

Advocates Zoom In On...

Advocacy for First Nations People

Monday 16 November
12:30pm AEDT



Between 19 October and 7 December 2020, Disability Advocacy Network Australia ran the "Advocates Zoom In On..." series of weekly hour-long discussions via Zoom - creating an opportunity for interested advocates to take a closer look at and speak about a number of key topics emerging in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission or DRC) and its examination of abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect.

Participants were encouraged to share their insights, observations, stories and case studies, and the discussion questions each week included opportunities to share perspectives on what recommendations advocates would like to see being made by the DRC, in relation to the topic in focus.

Identifying details have been removed from the edited transcript below. Participants in each session are identified as advocates from their State and Territory, and are also numbered, where multiple advocates from that jurisdiction took part. Participants were informed that sessions would be recorded to capture their insights and observations. Live captioning of this discussion was provided by [AI-Media](#). Care has been taken but errors may exist in the transcription.

DANA would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the various lands around Australia from which advocates participated in these virtual meetings and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past, present, and emerging.

DANA would also like to acknowledge the time and generosity of participating advocates from a diverse range of advocacy organisations around Australia, and the funding of the Australian Government Department of Social Services for DANA to provide DRC systemic advocacy support. Visit www.dss.gov.au for more information.

Transcript of Zoom discussion – 16 November 20202
Comments typed in Zoom chat function: 15

Transcript of Zoom discussion – 16 November 2020

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Firstly I would like to acknowledge the owners of the various lands on which we are meeting, and pay respect to Elders past and present and members of Aboriginal communities here today, and any Torres Strait Islanders who may be here today.

I think it is especially important today to have Aboriginal and First Nations voices among us and acknowledge that today we are asking questions that cannot be answered by white-led organisations. We have organised these discussions to hear the experiences and insights from advocacy organisations around Australia.

We also know that disability advocacy can never be one-size-fits-all. And what might be culturally appropriate and responsive support in one location may not be elsewhere. For today's discussion it is very important to keep in mind the intersecting discrimination and intergenerational trauma experienced by First Nations communities. And that the expert on these problems and solutions are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves and their representative organisations.

That sort of leads me to acknowledging First Peoples Disability Network, and we have [Systemic Advocate 1] here today. And [Systemic Advocate 2] which is really wonderful. Would one of you like to speak?

[Systemic Advocate 2]:

I am [... from] First Peoples Disability Network Australia, we are the national representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, their families, carers, and extended support networks. We are the only national peak that represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, and our work comes from a human rights framework and the social model of disability.

We have been funded to support the [advocacy] providers in regards to disability business and for them to work and align more closely with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people if they want to tell or share their story about neglect, violence, and abuse in institutional or other settings.

I think it is a really important time, just closing off from NAIDOC [National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration], where people have been allowed to celebrate their culture and who they are as Aboriginal people. I think we need to be reminded that for many of our people it is only one week a year they get to feel important and be part of Australian

society. But the rest of the year for most of our people they are disadvantaged or marginalised in whatever setting they may be, nationally across this country.

I think there is many stories and conversations to be heard, and we are here to work alongside the providers or yourself personally, so please feel free to contact us anytime where we can support. I would hope most of you would have done some of the training we have developed in regards to connecting to community and connecting locally with your Elders or other people with disability. Or understanding language or traditions in your regions where you may be sitting today.

I will leave it there, but I am online for anyone that wants to have a chat in the chat room, and thanks to everyone for coming along today.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Thank you, [Systemic Advocate 2]. That's fantastic. Excellent to have that overview, because we know that First Peoples [FPDN] have so much expertise in this space and it has also been identified by the Royal Commission that this space needs quite a lot of work in order to strengthen the advocacy support that is available.

I would also just like to remind people that if the discussion brings up memories or emotions there are services available to support you and to support those you support. There are many difficult feelings that might be brought up by talking about some pretty horrific things sometimes. So, I will also share the links to where you can find your local counselling service or advocacy organisation. There are some Indigenous-run counselling organisations in some locations. But you can also find what else there is through the national counselling and referral service. I will share some of that information in the chat.

