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Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

Social Policy Research Centre

My Choice Matters evaluation

Interim report

July 2014

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Abbreviations

NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NSW CID	New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre

1 Background

My Choice Matters supports people with disability and their families to increase their skills, knowledge and confidence in making choices and taking control over their lives. It has a particular focus on supporting people's transition to self-directed supports and individualised budgets. It funds initiatives to build the capacity of people with disability and families through development activities and to support people to run their own projects. My Choice Matters is a capacity building initiative of the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW CID), funded by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC). The My Choice Matters program coincides with the launch and promotion of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at UNSW Australia has been tasked to evaluate the My Choice Matters initiative. My Choice Matters is one of a series of programs funded by the NSW Government to deliver capacity building for people with disability in NSW. The My Choice Matters team recognises the potential overlap and is targeting their sessions so as not to duplicate or clash with the programs of other providers.

My Choice Matters has application for all people with disability currently receiving formal support as well as those people who are looking for formal support. My Choice Matters is targeting people with disability and their carers aged 0–65 years across all demographic groups. My Choice Matters is committed to engaging with people from Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and this is being achieved by sharing information and resources, and working in partnership with specific organisations. For example, Samarpan Inc. co-hosted an information session for people from a South Asian background with My Choice Matters on the NDIS and Person Centred Approaches to Disability Care in August 2013; later in the year My Choice Matters co-hosted another session with the Aboriginal Disability Network as a way of reaching Indigenous people living in Sydney.

The program aims to reach 2500 to 3000 people; in total, 560 people registered for workshops in the period May 2013 to December 2013 and 335 people attended. The four main components of the My Choice Matters program are:

- 'Get More Skills' to develop more skills and build individual capacity, find out about local needs, and determine what skills may be out there
- 'Become a Leader' to encourage people to become a leader, using Social Leadership Australia to run workshops to build leaders
- 'Share Stories' to share stories, ideas and information from different individuals with the aim of disseminating these shared insights and ideas with others

- 'Run projects' to help people to access funds and implement their projects.

The first of the 'Get More Skills' sessions began in May 2013. The three core objectives of the evaluation are looking at the ways in which My Choice Matters contributes to increasing skills and knowledge; how these increased skills and knowledge then contribute to people being able to take action; and explores some of the barriers which prevent people taking action.

This report details the findings of the evaluation of Phase 1 of My Choice Matters. A number of recommendations were made to My Choice Matters and to the ADHC Board during this evaluation period to ensure the program, and the data captured, could be improved where possible. These recommendations are also noted in this report.

2 Analysis and recommendations

For the purpose of analysis, SPRC has examined the following data provided by My Choice Matters:

- registration and attendance data
- Richter Scale data collected as part of the 'Get More Skills' sessions
- participant feedback forms.

In addition, two of the researchers attended 'Get More Skills' sessions and were able to provide a number of observations to the My Choice Matters team.

2.1 Registration and attendance data

In terms of registration and attendance, SPRC has reviewed the data provided to understand who the program has or has not reached. Within Phase 1 of the My Choice Matters program there have been two distinct rounds of Get More Skills capacity building workshops: Round 1 went from May to June 2013, and Round 2 went from August to December 2013. The registration figures and attendance figures are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1 Registration and attendance data for Get More Skills workshops

	Registered (n)	Attended ^b (n)	Attendance rate
Round 1 ^a	403	245	61%
Round 2 ^a	157	90	57%
Total	560	335	60%

Notes

^a Round 1: May-June 2013, Round 2: August-December 2013

^b Some people also turned up on the day without pre-registering

The number of people attending the different events varied considerably. For example, in Round 1 the largest number of people attending overall was at Hornsby (87) and the lowest was at Coffs Harbour (10). In Round 2 the greatest number to attend was at Wollongong (40) and the lowest at Bathurst (2).

There was also a difference in the number of people with disability attending the events. In Round 1, Hornsby also had the largest number of people with disability attending, while no one with disability attended the Coffs Harbour event. In Round 2, Dubbo had the largest attendance by people with disability, while no one with disability attended the Bathurst event. Overall, 28.7 per cent of attendees were people with disability.

Exploring the factors which prevented people with disability attending would be useful. For example, it might be the length of the event, the accessibility of the venue and the facilities, the ability of people with disability to access support staff, and the methods of disseminating information about the events to ensure they reach people with disability.

Recommendation: Explore why people with disability are not attending

The figures from Round 1 show the largest specified group of people with disability were those with a cognitive or intellectual impairment (12.7 per cent), while a greater number choose not to reveal their disability (55.9 per cent). In Round 2, the largest specified group was again people with a cognitive or intellectual impairment (10.7 per cent), with 83.1 per cent not specifying their disability. The majority of attendees in Round 1 were people aged 45–65 years (30 per cent) and again the ‘unspecified age’ group was greater at 45 per cent. In Round 2, the 45–65 age group represented the largest age group (64.1 per cent), with 17.9 per cent of people with disability from the 65+ age group. Language spoken at home was unspecified in the greatest numbers (59.6 per cent) in Round 1. In Round 2, most participants said that they spoke English at home (72.1 per cent), with no other language being spoken by more than 1 per cent of participants.

