



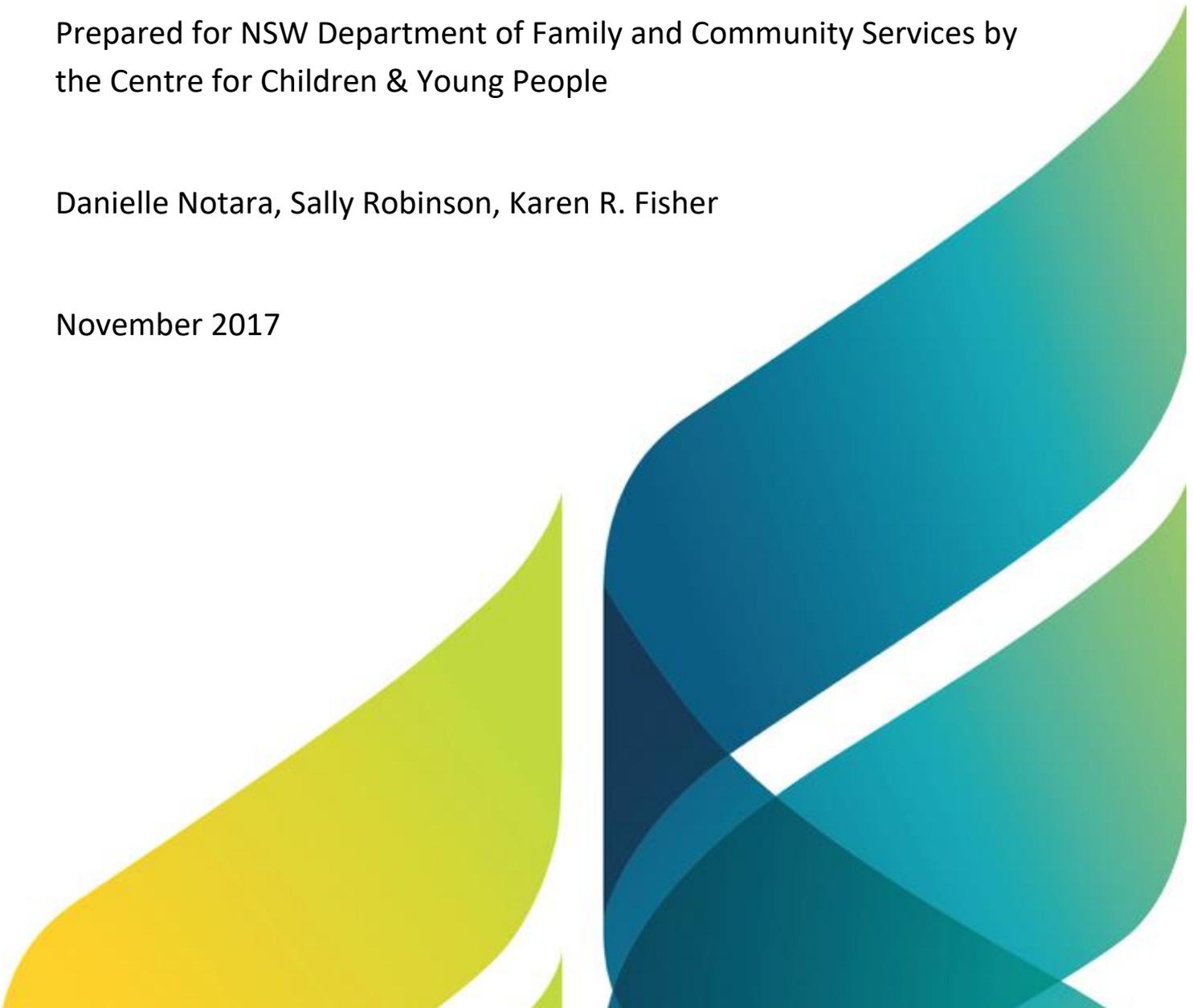
Evaluation of the CREATE Ability Project, Year 2 (TAP2)

Final Report

Prepared for NSW Department of Family and Community Services by
the Centre for Children & Young People

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Abbreviations

CRPD Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CCYP Centre for Children and Young People

NDIS National Disability Insurance Scheme

SCU Southern Cross University

SPRC Social Policy Research Centre

UNSW University of NSW

FACS Department of Family and Community Services

ADHC Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care

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Plain English Summary

The CREATE Foundation runs The Ability Program for young people leaving Out Of Home Care. It is called TAP for short. After one year of TAP, CREATE made some changes to improve the program, and ran The Ability Program 2 (or TAP2) in a second year.

The TAP Program is workshops for young people with disability. In the workshops, young people can find out about their rights, make their own decisions and learn new ways to tell people what matters to them.

What is this report about?

The Department of Family and Community Services asked researchers to talk to young people and find out what they thought about TAP2.

The researchers also spoke to some CREATE Young Consultants, CREATE Staff and other workers to ask them what worked well about TAP2 and anything that could be done better.

What worked well about the TAP2 Program?

Young people said they learned new things about their rights and how to speak up about what is important to them.

Some young people made changes in their lives after the workshop because they felt more confident about making decisions.

CREATE staff did a good job at including young people in the activities at the workshops. They made it fun and interesting.

Some young people became a CREATE Young Consultant and said they liked helping other young people. Meeting other young people in care at the workshops was important and young people made new friends.

What was not as great about the TAP2 Program?

Some young people who used TAP2 said they found it hard to make changes because of what other people in their lives said they can and can't do.

Young people who didn't use Facebook or have a mobile phone found it hard to keep in contact with CREATE after the workshop.

Some young people found it hard to get to the workshops in their wheelchairs. Others found some of the information hard to read and understand.

What could help TAP2 in the Future?

It would help if young people can choose if they want to go to a program that is with other young people in care or just with young people with disabilities.

It would help CREATE staff to know more information about each young person attending the workshops before they arrive. Then they can plan to make sure everyone is included.

At the moment, some young people go to just one workshop. It would be good to have the chance to go to all three of the TAP2 workshops. This would help in learning more about getting support to make decisions.

