



Parents as Peer Leaders Project

Final evaluation

November 2020–June 2022

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Foreword

A commitment to family-centred practice is essential in early childhood intervention (ECI) and is central to the National Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention (ECIA, 2016). However, focusing solely on professionals to promote this overlooks the significant role that families can play in shaping their child's development. It is crucial to empower families to take an active role in the parent-professional partnership, as they have the most profound and enduring impact on their child's growth.

Parent peer work is a powerful approach to foster family engagement in ECI and foundational supports. When implemented effectively, parent peer work can spark a transformative shift in mindset by sharing personal experiences and insights among families. Although the use of paid parent peer work in early childhood is not yet widespread, it is during these early years that families could most benefit from connecting with knowledgeable parent peers.

Integrating paid parent peer workers into the early childhood intervention and foundational supports ecosystem provides families with invaluable assistance and complements the work of non-peer professionals. These peer workers are a trusted and sustainable resource, offering insights and guidance based on lived experience. The Parents as Peer Leaders Project builds on Plumtree's experience in co-designing capacity-building initiatives through parent peer workers. They include:

- Building capacity in families of young children with disability: A family leadership and peer led approach, funded by the NSW Ageing Disability and Home Care 2016-17 Information Linkages and Capacity (ILC) Transitional Project (2017–18)
- Families as peer workers in ECI project, funded by the NDS Innovative Workforce Fund (2017–2018)

Our vision is for a future where the role of paid parent peer workers is regarded as equally vital as that of non-peer professionals. Peer work will become universal for all types of organisations, ensuring that families receive holistic and empowering support throughout their parenting experience.

We used our experience with parent peer work to design the Parents as Peer Leaders Project (PPLP), building on the Now & Next program, which was co-designed with parents in 2015. The project specifically aimed to support families whose children do not have an NDIS individual funding package. The goal was to ensure that these families received the support and resources to navigate community and specialist services by participating in the Now & Next program and building family leadership through the development of local parent peer leaders.

The results of the project highlight the unique needs of unfunded families. PPLP's positive outcomes show that early connection with parent peer workers and structured programs like Now & Next are crucial in helping unfunded families set a vision and goals for their whole family to thrive.

On behalf of Plumtree, I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone involved in the Parents as Peer Leaders Project for their invaluable contributions. Their collective efforts have been instrumental in advancing the integration of parent peer work into ECI, and we hope this evaluation will inspire continued progress in this essential field. I would also like to thank the Department of Social Services, which funded the project under the Information, Linkages, and Capacity Building (ILC) program from November 2020 to June 2022 and January 2023-June 2024. The PPLP has established a strong foundation for the growth of parent peer workers across various organisations, including early intervention services. Their complementary expertise and lived experience provides vital assistance as a universal and accessible foundational support for families of children with or without NDIS individual funding in the future.

Sylvana Mahmic,

CEO, Plumtree Children's Services



Executive summary

The Parents as Peer Leaders Program (PPLP) is a transformative capacity-building initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services under the Information, Linkages, and Capacity Building (ILC) program.

The target group for this project comprises parents whose children do not have NDIS individual funding. These families are challenging to identify and engage with due to the fragmented and disjointed support system they face. The parents may not recognise their child as having a disability, or they might still be processing the implications of their child's developmental differences. Their primary focus is often on securing NDIS individual funding or therapy services.

Many of these families are not connected to relevant parent networks. In cases where the child does not have a diagnosed disability, finding appropriate support is difficult, especially in the current NDIS-dominated environment. Some families, particularly those from marginalised groups, may also hesitate to engage with available supports due to fear of judgment or unintended consequences.

PPLP aimed to support unfunded families in navigating community and specialist services through the Now & Next program and build family leadership via local parent peer leaders. The results highlight the unique needs of these families and show that early connection and structured programs like Now & Next are vital for setting a vision and goals that help the entire family thrive. Families benefit from the Now & Next program at any stage of their journey. It reduces isolation and fosters a supportive community, leading to positive outcomes for both parents and children.

A central aspect of the Parents as Peer Leaders Project is the integration of parent peer workers—who have lived experience in raising a child with disability or developmental delay—to offer invaluable support and guidance to other families. Trained by Plumtree, these parent peer workers play a crucial role in creating a sustainable leadership resource within communities. They ensure that families without NDIS individual funding can still access essential resources and peer networks, including those beyond Plumtree and Now & Next.

PPLP was also committed to co-design, directly involving families without NDIS funding during its development. Co-design was vital for ensuring that the communication strategies, resources and support provided were effective and aligned with the families' needs. The involvement of a 17-member advisory group was instrumental in this process, providing critical advice that led to improved project outcomes.

Running for three years, the Parent Peer Leadership Project aimed to achieve three key objectives:

01

Support and connect families without NDIS funding

The project successfully engaged 1,008 families across Australia, significantly surpassing its initial target of 545 families, and highlighted a strong demand for parent peer support. Through one-on-one phone conversations with trained parent peer workers, families were able to discuss their child's development, navigating community and specialist supports, and receive co-designed resources tailored to their needs. Resources included printed navigation guides and two e-books that explained the roles of early childhood professionals and provided practical tips for getting started while waiting for support.

02

Promote parent peer leadership and increase parental agency

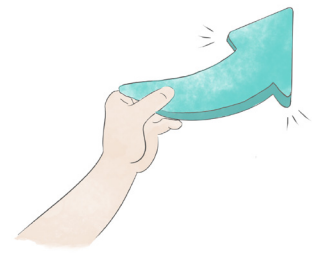
A central element of the PPLP was the delivery of the Now & Next program, which focused on building parent peer leadership and enhancing parental agency. Of the 1,008 families who RSVP'ed and connected with a parent peer worker, 788 expressed interest and availability to commit to the 8-week online program. These families received welcome packs that included the Pictability vision-setting kit and course materials. A total of 672 families participated in 73 groups, with 425 completing the program—a completion rate of 67.7%. The Now & Next program equipped parents of children without NDIS funding with resources and peer support to navigate both specialist and community services. The program empowered parents holistically, enabling them to set and achieve meaningful goals for their child, family and self, and fostered a strengths-based approach that shifts the focus from limitations to possibilities.

03

Build family leadership through peer networks

The PPLP aimed to build family leadership through increased peer networks and a parent peer-led approach. The project trained 36 family leaders and accredited nine parent peer facilitators of the Now & Next program across Australia. A total of 29 groups were facilitated by these new peer facilitators. The Family Leadership Training component exceeded expectations, significantly expanding the reach and impact of family leaders within their communities in every state and territory.





Key achievements and impact

Exceeded targets and identified peer support demand

Parents of children without a NDIS individual funding package were identified by our advisory group as the most difficult group to connect with due to isolation and challenges in navigating community and specialist supports. Reaching nearly twice the number of the 545 families projected at the start indicates the demand and value of parent peer support and tailored resources for these families. PPLP's outreach was extensive, engaging a diverse range of families, including 3.4% from First Nations and 27.4% from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Fathers' participation was conservatively estimated at 17.5%, with many more attending alongside their partners without formal enrollment. The project reached families across Australia, with 67% from metropolitan areas, 31% from regional areas, and 2% from very remote areas, with significant representation from New South Wales (46.3%), Victoria (18.9%), and Queensland (10%).

Improvement in parental hope, wellbeing, empowerment, and goal attainment

Outcomes of the Now & Next program were measured before and after participation using various indicators, showing statistically significant improvements in hope (9.09% increase), empowerment (9.3% increase), well-being (3.2% increase). Goal achievement rates were also high, with 87.6% achieving family goals, 80.6% achieving child goals, and 77.7% achieving personal goals within the 8-week program. Satisfaction was high, with 98% recommending the program, and 83.3% of participants rating the program 9 or 10 out of 10, resulting in a high Net Promoter Score of 81.5%. Session ratings consistently ranged from 9.0 to 9.5 out of 10, reflecting the program's quality and effectiveness. The DSS outcomes indicators showed improvements in all five individual capacity-building measures, with scores ranging from 86% to 96.1%.

Larger gains for most vulnerable families despite greater barriers

An important finding was that families without a NDIS funding package had lower baseline levels of hope, empowerment and well-being compared to other Now & Next families measured in our benchmark data. They also had a higher no-show rate for session one (14.2% compared to 3.2%) and completion rates were lower (67.7% compared to 75%). This confirmed anecdotal feedback from our parent peer facilitators about the higher overwhelm and stress experienced by these families compared to others they worked with.

Despite these challenges, families made substantial gains, achieving larger increases in outcome measures and goal achievement than the Now & Next benchmark. Although their final levels were below the benchmark, results showed that families without NDIS funding ultimately benefited from the Now & Next program with significant capacity gains.

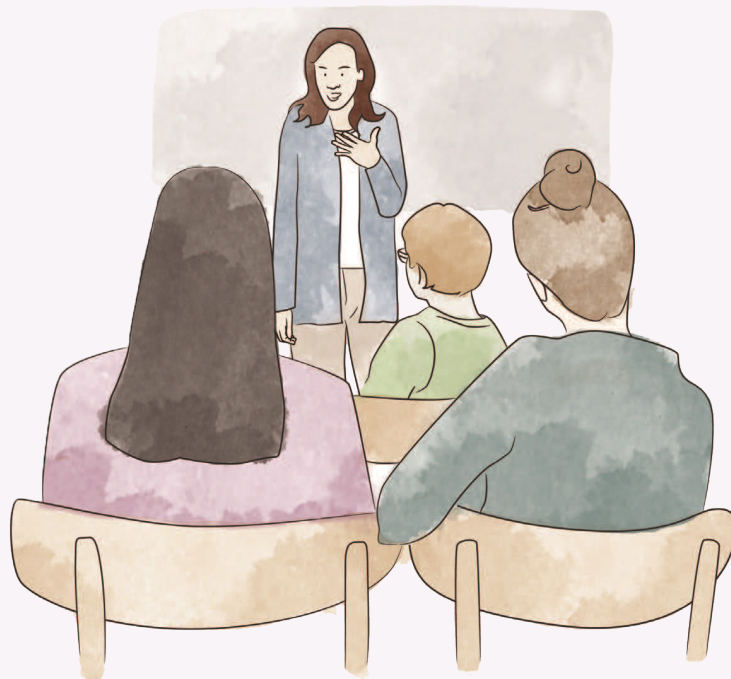
Promoted family leadership

The project successfully trained and accredited 36 parent leaders in every state and territory, surpassing the target of 33. Additionally, nine parent peer facilitators for the Now & Next program were accredited, who led 29 of the 73 groups nationwide. This achievement not only expanded family leadership resources, but also created a ripple effect: These empowered parents continue to inspire and support others within their communities, amplifying the program's impact far beyond its initial scope.

Recommendations

The Parent Peer Leadership Project was a success and demonstrated the effectiveness of a peer-led approach in empowering families whose children do not have NDIS funding. By enhancing hope, empowerment, well-being, and goal achievement, the PPLP equipped these families to better navigate the complex landscape of specialist and community support systems. The project's use of co-design and peer leadership presents a valuable model for future initiatives aimed at supporting families at risk of being disconnected from traditional support networks. Our recommendations are:

1. **Expand the use of paid parent peer workers:** Encourage the integration of paid parent peer workers in early childhood intervention and foundational supports to enhance family engagement and create sustainable community resources.
2. **Provide structured programs for free:** Offer programs like Now & Next to parents at no cost, so parents not have to choose between using NDIS funding for their child's therapy and their own capacity building.
3. **Provide Now & Next to all families:** The Now & Next program provides valuable support to all parents of children with developmental differences, delays, or disabilities, regardless of where they are in their journey. Whether they are just beginning to navigate the challenges or are further along in their experience, Now & Next gives parents the tools, knowledge and community they need to foster positive outcomes for their children and themselves.
4. **Leverage co-design and parent peer leadership:** Continue to emphasise co-design and peer leadership in future initiatives, recognising their benefits in empowering families and creating lasting, positive changes in the disability sector.



Now & Next program overview

The Now & Next program, a core component of the Parent Peer Leadership Project (PPLP), is a peer-led and co-designed initiative that empowers families of children with developmental delay or disabilities. It was launched in Australia in 2015 in a community-based setting.

The Parents as Peer Leaders Project expands on Now & Next by building family leadership for those without NDIS funding through connecting with local parent peer leaders. Now & Next is unique in its peer-led and co-designed approach, where parents with lived experience of raising children with disabilities serve as facilitators without professionals. These facilitators, trained and employed by Plumtree, offer complementary supports to those provided by non-peer professionals and bring invaluable insights and understanding for families.

