

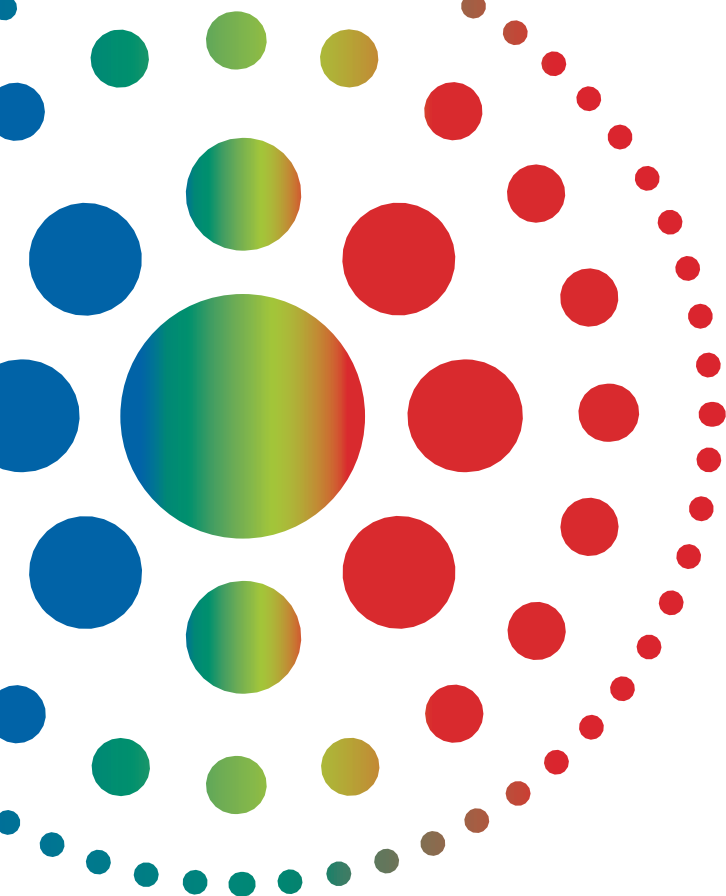


resourcing  
inclusive  
communities



# LIFE LONG LEARNERS

Real stories of people with disability accomplishing learning achievements



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# Thank you

Resourcing Inclusive Communities would like to thank the individuals and families who contributed their stories and photos that helped create this booklet, **so that others might be inspired by the possibilities of learning throughout life.**



“She’ll never learn.”

“He will always have the mind and ability of a two-year-old. Tests show he will not develop beyond...”

“He will never have an imagination.”

“She won’t develop a sense of humour.”

“His low IQ means he will be like a child for life.”

## **Sounds familiar?**

She won’t... She can’t...

He’ll never...

Who gets to decide this?

Why do some people think they can predict the future?

Should the complete sum of a person’s life be stated at the beginning, and shut down all other possibilities?

# Have you heard these statements?

Most people with disability have been tagged with a long list of deficits. Many of these are determined through an array of assessments that indicate what is wrong with them. What often follows is a whole series of interventions to try to 'fix' their problem. While some of these may be helpful and necessary, too often deficits are used to define the identity of the individual and what their life will be. This can have a negative impact on the experiences, opportunities and roles they are offered throughout life. Many people with disability are not expected to learn, and so are not given the chance.

The people and families represented in this book chose to see beyond the deficits and limiting statements of experts, professionals, relatives and general commentators!

They decided life is a learning opportunity for everyone.





“High achievement  
always takes place  
in the framework of  
high expectation.”

Charles Kettering





# Joscelyn is a proud reader

**At the age of 12, an educational professional said that Joscelyn couldn't read and never would. Not surprisingly, with such low expectations Joscelyn went through most of her schooling as a non-reader.**

At 18, Joscelyn became enthralled by the news of the engagement of Prince William to Catherine Middleton. She started purchasing magazines featuring articles about the royal couple. Joscelyn needed members of her family to read the articles to her, but what she really wanted was to read about Wills and Kate for herself.

In her final year of school, some dedicated teaching staff started a reading programme. When she left school, Joscelyn's family engaged a reading tutor to continue her progress.

