



Annual Report

2019-2020

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Image: A photo of Kristy Trajcevski (CDAH President)

“An organisation such as CDAH only works when we each play an active part. How will you ‘pay it forward’ in the coming year? How will you share your experiences, knowledge and strengths to help others? Let us know how you will contribute.”

Kristy Trajcevski (CDAH President)

A Message from Kristy Trajcevski

At CDAH, we worked hard to offer online connections among our peer networks when COVID-19 hit.

It was important to us that we keep our members and staff safe during this period of great uncertainty and upheaval. We have had some great success with engagement.

The CDAH Zoom office had wide and varied offerings from Auslan lessons to Sport - this has allowed us to reach out to more people in our community and is something that we are considering making a more permanent part of CDAH's services.

I'd like to thank our outgoing Executive Officer Dave Belcher.

Thank you for your vision and tenacity over the past few years in that role.

Thank you also Jess Watkins for stepping into the role of EO. I value your level head and ability to get things sorted.

I am also excited about working with our new EO Andrew Vodic who comes to us with a wealth of peer support and management skills and I hope that he will be able to use them to help CDAH move to its next phase.

Speaking of the next phase of CDAH, the Board plans to move forward constitutional changes which will ensure that CDAH fully represents the needs of disabled people and ensures that families become valued supportive allies for their loved ones.

Lastly, I would like to thank the staff and volunteers for making such an effort in these trying times.

Looking forward to many more challenges and successes in the new year.

Kristy – Lee Trajcevski, CDAH President



Image description: Photo of Deb, HIVE Coordinator holding up a card that reads, "I WILL continue to be mad."

A Message from the Executive Officers

It's been a big year for CDAH.

Our new projects see us continue to grow the strength of our community in the Hunter, and the peer movement across NSW alongside our sister organisation Diversity Disability Alliance.

The Deafblind Project and Peer Mentoring Project in the Large Residential Centres has meant lots of stronger connections with people moving out of institutions in the Hunter.

COVID-19 has made us all:
find new ways to connect
work out how we give to each other
keep each other safe and well, and
it helped us to make sure we are giving to our community in every way.

A HUGE thankyou to everyone who put in the hours to make sure we stayed connected, it was a big task, and one everyone at CDAH did with bells on.

We're looking forward to connecting more, growing stronger, and changing the world, each small step at a time.

David Belcher & Jess Watkins, Executive Officers

COVID-19 and CDAH's Connection Tree

COVID-19 affected everyone in our community. We had to close our office doors, but we worked really quickly to stay connected.

Our community was already isolated and at a high risk. We wanted to support each other and be able to quickly identify who needed additional help during lockdown. We opened the CDAH Zoom Office and started hosting meetings, workshops, and peer groups online. Sometimes had over 50 people join in each day. We started supporting people with disability who were self-isolating.

We called this project 'Connection Tree' where CDAH members contacted other members, checking in and seeing what everyone's needs were.

But we did not stop there - people who had been contacted were asked to contact other people with disability so the connection to our community was at a high. We contacted over 200 people in the first 2 weeks of lockdown.

"The response from our community was amazing. We were flooded with offers and started coordinating food and supply deliveries and sometimes daily phone support to people who were feeling anxious and alone.

Members with tech skills were contacting members who needed help to get set up with Zoom", said David Belcher. "These were difficult times and we all pulled together to make sure no one was left behind. We worked together to support people who needed it most during this period. Our office was closed, but we still made sure our community was keeping safe and connected." -Cath Mahony



Image description: photo of 19 people on Zoom.



Peer Mentoring

Our Peer Mentoring program supports people to achieve the change they want to see in their lives.

We strongly believe that each person with a disability has the right to be an active citizen and have a genuine voice, choice, and control of their life.

CDAH has a variety of trained peer mentors with many different skills, passions, and life experiences.

We believe that people who have shared experiences can offer an essential source of support to people with disability and their families.

-Raelene Bock



Image description: photo of Raelene

"Peer mentoring had a profound impact on my life. Mostly, it helped me to learn how to dream again, not just have NDIS goals.

I'll never forget the day my mentor asked me, 'what are your dreams?' It reminded, 'oh my god, that's right, people dream'.

It gave me back a sense of hope, that things were possible again and that I have a lot to offer to my community and to contribute to society.

We were a really good match, we had some common areas of lived experience. My mentor was matter of fact and down to earth and had a way of getting me to come up with solutions for myself.

After a long period of time of having limited control in my life, I learnt how to make choices again.

I now have a resume that will help me find work when I am ready to do this. This was the biggest obstacle that I wanted to overcome.

I am now more ready to take that step when the time comes."