The program emphasises a strengths-based approach, encouraging families to focus on possibilities rather than limitations. Through a series of eight 2-hour sessions, participants are guided in setting and achieving goals for their child, family and themselves. Using resources like our innovative Pictability kit, vision and goal-setting become an intuitive and engaging process.

The Now & Next program is evidence-based and built on positive psychology. The online program provides a peer-led environment for participants to develop their goals, connect, support and learn from each other.

Course outline

Session 1

Set a vision including goals for their child, family and self

Session 2

Choose a family goal and discover how to achieve it

Session 3

Choose a child goal and discover how to achieve it

Session 4

Identify your signature strengths and use them to achieve your personal goal

Session 5

Focus on things we can control

Session 6

Apply the PERMA (Positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement) wellbeing framework (Butler & Kern, 2016)

Session 7

Improve partnerships with professionals

Session 8

Use the toolkit in the future

Since its inception in 2015, Now & Next has evolved with content refinements. It moved online in 2019 to reach more families across Australia, including those in regional and remote communities. The program has also extended its reach internationally, with groups being held in countries including New Zealand, Canada, Finland, Albania, Croatia and Singapore. Now & Next's effectiveness is evident in the statistically significant improvements in hope, empowerment, wellbeing, and increases in goal attainment by parents. In an external evaluation by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (2018), Senior Research Fellow Dr Tim Moore concluded:

There is no other Australian program that has been co-designed with parents, that places parents in such a leadership role, and that can show such results.

In addition, a 2024 peer-reviewed study showed that positive impacts for families are sustained in the medium to long term (Lancaster et al., 2024). The program's success led to the creation of a broader movement pioneering the integration of parent peer workers into early childhood intervention services and recognised the unique value they bring.

“

KATRINA

I think more than anything it's given me hope for the future. Prior to doing this program I was feeling quite despondent about parenting and issues I was facing. I don't really have a lot of people I can talk to about these things and spending time with you all and sharing has been invaluable to me.



Parents as Peer Leaders Project overview

The Parents as Peer Leaders Project (PPLP) aimed to empower families of children aged birth to 14 years who have developmental delay or disability through the Now & Next program, and produce local peer workers using a family-leadership approach.

It was initially funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS) from November 2020 to June 2022. Following a brief hiatus in funding, the project was renewed in February 2023, marking the start of the second phase that continued until June 2024.

PPLP specifically targeted families of children without a NDIS individual package, either because they do not meet eligibility criteria, or are in the early stages of navigating diagnosis and funding requests.

While demand for support through NDIS funding continues to grow, the limited support available outside the scheme often creates an 'NDIS or nothing' scenario for unfunded families, who feel overwhelmed and uncertain of the future.

These families particularly benefit from capacity building through peer networks, enabling them to support their child and navigate community and specialist resources in the absence of NDIS funding. The project exceeded its funded activities which were to:

- Deliver 46 national online Now & Next groups to 545 families, with 23 of these groups facilitated by new trainees.
- Train 33 local parent leaders, creating a sustainable leadership resource beyond the project's duration.
- Train and accredit family leaders in each state

Outcomes vs funded activities

Parents as Peer Leaders Project 36 months



1008
non-NDIS families engaged vs 545 target

788 families received program resources
 672 parents completed Pictability vision and goal setting
 425 completed Now & Next



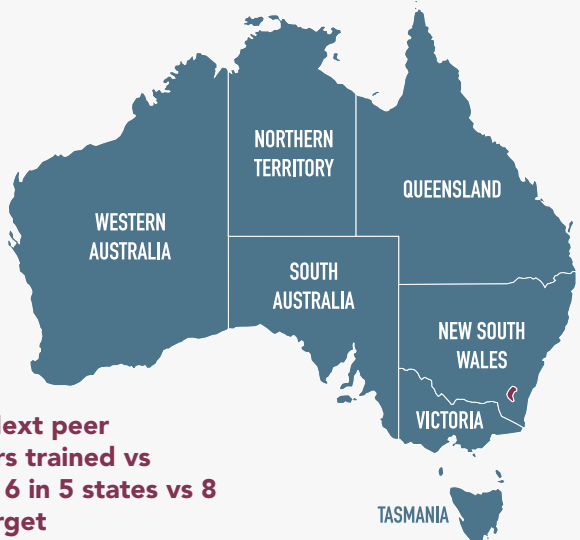
36
peer leaders trained vs 33 target to create sustainable peer leadership resources




29
Now & Next groups co-presented by new facilitators vs 24 as part of family leadership building



73
Now & Next online groups held vs 46 target



9
Now & Next peer facilitators trained vs target of 6 in 5 states vs 8 states target

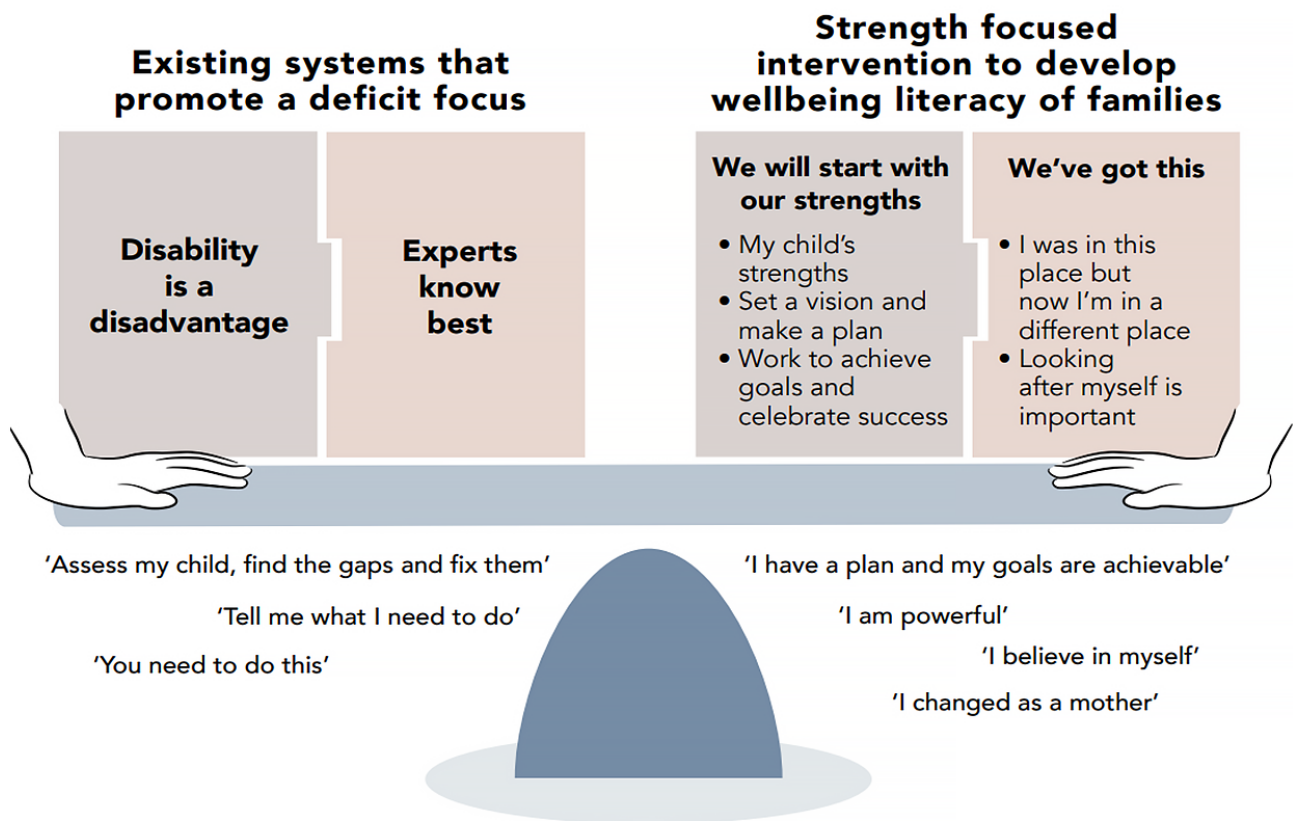


A positive, strengths-based approach

Developmental delay and disability are often seen through a lens of limitations and deficits rather than strengths, as this attitude is so common in society. As a result, parents often believe that the experts know best. Although families are the primary decision makers for children under nine, this deficit outlook can undermine confidence, leading to a focus on seeking therapy and an over reliance on clinic-based specialist models.

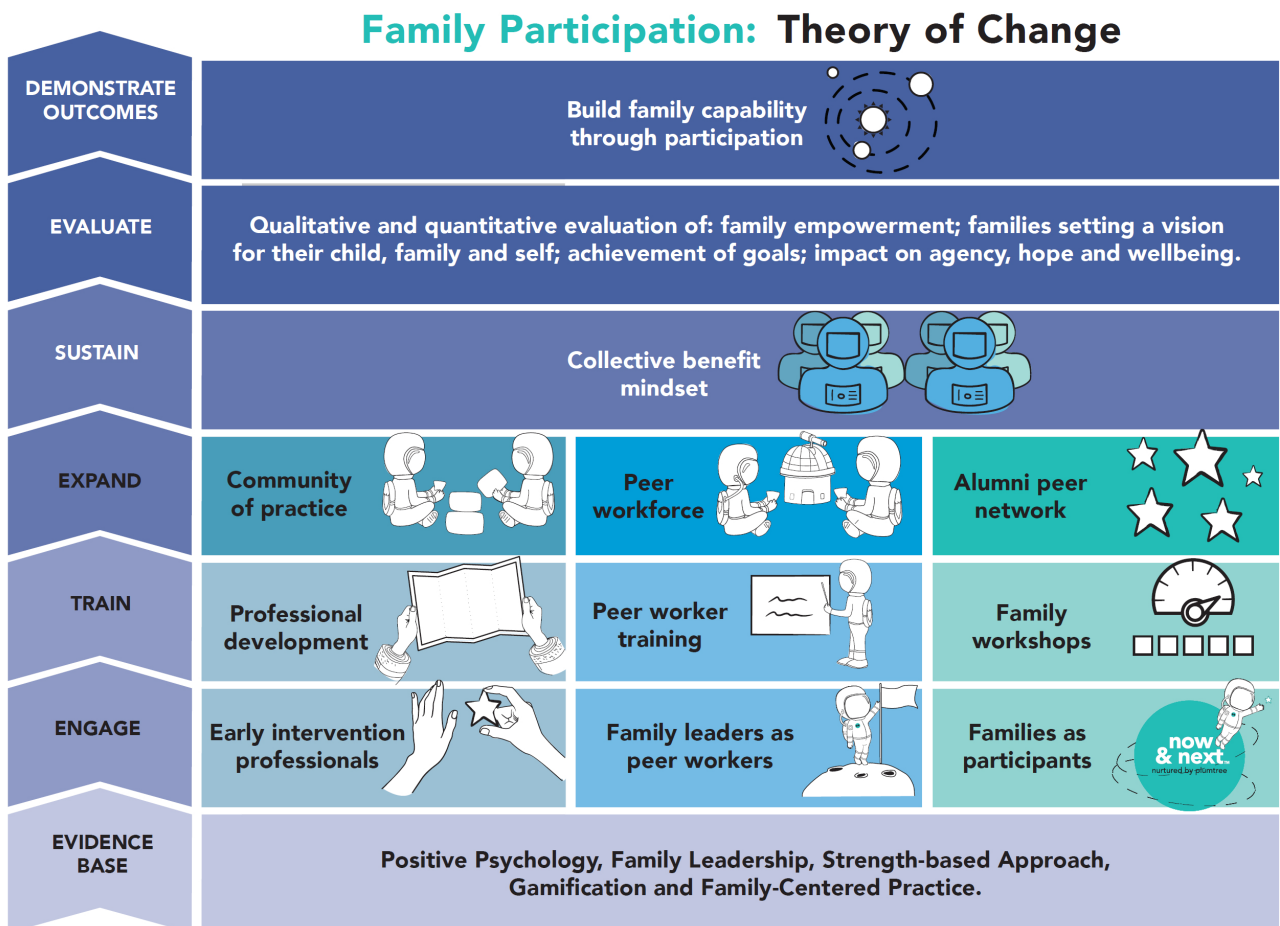
Now & Next takes a different approach. Parents often do not realise that therapy is only part of a bigger picture for their child’s learning, development and wellbeing—and there’s a lot they can do to get started. Our experience with peer-led support since 2015 has provided evidence that intentional capacity-building programs can lead to measurable, positive, and lasting outcomes in the medium term.