CREATE could talk to the young person about how they would like to stay in touch. This is very important when people don't have Facebook or use a phone.

The CREATE Young Consultant Program could include young people with a bigger range of abilities. Other CREATE services and programs could learn from the experiences of young people in the TAP2 Program.

Summary of evaluation findings

The CREATE Ability Project (TAP2) aimed to empower young people with disability in or leaving the care of the Minister to transition to independence and promote supported decision-making through participation in workshops and camps, underpinned by education grounded in human rights principles. This evaluation identified the effectiveness of TAP2 in building young people's capacity to understand and implement supported decision-making. It assessed whether over time their understanding of supported decision-making principles improved, and considered which aspects of the project contributed to promoting these principles of decision-making. The evaluation methods aimed to capture the experiences and reflections of young people using the workshops about personal change in their circumstances, and assess how the project built organisational capacity across CREATE.

Young people who participated in the evaluation were often experiencing transitions typical of their age, although their contexts of disability and out-of-home care clearly played a role in both the processes and outcomes of their decisions. They were leaving school, engaging in tertiary training, planning for independent living, and forming relationships with other young people based on shared experience. As such many outcomes reported by and for young people are large scale and long-term, and are difficult to attribute solely to the workshops. However, the processes that young people described and attributed to these outcomes clearly stem from improved control in decisions, personal wellbeing and social connectedness. An increased confidence and sense of empowerment from understanding and applying a rights-based approach to decision-making and self-advocacy may have resulted in these transitions occurring positively and with improved outcomes.

While dependent on personal circumstances, life stages and level of support needs, young people applied the skills from TAP2 to better manage support and negotiate relationships. There is potential for helping other young people who also need support with their decisions, but who would like to feel more control over how they get that support. Social connection and the ability to connect with other people with similar experiences of care was strongly valued by young people. CREATE served as a key facilitator of young people's relationships established through TAP2 and could further build capacity in young people to sustain these friendships independently and into wider communities.

The forward direction of the Program is supported by extension of funding for Year 3 by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) to build on work completed during phases 1 and 2, with a focus on Year Two NDIS implementation sites (including funding under the 2017-18 National Disability Insurance Scheme Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant round). With that changing emphasis, a capacity building opportunity exists for TAP3 to prioritise mainstreaming its offering, building on the knowledge gained from TAP2. This can be brought into alignment with opportunities which will emerge through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) environment to further develop recruitment pathways, clarity in scheduling, accessibility in program design and delivery, and to consider specialist and mainstream offerings and extend regionally and nationally.

There are clear opportunities to build on the good practice established through TAP2 in embedding supported decision-making into wider programs and learning, building local connections, and ensuring consultation with young people at all stages of future program development. To move successfully into new communities, increased resourcing and/or new approaches will help to engage, build capacity and ensure future participation and youth peer leadership.

1. About the Evaluation and this report

1.1 Evaluation of TAP 2

The CREATE Ability Project (TAP) aims to engage young people with an out-of-home care experience who are receiving support from a disability service provider through participation in workshops. The skills gained during TAP workshops are aimed at empowering young people to transition to independence, including life skills, leadership, self-advocacy and supported decision-making.

Young people who participated in the evaluation are also participants in the NSW Leaving Care program which supports young people with disability to transition from the parental responsibility of the Minister for NSW Family and Community Services, to live as independently as possible and be part of their local community once they turn 18 years of age.

Aim

This evaluation aimed to capture the experiences and reflections of young people using the workshops about personal change in their circumstances. At an organisational level, the degree to which the project built capacity across CREATE to support young people with disability was of particular interest.

To do this, the evaluation answered two key questions:

1. Was the CREATE TAP2 project effective in building capacity in young people with disability 15-25 in or leaving the care of the Minister to understand and implement supported decision-making and did their understanding of supported decision-making principles improve over time?
2. What aspects of the project contributed to promoting the principles of supported decision-making?

Approach

In order to maximise an action learning approach in this evaluation, we used an inclusive evaluation design, using qualitative methods informed by the Most Significant Change approach (Dart & Davies, 2003; Asadullah & Muntz, 2015). The primary purpose of this approach is to facilitate project improvement by prioritising learning and directions explicitly valued by stakeholders (especially those least empowered), to support constructive change.

Methods

Alongside analysis of administrative data, two rounds of face-to-face fieldwork was conducted. In the first round of fieldwork, four CREATE Workshops and Camps were observed in three sites, and young people participated in short interviews, in which they recorded a 'message to myself', to assess from their perspective what they learnt and what they hoped to take forward.

A subset of participants were followed up in round two fieldwork, 6 weeks post-event. In individual interviews, they revisited and reflected on their advice, and on whether and how they had put learning into action, along with any constraints to this. Further interviews took place with support people and key stakeholders including CREATE and FACS.

Ethical approval for the evaluation was obtained from Southern Cross University (ECN-16-326). All names and some identifying details of young people have been changed in this report.

1.2 Young People's Reference Panel

Advice was sought from a Young People's reference panel, convened by CREATE for the evaluation. The group met on two occasions: once to provide advice on the fieldwork content and methods, and again to provide advice on emerging themes from the fieldwork. The group provided detailed and very useful feedback to refine the methods for the first round of fieldwork to increase the range of options, wording of some questions, and youth-friendliness of activities offered. In the second round, their advice confirmed and extended findings from the fieldwork.

2. Background

Transitions from youth to adulthood for young people with disability are reported to be more complex and require evidence based enquiry (Wehman, 2013). Young people with disability, due to a range of factors including age, stage of life transitions and high cognitive and communication needs, can be more vulnerable when making decisions (Franklin & Sloper, 2009; McNeilly, Macdonald, & Kelly, 2015; Mitchell & Sloper, 2011). While there is a policy shift to the National Disability Insurance Scheme with a focus on individualised supports, research suggests that person-centred planning alone is not enough to ease this transition for young people with disability (Kaehne & Beyer, 2014; Robinson, 2014b).

