

THE WOBBLY HUB AND DOUBLE SPOKES PROJECT: PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY IN RURAL AREAS



FACULTY OF
HEALTH SCIENCES

“Based on our research work in Western NSW and the experience of the team, we have developed four streams of enquiry related to people with a disability in rural areas: Insights into rural contexts; access to supports; alternative service models and workforce development.”

- Dr Angela Dew, Project Manager



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“Right from the project’s initial development, its methodology has been grounded in respecting and harnessing the wisdom and knowledge of people in rural areas: people with a disability, their carers and those who work in the sector.”

Professor Craig Veitch, Chief Investigator

THE WOBBLY HUB AND DOUBLE SPOKES TEAM

The research team is based in the Faculty of Health Sciences, at the University of Sydney and is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council. The team includes experienced researchers and early career researchers who bring a depth of knowledge of research methods as well as research higher degree students, honours students and enthusiastic research assistants. The project was conceived in collaboration with management and frontline staff from NSW Ageing Disability and Home Care, Western Region. Their contribution to the project design and ongoing support has been invaluable to the project’s success.

INSIGHTS INTO RURAL CONTEXTS

The Wobbly Hub and Double Spokes (WH&DS) team have engaged with

service users and service providers in Western NSW to understand the experience of people with a disability in rural and remote NSW. In our first round of data collection we spoke with 78 carers, 10 people with a disability, 97 service providers and 50 senior managers. Participants highlighted the imposition of distance and workforce shortages on access to therapy support. We heard from 380 respondents in our carers (165) and therapists (215) surveys, who provided a great insight into their experience of accessing and providing therapy services in rural and remote areas.

We have engaged in a more detailed investigation of the issues that rural private therapists face. We spoke with 28 therapists, conducted an online national Delphi process with peak organisations and gained feedback from nine service users to develop a quality framework for rural private service delivery under DisabilityCare Australia.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In our research to date, the rural therapy workforce has been identified as requiring support and development. We have heard that there is a committed, experienced and stable group of therapists in rural areas. There are also a smaller group of relatively new graduates moving into rural areas. We have identified rural private therapists as an emerging workforce, representing an unrealised potential in supporting rural communities. The therapy support worker role is expanding, revealing training and development needs for both therapists and support workers.

Access to professional development is an ongoing challenge in rural areas for all sections of the therapy workforce, highlighting a need for exploration of creative responses. The Wobbly Hub team is contributing to the understanding of these issues through our work with rural service providers.

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE MODELS

Our research has led to an exploration of alternative service models to increase access to therapy supports for people with a disability in rural and remote locations.

Technology holds a currently unrealised promise of increased service access. The Wobbly Hub team is partnering with service providers and service users via pilot projects to explore the possibility of this technology.

New models of service delivery engaging therapy support workers are being trialed in Western NSW with state and NGO service providers. The Wobbly Hub team is undertaking formative evaluations of these pilots to build the evidence around the implementation of therapy support worker service models in a collaboration with the service users, the funding agency and service providers. As part of the evaluation process the team is exploring outcome measurement that reflects the participation and inclusion of people with a disability and their families in the community.

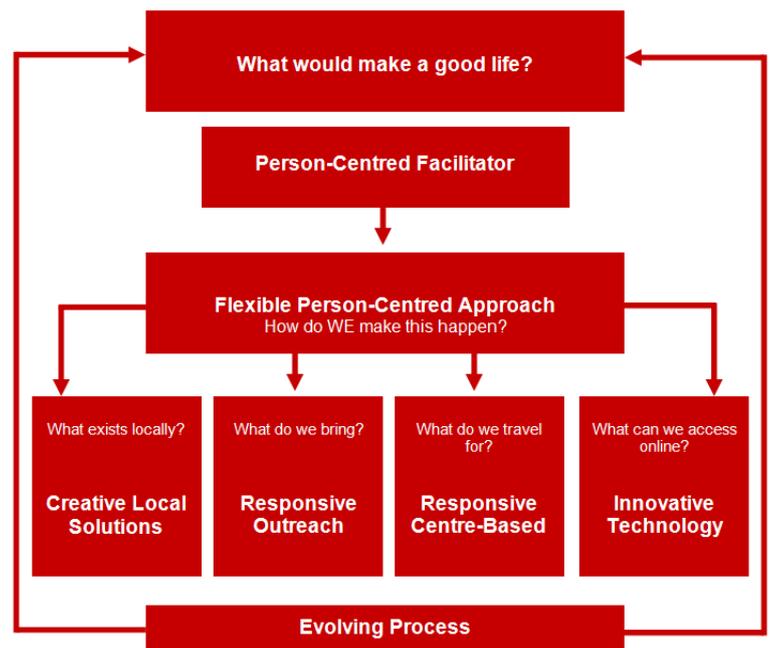
ACCESS TO SUPPORTS

The Rural & Remote Person-Centred Approach (pictured below) was developed from interviews and focus groups. It addresses the barriers to accessing supports in a timely manner.

The exploration of **Creative Local Solutions** opens the conversation to recognising and developing local capacity. **Responsive Outreach** harnesses the specialist support provided by the services that travel to rural locations. **Responsive Centre Based** service options require the service user to travel, but may provide particular supports that are best accessed in this way. **Innovative Technology** is expanding service options for rural and remote communities, both in direct service delivery as well as information and support.

Framing the supports required by a person with a disability and their family using this model broadens the options and assists with engaging the full range of services that are available to the community.

RURAL AND REMOTE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH



Dew, A. et al 2012 Addressing the barriers to accessing therapy services in rural and remote areas *Disability and Rehabilitation*

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