# WDN Meeting Minutes

**Tuesday 10 September 2024, 12:00pm – 12:30pm**

**Fountain View Room, Civic Centre, South Morang**

## Attendees:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Jordan Plowman | John Brindle |
| Michael Parremore | Seane Cumming |
| Brad Harris | Tereza Uodish |
| Thaera Aldawood | Laura Lin |
| Anil Poudel | Darna McLear |
| Shannon McLear | Chris Hibbert |
| Brooke McCarthy | Rebekah Wena |
| Hazel Dompreh | Talia Pulis |
| Angela Karamalakis | Makayla Rao |
| Arthur Kyriazopoulos | Kitty Zhou |
| Tandem Siviour | Sana Saiyad |
| Dalal Sleiman | George Tsetsinis |
| Pania Bailey-Jenkins | Samantha Spooner |
| Kimberley Richardson | Rosie Beaumont |
| Sudad Issa | Nidhal Nasser |
| Dhikra Issa | Lidia Gorgees |
| Jamal Gorgees | Dianna Zammil |
| Mary Newnham | Tony Tregale |
| Gul Arik | Sandra Verdam |
| Judy Toy | Nayiba Markus |
| Usha Karki | Abir Aboukhres |
| Mabruka Mohamed | Tuba Unver |
| Georgia Lenz | Reeti Nischal |
| Jacqui Richards | Sam Habib |
| Ruby Prasad | Lynne Harris |
| Kim Bogert |  |

## Apologies:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Tina Anup | Lisa Eaton |
| Foteini [Charalampidou](https://www.trybooking.com/au/event/checkout/review?bookingURL=9230b83d-3ed1-480a-92ce-7f70cffea618)  | Bandana Khadka |
| Jonathan Chen | Jacob Kinniburgh |
| Marissa Knott | Tyrian O’Brien |
| Siviour Tandem | [Visweswara](https://www.trybooking.com/au/event/checkout/review?bookingURL=fba0f73d-8ed3-4301-bf3d-64e1bd66e294) Takkallapati |
| Joanne Templeton | Sri [Thulasiraman](https://www.trybooking.com/au/event/checkout/review?bookingURL=6acece2a-c555-4adf-8907-f3add6756edf) |
| Medhavi Verm | Beau Voltz |
| Courtney Walsh |  |