And really, I just want to speak as little as possible today and just sort of prompt [with] questions so we can hear some of those experiences on the ground. And the first is a very big question from one of the issues papers, **what are the experiences of First Nations people with disability regarding violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation?**

[Systemic Advocate 2]:

They are big conversations. I will keep it short. I think we need to acknowledge the intersectionality of discrimination, being Aboriginal, disability, but also for many of our communities, English being third or fourth language. We need to acknowledge that across Australia.

I think that is a starting point for further conversation around why people feel marginalised in whatever setting they are entering in regards to getting support in their life. I will leave it there.

[QLD Advocate]:

...One of the experiences we are experiencing around First Nations people is... there was just no support in the rural or remote areas. And two, we find a lot of First Nations people are very reluctant sometimes to engage, and I think that is a barrier for some supports

available. Because of that feeling of, like, an authoritarian kind of figure, regardless of what kind of organisation you come from there is a lot of mistrust. ... We identified in one of our rural/regional areas it was not being covered and there was a lot of people missing out on NDIS access. They were... a lot of First Nations communities. We were able to get funding for one year for supporting NDIS access, but the barriers were still there, and that took a lot of building those relationships.

Some of those areas still weren't covered and there is a massive concern out there that in remote and rural areas where a lot of communities are, that the supports are not there, as well. They have to come from out... and into these areas. It takes a long time, and a lot of the areas are not covered.

That's the barriers I feel that we face, and I believe that First Nations people have.. massive mistrust as well. It's how we get over those barriers.

[NSW Advocate]:

[NSW Self Advocate] is now online. Siobhan might just repeat the first question for you..?

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Question number one was a really big one which we have had a couple of comments on so far. One of the experiences of First Nations people with disability regarding violence, abuse, neglect and/or exploitation? It's definitely a big question and how to tackle... because I think a lot of advocacy organisations have stories but it is hard to capture the enormity of it.

...Question two is more focused on solutions and what needs to be made better. **How can current systems better prevent or respond to experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of first Nations people with disability this might include areas such as the NDIS**, which [QLD Advocate] has already mentioned. Justice, health, education and out-of-home care. And we were actually talking about the child protection system last week. We had some great contributors some of whom are here today. Does anyone want to speak about making current systems better?

[VIC Advocate 1]:

It's a tough one because I am a white person and I am not wanting to impose how to fix things... I don't have full insight to what everything is and the capacities. Everything is rooted in the loss of identity, culture, removal of their lands, the trauma across generations. And a lack of understanding of presentation of trauma - First Nations people being seen as 'schizophrenic', maybe, whereas they are traumatised.

As an advocate, I would like to be better equipped and be able to be linked with the First Nations services and have training. I have tried to access training before, but it booked out very quickly. If it hits the inbox on a Friday and you don't work on a Friday, you miss out. That's a starting point for me, that there needs to be work done right across every sector of society for our First Nations people. Yes, there has been some improvement, but a lot is minimal. I think there is a fuss made that the government has done this or that, but it is minimal compared to what needs to be done, the investment that needs to be made.

[Systemic Advocate 1]:

I would like to acknowledge what [VIC Advocate 1] was saying about training and support. As most of you should be aware, FDPN has been funded to provide training and support to all the providers who are funded to undertake DRC work.

I have sent an email out to the main contacts of all of those about our training. And have had quite a bit of engagement from a number of NDAPs [organisations funded through the National Disability Advocacy Program]. What it entails at this stage is online training... What [Systemic Advocate 2] was saying about the intersection between disability and Aboriginality. And effective ways to work respectfully with our First Nations people. We are just changing the structure on how we organise the training, so it has been service by service. Many services have had that. We will be putting all those dates up online to start with next year, so you can begin. I hear what you say, [VIC Advocate 1], about things booking out. We will make sure everyone has an opportunity to get the training. I am also happy to answer any questions about the training in the chat or afterwards.

