The event was hosted by the Chartered Accountants of Australia and New Zealand (CAANZ) and CPA Australia. These two professional bodies commonly do not host events together. The launch was recognised as a significant achievement for the project to have secured the interest, commitment and support of both industry bodies. It was also a strong message to the sector on the importance of inclusion in the workplace.

The **Aged Care Community of Practice** focused on the co-design of a group traineeship model that is supporting five aged care providers to employ and train eight aged care trainees living with disability. The goal of the traineeship project is to create a demonstration model than highlights the benefits for the industry of employing people with diverse strengths and abilities. The higher-level goal of the model is to test, refine and promote it as a viable recruitment strategy for the aged care sector, and possibly other industries.

The co-design process was essential to developing the group traineeship model. Through the discussions each aged care employer was engaged in identifying and addressing the barriers to employment for their particular organisation. Changes were made to existing recruitment processes and pre-employment medical requirements, the design and implementation of procedures and processes, and the availability of supervision and support. The changes reflected the commitment to participate in the traineeship program and hire a trainee with disability.

Resourcing for this intensive project activity, the development of the group traineeship program for the aged care sector and assistance to the five aged care providers, was independently funded through a grant in partnership with EQUALS from the Department of Innovation and Skills SA. The additional funding meant the project team could significantly increase their support to this group to address the changes to employment practices required. Stakeholders considered it a significant achievement for Road to Employment to recruit and engage five aged care providers who committed to trialling and implementing the traineeship model.

Previous research demonstrates that knowing people with disability in the workplace is key to changing workplace practices and culture. When people have workplace contact with people with disability, they are more likely to understand the benefits of a diverse workplace and know how to make reasonable adjustments. It is expected that at least some of the trainees in the aged care group will have permanent employment from completing their certificate and training and that employers will take on further trainees. The objective of the group is to change the culture and work practices of their organisations, to the point where, employing people living with disability is understood and practised as business as usual.

The Road to Employment project has delivered **business mentoring** to four organisations, providing advice and resources, training and advice to staff and senior management. Employers report they are becoming more disability inclusive and aware. They said they are improving their internal organisational practices, are feeling more confident about employing people living with disability, and have interviewed people with disability for new positions.

As the project is evolving it is identifying new avenues for delivering its objectives. The activities with school communities highlighted the possibility and need to engage with stakeholders and policy makers in the education sector. The project was exploring how to engage key stakeholders who would form an Education Community of Practice. The aim of the group will be to promote the employment of staff and teachers living with disability in South Australian schools.

### **Impact on student and parent expectations**

The Raising the Bar **workshop module for parents of pre-school children** has been fully developed and delivered two times. Parents of pre-school aged children who participated in the workshop provided mostly positive feedback. They reported their knowledge of inclusive schooling and education principles had improved a lot and that they were going to make changes and seek alternative schooling for their child, as a result of taking part in the workshop.

The remaining Raising the Bar modules to parents, teachers and students of primary and high school cohorts will be piloted in late 2021 and early 2022.

The mentoring for year 9 high-school students was re-organised to align with other JFA Purple Orange activities in schools. In the second half of the project, the activities to influence employment expectations in schools and with supporters will focus to deliver the workshops up to five times and implement the mentoring to high school students in up to three schools.



## 3 Effective processes

This section looks at the project activities and processes to connect people with disability to employment opportunities and change expectations and practices within school communities and parents. Details about each part of the project are in the Appendix.

### 3.1 Communities of Practice and businesses mentoring

The activities with employers aim to raise employment expectations, change employment practices, create inclusive workplaces and cultures, and create employment opportunities for people with disability and employers.

The two Community of Practice groups are in finance and aged care. Details are in the Appendix. It took between 5 and 9 months to identify all stakeholders and fully form the two Community of Practice groups. Their activities gained momentum after a further 6 months, once the groups and relationships were formed and they agreed on their purpose and planned actions for the project. The groups chose different directions through their process of narrowing down, defining and implementing their goals.

A central feature of the Community of Practice groups is that people with disability are participants and have leadership roles. The participation and leadership of people with disability ensured that the activities of the Community of Practice in the workforce and industry remained informed by lived experience, and that priorities for action were driven by people's perspectives from their lived experience.

Engaging participants in the groups depended on strong facilitation so that the views of the participants could inform the goals. Self-directed action and goal setting sustained participant interest and continued investment in the project. Not all participants who were initially engaged remained involved. Some participants in the aged care group left during the year, perhaps because they found the vision of the group too challenging. Other factors that impacted on continued participation and engagement was a clearly defined action and purpose of the group; and supporting members to remain invested to drive change.

