WORKFORCE **INNOVATION**
through **SELF-MANAGED SUPPORTS**

**A Project Report by the
National Alliance of Capacity Building Organisations**

About this report

The Workforce Innovation Through Self-Managed Supports project documents the experiences in self-managed employment relationships, Australia-wide, from the perspectives of the employer (the person living with disability, their family, or both) and their support workers.

Six organisations across Australia collaborated on the project: JFA Purple Orange, Belonging Matters, Community Resources Unit, Valued Lives Foundation, Family Advocacy and Imagine More.

This accompanying report is supported by a grant offered under the Innovative Workforce Fund, administered by National Disability Services (NDS) with funding from the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

The opinions or analysis expressed in this document are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department, the Minister for Social Services or NDS, and cannot be taken in any way as expressions of government policy.

Who should read this report?

- **People considering self-management** — this report is designed to fast track your understanding of the process by providing practical information from those who have already experienced self-management arrangements.

- **People considering direct employment as a support worker by a person living with disability or their family** — information in this report will help you determine whether this type of arrangement will suit you.

- **Anyone who directs their support workers** — the collective wisdom gathered here will hopefully be of value given the aim of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is to give participants choice and control to direct the support they receive, regardless of the type of plan management they have selected.

What is self-management?

The Independent Advisory Council of the NDIS defines self-management under the Scheme as:

"A plan management option where a participant or their nominee takes responsibility for the whole or a part of the package with the Agency allocating the budget directly to the participant (or nominee) who is responsible for all aspects of administration of the package .... a participant who self-manages their supports can undertake all the above responsibilities themselves or pay an intermediary to undertake one or more of the functions on their behalf. The key point that differentiates self-management from other forms of plan management under the NDIS is that ... [funds are] paid directly to the participant."[1]

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[1] Independent Advisory Council of the National Disabilty Insurance Scheme 2017, *Independent Advisory Council submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into NDIS costs March 2017*, NDIA, Canberra, p 8.

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Executive summary

Self-management is not yet a common plan management arrangement under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). In the first quarter of 2017–18, only 18% of plans were self-managed, up from 17% previously.[2]

While there is some research on self-managed supports from the perspectives of the person and family members involved, the perspective of support workers has rarely been considered. The Workforce Innovation Through Self-Managed Supports project addresses this gap by documenting self-managed employment relationships, from both the perspectives of the employer (the person living with disability, their family, or both) and their support workers. The project interviewed 25 people living with disability and their families who self-manage their NDIS or state-based funding packages together with 15 of their support workers, to identify and share key factors for success or difficulty in these arrangements.

Most respondents reported that they chose self-management as it offered increased choice and control. They highlighted the ability to choose their workers and to use non-NDIS-registered providers; to choose who would come into their home; the ability to be flexible and creative with funding to focus on individual interests and goals; value for money; and the direct relationship they had with their workers.

Participants had various employment arrangements with their support workers, reflecting the diversity of ways people can self-manage. The common theme was that all self-directed their workers. Some managed all employment processes and employed workers directly, often as a company or partnership. Those who took on the full responsibility were able to pay more than the award rate for 'good' workers and for specific skills or tasks. Others had some help from third parties. Where an agency or online employment platform was used to source workers, the worker was directed by the person/family member but paid by the agency or online service. Others sourced their own workers and employed them directly but contracted out the payroll functions. Some used a host organisation or financial intermediary that was the employer of record.

Key recruitment methods included via personal networks, online employment platforms and agencies, and by advertising on websites and in community and educational settings. The interview process depended on the recruitment process, with those sourced via their personal network not requiring a formal interview. Nonetheless, most participants undertook some pre-employment reference or police record checks. Sometimes this task was contracted to another

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[2] National Disablity Insurance Agency 2017b, *National Disability Insurance Scheme: COAG Disability Reform Council quarterly report,* 30 September 2017, NDIA, Canberra, p.25.

service. Induction and training tended to focus on individual needs and personalities. Two training types were common: 'buddy' shifts, where the new worker would shadow a more experienced worker, and values-based training.

Two-way communication was emphasised, highlighting a greater focus on relationships in self-managed arrangements. Both formal and informal methods of giving and receiving feedback were important. Many participants held regular team meetings. Others used a Facebook page or a key worker to deal with administrative tasks. Good communication and team building were a factor in worker satisfaction and stability.

Most who self-managed recognised the benefits of this arrangement for choice and control, value for money and the opportunity for them or their family member to have a valued life and to employ workers who shared their vision and values. Challenges were noted, mainly in the early stages of self-management around locating and understanding information about the responsibilities of an employer, dealing with the paperwork required by NDIS and navigating the NDIS portal.

Participants were positive about advising others to self-manage, highlighting that people considering this arrangement can do this in stages and that support is available.

Of those workers interviewed for the project, seven were directly employed by the person they supported or a family member; four were employed by a host agency or online employment platform; and four were self-employed as sole traders.

One of the strong themes to come out of the support worker interviews was that people were attracted to this work because it was considered rewarding, aligned with their values and allowed for a deeper connection with the person they supported. Under self-management arrangements, they enjoyed greater flexibility, creativity and initiative as roles could be tailored to them; they could change activities on the day to suit the person rather than be restricted by agency priorities; and they could support beneficial, positive activities.

Recruitment was related to the varying tasks performed by the workers. Some had been personally approached for the job, others heard about it from a friend or teacher or responded directly to an ad. For those who were interviewed, the process generally involved the person they would be supporting who had the final say. Workers who did not have a formal interview often underwent a 'meet and greet', often after a pre-screening process by an agency.

Several felt that they did not receive enough training when they started in their role. However, where workers were recruited for their specific professional skills, induction was brief and focused on individual requirements. Where ongoing training was provided, funding was often allocated to values-based training or to upskilling for future roles.

Challenges were also raised regarding pay, particularly where hours were shorter, as was isolation, where the worker had nobody to bounce ideas off or seek advice from. Concerns

about maintaining clear boundaries were also discussed, given the relationship between the worker, the person they support, and the family member can be more involved in self-managed arrangements. Nevertheless, most workers felt that these were managed appropriately through good communication and feedback.

Most workers advised others to consider working in a self-managed arrangement. Some cautioned it required a deeper commitment and less certainty about what each day would bring, but that it was much more rewarding than traditional disability work.

People who self-manage and their family members

Demographics

Eight people who self-managed completed the demographic survey conducted as part of this project, with the results shown below. The participants are referred to by pseudonyms throughout the report.

People who self-manage

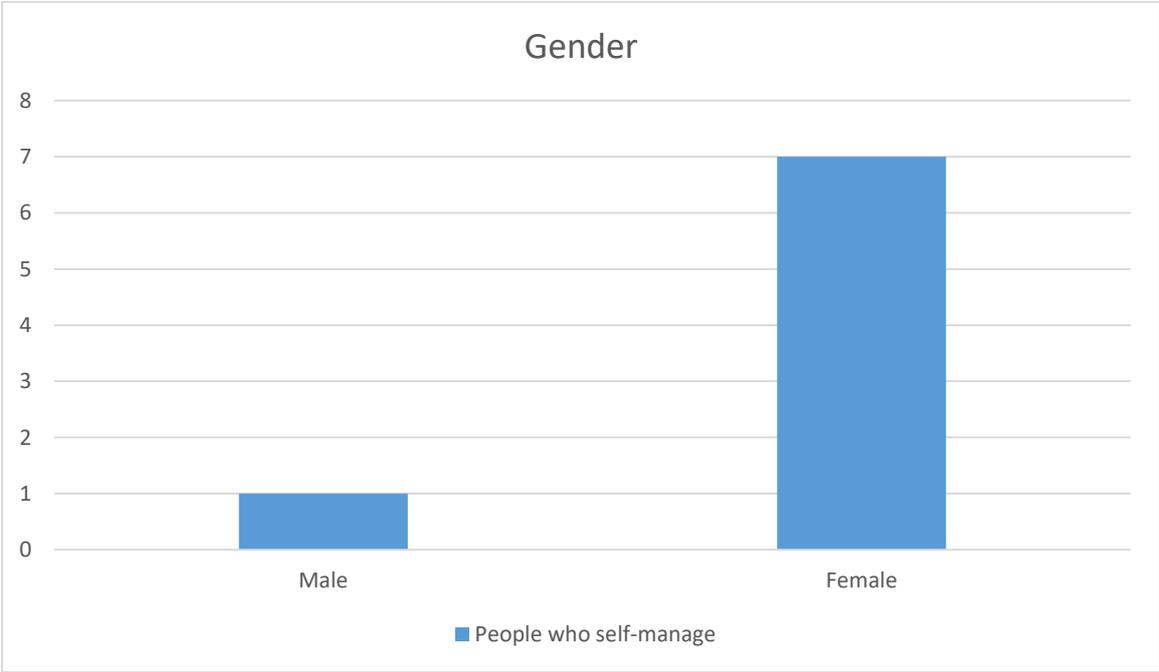*Figure 1: People who self-manage – gender*
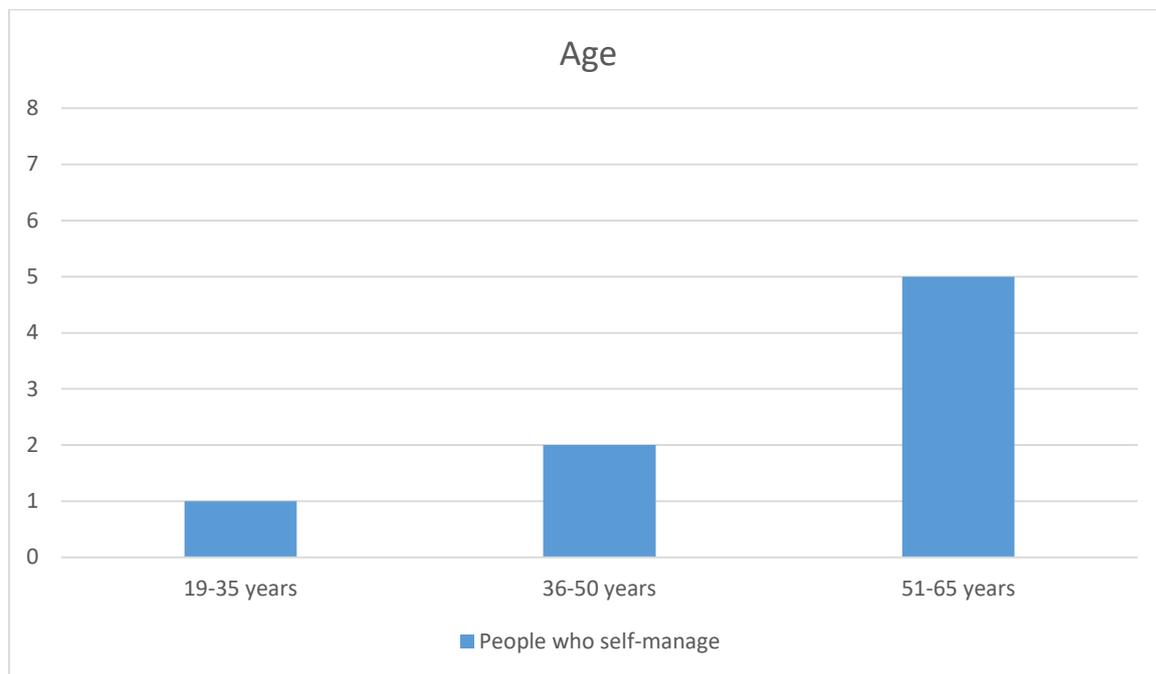
Age