## Items

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Acknowledgement and WelcomeKimberley Richardson, Unit Manager, Healthy and Inclusive Communities |
|  | HousekeepingRosie Beaumont, Community Strengthening Officer, City of Whittlesea |
|  | Council UpdateRosie provided an update on Council’s response to issues raised at the last WDN meeting which facilitated four themed discussions.Supporting Neurodiverse Families**This discussion highlighted:** the lack of appropriate spaces for families to meet and enjoy activities in the community. They require highly accessible infrastructure, amenities and special arrangements for using spaces.**Our response:** The Community Strengthening team has begun conversations with design and facilities teams across Council to explore options for creating a community area that meets the needs of people who require a high level of accessibility.Supporting the Transition from School to Independence and Employment**This discussion highlighted**: the lack of work readiness and work experience opportunities for school students with disability and the absence of pathways to viable employment options after school.**Our response:** The Community Strengthening team is bringing together representatives from the special school sector and local employers and organisations interested in employing young people with disability. We are exploring a number of opportunities to pilot work readiness and work experience initiatives for students with disability and complex support needs and pathways to sustainable employment.Social Connections for Carers**This discussion highlighted**: the lack of local activity and peer support groups for carers and families supporting people with complex needs.**Our response:** Guest speakers at this meeting included coordinators of the Lalor Carers Catch Up group, the Nillumbik Memory Café and Autism support organisation, Amaze. These speakers talked about how to set up and sustain different peer support and activity groups in the community.Mental Health Support Gaps**This discussion highlighted:** the need for more community-led support groups for people from different cultural backgrounds. These groups can create a safe space for people who are not accessing mainstream mental health services but require information or peer support to deal with mental illness.**Our response:** Guest speakers at today’s meeting discussed the Libyan Women’s Group and the Galada Indian Seniors Group and how they were formed and have grown over time. |
|  | Group Session IntroductionRosie introduced the two group sessions that would run separately. |
|  | NDIA Questions Part 1Facilitator: Rosie Beaumont with support from Kimberley Richardson and Pania Bailey-JenkinsWDN is hosting an information session with the NDIA in November. Virginia Wiggins, Assistant Director of Community Engagement, will answer a set of pre-submitted questions about the recent proposed changes to the NDIS.This session ran through the key areas of change proposed for the NDIS and had a facilitated conversation with NDIS participants, service providers and disability organisations to collate a set of questions. The areas discussed were:* + Funding
	+ Foundational Support
	+ Navigator Roles
	+ Provider Registration
 |
|  | Community Groups Part 1Facilitator: Sana Saiyad with support from Dalal Sleiman and Sam Spooner.This group focussed on how to set up support and activity groups for people with disability and carers. Sana provided an overview of the Community Development Worker role and how it can support groups to establish in the community. Five guest speakers followed:Dalal Sleiman, Cultural Diversity Officer, talked about the Galada Indian Seniors Group and how it has expanded from a small, informal ‘foyer group’ to a large established group.Jacqui Richardson, Community Engagement Advisor with Amaze, talked about her organisation’s work supporting community groups for people with Autism, including tips and tricks to get started and keep a group going.Kitty Zhou, Coordinator of the Lalor Carers Catch Up Group talked about how she established this popular group that meets monthly to enjoy activities and provide support to each other.Sandra Verdam, Coordinator of Nillumbik memory café groups, described how she has built peer support, respite and activity groups for carers of people with dementia. Groups run in multiple venues across the municipality.Mabruka Mohamed talked about her experiences building her skills and knowledge to support the women in her community and establishing the Libyan Women’s Group o provide a safe space for women to meet, share information and culture and offer each other support. |
|  | BreakThere was a 20 minute break with afternoon tea provided. |
|  | Group Sessions Part 2Questions for NDIAThe group reviewed their proposed questions and agreed on a list to submit to the NDIA. The questions address:* Changes to the criteria for eligibility
* How service quality will be assured and maintained
* Risks to the sustainability of the NDIS marketplace
* The impact on participants as the Scheme transitions to new processes and rules

Any response to our submitted questions will be reported to members prior to the event in November.Starting A Community GroupThe group discussed group opportunities currently available in the community and some of the challenges to attending or start your own group. Feedback from this conversation will be used to develop information resources and inform the work of the Community Development Team.Full records of the NDIA and Community Group discussions are included at the end of these Minutes. |
|  | Facilitator Report BackSana and Rosie  |
|  | Next Meeting:Thursday 14 November 202410.30am – 12.30pmFountain View Room, Civic Centre25 Ferres Boulevard, South MorangFor more information go to [Whittlesea Disability Network Hub | Engage City of Whittlesea](https://engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/wdnonline)Please note: An incorrect date for this event was reported to the NDIA group. The above details are correct. |

## NDIS Questions Session – Full Report

Facilitator: Rosie Beaumont with support from Kimberley Richardson and Pania Bailey-Jenkins

### Introduction

* The NDIS Amendment Bill has been passed and changes to the NDIS will begin from October 2024.
* WDN is hosting a visit from the NDIA in November to answer questions about these changes
* Today we will collate a list of questions to submit to the NDIA.

### NDIA Event Details

**What:** Information session with Virginia Wiggins, Assistant Director Community Engagement, NDIA

**When:** Thursday 14 November, 10.30am – 12.30pm

**Where:** Fountain View Room, Civic Centre

25 Ferres Boulevard, South Morang

This is a free event and light refreshments will be served.

### What We Know

The changes will impact eligibility and compliance, how funding is allocated and how the scheme operates.

A joint statement by Disability Representative Organisations responded to the proposed changes, calling for:

* A delay to changes concerning funding until more consultation and clarity can be provided
* Removal of the detailed list of 36 funded service areas and restoration of the principles-based approach to assessing funding requests
* Guidelines and assurances about how funding and planning decisions will be reviewed.

