NCOSS 'WHAT WORKS'

BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA'S PEER MENTORING PROJECT

Five (5) strategies that worked for BCA when they trained volunteer peer mentors to connect with and to advocate for themselves and others.

Stories of Change and Good Practice

This document is part of a suite of resources developed by NCOSS under its Skilled to Thrive capacity-building project.

December 2019

Background

The 2019 NDIA-funded UNSW Peer Support practice review found that there were gaps in peer support delivery for people with complex communication needs. (1)

Among other things, the review stated that this gap could be addressed by the design and development of appropriate strategies and resources.

Some organisations are pioneering some solutions. Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is one such organisation.

Below are five (5) strategies that worked for BCA in its peer mentoring project implemented from July 2018 to June 2019.
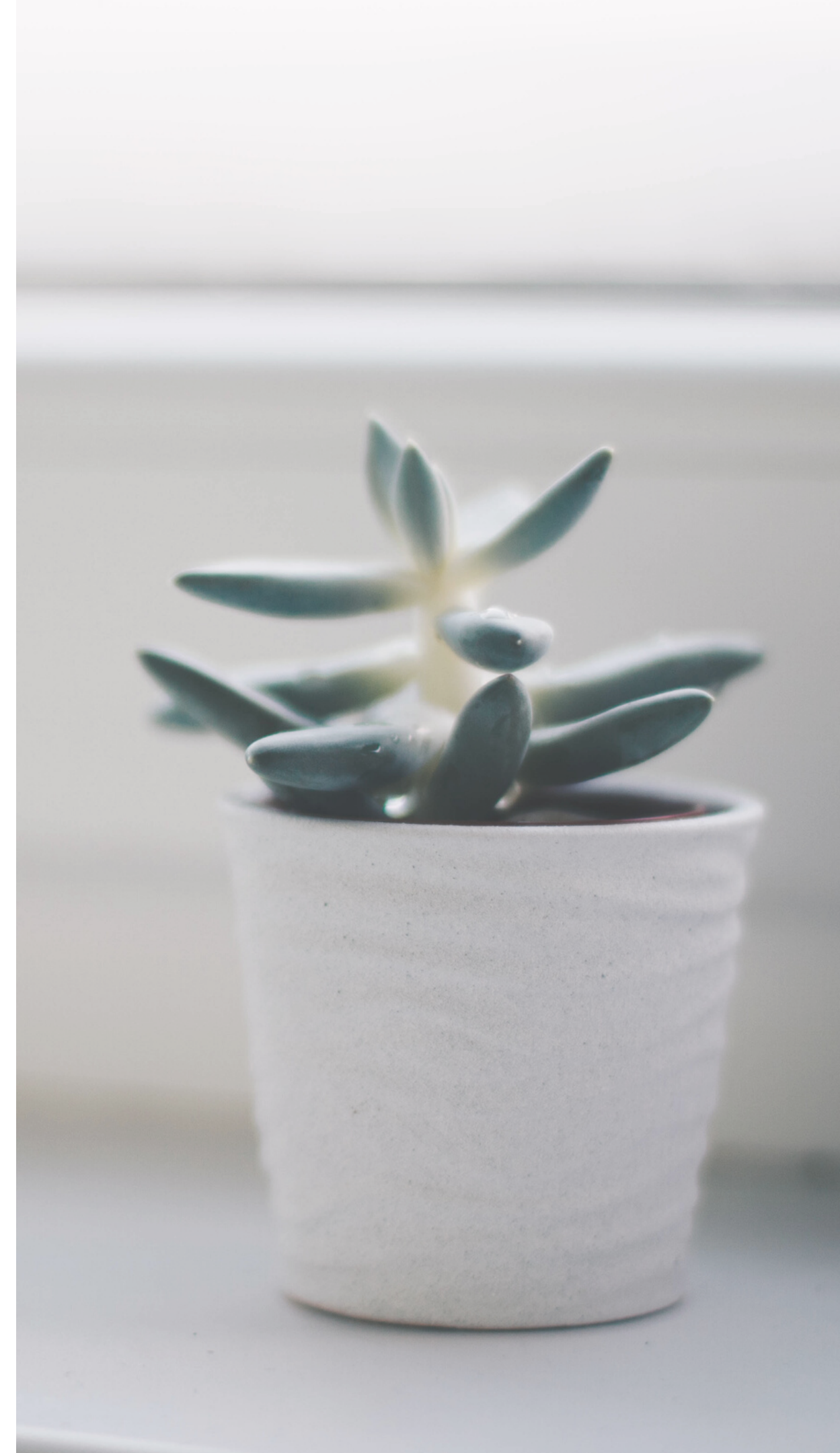
01

Using the right mix of tools, platforms & resources .

