

Valued Lives Peer-to-Peer Networks Co-Design Project

Report

27 June 2023

This report was produced on the lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and their Elders past, present, and emerging.

Throughout the project, people with experience of disability have shared experiences, views and aspirations. To these people, we thank you for being generous and trusting us with your contributions.

About this report

This document is the result of work commissioned by Valued Lives Foundation (Valued Lives) regarding the Peer-to-Peer Networks WA ('Peer Network'). It was created by Innovation Unit for Valued Lives, who remain the owner of the report.

The report contains findings of the work completed by Innovation Unit from April 2023 to June 2023, in partnership with Valued Lives staff, people with experience of disability (personally and/or within their family), and external partners and key stakeholders.

Insights and implications are presented here, to support Valued Lives in continuing their journey of service innovation focused on the Peer Network in order to meet the contemporary needs of the community.

Contents

| | Page: |
|--|-------|
| 01. <u>Project summary</u> Project aims and objectives, and summary of the resulting design principles and recommendations | 4 |
| 02. <u>Project activities</u> An outline of all the activities undertaken through this project | 8 |
| 03. <u>Insights</u> Key findings obtained from focus groups with current groups within the Peer Network | 13 |
| 04. <u>Design principles</u> Six principles to guide the development of the future Peer Network | 18 |
| 05. <u>Implications</u> Future directions and opportunities for innovation | 22 |
| 06. <u>Appendix</u> | 38 |

Project summary

The project's aims and objectives, and a summary of the resulting design principles and recommendations.

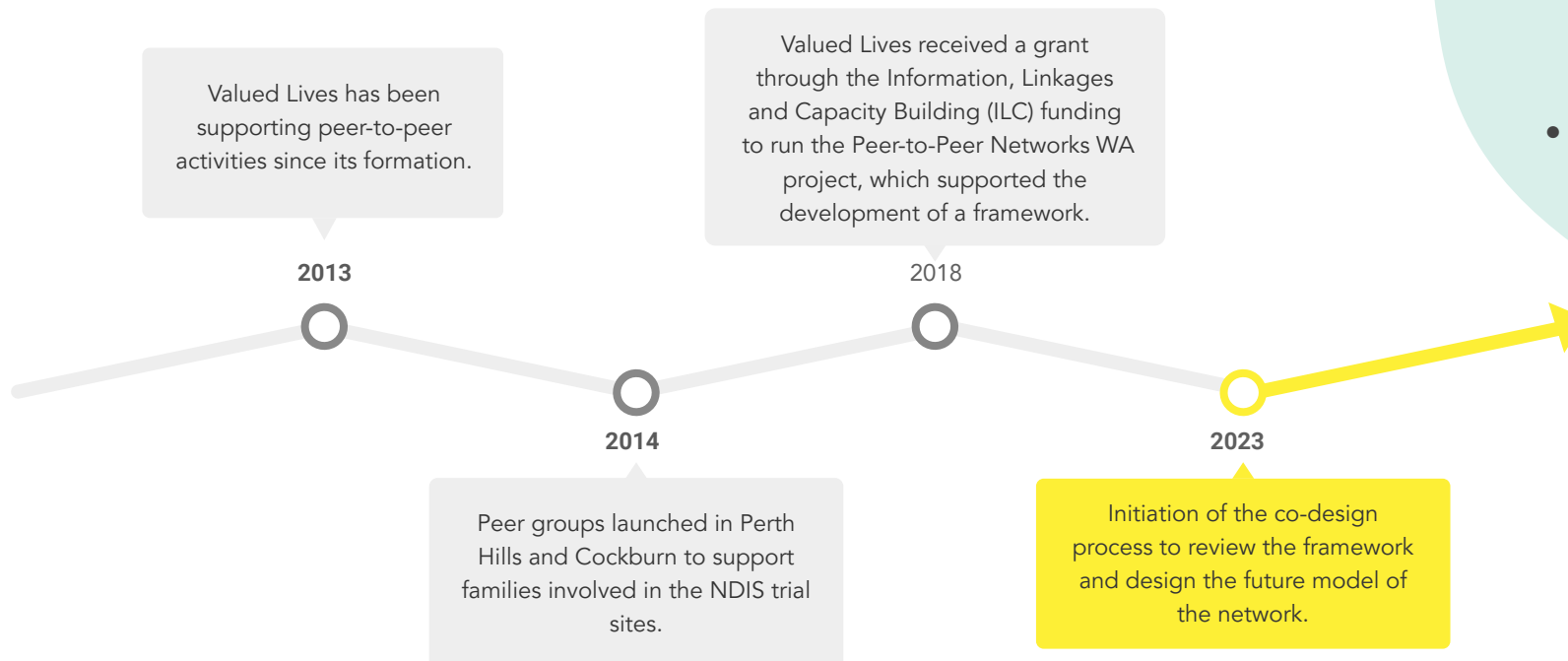
Project Overview

Project background

Based in Western Australia, Valued Lives Foundation is a not-for-profit disability support service provider, empowering people with disability to live their best life as valued citizens. The organisation provides direct support and innovative employment, together with peer support services through the Peer-to-Peer Networks WA project. The peer project is dedicated to fostering a strong sense of community and empowerment among individuals with disabilities and their support networks. It is a supportive and inclusive environment where individuals can connect with peers who understand their experiences.

While the Peer Network has promoted great results, it has been identified that the networks are currently driven by and reliant on paid staff to sustain network activity; which ties up significant human resources and contradicts the intention of the networks to be driven by peers with lived experience. Valued Lives believes the networks could create more impact with less investment, by considering more innovative approaches, different business models or increasing the ownership and leadership that people with disabilities hold.

A simple history of the Peer Network is represented in the timeline below.



Aim

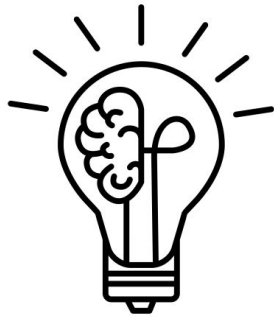
Co-design an innovative approach to peer-to-peer disability support that sets the future direction for the Peer Network

Objectives

- Understand the current experiences and needs of people engaged in peer-to-peer support networks (both staff and people with lived experience)
- Update the Peer Network model to ensure it meets contemporary needs of the community
- Articulate recommendations for bringing the new model to life

Design Principles

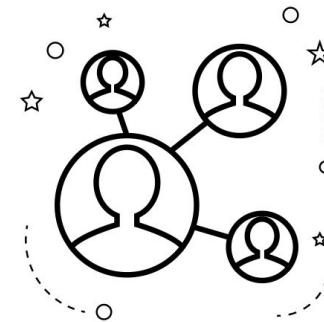
The six Design Principles below were developed through the co-design workshops, informed by insights from the focus group research. They are compatible with Valued Lives' values, whilst providing more actionable guidance for team members. See the [Design Principles section](#) for more detailed descriptions.



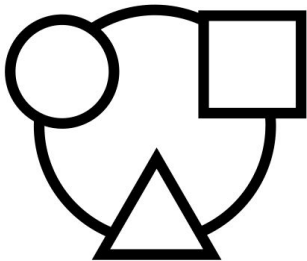
**Supports
self-advocacy**



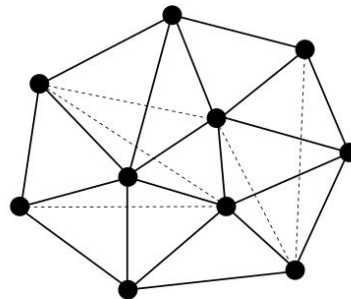
Group-led



Connected to community



**Diversity through
whole network**



Shared responsibility



Inclusive and caring

Implications

There were 22 actions and recommendations identified through the co-design process to bring to life the new Peer Network model. Below is a brief summary of these, aligned to the five key moments of the new Peer Network Journey. See the [Implications](#) section for more details.