[NSW Advocate]:

[...] Is that training, I know it's directed to NDAP organisations but are other organisations allowed to sneak in?

[Systemic Advocate 1]:

We are only allowed with this funding to provide training to the NDAP [organisations]. There is opportunity to discuss how that can work but that is our priority. I'm happy to have a chat via email as to how we can support that.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Anyone else want to jump in on how to make systems better? Or which systems are most in need of improvements [...] what you may have seen in your advocacy work really needs improvement?

[NSW Self Advocate]:

I am working on a project with [NSW Advocacy Organisation] with [NSW Advocate] [...] I just want to make a point and it is obvious to me but maybe not to everybody. If you want to advocate for someone, you need to talk more to the person you are advocating for. I heard a lady say earlier that she wasn't up to scratch, not knowledgeable with what has happened in the aboriginal community. I think more contact with the aboriginal community. We don't have all the answers here around this table.

I think we need to be talking to the people that we are advocating for more. That's why I am aboard with [NSW Advocacy Organisation]. There are lots of Aboriginal people with disability who we need to engage with to understand what ID [intellectual disability] is and how it affects other people and how we can support.

[...] my part of the question would be a response, would be that is... what we need to do, make the links far stronger with the people we are advocating for. In the Aboriginal community we say nothing about us without us. That needs to be done. We can't advocate unless we have the grassroots people there. A common-sense response, I think.

There needs to be a lot more done with Aboriginal people, in particular. I know a lot has been done, but the problems are still there, so we need to do more.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

This was something that definitely came up when he had a recent conversation with people in the Northern Territory. As you say, [NSW Self Advocate], there is so much to be done.

[NSW Self Advocate]:

Educating people though, the project I am working on is with PHN, public health networks in particular areas of the country. But obviously there is a need there. But it goes beyond PHN. I think people with ID, for example and physical disabilities, who come in contact with the legal system, police... Police would be the most uneducated people I have ever seen when it comes to working with people with disabilities. And with intellectual disabilities. And that is only from my point of view. I'm sure others have it, but police and educators, the education system in a lot of areas, they need to understand a bit more about the people they are working with, and understand the disability as well. Not many people know what an intellectual disability is, for example.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

That's actually getting onto my next question which I might read out. Then you can tell me more about justice. **What are the experiences of First Nations people with disability in engaging with the criminal justice system? For example, are the processes and services culturally appropriate and safe?**

[NSW Self Advocate]:

My response to the last one, what I said earlier probably answered that. No, it is not. It is not culturally responsive or appropriate. The police will say that it is in the justice system - will say that it is, but it is not. There are still problems there. More understanding about what disabilities are, for a start. I don't want to take over the conversation.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

...From my understanding, there is still a lot of work to be done on justice across all the different states and territories, even where they do have specific problem solving happening. Does anyone else want to talk more about **the problems with the justice systems** and also what good things are being done?

[QLD Advocate]:

I am sure everyone has come across it - I think one of the biggest issues we have seen in our region is that somebody can identify very clearly with an intellectual disability, yet the police will go ahead without giving that person any form of support, with police interviews and carry on without that. A lot of the time [people with disability] don't really understand

what they are getting charged with and they agree with what the police say. One of the biggest changes needed is to ensure that people, if they are going to be interviewed by the police, there needs to be a firm support network for that person before being interviewed. That is one of the biggest things we have come across, that there is no support for that person when the police are interviewing them.

[NSW Self Advocate]:

Hear, hear. There is a question in itself - most people in the justice system... and corrections and probation and parole, juvenile justice and so on, they all have Aboriginal Liaison Officers. Are those liaison officers doing their job if they have not got support networks in place for them? Exactly. That is a big question there.

[QLD Advocate]:

I think a lot of the time it is an excuse that they were not available, if there was some kind of network in place for people. But sometimes I think it is the ignorance or lack of training of police around support services. I think that is one of the biggest things, a lack of knowledge from police around what support services or referral systems, or anything, that is actually in place.