-Cedar, Peer Mentee

Peer Groups

It's a privilege for CDAH to work with a range of peer groups as people come together to share experiences, learn from each other and take action on things that matter.



Women First Peer Group

Our Women First Peer Group has been running for 2 years and still going strong. We have had our challenges this year not being able to meet in person as a group, however we have been able to make it work via Zoom/online.

Our women's group is safe space for women who have a disability to come together to discuss any issues good or bad, that is going on for them.

It has been really important for us to meet throughout COVID-19 and the lockdown and to check in with each other every month to show support for each other.

-Suzy Trindall



Image Description: photo of a group of women sitting around a table

Speak Up Hunter

Speak Up Hunter is a peer group run for, and by, people with intellectual disability. This was a hard year for Speak Up Hunter because of COVID-19.

But while we were in lock down, we made up a song to help us cope.

We also applied for a grant from Newcastle Council to be able to create a wall mural. We hope to start next year with UP&UP Shane and Faith.

-Erin Forrester



Image Description: A photo of Speak Up Hunter peer group at the 2019 'Having A Say' Conference in Geelong

The Hive

The Hive (the mental health peer group) has been meeting together over the past 2 1/2 years. It is still going strong.

We initially came together to lobby for the improvement of mental health services in the Hunter following the unnecessary deaths of 2 residents during admission to acute mental health units in the Hunter.

Such is the reality of our lives and why peer support is so important.

Although we are not a large group, several of us have been coming regularly from the beginning. We usually get five or more people to the meetings where we catch up on each other's lives, share strengths, discuss important issues and support each other as peers.

We share a variety of life experiences, including times of mental distress. Often, we are the people with the hidden disability that makes others wonder 'why we are part of a peer-led disability organisation like CDAH?'.
We don't often speak about our experiences of trauma at the hands of the mental health system or how our mental distress is experienced and how we might be impaired.

Each of us are survivors and growing strong together. The Hive is increasingly becoming involved in improving the NDIS and commenting on issues.

Over the last year, we have been meeting via Zoom and had people from Sydney and overseas join us, which has been great. Zoom has well suited some, but others have found this problematic.

We are currently deciding what form the meetings will take into the future.

-Debbie Hamilton

Members' Action Group

The Members Action Group meets monthly on the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

We promote the aims of CDAH to make a stronger peer movement and a more inclusive Hunter community, building our capacity to learn, grow and gain support from each other.

This is a volunteer group of CDAH peers with lived experience of disability. Our current projects include:

- The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.
- The Disability Pride movement in the Hunter and beyond - we are planning to have a parade/march in the future.
- The History Project - the history of the Peer Led Disability Movement in Newcastle and the Hunter region. Some members are working on a podcast including CDAH history.
- Citizenship and inclusivity through representation at local councils by CDAH members.
- Making the CDAH magazine accessible for everyone.
- Developing the Members Action Group Terms of Reference

-Cedar Whelan

Peer Projects

CDAH is committed to building strong partnerships in our community that give us opportunities to develop new projects, supporting us to deliver our core peer work whilst driving connections to bring about inclusion in the Hunter.



NSW Learning Hub

Thanks to an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant from the NDIS, we are proud to be partnering with Diversity and Disability Alliance to support people with disability to build leadership skills and connect with their community through peer support training and resources.

We are running training over 3 years to strengthen the power and increase the uptake of peer support in our communities.

We are also supporting peer networks to develop, running a community of practice and working toward a NSW Peer Support Conference.

Already we have connected with hundreds of peers across diverse communities.

-Cath Mahony

Peer Mentoring Project with the Large Residential Centres

Over the last year, we continued our peer mentoring project with the Large Residential Centres. These centres are now closed as people have moved into new homes in the community.

Whilst CDAH applauds the closure of the centres, much work needs to be done to ensure that people with disability have the opportunity to live full, included lives in our community.

We know that just living in the community and having rights doesn't magically bring about inclusion.

Feeling like you are part of community, that you belong, and that you matter develops as a result of relationships with other people.

Sharing our lived experience of disability, we connected in unique ways with our peers, offering human connection, relationships and peer support and spent time working out ways to build relationships in the local community.

We know how much it matters to us to feel part of our community and we also know the stress and anxiety of beginning new lives in new homes in new areas. We are committed to continuing our work fostering social networks with people and look forward to building inclusion in our community over the coming years.



Relationships and Community are key

Image Description: A collage of photos of 4 women

A Story from Tania Lewis, Peer Mentor

“The best work I have ever done in my life was connecting one woman back with her family and country and culture.

She'd been living at Stockton since she was a young girl and hadn't seen much of her family or been back on country all of that time.