TELECONFERENCE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

BCA used video conferencing to train 64 peer support leaders across Australia.

PODCASTS

They also recorded two (2) podcasts that are now available to all BCA members in Australia.

Choose tools that maximise results.

NEED PRINT DISABILITY- FRIENDLY RESOURCES?

Speak to your local vision service provider about converting your resources to Braille, large print, picture-based boards & visual aids, and about speaking devices and other formats. For training on peer mentoring, BCA is making available its suite of resources.

Matching peer mentors and mentees.

It comes down to matching the right people and laying down sustainable supports.

BCA matched peer mentors and mentees based on personal profiles, common interests and skills. Any matching process is not perfect by nature, but BCA ensured a good chance for success by complementing the matching process with appropriate tools and processes.

YOU CAN DOWNLOAD SOME TOOLS FOR MENTORING SUCCESS.

Although peer mentoring is not a transaction, it helps to have a basic "toolkit".

To start with, an Agreement template gives mentors and mentees the opportunity to lay down mutual expectations, guidelines for confidentiality and privacy, preferred ways & times to communicate, and other 'protocols', Other tools could be goal-oriented templates for one-on-one or group meetings, as well as simple forms for 'checking in' and giving feedback.

03

## Communicating to build confidence.

BCA believes that self-confidence is key to self-advocacy. A self-confident person with disability believes that their issue is not embarrassing, but is worth raising. A self-confident person who believes in self-advocacy believes that a 'lone' voice has enormous potential to contribute to a bigger collective voice.

CAN SELF-CONFIDENCE BE 'TAUGHT'?

If confidence is more of a skill than a gift, as many psychology experts believe, can it be 'taught'? And if a community is presenting systemic and societal barriers to building confidence (as a result of not being as inclusive as it should be), could peer mentoring make a difference?

We say that peer mentoring is conducive, even key, to building mutual self-confidence because -

