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Building Community Capacity in the NDIS



**A report on the *Glenorchy Together*
research project**

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About *Glenorchy Together*

This report details the journey and findings of an action research project undertaken throughout 2018 and 2019 in Glenorchy, Tasmania.

Known locally as *Glenorchy Together*, this project has been the result of a partnership between RMIT University's Social and Global Studies Centre, Baptcare, Glenorchy City Council, and a core group of community members who identify as having a disability.

Formed in response to the rapid and profound changes currently taking place in Australia's community sector, *Glenorchy Together* has sought to explore two key questions:

1. How can we best conduct community capacity building work in an NDIS environment?
2. What conditions need to be in place to enable people with a disability to lead this kind of work?

The following report details the project's processes, outcomes and insights.



The project in context: the NDIS, Community Capacity Building, and Co-Design

In July 2019, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, or **NDIS**, will be reaching full roll out. In terms of numbers, this will mean:

- An estimated 460,000 people accessing funded supports through the NDIS¹, and
- An estimated investment of \$21.5 billion in 2019 – 20, or approximately 1.1% of Australia's GDP.²

With much riding on the success of the scheme, there has been a significant amount of focus on understanding the potential opportunities and constraints that individualised funding will present to people with a disability and their families. Relatively little attention, however, has been paid to the implications of the NDIS at a community level.

Community Capacity Building, a term sometimes used interchangeably with community development, refers to work that is done to increase a community's strengths in a particular area. In the context of the NDIS, community capacity building work frequently focuses on increasing a community's capacity to be welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to people with a disability.

The NDIS's shift away from block funding is changing the operating conditions for community capacity building, bringing an increased focus on short-term projects contracted through funding bodies like the NDIA's *Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program*, or ILC to community groups and service providers. More exploration is needed to understand the implications of this shift for people with a disability, the community, the sector, and its workers.

Increasingly, practitioners are being asked to focus on how they can empower communities to take the leading role in conducting capacity building work. **Co-Design**, a set of principles and practices intended to give agency to consumers in the design process, has provided a useful framework for this approach. The NDIA has embraced co-design at a policy level, but there is a need for a more cohesive understanding across the sector as to how co-design methods can be practically applied to empower people with a disability and their families.

¹ Source: *What is the NDIS?*, www.ndis.gov.au, 29/5/19

² Source: *Paying for the National Disability Insurance Scheme*, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/Briefing_Book45p/NDIS, 29/5/19

What We Did: Project Activities

As an action research project, *Glenorchy Together* set out to learn by doing. Over the course of 18 months, the project ran a series of co-designed community capacity building activities in Glenorchy to gain an understanding of the constraints and enablers to conducting this kind of work in an NDIS environment. The project worked with key partners, Bapcare and Glenorchy City Council.

This involved:

- **Recruiting a group of community members** to work alongside RMIT throughout the research project, comprising a mixture of local residents who identify as having a disability and Glenorchy City Council workers, the *Action Research Group* (or ARG) was responsible for leading the project's community capacity building initiatives.
- **Exploring Glenorchy's strengths, aspirations and priorities** through a multi-faceted community consultation process. This involved the production of three distinct community asset maps, a review of existing council strategies, a series of community focus groups and interviews, and a round of surveys conducted by the ARG members. Based on the consultation results, the ARG made the decision to focus on two priority areas: creating a safe and vibrant space around the Glenorchy bus mall, and providing accessible information about what's on in the Glenorchy area
- **Working with the community to design these projects**, or 'prototypes', to meet the needs expressed through these priority areas. Again, this took place via a number of different processes, including a series of co-design workshops, a number of sessions with a local architect, a community forum, and a suite of transect mapping walks across the Glenorchy CBD.

This process resulted in the development of two group projects:

1. A model for a vibrant and safe bus mall area, designed by the ARG in partnership with a local architect.
 2. A 'Welcome Tour', designed to give socially isolated people and those who support them in informal and formal roles a first hand introduction to some of Glenorchy's important 'assets' i.e. people, places and groups.
- **Testing the projects** by presenting the bus mall vision to a consulting public artist (hired through Glenorchy City Council's CBD revitalisation initiative), and by running a trial welcome tour.

Stories from the Frontline

WILL

About me: I like playing video games like Call of Duty and riding my bike. I like living in Glenorchy – it's a little bit quieter in the daytime. I like that I can get around places on my bike. I wanted to join Glenorchy Together to meet different people.

My most important moment: I was riding down Russell Road and cracked my back rim of my bike on a pot hole. I thought that it was not good – I couldn't ride my bike anymore and it was dangerous. I told council at the Glenorchy Together meeting and they fixed it. It made me happy. Since then, I have spoken to council about other things – about needles left on the side of the road and long grass in a vacant block. It is a lot easier to talk to council face to face and knowing people at council helps.