Figure 1: Shift in perspective experienced by participants through an intervention, moving from a deficit-based approach to strengths-based empowerment. Figure developed by Mahmic et al., 2021



Our rationale was grounded in our theory of change, which aimed to enhance parent participation through family leadership and peer support. Now & Next draws from evidence-based practices from positive psychology, strengths-based approaches, family-centered practices, and gamification, all of which have proven effective in promoting family empowerment and engagement.

Figure 2: SIPP-informed theory of change to build family participation through parent peer work. Figure developed by Mahmic and Janson.



V2 2024

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The program also encouraged families to look beyond specialist services. The journey of raising a child with disabilities can be seen as crossing a metaphorical bridge toward a life of citizenship, acceptance, and purpose. While some families may navigate this path independently, many need support to see the “big picture” and develop a clear plan for their child’s future. To help, there must be investment in capacity-building initiatives such as family leadership, peer networks, and education. These initiatives should be delivered in a way that allows families to learn and grow at their own pace, gradually building the skills they need over time.

On this bridge, families have access to three key lanes of support:

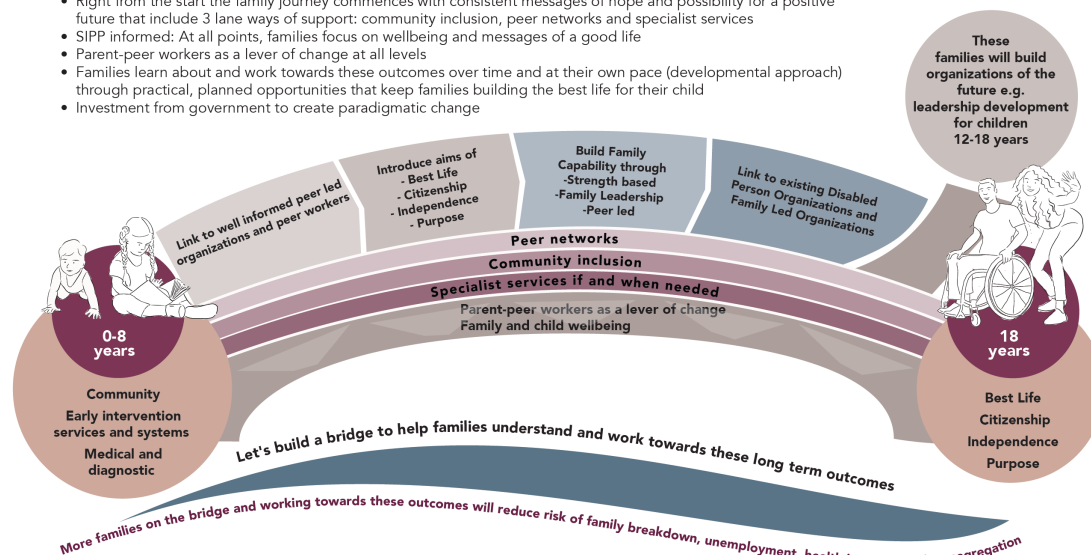
1. Community inclusion, where participation in activities outside the home helps children develop independence.
2. Peer-led networks offering valuable lived-experience support that complements non-peer professional services
3. Specialist services, such as therapy, which are important but should not dominate the child’s life.

As families progress on this journey, they will strengthen their abilities and, in turn, create a better future not just for their own child, but for others as well. With continued support and investment from the community and government, this bridge can be made wider and stronger, ensuring that families are empowered to thrive and lead future generations toward success.

Figure 3: A SIPP-informed approach to designing a family capacity-building framework: a developmental process for families and an investment approach for government. Figure developed by Sylvana Mahmic. Copyright 2024

Family capacity-building framework: An investment and developmental approach using systems informed positive psychology (SIPP)

- Right from the start the family journey commences with consistent messages of hope and possibility for a positive future that include 3 lane ways of support: community inclusion, peer networks and specialist services
- SIPP informed: At all points, families focus on wellbeing and messages of a good life
- Parent-peer workers as a lever of change at all levels
- Families learn about and work towards these outcomes over time and at their own pace (developmental approach) through practical, planned opportunities that keep families building the best life for their child
- Investment from government to create paradigmatic change



Co-designed to meet family needs

During the inception of PPLP, the target group of parents began a co-design process with Plumtree peer workers to better understand the needs of families of children with developmental concerns or disability who were not connected to the NDIS. These families are often challenging to identify and engage with due to a fragmented support system. Some families may not recognise their child as having a developmental delay or disability. Those who do often prioritise securing NDIS funding or therapies, but are not aware of peer support networks, their value or how to access them. To effectively engage these parents, we were guided by our advisory group’s insights to develop messaging that focused on the benefits that peer supports can provide for children’s development. We began with data analysis and preparation, gathering insights from previous Plumtree projects and the experiences of parent peer workers.

Two focus groups were conducted, involving six participants from diverse backgrounds who had completed the Now & Next program without NDIS funding. These groups, along with a co-design session with parent peer workers, helped identify the unique challenges and priorities of the target families.

Two main themes emerged: the frustration with waiting lists and not being able to get started with helping their children, and the need to understand the roles of professionals available to support children's development.

The co-design process culminated in a generative design phase, where parent peer workers collaborated to create "stepping stones" into the program, such as informational flyers, webinars, and videos tailored to the needs of these families. The strategies and resources developed through this collaborative approach were refined and tested to ensure their effectiveness.

The outcomes of this process highlighted the importance of a parent peer worker engaging families early, creating safe entry points, and providing accessible, relevant support that resonates with their circumstances.

Several key resources were developed to better engage and support the target families:

E-books: Two e-books were prioritised, comprising 16 specially-produced videos to address the priorities identified in the co-design process. These e-books provided practical information to help families orientate and get started.

1. [Support for Developmental Concerns: An Introduction to Early Childhood Professionals](#), covering topics such as the role of parents in making a difference, explaining early intervention, how early childhood intervention professionals work with families, achieving good outcomes at early childhood education and care settings. It described the roles of professionals including occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, behaviour support specialists, early childhood special educators, keyworkers, and parent peer workers.
2. [Support for Developmental Concerns: Tips from Our Team](#), offering advice on getting started, encouraging positive behaviour,

expanding communication, developing movement skills, and starting toilet training.

3. Additionally, an e-book was created using existing videos from a prior project called [About Play](#), which helped families understand the value of play in supporting development and offered strategies to get started.

Information materials: Handouts to assist families with navigating community and specialist services, helping them understand the available supports for their child's development. Additionally, resources like *Becoming, Belonging, Being*, self-care tips, and highlights from the Now & Next program were provided in a PDF e-book format.

Workshops: Two workshops were designed to address common challenges faced by non-funded families. Facilitated by trained parent peer workers, the workshops provided parents unsure about committing to the 8-week Now & Next program with introductory information about child development and opportunities to connect with parents and peer workers.



SARA

It has given me tools to simplify things such as goals and the steps to achieve them—and takes away the overwhelm to make them happen. Now & Next has highlighted ways that we can focus on our strengths and what we already have to help with challenging situations.

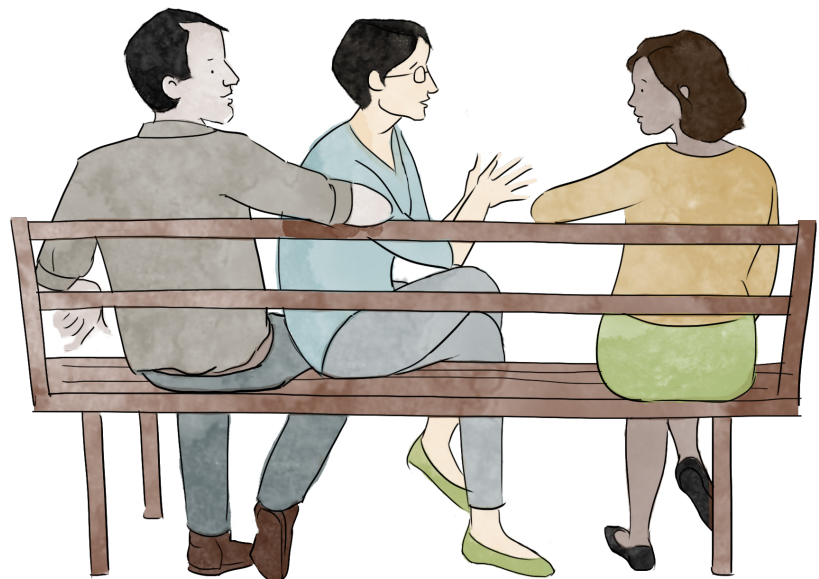
Peer connection and support for families

A crucial element of support for our target group of families was establishing a personal connection through a telephone conversation with every family that registered for the Now & Next program.

Many parents, overwhelmed by information available online and via social media, often make rapid decisions about engaging with programs without fully understanding what they are about. To address this, our parent peer worker contacted each of the 1,008 families who registered for Now & Next by phone. As well introducing the program and answering questions, the peer worker provided resources and tailored support addressing concerns.

Common themes that emerged included the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic on available services, stress related to their child's development or medical issues, feelings of isolation, and a general sense of overwhelm about their child's future.

For families who expressed continued interest in the eight-week program, we sent out course materials. They included the Pictability kit, which helps families set a vision and goals, and a course booklet designed as a mindfulness coloring book. These resources were designed to provide both practical tools and creative ways for participants to engage with the course content.



The impact of peer support in family engagement

The connection with a peer worker rather than an administrative person made a significant difference to the families. This peer connection brought an added layer of understanding and empathy that is crucial, especially for families who are vulnerable or isolated. The introduction to parent peer work not only legitimises the experience, but also provides families with someone who “gets it” and understands what they hope to achieve from the program.

After the initial contact, other parent peer workers followed up with a confirmation email, ensuring that families felt supported from the start. Families were also invited to participate in research and complete a pre-program survey. Communication was maintained throughout the process, with families receiving e-books, kits, and regular check-ins via email and text messages.

Each Now & Next session was accompanied by a reminder, ensuring multiple touchpoints through email, text, and phone calls, especially at the beginning. Families appreciated this ongoing contact, as they were often managing other challenges, such as hospital visits, the impact of the pandemic, illness or other issues.

Session one: Setting a vision

We began the course with Pictability, our unique visioning tool that empowers families to take charge of the planning process according to their needs. During this session, participants set goals for their child, family, and themselves. They identify goals that can be addressed independently, and ones that may require professional assistance. This process builds a sense of agency, allowing families to actively participate from the outset by leveraging their own strengths and resources. The Pictability kit can be used beyond the initial

session. Parents can continue to use it in the future as their child grows and family priorities change.

Course completion

We observed that families, particularly those parenting children with developmental delays or disabilities, faced numerous challenges, such as the impact of illnesses. This was especially pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the demands often made it difficult for families to complete the program. To support them, we offered catch-up sessions, sent follow-up text messages to encourage re-engagement, and provided options to complete the program at a later time when their family circumstances stabilised. We considered completion of at least four out of the eight sessions sufficient, as these sessions covered the crucial vision-setting, goal-setting, and goal-achieving processes for the child, family, and self.

The completion rate for the Now & Next program was 67.7%, lower than our global benchmark of 75%. This difference can be attributed to the unique set of circumstances faced by the target families. They were early in their journey of addressing their child’s developmental concerns, often feeling overwhelmed and rushed, while managing additional pressures brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

When compared to broader parenting programs, a 67.7% completion rate is comparable. Typical completion rates for such programs usually range between 60-70%, with variations depending on the target group and the challenges they face. Programs supporting parents of children with disabilities often see lower completion rates due to the additional barriers these families encounter. As PPLP families were dealing with even greater challenges as they were earlier in their parenting journey, this completion rate highlights the project’s effectiveness in engaging with and supporting these families despite the complexities they faced.



ADRIAN

Unbelievable. Amazing course that reinforces that you can still live. We are not victims and our children will thrive when they are empowered and guided by empowered parents.

Family leadership and peer facilitators

A family leadership approach is fundamental to the PPLP and builds on our comprehensive experience in delivering parent peer supports to families.

This is a sustainable approach, as it fosters family participation and leadership from the earliest stages. Family leadership recognises that parents are the constant presence in their child's life and will be key advocates in helping their child and the whole family achieve the best outcomes for a good life. With the PPLP, we aimed to expand the number of family leaders on a national scale. We co-designed new family leadership training and refined it after a pilot phase. All graduates of the Now & Next program were invited to participate in the training, which was conducted eight times. It comprised three weekly-sessions of 2 hours each, delivered online via Zoom. Additionally, there were four self-paced units that participants were required to complete between each session.