The achievements of the Community of Practice groups have exceeded in expectations. Diverse representation of stakeholders in the Community of Practice groups and project Steering Committee – with members represented from industry, lived experience, policy and advocacy (often representing more than one perspective simultaneously) – has contributed to the project success. The project's ability to identify and link in with key partners and resources (training, external funding, knowhow) to assist in the development and implementation of the traineeship

program and resource kit have been essential. Connecting to resources and knowledge within the groups and externally meant they could scale up their vision beyond the individual participants.

Road to Employment includes a range of activities to achieve its objectives, which the employers benefited from. In addition to the Community of Practice, at least several finance and aged care employers chose to engage in the personalised mentoring and training in disability inclusion offered by Road to Employment. Once these employers defined the barriers they wanted to tackle, such as adapting physical parts of the building, the ongoing support from Road to Employment meant that they could act on their commitment to change. Stakeholders reported that some changes required longer internal processes, approvals, committing resources to make the changes. As part of the business mentoring, Purple Orange followed up and provided advice regularly, which according to the interviews made a difference enacting on the change process.

The Community of Practice and business mentoring processes changed some employment practices. In the interview and case study data employers reported adapting hiring practices, building access, considering the recruitment of trainees and linking to disability internship programs for university graduates. Stakeholders were hopeful that employing and working with people with disability in the workplace was likely to have a lasting impact on the work culture in the participating organisations more widely, influence inclusion and diversity attitudes and practices.

### **3.2 Activities with parents, teachers and students**

The Raising the Bar school project activity aims to set and reinforce high employment expectations at key points throughout the lives of people with disability and influence the attitudes of people who support them such as parents and teachers. Road to Employment builds from another successful JFA Purple Orange project, the Inclusive School Communities Project. The lifecycle approach is novel as few employment projects have applied this concept in practice. It is also backed by policy and the academic literature (Meltzer et al., 2016; NDIA, 2019; Stokes, Turnbull, & Wyn, 2013).

The Raising the Bar workshops have the potential to make a lasting impact on employment expectations of people who support children and students as they navigate education and transition out of school into adult life. An important feature of the Raising the Bar approach is that all decisions and material are developed through a rigorous co-design process that involves people with lived experience from diverse perspectives – parents of children with disability, teachers with experience in segregate and inclusive settings, young person with disability and other stakeholders.

Four of the Raising the Bar workshops are still under development. One module has been completed and delivered two workshops to parents of pre-school aged children. Participants' written feedback was positive. Parents said they were going to reconsider their child's education options and imagined a different future for their child. They felt moved by the lived experience input and liked that the workshop was co-presented by persons with lived experience. It appears that lived experience input and leadership contribute credibility to the workshops and facilitate emotional connection.

A strength of the Raising the Bar approach is that it is continuously being tested, questioned, reflected and refined. This is true for the workshop content itself, using feedback from the target groups, as well as the co-design group reviewing engagement (recruitment) strategies for parents or teachers, or thinking about alternative ways (design and format) of delivering the content to reach more families. Input from a diverse range of stakeholders with different lived experience is a helpful component in this process. On the flipside this strength of the process, working with relatively large groups (up to 15 co-design members) with diverse perspectives also presents a challenge.

The lessons from the Raising the Bar workshop co-design process to date has been that to do co-design work requires significant time, resources and dedicated inclusive facilitation to manage stakeholder relationships, engagement, dynamics in the group, create a safe respectful space and ensure that members feel supported and are heard and listened to, and everyone's input is valued.

Another lesson for Raising the Bar is to consider taking the modules into different formats – fully or partly online, also creating accessible video summaries of workshops. It was suggested that different formats would help in the engagement and recruitment of audiences and make the workshops accessible to parents and teachers who live in regional areas or are not able to attend in person.

### **3.3 Project governance**

The Road to Employment project has two governance and management groups. The Steering Committee and a recently added internal project group.

During the implementation phase of Road to Employment, the project leader and the project team established an internal project group. The internal project group meets fortnightly and involves all staff on the project and senior leaders. The group is responsible for the day-to-day project implementation and reporting of major decisions to the JFA Purple Orange CEO and the Steering Committee. This function of the group ensures that the parts of the project are consistent with the project as a whole, communication across the team is facilitated, and input and leadership from

staff living with disability is central, achievements and challenges are communicated and resolved quickly, and project managers are accountable to JFA Purple Orange.

Adding a second level of governance structure to the project is an effective process. It ensures that the project, which is delivering and overseeing many components, across diverse areas – schools, working with employers, co-design – maintains essential processes like communication and information sharing, problem-solving and reflection, input and leadership with lived experience across all its activities at a central level.

