

Volunteering and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

A Survey of Victorian Disability Organisations

1. Introduction

Volunteers create community. Having volunteers support people with a disability provides greater capacity and likelihood of developing a community where people are accepted and included.

The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will provide people with a disability greater choice, control and access to services. It is based on principles of community inclusion and forms part of how the Government will meet its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the UN Convention), to: *'... promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.'*

The NDIS will provide \$22 billion a year to support 460,000 people with disability. However alongside increased opportunities and resources, there is also concern that the Scheme could inadvertently limit or destroy some of the social capital that enables people with a disability to enjoy real community inclusion. Some disability organisations support children and adults with a disability through engaging volunteers in direct 'one on one' or group based support. Currently it is unclear how these services will be resourced to continue this vital work. These services do not fit into the 'tier 3' individual packages and will require significant 'block funded' or 'bulk purchased' mechanisms to be maintained and further developed.

Concerned about this situation, in late 2015 a small working group of disability organisations that provide support to people with a disability through volunteers in a primary service role, met to explore this issue. The group comprised staff from Extended Families Australia, Inclusion Melbourne, Interchange Incorporated and People Outdoors. The group developed a survey and invited other disability service organisations in Victoria to complete it. 47 separate organisations completed the survey.

This paper explores the need to support volunteering under the NDIS and discusses the results of this survey.

2. Executive Summary

The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will provide \$22 billion a year to support 460,000 people with disability providing greater choice, control and access to services. However alongside increased opportunities and resources, there is also concern that the Scheme could inadvertently limit or destroy some of the social capital that enables people with a disability to enjoy real community inclusion.

In late 2015 a small working group of disability organisations that provide support to people with a disability through volunteers in a primary service role, met to explore this issue. The group developed a survey and invited other disability service organisations in Victoria to complete it. 47 organisations completed the survey.

These organisations collectively engage a total of 5,175 volunteers to support 11,124 people with disability. Although only 51% of those agencies were able to share their volunteer hours, they still collectively reported delivering in excess of 370,475 hours in 2014-15.

It is unknown how many of Victoria's 312 registered disability organisations engage volunteers in the direct support of people with a disability, although the number is likely to be significantly greater than the sample of this survey.

These results show the enormous reach of volunteers and the significant place they have in the community and the delivery of supports and services to people with a disability.

Alarming, whilst nearly all of the respondent organisations (96%) aspire to continue to provide volunteer supports under the NDIS, only one third (33%) of those surveyed have made any plans to transition their volunteer programs into the NDIS.

This statistic is very concerning and represents a real danger for loss of social capital with the introduction of the NDIS.

The following recommendations are made in the context of this project and intended for consideration of future funding for volunteer supported services in the disability sector:

For State Government

1. To map the number of funded services that provide direct support to people with a disability through volunteers and the current level of funding to these services.
2. Ensure that Victoria maintains or increases the funds currently expended on specific volunteer coordination to support people with a disability through its multiple programs including HACC, Disability Services, Department of Justice and other areas.
3. Develop a transition plan for current volunteer coordination services to the NDIS, in consultation with NDIA and relevant disability service providers.
4. To establish a process for continuation of current block funding arrangements for volunteer coordination services whilst further planning and work is carried out.

For Federal Government / NDIA

5. To invest in research to identify best practice volunteering models for supporting people with a disability and achieving outcomes, with a view for effectiveness, efficiency, replication and scaling up.
6. To clarify with organisations utilising volunteers in direct support of people with disabilities how these will be funded under NDIS.

3. Background

3.1 The National Disability Insurance Scheme

The NDIS is a radical new way of funding disability services and supports in Australia. Meeting Australia's obligations as a signatory to the UN Convention is also the first Object of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (the NDIS Act) and is an objective of every intervention under the NDIS.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme was initially implemented in trial sites around Australia that commenced in 2013. It is now being rolled out progressively across Australia from 1 July 2016.

The NDIS reforms will see the disability sector:

- Moving away from eight separate State/Territory funding schemes to one uniform, national scheme

- Changing from block funding of disability service provider organisations by governments to individualised funding for people with disabilities based on individual needs assessments
- Ditching Australia’s old welfare and charity model of disability funding, replacing it with a legislatively guaranteed “insurance” model whereby all Australians who meet the eligibility criteria are legally entitled to NDIS funding for all ‘necessary and reasonable’ supports.