Especially the young ones coming in, we had a recent incident where somebody, they did not know there was a referral system, they did not know that these services and support services are out there at all. I think it is very much that there needs to be a lot more education for police as well around what support services are available.

[WA Advocate]:

I am [...] from Western Australia [...and we] have a legal aid service here. We have an AVS [Aboriginal Visitors Scheme] here but they have not got grassroots people in those positions.

You know, I am working with [WA legal advocacy organisation], I'm a disability advocate and [Aboriginal person].

Since I've been here, we've had one person who has been assaulted and has a disability, he is receiving NDIS. Yes. The police assumption is... is still there, hasn't changed, you are guilty first then Aboriginal. There was a lot of learning that needs to be done.

Even the community needs to know their rights. And people in positions like myself and the police, liaison officer, AVS [Aboriginal Visitors Scheme] workers, legal aid, they have contacted these clients and they should let them know their rights. Yes.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

I was just going to say that [NSW advocacy organisation], does a lot in terms of teaching people about their rights and that seems to be a theme across a lot of different areas people don't often understand, or don't know their human rights. Is that something that we can improve on?

[NSW Self Advocate]:

I think so, yes. Not just the person with a disability either, we like to do... to teach people about their rights and basic rights as a human being, but the people they are working with, they are the ones who need to know... You are working with a person with particular needs and particular challenges and particular concerns, so you have to think outside the square for a while and put yourself in their shoes for a while. Some workers think they know everything, but unless you work with a person with a disability, unless you walk in their shoes, you don't know anything.

I can speak on that from a personal point of view, some of you may know, because I am blind. I can take that experience. Speaking from that point of view.

And I certainly get treated differently. Unless I stand up and tell them my rights. (Laughs) Anyway, just my point of view.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Thanks, [NSW Self Advocate]. Does anyone else want to jump in and talk about either the justice system or other systems that need to be made better?

[NSW Self Advocate]:

They were still lots of people all over the country talking about all the things before, what changes are being made? Not changes, why aren't there changes?

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

That is a very pertinent point I think, [NSW Self Advocate], with the Royal Commission happening I think Mary has got her mind not on just on the outcomes of the Royal Commission recommendations, but a lot of work will need to be done by disability advocates at the organisations on the ground to make things happen in each state and territory.

Because a lot of the health and justice... a lot of this stuff is all decided at state or territory level. There is a lot of work to be done in terms of making sure what comes out of the Disability Royal Commission is... good changes, particularly for this community, for these communities of people with disability who are some of the most disadvantaged. Are there examples of good practice for people with disability taking place in rural and remote areas?

[NSW Self Advocate]:

Can I just make small point here? I'm sure that people would agree with me here, every Aboriginal community is not the same. We are very different, we are very diverse, we have different needs and different resources. We have different aspirations and different interests as well.

We cannot do a blanket cover for everybody, you know? Everyone has to be looked at individually throughout Australia. You have got traditional people, you have got urban people, who all have different needs. Some are isolated, socially isolated as well as geographically isolated.

One solution does not cover all. I'm sure they would be a lot of agreements with that... is based on the individual rather.

[Systemic Advocate 2]:

That is correct, I think we need to acknowledge that prior to invasion or bureaucracy or any other name you want to give it, there were 250 odd Nations across this land, and the borders that we see today or the funding rounds that we see today that only work in certain areas and are only funded for this particular region, it is not about community.

Our communities travel back and forth as they did traditionally for many years, even if they live in an urban setting, they go back to their natural countries where they have other family mob. And they should be allowed to do that no matter which setting they sit in. They should be able to be supported.

A good example would be, and this was started by an Aboriginal nurse up in Cairns with remote dialysis, no one had ever thought of it before and she initiated that process, [...] She is an artist also. It was allowing people who wanted to go out home to country to have portable dialysis, God forbid, we live in 2020 and Australia doesn't do remote dialysis appropriately across this country. We all know that connection to country and family and being with your own is the best health and well-being anyone can have, it doesn't matter what nationality you are.

