

# Changing Lives, Changing Communities: Mackay

## Magpies Sporting Club, Mackay

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# About Changing Lives, Changing Communities

Changing Lives, Changing Communities are 13, two-day events across Queensland, creating new ways for people – citizens, community organisations, private sector and government representatives – to come together, envision and ask, “What will it take to create communities where everyone contributes, matters and belongs?”

Changing Lives, Changing Communities is about bringing together all parts of the community to co-create solutions to ensure everyone is included in their community, and can access what they need; like a place to call home, good health, transport, education, and meaningful employment.

This document brings together the highlights of the two days in 2018 in Mackay.

The Changing Lives Changing Communities events in Toowoomba, Mackay, Caboolture, Brisbane, Gold Coast, and Normanton are funded through Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) National Readiness Grants - National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) – a partnership between Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN), Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) and Anti Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ).

# Check - in: What inspired you to be here?

* Learn how to contribute to my community
* Be inspired
* To start my journey as a support worker
* I like learning about people with different backgrounds and their ability in life
* The opportunity to meet with like-minded people who share the desire to make our community more inclusive
* Learn more
* Hear and share stories from the community
* Make Mackay a more inclusive, accessible place
* I try to be involved in anything that has a positive influence for all people
* Break down barriers and build skills
* Collective sharing gives power
* Looking to collaborate in building ideas for a more inclusive Mackay
* I was inspired in the hope for change in our community and what we need, not what people outside of our community think we want!

# The Mackay context: panel

## Tammie Lewis

### Business Development, Incredable Ltd

Tammie works at the Incredable Tip Shop in Mackay. Working with 22 staff and 25 volunteers, the tip shop has been running for five years supporting people with disability make a change in their lives. People in the tip shop are supported to move through the ranks at their own speed. With no government funding, the organisation works to train people, develop their confidence and start to realise their goals, whatever they may be!

## Helen Styles

### **Community Development Officer, Mackay Regional Council**

Helen spoke about the importance of planning for natural disasters so when they do hit, you are ready to act and bounce back. Planning is for community services as well as individuals, however it can be done together to make sure the most can be made of community assets and people. Remember, during an emergency, it is more likely neighbours will help each other than emergency services will help them.

## Valeriya Edsell

### Safer Pathways CALD Women Program Coordinator at George Street Neighbourhood Centre Association Inc

George Street Neighbourhood Centre has been supporting the Mackay community more than 30 years. The centre prides itself on being a resource for multicultural people in the area and is Valeriya’s passion. The Mackay community is at the heart of everything the centre does, working tirelessly to build a sustainable and resilient Mackay. Inclusion is one of the centre’s foundation bricks.

## Frances Rewharewha

### Central Queensland University

Frances teaches an aspirational program for high school students preparing for steps after finishing school. She reminds the young people that they can ask questions because ‘there are people paid to actually answer your questions so make them work’. Her focus is preparing students for the transition to post-school pathways which, she believes, are crucial to future employment. The Connect Year 12 Program is dedicated to helping students explore their own identity, interests and strengths, overcome any challenges they may face, and explore opportunities for higher education.

# Stories of inclusion

## Lexis Geia

Lexis talked to us as a mother and staunch advocate of the NDIS. She has two children who have been diagnosed with autism and epilepsy and, until she accessed the NDIS, she was struggling and felt like she was managing this alone. Access to the NDIS has changed her life and the life of the two boys. Lex is now a huge advocate and takes the time to share what she has learned with others in her community.

## Dave Conway

Dave is a local, partially blind artist who is making his mark using the internet and local gallery spaces. [Art from the Blind Side](https://www.facebook.com/ArtFromTheBlindside) had allowed Dave to access the world and sell his art. He has also hosted exhibitions, although finding spaces has been a little challenging. After selling more than 400 pieces of art Dave is moving forward and is passionate about the future.

## John Slade

John works for Endeavour helping to manage the warehouse. He could not hold his enthusiasm back in talking about the work, helping others and how he has been able to start to realise his dreams. When asked what made it possible, John responded, “Determination – lots of determination!” Rising to his level of enthusiasm and positivity was met with cheers and clapping from the group.

## Garry Matthews

Gary told a story about the past and the present - his story of growing up in an institution and how things have changed for people with disability. For Gary, the NDIS has led to even more change. He has taken up archery, a long-held dream, as well as working to improve his mobility through a range of different services.