By allocating funding for disability services and supports to people with disabilities themselves rather than to service provider organisations, and by introducing individualised funding packages, the NDIS aims to ensure that Australians with disability – and their families, where relevant – enjoy far greater choice and control over all necessary services and supports.

The NDIS is based on three tiers: Tier 1 recognises everyone in Australia is a contributor to the scheme and may need to draw on it at some time in their lives (eg: following a catastrophic injury resulting in a lifelong disability); Tier 2 provides general information about support options and generic services for people who have a disability, but not at the level that a person requires daily assistance with everyday living tasks; and Tier 3 provides individualised planning and funding for people who require specialised supports. Tier 2 is now known as Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) and this will be accessed by potentially millions of people.

The NDIS will provide ongoing financial support for the estimated 460,000 Australians with significant and permanent disability. This support will include, for example, funding for intensive early intervention therapy services and/or equipment, where there is good evidence such therapy and/or equipment will substantially improve or arrest a decline in functioning. If a person is eligible for a support package in the NDIS, he or she will receive funding on an annual basis to purchase the services, aids and equipment that they have been assessed as needing. People then have the choice to purchase this from any provider. As individual circumstances, condition or needs change, NDIS participants will be able to apply to have their funding plan adjusted accordingly. Additionally, participants will be able to select to self-manage their own funds, in which case they will be paid into a nominated bank account, or else ask the NDIA (the agency established to administer the NDIS) or a third party to manage the funding.

3.2 Information, Linkages and Capacity Building

It is important to see Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) as an integral part of the NDIS. Successful implementation of ILC is key to the overall goal of the NDIS to increase opportunities for people with disability to take part in the Australian economy and society. Successful implementation of ILC is also key to the sustainability of the scheme in the long run.

The NDIS Act outlines that the Agency can fund people and organisations to deliver ILC activities: ‘The Agency may provide assistance in the form of funding for persons or entities:

- a. for the purposes of enabling those persons or entities to assist people with disability to:
 - i) realise their potential for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development; and
 - ii) participate in social and economic life; and
- b. otherwise in the performance of the Agency’s functions’

In undertaking this role, the Agency must use its ‘best endeavours’ to act in accordance with any relevant intergovernmental agreements as well as act in a “proper, efficient and effective manner” (Chapter 6, Part 1, Section 119). These intergovernmental agreements include such things as the bilateral agreements signed between the States and the Commonwealth; and the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Applied Principles, which outline the responsibilities of the NDIS and mainstream service systems such as education and health.

With this backdrop, all Australian governments agreed in mid-2015 to the ILC Policy Framework. The National Disability Insurance Agency has been given responsibility for implementing the policy, which outlines two broad aims for ILC:

1. To provide information, referral and capacity building supports for people with disability, their families, and carers that are not directly tied to a person through an individually funded package.
2. To partner with local communities, mainstream and universal services to improve access and inclusion for people with disability.

This policy framework identifies five activity streams:

1. Information, linkages and referrals
2. Capacity building for mainstream services
3. Community awareness and capacity building
4. Individual capacity building
5. Local area co-ordination (LAC).

These areas of work reflect the governments' shared view of the most effective ways of increasing the social and economic participation of people with disability. It also explains the intended scope of ILC. This is important as in the future **the Agency will only fund activities that fit into one of the five streams**. This means, for example, that ILC funding will not be provided to organisations to help people with daily living activities such as assistance with shopping or cooking because these types of activity do not fit within any of the five activity streams. This has impacts on disability support organisations who have service models built around connecting volunteers to people with a disability for the purposes of increasing social participation and decreasing social isolation; and also for those disability supporting organisations that link and support people with a disability into voluntary roles.

While the ILC Policy Framework identifies activity streams and funding principles, it does not explain how to implement them. Implementation will include:

- setting the priorities for funding
- establishing the expected outcomes
- working out how those outcomes might be measured.

In late 2015, the National Disability Insurance Agency released the *ILC Commissioning Framework*, a document intended to translate the policy into action and provide a basis for consultation and feedback. The Framework outlines how the Agency will fund and manage information, linkage and capacity building (ILC) activities in the future. It sets out what outcomes we expect from those activities, and how we expect those activities will be funded and delivered.

