



Ability Links NSW Newsletter

Issue #1 October 2013

What is Ability Links NSW?

Ability Links NSW (ALNSW) is a new way to support people with disability, their families and carers as part of the ongoing reforms of the disability service system in NSW. The NSW Government has committed \$28.7 million per year to the ALNSW program. When fully established, ALNSW will comprise a network of 248 Ability Links Coordinators, known as Linkers, across the state, including 27 Aboriginal Linkers.

What do Linkers do?

Linkers have three main roles:

- work with people with disabilities, their families and carers to plan for their future
- work with people and their families to help them become more confident, supporting them to achieve their goals by building new networks and accessing support and services in their community
- work alongside communities and mainstream services, supporting them to become more welcoming and inclusive.

Who can access Ability Links NSW?

By 1 July 2014, families in every part of NSW will be able to access a Linker. There will be 111 Linkers across the Sydney metropolitan area, 35 in the Hunter region, 31 across northern NSW, 20 in the Southern Highlands and the Illawarra, with a further 24 Linkers across western NSW. An additional 27 Linkers will be Aboriginal identified positions who will

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work with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities across the state.

Who will auspice Linkers in other parts of NSW?

A staged procurement process ([RFT ID ADHC.13.24](#)) is being undertaken for the delivery of ALNSW across the state (except Hunter region). The procurement process includes:

- pre-market engagement and communication
- call for Registrations of Interest
- Select Tender with shortlisted candidates identified from Registrations of Interest
- negotiations.

Registrations of Interest will close at 2pm on Friday 15 November 2013. It is expected that the procurement process will be finalised by 1 April 2014 in time to commence operations from 1 July 2014.

More information is available from the Ability Links NSW web page or email Ability Links NSW at abilitylinksNSW@facns.nsw.gov.au

A separate community engagement and procurement process is being conducted to engage providers to auspice the 27 Aboriginal identified Linkers.





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A staged procurement project is currently underway for the four ALNSW (Aboriginal) positions in the Hunter region. The project includes consultation and briefing sessions which were held in March and July 2013, followed by a call for Registrations of Interest and Select Tender.

Procurement and mentoring support was offered to Aboriginal non-government organisations invited to participate in the Select Tender. This support was offered to enhance Aboriginal non-government organisations' understanding of the tender process and to assist Aboriginal managed non-government organisations to prepare competitive tender submissions.

The Select Tender included a written and conversational component in recognition of the strong focus on verbal communication in Aboriginal culture.

It is anticipated that the auspice/s for the Hunter region will be appointed in October 2013 and will be operational from 1 January 2014.

A framework is being developed to ensure that the procurement project is culturally safe and respectful to the Aboriginal community.

The preferred approach is for Aboriginal managed non-government organisations or partnerships to be procured for the provision of the Aboriginal identified positions.

The procurement project for the remaining 23 Aboriginal identified positions will commence with up to 18 consultation and briefing sessions to be held statewide throughout November 2013, followed by a

call for Registrations of Interest and Select Tender. The Select Tender will include a conversational component.

Procurement and mentoring support will be available to Aboriginal non-government organisations.

It is proposed that time-limited governance and capacity building support will be available to auspices appointed through the Hunter and rest of state procurement processes for the Aboriginal identified positions.

More information is available from the Ability Links NSW web page or email Ability Links at abilitylinksNSW-Aboriginal@facns.nsw.gov.au

Update from the Hunter region

ALNSW commenced in the Hunter region on 1 July 2013. There are 35 Linkers currently operating in the Hunter region under the auspice of the St Vincent de Paul Society; 14 are located in the National Disability Insurance Scheme launch site.

Since 1 July, the St Vincent de Paul Society provided active support to over 230 people with disability, their families and carers, and established over 10,170 community contacts through meetings and information sessions with interagency groups, service providers, community groups, schools, businesses, expos and community events.

Linkers have made connections with services and organisations including Lions Clubs, Wesley Mission, neighbourhood centres, community radio, local councils and visitor information centres in the Hunter region.



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Linkers have also participated in local community events including NAIDOC week events, Hunter Multicultural Services Expo and the Hunter School Leavers Expo for Students with Disability.

A spokesperson from St Vincent de Paul Society said "The St Vincent de Paul Society is pleased to be the provider of this new and groundbreaking initiative. Ability Links fits so well with our organisations' work in local, community-based responses to social justice. Since 1 July, we have been fortunate to meet with many people with disability, their families, carers and community members across the Hunter. We look forward to continuing our work with people with disability for their full participation and inclusion in community. We're also inspired by the work we see happening in other organisations, community groups and by individuals, and look forward to developing our connections and partnerships across our communities."