1

Finding the network

2

Setting up a new group

3

New member orientation

4

Ongoing connection and problem-solving

5

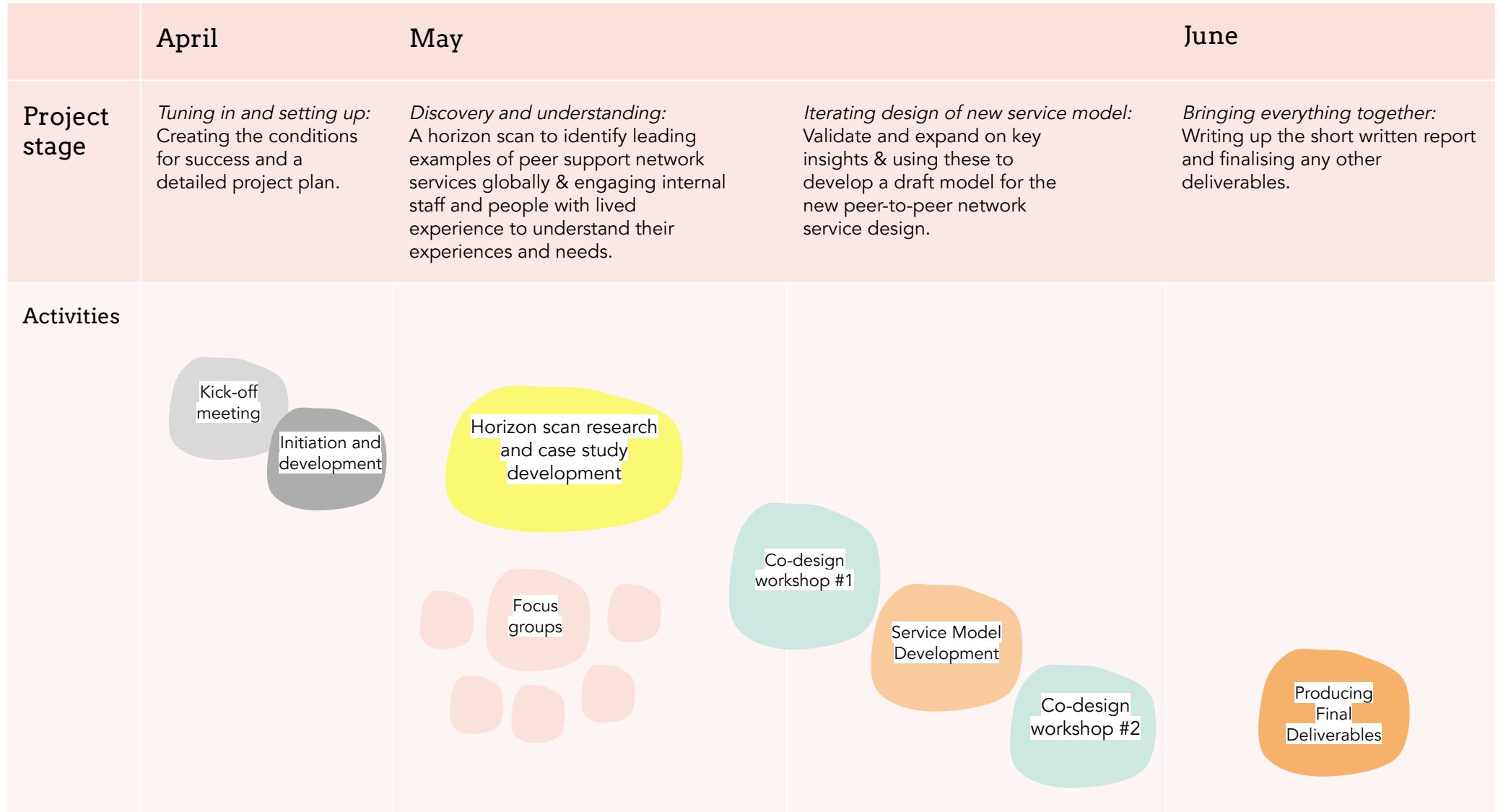
New paths

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| 1.1 A new name | 2.1 Resources for new groups | 3.1 Orientation pack (for individuals) | 4.1 Network-wide digital platform | 5.1 Individual leadership pathways |
| 1.2 Contemporary marketing strategy | 2.2 Network charter | 3.2 Group orientation resources | 4.2 Bank of skills and resources | 5.2 Resources and coaching to support group changes |
| 1.3 Time-saving communications templates | 2.3 Face-to-face coaching for new groups | | 4.3 Peer-to-peer mentoring | 5.3 Feedback loops and shared learning |
| 1.4 Maintaining information online | 2.4 Structured facilitator support | | 4.4 New group roles | |
| 1.5 Engaging partners | 2.5 Peer-to-peer mentoring | | 4.5 Whole-of-network events and workshops | |
| | 2.6 Financial and in-kind resources | | | |
| | 2.7 Community presence | | | |

Project Activities

The Peer-to-Peer Networks service design project was carried out between April and June 2023.
The timeline and description of activities is outlined over the following pages.

Project Activities



Focus Groups

May 2023

Focus groups were conducted by Innovation Unit with the support of a Valued Lives team member. The purpose was to hear from internal staff and people with lived experience to better understand their experiences and needs regarding the peer-to-peer support networks.

There were 4 focus groups with staff, a cultural diverse group of parents of children with a disability, the Fremantle peer group, and the Perth Hills peer group.

The insights developed from this research activity were synthesised and used as a basis for the design activities in the first co-design workshop. The insights are summarised in this report (see [Insights](#), p. 13).

Horizon Scan

May 2023

Horizon scanning is a future-focused research method which expands the range of ideas available in a design process.

A horizon scan looks across a wide range of places and practice to answer our questions and to address the issues we are wrestling with. It isn't about finding one model to replicate, but looking across the qualities and features of a number of examples to consider how desirable aspects might work in our context, for our goals and ambitions.

In this project, a horizon scan was conducted with a focus on peer support models but across different sectors. The resulting case studies were used to inspire creative thinking in the first co-design workshop and included:

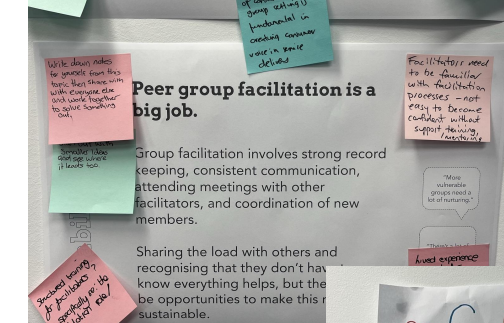
- Camerados (UK),
- Harakeke (NZ),
- Parents Anonymous (USA),
- Family by Family (Australia),
- Men's Sheds (Australian-led),
- Chayn (UK-led), and
- Networked Learning Communities (UK).

10 May 2023

10 May 2023

transferring voice from carers to people with disabilities over time.

Direct involvement of people with disabilities (children and adults) in group meetings is important for it's long term sustainability.



Write down notes to provide some flow back that there isn't much work together to assist something out.

Remember how good it would if people too.

Group calling U.S. fundamental in creating consensus via a more defined

Facilitators need to be familiar with facilitation processes and easy to become confident without support from U.S. facilitators.

Peer group facilitation is a big job.

Group facilitation involves strong record keeping, consistent communication, attending meetings with other facilitators, and coordination of new members.

Share money, or resources or anything that can be shared

Many volunteer groups tend a lot of nurturing.

There's a lot of hard expense

Share money, or facilitate the majority of the work you can.

Group calling U.S. fundamental in creating consensus via a name debate.

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BIB

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Co-design Workshop #2

The second Co-design Workshop was held at Valued Lives in Belmont and attended by 16 participants including Valued Lives staff, current members of the Peer Network, people with lived experience and their supporters, and key external stakeholders.

The intention for the workshop was to validate and refine a draft service design for the peer-to-peer support networks and identify key recommendations for the implementation of the model.

Activities included prioritising and refining the design principles in small groups, reviewing and responding to the draft model (see below), building out the detail of key moments in the model in small groups, and sketching the future peer network model (see [Appendix](#)) in small groups.

24 May 2023



Insights

Key findings obtained from data and stories gathered throughout the Focus Groups, which inform the development of the future model.

Insights: what happens in the network

Each group is a “braintrust” for problem solving, the more different perspectives and experiences the better.

The group is a space for ideas, planning, and problem solving together - not just receiving information.

“Sharing nuggets of information.”

“It’s very hard, the information is not in the [home] community.”

Groups that are strong share a common experience beyond disability.

That can be lots of different things, for example:

- being in the same community or suburb,
- belonging to the same culture,
- having an experience of the same disability,
- being of a similar age.

“It’s easier to ask another Mum with the same experience.”

“If you think someone knows more than us there’s that fear, but in this group we’re all on the same level.”

Making and strengthening connections with other people is supported by a friendly, caring culture.

Network members spoke about a reduction in social isolation, even though it may not have been their primary motivation to participate. Social connection is encouraged by a community building, relational approach where everyone is welcome.

“Camaraderie”

“Going from individually feeling like ‘I’m alone in this’ to now ‘you’re not alone’... the relief knowing someone else is in the same boat.”