In 2011, the Productivity Commission released its report into disability care and support in Australia. In recommending the introduction of the NDIS, the Commission recognised that not everything could or should be achieved by giving people with disability greater access to individually funded packages. The Commission argued that individual and community capacity building would be needed if people with disability were going to achieve greater social and economic participation. The Commission also recognised that there would be a group of people with disability who, while not eligible for an individually funded package, might still need some form of support. It is expected that through ILC, the NDIS will provide a comprehensive information and referral service to help all Australians with any level or type of disability to access mainstream, community and – where necessary – specialist disability support services.

4 Volunteering

4.1 Who Are Volunteers?

Volunteers are unpaid community members, supported through a not-for-profit organisation, who contribute to the social inclusion of people with disabilities. 'Not-for-profit organisations are the vehicle through which volunteers provide a community benefit. Volunteering is distinguished from paid work' (Volunteering Australia 2006).

A distinction can be drawn between 'informal volunteering' which is what people do in their private lives to, for example, assist a neighbour, friend; versus formal volunteering, which is orchestrated through an organisation. Volunteer programs are an active and supported means to involve community members in the lives of people with disabilities. Natural or informal supports do not depend on organisations as an intermediary.

Volunteers make a significant contribution to society and the economy. Volunteers were estimated to provide a volume of work equivalent to 14 per cent of paid jobs in Victoria, with the value of volunteering across all sectors estimated at over \$16 billion to the Victorian economy. Of this, formal or organised volunteering through organisations is estimated at around 40 per cent of volunteer time, with the remainder provided through informal volunteering arrangements. Women are more likely to volunteer than men however, on average, men provide more organised volunteer hours per year.

4.2 Advantages of Volunteers for the NDIS

Volunteers have potential to contribute substantially to the goal of the NDIS to increase social and economic participation of people with disabilities. Volunteers can contribute beyond what staff and family members can achieve alone. Research consistently shows that volunteers can:

- Reduce social isolation and improve mental wellbeing of vulnerable people that cannot be achieved, or in addition to, what can be achieved with paid staff or family. That is, involving volunteers in people's lives can reduce loneliness, and reduce mental health costs.
- Extend the effectiveness of formal services: both cost and impact: that is, formal funds go further – even after costs for volunteers are taken into account.
- Challenge the assumption that the only response to staff shortfalls is more paid staff about the need for workforce expansion and the predictions of workforce shortfalls.
- Strengthen the capacity of the community sector to provide informal support as/when/if volunteering relationships through a CSO translate to informal community support.
- Provide safeguards for vulnerable people through building relationships with community members (for example, Klees 2005; Montclair 2011).

4.3 Effectiveness of Volunteer Programs

There are examples of successful approaches which have been tried by organisations to establish and maintain volunteer supports for people who are socially isolated and lonely (Amado, 1993, Klees 2005, 2013).

Volunteer roles and how they are used by organisations vary. Progressive disability organisations will engage volunteers to effectively increase social connection, inclusion and participation by supporting volunteers to:

- Develop personalised supports for individualised lives
- Provide a range of support to maintain each different relationship with a community member, including support to family members (typically but not exclusively parents), the person with a disability and the volunteer

- Provide support to the relationship as long as needed by the volunteer, the person with a disability and/or his/her family. (Organisations recognise that the volunteer and person with a disability may choose to move on)
- Increase the amount of effective support available for each person to pursue activities, hobbies and ongoing learning while at the same time increasing the number and nature of various informal social relationships.
- Provide opportunities for community members to participate
- Provide volunteering opportunities for people with / without a disability
- Connect a person with a disability to a community activity, group, interest or pass time
- Increase awareness in community of people with disabilities

See *Attachment 1* for an example of one volunteer programs objectives (Inclusion Melbourne).

5 Survey Results

5.1 Scope of volunteering

A total of 5,175 volunteers are engaged and supported by the 47 organisations who responded to the survey. Of those volunteers, 4,073 (79%) are directly supporting people with a disability.

11,124 people with disabilities are directly supported by respondent organisation's volunteers.

Only 51% of respondents chose or were able to share the estimated number of direct support hours provided by volunteers. It is unknown if the lack of response by some organisations is a hesitation to share or a lack of data recording to provide this information. It is expected that those funded through DHHS Disability Services Community Respite should have this information on hand as it is a reporting requirement. However with only 24 organisations responding to this question, there was still a staggering 370,475 hours of direct support provided in the 2014 / 2015 year. If these organisations are representative of other organisations it could mean that volunteers in Victoria are providing in excess of one million hours of direct support to people with a disability.