Supported decision-making marks a philosophical shift and a practical move away from substitute decisions. This is underpinned by recognition of the rights of persons with disability to make decisions, and the right to access any supports to do so. The United Nations have set the agenda with revisions of the Convention on the Rights of Person's with Disability, in particular Article 12, dealing with equal recognition before the law. Signatories to the Convention, including Australia, are now required to implement supported decision-making as key to compliance with human rights obligations (Carney, 2015a).

The disability and social services sectors in Australia have begun to re-think the way services are provided to people with disability as a result. Steps are being taken to trial evaluate and measure approaches to supported decision-making. A recent review of this policy landscape in Australia was undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre (Purcal et al, 2017). It drew on the findings of various state based trials and pilot programs across Australia. A number of key best practice themes emerged that could be applicable to a project such as TAP2. They were related to the development and promotion of supported decision-making skills; resources for a broad community audience, including accessible material for support people; and acknowledgement of a role for organisational capacity building.

In a joint initiative with the NSW Trustee and Guardian and the Public guardian FACS, ADHC conducted a small scale pilot project in 2013/14 to explore what supported decision making might look like in practice in the NSW context. The aims of the pilot project were to learn:

- More about how supported decision making relationships work
- What tools and resources are useful
- What issues may need to be considered for the broader application of a supported decision making framework.

ADHC's SDM pilot received a positive mention in the United Nations 'Concluding Observations on the initial report of Australia on the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013'.

There is also further information on the pilot in the following documents which can be found on the FACS website:

- Supported Decision Making Pilot Framework
- My life, my decision: An Independent evaluation of the SDM pilot
- Supported Decision making background and learnings.

2.1 CREATE Foundation

CREATE Foundation is the national peak consumer body for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. They represent the voices of over 43,000 children and young people currently in care, and those who have transitioned from care up to the age of 25. CREATE's mission is to create a better life for children and young people in care and is guided by the principles of:

- **Connect** children and young people to each other, CREATE and their community to;
- **Empower** children and young people to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard to;
- **Change** the care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services, and increase community awareness.

2.2 The Ability Project

The Ability Project (TAP) was developed and implemented with funding from New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) to support young people with disability in out-of-home care, in their transition to independence. The need for the program was identified by FACS and the program arose from the results of the supported-decision making pilot described above. CREATE was engaged to include children and young people both specifically and in their wider cohort. Young people in care with a disability were included in the initial program design, as well as having their feedback sought on an initial program pilot. It comprised three elements:

CREATE Your Future: an existing National CREATE Core Program adapted for TAP1, which provides young people with the relevant skills and knowledge to effectively transition from care to independence. The areas covered include life skills, relationships, identity, wellbeing, housing and finance

Speak Up: a CORE Program adapted for TAP1 in NSW which is an empowerment program that assists young people to Speak Up and have their say on issues that affect their lives. Participants learn about the care system and develop advocacy, leadership and public speaking skills. Participants can progress to being Young Consultants, and use their stories and experiences to represent CREATE at local, state or national events and forums. CREATE Young Consultants, are program participants who have progressed to the point that they can be actively engaged in systemic advocacy opportunities, to utilise their voice and lived experience to contribute to improving the care system, policies, practices and services, and increase community awareness. This includes utilising their stories and experiences to represent CREATE at local, state or national events and forums.

Voice Your Choice: developed specifically for TAP at a NSW level. This comprises two workshops offering (i) Supported Decision-Making training for young people and (ii) Supported Decision-Making training for carers, case workers and support workers.

Workshops for young people cover:

- What is a decision and how are they made
- Who can help you make decisions?
- How do you work together with other people in order to make decisions?
- What can you expect from someone supporting you?

Workshops for case workers, support workers and carers include:

- What is supported decision making and its context?
- What is the role of the supporter in the decision-making process?
- How do we create barriers or enablers in supported decision making?

Year One (TAP1)

TAP1 was implemented in 2015-16 and delivered workshops across half-days, camps and group-home sessions offered in Sydney and regional locations. The following programs were offered:

- CREATE Your Future
- Voice Your Choice
- Speak Up Level 1 for TAP

2.3 TAP2 Program Characteristics

Year Two/TAP2 continued the workshops from TAP1 with the addition of the following:

Speak Up Level 2 for TAP: building on knowledge from Level 1

Hear Our Voice: Facilitated sessions that provide an opportunity for young people to speak about issues affecting children and young people in care. The audience consists of local and state-level workers, sector professionals and key decision-makers. Objectives include informing the sector via the voice of children and young people in care and gaining commitment from participants about what they will implement in their work to support positive change.

Youth Advisory Groups: An informal anonymous group discussion that focuses on exploring the experience of young people with a disability in the care system. Young people share stories of their care experience in a safe environment, realise they are not alone and have access to information and support from their peers. It provides increased opportunities for the young people to have voice, and ensures inclusiveness.

Connection Events: Community engagement events where young people, support workers and family connect with each other and the CREATE team. These events aim to promote a feeling of safety and belonging for children and young people participating.

2.3.1 Break Down of Program Characteristics

EVENT	COMPLETED	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
CREATE Your Future	10	38 Young People
Camps	4	29 Young People
Speak Up Level 1 & 2	5	35 Young People
HOV Forum	2	9 Young People and 55 Case Workers
Connection Event	9	184 Young People and 95 Case Workers
Youth Advisory Group	9	42 Young People
Voice Your Choice Young People	8	25 Young People
Voice Your Choice Case Workers	8	63 Case Workers

Note: Some young people are counted more than once if they attended more than one activity

The TAP2 Program was delivered on a rotating basis across 19 locations throughout NSW, including Sydney and 11 regional areas.

The program included:

- 28 workshops to 98 young people, across half-day events and camps
- 9 Youth Advisory groups attended by 42 young people
- 9 connection events attended by 184 young people and 95 case workers
- 8 workshops to 63 caseworkers.