LISA

About me: I genuinely care about other people and enjoy seeking creative ways to bring communities together. I appreciate being around like-minded people who are wanting to make the world a better place. Kindness is one of my core values.

My important moment: The inspiring moment when I realised that I had been introduced to a person whose passion for Glenorchy makes him a genuine, dedicated, community champion!

What has changed for me: Glenorchy Together has strengthened my links with the community; provided me with true insight into potential future initiatives and affirmed my belief in the power of meaningful, engaging, collaboration.

My message for others: Embrace opportunities to become involved in initiatives such as Glenorchy Together. Don't under-estimate the power and value of bringing like-minded people together. The future directions of our communities can be led by embracing the passion, imagination and energy of our people.



EDWARD

About me: I have lived a full life in Glenorchy and been active as a member in the workforce provided by our city. I would like to work within the city and help people with mental health problems, because I've been through the fire and brimstone with depression and anxiety. I know what it's like to feel lonely.

My most important moment: Becoming a team. When we first started off we were all new to each other. We didn't know what to expect, what we were going to do and achieve when we came together. We respect each other and give each other time to talk. We've grown to learn that each other's input is just as important as your own input. We've turned out all having individual traits which have become important to what we've done. [The project] let us do different jobs in the meeting and now I know what facilitating is. I also learnt to talk to larger groups, like at the Council's Safer Communities Committee meeting and at the community forum that we ran.

What's next? I would now like to create a group in council that could come up with ideas that are not thought of, but could become important. We [Glenorchy] are underrated but are the third biggest city in Tasmania. There is no end to what we need to do.



BROWN (BRONWYN)

About me: I live in part of Glenorchy – Moonah – and love it, always have. Have also been a bit of a northern suburbs girl, whether it's here in Hobart or in Melbourne. I am passionate about the finer parts of human society, bush and wilderness, arts and good food, as well as diversity of ethnicities.

An important moment for me: I have found it very heart-warming and inspiring to be a part of the group and see how much people care about their community. I've always thought that is an important starting place. So many of our meetings are amazing eye openers for me. It's just great to be able to understand how everyone else feels about it.

LIZ

A bit about myself: I guess you could call me a bit of a newbie to Glenorchy. I moved here around 5 years ago. A few of life's pleasures, for me are - reading, gardening, music and art.

An important moment for me on the project was when I realised I was in the company of people, who believed, that as well as listening to what people in the community had to say - we also had the chance to take that information forward and to pass it on to people who might act upon it, to affect change.

I know that through my involvement in the project, my confidence and energy have grown - having taken significant knocks in the recent past due to health difficulties. I have met people who were prepared to spend time and exert energy, in seeking to make their community a better, fairer, more welcoming and more inclusive place.



ELISA

About me: I am a northern suburbs girl through and through, having lived in the city of Glenorchy most of my life and working with the community for over 13 years. Passion to help others create change for their own communities is what drives me every day. I am a fun seeker and try to find a laugh in everything I do. I am a total people person. I am compelled to order crème brulee anytime it's on the menu.

My important moment: An important moment for me was to see how what we were doing is a part of the bigger picture. For example the consultation results pointed us in the direction of public art, seeing how this linked in with the CBD project meant that the need could be responded to external from the group but with the group's input. Through the project I have learnt so much about true inclusiveness and the model of co design, these are skills that I will take into my future work.

The message I have for other people is to never underestimate what you have to offer, how important your voice is and how you can be part of change in your own community.



Outcomes

Glenorchy Together's 18 month journey has produced a range of significant outcomes for individuals, for the community, and for GCC. The project has also produced four key prototypes which have the potential to inform community capacity building into the future with implications for the community services sector, the NDIS, and different levels of government.

In terms of **individual outcomes**, ARG members have reported the following:

- Increased confidence and skills to contribute to community change through engagement with civic processes and institutions
- Increased social connections and networks
- Skills and confidence to design and lead community capacity building work
- Increased research and project administration skills
- A feeling that they bring their experience of disability to civic action that builds a more diverse community
- Invitations to sit on committees and take part in other community leadership roles.

Other **outcomes relevant to Glenorchy City Council** and the broader community included:

- Local government having access to a new voice and process for checking on the pulse of the community, for exploring ideas for change, and for identifying new community leaders
- A new model for tapping into the latent potential in communities and, in particular, activating the desire of individuals to contribute to making their communities better for everyone
- A 'work ready' leadership group who can respond to emergent community agendas.

The ARG has done significant work towards testing the Welcome Tour and fostering a safe and vibrant space around the Glenorchy bus mall. This this process, RMIT has developed **four prototypes**, each of which has the potential to strengthen our ability to co-design inclusive and welcoming communities under the NDIS.