Below is a summary of the key discussion points and associated questions from WDN members.

### Transition period

Q: What is the priority of the NDIA - what will they transition first?

Q: How will participants be protected i.e. ensuring continuity of support as the Scheme and service providers transition?

Q: Will there be automatic roll-overs?

### Communication with the NDIA

Participants currently receive cold calls from private call centres in response to issues raised. Personal information is requested over the phone to progress issues but there is no way to verify who a participant is talking to. If they refuse to provide information, this can have a detrimental impact for the participant re the outcome of a dispute.

Q: How will effective communication channels be kept open between participants and the NDIA over transition period?

Q: Will current barriers to confidential and accountable communication be addressed?

### Funding

Families are receiving less funding for specialist supports that are deemed the responsibility of parents and carers. This is creating unsustainable pressure on families and the NDIA will not divulge how they prepare plans.

Q: Is there going to be more expected of parents or carers?

Q: What will the criteria be for funding and planning decisions and where will this information be available?

Sometimes funding is not utilised over the life of a plan but the underspend is beyond the control of participants.

Q: Will changes better manage the issue of fund under-utilisation?

### Pricing

Services set their own prices with no restrictions or accountability and there is confusion (amongst participants and service providers) about pricing guidelines provided on the NDIS website.

Q: Are changes going to improve clarity (information provided) about pricing?

### Service Quality

The current NDIS marketplace is uncompetitive and participants are captives with a lack of choice and control.

Example: Many providers offer multiple services i.e. support coordination, SIL and social connection. This creates potential conflicts of interest and it is unlikely they are specialists across such a wide range of service areas.

Q: How will the NDIA measure value for money?

Q: How will service quality be monitored and assured?

Q: Will the known problem with fraud be better managed?

### Costs to Service Providers and Risks to Workforce

The costs of doing business represents as big a risk to the Scheme as growing pressures on participants and carers. Services are concerned about how to balance the need for quality of service with affordability pressures.

Example: Service providers are experiencing growing cost pressures that threaten their viability.

* Prices haven’t increased in line with CPI.
* For-profit organisations operate like not-for-profits to stay in the market.

Q: Will there be support or compensation for smaller businesses to remain viable?

There is a lot of burn-out in the workforce as it responds to increasingly complex cases

Example:

* High turnover in allied health
* Disability support workers often need to provide specialist care across multiple areas but there is no need for certification as for Aged Care or childcare workers.

Q: Will there be support for practitioner training and capacity building?

### Access

Q: How will eligibility to the scheme be assessed? Where will that information be available?

Q: What criteria will be used to determine level of need i.e. mild/moderate/severe?

Q: Will the NDIA absorb the cost of assessments for eligibility?

The Agency will have greater powers to review and change participant status i.e. self-management

Q: Is self-management being threatened/undermined?

### Navigator Roles

Navigator roles appear uneven – some provide specialist care and cover more areas than others.

Q: What skills and qualifications will Navigator roles require? Where will this information be available?

Q: How will the quality of support be maintained across the range of Navigator roles?

Q: Will Navigators have a role in assessments?

Q: How big is the target population for non- NDIS families – what is the caseload expectation of the navigators to support this population? Will there be capacity?

### Service Provider Registration

Current registration requirements do not provide incentives to remain in the system. It would be easier to de-register and still function.

Example: 3 year audits and 18 months surveillance costs providers $15K

* Only the larger organisations can cover costs related to registration.
* Grants are only geared to non-profit agencies.

Q: What is the benefit to service providers of being registered with NDIS?

Currently, 85% of service providers are unregistered and do not require auditing.

Q: With a significant increase in the number of registered services, what will the capacity of auditors be to regulate the sector?

Q: How will increasing costs associated with new compliance requirements be absorbed?

An audit-support market is building around services providers, that guarantees to get them through the audit for a fee.

Q: How do we ensure audits do not become tick and flick exercises?