How have Linkers helped people in the Hunter region?

Two examples of how ALNSW is working with people in the Hunter region are described below.

1. John's mother called Ability Links to discuss John's desire to build more social connections in his community. John, who has autism, lives on his own and works 4 days a week. John was matched with a young male Linker named Matt who was from his local area. Matt phoned John and John explained he is in his early 30s and would like to have more friends his own age, as he socialises mainly with his mum and her friends.

Since this initial call, Matt and John have met several times to discuss John's interests and have made a list

of social activities John is interested in pursuing in order to meet like-minded people. To this end, Matt is also currently supporting John to develop his confidence and friendship-building skills.

With Matt's support, John has organised to attend a young men's social group and an art class in his local area. John has asked that Matt accompany him initially to these activities and support him in meeting new people. John hopes that in the future, with Matt's support, he will be confident to attend these and other activities on his own and will make lasting friendships.

2. A teenage girl named Lisa was referred to Ability Links by a youth support service. Emily, a young female Linker, called Lisa and they arranged to meet. Lisa explained to Emily that she has an intellectual disability and that sadly, her mother who had been her sole carer, had recently passed away. Lisa and Emily spoke about where she was currently living. Lisa explained she was living at her friends' houses and that the youth support service was supporting her to find permanent accommodation. Emily asked Lisa about her hopes and dreams for the future and asked what she wanted to do once she finished school. Lisa was taken aback by Emily's questions as Lisa said no one had ever asked her about her dreams before.

Emily's questions prompted Lisa to compile a long list of all the things she wanted to do in life. Emily and Lisa continue to meet regularly to make plans for Lisa's future based on Lisa's list. Lisa says she is happier since meeting Emily as she feels more positive about finishing school and more supported to achieve her dreams, particularly now that she does not have her mum to assist her.





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Upcoming projects and events

1. Ability Links NSW Advisory Group

The ALNSW Advisory Group provides input and advice to support the successful implementation of ALNSW statewide. The Group is made up of representatives from Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) and key stakeholder organisations including Family Advocacy, the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS), Local Government NSW and a representative from QLD Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. Meetings are held approximately every eight weeks. The next meeting is scheduled for 4 November 2013.

Similarly, ALNSW Aboriginal Advisory Group provides input and advice on the implementation of ALNSW with a specific focus, but not an exclusive focus, on the 27 Aboriginal Linker positions. The Group includes members from ADHC, Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat, the Aboriginal Disability Network NSW and a representative from Aboriginal Affairs – Office of Communities in the NSW Department of Education and Communities. Meetings will be held every eight weeks. The first meeting of the ALNSW Aboriginal Advisory Group was held on Monday 30 October 2013.

2. CALD Responsiveness Framework

ADHC recently engaged the services of Cultural Perspectives, a multicultural research and communications agency, to help ensure issues relevant to people with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are addressed in the roll out of ALNSW.

81 people attended the community sector workshop conducted by Cultural Perspectives at the Pullman Hotel on 22 August 2013. The participants represented a broad spectrum of the community, including CALD disability advocacy groups, migrant resource centres and a range of other non-government organisations.

Feedback and issues identified during the community sector workshop will be analysed to inform ADHC's Cultural Responsiveness Framework.

3. Ability Links NSW Evaluation Strategy

ADHC will undertake two evaluations of ALNSW: a formative evaluation during the first 12 months of implementation and an outcomes evaluation over the first three years of operation.

The ALNSW Evaluation Strategy includes:

- a logic model for ALNSW
- process evaluation and outcomes evaluation
- data collection and analysis.

The primary purpose of the strategy is to inform ADHC's plans with regard to:

- data collection requirements for the Hunter launch site
- a consultancy brief for the external evaluation contract.

4. Ability Links NSW Aboriginal Community Consultations and Briefing Sessions

ADHC will be conducting 18 community consultation and briefing sessions statewide commencing 1 November 2013. For location details and more information refer to the ADHC website or email abilitylinksNSW-Aboriginal@facns.nsw.gov.au.





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Where can I find more information?

For more information about ALNSW you can visit the ADHC website:

http://www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/individuals/inclusion_and_participation/ability_links_nsw

or email the ALNSW team:

abilitylinksnsw@facs.nsw.gov.au

abilitylinksNSW-Aboriginal@facs.nsw.gov.au

For information about Ability Links in the Hunter, please visit the St Vincent de Paul Society website,

<http://www.vinnies.org.au/ability-links-nsw>