Recommendation: Explore other ways of capturing this information for the evaluation, e.g. at registration, and how to attract other people to the sessions

2.2 Richter Scale data

The following Richter Scale questions are given to participants to consider as they arrive and again at the conclusion of the workshop:

- How confident do you feel about being in control?
- How confident do you feel about speaking up?
- How confident do you feel making choices in life?

Participants were asked to make a response on a scale between 1 (least confident) and 10 (most confident) before the session commenced, and again at the end of the session, after having participated, to indicate whether their thinking or feeling about these three areas had changed.

The Richter Scale feedback mechanism was initially in the form of a wall chart which people filled in upon arrival to the workshops (and at the end of the workshops) as a way to set the scene for the session to follow. Whilst the data and the concept of the Richter Scale were considered to be very useful, as well as a good warm up exercise for the participants, the researchers were concerned about privacy issues and recommended that this exercise be completed individually. Also, as a group exercise there was no way to track any change by from the beginning to the end of the session for an individual. And, with people arriving late or leaving early, there was no continuity in the data itself.

We have aggregated Richter Scale data for most of the workshops that occurred until December 2013. For 'Voice', we have data from 22 workshops, for 'Choice' we have data from 23 workshops, and for 'Control' we have data from 22 workshops.

Although figures have been provided from each session according to the three main questions areas, and also in an aggregate form, there are caveats about interpreting either the session figures or the aggregate numbers. Due to attrition of attendees during the event, as well as late arrivals, the number and relationship between the morning and afternoon responses is not truly indicative of individual outcomes. The total numbers who responded in the afternoon (with the exception of Newcastle) were often lower than the numbers for the morning session. Is this because people left before the end of the day, because they forgot to make a response, or because they were overwhelmed with the information which they had received and needed further time to reflect on their new understanding? The Richter Scale, in its original format, made it difficult to track any individual response; it was impossible to follow a specific person's response from the morning to the afternoon.

The afternoon percentages appeared to be small incremental positive changes in the scales 1 to 5, e.g. in the area of 'Voice', scale 2 showed a reduction from 3 per cent to 0 per cent, and scale 3 a decrease from 3 per cent to 1 per cent, denoting an increase in confidence.

As would be expected the greatest areas of change were generally around scale numbers 7, 8, 9, and 10. In 'Control', scale 10 rose from 20 per cent to 27 per cent, scale 9 rose from 18 per cent to 23 per cent, scale 8 rose from 17 per cent to 19 per cent, but scale 7 decreased from 16 per cent to 12 per cent.

In 'Voice', scale 10 increased from 25 per cent to 34 per cent, and scale 8 from 16 per cent to 21 per cent, while scale 9 remained consistent at 18 per cent.

'Choice' showed a significant increase at scale 10 from 23 per cent to 30 per cent, scale 9 from 19 per cent to 25 per cent, and scale 8 from 19 per cent to 23 per cent, but a drop in scale 7 from 15 per cent to 8 per cent.

Recognising the benefits of the Richter Scale during the events, a short survey of 'quick questions' will be used during follow-up communications to better understand whether people are moving forward, backwards, or staying the same (see Section 3).

3 Next steps

The research team has developed a series of 'quick questions', in the form of a survey, to gather further feedback on participants' experience with the workshops and explore a number of the issues raised above. The questions will also target those people who have not attended a workshop but have heard of MCM, and those people who have not heard of MCM, in order to ascertain if they would be interested in attending a workshop, why they haven't in the past, and what they would like to learn about in a workshop.

The quick questions will be used over the remaining period of the evaluation in order to discern changes over time and to explore issues arising. This is particularly important given the different types of programs and sessions being run in the rest of the program. The quick questions will be distributed to My Choice Matter contacts and SPRC distribution lists via an online survey; the first questions were sent out in June 2014.

The researchers, in conjunction with My Choice Matters, have also developed a diary feedback component. Participants will be given a series of questions that ask them to regularly reflect on their experiences with My Choice Matters and any changes they may have made since participating in the program. My Choice Matters staff will collect this data. These diaries will then be used by SPRC researchers to inform and provide context for a series of qualitative interviews. Participants in the Become a Leader course are the first program participants that have been asked to keep this diary, and have already begun this process. The Become a Leader diary questions also contain some questions which will be used by My Choice Matters for internal evaluation purposes.

Participants in the quick questions survey will also be asked if they would be interested in giving feedback about My Choice Matters in a subsequent qualitative interview. They will also be asked to also keep a diary which will be used as the basis for an interview at the end of a three month period about their experiences with the program.

These additional evaluation components have been developed in conjunction with My Choice Matters and have been approved by the UNSW Ethics Committee.

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