## Life changes for a family in Mackay

While most parents would enjoy spending time and having conversations with their kids, for Lexis Geia it is particularly special because it is something that has not been possible until recently.

Lexis has two boys who have been diagnosed with autism and epilepsy. She was struggling and finding it difficult to afford the necessary therapies until she was introduced to the NDIS.

“Before the NDIS we did struggle a fair bit. I had no understanding of what autism was. When they were diagnosed I was just handed a piece of paper saying this is what autism is. Just go home and read it,” said Lex.

“I read it, but it was not registering for me.”

After seeing many doctors and healthcare professionals, Lex met a doctor who mentioned that her boys would probably be eligible for an NDIS package.

“He knew the sort of person I was and that it would be hard for me to go home and make that call for help. So, he made me contact the NDIS and fill out the paper work in his office,” she laughed. “In fact, he wouldn’t let me leave until I had it all done!”

“Once the boys got their plans everything has been smooth sailing. That was about two years ago, and we have had no problems at all.”

The biggest difference for Lex is that her boys are now able to do things for themselves.

“They can dress themselves, bath themselves and brush their teeth themselves.”

“It is awesome.”

With some excitement, Lex explains she is no longer working full time but able to be at home with her boys.

“I’ve never been able to do that before and it is amazing. I have a totally different relationship with them and it is great.”

Lexis now takes the things she has learned and generously shares them with others who find themselves navigating the same concerns and systems. She sees the two days at Changing Lives, Changing Communities as an extension of that sharing.

“It’s an awesome two days, to listen to other people speak about their stories. It is great to see organisations and businesses coming together to understand and include people with disability in everything they do.”

# Recipe for inclusion

## While storytellers were sharing their experiences, we asked participants to listen to the ingredients for inclusion. These are the keywords participants heard:

1. Determination
2. Support
3. Accessibility
4. Social media
5. Education
6. Community participation
7. Opportunities
8. Connection
9. Persistence
10. Understanding and acceptance

# Blue Skies Scenario (2009)

The Blueskies Scenario was a community response to the call for an alternative future for people with disability, their families and supporters.

It started with a core group, a dedicated group of community members working together who had power to influence, commitment and ‘natural authority’ across the stakeholder groups. The group included:

* Valmae Rose – National Disability Services
* Brad Swan – Assistant Director General – Department of Communities
* Lesley Chenoweth – Professor of Social Work - Griffith University
* Kevin Cocks – Director – Queensland Advocacy Incorporated
* Ann Greer – Manager - Community Connections
* Mark Henley – CEO – Spinal Injuries
* Nino Lalic – Advisor – Minister of Disability Services
* Grahame Schlect – Carers Queensland
* Fran Vlcary – Coordinator – Queenslanders with Disability Network
* Alissa Phillips – Executive Director – Space
* Margaret Ward – Strategic Planning and Policy Officer – Mamre
* Ian Plowman – Registered psychologist – independent facilitator

The core group had a shared purpose – they were clear about what they were doing, why and how we are going to achieve it. The Champions were a group of supporters who believe in what the core group were doing, who spread the word, talked to others about it and built the momentum. An integral part of the process was hosting community conversations with community members to develop shared values, purpose, and build the vision. This helped to develop a shared vision through conversations about what it needs to look like, and what will it take? The scenario was the clear articulation of what the alternative future will look like. Another important part was connecting with the community and getting their buy in, see how it benefits and getting people to care about it. It was also important to have influential buy in – People who could make decisions and influence on the board.

This led to the end goal – Deliver an outcome that makes good sense, socially and economically.

For more information about Blue Skies, please click [here](http://blue-skies.info/videos/blue-skies-video/).

# World Café

## What will it take to create a community where everyone contributes, matters and belongs? (key words written from participants to answer this question)

* Education
* Accessibility
* Awareness
* Open
* Communication
* Community
* Acceptance
* Information
* Knowledge
* Involvement
* Different formats
* Transparency
* Collaboration
* Flexibility
* Opportunities
* Diversity
* Connections
* Patience
* Value
* Inclusion
* Willingness

## What are the elements already happening here? (key words written from participants to answer this question)

* Mackay is being defined as a result of the NDIS person-centred based approach - funding is driving people’s needs
* Businesses are growing with the need
* More professionals are now available to be accessed
* Mackay has small areas of appropriate setting but are limited to whether you belong to that provider or organisation
* More flexibility or a neutral setting in Mackay would be a great source

## What action am I willing to take to progress the vision? (key words written from participants to answer this question)