The project Steering Committee, which originally met quarterly, meets bi-annually and has transformed into an advisory group. This change occurred after the project established most activities and formed the co-design groups. This shift has also been possible and supported because the Community of Practice groups and Raising the Bar groups maintain decision-making functions at that ground level to ensure groups have ownership of the process and outcomes.

### **3.4 Co-design**

The Community of Practice groups and the Raising the Bar workshops are built on the principles of co-design and leadership of people with disability. The Road to Employment project employs staff living with disability and creates opportunities for leadership of people with disability across its management and governance groups. Maintaining the input and voices of parents, teachers, young people and project staff with disability has ensured that the project and its activities remain aligned with their objectives. Community stakeholders perceived that the co-design and leadership of people with disability added to the credibility and effectiveness of Road to Employment.

Relationships and an interest in disability inclusion are critical to the success of the project. Engaging and keeping stakeholders committed to activities in the Community of Practice groups; project governance; employers in the business mentoring program; parents, teachers and students involved in co-design of workshop material, delivery and participation in workshops are critical for the projects ongoing impact. Co-design and leadership of people with disability and lived experience are present in all project activities and governance groups. Because co-design is such a central process, management and engagement of groups was described as a critical success factor.

## 4 Future directions

This section raises considerations for the ongoing implementation and strengthening of Road to Employment. The questions are based on the review of project documentation and meeting minutes, observations of project activities, interviews, case studies, and focus groups with a range of stakeholders in the project. The considerations are intended to highlight strengths and limitations and to promote reflective practice that could assist in the project's ongoing implementation, sustainability and legacy.

### 4.1 Co-design and inclusive facilitation

Stakeholders suggested that Road to Employment was breaking ground in the way it facilitated the co-design groups (see Section 6.6). The project invests into the development of good practice strategies for managing inclusive co-design. Documenting the extensive knowledge of the project to date would fulfill two aims. It could be later used internally to up-skill staff across JFA Purple Orange that regularly provide similar co-design activities across different projects. Secondly it could be marketed as a (commercial) service for organisations or employers that wish to undertake effective and safe co-design but do not necessarily have the know-how to do it well. Eventually, the co-design know-how could become part of the project legacy and contribution to good practice for other capacity building organisations.

### 4.2 Concentrating resources and capitalising on learnings

The Road to Employment project has made strategic decisions to focus on a small number of industries in the Community of Practice model rather than continuing to expand its work in new industries and partners. This approach has meant that Road to Employment could concentrate its limited resources, extend the scope of work with existing Community of Practice groups, learn from the process and adapt the model where required. The benefit of focusing on fewer industries was to capitalise on the lessons and outcomes over time from the existing COP industry groups.

### 4.3 Connecting the individual parts and promotion

In the evaluation stakeholders suggested that they would like more connection and sharing of knowledge, resources and impact across the different project activities. This was seen as a way of learning from each other but also feeling part of something bigger. The project leaders have started sharing highlight updates with some groups and this practice could be expanded.

Road to Employment is using a range of media and marketing to promote their activities and increase the impact of their work. These include videos, social media, news articles and event launches to share the impact and developments of their work. Stakeholders suggested that in the future the project should continue investing in targeted marketing campaigns and promotion on social media to promote the stories of change from the traineeship model and inspire other young people, families and employers to seek out similar opportunities.

A central point was that the sharing of success stories, the aged care traineeship model, could occur across a range of media to influence employment expectations more extensively within these industries and in other industries or on a broader scale.

#### **4.4 Project governance**

The advisory role of the Steering Committee may open opportunities to reflect on the governance of the project and the Committee's role guiding the project into the future, especially about questions of sustainability and legacy. The project's sustainability, in for example, possibilities of commercialising aspects of the project (e.g., accessibility assessment for buildings, facilitation of co-design workshops), applying for new funding and partnering with new organisations – are important questions to be explored in the next phase of Road to Employment. The Steering Committee could also be involved in decisions about the project's legacy, what knowledge, resources and impact does Road to Employment want to be known for and how should these be made available to the broader public.

In the future the Steering Committee could contribute leadership in negotiation and guidance of project stakeholders when divergent views or priorities for the project's future direction arise. One example of this could be about expanding and starting new community of practice groups, over consolidation of existing project groups and processes.

## 5 Research design

### Research approach and questions

The SPRC and Flinders University research team are undertaking the developmental evaluation of Road to Employment from September 2020 until March 2023.