Network members like to have fun and share a laugh

Network members spoke about a reduction in social isolation, even though it may not have been their primary motivation to participate. Social connection is encouraged by a community-building, relational approach where everyone is welcome.

“Helps to put life into a bit of balance.”

“I always leave feeling a bit lighter.”

Insights: why the peer network is important

Information found through the Peer-to-Peer network helps people to navigate complex and unfamiliar systems.

One of the main drivers for people engaging in the networks is to figure out how to access suitable support, particularly in the NDIS system.

The introduction of the NDIS was a key reason for starting the first networks in WA.

"It's changed my life, I'm thinking 'why didn't someone tell me', this would have made a bloody difference."

"Getting from a dark spot of not knowing towards light, knowing what's ahead of you."

The 'change' that people seek through their participation is personal or close to their heart.

The networks are not intended to be vehicles for advocating system-level changes (though this might happen as a flow-on effect). People are seeking personal change (i.e., empowerment) and shifting mindsets within their own community.

"I want other people to understand autism... challenge the perception of 'your child is being naughty'."

Involvement in the Peer-to-Peer network increases knowledge of what is possible, so people feel empowered to expect more from the system.

Access to information helps to raise expectations and creates a sense of hope. This helps to sustain energy and persistence needed for self advocating.

"Being inspired by others who are 'ahead' in the journey."

"It opened my mind to so many things."

Insights: how it works

There needs to be a balance between structured information sharing and informal social connection.

Too much emphasis on formal learning can make group members feel overly defined by their experience of disability.

Opportunities for unstructured sharing and fun are important for groups to be successful, but information sharing is still the focus.

"Some social interaction, experience sharing, and education"

"Big turn off is peer groups where the focus is on recounting trauma."

Groups want to learn from each other first.

Learning and capacity building workshops are a way to fill gaps in group knowledge, complementary to their own experience. Facilitators and Valued Lives staff help to fill gaps through larger network.

"If someone has an issue and it comes up multiple times, [Facilitator] would organise someone to come in and speak on that topic."

Face-to-face local connections are an important part of what people are seeking, but this model isn't for everyone.

Many network members agree on the benefits of face-to-face meetings and support. However, this is difficult for people who do not live near a meeting venue, require public transport access, work during meeting hours, or have caring responsibilities that require flexibility.

"You can come along and have a coffee, at least you're not isolated at home."

"[I was] looking for something based in Perth, there's lots over East"

Networks need to feel like a safe space in order for people to share openly.

A safe space is important for equal participation from diverse group members. This involves active listening, judgement-free sharing, and ensuring everyone has the chance to speak.

"Everyone gets a chance to talk."

"People can ask anything."

Insights: sustaining the network

As young people with disability get older, the Peer groups need to transition from parent focused to young person focused.

Capacity building for families can mean transferring voice from carers to people with disabilities over time.

Direct involvement of people with disabilities (children and adults) in group meetings is important for long-term sustainability.

"Capacity needs to be thought about not just for parent, but also for the child, and for how parents view their child."

Peer group facilitation is a big job.

Group facilitation involves strong record keeping, consistent communication, attending meetings with other facilitators, and coordination of new members.

Sharing the load with others and recognising that they don't have to know everything helps, but there may be opportunities to make this role more sustainable.

"More vulnerable groups need a lot of nurturing."

"There's a lot of paperwork."

Finding a group can be difficult, it often happens ad hoc and people are sometimes nervous about joining.

People are finding networks mainly through word-of-mouth and Facebook. In the past, Local Area Coordinators helped to connect people but this has changed under NDIS.

For people who do not have a word-of-mouth recommendation, picking up the phone to connect is daunting.

"How do people know that it exists?"

"There is a fear of going out of your comfort zone."

There are risks in a small team driving the quality of information and community connections.

The small team at Valued Lives who support the Peer-to-Peer Networks bring their own knowledge and relationships to the work. Changes in the team may result in changes to the nature of support they are able to provide.

Design principles

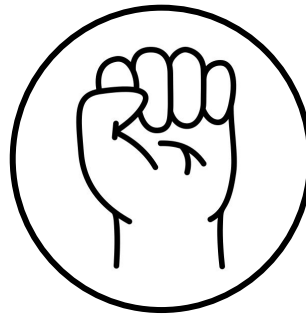
Six principles to guide the development and implementation of the new model.

Design Principles

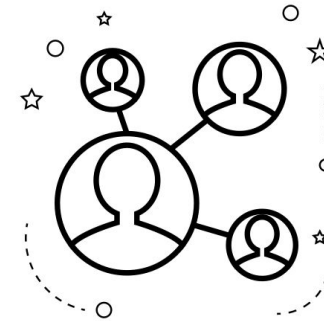
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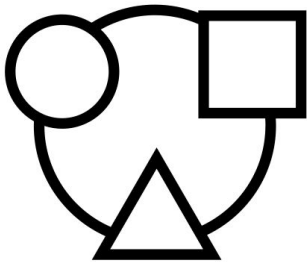
**Supports
self-advocacy**



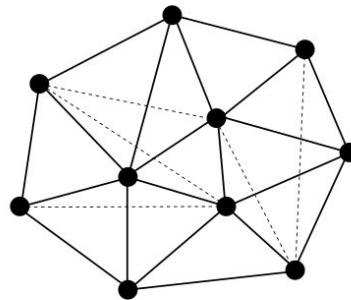
Group-led



Connected to community



**Diversity through
whole network**



Shared responsibility



Inclusive and caring



Supports self-advocacy

This principle supports the network's core purpose of building natural support. The whole network is supported to develop capacity for self-advocacy and family leadership within groups, and within each group this is approached in a person-centred and holistic way to meet the needs of individuals. This looks like:

- Strengths-based thinking (focusing on moving forward, the positives and possibilities)
 - Skill-building,
 - Collaborative problem-solving,
 - Planning for the future,
 - Working with, not for, group members.
-



Group-led

Groups are peer-led and determine their own priorities, each group within the network is different. Groups can form around any shared experience (e.g., location, age, culture, type of disability). For individuals, connecting through similarity helps to create a safe space and supports sharing of relevant information. To achieve this:

- Group practices (like meeting format and communication channels) are flexible and tailored to group needs,
- Members within a group share the responsibility of sharing goals and working towards them,
- Peers are supported and empowered at both the individual and group level,
- Individuals and groups are aware of leadership pathways available to them and pursue these as they feel ready.



Connected to community

The network supports groups and their members to create new connections in the wider community. Groups are not isolated from their neighbourhoods or context - they embrace this and link into relevant community assets as needed. For individuals, this means:

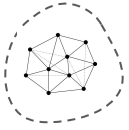
- Knowing what is available and how to connect to support as needed,
 - The whole family/support structure around each person with a disability can get involved.
-



Diversity through whole network

Access to a big, varied pool of knowledge and expertise across the whole network complements informational needs of individual groups. Sense of is reinforced through awareness of a larger network that supports innovation, strengthens inclusion and recognises intersectionality. This means:

- Flexibility in how groups are supported by the Valued Lives Team and the network to enable diversity throughout the whole network,
- Developing relationships with partners and the wider community to support diverse needs, especially those not currently represented much in the network (e.g., culturally and linguistically diverse, First Nations people).



Shared responsibility

The network is resilient to changing group and individual pressures over time by sharing responsibility between peers, the Valued Lives team, and community partners. Valued Lives provides 'scaffolding' support for a decentralised, interconnected and collaborative network. Within groups, roles and tasks can be carried by multiple people and can change over time. Individuals have opportunities to grow in and out of leadership positions. This looks like:

- Group facilitators carry some specific responsibilities, but not *all* responsibilities. Other group members contribute in ways that are meaningful to them, and everyone works together as a team. Each group should have a basic protocol for what to do if the facilitator, or multiple members, are unable to carry out their responsibilities.
 - Different groups throughout the network can connect and support each other,
 - Success of a group is not dependent on one person or on the ongoing support from the Valued Lives team.
-



Inclusive and Caring

Groups across the network feel warm and friendly. Members foster an informal, social atmosphere where everyone in the group can be themselves and sometimes have a laugh. This looks like:

- People finding groups for the first time feel welcomed and safe to give it a try,
 - The group feels like a place of wellness, empathy, and care,
 - People 'find their tribe',
 - Long-term friendships are formed,
 - Potential barriers to participation are mitigated by peers and Valued Lives team where necessary (e.g., physical and sensory accessibility needs, geography and cost,
 - It doesn't feel like a chore to attend meetups.
-

Implications

Future directions and opportunities for innovation that resulted from the co-design process.