Figure 3: People who self-manage who identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
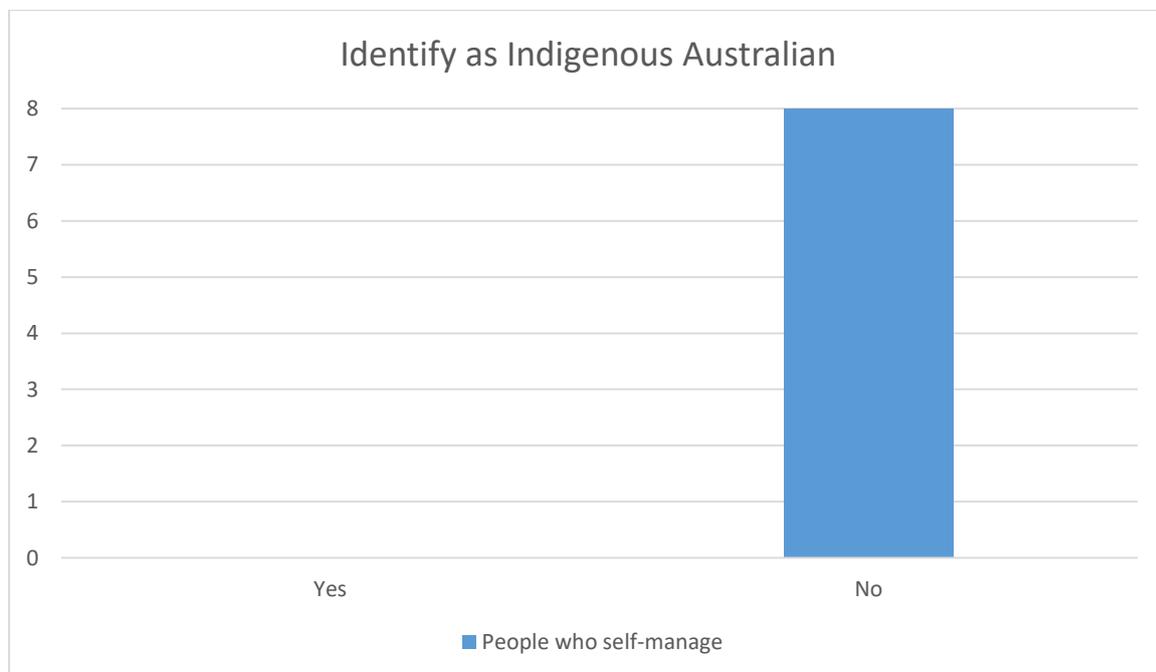
Identify as Indigenous Australian

Figure 4: People who self-manage — cultural or language background from somewhere other than Australia

Figure 5: People who self-manage — location
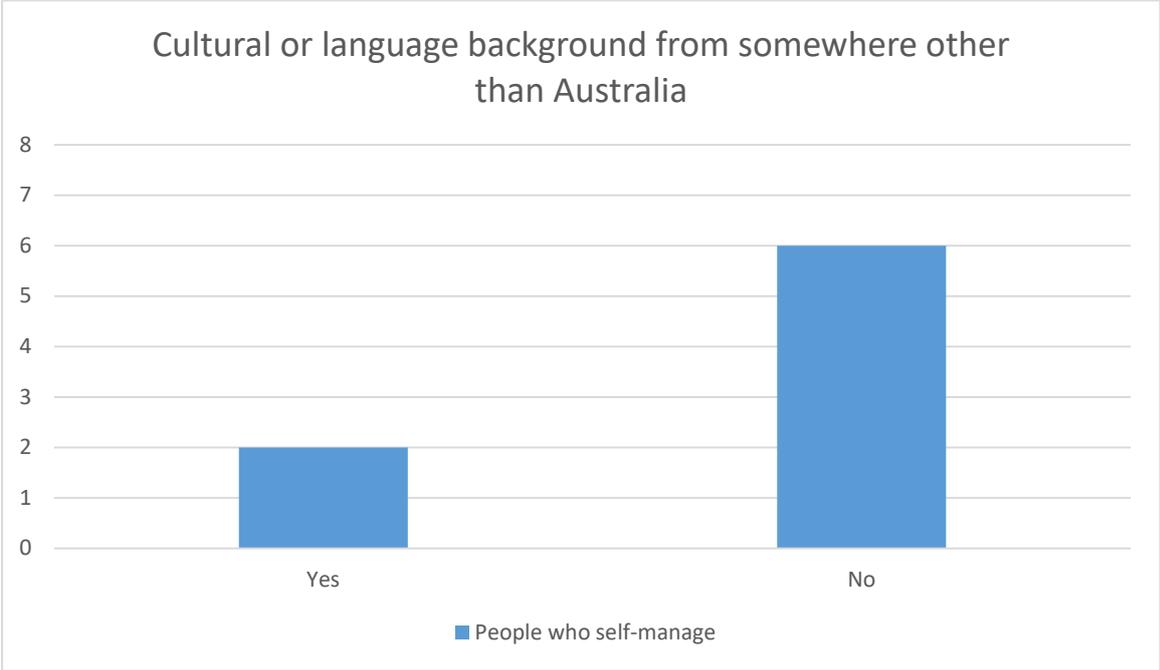
Figure 5: People who self-manage — location

Figure 6: People who self-manage — employment

Employment
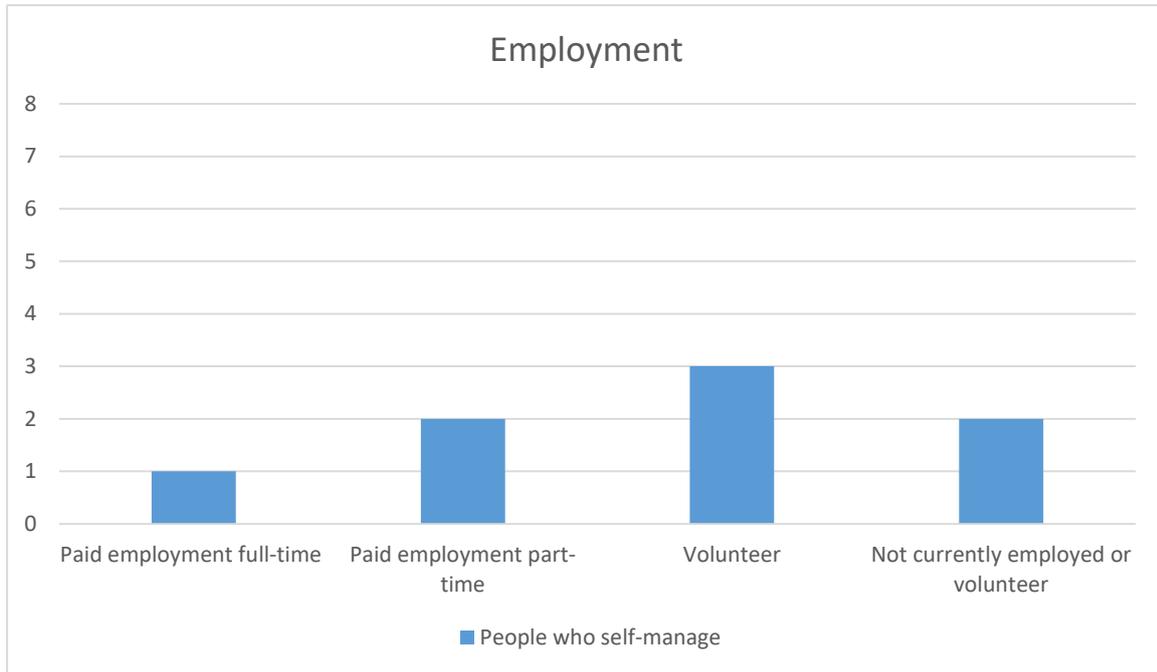
Figure 7: People who self-manage — type of disability
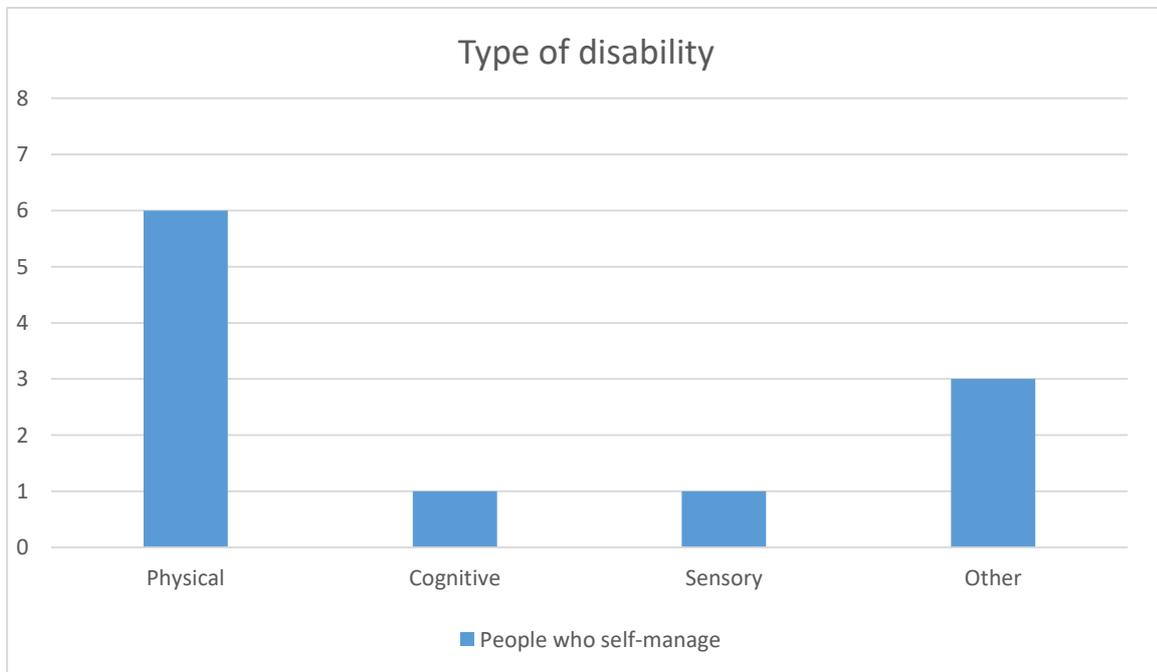
Type of disability