3. Evaluation Characteristics

3.1.1 Break Down of Evaluation Characteristics

	Workshops Observed			Young People Participation		Age Range			Geographic Area			Support People**	
	Speak Up 1 and 2	Voice Your Choice	Create Your Future	Workshop	Evaluation	15- 17	18- 20	20- 22	Rural	Regional	Metro	Nominated	Participated
Site 1	1			6	5	4	1		2		3	5	3
Site 2		1	1	5	3		2	1	1	2		2	1
Site 3		1		3	1		1				1	1	1
Total	1	2	1	14*	9	4	4	1	3	2	4	8	5

* The evaluation sample size was small due to relatively low participant numbers in the small group workshops. Optimal participant numbers were considered 8-10 young people.

** Included family, disability support workers, housing support workers and ADHC case managers.

3.1 Stakeholder Characteristics

- Three interviews were conducted with CREATE including program staff and management.
- CREATE also supplied administrative program data, program modules and materials for analysis and discussion.
- Two interviews were conducted with key policy stakeholders from ADHC and FACS.

4. Program effectiveness: Outcomes for participants

The effectiveness of TAP2 was measured using a logic framework (see Appendix A). This captured evidence of learning principles in outcomes experienced by participants across the domains of: improved control in decisions (e.g. community inclusion, disability support); personal wellbeing; social connectedness (participation, connections and informal support networks).

4.1 Understanding of supported decision-making

Supported decision-making was the key focus of the Voice your Choice Workshop, while the other two workshops developed skills and relationships to support decision-making. Young people who attended the Voice Your Choice workshop more clearly articulated their understanding of supported decision-making. Post-workshop, they reported learning about the difference between big and small decisions, the role of support workers to facilitate supported decision-making and making informed decisions. Young people were also aware of the supported decision-making principles of options, choice and risk. Six weeks later, half of the young people who took part in the Voice your Choice workshop spoke about making new choices, but didn't link it to the workshops.

"We have a right to make decisions, that's what I picked up and we can make mistakes as well...We learnt about supporters too because sometimes when you have a big decision you need someone to help." [Participant]

The majority of young people who participated in the Create Your Future and Speak Up training demonstrated an increased understanding of supported decision-making principles. Their experiences showed young people were more aware of rights and their interpersonal skills had improved. Three young people did not discuss or demonstrate an understanding of supported decision-making at the workshops or in their six week follow up, due either to their level of support need or to unmet disability-related needs for accessible information and support (refer 7.2.3, below).

4.1.1 Increased choice-making

The evaluation aimed to establish if an increased understanding of supported decision-making increased young people's choice-making. At the 6 week follow up interview, some young people spoke about making significant changes in their lives.

"I stood up for myself after the camp, I stood up for my rights ...I decide to move and take my own safety into my own hands...I didn't feel respected or safe in the house ... So I decide to move and take my own safety into my own hands." [Participant]

A small number of young people attributed what they had learnt in the workshops to increased confidence and knowledge which informed their decisions. These decisions were regarding major life choices such as, where to live, re-establishing or cutting off from relationships with birth parents and planning for the NDIS. When choice-making did not increase this was due to structural barriers in place. These were commonly restrictive support practices, rules and regulations placed upon young people by family, services and government agencies.

Simone had not been involved with CREATE before and heard about the Voice Your Choice workshops through her disability support provider. Already finished school and undertaking tertiary education, she came to the workshops with experiences of discrimination and a sense of unfair systemic issues. Simone reflected at the conclusion of the workshop that while she already knew some things about decision-making she sometimes made mistakes but understood now that it is ok to make the wrong decision sometimes and it was her right to do so. Simone spoke about her goal for increased social inclusion and a need for resourcing this through the NDIS. Her NDIS plan was being processed at the time of the workshop and at the 6 week follow up had been finalised. Simone was not happy with the allocation of funding and had asked her service provider to support her with a review. The service provider mentioned in the interview that Simone's mum always came to the planning meetings as a supporter. Simone also nominated her mum as the support person to be interviewed for the evaluation. Two weeks following the final interview with the Simone, her mum was interviewed and noted in the past, during planning, Simone played a more passive role, sitting back and allowing others to lead. This time around her mum was pleasantly surprised to witness Simone taking the lead in the NDIS review meeting. She watched as Simone led the discussion, and directed the outcomes of the meeting with a newfound confidence and sense of purpose. Simone's mum attributed this to their participation in the CREATE workshop.

4.2 Control in decision-making

Control in decision-making was measured in terms of young people experiencing improved community inclusion and disability support. In the case that young people felt empowered and confident to make changes in their disability supports, they reported improvements. This was in terms of the structure and type of support received and resources needed to action decisions. Young people reported that in the six weeks following the workshops they had engaged with their support people to work towards goals. This included negotiating with parents and carers to access a personal mobile phone, access to social media and preparing to sit for their Learner Driving License. Community inclusion was described as occurring for some young people through increased participation at school, particularly in extra-curricular activities. Others spoke about future goals to enter the workforce and complete education and training. While these goals were long term and not wholly in the scope of this evaluation, young people discussed these as being attainable and in progress. Taking the lead in their decision-making was key to driving these community inclusion goals through transition and NDIS planning processes. Where community inclusion as a goal was not considered by the young person to be attainable, this was due to a lack of support in decision-making. Young people felt that their ability to undertake activities were faced with limited beliefs by support people and they experienced barriers to accessing funding.

"...they are restricting me, and not I'm having the support to be able to change it, I need the supports to achieve it." [Participant]

4.3 Wellbeing

Young people report an increase in confidence and self-esteem after attending the camps and workshops. This was attributed to learning about rights and having new opportunities arise from their contact with CREATE. Young people spoke about the positive impact of the workshops in terms of their school environment. They spoke about newly acquired skills and knowledge of bullying, both in advocating for other students and reflecting on their own behaviour and relationships. Young people also reported increased participation in school activities and studies.