Imagining the future Peer Network

Informed by the insights from research and developed in the first co-design workshop, the following is a summary of the aspirations for the future Peer Network. It represents a very simple theory of change; a starting point for further development by the Valued Lives team.



Over the following pages, the change from the current Peer Network model to the future model is outlined and supported by visual representations (originally sketched in the co-design workshops).

Current model

The Peer Network is made up of multiple groups that each support people with disabilities and their families to share knowledge and solve problems together. Valued Lives supports the network by providing immediate administrative, practical, and relational assistance to each group, as well as coordination of training and skill development for the whole network.

Key characteristics:

- Problem-solving and self-advocacy focuses on navigating the NDIS and closely related service system,
- A few discrete groups with little to no connection between them,
- Individuals typically participate in one group,
- Facilitators hold the majority of responsibilities for their group's functioning,
- Facilitators are supported directly by Valued Lives staff through bi-monthly online check-in sessions.

Valued Lives team supports the network by:

- Supporting groups with immediate needs,
- Mentoring individuals, especially new facilitators
- Providing specific information (e.g., service information and NDIS updates),
- Providing learning opportunities (e.g., workshops) focused on group-specific content,
- Supporting group logistics and administration.

Future model

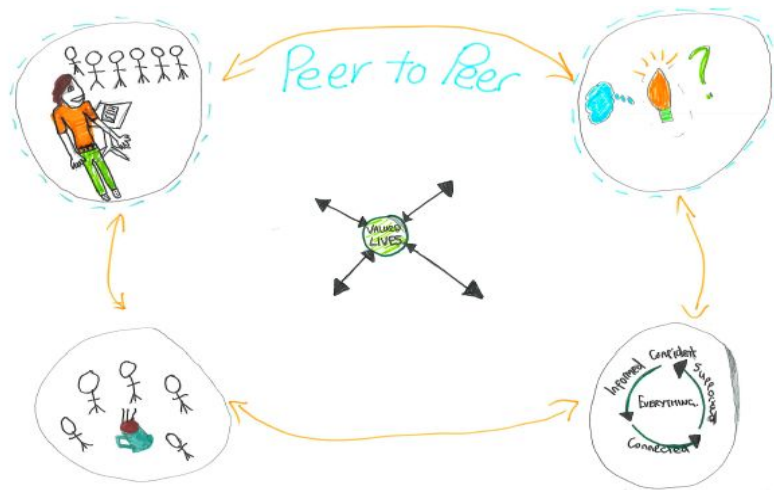
The Peer Network is a network of interconnected groups that support people with disabilities and their families to build stronger natural supports in their communities. These groups are initiated by people with a disability or their families, and take the shape based on group members' priorities. Valued Lives supports the network by putting systems in place that foster connection and sharing within and beyond groups and the network. Through this, individuals and families are resistant through the inevitable changes to the service system and in their own lives.

Key characteristics:

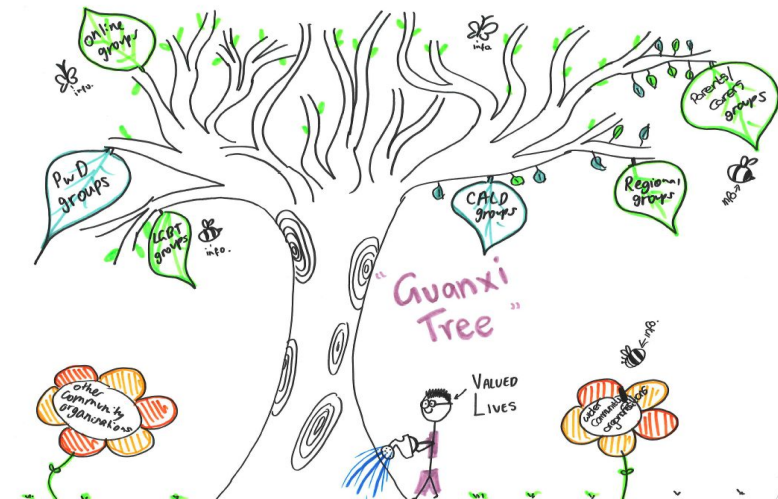
- Many self-managed groups, connected to each other through the network, which are diverse in nature (i.e., in size, how they communicate and meet, etc.) and membership (i.e., the people),
- Facilitators are the primary connectors between groups and the rest of the network, while day-to-day group responsibilities are divided between multiple group members (at their discretion),
- Facilitators form a Community of Interest with multiple channels of communication and opportunities for shared learning, including mentoring relationships.

Valued Lives team supports the network by:

- Building connections and capacity across whole network,
- Connecting individuals, groups, mentors, and the wider community with each other and encouraging them to share information and problem-solve together,
- Connecting individuals and groups to existing learning opportunities and leadership pathways,
- Providing capacity building opportunities in 'signature' areas, such as family leadership,
- Supporting new facilitators and groups in the setup phase,
- Providing a few template materials and simple guides, and encouraging groups to share resources with each other.

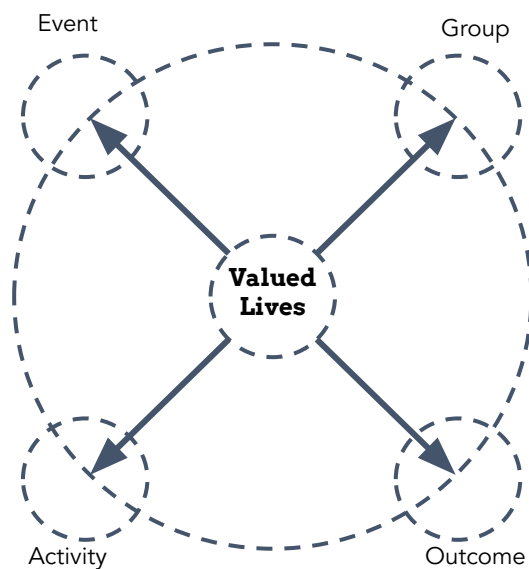


Current model sketch (Co-Design Workshop #1)

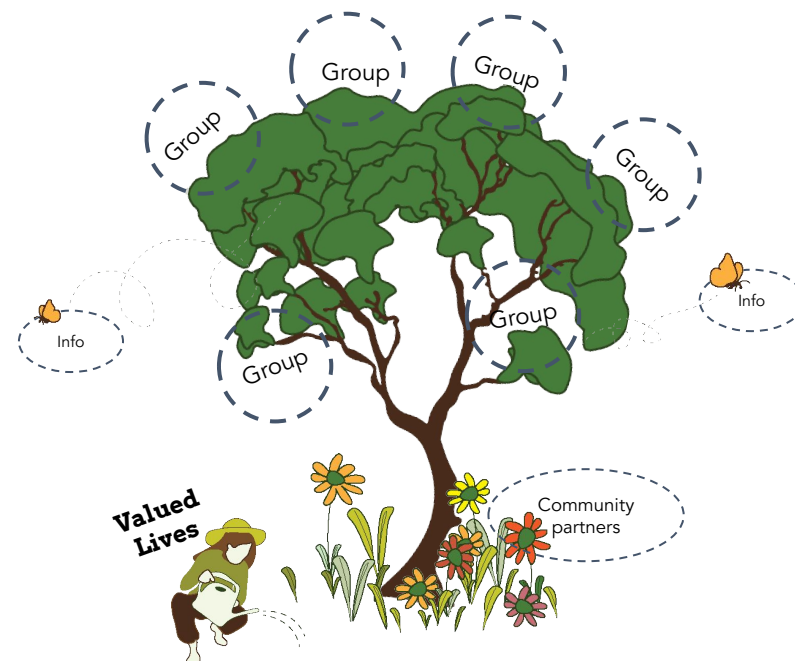


Future model sketch (Co-Design Workshop #2)