The key research questions for this evaluation are:

**1. What effect did the projects have on people with disability seeking to be employed and employment opportunities?**

- extent to which the project achieves the intended outcomes (project logic)
- extent to which the project meet the grant outcome measures
- impact on workplaces, industries, teachers, parents, young people and adults with disability

**2. What processes were effective for the projects to connect people to employment opportunities and to improve the expectations and practices of employers, schools, families and communities to employ people with disability: school-based workshops, mentoring, one to one support, communities of practice?**

- extent of and how the project built successful partnerships
- impact of codesign and inclusive steering group on the project
- impact on the people from participating in the codesign
- how the project influences other workplaces and professionals
- lessons learnt and good practice

**3. What barriers, challenges and opportunities were evident, resolved and remain in the project process and how might these contribute to better ways of working with people with disability, families, teachers, schools and employers to increase employment opportunities?**

- unintended benefits or drawbacks of the project to participants, workplaces and professionals
- strengths and weaknesses of the approach taken to build the capacity of employers, organisations, students, families and schools
- what could be done differently

**Developmental evaluation** is useful when projects such as these are breaking new ground with novel approaches (Patton, 2010). The approach is to incorporate the evaluation within the project, as a way of informing change during the project. One of its features is to use the existing information and processes of the project as the evaluation data, so as not to impose additional burden and activities on the project participants. This approach means that we will draw from the project, our research

knowledge and iterative knowledge from the evaluation as it progresses to contribute to project improvement during the life of the evaluation. This method includes providing opportunities to share and reflect on learning with the aim of refining elements of the project.

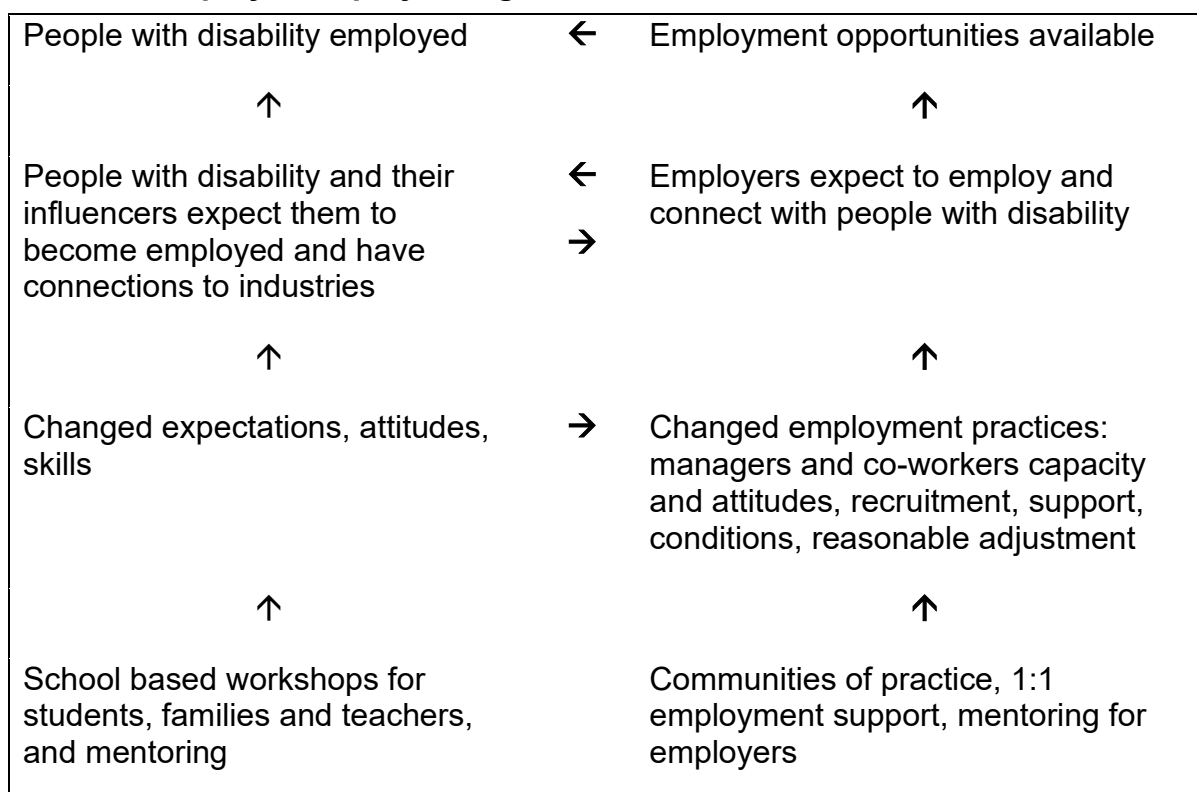
**Co-design** occurs during the first part of the evaluation. The co-design process improves the evaluation approach and methods. The co-design includes collaboration between the evaluators and people from JFA Purple Orange, the Steering Committee and the Communities of Practice, including people with disability and lived experience (parents with children with disability) in all groups.