It is unknown how many of Victoria's 312 registered disability organisations engage volunteers in the direct support of people with a disability, although the number is likely to be significantly greater than the sample of this survey.

These results show the enormous reach of volunteers and the significant place they have in the community and the delivery of supports and services to people with a disability. Clearly volunteers form a significant part of disability service sector.

5.2 The role and focus of volunteers

Respondent's volunteers performed the following direct support roles:

- One on One Support in the form of community access and inclusion, mentoring, friendship, and skill development work
- Leading or supporting activities such as groups, social events and camps
- Skills based volunteering (eg counselling)

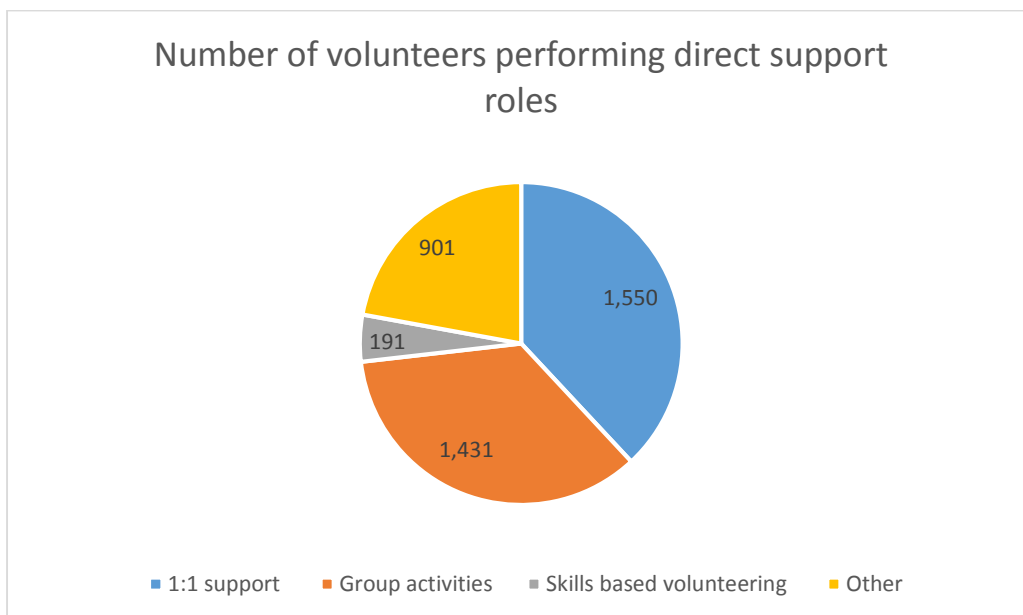


Diagram 1 – Number of volunteers performing different types of direct support roles

Volunteers also performed the following indirect support roles - administration, maintenance, skills based (eg IT, legal, finance), as well as performing other roles such as meals delivery, fundraising, driving and serving on Boards of Management.

Volunteers in direct support roles contribute across all the key life areas of education, employment, social participation, independence, health and wellbeing and living arrangements.