Thirty-six parents participated and achieved a 100% completion rate. These participants completed pre- and post-training surveys to assess the training's effectiveness in enhancing their understanding of topics relevant to the needs of parents of young children. The results showed significant gains across all core topics. However, person-centred facilitation was identified as the area where parents felt the least confident compared to other skills. It is important to note that not all family leaders go on to facilitate Now & Next or other parent workshops. For those who continue to become Now & Next peer facilitators, additional person-centred facilitation training is provided to ensure they are well-equipped to support other families.

Masterclasses for family leaders

Throughout the Parents as Peer Leaders Project, several masterclasses were conducted for family leaders. Developed from their feedback, these sessions were crucial for deepening knowledge and skills in specific areas of interest. The masterclasses provided a platform for family leaders to engage with expert content, share experiences, and gain practical insights they could apply both to family situations and in their roles as peer leaders.



The sessions not only enhanced participants' confidence and competence, but also fostered a stronger sense of community and shared purpose among the family leaders. Recordings of the sessions were shared among facilitators to extend learning opportunities. These masterclasses were instrumental in enhancing the leadership qualities of participants, equipping them with the necessary skills to contribute to their communities.

Masterclass topics included:

- Rehearsal space—peak performance & flow
- Making parenting groups accessible for neurodivergent parents
- Technology integration in online groups-fine tuning our technology skills
- Global families, local leaders
- Building family leadership through peer work in the early childhood years: activating family participation (online and part of the International Intellectual Disability Leadership [IIDL] initiative)
- Family leadership: fostering the path of inclusion, growth, and resilience from the beginning (online and part of the IIDL)
- Family conferences: three held in this period

Peer facilitator training

Of the 36 participants who successfully completed the family leadership training, nine were identified through a process of reverse recruitment and invited to further their training to become Now & Next facilitators. Senior parent peer leaders employed a matrix to assess and rate the suitability of these family leaders for peer work, ensuring that candidates demonstrated the necessary skills, commitment, and potential.

While some parents declined the opportunity to become facilitators due to work and family commitments, those who accepted underwent

a comprehensive 44-hour training program. This training included pre-facilitation preparation and a “buddy” system where new facilitators co-led sessions alongside more experienced leaders. During this period, additional training and support were provided to enhance their confidence and effectiveness.

Upon completing the training, these nine parents were accredited as facilitators and offered paid roles. They continue to receive ongoing support from a senior facilitator to ensure continued growth and success in their new capacity.

Enhanced accessibility through sponsorship of NDIS families

During the PPLP period, Plumtree also offered the Now & Next program to parents whose children had NDIS individual funding. Initially, these families were required to use their NDIS funds to pay for the program, but participation was low. Our advisory group noted the confusion that arose from offering the program for free to families without NDIS funding while charging those with NDIS funding.

To address this issue and increase participation, Plumtree introduced a sponsorship strategy in February 2024. Using funds raised by Plumtree to cover the program costs for NDIS families, the strategy successfully eliminated the financial barrier and resulted in a significant overall rise in RSVPs. Enrolment from NDIS families increased from 20 in a six-month period in 2023 to 140 in the same period in 2024 after sponsorship was announced.

This experience highlighted the importance of offering capacity-building programs free of charge for families to avoid competing with a child's NDIS therapy funding. These insights will guide future strategies, emphasising the need for clear communication and the removal of financial barriers to enhance program accessibility and participation.

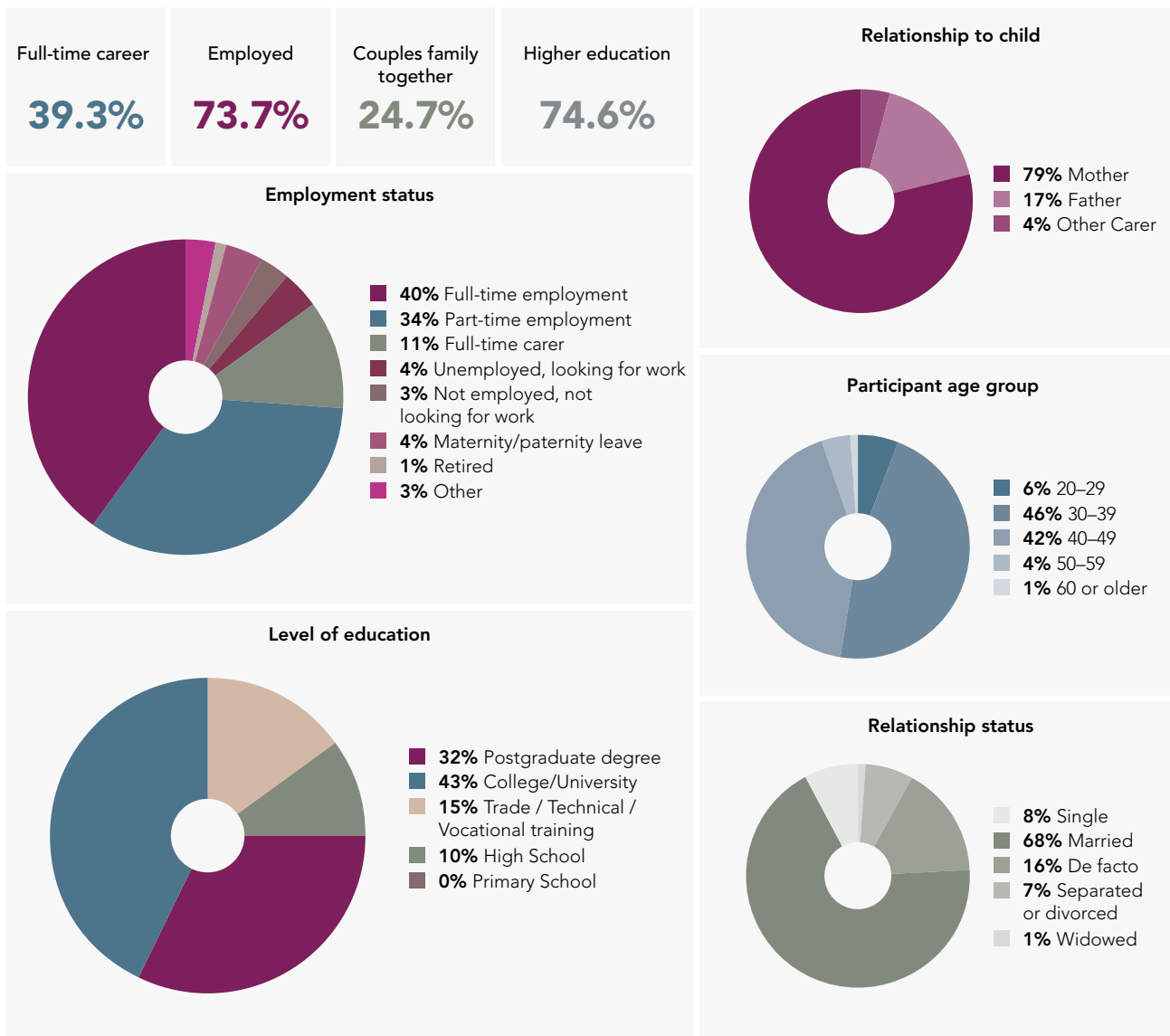


EMILY AND RENATO

By doing this with my partner I feel like he is now more of an active participant in the thinking part of supporting our child.

PPLP participants

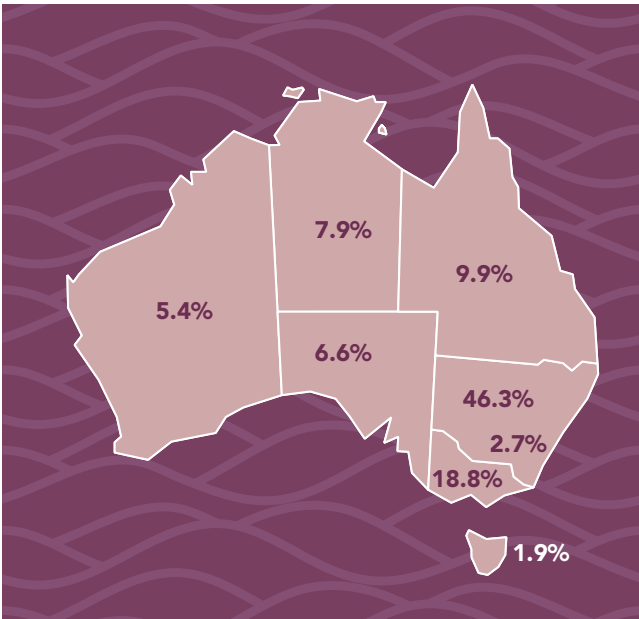
Families enrolled in Now & Next for the period between November 2020 to June 2022 and January 2023 to June 2024.



Geographical location

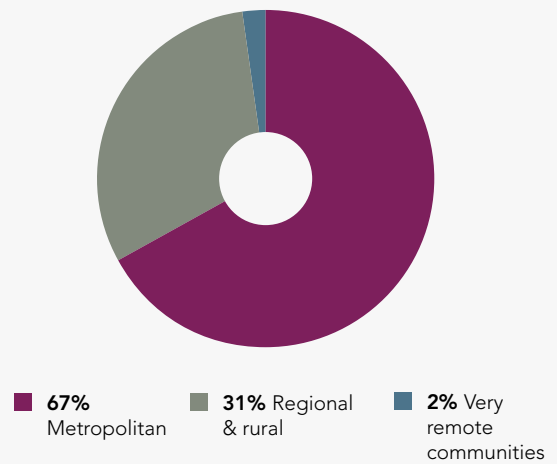
Participants in the program came from all Australian states and territories with 46.3% from NSW, 18.9% from Victoria and 10% from Queensland. Additionally, 2% of program graduates were from remote and very remote communities, aligning proportionately with the 2.1% of the Australian population living in these areas.

State / Territory Australian participants



Remote, rural & metropolitan areas Australia

<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/07/modified-monash-model-fact-sheet.pdf>



Cultural diversity and First Nations

The cultural and linguistic diversity among participants demonstrated that the Now & Next program was accessible to families from various backgrounds. However, while 3.4% of First Nations families initially connected with a parent peer worker, this engagement was not sustained into enrollment in the Now & Next program, falling short of our benchmark for First Nations participants.

24.5%	Culturally & linguistically diverse families
32	Different country of origins
28	Different languages spoken



3.4% First nation families connected with a parent-peer worker

While the number of families who connected with a parent-peer worker was **3.4%** closely aligning with **3.8%** as stated in the ABS 2021, the number of families who went on to complete in the Now & Next program fell to **0.4%**

Net promoter score and feedback

Parents rated the Now & Next program highly, with 98.3% recommending it, resulting in a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 81.5%—considered a very high score globally. Additionally, 83.3% of families rated it 9 or 10 out of 10 when asked, “Now that you have completed the Now & Next Program, how likely are you to recommend it to other families?”

“
 _____ LINH
 I’ve used the signature strengths to look at the relationship between my partner and I. This framework helped me to build a stronger relationship to support our children as I could understand how we can strengthen each other throughout our relationship and parenthood.



<http://www.netpromoter.com/know/>

PPLP outcomes

The research outcomes of the Parents as Peer Leaders Project were evaluated using a variety of measures to assess its impact on participant hope, empowerment, wellbeing and goal achievement. Participants also provided responses to the five DSS capacity-building questions.

This section outlines the methodologies employed and presents the findings that highlight the effectiveness of the Now & Next program in fostering strength-based growth among participants and is aligned with DSS requirements for reporting short, medium, and long-term outcomes.

Short-term outcomes

The DSS defines short-term outcomes as those that occur shortly after participants have completed an activity. These outcomes were measured through a 'what happened' survey. The DSS capacity-building questions yielded the following results:

93.1%

learned new skills and knowledge.

94.5%

gained motivation and confidence.

96.9%

felt their contribution to the project was valued.

86.8%

reported increased leadership and influencing opportunities.

94.7%

felt they had a say in things important to them.

Medium-term outcomes

An existing research protocol was used to measure the impact of the Now & Next program. Firstly, at the beginning and end of each session, wellbeing was measured utilising the Session Ratings Scale (SRS) derived from the Partners in Change Outcomes Measures scales (Duncan & Reese, 2015). Participants provided ratings across four dimensions of wellbeing: Individual (personal wellbeing), Interpersonal (family, close relationships), Social (work, school, friendships), and Overall (general sense of wellbeing).