## Methods, questions and rationale

The evaluation uses a mixed method design. Data is collected by the research team and members of the Road to Employment project. The aim of the research is to assess the processes and impact of the project. The main data sources include interviews with one or two stakeholders, small group discussions (up to 5 stakeholders), case studies of the project activities and governance structure, observation of co-design group activities, and review of program documentation.

The methods have been developed to reflect the project logic below.

### Road to Employment project logic





## Reporting and publishing

The evaluation findings and reports are made publicly available throughout the research period. The Final Road to Employment Evaluation report is planned for March 2023. The research team will also publish evaluation findings in academic journals to add to the international evidence base and quality assurance via peer review.

All our publications relating to the Road to Employment project are on the university website: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/arts-design-architecture/our-research/research-centres-institutes/social-policy-research-centre/our-projects/road-employment-evaluation>

## 6 Appendix: Summaries of project activity

### Part A Raising employment expectations, practices and creating opportunities for employers and people with disability.

#### 6.1 Community of Practice (COP) Aged Care

At the beginning, the aged care community of practice group identified a clear objective, to develop and implement a traineeship program. Working towards a self-determined and innovative goal, kept members motivated and provided a sense of accomplishment.

It feels like we're at that point now where we need to sort of start to see some action and things coming to reality, I think we're on track for that. ...We just want to move forward with this [traineeship] and I am so happy about that.  
(Aged Care COP stakeholder)

Resourcing for this intensive project activity was independently sought in partnership with EQUALS, via a grant from the Department of Innovation and Skills (under a Training Priority List). The additional funding meant that the project team could significantly increase their support by hosting workshops and providing individual support to each provider.

Stakeholders considered it a great achievement that the project recruited five employers in the aged care sector and overcame initial challenges like COVID. A more significant barrier for the project was working with stakeholders to overcome the barriers for employers in taking on trainees living with disability. Employers needed to understand the impact on staff time and their stretched resources, the impact on residents and barriers like the use of medicals to assess suitability to the role. Overall, ten aged care providers expressed interest in the project and five pulled out due to these barriers.

Keeping a large group engaged and committed required leadership, skilled facilitation and a central point of organisation.

There's a lot of great things that we can do and want to do as an industry, but what makes it hard for us is that there's never a central point, someone who is bringing us together. (Aged Care COP stakeholder)

Another key success factor was the collaborative partnership nurtured through the community of practice that allowed the aged care providers, Disability Employment Services (DES) providers, Barkuma and Maxima and the Registered Training

Organisation, EQUALS International, to work with JFA Purple Orange in developing aspects of the traineeship. Each partner brought a different perspective and allowed for the development of a workable model that addressed the barriers for employers.

Importantly the group was co-chaired by the CEO and RN of an aged care provider living with disability. Facilitators ensured it was a safe space for members to voice concerns and questions, myths about disability inclusion were carefully debunked. People with lived experience contributed to breaking down stereotypes and identifying relevant and meaningful goals for the group to pursue. Aged care employers with experience of inclusion helped to raise employment expectations by sharing their real life experiences of employing people living with disability in their organisations.

### ***Impact to date***

The aged care group have successfully co-designed and developed a traineeship program. Five aged care providers have committed to employing eight trainees. The trainees have been recruited and commenced training in October 2021. Under the group traineeship program, trainees are completing a Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing).

It is hoped that the group environment will mean that trainees connect and provide each other with peer support, plus feel part of a bigger undertaking. The support predominantly being provided by Purple Orange is in assisting organisations to become more comfortable with disability and to thinking more flexibly in the workplace to accommodate different approaches to recruitment and reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

When an employer makes the effort to customise for people with specific disabilities, we see huge success, and it opens up opportunities for people to grow and for employers to be exposed and see the great success. (Aged care COP stakeholder).

The traineeship program is seen an innovative way of bringing diversity into the aged care workforce. Group members hope this pathway can be adopted and promoted as a viable recruitment strategy for the industry more broadly.

### ***Lessons for the future***

The project is planning to promote the activities of the group and the traineeship program through social media and targeted marketing campaigns to the Aged Care sector to reach a wider audience of people, families and future employers. It was further suggested to invest in Champions with lived experience to become involved in the future promotion of the traineeship program.

There is a real opportunity for us, once we get some trainees on the ground, to really promote the heck out of it. I reckon there's going to be really lots of great stuff that we're going to be able to put out there. (Aged care COP stakeholder).

Members also identified a need to share resources and ideas across the different community of practice groups and the RTE project as a whole.