Rural and remote communities already suffer from a lack of choice in services.

Q: How will the NDIS support thin markets to sustain as registration requirements change?

Q: What is the timeline for moving the market to new registration requirements?

Q: How will continuity of support be ensured as services transition to registered status?

### Compliance and Accountability

The Q&S Commission response times for complaints has increased – currently a 3 month delay. There is no accountability around response times.

Q: What strategies are in place to ensure the Q&SC is responsive?

## Starting A Community Group Session

Facilitator: Sana Saiyad, Community Development Coordinator, City of Whittlesea. Supported by Dalal Sleiman and Sam Spooner.

### Overview of Community Development Team

* 8 Community Development Officers (CDOs)
* Each works in a different area of the community
* Help community members understand what spaces and resources are available to start or join a group
* Community members take the lead in group management so it can be sustained over time
* Community Facebook pages help support local activities and events, they provide further opportunities for community members to connect and promote events and groups

### Foyer groups

Speaker: Dalal Sleiman, Cultural Diversity Officer, City of Whittlesea

Group: Galada Indian Men’s Seniors Group

* These are groups that use community spaces informally
* Access to a space can be explained by Community Facilities Officers.
* May be a small group of 2 – 3 that has capacity to grow over time
* CDO at Galada Community Centre encouraged them to use an informal part of the Centre to meet
* They started informing other Punjabi speaking men from their community and expanded
* The group started meeting at Kirrip Community Centre and grew large enough to split into two groups – one meeting at Galada and the other at Kirrip
* They received support from Dalal to become an incorporated group so they could apply for grants
	+ Requires a minimum of 5 members and election of executive committee members
	+ Once committee was elected they selected their name- Galada Indian Men’s Senior Group
	+ Dalal explained their eligibility to apply for funding and venues.
	+ A lot of competition for Community grants. CDOs can help groups to meet the grant guidelines
	+ The group has been successful in receiving 3 grants
* The group had to get public liability insurance to host events
* They decide how they will cover the cost – charging members fees and supplementing with grants
* CDO supported them to choose appropriate insurance
* Challenges may arise if Committee members change. They may not notify officials such as Consumer Affairs Victoria.
* It is important to create a generic email address for all important communications
* Limited English can also create a barrier when learning about complex processes such as applying for grants

### Lived Experience Groups

Speaker: Jacqui Richardson, AMAZE

Groups: For people with Autism and their families

* Amaze is a leading Autism organisation driving change so that individuals and families can live their best lives
* They partner and deliver the Autism Connect Helpline
* Jacqui is employed to engage Autism Support groups. This is mostly for attendees who are Autistic
* Keeping people connected and supporting mental health and wellbeing is the ‘why’ of the work.
* They may want to hear about services and create connection
* Jacqui documents any barriers and also conducts capacity building workshops- for example free session on advocacy for Autistic people in schools
* She supports a Community of Practice for peer learning and to connect across Victoria and interstate

#### Tips

* Keep your meet up times and place consistent
* Have a back-up person (as group organiser)
* Consider where you are meeting - is it appropriate for sensory needs? Foyer spaces at Council can work well (access to break out spaces etc)
* Know your limits- tell people. ‘I don’t have all the answers, I’m here to learn too’
* Connect people with information and provide referral

#### Challenges

* Social Media groups can be burdensome to moderate as a volunteer- AMAZE recommend closed pages for group events that can provide fit for purpose information
* Autism Friendly environments require attention to detail-

For example, What the facilitator looks like, process for accessing a quiet space etc.