Secondly, parents completed a survey before Session 1 and following Session 8, which aimed to gather comprehensive information about

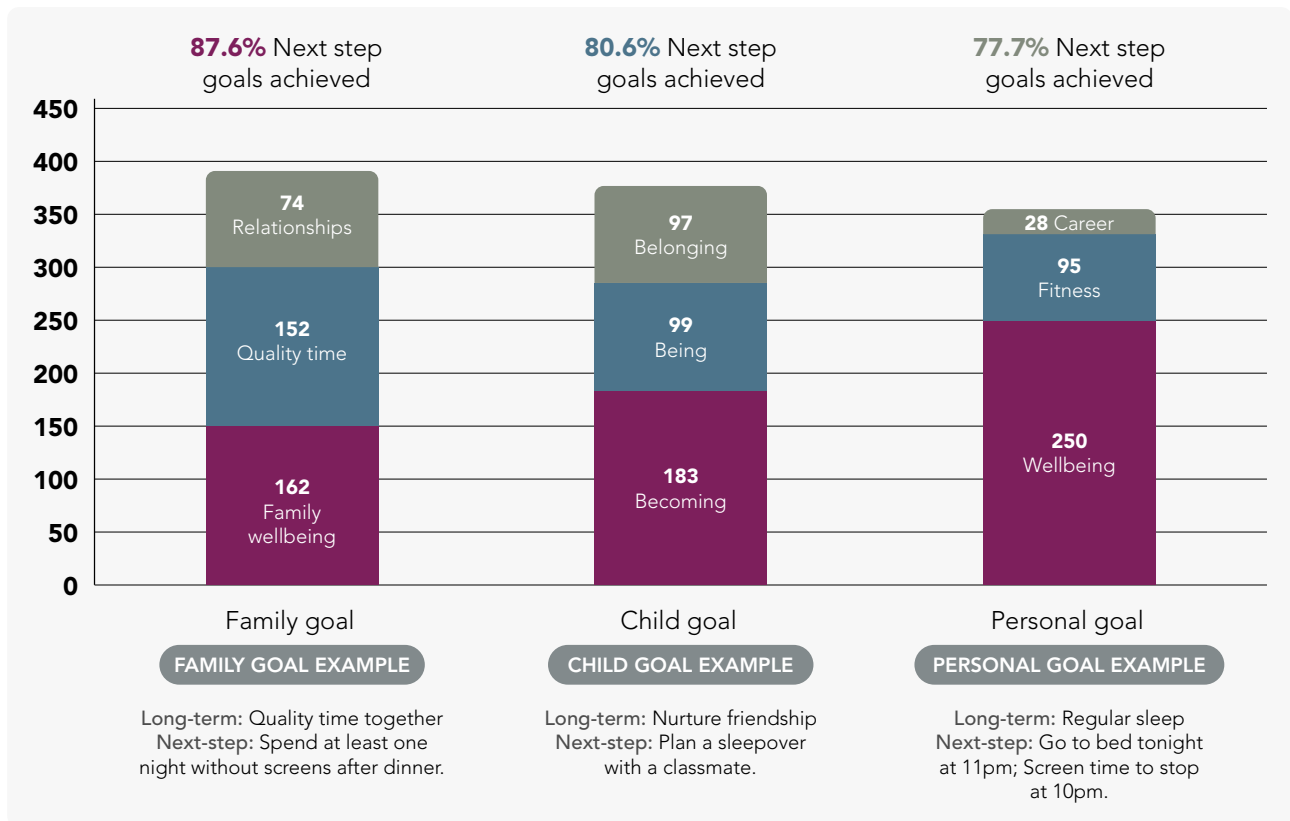
their wellbeing, sense of hope, and feelings of empowerment. The survey consisted of various established measures, supplemented by additional single items designed to capture specific positive psychology constructs. These included the PERMA profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016), a 23-item assessment tool specifically designed to evaluate the five dimensions of wellbeing, along with items gauging negative emotions, physical health, loneliness, and wellbeing; life satisfaction (using Cantril's ladder, a single question subjective wellbeing measure); community support; optimism; coping strategies; and feelings of struggle, competence, and confidence in promoting one's own and other's wellbeing.

Additionally, the survey incorporated the Adult Hope Scale (AHS) (Snyder et al., 1991) which consists of 12 items that gauge pathways (planning to achieve goals), agency (goal-directed energy), and overall hope. Finally, the survey included perceptions of community support, which were measured using four questions derived from the Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES; Akey et al., 2000). These questions assessed feelings of isolation from other parents, a sense of community with parents of children with disabilities, emotional support from fellow parents, and the availability of other parents for assistance when needed.

Goals achieved during the program

A key objective of the program is to help parents break down long-term goals into achievable steps through peer coaching, enabling them to accomplish these goals within the 8-week program. Families reported successfully achieving their goals in the following categories: 87.6% for family goals, 80.6% for child goals, and 77.7% for personal goals. These results are based on 403 responses.

Figure 1: Goals achieved



Wellbeing increased over 8 sessions

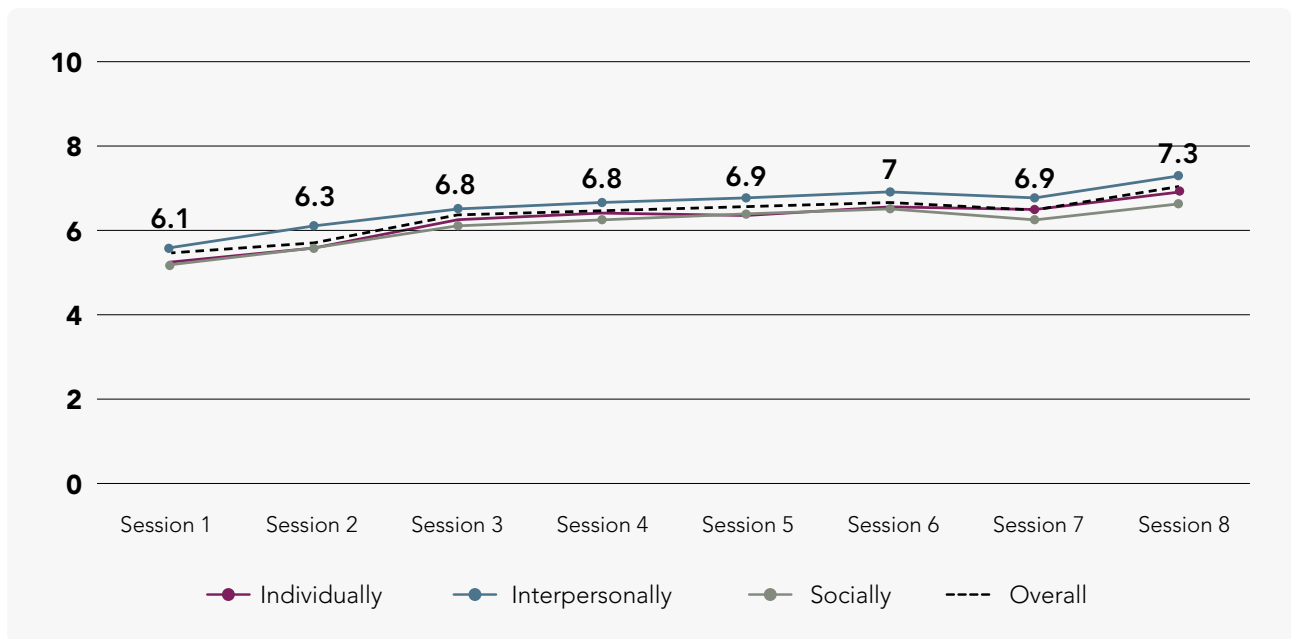
Participants reported their wellbeing and functioning at the start of each session, focusing on individual, interpersonal, social, and overall feelings from the past week. Based on 403 responses, participants reported a significant improvement in wellbeing between Session 1 and Session 8.

Duncan and Reese (2015) and colleagues developed the Partners for Change Outcome Management System (PCOMS*). PCOMS is often referred to as an evidence-based method or outcome measurement system. It provides a model for continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of programs.

PCOMS uses a four-item scale to collect participants responses. The data is then used to enable Feedback-Informed Treatment, an approach that uses clients' comments about the therapeutic relationship and outcomes to inform, adapt and improve services. Participants reported their wellbeing and functioning at the start of each session, focusing on individual, interpersonal, social, and overall feelings from the past week. The figure shows data from 403 parents/carers, highlighting a significant improvement in wellbeing between Session 1 and Session 8.

Reference: Duncan, B. & Reese, R.J. (2015). *The Partners for Change Outcome Management System: The client's frame of reference revisited. Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 52, 391–401.*

Figure 2: Participant wellbeing increased



Participants felt more empowered

The Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES) for parents raising a child with disability was developed by the Beach Centre, Kansas University. It includes 23 items asking parents questions about feeling isolated from other parents, feeling a sense of community with other parents of children with disabilities, emotional support by other parents, and that there are other parents that can be counted for help when needed. Scores range from 0 (unsupported) to 10 (well supported).

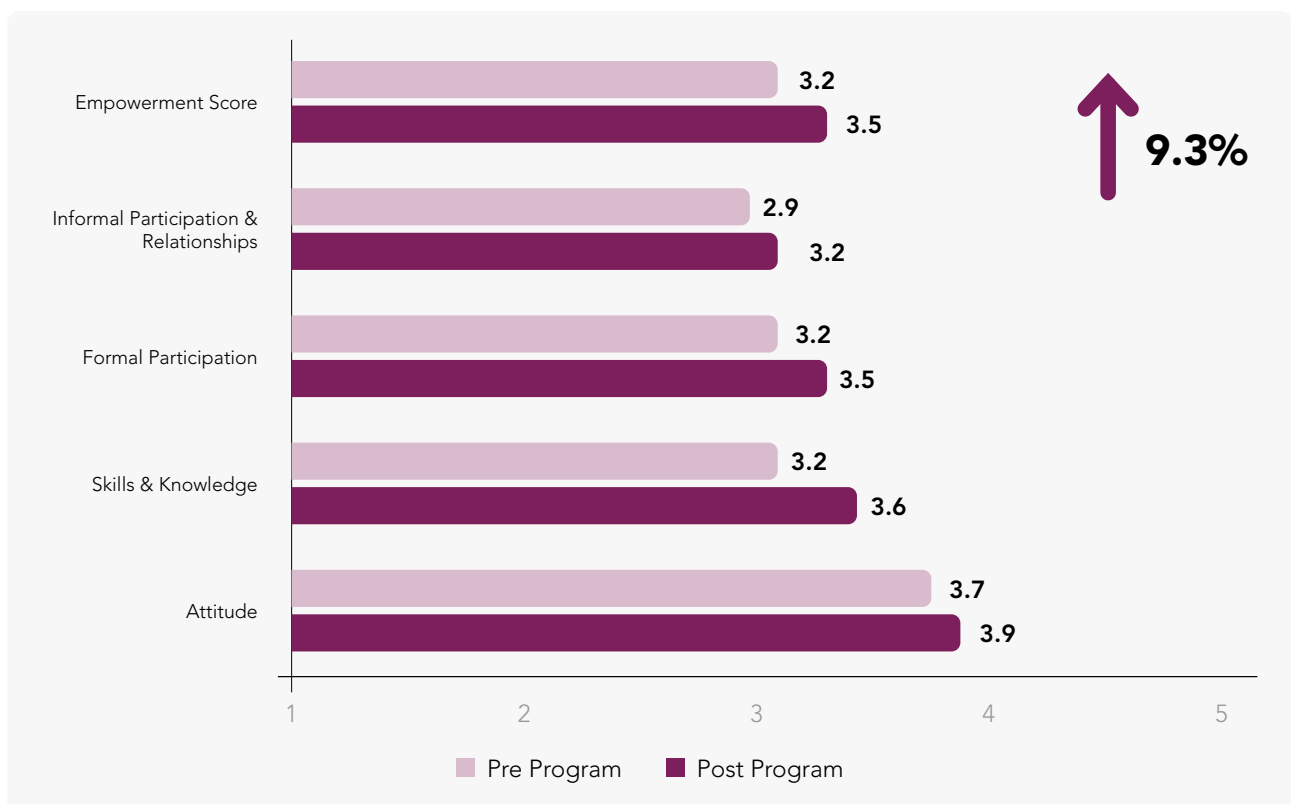
The PES scores are displayed through four subscales (Figure 7): (1) attitudes of control and competence, (2) cognitive appraisals of critical skills and knowledge, (3) formal participation in organisations, and (4) informal participation in social systems and relationships. Taken together, these subscales represent a full picture of how parents raising children with disabilities cope and can grow empowerment. Based on 128 pre-and post responses, participants completed the program feeling significantly more empowered.