## 6.2 Community of Practice (COP) Finance

The Finance group consists of employees and leaders representing eight accounting firms and two industry bodies, the Chartered Accountants of Australia and New Zealand (CAANZ) and CPA Australia, as well as project staff and interns. The CAANZ had an existing interest group on diversity and inclusion however without a disability focus.

The Finance community of practice has concentrated on raising the profile of people with disability in the accounting profession. A second objective has been to develop a resource kit for employers to facilitate recruitment, retention and inclusion of people with disability and create inclusive workplaces.

We're looking at that shift in diversity and inclusion, we are changing it from, "This is a special project that you have to work on," to, "This is part of your normal daily practice and here's how you can do it better." I think that's an important shift. (Finance COP stakeholder).

Members used the knowledge and experience in the group to benefit their own organisations and workplaces. Three members of the group used the opportunity to take part in Business mentoring program being offered as part of the project. Members shared their experiences around making changes to their recruitment practices.

The finance COP group created a forum to look at employment opportunities more broadly. They identified the need to connect to the university sector and recruited to the group a representative from Adelaide University. As part of these discussions the group looked at opportunities that could be created through the Achiever program. The Achiever program is a paid intern placement for graduates, the recruitment process is highly competitive and attracts high quality candidates who often find the internship opportunity leads to employment.

Supported by the Finance Community of Practice, CAANZ trialled changes to the Achiever program and offered an alternative recruitment strategy for candidates in South Australia to improve access for people living with disability. The changes made were possibly applied too late in the process to attract candidates in the 2021

recruitment round. However, though the influence of the group, exploring further changes to the Achiever program and providing employment opportunities to people living with disability remains an important priority for 2022.

Codesign and leadership from people with lived experience, also diversity in representation, having senior leaders from key organisations on board, were important factors for the groups' success. They added credibility, leadership and momentum to the group and achieving its identified actions.

JFA Purple Orange played a central role in facilitating and coordinating the group and following through on actions. In addition, members of the group were linked to other support for businesses provided as part of the project. At least two accounting firms received personalised mentoring, training and support in disability inclusion through the Business mentoring activity.

### ***Impact to date***

The two finance industry bodies, CAANZ and CPA Australia, do not commonly work on the same project together. Engaging the two industry players in developing and launching the resource kit was considered a great achievement of the Road to Employment project.

The resource kit, to develop a more diverse workforce and create more inclusive recruitment practices, and corresponding educational event launch are designed to raise awareness and support employers were both initiated by the Finance COP. The resource kit was designed with the view to support smaller businesses but has relevance for larger employers.

It's a collection of information that's going to help [firms] to navigate that situation. It is those smaller practices, they need the most help, because they don't have a HR person. They don't have a diversity and inclusion officer. So, anything we can do to make their life a little bit easier, I think will be really good. (Finance COP stakeholder)

Stakeholders hoped that the resource kit and its promotion will continue making an impact beyond the project life, creating opportunities for more inclusive employment in the local industry, possibly also on a national level.

### ***Lessons for the future***

For the sector, stakeholders identified a need to continuously review processes, as new technologies emerged, new possibilities and barriers emerged too. Fostering Champions with lived experience in organisations, who can advocate for change, was seen as another way of promoting visibility and inclusion.

For the RTE project, stakeholders wanted greater promotion and sharing of success stories within and beyond the project.

The Finance community of practice had been established as part of a previous Purple Orange project. The group has been working together for almost 2 years. Some members questioned the sustainability of the group. Without another clearly identified goal, interest and commitment in the group might wane.

### **6.3 Education Community of Practice**

Together with stakeholders in schools, RTE have identified the need for an Education Community of Practice. The project was in the early stages of exploring this option for the future. The aim of the group would be to encourage the employment of people living with disability in SA schools. A main challenge in the beginning was to identify and establish relationships with key stakeholders in Education policy and planning.

#### ***Lesson for future***

Relationships are critical for the success of the project. It takes time, resources and 'knowing people' (existing relationships) to identify and establish new relationships.

### **6.4 Disability inclusive mentoring for businesses**

The project is offering a suite of tailored disability inclusion services to businesses initially modelled on the *Business Inclusion and Diversity Services* scheme of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. Mentoring individual companies in disability inclusion is part of the original Road to Employment project plan.

The primary goal of the Purple Orange Business Mentoring is for businesses to become disability confident and to customise their protocols and practices to improve accessibility. This may include

- quarterly mentoring meetings
- assessment of physical spaces, accessibility report
- audit and refinement of existing disability action plan
- cultural and disability awareness training to management or staff
- review of recruitment processes, protocols, and induction process
- linking the organisation other relevant programs
- provision of resources, factsheets, videos.