I think some other examples that happen up in [NSW Self Advocate]'s region, up in Armidale 'Services Our Way'.¹ Basically that is an advocacy program, it is walking alongside families... And supporting them in what they need in their life, whether it is accessing programs, accessing social support, early intervention for their children, and you know, it was up for a Human Rights Award last year in Sydney because they do amazing work.

But it has to be that slow process of one-on-one, having a conversation, knowing who your audience is, it just does not happen in one phone call. It does not happen with one meeting with your clipboard at the front door. You need to meet under a tree, sit down in the dirt, meet at a coffee shop, and maybe you need to meet for a whole year until you build a relationship. I think that is what we're talking about. This stuff does not happen on government contract processes, ... [or through] a year contract, 'hurry up and build a relationship with the community that we have never had.'

This should be ongoing even after the DRC, if you really want to make a change in people's lives, and we are not just talking alone for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, all people with disability, it does not matter what disability that is, they have learned to be resilient but with a little bit more help and a little bit more walking alongside them to enable them to have

¹ At the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office, **Services Our Way** (SOW) provides culturally appropriate service coordination, support and capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families experiencing vulnerability, empowering them to improve their well being and achieve their goals. See [Services Our Way | Aboriginal Housing Office \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal-housing-office/services-our-way)

the life they want, not what you want, what they want, however that looks in their community, that is what we are trying to achieve here.

And lastly I would say that we have what is called the Patterson Street Hub up in Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory,² that came from community initiative. Many meetings and going up there for a long time, the community kept saying they wanted something of their own. And with the help of some philanthropic money, we don't get any government money because we are not reportable to anyone, the hub works as everybody is welcome.

Whether that is schoolchildren, Elders, people needing help with NDIS, people needing help with housing, or they just want to book a bus to Alice Springs, or they just want to come into the air conditioning and have a cup of tea and read a book from the library. It is a safe space that everybody is welcome and everyone can support each other or get support if that is something they need.

What evolved out of a conversation, now we have a Men's Shed, we have a youth group, we have activity groups, we even had to put in a policy because it is called the hub, "no [school], no play". The schoolchildren were wanting to come there rather than go to school. That tells you in itself it is a safe space.

And if we acknowledge overcrowding and lots of other things happening in our community, if there is a safe space for community to go to and it is something they initiated, you know, what I am trying to say with all this is it is about having conversation. Real conversations.

Not the tick and flick, because my data says have a met an Aboriginal person today, I will tick that box. Did I make a phone call? Yes, I will tick that box. Real conscientious conversations, and not everyone's life is going to change. But you might learn something from having that conversation. I would just leave it there. Thanks.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Thank you, [Systemic Advocate 2] and [NSW Self Advocate]. Both of you making that point, things are not one size fits all, it is templates for practice. You have got to talk to community and allow that to drive it. Does anyone else have an example like that or any other comments on that point?

[DANA CEO, Mary]:

Thanks, [Systemic Advocate 2], that was really great to hear you talking about that stuff. Because I think every advocate joining in today, has felt or feels that frustration with the way that government funds work. They try to drive for particular things, and some of it is about ticking boxes for government departments and putting data that is not always the right data or relevant, but it is something the department asked for and so people scramble around to try to give it to them.

² Paterson Street Hub is a community space on the main street in Tennant Creek for community members to meet, share ideas and stories, connect with each other and seek assistance. [Paterson Street Hub - FPDN](#)

And the pressure, the demand for advocacy from everywhere, coming from everywhere, ...it just looks and feels like it has been so intense in the last few years that lots of advocates just almost run from one person to the next, to the next, to the next.