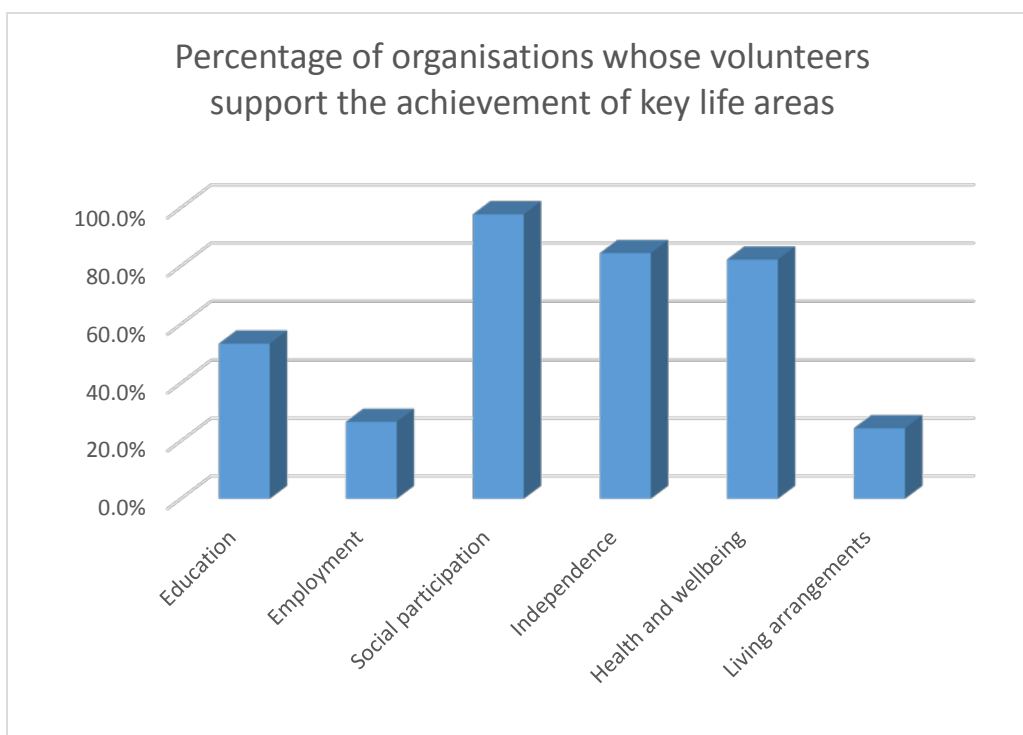


Diagram 2 – Percentage of organisations surveyed supporting achievement of key life areas through volunteers

Volunteers clearly add value and create opportunities for people with a disability to achieve key life goals. 98% of the organisation surveyed have volunteers assisting people in the area of social participation, with 84% or organisations assisting to people to achieve independence and 82% health

and wellbeing. These represent already significant payoffs for people with a disability and funders in terms of genuine quality support and value for money. There is undoubtedly capacity to further develop and grow some of these areas, such as help with living arrangements, bringing even greater value.

5.3 The Difference between volunteers and paid staff

It is widely held that there are differences in benefits and outcomes between using paid staff and volunteers for community inclusion and participation for people with disability. Responders were questioned regarding observed differences between using staff and volunteers in terms of benefits and outcomes for the community and people with a disability. 83% of responders have observed differences. The positive differences noted include increased social connection and community participation, genuine relationships and the value of lived experience.

The respondent's comments regarding this include the following:

- *'Volunteers and the people we support often develop stronger connections than that of paid staff'.*
- *'The relationship can be different, not time based or output focused. More fluid and changes with the needs of individual. Strong links to community'.*
- *'The child, young person and family usually feel genuine friendship and care ... it is a friend, not just a 'carer'... and friendships are sustained beyond the program'.*
- *'Volunteers have more time to give for social interaction, therefore increasing much needed social networks for people and meaningful relationships are formed by sharing common interests, values and goals. This extra time and attention leads to improved self-esteem and general wellbeing as well as providing life enhancing opportunities and experiences for those people accessing our services'.*
- *'For some people volunteers can be the only ones in their life who aren't 'paid' to be with them'.*
- *'Volunteers are the community presence at ... They connect people to the community by using their networks and skills. Participants know that volunteers want to be part of their lives without payment to be involved'.*
- *'Volunteers are viewed more as chosen contacts than staff...'*
- *'We find volunteers are very committed with no expectations and see the person and not the disability. Volunteers can come with various skill sets which can be very advantageous in program planning whereby some staff have been trained in disability only which can sometimes hamper progression'.*
- *'Volunteers are members of the general public who can help break down stigma - they tell their friends and family about their volunteering and it helps to widen peoples understanding. They're passionate and motivated ...)*
- *'We utilise a diverse range of volunteers from 14 - 76 years of age. We will not have this diversity with only a paid workforce. Volunteers make a valuable contribution to the organisation with the supports they provide and also provides them with value and purpose. It is a beneficial arrangement for the clients, organisation and volunteers'.*

5.4 Future Plans

Nearly all of the respondent organisations (96%) aspire to continue to provide volunteer supports under the NDIS. However only a third (33%) of those surveyed have made any plans to transition their volunteer programs into the NDIS.

This statistic is very concerning and represents a real danger for loss of social capital. It undoubtedly reflects the lack of information and government policy regarding how volunteering programs will fit and be funded under the NDIS. With no clear pathways for transition, this leaves organisations floundering and without clear messages to give people with a disability and their families currently supported by volunteers. There is a wide spread concern from organisations about the impact of failure or delayed transition of programs into the NDIS where volunteers directly support people with a disability into the NDIS.