On average, overall empowerment scores increased from 3.2 (out of max 5.0) to 3.5 at the end of the program (9.3% increase), reflecting increased outcomes in all empowerment subscales, which are statistically significant ($P < 0.0001$).

Confidence interval: The mean of pre minus post scores is -0.287 , 95% confidence interval of this difference; $t = 7.9381$; $df = 127$; standard error of difference = 0.036

Reference: Akey, T. M., Marquis, J. G., & Ross, M. E. (2000). Validation of scores on the Psychological Empowerment Scale: A measure of empowerment for parents of children with a disability. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 60(3), 419–438.

Figure 3: Empowerment increased



Participants felt more hopeful

'Hope is defined as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathway.' (Snyder, 2020)

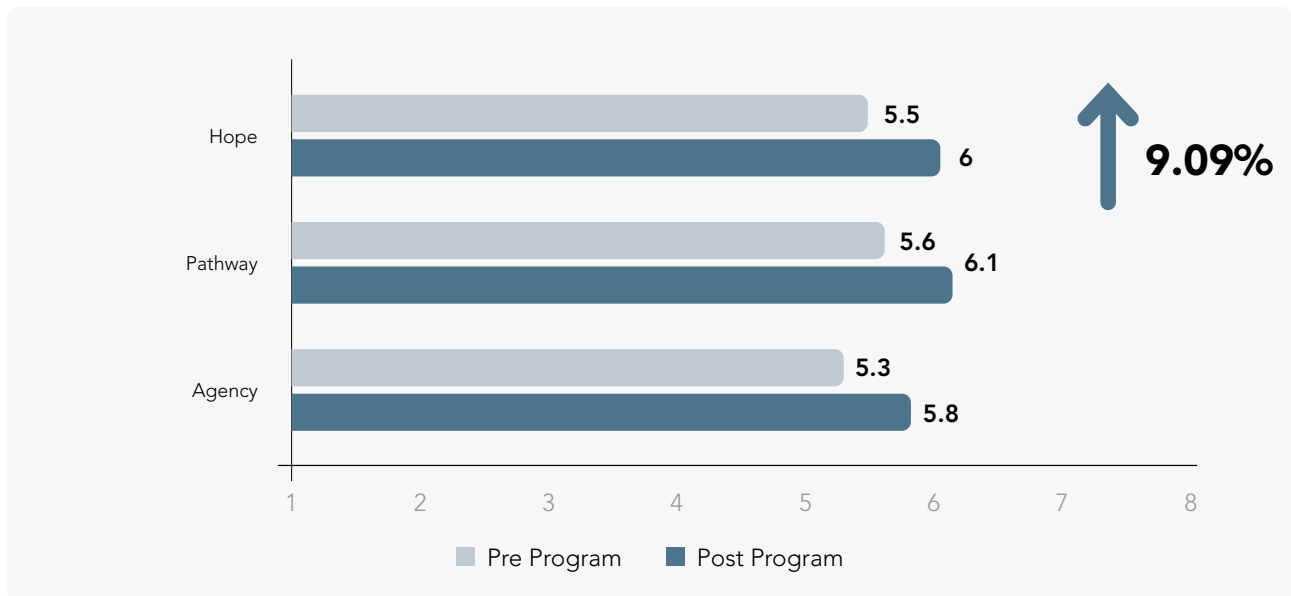
Based on 128 pre-and post responses, participants left the program feeling significantly more hopeful (6) compared to their pre-programs hope reports (5.5).

On average, participants reported increases in Hope, Pathway and Agency scores after the program that are statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$).

Confidence interval: The mean of pre minus post scores is -0.486 , 95% confidence interval of this difference from -0.656 to -0.316 ; $t = 7.9381$; $df = 127$; standard error of difference = 0.036 .

Reference: Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., et al. (1991). The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 570-585

Figure 4: Participant hope levels



Wellbeing improved

The PERMA profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016) covers five core domains of happiness and wellbeing that include positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishments (PERMA).

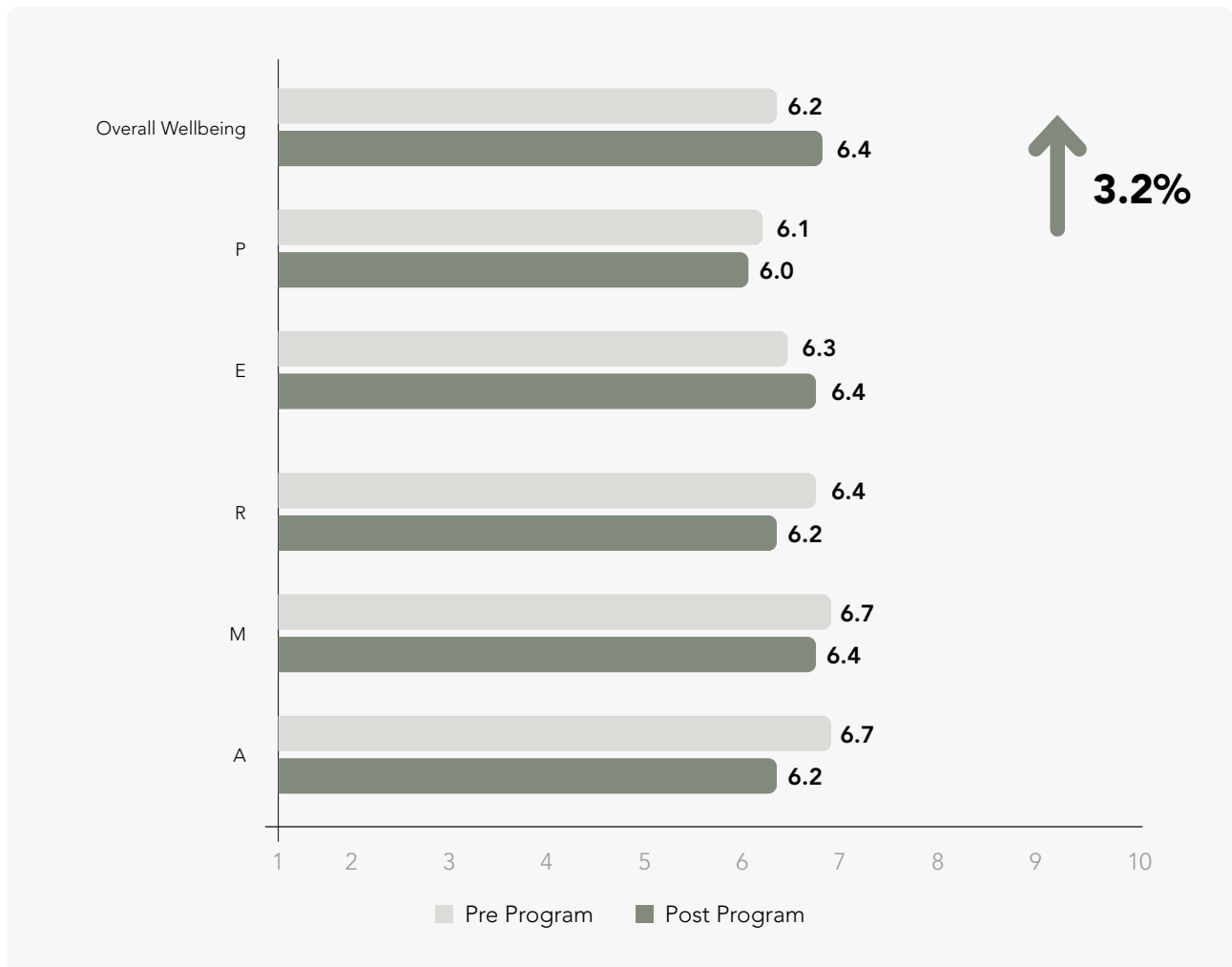
Based on 134 pre-and post responses, participants reported statistically higher wellbeing levels at end of the program in all 5 domains of the PERMA model.

Increases of wellbeing levels reported by participants after the program are statistically significant ($p < 0.0481$).

Confidence interval: The mean of pre minus post scores is -0.202 , 95% confidence interval of this difference from -0.403 to -0.002 ; $t = 1.9953$; $df = 133$; standard error of difference = 0.101 .

Reference: Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2016). The PERMA-Profiler: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 6(3).

Figure 5: Participant wellbeing



Other areas of improved wellbeing

Along with the 5 pillars of wellbeing or PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment) as defined by Seligman (2011), The PERMA-Profilier also measures negative emotion and health. Emotions play an important role in our wellbeing, and can range from very negative to very positive, and from high arousal (e.g., excitement, explosive) to low arousal (e.g., calm, relaxed, sad). For Positive emotion, the PERMA-Profilier measures general tendencies toward feeling contentment and joy. For Negative emotion, the Profiler measures tendencies toward feeling, negative (sad, anxious, and angry) and lonely.

Based on 134 pre-and post responses, participants' negativity and loneliness ratings significantly declined after the program.

Decreases of negativity statistically significant ($p < 0.0025$).

Confidence interval: The mean of pre minus post scores is 0.391, 95% confidence interval of this difference from 0.141 to 0.642; $t = 3.0872$; $df = 133$; standard error of difference = 0.127.

Decreases of loneliness statistically significant ($p < 0.0037$).

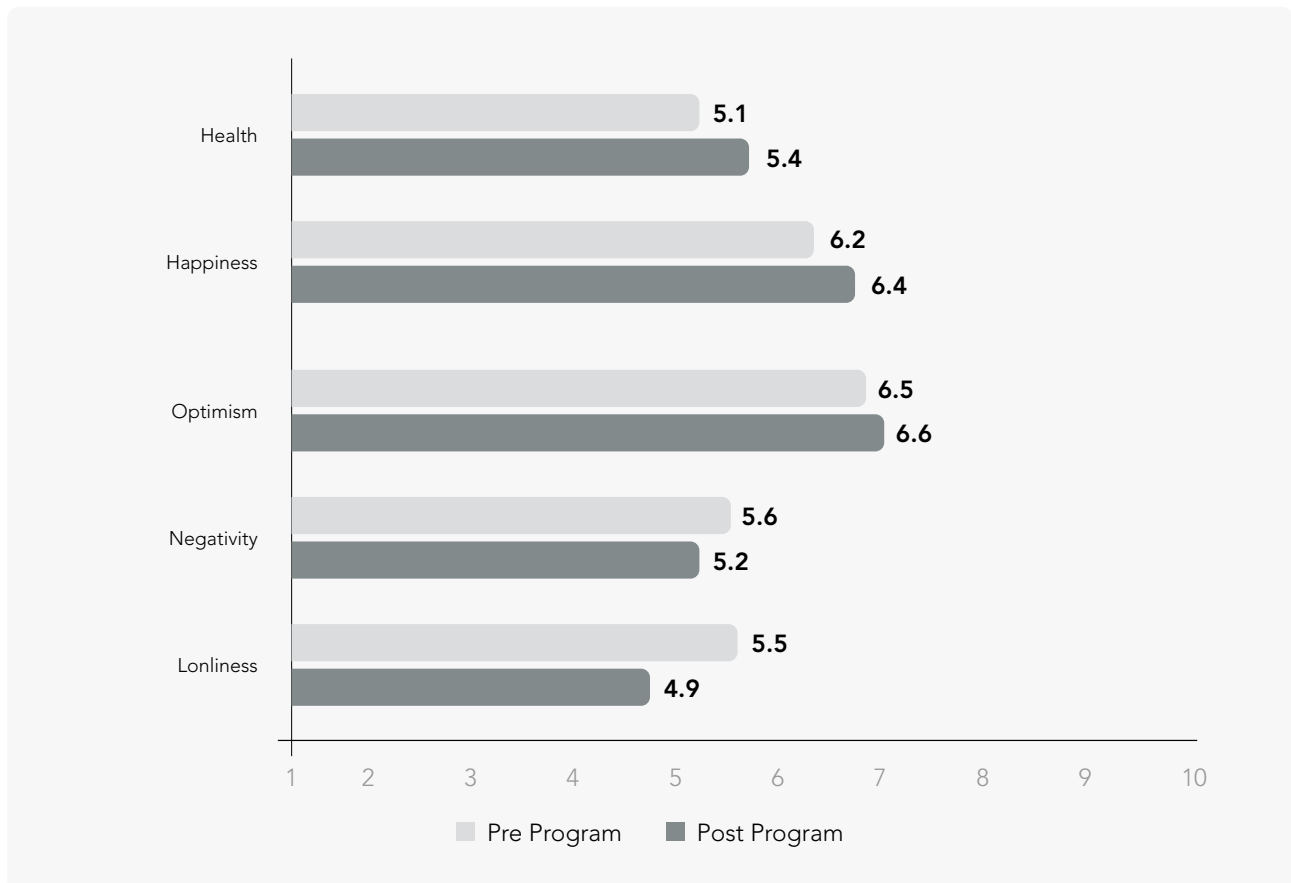
Confidence interval: The mean of pre minus post scores is 0.612, 95% confidence interval of this difference from 0.02 to 1.022; $t = 2.9529$; $df = 133$; standard error of difference = 0.207.