The question about the type of disability the respondent lives with allowed multiple responses. Other includes psychosocial and neuro-muscular.
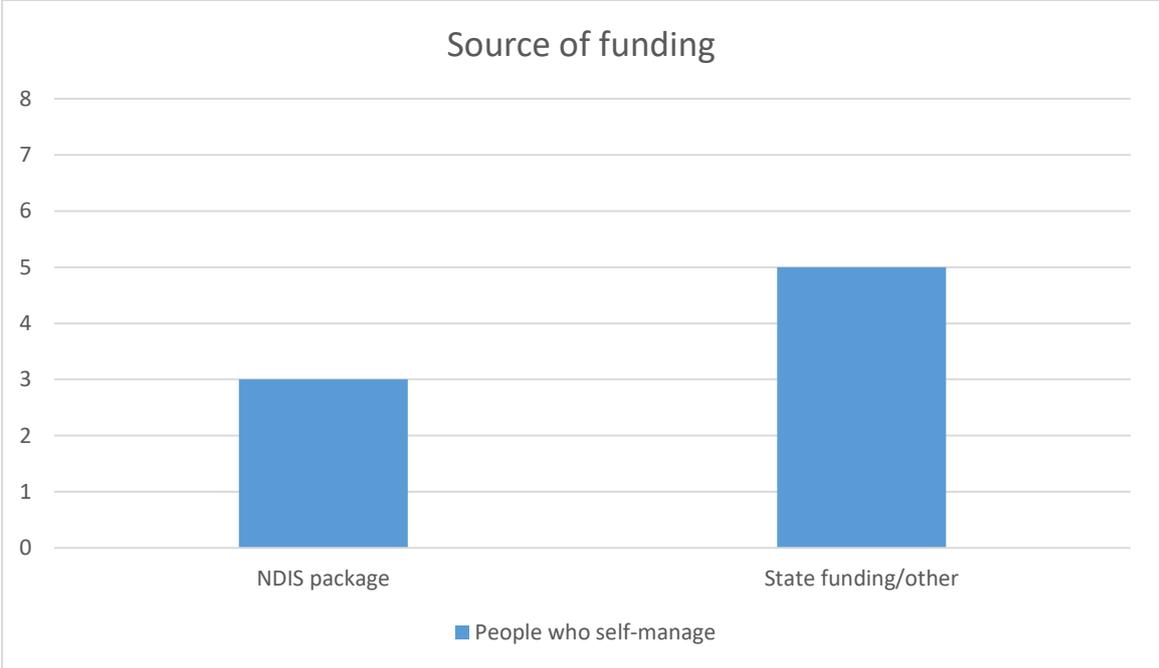
Other includes motor accident compensation.

The number of hours of support managed per week ranged between 4 ½ hours to 80 hours.

Family members

Twelve people who managed an NDIS or state-based funding package for a family member completed the demographic survey. Their responses are displayed below. Please note except for gender, responses refer to the person being supported.

Figure 9: Family members — gender

Gender of family member
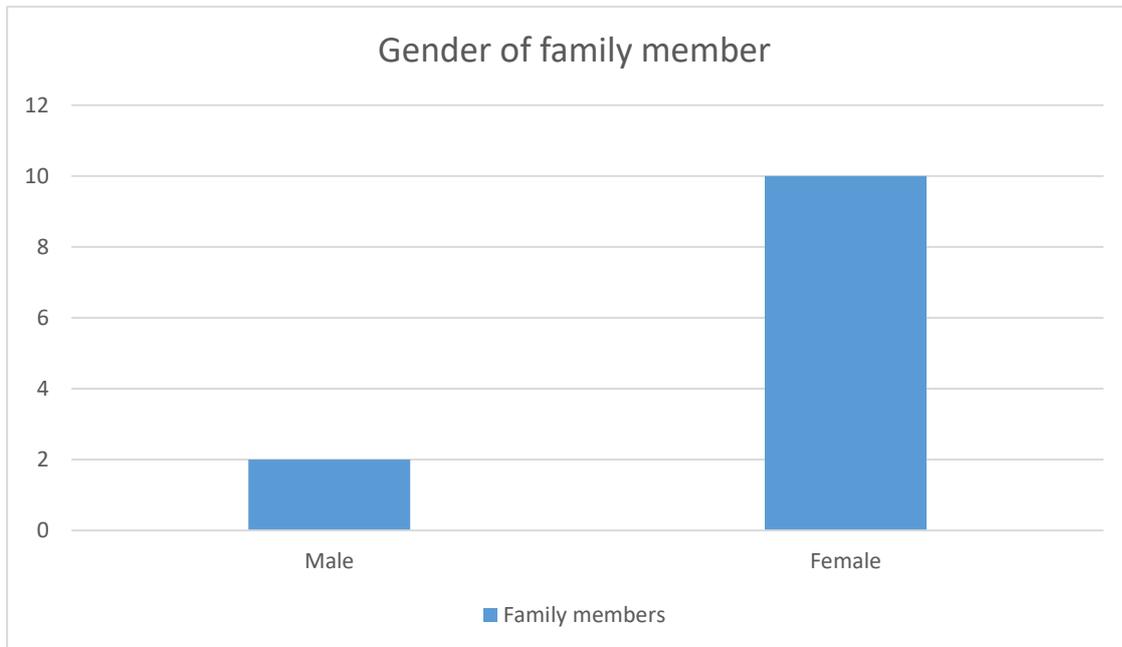
The following charts refer to the person being supported.

Figure 10: Person being supported — age

Age
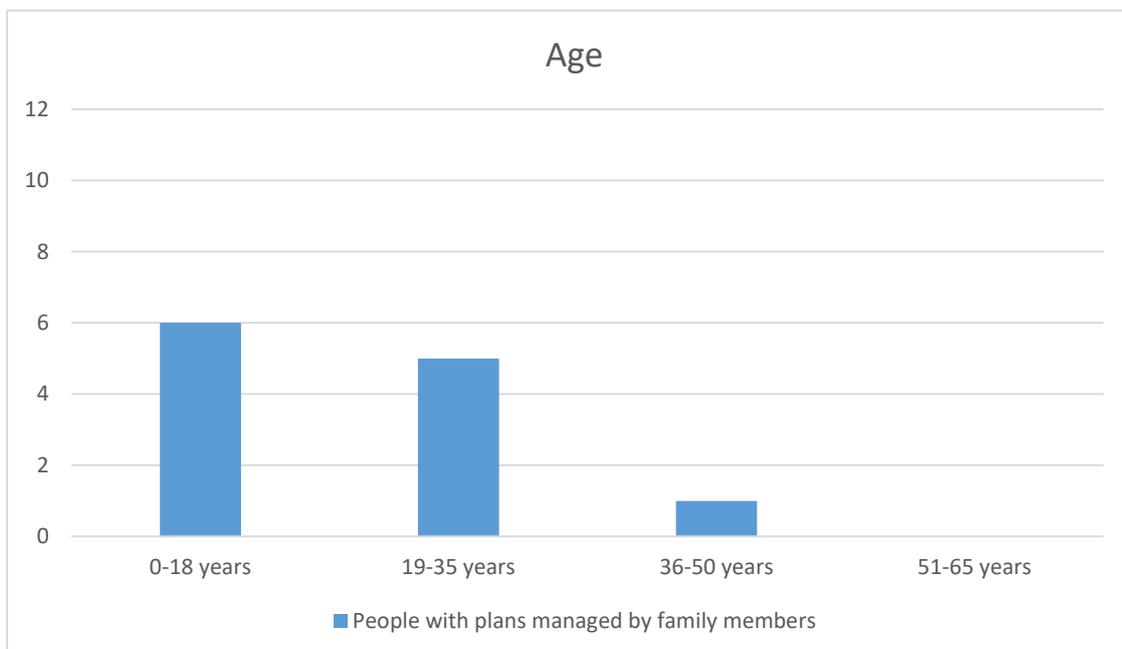
As would be expected, the age of the person living with disability was younger in the group where the package was managed by a family member than in the group of respondents who self-managed.

Figure 11: Person being supported who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Identify as Indigenous Australian

Family members
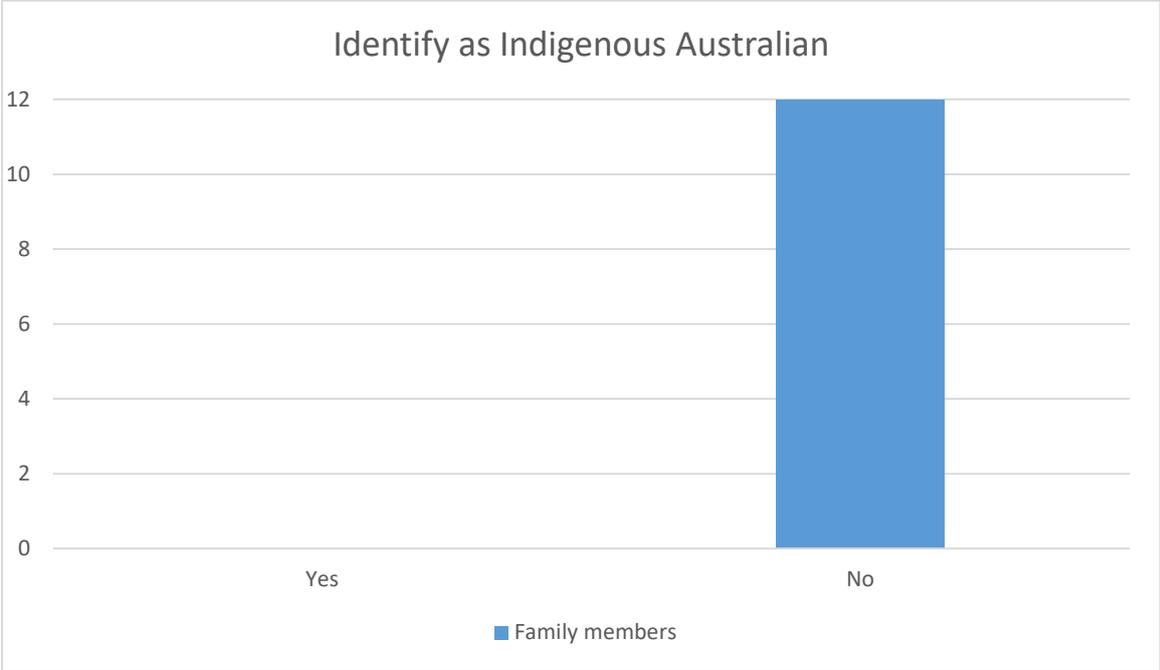
*Figure 12: Person being supported — cultural or language background from somewhere other than Australia*