Three times a week for an hour, Joscelyn worked through a reading programme and practised her reading skills. After much work and determination, Joscelyn was able to read not just her magazines, but menus and shopping lists. Joscelyn can now do many everyday tasks that require reading. There is still lots of practice needed to keep up her reading skills, but Joscelyn is now a proud reader.

With the support of her tutor, Joscelyn wrote a book to present to Prince George when she was invited to greet the royals when they got off the plane in Australia for their royal tour in 2018... but that's another story.

# Grace and Tim are skiers

**Before marrying, I was an avid skier. Andrew and I even went skiing in Whistler for our honeymoon. After Grace was born, I put skiing on the backburner, but held a desire that she too would be able to at least give it a go sometime.**

Last year, we decided to give a family ski trip a try. A few months before we left, we got kitted up with ski clothes. Grace loved all the gear. It also helped that we were going to fly somewhere to ski, as Grace loves flying.

We really talked up how fun skiing was going to be. We put Grace and her younger brother, Tim, in the kids' ski classes on the slope. Grace got some gorgeous, patient young male instructors whom she would try anything for!

Lastly, and I'm sure this was a big motivation, she really wanted to ski alongside her dad and keep up with her brother. After a week of practice, attaining small, achievable goals and receiving lots of encouragement, not only was Grace going down the beginners' slope but also an intermediate slope – receiving huge accolades!

When I ask Grace why she wanted to learn to ski, she simply says because it's fun! She's already excited about going again this year and I'm stoked she loves doing something that I love, too.









# Emily is a driver

**Emily's first motivation to drive was to simply do what her two older sisters were able to do. Living on five acres, the girls were encouraged to develop driving skills in a 'paddock basher'. Emily showed great interest in driving and progressed to her own modified car with lengthened pedals and raised seat. After many years of fun and developing driving sense, Emily practised the L-test online. She eventually sat the test and passed. She had five years on L plates and then gained her Ps.**

Emily lives with her family in the country, 10 minutes out of town where there is no public transport, so it is important she can drive herself to work. Driving has definitely added to Emily's growing independence and given her the freedom to have her own life.







“Imitation is one of the most powerful learning mechanisms known.”

Wolf Wolfensberger

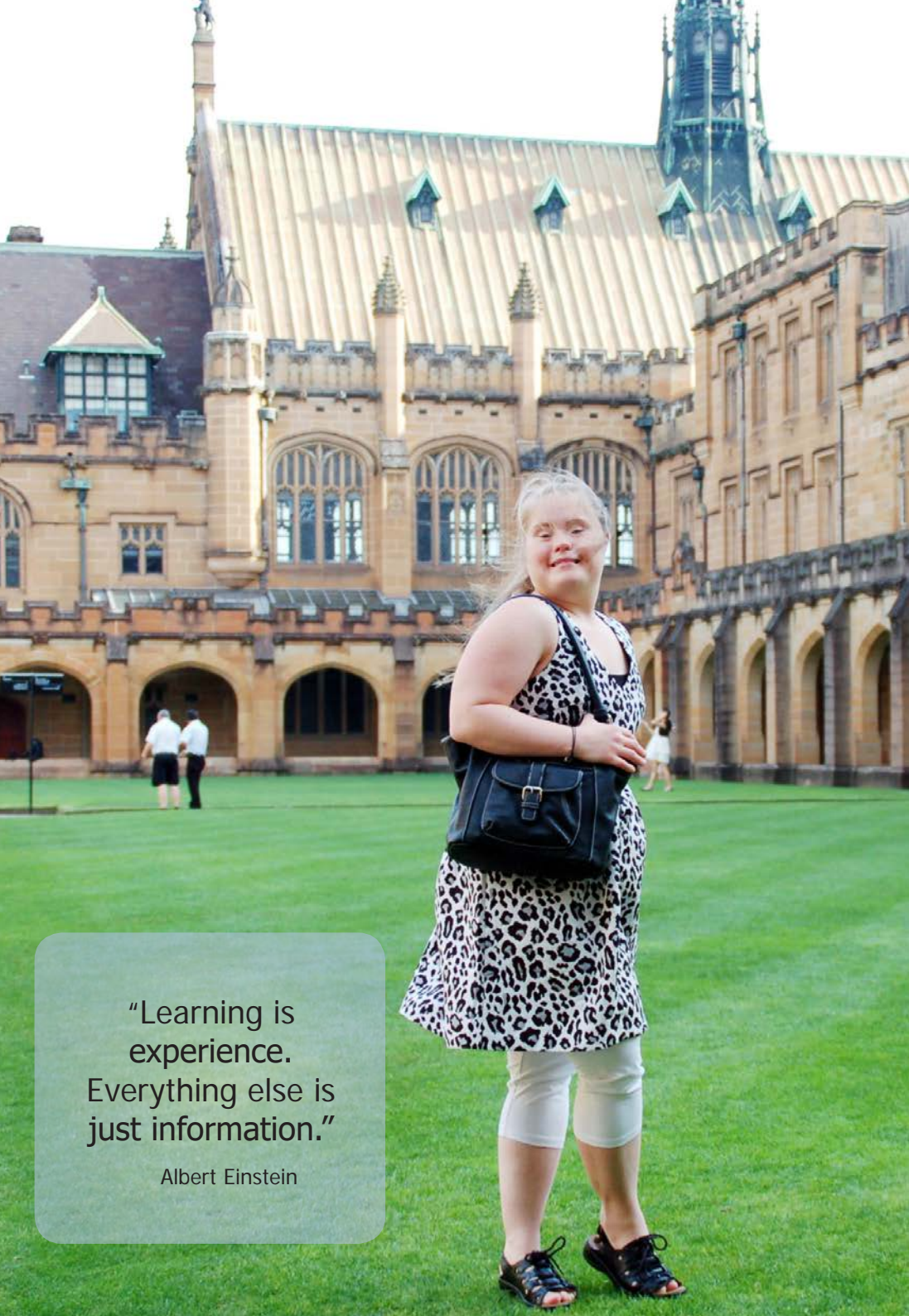
As imitation is such an effective way for people to learn, we should be mindful of who are the role models that a person with disability can learn from in his or her life.