For more information, contactjacqueline.richards@amaze.org.au

Story telling resources are available via WDN email: access@whittlesea.vic.gov.au

### Carers Catch Ups

Speaker: Kitty Zhou

Group: Lalor Carers’ Catch Up

* Kitty is a carer to a daughter with Autism
* In November 2022 she completed the City of Whittlesea Community Leadership Program and was motivated to set up a carers support group - wanted to connect with individual and organisations and provide an opportunity to recharge
* Was supported by CDO, Michelle, to connect with Lalor Library. Their collaboration brought the group to life
* Reached out to networks via social media and Michelle/ the Library also helped to promote
* The group began early last year and now hosts monthly meeting and celebrations
* Carers feel supported, valued and connected

#### Tips

* Build strong partnerships by connecting with local organisations such as Whittlesea Community Connections, Centrelink and Ministers for Parliament. This can help source funding opportunities
* They are an Incorporated group, auspices with Lalor Neighbourhood House
* They also use Community Voice online platforms to reach a wider audience

### Questions and Comments

* Request for contact details will be managed by Sana. Suggested interested people can also attend centres to have a chat
* Question for Jacqui - Do facilitators need qualifications? Jacqui suggested inviting experts and speakers to address gaps and community participants might also have expertise.
* Facilitators don’t need to have all the expertise. CDOs can also provide links to experts
* A member of the group also highlighted the availability of Leadership courses- as well as facilitation skills workshops
* Setting up group norms and agreements is also helpful to establish ground rules.

### Activity and Respite Group

Speaker: Sandra Verdam, Volunteer Coordinator

Group: Nillumbik Memory Café

* Established a coffee group on Sunday mornings
* Applied for a grant for free coffee via a local general store
* Started the Dementia Alliance in Nillumbik
* Experience can be lonely and isolated. It’s not always safe to take people to cafes with Dementia
* Became a member of the Positive Aging Advisory Committee in Nillumbik to advocate for individuals and carers with Dementia
* Sandra’s idea was not structured but was around support
* Some people had already lost their partners and volunteered to assist in the kitchen
* Approaching their 3 year anniversary - groups now meet in Eltham, Hurstbridge and Diamond Creek
* Carers can share their experiences. Eg How do you apply for My Aged Care
* Participation numbers might vary but the purpose is connection

### Cultural Community-led Group

Speaker: Mabruka Mohamed

Group: Libyan Women’s Association

* Mabruka came to Australia in 2010 with sponsorship from Libyan government
* War started so that this funding was interrupted
* Applied to stay here to be safe
* In the Libyan community, many men continued studies and women took on carer responsibilities in the home
* Women didn’t know how to connect with Council and Covid experience underlined this
* Mabruka wanted a group to help women engage and thrive
* Started attending information sessions and also enrolled in courses to improve English skills
* Sought information to connect women to groups
* Learned about legal requirement of groups and became incorporated
* Relied on volunteers and community support
* They are transparent and have an intention to serve, creating a safe place and environment

#### Tips

* The balance between community needs/ needs of the group is important
* Partnered with Spectrum and participated in Leadership Courses, the Writing Grant program was a challenge
* Partnered with WIRE in providing education, particularly removing barriers- ‘promotion and assurance it would be provided in language’
* Teach children about connection in culture and celebration with broader community

#### Challenges

* Language was a barrier in connecting women to services, translation was often required
* How to involve people in procedures was difficult—for example Consumer affairs processes. This takes time
* Funding is also a challenge- they had some difficulty in acquiring venues
* Challenges in finding spaces suitable for children, but also attracting more individuals in need

### Group Discussion

* Carer/ Neuro Diverse barriers include funding inconsistency and discovering networks,
* struggles regarding bringing people in and maintaining networks
* Chris from Mill Park Leisure and Thomastown Recreation & Leisure Centres (TRAC), highlighted assets, processes and people at leisure centres that can help groups
	+ Example: Men’s’ Somali group activities at Mill Park Leisure
	+ Can be one off days that are subsidised
* Children can be challenging to cater for
	+ Mill Park Leisure and TRAC have splash story time group
* Sometimes not having a drivers’ license is prohibitive
* NEAMI raised challenges around program availability and cost for people with mental illness
	+ The Take charge Program at Mill Park Leisure and TRAC is free with 60 day membership for those referred as a mental health plan via GPs
* Language barriers and developing group for digital literacy, cultural activities
* Cost can be prohibitive
* Forming a community group can be cumbersome and advocacy can be required