It took us a long time to get to know each other, she was really shy and not used to personal contact at first. She pulled away from me when I tried to massage her hands. As we spent more time with each other, she would reach her hands out to me each time I arrived and put her hands out for more when I stopped. She would take a look at me from the corner of her eye so I knew that she knew that I was there and what we were doing. It was around that time that I found out where she was from, got her sisters number, rang her up and left a message saying I was an Aboriginal woman doing peer mentoring.

She rang back straight away.

We talked about arranging a trip for them to spend time with each other on country, get to know the local mob before she moved there permanently. We sent some time making this happen so that everything would work out well; accommodation, equipment, support, transport. One of the support workers at CDAH, Lucy spent lots of time getting to know her really well and how best to support her.

The moment that I saw those two sisters hugging and crying on the footpath made me so grateful about the work I get to do. These sisters were just so happy to be with each other.

They had the best few days together. Getting to know each other again, hanging out, holding hands, laughing, hugging, listening to country music. Visiting the local sites together, connecting with the local Aboriginal Medical Service and local Aboriginal disability service provider. Reconnecting with each other and rebuilding their relationship. I feel privileged to have done what we did. For those sisters to make that connection again, after it had been broken for so long. It's so important to bring family together especially mob.

Staff at Stockton said she'd been ignited. That she hadn't been this happy in all the time they'd known her. Shows the importance of kin and country to us Aboriginal mob.”

Hunter Deafblind Project

Over the last year, the Hunter Deafblind Project worked alongside deafblind people who were living in the Stockton Centre as they moved into their new homes in the community.

Building relationships with each individual, uncovering their potential, their personality, lived experience, pattern of interests and past and potential life roles, were key in our work assisting people to build their community connections.

We are excited to be continuing this work over the next 3 years, thanks to an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant from the NDIS.

“I am passionate about seeing deafblind people be full and equal citizens in their local and wider communities. This work gives me the opportunity to bring information to people about deafblindness, build relationships with deafblind people who have never had a friend before in their life. I get to support them to build a network of people around them who truly care about them, see their potential, want to learn how to communicate with them and value them. Who wouldn't want to do that for a job?”

-Justine Lorenz, Project Coordinator

Hunter Deafblind Connect

Hunter Deafblind Connect is a network that started in September 2019 – we are working towards inclusion, particularly for deafblind people who have moved out of the Stockton centre, most of whom only have paid supports in their life.

We believe that everyone deserves a friend. We were thrilled to have over 70 people join in our foundation workshops. The training was run by experts Steve Ripley and Justine Lorenz.

The workshop explored the meaning of deafblindness, and the many different approaches to supporting people who are deafblind to have dignity, respect, choice and control.

Importantly, over 20 people committed to coming together each month to exchange information, share experiences, develop new skills and connect with others. We now have over 200 people involved.

"I am a person living with DeafBlindness, and I am passionate about any endeavour to provide a life of dignity for people who are DeafBlind.

The Hunter DeafBlind Project by its very being is working to ensure that DeafBlind people in the Hunter region are not only cared for, but are cared about and living with dignity.

This is the right of every citizen.

The project also addresses the issue that DeafBlind people in the Hunter region are supported by people who have the appropriate communication skills necessary to provide choice and self-determination. I am privileged to be working with such a unique project."

-Steve Ripley, Project Coordinator



Image description: photo of Steve presenting and signing

Hunter Deafblind Group

We continued to meet each month over COVID-19.

It was hard on Zoom, but with the support of interpreters and communication guides, we stayed connected to support each other.

We now have a Facebook page that has over 300 likes! We use this Facebook page to raise awareness about the Deafblind community, promote our events, connect with the wider community and show that deafblind people can do anything!

"I enjoy being part of the Deafblind project and organising events because it keeps me active and gets me out of the house into the community. It is an opportunity to meet new people who are Deafblind and we learn from each other to build our skills. This will assist us to gain employment. It also allows for us to try new things and build on our friendships."

-Geoff Locock, Deafblind Peer Group Connector



Image Description: A photo of Geoff signing (Deafblind finger spelling) with another member of the Deafblind group.

Statement of Financial Position as of 30 September 2020

Current Assets	How much money CDAH has	\$1,003,280
Total Asset	Dollar amount of all the things we own and money we have	\$1,039,885
Total Liabilities	Liabilities What we owe to others	\$166,306
Equity	How much we have at the end of the year if we sell everything we own and pay all the money we owe to others	\$873,860



Statement of profit and loss for the year 30 September 2020

Revenue	How much money we got in this year	\$977,017
Expenses	How much money we spent this year	\$620,370
Profit for the year	How much money we have left over this year	\$356,647