- It's easier to "hear and be heard" when you're with a peer, especially when you have the same disability;
- It's also easier to share or learn skills together: doing paperwork, asking better questions, preparing for tasks, getting information, weighing pros and cons when deciding, identifying next steps after making a mistake, articulating or clarifying an idea, and connecting with others.
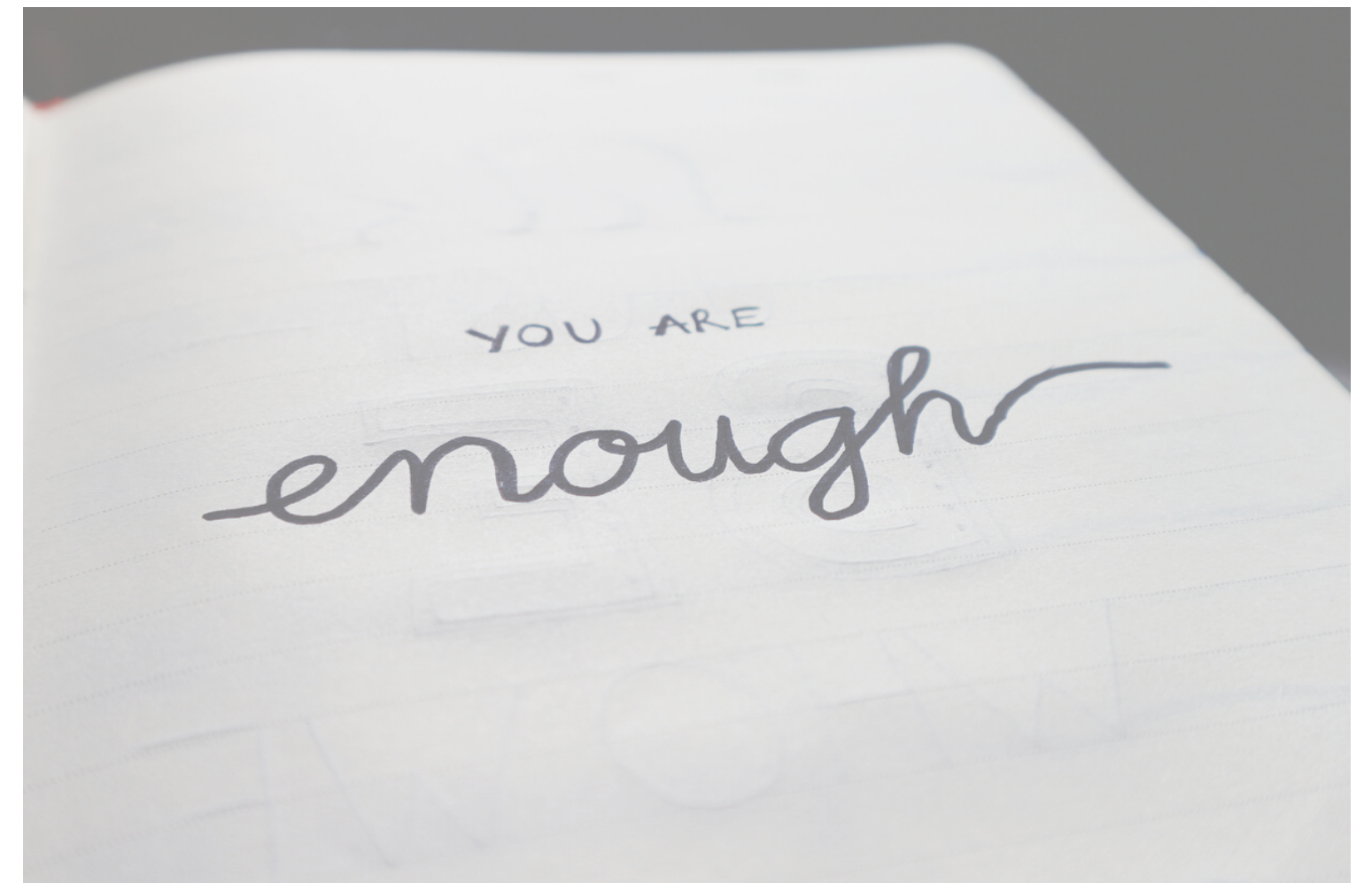
04

Getting feedback.

Evaluation is not a dirty word. There are simple ways to build in evaluation at key stages of a peer mentoring relationship, and even at the start or end of each conversation. BCA calls it "checking back in".

YOU CAN MEASURE PROGRESS AT EVERY MEETING.

Peer mentors can set aside 5-10 minutes at the start of a meeting to chat about goals *(2)*.

- What progress has been made towards your goal?

- If you could quantify it, are you 30% there, 80%...?

- What would take you from 25% to 40% by our next conversation?

05

Planning for sustainability.

BCA has initiated steps to preserve the learnings and expertise gained from their peer mentoring project. These include offering:

Content expertise to other similar organisations
Training resources
Consultancy services

DOES YOUR PROJECT NEED A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN?

Not all projects need to continue, and not all aspects of a project are sustainable. Asking these questions might help *(3)*:

- Which activities are most effective or critical to continue? What does your evaluation data show about their impact?
- Which components can be sustained with minimal financial resources? Human resources?
- Can the project or aspects of the project be integrated into existing/ ongoing programs or partnerships?
- Are there components that are highly respected or supported by the larger community? Is your data sufficient to tell an impact story, that could lead to new donors?

References & resources

(1)   A Wehbe, L Davy, K Fisher, S Robinson, R Kayess (July 2019).
      NDIS Peer Support Final Report. UNSW Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney.

(2) C Moore. Goal-Setting Theory, "How to set and achieve life goals
      the right way". Positivepsychology.com, November 2019.

(3)   Sustainability Planning Guide (Step 3). US Department of Health and Human
      Services, November 2017.

(4)   N Barber, "What is a Peer Mentor, and how can a Peer Mentor help you?"
      Blind Citizens Australia audio file, June 2019.

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Acknowledgment

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