“That’s what I like about myself, I like helping people.” [Participant]

“Just being able to build on my leadership skills that I’ve learnt and be able to if anyone needs help, try and help them.” [Participant]

By completing the Speak Up 1 and 2 workshops, young people have the training necessary to be a CREATE Young Consultant. Some participants, within the six weeks, had travelled to Sydney to take part in events or had participated in consultations over the phone. They report these experiences in terms of giving them a purpose, feeling valued, making a contribution and impacting on the future experiences of young people in the care system. Young people noted that they received payment for their participation in the form of gift cards, football tickets and that their travel and accommodation was paid for by CREATE. They were excited and happy to receive this acknowledgement and looked forward to the opportunity for future travel, particularly from regional areas to Sydney, with the role.

Support people recognised the improved confidence of the young people, and that for these young people it was the first time they had taken part in something of this nature. They observed that training as a Young Consultant has potential to provide young people with experience to enter the paid workforce. Overall support people reported positive feedback from young people about their attendance and participation at the workshops.

“He is getting motivation from this... and it is getting him the confidence to do up his resume and get a part-time job in something that he really likes.” [Supporter]

4.4 Rights and Advocacy

Young people spoke about improved awareness of rights and self-advocacy. This was evident in the range and types of decisions made following the workshops. They understood advocacy as ‘standing-up’ for oneself and could situate their role as self-advocates as well as systemic advocates in the out-of-home-care system. Young people reported having new conversations with family members and asserting themselves where they previously would not have done so. Some approached their support services and advocated for change in the delivery and quality of supports. Other young people felt inspired to work with CREATE to share their story and ‘have a say’. The success of the CREATE Young Consultant program and peer approach was further evident in the advisory role young people played during this evaluation.

“Just really getting to really know exactly what I can say and the rights and stuff because no one really sat down with me and really went through any of this stuff.”
[Participant]

4.5 Social connectedness

Making friendships at the workshop was an important and positive outcome of participating in the workshops for the young people. This was seen to be an opportunity to connect with other young people who had a similar background in the out of home care system. It was an opportunity to talk and learn from each other’s experiences, and for some young people these friendships continued after the workshops. Barriers to staying connected for young people included being in school and not having access to their own mobile phone or transport. Distance was cited as a reason for finding it hard to keep in touch with young people living in different towns and regions, having come together for the workshop. Access to social media was another common barrier for young people to communicate with each other after the workshops and remain in contact with CREATE. For those who did access social media, they described regular contact with CREATE, with the young people checking in on a regular basis to say hi and chat with staff.

“...if something bad happens we can just call and talk to each other, I got a really good friendship...” [Participant]

“...being with kids who are like them....to have that shared experience... I think it’s nice for them to feel like they’re not the only one...” [Supporter]

4.6 Summary of outcomes

Young people who participated in the evaluation were often experiencing transitions typical of young people their age, although their contexts of disability and out of home care clearly play a role in both the processes and outcomes of their decisions. They were leaving school, engaging in tertiary training, planning for independent living, and forming relationships with other young people based on shared experience. Many of the outcomes reported by and for young people are difficult to attribute to the workshops. However, the process that young people described through which they achieved these outcomes clearly stems from improved control in decisions, personal wellbeing and social connectedness. An increased confidence and sense of empowerment from understanding and applying a rights based approach to decision-making and advocacy (self and systematic) may have resulted in these transitions occurring positively and with improved outcomes.

“...just the last 6 weeks I just feel like so much has happened and so much positive stuff rather than negative.” [Participant]

“They definitely played a big role in my personal life and helping me make my own decisions. It really did, when I got home I was really thinking about what decisions I should be making in my everyday life.” [Participant]

5. Program effectiveness: Service design and delivery

5.1 Training design for supported decision-making

Supported decision-making principles underpinned the program design, and evident in the delivery across the three workshops. While the clear focus of Voice Your Choice Workshop, the principles of supported decision-making were addressed more subtly in the Create Your Future and Speak Up Workshops.

5.1.1 Program Design

While the facilitators adapted the delivery of the workshops where possible, a framework for embedding supported decision-making principles across the facilitator manuals was not made explicit. There was a large quantity of information to be delivered within the Voice Your Choice facilitator manual. The structure of the workshops program, while allowing for optional inclusion of activities, resulted in some of the more practical elements either being rushed due to time constraints or being missed altogether. An example of this was the 'Next Steps in Supported Decision-Making' Tool Kit, intended for young people to take home and complete with a support person to build capacity in the relationship. None of the participants in the Voice Your Choice Program had done this and some were no longer able to locate the manual. The lack of take-up could be associated with a need for plain English and easy-read versions of the toolkit and further engagement and follow up with support people by CREATE.

5.1.2 Program Facilitation

The facilitation of each workshop was observed to engage young people in active supported decision-making processes. Workshops opened with agreement on a group name and creating a 'group charter' involving the young people naming and agreeing to behaviours they wanted to keep in and out of the space. This was visualised and young people all signed the board. A reasonable level of risk was encouraged. For example, when a young person said swearing shouldn't be allowed in the group, the facilitator discussed this with the group who decided to place it between both the 'in' and 'out' areas. The activities were participatory with facilitators engaging with participants and documenting responses to brainstorming sessions on butcher's paper, encouraging participation and positively reinforcing their contribution. Throughout the workshops principles of options and respect were demonstrated by facilitators, e.g. when young people changed their minds. In the breaks young people chose their favourite you tube music clips to play on the large screen and this built a sense of choice and ownership of the workshops.

"So I guess the principles of supported decision-making, it is about choice, it is about control, it is also about participation, inclusion..." [CREATE]

"...we didn't just take the principles and put them in, it's like the way you do it, and it's the approach... It's the choice of young people to participate, they guide how they learn, they do have options within the program and it is always about building skills and development and being able to practise the skills within the room so that their confidence is built." [CREATE]

5.2 Service delivery

5.2.1 Planning

The scheduling of events was done so to ensure a widespread across NSW. The events in Sydney were reported to have higher attendance rates than those in regional and rural areas. When young people lived outside of the area where workshops took place, this impacted the likelihood they would attend due to travel and transport.