The ultimate objective of the mentoring to businesses is to educate, raise awareness and promote change from within, so that companies can initiate strategies to be

welcoming, inclusive and accessible. There is an emphasis on employment and supporting businesses to make changes to their recruitment practices. Businesses are advised on how they can make their recruitment practices more inclusive and take on strategies for targeted employment.

To date, Road to Employment has delivered tailored mentoring to at least three companies. All three companies were identified and recruited through the community of practice groups. Working closely with firms in the community of practice model meant that RTE could promote their tailored support and for businesses to identify an interest in this offering. The link between different project components and building trusting relationships is a strength of the RTE model.

Stakeholders in the interviews reported that bringing in lived experience, staff and facilitators with disability presenting and delivering trainings, conducting assessments, was essential and added further 'credibility' to the program.

I tend to listen to people with lived experience with a lot more credibility than those that don't, to be perfectly blunt. (Stakeholder in Business mentoring)

Having senior leadership involved and committed to the implementation of disability inclusive practices and changes appears to be an important factor influencing the extent of changes undertaken and how much that 'culture shift' filters through to other levels of the business.

### ***Impact to date***

As a result of the RTE business mentoring several companies reported adjusting their recruitment material and processes, for example, changing interview questions or clearly inviting people with diverse needs to apply in their ads.

One business that has been involved extensively and undergone significant review and changes to their physical environment, policies and procedures, support practices for staff and received trainings to management, described the changes that occurred as a 'culture shift' that had filtered through the organisation.

It's not a big clunky change that everybody knows about it, like now, inclusion is simply part of our fabric; our DNA if you like. These kinds of changes have just been made to our main business practices [...]. So, you know, we want people to not be afraid to talk about their [needs] any changes that need to be made [...]. So hopefully [...] over the years, now that we put all these little changes in, that they will sort of make a big change, in terms of comfortable environment and welcoming environment and we will see that in our staff surveys. (Stakeholder in Business mentoring)

## ***Lessons for the future***

Existing networks can help in the identification of new organisations for mentoring. Relationships are important at the start and throughout the mentoring to businesses. Businesses need to identify that they can benefit from a review or update to their practices and trust that RTE have the skills, know-how and credibility to work on this together.

It's good to have [this] kind of external people keeping me accountable as well – that's kind of key part of this mentorship for me. (Stakeholder in Business mentoring)

Throughout the mentoring process, which can take a year or longer, relationships are key to keeping the process rolling and stakeholders committed and accountable to implementing changes.

JFA Purple Orange Business Mentoring is currently offered as a cost-free service. While this is an incentive for businesses, it remains a resource intensive part of the project. In the future, there might be opportunities to deliver parts of the mentoring (accessibility audits and reports) as a fee-for-service, to allow Road to Employment to scale up their offerings to more businesses or maintain this component past the funding period.

## **Part B Raising employment expectations for students, families and teachers in schools.**

### **6.5 Raising the Bar workshops to five different target audiences**

Raising the Bar workshops to five different target audiences are being developed to influence employment expectations of families and teachers and students.

The audiences of the Raising the Bar in schools are:

- Parents of pre-school aged children
- Year 6 students
- Year 9 students
- parents and teachers of year 6 students
- parents and teachers of year 9 school students.

The first workshop to parents of pre-school children have been fully develop and delivered. The content for the other workshops is being tested and refined in 2021.



RTE has established a co-design working group and four smaller working parties in school communities to work on Raising the Bar. The groups vary in size from 4 to 13 members in the central co-design group. The different groups consist of people with disability, parents of children with and without disability, teachers, early childhood educators, the RTE team and interns. Students were not yet involved in the development of workshop material. Co-design members having a strong personal connection and interest in the project helped with the ongoing commitment to this group. The primary goal of the co-design groups is to develop content, inform implementation and participate in the delivery of workshops for parents, teachers and students. RTE is collaborating with an experienced workshop provider, Enabled Youth Disability Network, to assist the project to deliver high-quality and timely information and support to the range of supporters within school communities.

**A high school student mentoring program.** The Year 9 Mentoring program is being co-designed by RTE staff and other stakeholders is being co-designed. The objective of the mentoring program is to assist individual students to identify their strengths and interests, link them to employment opportunities and facilitate their employment discovery as they transition out of school.

**Case study: Insights from the Raising the Bar workshop to parents of pre-school aged children.**

Parents who took part in the first couple of Raising the Bar workshops reported the following strengths and impact,

- facilitators/parents with lived experience being involved in the design and presentation has been central in underlining the authenticity and credibility of the content, allowing attendees to foster a meaningful connection to their own experience.
- parents liked that the workshop used evidence but also based “co-operative learning” pedagogy which encourages attendees to bring along their own stories.
- practicalities like parking, a comfortable meeting/workshop space, lunch and refreshments were also described as an important part of their experience.