Additionally, the project has significantly **increased our understanding of how to do co-designed community capacity building work in the NDIS context**. This includes increased understanding of the enablers as well as the challenges in this new landscape.

The Four Prototypes

Prototype #1: Changemakers

What: A new place-based initiative that brings together a core group of interested individuals (including people who identify as having a disability) to design and work on a project that benefits the local community. This group would operate as an independent body but would have strong links with local government and across community, services and the business sector.

Why: Through the experience of the ARG members, *Glenorchy Together* has demonstrated the benefits – at both an individual and community level – that come from bringing a diverse group of people together in an independent space to find solutions to local issues. This model has also shown how new opportunities for participation reveal and draw on community members' deep interest in and capacity to contribute for collective benefit well beyond individual gain. The development of additional groups in different locations will enable us to further explore this model and to extend its benefits to more individuals and communities within Tasmania.

How: The development of new Changemaker groups will require the resourcing of dedicated project hours and strong partnerships with local government. Additionally, further work is required to understand what will enable the participation of different demographics, including people with complex physical and multiple disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Prototype #2: A Community of Practice

What: A series of networking events, practice-sharing sessions, and workshops for Tasmanian community capacity building professionals.

Why: Community capacity building work is highly skilled, difficult to pin down, and potentially threatened by the trend towards individualised funding and a competitive market model. A community of practice would provide peer support, a collective voice, and an opportunity to workshop common challenges, such as best practice around co-creation methodologies and social impact measurement. *Glenorchy Together* shows there is a large latent and willing group of people able to commit to active citizenship and strengthening communities supported through collaborative and supportive exchange.

How: To be effective, a community of practice will require active support from both government and the sector to enable frontline staff to attend events, as well as investment in a dedicated facilitator.

Prototype #3: Community Welcome Tours

What: Accessible walking and bus tours that offer participants a personalised introduction to some of the key places, people and opportunities in their local community.

Why: The *Glenorchy Together* consultation process revealed that many people wanted to learn more about their community, but needed to do so in a way that was accessible, personal, and didn't require extensive literacy skills. The Community Welcome Tours prototype led by project group members gives socially isolated community members the opportunity to experience what their community has to offer in a safe and supportive environment, and to know that they can be sure of a welcome when they return to places in the future. The Welcome Tours will also offer those in informal and formal support roles, such as family members or professional caseworkers, the opportunity to make more meaningful referrals by visiting and experiencing community resources and locations first-hand.

How: The Welcome Tours were successfully trialled in May 2019, and will require the investment of dedicated project officer hours to be taken to the next stage of development.

Prototype #4: Digital Mapping

What: An interactive online map that showcases social and recreational opportunities, as well as key services, in the local area is being trialled

Why: Many communities currently lack a centralised source of information about what's on locally. Through the *Glenorchy Together* consultation process, local residents expressed that this lack of information contributes significantly to social isolation and lost opportunities. Similarly, there is an emerging cohort of professionals working in referral and caseworker roles (including NDIS Local Area Coordinators) who are required to have community information at their fingertips, but currently lack a means of accessing and recording this information. An online mapping resource could act as an accessible source of information for community members, whilst simultaneously streamlining the work of the NDIS and other professionals who support them.

How: This prototype is scalable, and could easily be employed within one community, or across a much a larger area. Similarly, it has the potential to offer meaningful work (voluntary or paid) to community members who could act as 'citizen scientists' in collecting information for the map. To make this prototype happen, an upfront investment in software development is required, followed by an ongoing investment in staff to maintain and promote the resource.

Learnings: Enablers

The following factors played a crucial role in enabling the project's positive outcomes.

VALUES

- **Trust and Relationships:** The project took a team-building approach with the ARG, and invested heavily in developing trusting relationships. Group members were specifically recruited based on their perceived compatibility as team members.
- **Respect and Diversity:** The ARG fostered a respect for diverse methods of input. Time and space was given to each member to share their opinion, and 'having a yarn' was seen as a valuable way of drawing out unique points of view.
- **Lived experience:** ARG members saw their lived experience as an asset which enabled them to bring a unique perspective to their work, but the group was not defined by disability. Rather than focussing on traditional 'access and inclusion' issues, the group instead chose to work on bringing positive outcomes to the whole community.
- **Place based:** ARG members shared a passion for their community and a commitment to making Glenorchy a better place. This sense of place underpinned all decisions made throughout the project.
- **Strengths and asset based:** The project was premised on the assumption that the group and Glenorchy community had both explicit and latent strengths and assets which, if developed and harnessed, would make lives better and produce opportunities.