Current model



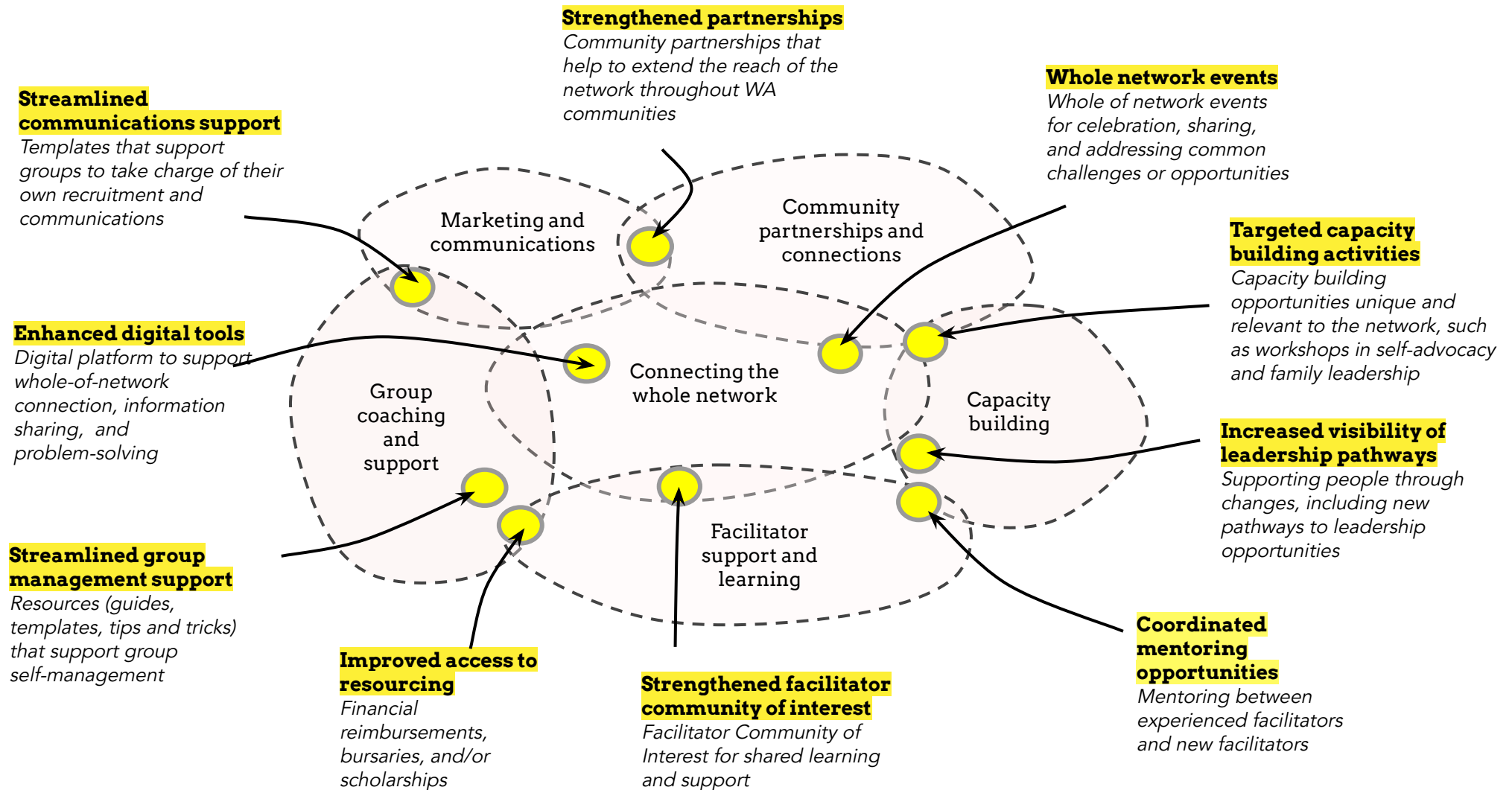
Future model



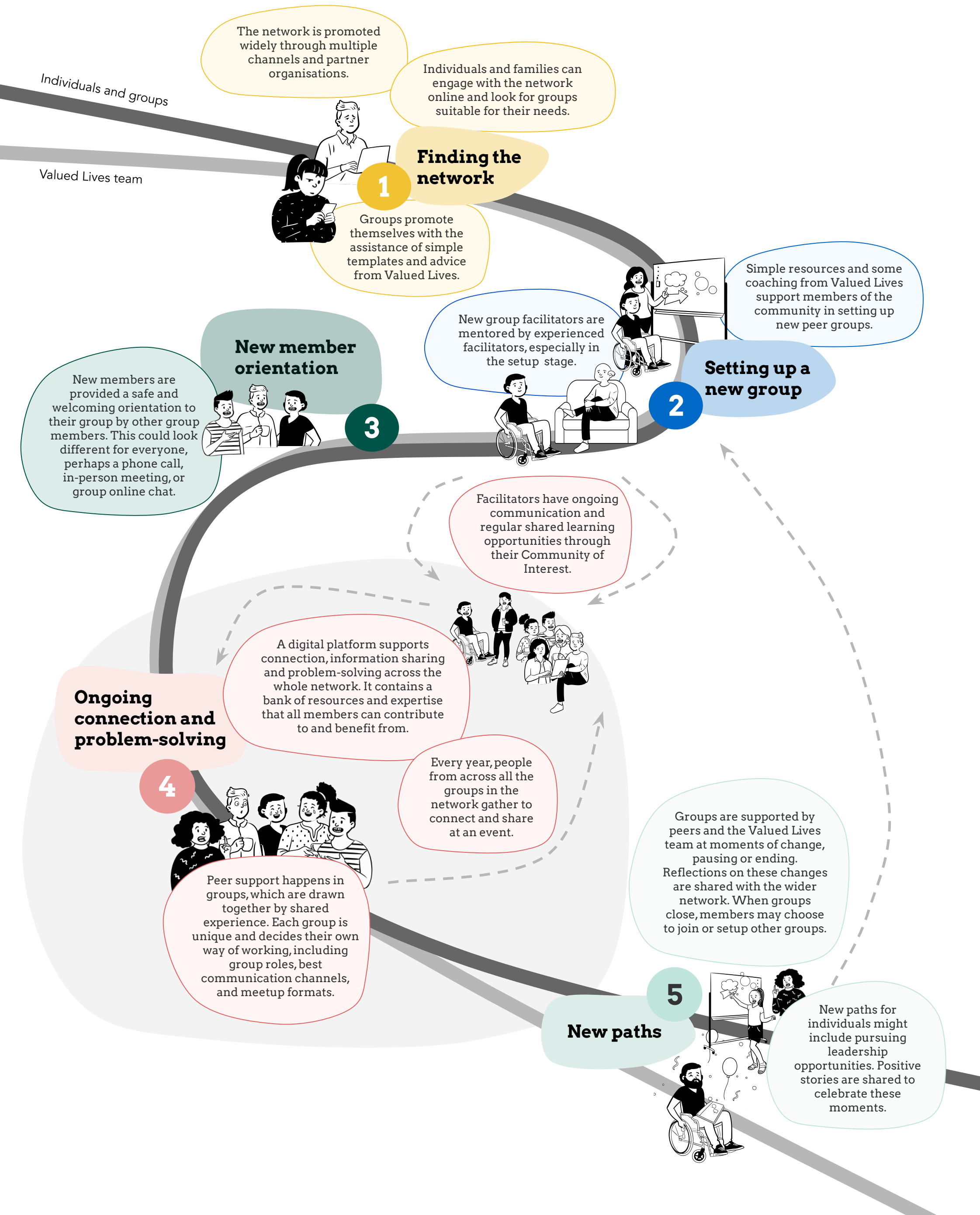
Recommendations

There were 22 actions and recommendations identified through the co-design process to bring to life the new Peer Network model. Over the page is the 'Peer Network Journey' outlining the experience of individuals and groups and highlighting key moments in their journeys. The pages that follow explore each of the five moments in detail, along with related actions.

The diagram below is a simple representation of the key components of the future model that look different to the current model.



Peer Network Journey



1

Peer Network Journey: Finding the network

We heard that it is currently difficult to find out about the network and individual groups. Outside VL events, communication about the network relies heavily on Facebook but we know that there are many different social media platforms used by different members of our community, and many people that do not access social media at all.



What this might look like for...

Individuals

Individuals need clear communications that describe simply what the Peer Network is all about and how it might be relevant for them. Communications will need to be conducted over multiple channels, reducing reliance on Facebook or social media (noting different cohorts use different social media platforms). It needs to feel trusted - word of mouth is helpful, as well as information available through different parts of the community. There are, of course, accessibility needs to consider - for example, using plain English. Individuals may be able to feel part of the network as a whole before joining a specific group. Clear, open communication will help with this.

Group facilitators

Facilitators will need support from the Valued Lives team to create and distribute communication materials - this support could look like a suite of simple marketing and communication templates accompanied by some tips and tricks.

Groups

Each group will need the ability to adapt materials and target communication to communities that are relevant to them.

The whole network

There will be a shared identity across whole network, with an understanding of what makes each group different or unique. It is important that anyone is able to 'see' whole network at any one time (for example on the Valued Lives website).

Valued Lives team

The team needs a simple communication strategy that has low investment and maintenance resourcing needs. Community partnerships can support the expansion of the reach of communications to the wider community. The team plays a facilitation role to connect individuals with groups that meet their needs.