* Stay educated around what’s needed in the community
* Need a 100-year plan like Sydney Harbour Bridge
* Interagency meeting, disability and seniors’ meetings are held
* The vision of bringing meetings together so all could be informed
* To collect date and extend conversations regarding the needs of the community
* Networking is too hard to access all the current meetings
* Link with all sectors so handovers are smooth for people over different funding provided from government – for example over 65 into aged care
* Information needs to be accessed. Holding a singular meeting would pass information more readily to source
* ACTION: to see if there could be one meeting approach instead of lots of smaller groups
* Sharing knowledge on experiences, services and programs
* Offer help-facilitation
* Self-care – not giving too much of yourself so you don’t burn out
* Acknowledging and respecting ‘perks’
* Showing you value - for example two for one deal reward system incentives
* Social media to advertise shared knowledge
* Networking meetings including families in information and activities and care needs
* Community disability webpage
* Contribute to education
* Be involved in conversations – time, energy and resources
* Making sure there is a consistent message being put through pathways and government
* Willing to change accessibility to all moving forward – housing
* Be more aware of accessibility in the community - making change
* Identify skill gaps and work in filling them
* Have general respect for people
* Advocate for inclusion for all
* Assist with committees
* Talk to media and businesses
* Push for targeted campaign to direct local business tourism to inclusiveness

# Appreciative Inquiry

## Making social change requires courage. We asked participants to share when they had to be courageous to create change. We asked what was inspiring/important and what helped it to happen. Here are some of the participants responses:

### What was inspiring/important?

* Perseverance
* Humour in the face of adversity
* Perception
* Confidence
* Finding your inner strength and independence

### What helped it to happen?

* Trusting yourself
* Accepting help from others

### What was inspiring/important?

* Brave and uplifting attitude
* Resilience to changing
* Desire to learn new things and succeed
* Dedication to be pushed to the best
* Diversity in experiences that helped with success
* Made into a kind and wonderful persona as a result

### What helped it to happen?

* Good attitude
* Hardworking ethic
* Changed environments to keep positive supports
* Family support

### What was inspiring/important?

* Personal passport
* Courage to go
* Courage to listen and act
* From big things, big things grow

### What helped it to happen?

* Individual agency
* Vision
* Real opportunity – create jobs
* Combining education, opportunity with experience
* Having awareness to see what’s missing and courage to create the opportunity
* From the heart

### What was inspiring/important?

* Courage to follow this idea
* Learning new skills – trust gut feeling
* Frame of mind, dignity and respect
* Stop, be grateful, acknowledge, and keep going

### What helped it to happen?

* Reached the end of the road
* Reaching out to others and seeing their experience
* Magic team using Facebook
* Appreciation of all aspects - add value people

# Choir of Unheard Voices

The Choir of Unheard Voices began in 2008 as a project to change people’s lives through singing. For nearly 10 years this is exactly what has happened, and the choir continues to work within the community as a performance and teaching group. They have taken on an advocate role for reducing mental health stigma within the community by their presence, by their songs, by their stories. Every time the choir sings, they show others they are not afraid to raise their voices in the hope their community will see how mental health does not define them, is not who they are and that they share the same journeys - just theirs have a few more dips and bumps and curves to navigate. As one voice they are proudly making everyone aware of the need to shatter this stigma within every community and to open the conversations and understanding of what mental health is all about.

# Open Space – ideas into action

## Project one

### Host idea – Youth mental health

### What could this idea become?

* Regional strategy: Developed to support, develop and nurture all our young people so they feel:
* They belong and have a voice in our community
* They are valued for their contribution
* They have opportunities to learn, develop and participate
* They feel safe and connected in their community
* This strategy would apply to all young people, regardless of their ability

### What do we know works?

* Community consultation
* Social media
* Letting youth have a voice
* Individual encouragement and support

### Who do we need to partner with?

* Councils x 3
* Education Queensland
* Mental health providers and network
* Sporting bodies/cultural/recreational organisations
* Cultural bodies
* General public
* North Queensland Primary Health Network
* Respiratory and Sleep Disorder Centre
* Partner with QCOSS, Mackay Youth Connection Network, Youth Justice

### What are the risks/challenges?

* Prevention is better than cure
* Youth learning and understanding, self-regulation and how to identify the triggers
* Cohesive community approach
* Interim goals – measurable
* Attitudinal changes
* Genuine collaboration