Cultural or language background from somewhere other than Australia

Family members
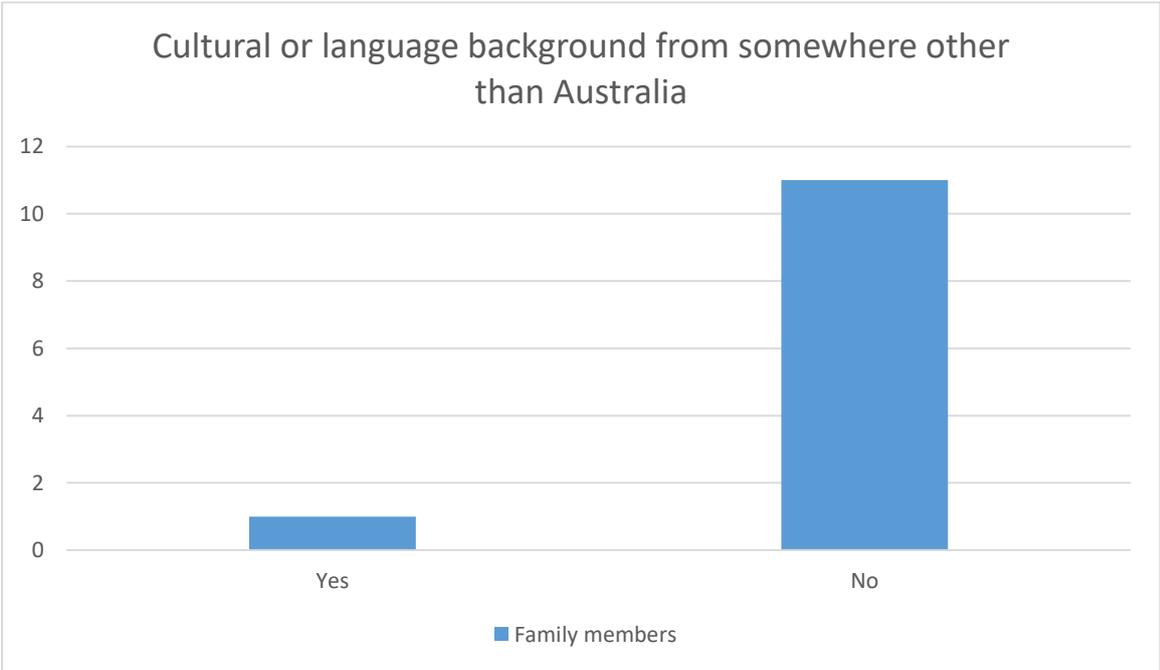
Figure 13: Person being supported — location

Location

Figure 14: Person being supported — employment
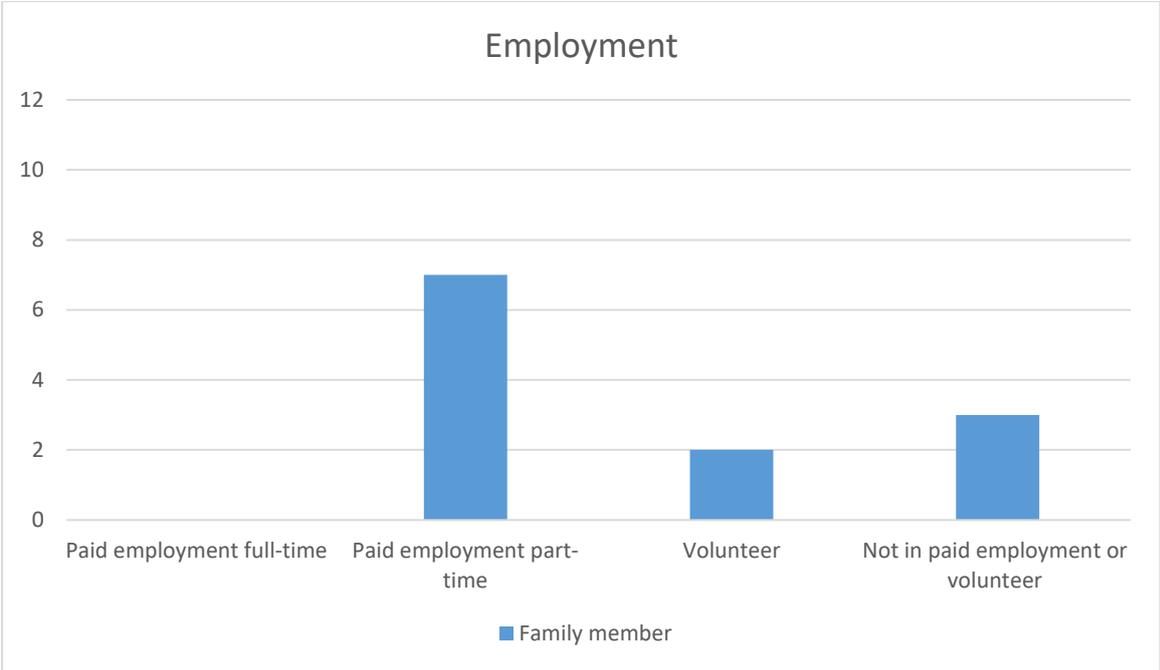
Employment

Part-time employment includes own microbusiness. Not in paid employment or volunteering includes school students.

Figure 15: Person being supported — type of disability
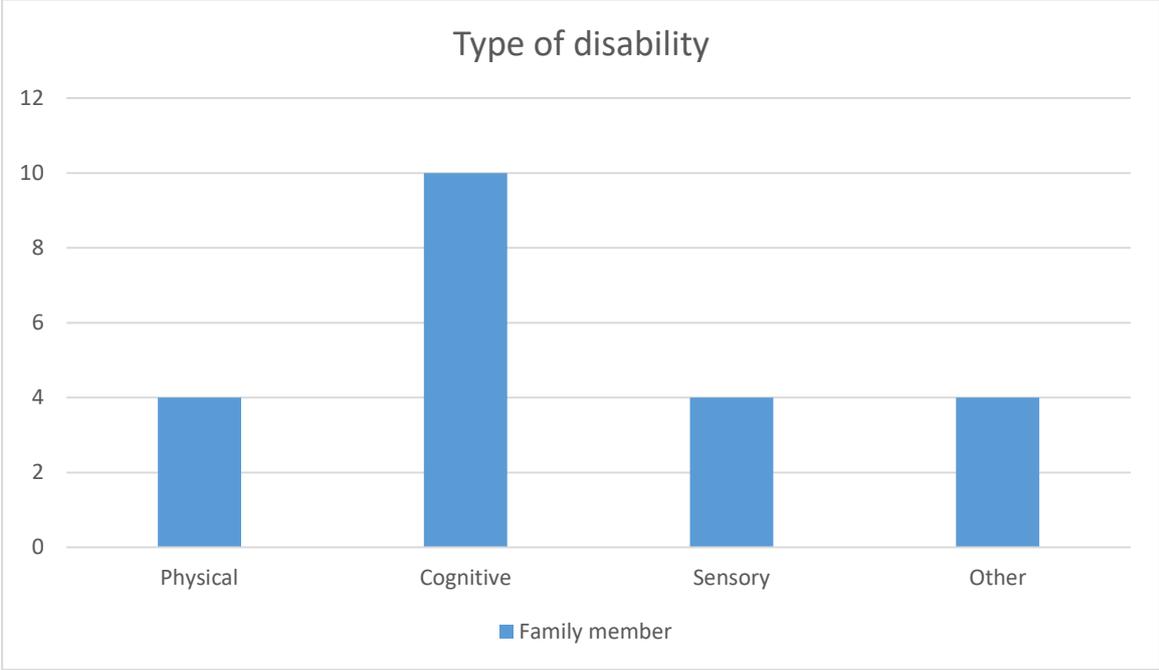
The question about the type of disability the respondent lives with allowed multiple responses. Other includes psychosocial and epilepsy and autism.

Figure 16: Person being supported — source of funding
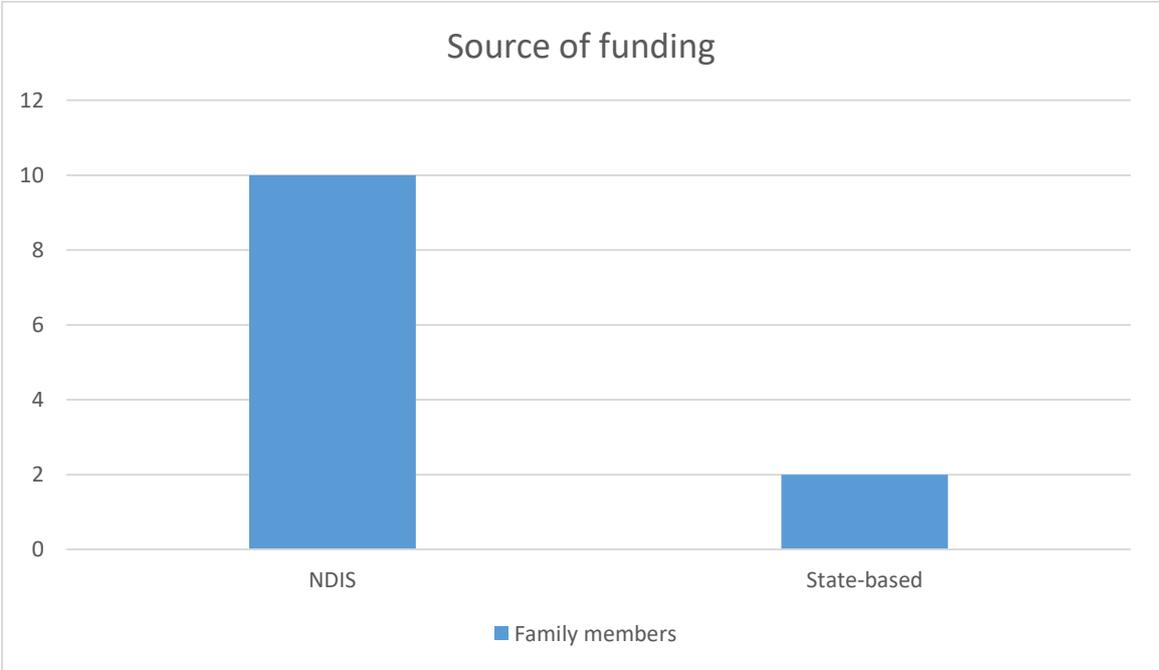
The number of support hours ranged from four hours a week to most days and overnights. Around half of the respondents reported that their family member received 25 hours or more of support a week.

Self-management arrangements

This section profiles the eight people who self-manage their individualised funding packages and the 18 family members who manage a funding package for their son or daughter. (A total of 25 interviews were conducted as one participant manages her own NDIS package as well as the NDIS package for her son.)

"Go for it. It was the best thing for us, gave us peace of mind. Be creative. Self-managing is not hard to do." Rima

Why self-manage?

Choice and control

One of the main reasons people give for choosing self-management under the NDIS is the ability to choose their workers and to use non-NDIS-registered providers. For example, Karen said, "I chose to self-manage from the get-go because I wanted to work with people that were not NDIS registered, and not having to worry about that has been an amazing benefit." Closely related to the concept of choice is control. Both Katie and Lisa self-manage because it gives them more control. Lisa explained: "I was tired of being told who would come into my house, who we could have as a therapist, what hours they would be allowed to do."

Past experiences and perceptions

Another common reason is past difficulties with using an agency to provide support workers. For example, Elaine chose to self-manage because of cash flow issues, the inflexibility of using an agency and being told when and how the hours could be used and having no say in the workers allocated.

For others, the view they had about service agencies was not one that matched their vision for their family member. For example, Kim was not interested in using any service that "would take [her son] Liam out of their lives and out of the community". Kim felt self-managing would be more beneficial for Liam and the family if she were "able to tailor any paid supports to fit Liam's vision and help him realise his goals".