“We can’t go to all the areas all the time so you could go to an amazing event somewhere and have a lot of kids and then you’re not back there for another 6 months. We’re trying to change that with the work plan this year, making it so at least every 2 months there’s an event or something so at least they can keep being engaged. And that took a lot of planning.” [CREATE]

Some support workers cited instances where this had occurred, due to the level of organisational capacity to support the young person to arrange their schedules and travel to and from workshops. The scheduling of some workshops in the evening also meant that staff were not able to attend and that young people would need to travel home after hours.

“There’s not a lot of things happening around here for our kids. Or if they’re happening in Sydney it’s usually just a day thing and transport is difficult.” [Supporter]

Some young people attended the workshop itself on their own. However, most young people accessed support to attend the workshops, whether through the recruitment process, rearranging normal activities, travel to and from the events and in some cases staying overnight at camps or workshops over two days. In a small number of cases young people brought a friend or a paid supporter. For young people with physical disabilities, travelling to and from the workshops required assistance. Young people and support people in regional areas spoke about an existing gap in available services and resources for this cohort of young people and a desire for CREATE to provide more programs.

“...put more of them on around this area because there’s a lot of kids in this area in the care system and they don’t know what to do and they don’t know about CREATE.” [Participant]

The event schedule needed to be updated in response to the levels of engagement and recruitment as TAP2 rolled out. As such it changed several times, and was not always up to date on the CREATE website. The following section discusses ways in which CREATE mitigated these effects.

5.2.2 Engagement

CREATE acknowledged that building relationships with key stakeholders took time and that once this had occurred, the engagement with young people followed. When this engagement had occurred (support people previously attended workshops, referred young people and/or were a CREATE

Mate) the number of participants were higher. CREATE built on any opportunities to engage when conducting workshops, meeting with stakeholders and signing up new CREATE Mates (a role as a key point of contact within an organisation for CREATE to send information and promote workshops and events). Several supporters in the evaluation spoke about their roles as CREATE Mates. They acknowledged it had improved communication and the timeframes in which they were notified of upcoming workshops and events.

“They sent a letter out to the people I have been with in foster care... they told us it was on and we went and ever since then it has been awesome.” [Participant]

“I sort of put myself up there as a CREATE Mate or CREATE Contact because I’m so enthusiastic about what CREATE does. So I’ll get the emails and share them around.” [Supporter]

When these roles didn’t exist, support people spoke about emails coming across their desks at the last minute, having been passed down an email chain. This impacted on their ability to consult with young people and their care givers about willingness to participate and to arrange the logistics to attend. As such young people did not attend. Support workers, who were not familiar with CREATE’s work, noted that the information they received was the same invitations provided to the young people. These did not describe in detail the content of the workshops and made it more difficult to pitch the programs to young people and their supporters. They instead relied on feedback from the young person who had attended to determine future referrals to the program.

Barriers to recruiting participants emerged when these established relationships did not exist due to staff change both within TAP2 and services. This was compounded by movement of young people amongst services and in residential settings, particular during transition out of care. A further (but necessary) barrier noted by staff was the need to communicate with younger participants through their support people to gain consent for activities.

“My foster father has another son and even he doesn’t know about CREATE and neither does he.” [Participant]

“I suspect that perhaps one of the things with kids moving placements and not updating details, maybe there’s a bit of losing track.” [Supporter]

CREATE explained that at the end of a workshop young people were given details for a Facebook group to join and stay in contact with the team. This worked well with some young people who reported regular communication and a sense of inclusion through ongoing relationship building and engagement. Others in the out of home care system did not have access to a mobile phone or to social media within their residential setting. Some young people chose not to use Facebook for various reasons and if using a mobile often had no credit to respond to CREATE texts and phone calls. Young people with higher support needs who did not use social media were found to have missed out on follow up from CREATE. This resulted in a missed opportunity for future participation, for instance as a CREATE Young Consultant

5.2.3 Access and Inclusion

CREATE facilitators delivered the workshops in a fun and engaging manner, building a strong rapport with the young people in a relatively short period of time. When staff were new to CREATE, it worked well for them to be supported by more experienced team members. From both interviews and observation of the workshops, it was evident that staff were often required to make decisions quickly about adapting the workshop content – both at the outset of the workshops as young people arrived and their strengths and support needs were identified, and also during the delivery of the content. CREATE reported challenges in having enough information about the young person's needs and preferences prior to the workshops to adapt the content appropriately. They suggested an improved process was needed as case workers often failed to pre-submit forms and CREATE staff instead filled them out with the young people on the day.

Difficult because we don't always know who we will have and what capacity they will have, we stick to content as close as possible but sometimes it is hard to deliver it."
[CREATE]

Challenges with recruitment and scheduling were a complicating factor that meant at times accessibility wasn't met for all participants. On these occasions, it was observed that some sections of the workshops were not accessible for young people with sensory and cognitive impairments. Video which was text heavy presented a barrier to young participants with low literacy levels and using assistive devices to view the videos. CREATE staff addressed this at times by stopping videos and reading the text out loud to the group. With limited time this slowed down the training and may be why some facilitators chose not to do so. When these young people needed more intensive one-on-one support to understand other written material, including the feedback forms and handouts, it was difficult for facilitators to prioritise this and manage the larger group. The activities at camp and following the workshops were designed to appeal to young people's interests, although some of the chosen activities were not accessible for those with physical impairments and who use wheelchairs.

TAP2 training resources were written by CREATE staff to be accessible for people with mild intellectual impairments, while still allowing for full participation by young people with higher support needs. The facilitator guides heavily referenced options for accessibility but mainly focused on physical accommodations to respond to sensory or physical disabilities. The supporting resources such as videos did not reflect the full spectrum of disability represented in the TAP2 Cohort. In the workshops and activities, young people with multiple disabilities were observed to have the lowest levels of participation. The adaption of programs for TAP2 go some way to achieving universal accessibility and CREATE staff aimed to achieve this within the resources available to them, however at times this was compromised and these gaps in accessibility emerged.