Participants' ratings of physical health, happiness and optimism increased, but did not reach statistical significance levels.

Reference: Seligman, M. E. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Simon and Schuster.

Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2016). *The PERMA-Profilier: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing*. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 6(3).

Figure 6: Other wellbeing scores



Participant life satisfaction increased

Cantril's Ladder for Life Satisfaction, also known as Cantril's Self-Anchoring Ladder of Life Satisfaction, or the Cantril Ladder of Life, measures life satisfaction by first asking the respondent to imagine their life by invoking their hopes and wishes for the future.

Respondents are asked to think of a ladder, with the best possible life for them being ten, and the worst possible life being zero. They are then asked to rate their own current lives on the zero to ten scale.

Based on 134 pre-and post responses, participants who completed the program reported significantly

higher life satisfaction, rating (6.4 out of 10) compared to those reported at the start of the program (5.7).

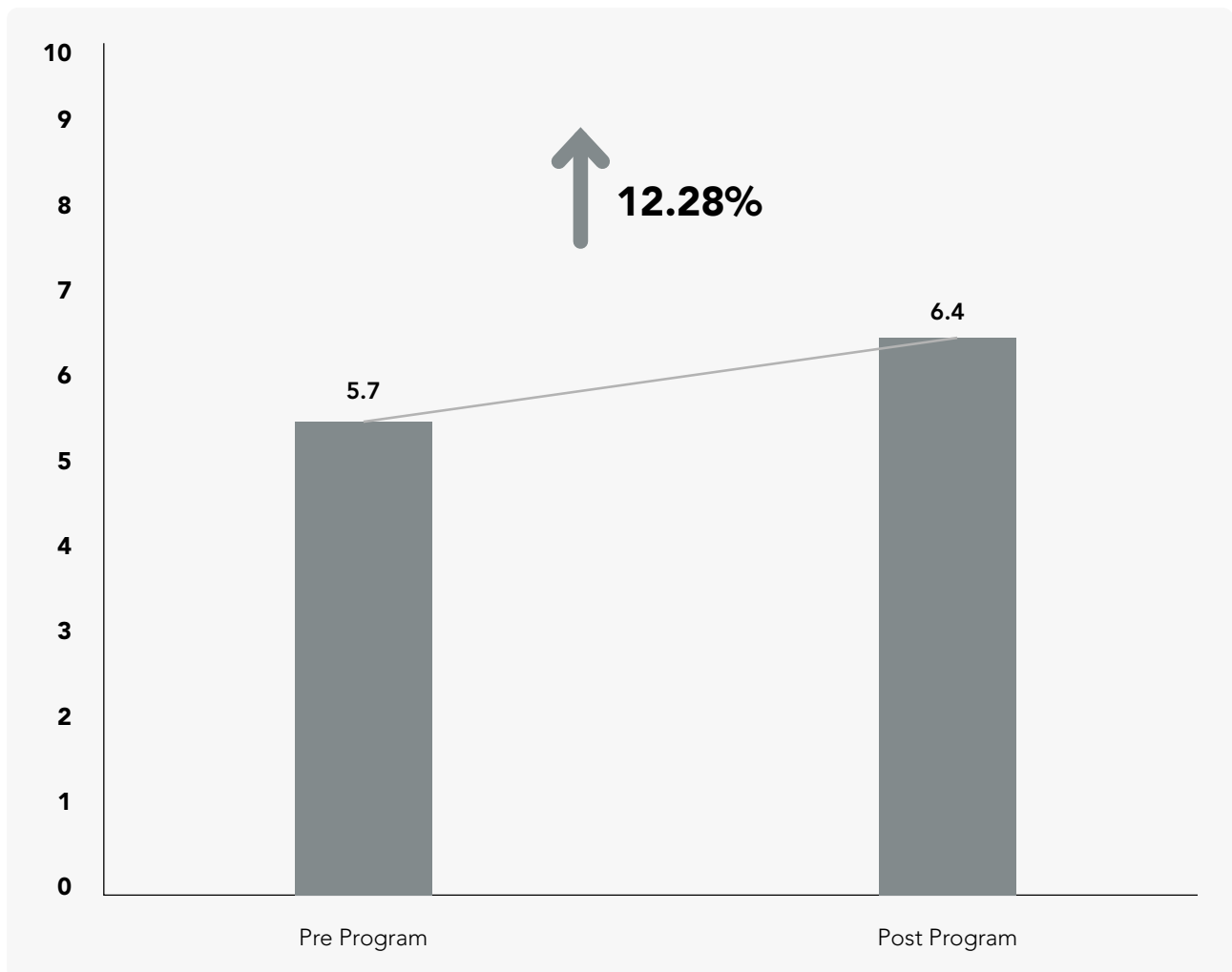
On average, participants reported increases in Life Satisfaction after the program that are statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$).

Confidence interval: The mean of pre minus post scores is -0.619, 95% confidence interval of this difference from -0.931 to -0.307; $t = 3.9261$; $df = 133$; standard error of difference = 0.158

Reference: Cantril, H. (1965). *The pattern of human concerns*. Rutgers University Press.

[Reference from the World Happiness Report](#)

Figure 7: Participant life satisfaction



Participants rated the sessions highly

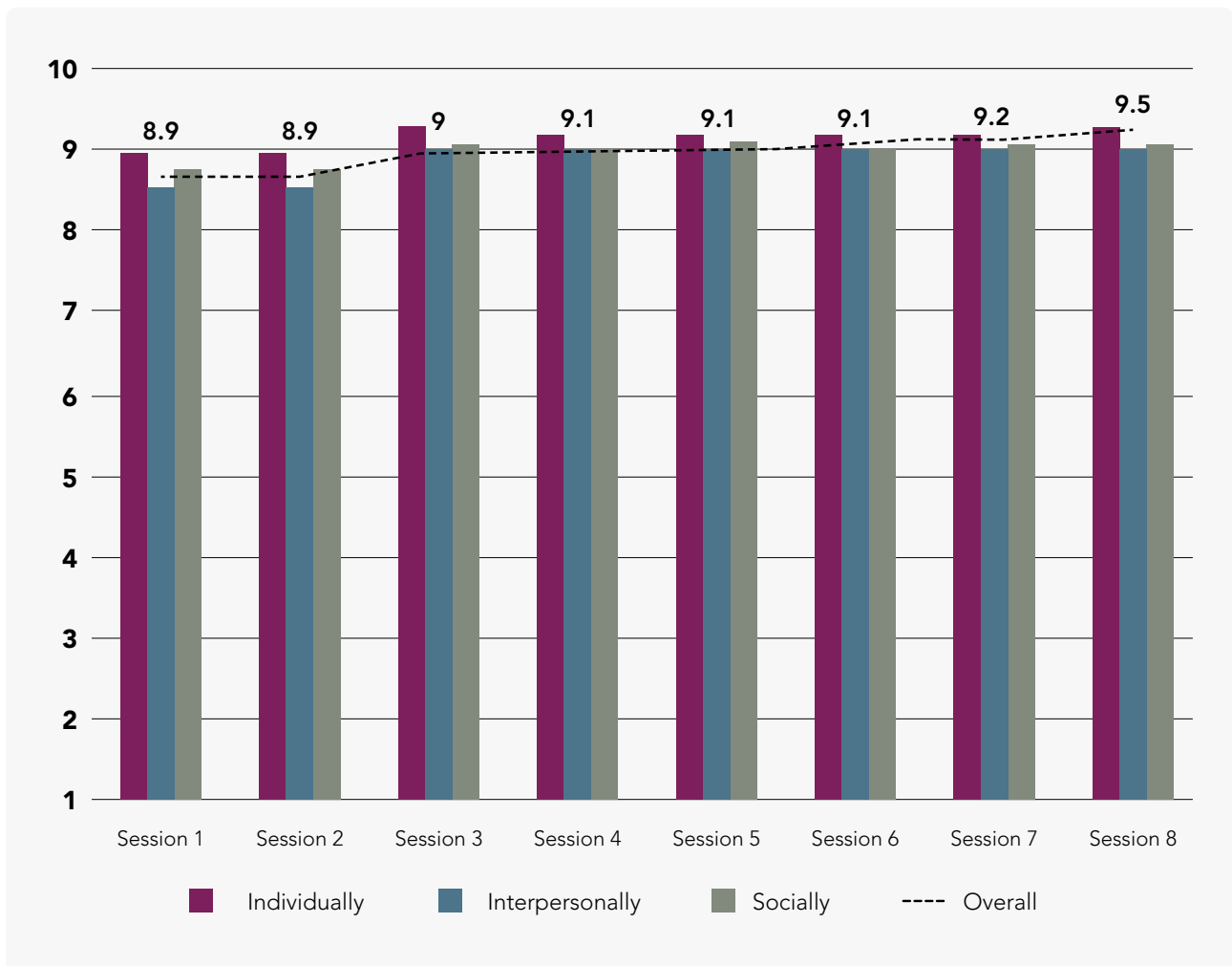
Partners for Change Outcomes Management System (PCOMS) measures participant satisfaction with the group and facilitators.

At the end of each session, participants indicated their ratings on a zero to ten scale on the following: feeling accepted and respected by the facilitator and other participants (relationships); working on and talking about what participants wanted to explore (goals and topics); the fit of the approach and facilitators for participants (fit); and finally, that the session was right for the participant (overall) across the eight sessions.

The ratings suggest that across the sessions participants had very positive experiences with the program. Relationship rating is the highest across the sessions.

Reference: Miller, S. D., Duncan, B. L., Brown, J., Sparks, J., & Claud, D. (2003). The outcome rating scale: A preliminary study of the reliability, validity, and feasibility of a brief visual analog measure. *Journal of Brief Therapy, 2*(2), 91-100.

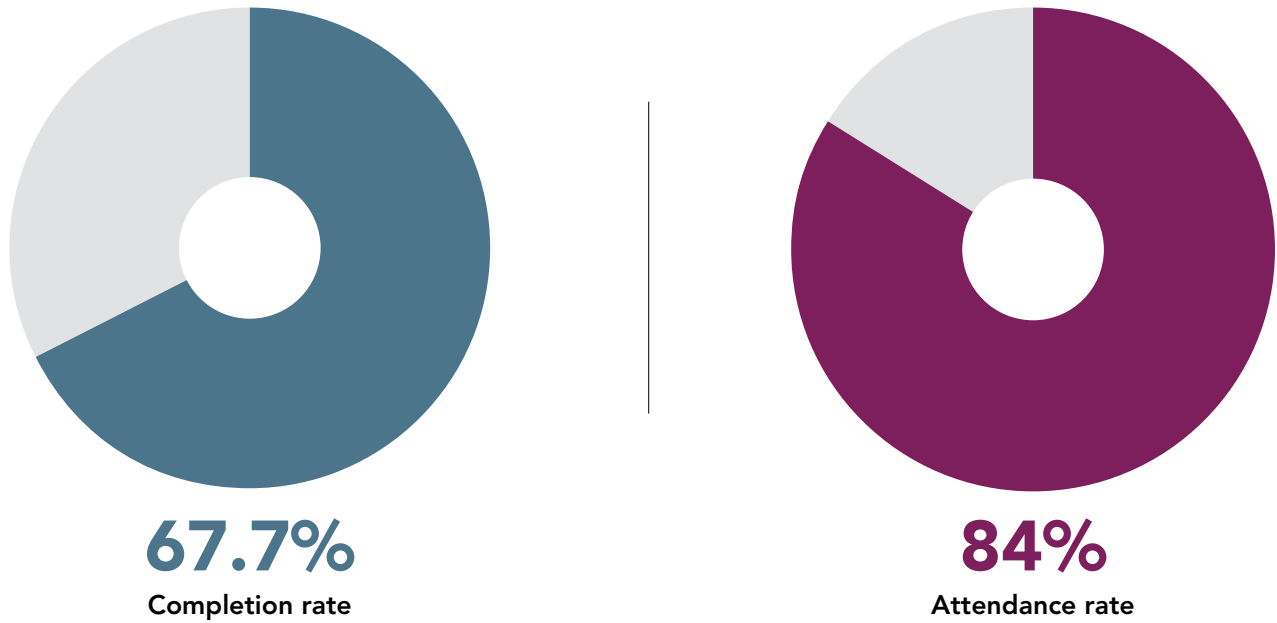
Figure 8: Participant session ratings



Program completion and attendance

Out of the 672 families who started Now & Next, 425 families completed the eight sessions, resulting in a completion rate of 67.5%. On average, 84% of participants attended each session, with a median group size of 10 participants.