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* It’s what people are not saying that is important
* Develop trusts with our youth
* Opportunities need to be appropriate
* Involved young people in solutions
* Need to learn genuine collaborative practice

### How do we make sure everyone is included?

* Be respectful
* Wide spread information
* Talk responsibility to be inclusive

### What are our next wise steps?

* ILC grant may apply
* Connect with other project groups

## Project two

### Host idea – Employment opportunities

### What could this idea become?

* Disabled people given opportunities – the same as everyone else
* Federal legislation
* Local business involved
* Mackay Council
* Forming partnerships
* Chamber of Commerce
* Centrelink
* Job Active

### What do we know works?

* Funding
* Wage subsides
* Boost
* Ongoing support
* Support workers
* Training/education

### Who do we need to partner with?

* Mackay Council
* Chamber of Commerce
* Centrelink
* Job Active
* Local business
* Franchisees

### What are the risks and challenges?

* Health and safety
* Fear
* Time, money
* EFFORT (too hard)

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* Stay positive
* Get back up again
* Never give up
* Follow up
* Keep connected

### How do we make sure everyone is included?

* Legislation
* Enforce anti-discrimination
* Make organisations accountable
* Fines – penalties for non-compliance

### What are our next wise steps?

* Contact all listed and follow up

## Project three

### Host Idea – TASKFORCE

### What could this idea become?

* Drivers/facilitators of change
* Consortium of local stakeholders
* Glue for action groups

### What do we know works?

* Collaboration
* Communication
* Diversity and skills and knowledge
* Networks
* Power of numbers
* Planning
* Commitment
* Achieving small goals
* Local ownership

### Who do we need to partner with?

* Chamber of Commerce
* Peak bodies across sectors – local/state/federal
* Community members

### What are the risks and challenges?

* Commitment
* Getting buy in from right people
* Change of government
* Political interference
* Sharing information

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* Active listening
* Place-based responses
* Celebrate and share (marketing internal/external)
* Calculated risk (challenge status quo)
* Keep it simple
* Action learning (geographic testing)
* Documenting the journey
* Staying focussed/clear sight of priorities

### How do we make sure everyone is included?

* Development of a charter
* Transparent and open communication (agreed process)
* Form of communication (language)

### What are our next wise steps?

* Participants (identify)
* BRING TO THE ATTENTION OF THE LOCAL MAYOR
* Development of the Foundation (Principles)

## Project four

### Host Ideas – Promote disability tourism in Mackay AGGRESSIVELY combining private and business sector

### What could this idea become?

* It has the capacity to affect every aspect of accessibility in Mackay. Accommodation, shopping, transport, restaurants, leisure. It can also bring a great boost to our tourism industry, which will have impact on the entire community

### What do we know works?

* Giving consistent messages to business owners
* Having enough people with the right skill set
* Collaboration between organisations
* Incentives
* Profits

### Who do we need to partner with?

* Tourism Mackay
* Council
* Chamber of Commerce
* Motel/hotel managers
* Grants – ILC (NDIS) Chamber of Commerce
* Department of State Development

### What are the risks and challenges?

* Show financial incentives
* Business owners won’t be interested
* People lose interest in the project after a while
* Right people with right skills bored
* Risk aversion insurance

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* Is my business accessible?
* Watch and follow a person in a wheelchair
* Perhaps experience using a wheelchair in their own facility?
* How to market the concept of a vital and financially empowered disability community?

### How do we make sure everyone is included?

* Educate business owners that the disability community is a great untapped market sector that EXCEEDS the Chinese tourism sector

### What are our next wise steps?

* Mackay/Whitsunday tourism
* Chamber of Commerce
* Spinal Life

## Project five

### Host Idea – Accessibility inclusion for the whole community

### What could this idea become?

* Remove all barriers/full inclusion into every aspect of life
* To access basic needs to live
* Housing/transport/community/activities/health – without having to rely on others for access

### What do we know works?

* New builds – access improved because of new legislation
* New footpaths considered
* Good public support then needed
* Buses – wheelchair access

### Who do we need to partner with?

* State/federal members
* Accessibility forum
* Private sector/business
* Department of Housing/housing forum
* Private enterprises
* Council
* Tech services
* Buslink
* Transport/roads
* Taxi

### What are the risks and challenges?

* Private shop owners – change attitudes/awareness/education
* Limited footpath access
* RISK! Have to walk/travel on roads
* No tie down points in buses for wheelchairs