And the time to have those conversations you are talking about are the very thing there is no time for. I talk to the almost completely burnt-out advocates and in some cases, they are in despair, about the kind of work they know they would like to do, which is miles away from what they are actually having to do to meet people's needs. There is a huge need to try and get that time, create the time for the networking and the real conversations that you are talking about, [Systemic Advocate 2].

The training that FDPN is offering as well as the linkages and conversations that the local Aboriginal organisations that... are going to help... and understanding, so advocates who are not Aboriginal, are able to do their work better and meet people's needs.

I can feel the problem and I don't know what the solution is. It is hard, really hard. Any ideas people have, if you think you can do certain things in your region if you had the time for it, what is it? Is it time? Having the right people? What exactly are the things that stop you from doing the work?

Having more of these conversations would help, I am sure. I think, [Systemic Advocate 2], we should talk to you and [Systemic Advocate 1] and the team further about what other things we could do to try and set the ground for advocates to be able to make the connections better...

[NSW Advocate]:

It's [NSW Advocate] here from [NSW Advocacy Organisation]. A couple of comments on a range of things, and I think I had this listed under question five as well. As well as the somewhat short-term issues with advocacy funding, like project funding, is certainly very similar, so I think that's part of the recommendation perhaps to the DRC that can pass that on. I think the opportunity to share some of those good stories and examples like [Systemic Advocate 2] has referred to. Is that the Purple Truck you are referring to? The mobile dialysis?

[Systemic Advocate 2]:

Purple house, that is up in Alice Springs. Similar, it was started by an Aboriginal nurse up in Cairns and got health to come on board. That was quite a few years, but she was persistent. She was an outreach nurse doing dialysis and most of her community wanted to go home to country. Some for 20 years. She enabled that, so now what happened with Queensland Health, because of that persistence, they have engaged what they call 'cultural navigators'. It's not the Aboriginal liaison, it is the navigator that supports and enables people to travel and get support for whatever issue it is. They are having these ongoing conversations, and I think we are not going to change the system unless we push back.

My answer to you, Mary, I would say if the advocates are helping one person and doing that comprehensively in a whole of person approach, that is better than seeing 10 people and those most disadvantaged and vulnerable miss out.

I think we have to push back against the system or it will never change. If we keep saying that the data says we need to do this and that, so many interviews per week, one-on-one, the government won't change, because they don't acknowledge the importance of advocacy. If we don't start pushing back, if we don't start saying that the most vulnerable people in Australia today are our First Nations people. If you are talking about closing the gap, this is part of that. It's not just about the DRC, it's about all elements of a person's life, housing, education, justice.

I think it has to be a mantra. We are not going to change things unless we push back and start... I'm not saying people are not doing real work, but really working with the mob instead of half-hearted... I will make a phone call and get your Centrelink hooked up but don't worry about the rest of your life.

I'm just being upfront about that. When you meet someone that has an issue... Maybe they have 10 other things in their life but they won't speak up. But you'll only learn about that when you form a relationship, you go into that home. When you do that, you will find other people in that home that need support as well. When you get past that house, the rest of the houses either side in that street all need support as well.

If we are really talking about change for our communities, where do we start? Let's just start doing it and stop talking about it, I think. That's my personal comment, let's just do it. What stops you having that conversation? If you don't know how to have the conversation, go and knock on a door, knock on a land council, knock on a medical centre. And lay your heart open, because that is what is expected from our community all of the time. We have to open up to everyone and tell the most vulnerable parts about our life, and the next thing you know, that service or project has moved on and we have to open up again for the next one to come along. Build these long-term relationships, because we're not going anywhere.

We are still here and we still have our issues and we will still survive. Most of our mobs are resilient. Whether they have a house, education or job. They are still surviving because we look after our own. Even if we don't have the expertise or education, we still navigate a system that wasn't built for us. Move into our world for a little bit, I guess is what I am trying to say.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Any other comments about **what can be done to strengthen advocacy for First Nations People with disability?**

[NSW Advocate]:

I think mainstream disability advocacy services that most of us are from, I think need to look at potentially their structure and their make-up. It's only very new for [NSW Advocacy Organisation], but we are certainly having allocated, identified positions. [NSW Self

Advocate] is on board as a project officer, not just in an Aboriginal identified role, because he is a good facilitator and he is in regional New South Wales. Part of his role is certainly targeted, specifically focusing on that. And also with another staff member with intellectual disability. [Our organisation has] a lot of project money which is great, but it won't always be the case. We know there is a lot of small advocacy services, so perhaps it's about thinking about paid advisory roles as well as employee and team member roles.