1

What needs to happen to make “finding the network” a reality?

“How do people know that it exists?”

| # | Action |
|-----|---|
| 1.1 | A new name New name and updated brand to represent the purpose and identity of the future Peer Network. |
| 1.2 | Contemporary marketing strategy Marketing and communication strategy (at whole network level) that widens the reach of communications and leverages multiple channels including community partners (see below). |
| 1.3 | Time-saving templates Simple resources and templates for groups to carry out their own marketing and communications. These could be initiated by Valued Lives team, and supplemented by additional resources and advice shared by the wider network. |
| 1.4 | Maintaining up-to-date information online Up-to-date information about the network on the Valued Lives website that clearly describes the purpose of the network, how to connect to peers, what groups are active and how to join them. |
| 1.5 | Engage partners Regularly engage and provide updated information to community partners willing to share information about the network, via their own communication channels (e.g., social media, newsletters) and/or at an individual support level (e.g., health and social care workers who support people with disabilities). Website listings such as Peer Connect should be checked and updated regularly. |

Peer Network Journey: Setting up a new group



There are currently nine active groups in the network, with appetite for a greater number and diversity of groups expressed through this project. Groups may not always emerge organically, especially when individuals experience barriers to participation. Some intentional outreach to support the formation of new groups may be required. The process of setting up a group is not yet codified, but is important as it sets the foundations for successful peer support. Done well, the group founder/s will feel confident and empowered to take ownership of the group and manage it with 'light touch' support from the Valued Lives team.

What this might look like for...

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Individuals | The launch of new groups should be communicated well throughout the network to support individuals in finding groups that are suitable for their needs. This communication needs to be clear about the group's purpose and how it will operate. Some individuals may need targeted guidance from Valued Lives staff if they are getting stuck when trying to find a suitable group. |
| Group facilitators | The founder/s of a new group are likely to become the facilitator/s of that group. In the first 3-6 months of running the group, they will need support from the Valued Lives team, the facilitator Community of Interest, and mentors. They will need to hear from these supporters what it is like being a facilitator in order to set realistic expectations and identify their own learning and development needs. |
| Groups | A new group will have strong foundations if designed thoughtfully at the start. Clarity of purpose, ways of working (including meeting space/s and rhythms), and roles and membership should be designed up front but with an understanding that they may change over time. In some cases where a group (or members thereof) faces significant barriers to meaningfully participate (e.g., geographic, due to dependents and family commitments, accessibility needs, etc.), financial or in-kind resources may be required (e.g., for childcare, transport, accessibility supports, etc.). |
| The whole network | There needs to be some shared identity across whole network, whilst at the same time acknowledging what makes each group different or unique - a network 'charter' may be useful in clearly stating what groups are committing to (e.g., principles, core purpose) without prescribing how the group should operate. The ability to be able to 'see' whole network at any one time is important, for example a map or list on the Valued Lives website or specially developed digital platform for the network. |
| Valued Lives team | The VL team may need to conduct intentional outreach work to encourage the development of new groups where unmet needs are identified. There also needs to be an easy way for the VL team to encourage people in the community to come forward with ideas for new groups and multiple ways to do so (e.g., a quick online enquiry form, direct phone call with peer coach, and through community partners). VL team members will need to support new groups in their setup, first helping to identify if this network is the right place for them and that they commit to the network charter (see above). It is also important that the need for the new group is evident and that it is not duplicating an existing group in the network. The group founder/s are likely to need some face-to-face support during setup to design the group, including purpose and membership, |

2

What needs to happen to make “setting up a new group” a reality?

| # | Action |
|-----|--|
| 2.1 | Resources for new groups Resources that guide groups through the setup phase, which may include ‘how-to’ guides, check-lists, and tip sheets (see other networks’ resources such as Town Team Movement , who have a charter and bank of resources). |
| 2.2 | Network charter A simple network charter (or similar document), which clearly communicates the purpose of the network and principles that all groups would need to commit to, and align with, this to be part of the network. |
| 2.3 | Face-to-face coaching At least one face-to-face opportunity for new group founder/s to be supported by Valued Lives team members in designing the group and building essential skills and knowledge to get started. This includes addressing any essential requirements (e.g., NDIS supports for members and any compulsory paperwork) as well as covering baseline expectations (e.g., creating a safe space for others). |
| 2.4 | Structured facilitator support Resources, training and support for facilitators - intensive in early months, then ongoing as required. The Facilitator Community of Interest will be the vehicle for most of this work. Some resources may need to be newly created, while others may already exist to reference directly or adapt (e.g. Peer Connect , Diversity and Disability Alliance). |
| 2.5 | Mentoring Mentoring opportunities, in particular new facilitators being supported by experienced facilitators. This includes new facilitators joining the facilitator Community of Interest even before their group is active, as well as one-to-one mentoring opportunities. |
| 2.6 | Financial and in-kind resources For some groups facing significant barriers to meaningfully participate, Valued Lives team members could support them in finding external support (e.g., grants) or invite them to apply for a bursary or scholarship directly from Valued Lives. |
| 2.7 | Community presence Targeted outreach to wider community to educate about the network and surface potential new groups, supported by community partnerships and collaborations. |

3

Peer Network Journey: New member orientation



Groups within the network remain open to new members - this is how they currently operate and how they intend to work in the future. Welcoming a new member to a group is an important moment. When it goes well, that individual will feel safe and comfortable to participate. To date, there has not been a consistent approach to this throughout different groups in the network and the quality of experience is usually dependent on the facilitator. Going forward, the responsibility for supporting new members at the moment of orientation should be more distributed and, in some cases, leverage digital resources.

What this might look like for...

Individuals

Individuals may find joining a new group a daunting experience. It is important that those welcoming them to a group meet them where they are. For some people, a first conversation in-person is essential and it may need to be at a time most suited to them to accommodate work or family commitments. For others, an online 'welcome' may be a preferred first connection, supported by some written materials. It is important that new members have simple and safe ways to express their personal preferences and needs (e.g., sensory needs, preferred times and ways to meet others, etc.).

Group facilitators

Group facilitators should be supported by others in their group to share the responsibility for new members orientation.

Groups

Resources outlining the essentials of a good orientation process and how existing group members can help with this. A very simple standard VL process may be supplemented by practices specific to the group, for example a group primarily communicating online might welcome new members in a post in their forum.

The whole network

Orientation really sets the tone for a person's experience in the network. Documenting the essential principles and practices that are expected of a good orientation help to ensure some consistency in quality of experiences across the whole network. Should the whole network be connected through a digital platform, there would need to be some resources supporting people joining the whole network online for the first time.

Valued Lives team

The Valued Lives team is unlikely to be directly involved in new member orientation, as this is the responsibility of each group. However, they will support groups to do this well by creating and maintaining orientation resources. The Valued Lives team may also facilitate connections - play 'matchmaker' - between individuals and groups/s that suit their needs.

3

What needs to happen to make the “new member orientation” a reality?

“It’s very important that people feel welcome and safe.”

#

Action

3.1

Network orientation pack (for individuals)

Individuals will benefit from a very simple orientation ‘pack’ for the network as a whole, explaining what it is and who it’s for, how groups work and how to join them, how to setup a new group, how to participate in online forums, and so on. This ‘pack’ may be a document, or it could be something else like a suite of digital resources including short videos.

3.2

Group orientation resources

Resources to support groups in providing new members a good orientation experience will be important. This may include content relating to accessibility and inclusion, acknowledging the different needs of individuals. These resources can be very simple and brief, leaving lots of room for groups to adapt to their group needs

Peer Network Journey: Ongoing connection & problem-solving



This is the essence of the Peer Network and is where most of the 'action' happens. However, it may not be where the Valued Lives team spend most of their effort. Ongoing connection and problem-solving happens between members of the network and groups themselves - peers supporting peers - while the Valued Lives team provide 'behind-the-scenes' support.

What this might look like for...