6 Conclusion

Volunteers play a significant and vital role in the delivery of support to people with a disability in Victoria. Volunteers create community and are an essential resource for many people with a disability to live full, inclusive lives enjoying the same opportunities as others.

Yet it is still unclear how and if volunteer based services, such as those represented by the working group organisations, are to be funded under NDIS. There is danger of losing thousands of volunteers and hundreds of thousands of hours of support to people with disabilities unless this situation is resolved.

For the NDIS to avoid inadvertently limiting or destroying the very social capital it wants to promote that enables people with a disability to enjoy real community inclusion and vital support, **urgent action** must be taken to establish appropriate funding models for volunteer services providing direct support for people with a disability.

It is unknown how many of the 300 plus disability organisations registered with DHHS engage volunteers in the direct support of people with a disability, although the number is likely to be significantly greater than the sample of this survey. Further research is required to understand the number of services, what funding they receive and the various roles that volunteers undertake in supporting people with a disability and helping them achieve a fulfilled life with genuine participation and inclusion in community. Without knowing the extent of these services and the funding required for their continuation, it is not possible to know if the funding planned for ILC bulk purchase (of which volunteer services might be a part) will be adequate to continue these vital services.

Some organisations have developed a volunteer capacity alongside other services, which are not government funded. A mechanism to include and understand the scope of these services is also required.

Effectively recruiting, screening, assessing, training and managing volunteers to work with vulnerable people and achieve meaningful outcomes takes significant work and resourcing. It should not be seen as a cheaper option (in fact in some cases it is not) but as a vital part of building a community that is inclusive of people with a disability. Volunteer services also sit alongside and integrate with other disability services. The working group believe that effective volunteer support must sit within disability or specialist organisations who understand the required focus of support and can train and support volunteers to effectively help people achieve outcomes.

7 Recommendations

For State Government

1. To map the number of funded services that provide direct support to people with a disability through volunteers and the current level of funding to these services.
2. Ensure that Victoria maintains or increases the funds currently expended on specific volunteer coordination to support people with a disability through its multiple programs including HACC, Disability Services, Department of Justice and other areas.
3. Develop a transition plan for current volunteer coordination services to the NDIS, in consultation with NDIA and relevant disability service providers.
4. To establish a process for continuation of current block funding arrangements for volunteer coordination services whilst further planning and work is carried out.

For Federal Government / NDIA

5. To invest in research to identify best practice volunteering models for supporting people with a disability and achieving outcomes, with a view for effectiveness, efficiency, replication and scaling up.
6. To clarify with organisations utilising volunteers in direct support of people with disabilities how these will be funded under NDIS.

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- Montclair, A (2011). Friendship Really Matters: Exploring effects of Compeer friendships for people experiencing mental illness, St Vincent de Paul Society, Box Hill, Victoria, Australia.

Attachment 1

Inclusion Melbourne's Volunteering Program has the following objectives:

For people with disabilities, to access volunteers to:

- Experience a more inclusive lifestyle through the development of social relationships, usually initiated through a common interest or activity or education and learning
- Have greater opportunity to be present in the wider community
- Have social relationships, including friendships with members of the community which are personalised and flexible, not based on payment. These can be enduring or task specific and are mutually beneficial, such as shared enjoyment of art or building of skills
- Have a valued role in social relationships, and not only as service recipients
- Continue to develop skills relevant for various social relationships and personal relationships, coping skills, processing emotions, strategies, problem solving
- To be contributors to various valued roles

For family members (typically parents) to:

- Recognise the importance for their son/daughter in forming attachments and involvement with community members.
- Develop trust in community members: recognise community members want to spend time with their family member
- Educate families about the value of volunteers
- Lift family horizons about what is possible in the wider community
- Know about/ recognise the role volunteers have with their family member
- Support the family and build skills and relationships for family member
- Have a 'break' as a consequence of the time spent between a volunteer and their family member

For volunteers as members of the community, including people with disabilities, to:

- Recognise the value of diverse personal relationships
- Experience opportunities and benefits of spending time with a person with an intellectual disability: to build relationships, to build community
- Be better connected in a way that increases emotional wellbeing and health, and personal development
- Contribute to meaningful and valued community work – to give back to the community
- Further progress their priorities for personal development and experiences which could contribute to education, social skills development, and employment opportunities
- Develop additional roles / opportunities beyond initial activity tasks