The other thing, and I think the link with closing the gap and other kind of a bigger, non-disability specific commitments that the government has made are probably really worth us thinking about how we can recommend that to the DRC to put out the recommendations. Real accountability stuff, the National Disability Strategy is another potential opportunity.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Definitely. Any other comments on **improving access to culturally safe and appropriate advocacy?**

[NSW Self Advocate]:

...If we can use existing networks as well. There's a lot of organisations like medical services, land councils. Organisations that are already set up. Instead of reinventing the wheel, let's use them. They are doing work in their local aboriginal communities. Make contact with them and build networks up, because there is a lot of work being done out there and lots of us sitting around the table here now may not know about it. They could educate us a bit as well. Maintain that contact with the existing networks that are already in place in different towns. More so now, because the NDIS have got a lot of organisations that have come on supporting them. Providing workers, service providers and whatever. There is lots out there. Let's not forget about them. They are there, but they weren't there two years ago.

[VIC Advocate 2]:

I'm an advocate within [Victorian advocacy organisation...], I was quiet all this time, because I don't have enough experience working with people of First Nations, in terms of advocacy. Not in terms of other areas of social services. I am new to the role and I am really interested to learn heaps today from this forum. I would like to have knowledge of who to contact and the network available and I would like to take this forum back to my team.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Only have a couple of minutes left. Anyone else, who hasn't spoken yet?

[VIC Advocate 3]:

Sorry I am so late. I don't know if you covered anything from the Rural Health Department of Melbourne University in Shepparton?³ I know they do a lot of work with indigenous communities.... They run projects that go around Australia. I don't know whether they have got some ideas or whether they could be funded to do some projects that look at how advocacy works.

³ Melbourne Medical School – Department of Rural Health: [Aboriginal Health \(unimelb.edu.au\)](http://AboriginalHealth.unimelb.edu.au)

They are part of the Melbourne University Medical School, but it's the rural sociology department, so it's not strictly medical in that way. It can do quite broad ranging projects, if they get grants or apply for grants. I don't know if there is someone who can work or make some connection with those people. That is an option.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

Thank you, [VIC Advocate 3]. Any final contributions or comments?

[WA Advocate]:

I have been working at my role as a disability advocate for just over one year. The clients have jumped 100% or more, who have attended the service. Most of my contacts are out of work.

I am a local community person and most of the people in this town are my family. They know me personally and they know what I stand for. I just feel like you need a local person in that area.

I have got a Bachelor of Applied Science so I am educated. I worked in the disability industry, I have been a carer in the industry, blah, blah, blah. I know in most cases they choose people whose résumé looks good, but you need to consider the grassroots people who have connection to that area. Maybe just have them as a support person or whatever, to reach the community.

[DANA Policy Officer, Siobhan]:

It has been a wonderful conversation today. I know that we barely touched the surface of many issues. We might wind up there. There is a lot more to be done and to be said. I will send information out to everyone with some of those links, and thank you... everyone for contributing. We will be ... sharing some of the fantastic comments with the group.

[DANA CEO, Mary]:

Thanks, thanks, everyone. We need more conversations...

Comments typed in Zoom chat function

[VIC Advocate 3]:

The more obvious one would be more appropriate LONG TERM funding for identified positions to support

[VIC Advocate 2]

will there be any resources to take from this training or access any links?

[SA Advocate]:

Thanks everyone

[Systemic Advocate 2]:

thank you everyone

[VIC Advocate 2]:

Thanks everyone, it was good discussion