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Individuals | Each individual brings to the network their own experiences and expertise, challenges they may be facing, and an offer to help their peers where they can. Experiences of the network will feel different for everyone - some people may be very active in multiple groups and across the whole network while others may just attend meetups with the one group they choose to participant in. By connecting with the wider network, (e.g., online or at whole-of-network events) people will benefit from a broad range of expertise, information, and experiences. |
| Group facilitators | Facilitators listen in to the needs of their own group and, where the group cannot resolve these themselves, seek advice and support from the broader network. This might be through a whole-of-network digital platform, the Facilitator Community of Interest, peer supervision (e.g., CoMHWa), other community organisations, or the Valued Lives team. |
| Groups | Groups form around shared experiences and decide their own priorities and ways of working, so all groups look different. They could look different in their size, membership (who makes up the group), format of communicating and supporting each other (e.g., monthly in-person catch ups, online video meetings, messaging on a digital platform, etc.). Some interesting examples of group communication formats include <u>Discord</u> (commonly used by gamers) and 24x7 video conferencing rooms (e.g., <u>Rise Up and Carve</u>). Each group can also decide roles that their members play, beyond the facilitator, to share the responsibility of group functioning (e.g., a co-facilitator, note-taker, meeting host, etc.). These roles could change over time, to adapt to changing needs. Groups can benefit from links to other groups and the wider network. Where a group cannot completely resolve a challenge presented by one of its members, they can reach out to other groups and community connections for additional help. |
| The whole network | The whole network is connected with the invitation to all individuals and groups involved to 'tap into' the rest of the network as they feel they need. Most 'whole-of-network' connection would realistically happen online, complemented by occasional events or other opportunities that the Valued Lives team could host or support when resources allow. Online connection needs to expand beyond the existing Facebook group - this is a good start but excludes people who are not on Facebook (primarily younger people who use other social media platforms and older people). Events and workshops may be hosted by Valued Lives or done in collaboration with other organisations. Responding to current needs and new challenges identified by groups, as well as addressing the diversity of the network, will ensure these opportunities have a big impact. |
| Valued Lives team | The focus of the Valued Lives team will be on building the capacity of individuals and groups to make and strengthen their connections, find information, and solve their problems with each other. This is done by tending to the conditions and spaces that enable this to happen. Only where there are gaps in knowledge and expertise throughout the network would the team play a role in finding specific information or responding to specific requests of individuals and groups. |

4

What needs to happen to make “ongoing connection and problem-solving” a reality?

| # | Action |
|-----|--|
| 4.1 | <p>Network-wide digital platform</p> <p>A digital community platform to distribute the responsibility of information sharing and problem-solving across the whole network and lessen the administrative load of the Valued Lives team. It could encourage more individuals to engage with the network (even before they join a group) and strengthen connections across multiple groups. This platform would need features for communication (e.g., posts, chat), file sharing and/or wiki, and possibly event listings. To be successful, it would need to be very easy to find and use, and moderated to ensure it is a safe and welcoming space. There are many platforms designed for this purpose (e.g., Discord, Mighty Networks, Circle) or that cover some features and not others (e.g., Meetup, Slack) where integrations could be helpful. In the first instance, it may work well to prototype and test some small changes in the existing Facebook group to encourage more diverse voices, active engagement of members, and sharing of information/resources between peers. Listening to feedback about these changes, the team could articulate a ‘must-have’ set of principles and features to support the selection of the most suitable platform.</p> |
| 4.2 | <p>Bank of skills and resources</p> <p>A ‘bank’ of skills and resources that members across the whole network can contribute to. The digital platform (above) would be an ideal place to host this, however some low/no-cost prototypes could include a Google document or simple Airtable database.</p> |
| 4.3 | <p>Mentoring</p> <p>Mentoring opportunities, in particular new facilitators being supported by experienced facilitators. This could include facilitators reaching out to their mentors to help solve problems that their group have been unable to solve and could benefit from broader expertise (see Action 2.5).</p> |
| 4.4 | <p>New group roles</p> <p>Groups identify roles in addition to ‘facilitator’ that meet their specific needs and share the responsibilities across their members. Valued Lives team could provide some ideas of what these might be and how they might work, but groups determine their version of these. Inter-group sharing of practices (e.g., through Facilitator Community of Interest or the digital platform) helps groups learn about what’s working for others and might work for them as well.</p> |
| 4.5 | <p>Whole-of-network events and workshops</p> <p>Events aimed at the whole network (and possibly wider community) enable connection and sharing across different groups and potentially reach further into the community, to support shifting community attitudes about disabilities. They would need to take into account the diversity of the network with the understanding some members would have greater barriers to participating (e.g., location, cost, accessibility needs, comfort with large groups, etc.). There may need to be few varied events to address different needs, for example young people may be most comfortable with other young people.</p> |

Peer Network Journey: New paths



It is understood that, while we want to see the life of the network as a whole thrive for years to come, the individuals and groups will come and go and change in response to changing needs. Changes and endings happen for different reasons and are important moments for the Valued Lives team to acknowledge and support. These are also key moments for listening to feedback from individuals and groups.

What this might look like for...

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Individuals | Individuals will move on from groups or the network as a whole for many different reasons, such as moving geographic location, major life events, developing new interests, or pursuing leadership pathways. There may also be times when negative experiences cause individuals to disengage. Valued Lives team will need to support facilitators to look for signs of this and seek additional support as required. The different pathways and options available to individuals will need to be clear so they know they can join different groups and stay connected to the network at any time, as well as imagine other pathways in their future (e.g., systemic advocacy opportunities, advisory boards, etc.). |
| Group facilitators | Group facilitators may need or want to step down from their role and this will need to be supported by their fellow group members. Some general guidance from Valued Lives team and the Facilitator Community of Interest will be valuable through this change. It may be possible that some groups have two co-facilitators for a period of transition. |
| Groups | Groups will start, end, and sometimes have a 'pause' or break when needed. Endings may not necessarily be a negative thing and in fact may be cause for celebration. The Valued Lives team could play a part in group celebrations and take the opportunity to gather feedback and stories which, where appropriate, could be shared throughout the wider network. Attrition from a group may be an indication that the Valued Lives team need to listen to feedback or provide additional support to a group, helping them uncover and address the cause of this. |
| The whole network | The whole network will benefit from hearing from individuals and groups at times of change, where those people feel comfortable sharing. For example, individuals pursuing leadership pathways could be great stories to share through 'news' online. Groups that are going through significant change or ending is also important news to share, along with the learning that has surfaced through reflection on the changes. |
| Valued Lives team | Changes to groups and individuals are important moments for the team to listen into and, in some cases, offer additional support. While these changes could be varied, some basic guidelines around how to manage them would be of benefit to the team and the network. Sharing stories and learning on a regular basis will help everyone imagine new positive paths and find comfort in managing changes. |

5

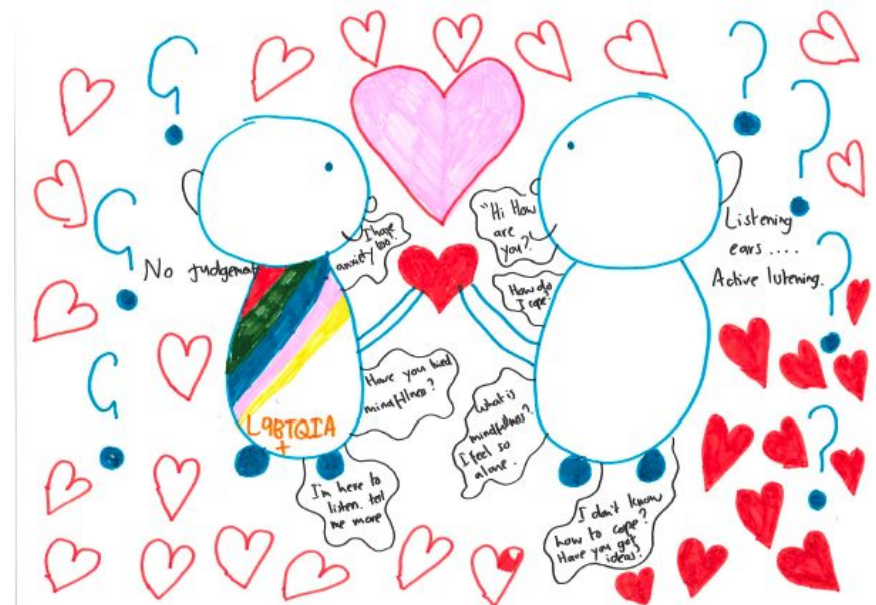
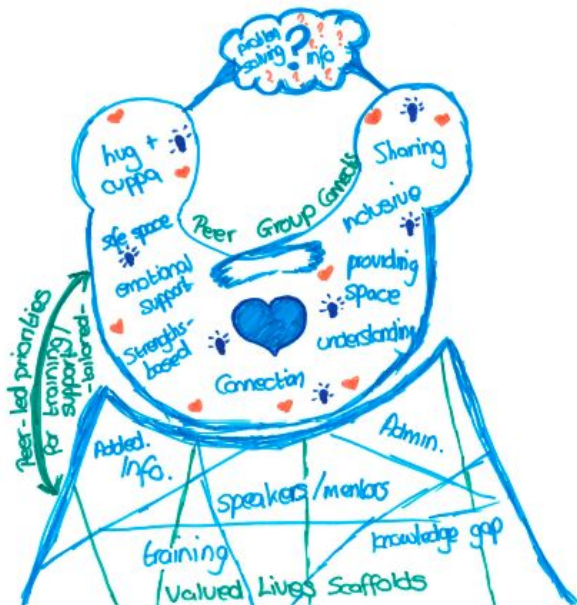
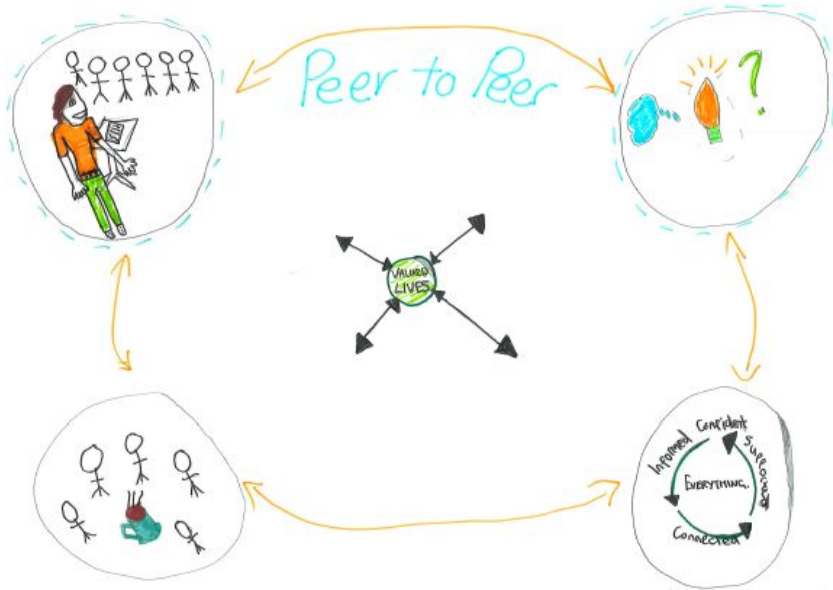
What needs to happen to make “new paths” a reality?