Figure 9: Program completion and attendance



Medium-to-long-term outcomes

The medium-to-long-term outcomes of the Parents as Peer Leaders Program (PPLP) were determined through feedback gathered from participating parents at several points by the parent peer facilitators and surveys. These insights were used to evaluate the program's sustained impact on the families' wellbeing, sense of community support, and their ability to achieve their goals. Program feedback demonstrated how participants continued to navigate challenges, build resilience, and strengthen their support networks over time.

The personal stories and feedback from participants included here are a small sample and clearly reflect the program's lasting impact. These outcomes can be categorised into several key themes, each supported by direct quotes from the participants themselves.



01

Improved personal and family wellbeing

Participants experienced improvements not only in their parenting but also in other areas of their lives due to strategies learned from the program.

Dina: Parent capacity building

“As parents, we need support just as much as our children, and reconnecting with others within our community can help with this. This connection helps us and reminds us that we are experts on our children and we know them best. However, it takes a village and community to build each other up, and all parents need help and support.”

Ray: Strengths focus

“Now & Next reminds us that community can help us remember or focus on our signature strengths. This is a great reflective tool.”

Lucy: Lessons for my life broadly

“Family Leadership Training gave me a chance to review the content at a much deeper level than before. It’s amazing how those strategies help me now in every area of my life and not just my parenting. Highly recommend.”

Aisha: Joy, connections, and the power of strengths

“The leadership training gave me an opportunity to reflect, pause, review, and re-group. As parents, often we get lost or stuck in the rhythm of the day. By doing the Now & Next leadership training, I was able to bring back some of the sparkle and re-evaluate possibilities and processes for me, my child, and my whole family.”

02

Deepened understanding and advocacy

The training empowered participants to become stronger advocates for their children, deepening their understanding of the issues they face and increasing their agency.

Yumi: I am my child’s best advocate

“Family Leadership Training has given me a deeper understanding and insight into the Now & Next program, which is very close to my heart. It taught me that I can be the best advocate for my child. Above all, it has helped me build beautiful connections with other families.”

Mary: I know skills now that could have been helpful before

“As a grandmother, when I had problems with all my three children growing up 30 years ago, the Now & Next program would

have made a huge difference. I think it is great. I couldn’t go to the professionals and tell them what I wanted for my children. I just sat and listened to them, thinking, ‘you have the training, you know best’. Instead, I could have told them they were so wrong with my children.”

Priya: I leaned into the parent-professional relationship

“Our physio had an enormous amount of experience. Unfortunately, the environment just didn’t work for my daughter. With newfound confidence after the Now & Next program, I asked if we could meet in a local park—it was a game changer. My child explored naturally, her confidence grew, and she even started communicating intentionally with our therapist using key word signing.”

03

Empowered and developed leadership

The program nurtured leadership qualities, enabling participants to take on influential roles in their families and communities.

Omar: Leading my family, community and better employment

“Family Leadership Training has given me access to many skills I had not previously considered. As a parent, these skills are applied to my own family and to my work with children and families. By upskilling, I found better employment opportunities where I could put into practice what I learned.

I am grateful for the opportunity to acquire this knowledge and utilise it to benefit my family and community. This is a credit to Now & Next program by Plumtree for this achievement. I am now more confident in my ability to lead my family and help other families and their communities, and for that I thank you very much. I am committed to continuing to develop my leadership skills and use them to make a positive impact.”

Raj: Helping me in my job

“In hindsight, the Family Leadership Training was very timely as I used one of its lessons on agency to support carers in my current job to get the best outcomes.”

Diego, Senior Peer Facilitator: Sustained peer connection and leadership

“It can’t be downplayed how important programs like Now & Next and Family Leadership Training are to families in regional or remote communities. I received an email from a Mum who did the program last year. She has moved out to Dubbo and commented that there is not any support out there. She reached out to learn more about the family leadership program in order to support other families.”

Nina: Paying it forward

“I would love to be given the chance to facilitate a Now & Next or Pictability session. I feel confident in my abilities to help other families, and I know that I will constantly have the opportunity to increase my knowledge as I deliver the program.”

04

Strengthened community connections

The program fostered stronger connections within the community and a sense of shared experience.

Linh: Leadership and connection

“I wanted to let you know that I ended up creating a local ketogenic diet group on Facebook. It’s very new, with only two people in the group, myself included, but I’m hoping to get more people on board to create a local community.”

Renay: Applying skills to support other families

“I unofficially use aspects of this program in working with mentorship and support group facilitation for foster carers and other parents who come to me for help and answers.”

Now & Next: transformative journeys

Stories of change that capture life-changing transformations experienced by families who participated in the Parents as Peer Leaders Program.

These stories from Now & Next facilitators highlight the resilience, growth, and empowerment of parents as they navigated the complexities of raising children with developmental delays or disabilities. Each reflects the unique challenges faced by these families and the significant, lasting impact that the PPLP has had on their lives.

Through their words, we gain a deeper understanding of how the program's strengths-based approach, peer support, and community-building efforts have not only addressed immediate needs, but also fostered long-term positive change in their lives and communities. These stories show the importance of a family leadership approach that builds the skills and confidence of parents to change their family and community.

From skepticism to advocacy

In one of our sessions, a highly professional father expressed that he joined primarily for peer support and had minimal interest in the program's content. He was initially skeptical and resistant to the material presented in each session. However, as he continued the program, his curiosity grew, especially with the strengths-based approaches and positive psychology elements that Now & Next emphasized.

Gradually, this father began to share his experiences with other participants, moving from a stance of questioning to one of active engagement and ownership of the program's principles. By the program's conclusion, he had undergone a significant shift, emerging

as an active participant and a vocal advocate for contemporary approaches to disability. His journey exemplifies the transformative power of peer support and Now & Next's content. It encouraged him to embrace a positive mindset and advocate for the same in others.

Reflection: The change from skepticism to advocacy was a common theme in parent feedback. This story illustrates the profound impact that peer support and a strengths-based approach can have on participants' mindset.

The strength in storytelling

During one of the sessions, a parent disclosed her autism diagnosis to fellow parents and facilitators. A journalist by profession, she found that the program significantly influenced her approach to writing about children, disability and families. After completing the program, she shared an article she wrote for a magazine with her fellow graduates, seeking their constructive feedback for confidence building, and reassurance.

She integrated Now & Next's principles into her writing. Through collaboration with program facilitators and reflecting on the feedback from other parents, they refined their article to highlight strengths-based perspectives. This experience not only transformed her view of parenting a child with a disability but also empowered her to become a leader in promoting contemporary narratives on disability through journalism.

Reflection: This story highlights the common ripple effect that the program can have beyond the immediate participants. By fostering a strengths-based approach, this parent was equipped to influence broader societal views on disability through their work.

Embracing neurodiversity

A parent peer facilitator worked with four neurodivergent couples that included a same-sex couple. The facilitator created a safe environment where they could share personal experiences of navigating their own neurodivergent diagnoses while raising autistic children. Despite initial feelings of overwhelm and uncertainty, these parents displayed positivity and hopefulness as a peer group.

They felt less isolated, connected with other parents, recognised their own challenges while being optimistic about their ability to support their children. Their experience shows the power of peer support and a strengths-based approach in building resilience and celebrating neurodiversity. The shift in perspective helped them to see autism not just as a challenge, but as a form of neurodivergence to be embraced with pride that ultimately benefits themselves and their children.

Reflection: This story exemplifies how facilitators trained to be neuro affirming provide a supportive peer environment that embraces diversity. It enables parents to move from a place of uncertainty to one of pride and resilience that positively impacts their lives and their children's futures.

Rediscovering family strength

A couple who joined the program described themselves as overwhelmed and not on the same page as parents. They felt as though they were failing in their roles. Through Now & Next, they learned to break down their goals, focus on self care and identify their strengths. The mother realised that it was okay to ask for help, and that she and her husband could work together as a team.

With this newfound clarity, the couple was able to set and achieve goals and next steps. For example, they prioritised more family time, establishing a regular family night to play board games together. The father focused on improving his personal health by preparing healthier meals and setting a positive example for the family. The mother committed to enhancing her fitness by joining a netball team and taking time to connect with friends.

Their child benefited from this structured approach with specific goals around establishing better routines, such as consistent routines for bedtime and preparing for school. The mother noticed that as the family connected more to these practices, her child became more motivated and engaged, reducing the need for her to constantly remind or "nag."

They became active contributors, supporting other families during the program. The positive changes they experienced were evident to the facilitators and themselves. The mother reported feeling renewed and less anxious, and the father became more involved in the family's journey, making healthier choices and modelling positive behaviours for their child.

The mother shared: "We were in survival mode and pulling in different directions before we joined the program. We were both apprehensive as often parenting advice seems to concentrate on what more you need to do when you are already time-poor and struggling. The Now & Next program was exactly what we needed."

The structured approach and evidence-based tools were great, but what made the program stand out was the gentle pull for us to see the amazing in the ordinary and the successes in the small steps. We left every session more positive and have started to let go of some of the guilt of not being enough. We were starting to acknowledge that what we were doing, we were doing brilliantly! The facilitators were amazingly kind and supportive, and together with the other participants, we felt like friends by the end of the program."

Reflection: This story underscores the importance of family cohesion and self-care in parenting a child with developmental differences. Partners or other important adults in the child's life are encouraged to do the program together. The program's focus on goal-setting and self-care helped this couple to reconnect as a team, improve family dynamics and overall wellbeing. The structure provided by the program allowed the family to thrive, finding success in both small and large steps. Now & Next ultimately strengthened their bonds, individual growth and outcomes for the child.

Final comments

Integrating paid parent peer workers into the early childhood intervention (ECI) and foundational supports ecosystem has proven to be a powerful approach for building family engagement.

With their lived experience and insights, parent peer workers provide complementary support to that offered by professionals and create a trusted, sustainable community resource. Although the use of paid peer work in early childhood is not yet widespread, families greatly benefit during formative years from structured connections with knowledgeable peers.

The Parent Peer Leadership Project (PPLP) has exceeded objectives, demonstrating the power of a peer-led approach in supporting families of children without NDIS funding. By enhancing hope, empowerment, well-being and goal achievement, these families are equipped to better navigate the complex landscape of specialist and community support systems. The program's success, deeply rooted in co-design and peer leadership, presents a valuable model for future initiatives aimed at families at risk of being disconnected from traditional support networks.

The impact of PPLP contributes to a broader movement towards more inclusive family-centred practices in early childhood intervention. The insights gained from this project underscore the potential of parent peer-led initiatives rooted in family leadership. Its positive outcomes create a lasting difference in the lives of children and their families across Australia and generate continuing change.



“

MARIAM

The program has created another avenue of support and connection for me that has become far more positive and beneficial than I ever thought it would. It has helped me understand there is a framework around making forward movement and progress in my child's life as well as my own and that of my entire immediate family.



Plumtree is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation that helps families thrive.

Trusted for over 30 years, we provide therapies and support for children aged birth to 8 years with a disability or developmental delay and their families. Our free online and centre-based playgroups and parent educational program support all families. At Plumtree Preschool, children of all abilities and cultural backgrounds learn together and begin to understand the value of inclusive communities.

Our award-winning, evidence-based programs and resources help families take control of their own learning and achieve positive outcomes.

Plumtree's passionate, culturally diverse team of specialists work from the heart in a caring environment where families feel respected and informed.

Visit our website www.plumtree.org.au and join the Plumtree mailing list or Facebook page to find out about our services, workshops and events.



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