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* Walk in someone else’s shoes – experience their daily life
* Feedback target groups
* Feedback family/carers
* Feedback to community leaders/private sector/government
* Find out why – limit change in private sector
* Expand conversations to private sector

### How do we make sure everyone is included?

* Walk in someone else’s shoes – experience their daily life
* Feedback target groups
* Feedback family/carers
* Feedback to community leaders/private sector/government
* Find out why – limit change in private sector

### What are our next wise steps?

* Change legislation to include modification to old buildings and private stops
* Unisex toilets in all public places/areas – for all access

## Project six

### Host Idea – What education can be provided in the broader community to be more inclusive?

### What could this idea become?

* Everyone is accepted and thought of
* Planning and policies
* People with disabilities living parallel lives
* Stop the word ‘disabled’
* Understanding the different forms of communication
* Everyone has their 20 universal needs

### What do we know works?

* Getting the education into young kids and exposing them
* Educating people through media and social media
* CEO’s, employers – professional development
* Adult education

### Who do we need to partner with?

* Service providers
* Families and carers
* Workshop holders
* Education sector
* People with disabilities
* Uneducated people

### What are the risks and challenges?

* No segregation
* Ingrained attitudes
* NDIS not providing training for services and carers

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* Contacting education departments
* Contacting service providers

## Project seven

### Host Idea – Mackay inclusive community centre

### What could this idea become?

* A safe environment that the whole community can access opportunities for volunteering and growth. Like seniors, schools and people recovering need a place to belong. A place of health and mental wellbeing. Short term accommodation would be part of this. Mackay has limited options around respite, rehabilitation and tourism opportunities for accommodation solutions. Safe to assist people with disabilities. Care Kitchen could be completed to supply the food. Promoting other business. Education for families – community based, networking for family groups. Community gardens build to suit all needs and provide regular volunteer positions. Shed connected to have a space for any gender to build and connect with the community. Support workers would be able to get placements to help others and obtain employment. No alcohol, no pokies, no drugs. Just endless opportunities!

### What do we know works?

* People want help and want to be connected – build it and they will come!
* NDIS has provided funding for people with disability to access the community but there are limited spots for volunteering and good places with accessibility outside of a shopping centre. So, any more opportunities for capacity building would be well received
* Schools need more work experience placements
* Needs to have a landmark for tourism to easily find us

### Who do we need to partner with?

* Mackay City Council, Regional Development Australia
* All sides of government (state and federal)
* Mayor to host a range of conversations with business partnerships
* The Mackay Taskforce – group formed at forum
* Community consultation

### What are the risks and challenges?

* That community might not use it
* Facility not built due to large land size
* Ensuring the facility is built to all needs of the community
* Location is not central enough
* Financial outlay and time constraints, viability

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* Flexibility to adapt to community needs
* Allow for growth
* Listen and be adaptable without losing focus
* Constant open and transparent communication across all sectors

### How do we make sure everyone is included?

* Promote a space where everyone feels valued, accepted and proud to be able to access
* Broad representation from community on Committee/Board

## Project eight

### Host Idea – Get business involved with INFO

### What could this idea become?

* Part of HR, performance management and marketing

### What do we know works?

* Done by accountant’s firm locally

### Who do we need to partner with?

* Champions – major boards
* Leaders
* Chamber of Commerce
* RIN

### What are the risks and challenges?

* Getting business involved

### What do we need to learn by doing?

* Pilot organisation
* Know industry
* Target specific organisation
* Find out what skills are needed on boards and committees
* Becoming advisors/sub-committees if cannot commit

### How do we make sure everyone is included?

* Awareness of the problem
* Market/advertise the need

### What are our next wise steps?

* Start with Chamber of Commerce, council and selected few organisations
* Lions clubs and rotary clubs

# Conclusion

Thanks to everyone who came along to Changing Lives, Changing Communities Mackay. We know you have made a difference. On competition of the two days, we asked participants: one thing I’ve learned and one thing I’m grateful for? These are your responses:

* Collaboration
* Introductions
* Education
* Reenergised
* People
* Generosity
* Love
* Inspired
* Ideas
* Friendship
* Excitement
* Working together
* Future
* Respect
* Networking
* Excitement
* New
* Community
* Progress
* Connections
* Passion
* Hope
* Perseverance
* Motivation
* Community
* Opportunity

Changing Lives, Changing Communities Mackay is a proud partnership between: Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN), National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS), and Anti Discrimination Commission Queensland (End of document).