***Impact to date***

The written feedback from the first workshops with pre-school parents was very positive. Reportedly parents ‘made an emotional’ link to the lived-experience stories, which motivated them to seek alternative education options for their own child or make other changes.

“It is so hard to find that information, to have it delivered as a free workshop is really important. Hopefully now we can deliver it many more times in different areas, to different groups of parents is really, really important. Because where else do you find that information as a parent, when you're so busy and tired and are hearing so many different things?” (Member working group party)

### ***Challenges in the Raising the Bar workshop development***

- Identifying specific stakeholders for the different working groups has been challenging, for example, early childhood educators for the pre-school group. Mostly the project could rely on existing networks and relationships from previous activities with school communities to recruit members to the codesign working groups.
- Keeping the groups focused on the task and managing different personalities in the groups has been resource intensive and challenging at times. The facilitation requires detailed planning and preparation, knowing and listening, skilled management of people and groups.
- Some groups have taken longer to complete the content for the workshops. This was partly due to disruptions like COVID but also the group size and making sure everyone had input into the developed content. These delays have impacted on the timely delivery and planning of workshop roll out within a restricted school calendar.

### ***Lessons for the future***

The delivery and roll out of the workshops are an ongoing task. It requires RTE and other stakeholders to identify and build links with new schools, where the workshops can be delivered. Particularly important is getting buy-in and support from senior management for the successful implementation of the workshops (including the recruitment and interest of parents and teachers).

Questions about the future of the workshops and how the project can reach more parents and scale up have been raised. The project management team and Steering Committee could explore different delivery strategies, taking the workshop partly online, or into a mixed format.

The importance of co-design and co-deliver in all Raising the Bar groups has been emphasised. A wide range of stakeholders with different backgrounds, experiences and interests have been engaged, including young people under of 30 years.

The project could consider including young people, year 9 students with disability, in the development and piloting of workshops that are targeting students. This is

particularly important as research shows that students with disability in the middle years are less likely to identify as 'having a disability', which might impact on their willingness to participate in skill building mentoring or group workshops designed for this target group.

## 6.6 Co-design experiences from the project

Good practice in co-design involves using strategies for individual members to feel heard, respected and valued, creating a safe and reflective space, supporting people to participate in a process that brings together opposing perspectives and experiences. Sound co-design also requires substantial time and resources. Only with the necessary investment, guidance and creation of a reflective safe space can inclusive co-design take place. A risk is if some members of the group feel undervalued, disrespected or harmed a co-design process can become tokenistic and wasteful of participants' time and cause painful experiences.

While co-design is frequently spoken about as an innovative approach, rarely is the process documented well. Purple Orange has produced a summary of their codesign process. Throughout the evaluation data we collected examples of inclusive, respectful and safe group facilitation practices that occurred across the different co-design groups.

*Initial phase:* Unless group members know each other well the initial stages of co-design process require time for the group to form – the group to define its purpose (identify a common goal) and understand the scope of their activities together. The first meetings should allow sufficient time to get to know each other and build rapport, including the different communication styles, backgrounds, interests, and what support members need to participate. The group can define how the meetings will be chaired, notes taken, decisions communicated, and find alternative ways to participate for those who may not be able to attend in person or share their views openly. Sharing the facilitation and minutes taking can be a way to provide leadership opportunities to members and promote stronger involvement in the group.

The chairperson and group facilitator have responsibility to ensure a safe, respectful and inclusive space is created. This involves mediating between members, using verbal and non-verbal communication to ascertain inclusion of all members, recognises that sensitive statements can impact on members with lived experience differently, harm can be caused even where it is not intended. Participants representing a minority group – one female in a group of males or a single person with disability among abled-bodies – may feel greater burden and responsibility to respond to and deflect critical comments. This underrepresentation can create a sense of emotional burden and uneven responsibility for some members in the group. While representation of people with experience in co-design groups is

essential it is important to ensure they have the support in place to participate (information is shared in advance to help people prepare), feel supported (during and after group meetings) and included in the decision-making process (input from the group is condensed and distilled).

Reflection and de-briefing are important tools for group facilitators and chairperson to undertake regularly, ideally after every co-design meeting. During the co-design process they hold significant responsibility to ensure inclusive (everyone is heard) and respectful group engagement (perspectives are valued as long as they do not create harm). This reflection process facilitates critical (self-reflexive) review of someone's engagement, checking in regarding sensitive comments or issues that have arisen and how to follow up, or refine the engagement process and group activities for the next time.