It is essential that positive role models are available to learn from and emulate.

### **Role models should:**

-  be positive
-  be age appropriate
-  have skills to learn from
-  be someone the person identifies with.





“Learning is  
experience.  
Everything else is  
just information.”

Albert Einstein

# Emma is a uni student

Attending university is a significant rite of passage for many young people. It is a time for pursuing your passions and exploring how you want to be in the world. It is an opportunity to meet all sorts of new people, many of whom might share your interests and university experiences.

At Sydney University, Emma audited subjects. This means she attended all classes and tutorials and could join in all aspects of uni life, but wasn't required to complete assignments or exams. As she is an aspiring artist, Emma studied art and art history. This has deepened Emma's appreciation for artists she admires and is influenced by, which has helped her develop her own artistic style.



# Jack is a mountain biker

**Jack has liked bikes from the age of two, before he could walk. When he saw his three older sisters bike riding with their friends, he wanted to ride a tricycle.**

When Jack was four, we moved to bike-friendly Canberra and bike riding became part of our commuting life. Jack enjoyed the bike buggy but also learned to pedal his tricycle. He advanced to a tagalong bike and then a two-wheeled bike with training wheels.

Jack struggled to learn to balance with the training wheels and so we got him a scooter. By age 11, Jack was flying down the streets of Canberra on his scooter, confidently steering and balancing over small jumps.

We continually offered Jack opportunities to try a two-wheeled bike but without success. It wasn't until Jack realised he could ride to school with friends that he wanted to master it.

Over time, Jack conquered his fear of falling. Firstly, he learned to glide on a 16-inch wheeled bike without pedals, and then he moved onto a 20-inch bike with pedals. Within six months, at 13 years of age, Jack graduated to a full mountain bike.

He is still learning about bike gears, road rules and how to stand when riding, and has a new goal to join the school's Mountain Bike Club.

It could have been easy to give up on the idea of Jack ever learning to ride, but with the right support and encouragement Jack is a bike rider and enjoys riding with others.

Jan









# The power of expectations





It has now become generally accepted that more often than not, what we expect of people is what people achieve and deliver.

**Some call this a self-fulfilling prophecy, but what is at work here is the power of expectations.**

Most of us are expected to learn and so we are provided with opportunities and places where we can learn. For people with disability, the opposite is often true because there are low or no expectations that they can learn. This results in those assumptions being realised because the person is offered no opportunity to learn and prove the assumptions wrong. Thus begins a negative cycle of failure, with predictable results.