The low expectations expressed by service providers was the catalyst for Iona to try managing funding for her son Max. Iona was told by two organisations that Max was 'unemployable'. Iona concluded that nothing was going to change unless she took control and focused on new goals for Max.

Flexibility and creativity

Flexibility of supports and being able to be creative, such as setting up a microbusiness, is another related reason. Lucy said, "Self-management offered the flexibility and individualisation to set up Tim's business." Similarly, Petra chose self-management because of the flexibility it offered as "supports could be arranged creatively with personal goals as the outcomes".

Value for money

Better value for money and being able to do more with limited funding is another motivator. For example, Helen uses her funding to negotiate good rates with the contractors that support her, and this increases the hours of support. She felt she had "choice and control over the whole budget and therefore ownership of the plan".

"Better value for money and being able to do more with limited funding is another motivator." Tess

How to self-manage

Where to go for advice:

Workshops and peer networks

For some, attending a workshop was the first step in deciding to self-manage or in gaining the skills and confidence to 'have a go'. Viola attended a peer support network, which "assisted with understanding how I could work with the funding and make it work well and plan well for my daughter". Roger used his network, including peer support from other parents managing their children's NDIS packages, and attended events run by the National Disability Insurance Agency and disability organisations.

Other sources

Others received advice from existing agencies used by the family that had a strong self-management culture and good supports for this approach. Some people did their own research or already felt competent about taking self-management on. For example, after some research,

Kristie talked to the host organisation to negotiate which parts of the process she would manage and which parts she wanted the organisation to pick up for her.

Not enough support
Some people had been self-managing for some time and did not get any formal support when they first started. For example, Amanda said, "I learnt from my own mistakes and from other friends who were also trialling self-management of state-based funding."

Ways to structure self-management:

Managing everything yourself
Around a third of the people or family members interviewed self-manage everything. Rima said that her husband is "very organised" and he does the financial components of the NDIS package for their son Ari while she does "the creative bits" such as planning Ari's community activities. Tess now completely self-manages after using a host agency for two years. She described this as "a gradual shift to sole responsibility".

Using some assistance, a host organisation, or both
Lisa and Roger use an online database of support workers who are pre-screened. Jenny uses a mix of agency-supplied staff and web-based platforms. Katie also uses a mix of methods depending on the type of support she needs.

Several participants discussed their use of host agencies. Lucy uses a third-party organisation that handles payroll, insurance, tax and super for the staff they directly employ. Iona and Anne use a financial intermediary. In Iona's case, the intermediary pays invoices to the online employment platform used to recruit workers. Anne has an agreement with a host agency that charges 10% of her daughter's package to perform the host role. This includes all employer obligations, invoices and reporting to the family on the balance of funds.

Recruitment

The tasks of advertising and pre-employment screening were out-sourced by several interviewees. Many use an online employment platform — either solely or in conjunction with other recruitment methods. This allows them to specify the type of support needed in a profile that applicants can read, and they can view the profiles of potential support workers to create a shortlist. Applicants are pre-screened by the service for references, certification and police checks.

Diane and Amanda self-manage state-based funding packages. The rules require them to use support workers employed by specific agencies only. This means that their workers are pre-screened. Other participants did the recruitment process by themselves, with an occasional 'buy-in' of specific services.

Using personal networks

Elaine lives in a remote area and "knows everyone". She asks around and approaches people she might be interested in employing and sometimes uses local resources that relate to her daughters' specific interests. She often employs students from the local school her daughters attend. She said she does not need to do formal references or police checks as she can speak to teachers or their parents.

Location is an important factor in the recruitment method chosen. Recruiting via their own network is also the main process used by people who live in regional areas, or where support is needed for a child or young person. For example, Karen prefers to hire people to work with her young son Jack who have been recommended by teachers or friends.

Interview process and what to look for in a support worker

Roger prefers to select workers with a specific skill set such as those studying a disability-related course like occupational therapy. His daughter Eloise is involved in the interview. She talks to the worker about what she is interested in and what activities she wants to do in the afternoon after school.

Elisa said, "Amy has her own criteria for the workers: young, preferably female, enthusiastic, honest and trustworthy." Elisa looks for other attributes, such as use of initiative, good with people and good social justice values. Elisa emphasised the importance of values as she felt "you cannot change a person's values such as respect and social inclusion but can teach the workers the skills involved in assisting Amy to operate her business". The interview process is twofold. Elisa meets potential workers first and questions them about their values. Suitable applicants go onto the next stage: a hot chocolate with Amy.

Several people who use their network for recruitment do not conduct formal interviews. Instead, they approach the individual they identify as a potential worker and talk one-on-one. As Diane uses an agency for her support workers, she runs a 'meet and greet'. "I have no specific preferences. I give everyone a go and see by their work if they are suitable. If it feels right, I decide on the spot."

Pay and conditions

Pay and conditions are closely linked to the recruitment process. People who use an online employment platform or those required to use specific agencies often said they had no discretion about the amount paid as it was a set rate. (A commission may also be payable to the online provider by each party.) In addition, workers who are mainly employed for tasks such as home maintenance and cleaning are likely to have their own business (with an ABN) or charge an hourly rate.

Several participants use a host agency to employ their support workers. Anne noted that the host agency pays according to the relevant award, which takes, into account qualifications and experience. Anne said, "We like to pay a bit over this, so we can keep good workers."

Directly employed

Other participants employ their own workers and therefore can be more flexible about rates of pay and conditions. For example, Tess pays the award rate. All her workers are casuals except one who is permanent part-time and who receives holiday and sick leave. Barbara pays all of her daughter's assistants a flat rate of pay. The coordinator is paid a higher rate. Elisa said that "the key currency with support workers is relationship — it's not just monetary". Nonetheless, she pays workers above the award "so they will stay".

Rima has a formal contract with Ari's support workers and she pays based on the award and the NDIS price guide. When deciding what to pay support workers, Lisa considers a range of factors such as the rates on the NDIS website, industry pay scales and performance. Lisa said, "When I had a support worker who did an excellent job, I was happy to increase her pay." As Elaine lives in a remote area, she bases payment on the NDIS price guide rate for remote areas. All her workers are casuals who are paid for the days they work only. Elaine explained, "Sometimes I pay above the rate if I have agreed with the worker on a set price."

Kim said, "We contacted [the] Fair Work [Ombudsman] when deciding what to pay. This was something we felt a bit overwhelmed with and working out what level to pay your support workers from the website felt a little confusing. After discussing with [the] Fair Work [Ombudsman] and working out the minimum rate, we considered what the support was worth to us and paid our workers above the award wage."

Induction and training

The type or level of training given to or expected of paid support workers depended on whether a host organisation or online employment platform was used, the method of recruitment, or both. As Jenny uses both an online employment platform and an agency, she expects that workers are already trained. She provides an orientation that focuses on her routine and "little things that are personal to me" but does not provide any ongoing or additional training.

Sometimes no induction or training is required because of the nature of the work or is more about orientation to the home, expectations and safety issues. This is more common when the person is employed for a specific task or the worker is already trained. For example, Helen said, "My personal assistant already had a good idea of what was required of her but did undertake training in orientation and mobility."

Others reported a more formal and extensive induction period because of the type of support required, level of responsibility and complexity of the work. For example, Lisa sends out an introductory book she has put together. "This includes information about Becky, the family, how we all work together and what the general routine is from week to week." During the first few weeks, workers learn about the routine and about Becky, then Lisa trains them to provide therapy assistance, so after eight weeks they are fully inducted into supporting Becky, while continuing to learn on the job.

Buddy or shadow shifts

The use of 'buddy' or 'shadow' shifts was common. For example, Sharon formalised the induction and training she needs for her son's workers. This involves both online training on a system set up by Sharon, then up to eight buddy shifts with Sharon or an experienced worker. Sharon explained, "The training system is always a work in progress, where workers are invited to fill in their own reflections, ask questions and provide feedback. During buddy shifts, one person will video the other, which gives everyone a great opportunity to learn what works and what doesn't and to brainstorm strategies on how things could be done better."

Communication and feedback

Most of the participants emphasised open and timely communication with their employees and two-way feedback to ensure issues are dealt with promptly. Careful matching and making job expectations clear are important components that help to reduce staff turnover. For example, Rima felt that there are few problems "if you select people very well. Matching is important. Even when one of our support workers left to join the police force, he still wanted to be involved. They see it as a positive job and a positive role".

Lisa likes to address issues immediately: "I am conscious of having to think like an employer... and deal with things professionally while being polite and empathetic. The rapport that is already established between myself and the support worker will help us in dealing with any issues that arise."

Regular team meetings and key worker/coordinator

Several participants highlighted the role of regular team meetings — a more formal feedback mechanism — and/or the involvement of a key worker or coordinator. For Lorraine, the key worker (a senior member of the team) takes on some of the day-to-day tasks of managing the team. "I delegate tasks to her such as appraisals and team meetings ... set up [of] interviews ... training and [as] first point of contact for issues. This is her job whereas I am 'Mum'." Lorraine felt this arrangement "provides clarity about where workers go for advice on specific issues".

Iona also mentioned the role of coordinator (in her case external to the team) who has regular contact with her son Max and helps him address issues with workers. The coordinator attends the regular monthly meetings with Iona, Max and his team. Anne also uses an external coordinator. She said, "I might ring or text for simple issues and support workers can talk to the team coordinator … for more serious issues. The coordinator might then speak to me to work out a strategy. The host agency can provide advice, but this would need to be paid for."

Social media and other communication methods

As well as using social media such as Facebook, some participants have come up with other innovative methods of communication and feedback. Tess and her team of support workers use an app to manage rosters and other human resources issues, which Tess said, "provides a barrier or invisible wall between support and HR".

Colin said that his son's support workers can text him at any time. He has back-up mechanisms in place, although these are rarely used. Colin keeps an eye on the way things are going at his son's house: "I arrive at varying times of the day, so I see how each person is working out. Most people who are not a good fit with Michael or are not good at working under low supervision self-select out."

External involvement

Dealing with feedback or issues that arise may be different when the support worker's contractual arrangement is with an agency, or they run their own business. For example, Amanda and Jenny deal with most issues one-on-one and directly to the agency for more serious issues. Jenny said, "I talk to the coordinator/team leader or email them for advice or a change of people. The process is two-way. Workers can also contact the agency directly."

Katie said that in a small community, relationships are based on trust and reputation. The people who work for her are people who run their own business and she does not need to use them if they are not reliable: "I am the boss. I don't kowtow to people who come on site."

"You need time, good communication and be good with numbers. Get help if you are not confident in all three." Jenny

Use of a host organisation and other 'buy-in' support

Fifteen people interviewed use a host agency or other purchased supports to help them in the various tasks involved in self-management. Table 1 summarises the details of the diverse ways that people used these services.