I guess one thing I find difficult is the feedback form just because they are very difficult and if there are literacy issues, they shut down before the workshops start...We go through them slowly, the smiley faces help a little, at the end of the day I would much rather have them understand the content rather than have filled in a feedback form perfectly." [CREATE]

The distinctions between TAP2 and general workshops at times unclear for young people, and support people. This was sometimes difficult for CREATE to manage sensitively. Not all young people self-identified as having a disability, and staff and support people did not want to use this label in order to engage them with TAP2. Support people said that while aware of the criteria, at times they were apprehensive about sending young people along who may find the material inaccessible due to the nature of their impairment. The limited resourcing impacted on CREATE's capacity to offer TAP2 and general workshops at the same time in regional locations, and CREATE staff would have preferred to be able to offer this option.

This tension was demonstrated by a young person who identified as a person with disability and attended a TAP2 workshop. They explained they would have preferred attending a mainstream workshop in order to meet a broader range of young people, but CREATE wasn't running that offering in the local area. Some other young people spoke about having attended both mainstream and TAP2 workshops. The young people's advice group suggested that having a diverse range of participants in a workshop builds social inclusion and educates other young people about the lived experience of disability in the out-of-home-care system.

"...I prefer to meet people without disabilities, I only go to disability services, it is my only choice and it is isolating." [Participant]

5.3 Program management and governance

Program management and governance within TAP2 was influenced by preparation for the shift to the NDIS. Participants for TAP2 were primarily drawn from the Leaving Care Program (LCP) which supports young people with disability to transition from the parental responsibility of the Minister for Family and Community Services to live as independently as possible within the community. Under the LCP, non-government organisations are funded to provide flexible support that may be linked to accommodation and opportunities for skill building, social, economic and community participation. Participation by a young person in the LCP is voluntary. As the relationship is between the young person and LCP funded NGO, communication to young people who may be interested in participating in the TAP program occurred via the relevant funded non-government organisation. FACS Districts assisted CREATE in reaching potential participants by getting the information out to the NGO's at the beginning of the project and ADHC assisted in this process with the development of communication ahead of the intended roll-out to regions.

Retention and staff turnover at CREATE from a program management level through to facilitators in TAP2 reflected the broader casualisation of the community services sector. Staff reported transitioning through periods of handover and learning new systems for information management. Despite this the TAP2 program has continued to deliver the suite of workshops and plan for year 3 of TAP with an extension of funding from the Department of Family and Community Services.

"It's been difficult to source with recruits. So, because it's meant to be only funded for a year it's hard to sign people up for a job for just a year." [CREATE]

CREATE staff discussed building the capacity of the TAP Program to respond to issues as they arose, particularly in engaging participants. Strategies were developed to draw on existing program resources and adapt the program into its third year to meet the challenges of engaging young people and their supporters. For example, CREATE engaged systematically with FACS districts and non-government organisations, with the assistance of ADHC, to provide information more directly to young people, with positive effect. The learnings from TAP2, particularly related to engagement, supported CREATE's successful application for an NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building National Readiness (ILC) Grant which aims to extend accessibility, engagement and diversity within TAP.

"I've seen it kind of evolve and put my two cents in on how we can make it, get more kids engaged and things like that." [CREATE]

5.4 Summary of effectiveness

In a similar way that TAP took what worked well in the core activities of the organisation and adapted these for TAP years 1 and 2, an opportunity exists to further build on the effectiveness of this program, moving into year 3. There are clear opportunities to build on established good practice in embedding supported decision-making into wider programs and learning, building local connections, and scaffolding support for young people's participation. These can be brought into alignment with opportunities which are available through the NDIS and ILC environment to further develop recruitment pathways, scheduling clarity, accessibility in program design and delivery, and to consider both specialist and mainstream offerings.

6. Sustainability of support and potential for adaptation and growth

Relationship building with key stakeholders in the services sector was a challenge for TAP2 in recruitment and engagement. It is evident that the TAP Program has built in lessons from each year and responded to feedback to develop the content and delivery of the workshops. From Year 1 to Year 2 the age was lowered to include young people between 15-18 in recognition of the need to build capacity early and prior to periods of transition. So too the supported decision-making workshop was re-designed so young people attended separately to their support person. Strategies were put in place to build engagement, through ensuring opportunities to meet and greet with workers when in the field. The CREATE Mates program provided a contact to assist with distributing information and promote events within organisations. However when this key contact left their position the opportunity to continue this process was lost. The capacity within CREATE to work with young people with disability and the disability sector has grown through TAP2. Facilitators delivering TAP2 also worked across the core programs and vice versa. This ensured the transfer of skills particularly between staff and when training facilitators in TAP2 from both youth and disability informed practice. Beyond this program the young people who have taken on roles as Young Consultants will continue to bring a lived experience of young people with disability. They will have the opportunity to contribute their perspectives of the out-of-home care system and the translation of supported decision-making principles in their lives.

Producing resources accessible to and inclusive of the young people supports sustainability for the outcomes of the program. The successful NDIS ILC National Readiness Grant demonstrates CREATE's

potential for building engagement in TAP and working towards universal accessibility. This grant will support development of video resources in conjunction with TAP3 funding and produce digital stories to augment training based on lived experience of the TAP participants.

“It has flipped I think to be a more positive inclusion to those kinds of things...we have been able to speak to young people who we weren’t able to before and get their perspectives on things that we weren’t able to before because we all know that there is a lot of young people in care with disabilities but they are really hidden from everybody and I think that this program has meant that we have been able to find those young people and really that has added something more to CREATE...I think that is really positive for the organisation.”[CREATE]

TAP2 was a NSW Program and stakeholders noted the potential for the adaption of the Program at a broader national level, and for other similar cohorts at a State level. Opportunities exist to apply the lessons learnt from embedding supported decision-making principles in the out-of-home-care setting.

“I think the information from the evaluation could help identify the dire need for work done in the SDM space for young people...I would love to see the program become standard practise across Out of Home Care programs across the nation.” [Stakeholder]

6.1 Summary of sustainability and potential for adaptation and growth

Attention to the implications from this evaluation will inform sustainable adaption and growth, including for younger children in the care of the Minister and young people with disability not receiving support under NDIS through an individual plan, but potentially through ILC. For national rollout in particular, investment in resources is needed to systematise the program so that approaches to promotion, recruitment, delivery and follow up with young people participating are consistent and work coherently to engage, build capacity and ensure future participation and youth peer leadership.