| # | Action |
|-----|---|
| 5.1 | Individual leadership pathways Peers, group facilitators, and the Valued Lives team at any time might identify an individual as having leadership potential or hear ambitions of this nature from them. These opportunities can be supported by building collective knowledge around what leadership opportunities exist (e.g., systemic advocacy opportunities, advisory boards, etc.) and sharing them throughout the network. |
| 5.2 | Resources and coaching to support group changes While group changes could be varied and happen for many different reasons, some basic guidelines around how to manage them would benefit the network (e.g., transition to new facilitator/s, hosting a celebration, ways to reflect together, etc.). The Valued Lives team will need to carry out practical tasks such as updating information about groups on the website and other communication materials. Where groups end, it is important the Valued Lives team offer support and an opportunity for feedback and reflection. |
| 5.3 | Feedback loops and shared learning Learning about changes that other groups and individuals go through, whether positive or negative, is extremely valuable to the wider network. Where appropriate, positive stories and summarised reflections (e.g., from groups that have ended) could be shared with the network online and other communication channels (e.g., an e-news). Moments of feedback may happen ad hoc and in response to changes, however this should be complemented by some simple regular feedback opportunities (e.g., at Facilitator Community of Interest sessions, whole-of-network events, online polls, or an annual survey). |

Appendix

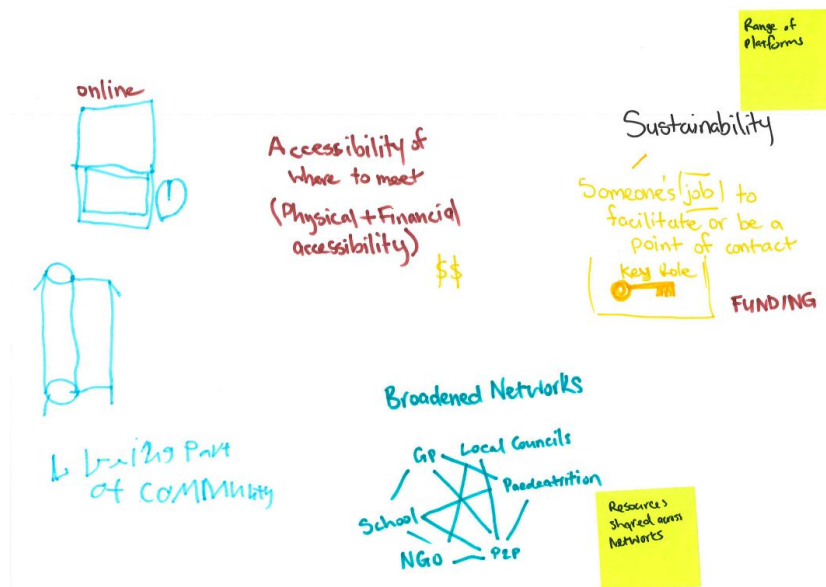
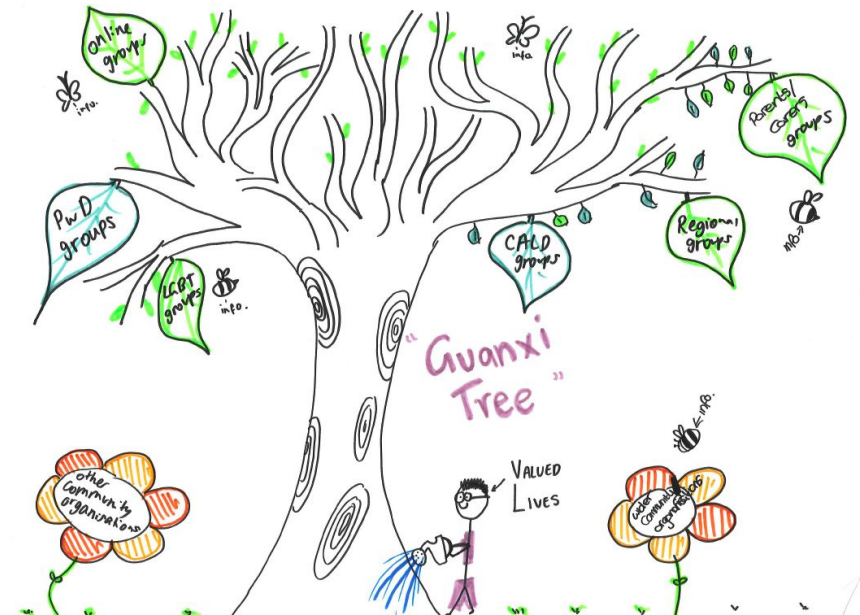
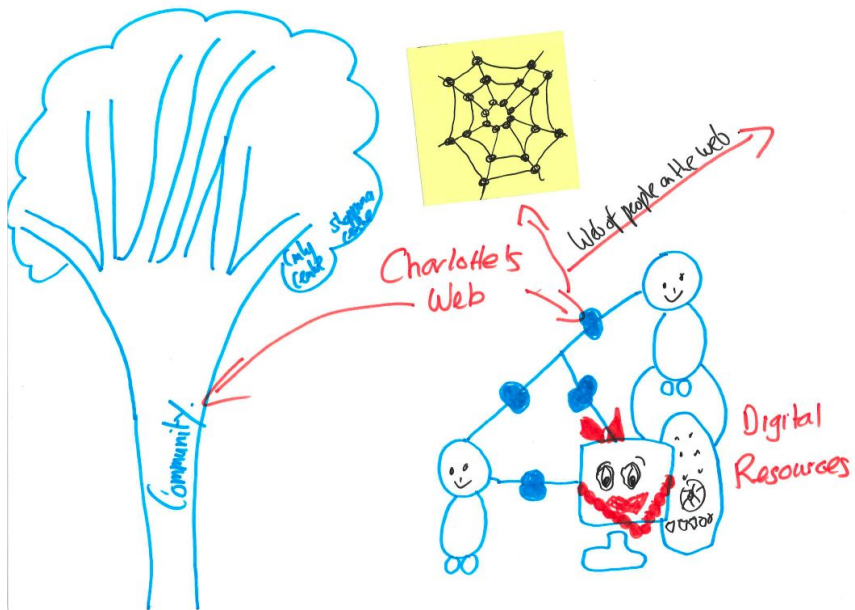
Current model sketches

Co-design Workshop #1



Future model sketches

Co-design Workshop #2



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