Table 1: Level of external support accessed by people who self-managed or family members

Participant	Type	Recruitment and checks	Interview	Employment and payroll	Rostering and choice of support workers	Other assistance
Edward[1]	Host agency	X	X (with Edward)	X		X
Roger	Online	X		X		
Lisa	Online	X				
Elisa	Host agency	X (Host agency is paid to do pre-employment checks)		X		
Barbara	Family company					
Colin	Family company					
Lucy	Host agency			X (payroll only)		
Kim (& Liam's circle of support)	Fully self-manage NDIS funds					
Kristie	Fully self-manage NDIS funds	X				
Viola	Fully self-manage NDIS funds					
Katie[2]	Use workers who have ABN					
Sharon (& Josh's microboard)	Fully self-manage NDIS funds					

Participant	Type	Recruitment and checks	Interview	Employment and payroll	Rostering and choice of support workers	Other assistance
Karen	Fully self-manage NDIS funds					
Tess	Fully self-manage funds	X (checks only: done by a recruitment agency)[3]	X (agency may pre-screen and be involved in interview if Tess is unwell)			
Lorraine[4]	Fully self-manage NDIS funds	X (some pre-screening by a recruitment agency)				
Helen[5]	Fully self-manage NDIS funds					
Judy	Fully self-manage NDIS funds					
Jenny	Mix of host agencies and online	X		X		X (dealing with issues)
Rima	Fully self-manage NDIS funds					
Anne (& Claire's circle of support)[6]	Host agency & online	X (some assistance from another agency)		X		X (holds funds & reports to State)
Iona[7]	Host agency & online	X (Online & some assistance from another agency)		X (Online)		X (Host agency holds funds, pays online agency for staff & reports to State plus another agency helps with dealing with issues)

Participant	Type	Recruitment and checks	Interview	Employment and payroll	Rostering and choice of support workers	Other assistance
Diane[8]	Host agency	X (some pre-screening & checks)		X		
Amanda[8]	Host agency	X (some pre-screening & checks)		X		
Elaine[9]	Partly self-manage funds (Host agency manages rest)			X (Host agency provides advice & has step-by-step guide)		
Petra	Host agency			X		

1. Edward has tried three different self-managed arrangements, including self-employing his supports. This details his current arrangements. 2. Katie mainly engages people who have their own business because of the type of support she requires: cleaning and home maintenance. 3. This is to protect Tess's privacy by safeguarding her identity. 4. Lorraine's daughters have a key worker who does some of the recruitment and direct management of other support staff. 5. Helen's workers have their own ABN or uses a Statement of Supply. 6. Anne's daughter Claire has a key worker/coordinator who does some of the recruitment and direct management of other support staff. Another coordinator from a family-governed agency (not the host agency) helps to recruit workers. This role is block funded and is unlikely to continue under the NDIS. 7. Iona mainly uses an online employment platform for recruitment. The employment platform is the legal employer and the host agency pays on invoice from the online employment platform. Iona also uses the services of the coordinator from the same family-governed agency as Anne. 8. Diane and Amanda have state-based disability funding that requires their support workers to be employed by a limited number of agencies. 9. Elaine self-manages some of Jo and Ava's funds and a host agency manages the rest.

Benefits of self-managing

Choice and control

Most participants said that one of the main benefits of self-management is more choice and control over every aspect of the arrangement. For Elaine, this meant "flexibility in choosing who you want and how they do it". For Amanda, it was "knowing who I am expecting to show up". Anne saw the benefit of self-managing as being able to "focus on the right match. We can oversee, adjust and revise roles and plan the way we want". As Diane summed up: "I'm the boss."

Personal values

Many participants highlighted how self-management aligns with their personal values, particularly the opportunity for a better life for them or their family. For example, Colin said, "I can confidently build a good life for Michael and not just be seen as an over-protective parent who doesn't trust services. I can ensure that efforts are going to build a good life for Michael rather than satisfying bureaucracy and their agenda." Barbara said, "Alice now gets to what she wants with who she wants. Her assistants have a deeper personal relationship and responsibility and are determined that Alice is happy … it is just life changing."

Value for money

Another main benefit is better value for money. Amanda said, "More hours and not being ripped off." Jenny said, "Less middle party and lower cost per hour." Helen said, "With a provider, you do not have as much control over things you are billed for. Self-managing gives you more flexibility with negotiating rates with support workers."

Personal growth

Karen has found some additional rewards of self-managing related to personal growth: "The skills I have learned in putting together the financial structure of self-managing my plan and my son's NDIS plan have enabled me to find other work opportunities." Helen also felt a sense of "personal empowerment about learning new skills and building capacity in bookkeeping and researching employment contracts and workers compensation".

Challenges of self-managing

Lack of information and advice was a challenge mentioned by several people, and navigating the NDIS. Related to this, Roger said one challenge was "claiming weekly on [the] NDIS portal. Coding changes and changes in definitions have been frustrating". Like Roger, Katie found keeping up with "the ever-changing NDIS rules was daunting at first."

Lisa said, "It can … be challenging to manage the payroll, since the workers' hours vary from week to week". Edward said, "You're an employer [when you directly employ] and can't hide behind your disability if something goes wrong. You have to be on top of everything — insurance, payroll, legal requirements and professional responsibilities."

Lorraine said, "Underspending is worse than overspending. I review every quarter and have a sense each fortnight about how it is going." Jenny said, "Cross-checking records against invoices can take time and if you are sick it is hard to communicate and explain why the payment is late. Electronic billing is best as it is too easy to lose a paper bill." Similarly, Barbara and Colin raised cash flow problems and who could do the payroll when they were not around. Barbara noted, "Cash flow can be difficult as NDIS does not pay in advance."

Elisa summed up, "It takes more time and effort, but I probably would have had the same workload anyhow, for example, turnover of staff."

Several people raised the challenges for their workers in their interview. For example, Kim said, "Support workers don't have the safety net of working for an organisation, and that if we are going to be away or any other instances when they are not required to support [my son] Liam, may impact on their livelihoods." Anne also acknowledged, "Staff can be isolated in a self-managed arrangement and there is a need to build in team meetings."
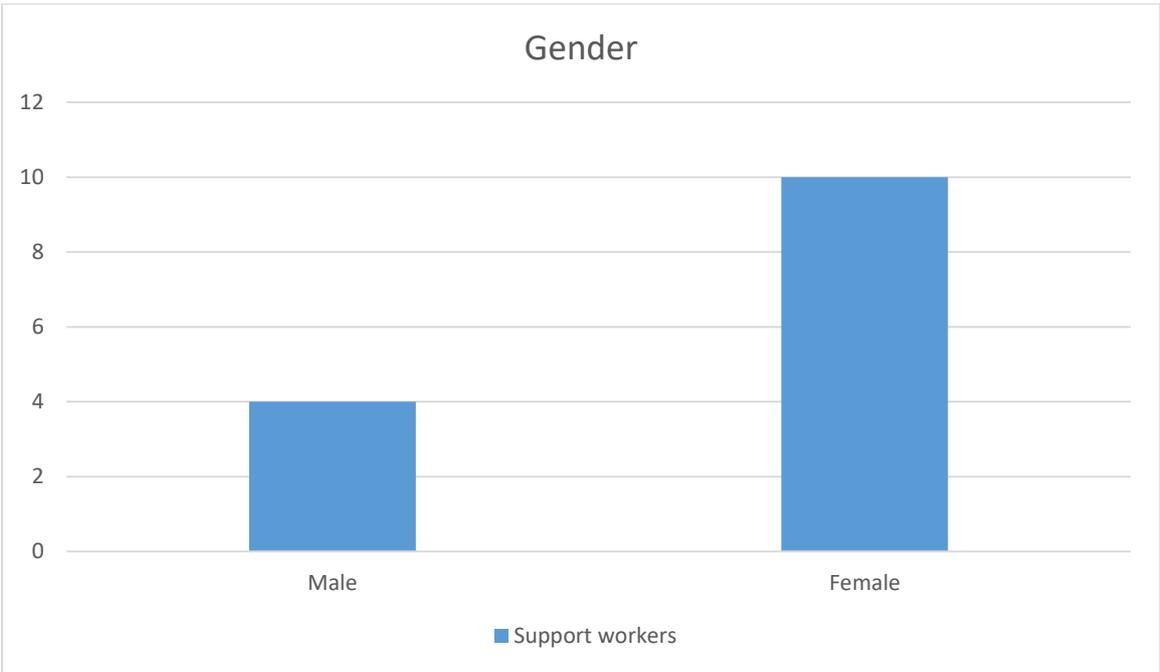
Support workers

This section covers the responses from the 15 support workers who were interviewed as part of the project. All of these participants were working in self-managed support arrangements, and most worked for self-managers who were also participating in this project and whose responses are detailed previously.

Demographics

Fourteen support workers competed the demographic survey. Results are displayed on the following pages.

Figure 17: Support workers — gender

"Everything about it outweighs the disadvantages that could arise, and having a family that self-manages means you are part of a team and have that personal experience with everyone you work with."
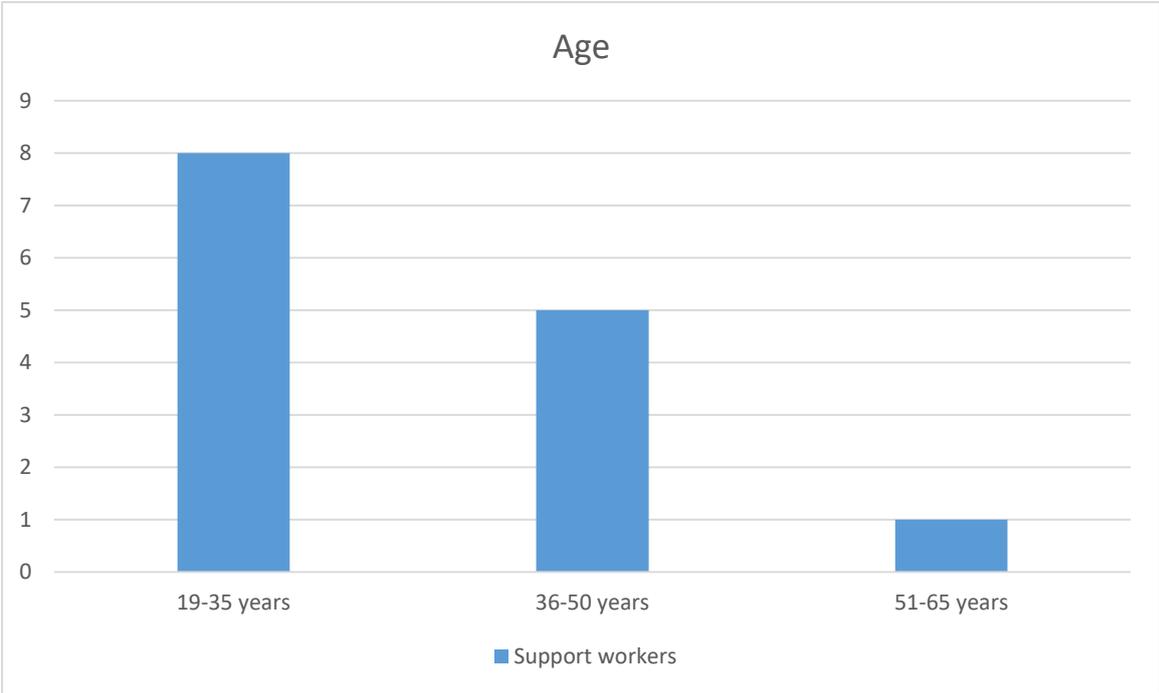*Fiona*