RESOURCES

- The employment of a full time, Hobart-based **project officer** was crucial to supporting the development of the ARG, its activities and the prototypes.
- The process required a significant investment of **time and emotional labour** from both the ARG and the project officer. A rigorous professional support structure is needed to make this model sustainable.
- The project's relationship with **Glenorchy City Council** was a key success factor, providing in-depth local knowledge, opportunities for civic engagement, and practical in-kind support.
- The **Tasmanian context** and local knowledge gave the project a greater and more immediate level of access to networks, decision makers, and mutual support structures than might be found elsewhere.

Learnings: Enablers (cont.)

PROCESSES

- The project placed a strong emphasis on **accessibility and inclusion** when it came to meeting logistics, discussion and decision-making, and written communication.
- The formal **Co-Design workshops** played a valuable role in articulating the group's thinking, but were only part of a larger participatory process.
- The group took a responsive approach to advocacy by installing a **'burning issues'** section at the start of each meeting. This enabled members to identify local issues and workshop potential solutions.
- **Asset mapping** played an important role in guiding the group's thinking, and three distinct maps were created at different stages of the project. The most successful iterations of the map were those that:
 - a) Included intangible assets like events and policies,
 - b) Went beyond googling and drew information directly from conversations with the community and 'research walks' around the CBD, and
 - c) Identified both existing and potential assets as a focus for partnership and growth.

This approach allowed latent assets to be identified and mined for potential.

Based on the project's learnings, we suggest that the above conditions need to be in place for community capacity building work to be successful, sustainable, and genuinely driven by people with a disability.

Learnings: Challenges

The environment in which the project took place was a complex one, involving multiple stakeholders and subject to changing funding structures. This presented a number of challenges, outlined below.

- The pressures of NDIS implementation **reduced the capacity of disability service providers** to engage in the project. This had a possible negative impact on the participation rates of people with more complex disabilities who require assistance from service providers to identify and respond to new and innovative opportunities.
- The process required a **significant investment of time and energy from the ARG members**. There is a need for further exploration around how ongoing co-production processes can be tailored for 'time poor' community members, including people who require funded support workers and family carers.
- The **number, scale, and complexity of decisions** that needed to be made by the group increased as the projects progressed, adding further demands to members' time and energy. This suggests that projects like this would benefit from transparent, frequently-reviewed governance structures.
- **Formal systems and bureaucratic rules** attached to funded research and government endeavours had the unintended but real consequence of limiting the activities and membership of active citizens with a disability.
- Whilst ARG members were reimbursed for their time as co-researchers in this project, there is **scope for a more streamlined and equitable payment approach** for community projects such as these.

Implications and Opportunities

The *Glenorchy Together* project has yielded a number of key insights regarding Community Capacity Building under the NDIS:

- We need **active citizens engaging locally** to ensure that communities are built to reflect the diversity of their members. A place and strengths-based approach to this will enable communities to discover and activate untapped potential within their people and environment.
- There is significant untapped potential for people with a disability to play a leading role in contributing to and shaping development and opportunities in the wider community. Individuals, communities, services sectors and all levels of government have much to gain from **moving beyond the traditional 'service' paradigm** that saw leadership opportunities solely within the disability sector.
- The NDIS brings a focus on **individualised models of inclusion, coupled with a competitive market approach to service provision**. This could pose significant challenges in terms of future collaboration within the sector, potentially reducing capacity for innovation.
- The responsibility for community capacity building can not sit solely with either the NDIS or disability service providers, and further exploration is needed to determine who resources and builds community capacity work in the future. **A place-based approach** to this could offer the opportunity to develop partnerships with the wider community.
- **Local government** represents a deep source of community knowledge and is a relatively stable arm of the capacity building workforce. It has significant potential to play an increased role in supporting the citizenship of people with a disability.
- The role of a community capacity building worker is complex, highly skilled, and both ethically and emotionally demanding. However, it has not been adequately envisaged in the NDIS context despite high expectations of the skills and impact of those in these roles. The move towards individualised and short-term project funding leads to workers in this field facing a loss of both job security and peer support. This poses a **significant threat to the sustainability of this workforce**.
- Co-Design has an important role to play in empowering people with a disability to lead community capacity building work, but it is only part of a **wider participatory and 'co-creating' approach**. Within the community sector, there is an increasing ambiguity as to what Co-Design/Co-Production actually entails, and a more cohesive definition is needed, grounded in the experiences of those doing this work.

Acknowledgements

As with any community exercise, this project was the result of sustained teamwork from a diverse and talented group of people in both Victoria and Tasmania.

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We would also like to acknowledge that *Glenorchy Together* took place on Aboriginal land, and to pay our respects to Tasmanian Elders past, present, and emerging.

An enormous thank you to everybody in the Glenorchy community who played a part in this project, big or small.

Together, we made it happen.

Together, YOU ARE HERE!