7. Implications for policy and practice

The results of the evaluation lead to a series of implications for contributing to policy and practice which may further scaffold supported-decision-making for young people with disability, both within CREATE and in other state and national initiatives such as the NDIS.

7.1 Implications for building young people's supported-decision-making

The outcomes for participants in the program indicate that young people were able to draw on the learning principles of supported decision-making shared through the TAP2 programs and apply these in their lives. The extent to which each young person did so was dependent on personal circumstances, life stages and level of support needs. Young people applied these skills to better manage support and negotiate relationships. The information and tools acquired through TAP2 have potential for helping other young people who also need support with their decisions, but who would like to feel more control over how they get that support.

Social connection and the ability to make friends and meet other people with similar experiences of care was strongly valued by those in the research and endorsed by the young people's reference group. Delivering a suite of workshops in an area would further allow for sustained relationship building with key stakeholders. This in turn could deliver in terms of engagement and recruitment across CREATE programs and build on the social connectedness that young people say is important to them.

CREATE also served as a key facilitator of young people's relationships and could build capacity in young people to sustain the friendships built within TAP2 independently and into wider communities. Young people in the reference group suggested that CREATE find ways to establish contact points for young people in towns across regional areas. They felt closer proximity would improve wellbeing because young people would feel like they have a place to go and someone to talk to, other than in Sydney.

It is encouraging to see such large numbers in the broader TAP2 Connection Events. As these events deliver on a priority social connection outcome identified by young people, the potential for building workshops alongside Connection Events could be further explored in the future.

7.2 Implications for TAP2

7.2.1 Current Programs

The principles of Supported Decision-Making in the Voice Your Choice training were reflected in the feedback from young people at the conclusion of the workshop. The decisions they made over the six week follow up period showed an increased rights-based understanding of supported decision-making. Speak Up training was most effective for young people in transition, from school to work, leaving care, and moving into the NDIS. It provided some young people with confidence and self-advocacy skills to improve decision-making. The CREATE Your Future life skills training provided young people with tools to better manage their relationships, with other peers and with support people.

Some reframing of existing materials in the core Voice Your Choice module would be valuable to capitalise on the work that CREATE have invested in the 'Next steps in supported decision-making' toolkit. By putting this at the front of the workshop, and by extending its value by creating an easy read version, more young people with disability are likely to leave the workshop feeling more confident that they know what is in the manual and how to draw from it after the learning activity.

There is potential for development of a Voice Your Choice 2 module in the same way Speak Up was expanded upon. The workshops were shown to increase understanding of supported decision-making. Follow up could focus on bringing together a rights-based understanding with a practical application of supported decision-making, and across a range of life domains.

Speak Up 1 and 2 were developed within TAP2 as a pathway to the core training to become a CREATE Young Consultant. The program would benefit from providing young people with high support needs, socially isolated young people and those under the age of 18 with support to remain engaged with CREATE beyond the workshops in ways that suit them. Developing a method of participation so that all young people have an opportunity to undertake the CREATE Young Consultant training and to have an active role as a young consultant will promote and extend supported decision-making, and provide a pathway to peer support and mentorship by young people with disability.

7.2.2 Future Programs

A parallel mainstream approach could helpfully address issues of inclusion, accessibility and availability of the workshops. TAP2 workshops were designed for young people with moderate support needs. While achieving this outcome, CREATE has an opportunity to also improve accessibility for a wider range of young people, both in terms of ability but also experience. The young consultants who provided advice to the evaluation, discussed their desire for a wider age range of young people to be included in TAP2. They suggested some younger people would also benefit from early intervention and from the ability to connect and learn from peers. Some spoke of the desire for inclusion of older young adults in the 20-25 age range to act as mentors. This could be built into a mainstreamed approach grounded in universal accessibility, drawing on adapted methods for program delivery. A targeted recruitment process would be crucial in ensuring that young people who are marginalised and 'harder to reach' continue to be picked up in mainstream recruitment processes.

7.3 Implications for the organisation

Developing a framework to embed supported decision-making across CREATE's offerings would enable the organisation to systematically increase the accessibility of all of the material offered, and ensure the benefits of the TAP2 (and TAP3) program have maximum reach across the organisation. To further increase accessibility, CREATE could adapt the language used across all of its programs to be more accessible to young people with cognitive disability, including in TAP2. This is most important in the facilitator manuals to explicitly guide facilitators and set the standard for accessibility.

The quality of the contribution young people made to the evaluation of TAP2 indicates the value for CREATE to actively seek their input into the design future programs. Following CREATE's processes for consultation with young people that is evident at the core of their work, young people with disability could be engaged specifically to build universal accessibility (in addition to the work of the ILC grant, through which CREATE will be engaging with young people). CREATE may be able to draw on young consultants to reflect on the implications of this evaluation and provide lived-experience advice on accessibility and materials, for example in writing plain English and easy-read workshop materials and conducting awareness training for new CREATE staff.

7.4 Implications for wider program development

As TAP moves into its 3rd Year, with secured funding from FACS, it is further supported by additional funding under the NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Stream. The ILC is focused on building opportunities for community inclusion and better supporting mainstream services to welcome and support young people. With that corresponding emphasis, a capacity building opportunity exists for TAP3 to prioritise mainstreaming its offering, building on knowledge gained from TAP2.

A further implication for improving program quality relates to potential national rollout and further opportunities under the ILC National Readiness Grants. To move successfully into new communities, increased resourcing and/or new approaches will be needed. Once established, the potential for regional extension to respond to young people's preferences could be explored. To support this, it would be helpful for the program approach to be systematised to assist newly recruited staff. This includes sharing the:

- recruitment approach and tools
- scheduling approach, incorporating learning about necessary relationship development
- program materials, including support resources
- activity supports and the importance of social connection around events
- guide for how to build the program at a local level

Appendices and References

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Appendix A: Evaluation framework