Figure 18: Support workers — age

Figure 19: Support workers — identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
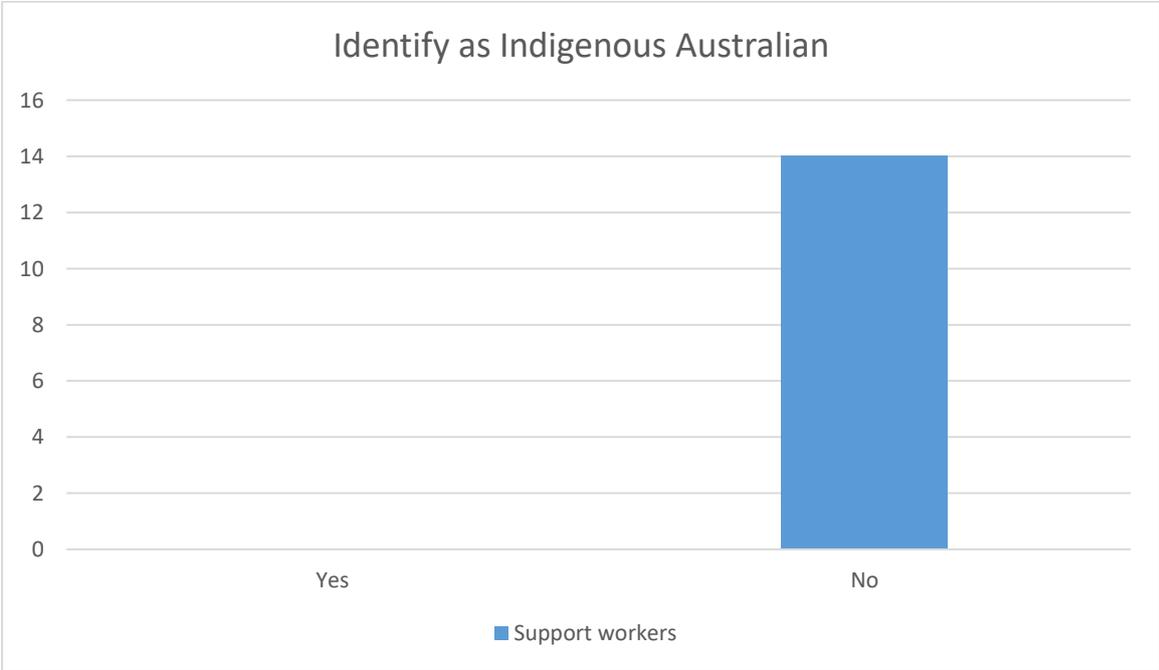
Figure 20: Support workers — cultural or language background from somewhere other than Australia
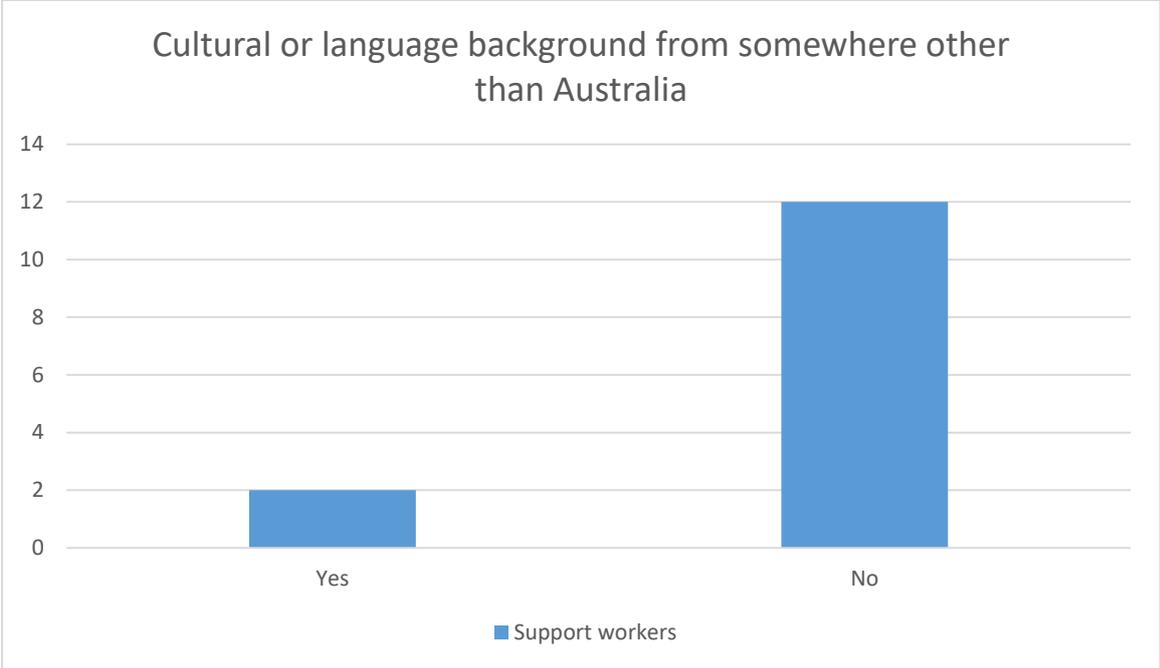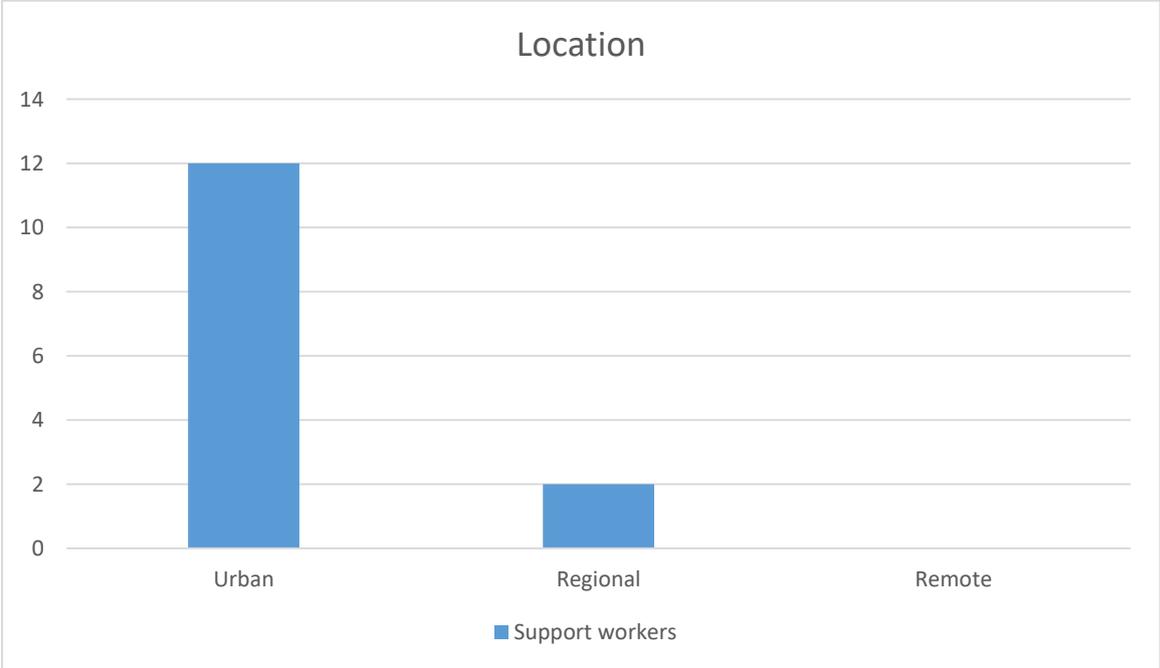

Cultural or language background from somewhere other than Australia

Figure 20: Support workers — location

Location

Work for more than one person who self-manages or for a service provider

The chart shows two bars, both at value 7:
- Only work for one person who self-manages: 7
- Work for more than one person who self-manages or for a service provider: 7

Legend: ■ Support workers
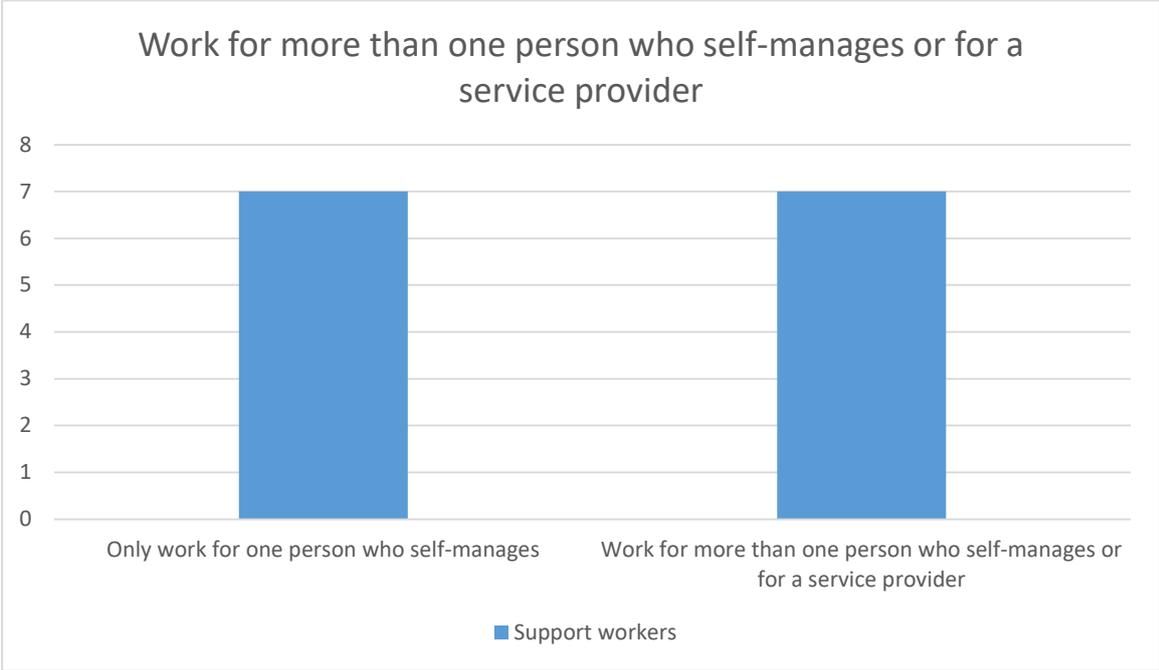
Employment

Half of the support workers had worked in the current self-managed support arrangement for one to two years, and half for three years or more (maximum six years). The overall range of working for anyone who self-managed (including arrangements not included in this project) was between one and eight years.

The 15 support workers interviewed had a diverse employment history. Only three had previous employment in the disability sector. Other occupations were varied: vacation care and childcare, aged care, student, public servant, retail, cleaner, real estate, own business, communication and barista.

Hours of support provided ranged from 4 to 40 hours a week. Five respondents provided up to ten hours of support, six up to 20 hours of support and three provided more than 20 hours of support a week.

"Give it a go. The more you give, the more you get back. It is up to your imagination as to how far you can go." James

Why work for someone who self-manages?

Values and rewarding work

Many of the interviewees talked about the satisfaction they get from working in a self-managed environment and how it aligns with their values. For example, Fiona said, "The families I work with are very driven to achieve goals, and to me goals are very important."

Bree had moved on from her previous job because she felt that it was not satisfying. "I like working with people who self-manage because I am actually helping people and not just helping them to make money." Like Bree, Olga found her previous work had left her feeling unfulfilled. "In this role, every little step, every little action that you take has a massive implication on someone's life."

This job

Many of the workers interviewed were specifically attracted to their current job. Gayle likes working for someone who self-manages because "you all want the same outcome — what is best for the person being supported. It's a diverse role, and every day is different, which I love". Gisele liked the idea that the position she applied for was to support Claire to work and to live in her own home. "The family sounded friendly and it was not too intense, and they were happy to employ new people to work who had no experience working for a person with disability."

Better than traditional disability work

Dan has worked in both self-managed and traditional disability settings. He said, "I am more motivated to work in self-management arrangements because you can form a deeper connection with the person, more flexibility and autonomy are allowed, it is a more fulfilling role as the person is the central focus, and you are more likely to be assisting people to have access to the good things of life."

Recruitment

Several workers spoke about being personally approached to take on their current job because they knew the family. Often, this meant they did not have a formal interview for the job. Others heard about the work through friends or teachers. For example, Bianca and Bree were encouraged by a friend to apply for support work and both joined an agency that mainly matches support workers to people who self-manage state-based disability funding packages. Bree has since moved on to working with people who self-manage under the NDIS. Others responded to ads looking for specific skills and interests that matched the individual interests of the person they now work for.

Interview process

For those who went through an interview process, a range of approaches were used to select the right person. Mostly, interview processes included the person they would be supporting (if they were interviewed by the family), and this person had the final say. For example, Dan was first interviewed by Evan's parents in their home, and then met Evan. Gisele also had a less formal interview where she met with Claire's mother at a coffee shop. However, Gisele said that although it was casual, she was asked questions and given scenarios. She then met Claire. Once Claire approved her, she met Claire's key worker who had her own questions and scenarios. Others reported a similar staged process.

The interview process involved fewer stages when family was not involved. For example, Bree and Bianca work for an agency who pre-screen applicants to find potential matches for people who self-manage. They meet the people they will potentially support in their own homes (often referred to as 'a meet and greet') and if there is a match, start work.

How support workers are employed

Support workers reported having a range of employment arrangements. These can be broadly classified as:

- directly employed by the person they support or family member;
- directly employed but the payroll function is outsourced;
- employed by another body such as an agency, host organisation or online employment platform; or
- self-employed.

Direct employment

Some workers were directly employed by the person self-managing or by a family member. Ruth has a work agreement with Amy's mother. The agreement sets out the expectations of her role; hours of work; use of the car; what to expect from the family; and what to do if cancelling a shift. This is also the case for Olga, who, as Josh's lifestyle coordinator, designs the work agreements of the other support workers. Olga said, "The work agreements are linked to Josh's goals, and revisited every three months to see what has been achieved and what needs to be worked on. The agreement … has a reward mechanism built into it at the end of the year [with] … a bonus or pay rise if things are going really well."

Other arrangements

Gisele is employed through a host agency that takes care of contracting, payroll and other employer obligations. Steven is employed via an online employment platform that covers all the insurances and employer obligations and does police and other checks. Steven noted that it was easy to do all this online. Bree and Bianca are employed by an agency that manages the payroll and other obligations. They have verbal agreements with each of the people they support about hours of work and tasks required.

Self-employed

Several workers have their own business with an ABN. Mel is self-employed and has her own service agreements with Helen. Mel has applied for registration as an NDIS provider. Three others have a contract with the person they support and describe themselves as sole traders.

Induction and training

The types of training support workers received, and how this training was funded, varied considerably among the 15 interviewees.

Induction

On-the-job training and buddy shifts were the main form of training. For example, Fiona did several buddy shifts as did Izzy, Bree and Dan. Similarly, Matt had only a quick induction where he learnt about the person he would support and spoke to the worker he would be replacing. He then did a buddy shift with Chris's mother.

Olga did some one-on-one shifts with Josh to get to know him and his needs and a subsequent reflective practice to share her experience. Olga is now adapting the induction process for other support workers and uses their feedback to fine-tune it further.

Bianca was positive about the on-the-job training she received and emphasised how important this type of training was to her: "They can train you in what they want." In contrast, some of the workers felt they did not receive enough training. For example, Steven said, "I felt that the orientation was a bit unclear ... at times, I was unsure if I should be doing something and was unsure of the best way to teach Max specific things. In hindsight, more training would have been beneficial, especially in how Max learnt skills." Such concerns suggest that this might be a challenge for some self-managed arrangements and that additional strategies might need to be in place to help where workers had less back-up support from more experienced workers.

Others were recruited specifically for their current job and received no additional training because of their existing professional skills. Naomi said, "You don't need qualifications as much as understanding [the person]. You can't buy a manual about this."

Ongoing training

Investment in ongoing training varied. This appeared to depend on the employment type, need and priority placed by the person self-managing/family on training and what funds could be used to support it. For example, Bianca received some ongoing training from the agency that employs her while Dan reported no access to formal training in this job or professional development, although he accessed formal training through other roles in the disability sector. In contrast, some families invested in ongoing training, particularly values-based training.

Communication and feedback

Several interviewees mentioned open communication and bringing issues (such as crossing boundaries) to the attention of the person concerned. For example, Bree noted, "Issues can be resolved if you have common sense and respect and you are aware that you are in their home, so you work to their standards." Sarah highlighted the role of day-to-day communication with Liam's parents. "We always had conversations, either at the beginning or the end of my shift, discussing what the day was like, what went well and how things could be done better." Sorting out issues can sometimes not be so straightforward. For example, Gisele found that "seeing Claire as my boss but being answerable to Claire's family [is] a balancing act. Building a relationship has helped with this".

Regular team meetings

Some support workers emphasised the role of regular team meetings involving family members and the person being supported as part of the team. As Matt said, "You need to listen intently and offer your contribution. You don't know everything even if you have been a support worker for a while. [In a self-managed arrangement] there is more opportunity for collaboration. We

can sit down together and nut things out. The buck stops with them — no manager or CEO." Similarly, Ruth pointed out the benefits of regular team meetings: "Getting to know other workers rather than just calling a phone number and advice from previous workers. It's a great support network. I feel well backed up and encouraged to have a relationship with other support workers and the family — not a two-hour shift then get out."

Benefits of working for someone who self-manages

There was quite a lot of agreement among the interviewees about the benefits of working in a self- managed arrangement. These centred on choice and having a valued life for the person they support and therefore a rewarding job, natural and deep relationships, flexibility and creativity.

Flexibility

Flexibility in what they do each day and in work arrangements was raised by many support workers. Izzy said, "Roles can be tailored to suit staff, and most importantly the needs of the person." Gayle explained why flexibility is so beneficial: "If the person I am supporting isn't having a particularly good day, we can change the day to suit. However, when working for an agency, the day is outlined and whatever condition the person being supported is in, isn't necessarily catered for when the agency is trying to meet the plan." Several also mentioned flexibility of work hours that suited their study and family.

Opportunities for creativity

Self-managed arrangements can provide more opportunities to be creative and for the worker to use their initiative. Steven said, "It is about learning together with the aim of making the person more independent. You can be creative — think outside of the square." Similarly, James said, "You can also take risks and be creative — say why not?" As an example, James talked about when he and Simon went stand-up paddle boarding. Because of Simon's high support needs, James felt this would not have been allowed in a traditional disability service arrangement.

Relationships

Many of the workers interviewed noted the critical role of relationships — with the person they support, their family, the team — as Dan said, "A deeper connection than conventional arrangements." Or, as Izzy said, "The more natural relationships are the key for good work and low turnover." Gisele saw the benefits of this arrangement as being "tailor made, it is intimate

and provides warmth and connections". Similarly, James described the relationship between him and Simon as "more natural but having a responsibility of care not expected in previous jobs".

Challenges of working for someone who self-manages

Expectations were a challenge for some workers. Bree said, "You can be vulnerable working in someone's home. It can be unpredictable at first when you don't know them or their expectations and you might be the only contact they have." Gayle and Gisele mentioned managing family members of the person supported as a challenge. Gayle said, "Sometimes the needs and expectations of all parties do not completely match up and it can be a balancing act."

Pay and working conditions

While some workers noted that payment rates and working conditions were excellent, others found these challenging. Mel found negotiating payment difficult as the person sets the price. Dan and Izzy raised the issue of work being casual and having less job security.

Bianca finds the hours and spread of work challenging as it often involves early starts, late nights and short shifts. Izzy works for four people and each have different arrangements for communication — she sometimes finds this a challenge to manage and to attend all the meetings.

Gisele felt that working with a host organisation could be challenging if they do not provide full and timely information to the family and that having no oversight body for people self-managing meant that the organisation could take advantage of the person or the worker.

Isolation

Some people have worked in both traditional and self-managed arrangements and saw some challenges that seem unique to self-managed arrangements. Matt said, "There is more support in a team environment where you can bounce ideas off others, compared to a self-directed arrangement." Steven felt that people or families who self-manage need to actively create opportunities for workers to connect with others involved in the social inclusion movement.

"You actually see the impact you are having on the person, you can see someone going from being socially isolated and having anxiety issues to building confidence and participating in community events. Being part of this journey is such a privilege."
Olga

NACBO

National Alliance of Capacity Building Organisations

Capacity Building for Inclusive Lives

The National Alliance of Capacity Building Organisations is a national network of not-for-profit, values based, capacity building organisations. We have a shared vision and belief that all people with a disability are valued citizens and have the right to contribute to society through social and economic participation.

We acknowledge that many people with disabilities are shut out from the richness of many ordinary experiences through outdated practices that limit people's lives. To shift this paradigm, members of the alliance provide information, education, mentoring, planning, peer support and leadership development.

Our aims as an alliance are to:
- Build people's knowledge, shift mindsets and strengthen values based leadership so that Australians with a disability are empowered to have full, meaningful and inclusive lives that are rich in relationships and
- Support and safeguard not-for-profit organisations in Australia who do this work, and
- Strengthen people's skills and competencies to enable social and economic contributions.

Collectively, the Alliance has an impressive online national presence that contains high-quality materials on global and local best-practice of community inclusion.

In 2015-16 year, NACBO worked with 10,000 people directly and had connected with 200,000 Australians online.

Our network includes the following organisations, who have more than 80 years of combined experience in regard to shifting mindsets.

As the lead agency on this project, JFA Purple Orange in South Australia may be contacted via their website www.purpleorange.org.au

www.cru.org.au and
www.thegoodlife.cru.org.au

www.family-advocacy.com or
www.resourcingfamilies.org.au

www.imaginemore.org.au

www.valuedlives.org.au

www.belongingmatters.org

July 2018