Expectations represent our beliefs, assumptions, prejudices and biases, and influence our attitudes and actions. Sometimes we are not even conscious how these things work together and how they can affect others.

So as not to do wrong by someone we should raise our expectations and:

-  believe that someone can learn with the right support
-  provide opportunities and places to learn
-  allow an individual to learn in their own way, at their own pace, and shape learning experiences to their needs
-  never assume what a person can and can't do.





# The trip planners

**When brothers Joshua and Jeremy were nine and six, they had a goal to travel to Japan so that they could visit the Pokémon Museum.**

To turn this goal into reality, the boys were told they needed to save for the trip – which is exactly what they did. To start the process, they were given bank books so that every month they could line up at the bank and deposit their money. Family and friends supported their goal by giving money at birthdays to put towards their trip. The motivation to go to Japan helped the boys to learn the value of money, as well as how to save.

After seven years they had saved enough and their dream came true. A different country and culture helped Jeremy and Joshua to overcome their fears and cope with the changes of being in a new environment. It was an incredible experience that not only strengthened family ties, but taught the boys that if you put the effort in, then anything is possible. Jeremy's next goal is to go back to Japan to learn Japanese.

# Margaret is a

“You are never too old to set a new goal or to dream a new dream.”

C S Lewis

In her early 50s, Margaret moved into a home of her own for the first time. It took some careful planning, but Margaret’s family and friends wanted to assist her to have better life opportunities.

Margaret lived in an institution in her early years and later at a group home, neither of which she liked. She then returned to live with her parents before she was supported to have her own place.

Margaret’s family employed an assistant to teach her the skills of being a homemaker. The assistant was someone from the local community who had experience in managing their own home. The assistant came a few times a week to help Margaret with shopping, budgeting, cleaning and cooking.

Margaret has now lived in her own home for many years and chooses to live by herself. Her confidence has grown and she needs less support to manage things. Margaret now does her own shopping and can pay her bills at the post office, once they’ve been checked by a trusted person. Margaret says she loves living in her home because of the independence it has given her.



# homemaker



# Valued social roles and their likely benefits

**The world is full of experiences, opportunities and possibilities that, if properly tapped into, a person can get to enjoy life more richly and explore and fulfil their greater potential. However, if they do not access these potential life experiences, then this scope for enriched living will be lost.**

The practical means to get to these experiences is through the taking up of valued social roles within community life that show promise of enriched life experiences of potential interest to the person. These roles can, for examples, include friend, companion, club member, traveller, employee, sports fan, music lover, partygoer, neighbour, adventurer, acquaintance, etc.

These sorts of 'life giving' roles are unusually in extremely limited supply in segregated settings reserved for disabled people, so their pursuit will inevitably mean a stronger presence of the person in many aspects of community life rather than on its margins.

Consequently, the route to enriched and satisfying lives that suit the person are not going to be in places called 'special', but will instead will be found deep within the rhythms and patterns of everyday community life.

Michael Kendrick







# Dan is an internet surfer

Dan likes to research the things he is passionate about and that are meaningful to him in his daily life. At the moment he is starting a job fixing up a lengthy driveway for a yacht club. He receives assistance to use the computer and look up images of earthmoving equipment, concrete and asphalt, and anything else that relates to his work.



# Rhiannon is a choir member

**Rhiannon is front-row centre in red in this photo of a combined schools choir event. She followed her brothers and sister, who have also taken part through the years. One of her brothers is in the choir with her, back-row centre, also in red.**

The thing that Rhiannon will tell you she enjoyed just as much as the singing, was the extra time she had to socialise with her schoolmates. The 50-kilometre bus trip to rehearsal with the other kids and the card games while waiting to perform, all provided ways to learn more about friendship. Rhiannon has learned and talks about how friendships are built around common interests.







# Jayde is a business owner

**Jayde has always been in the thick of her community. Her family made an early decision that she would mainstream all the way through her schooling. They realised that this typical pathway through education would provide a rich source of learning experience, varied opportunities and effective role models.**

As Jayde got older, her family started to think about her future and what she could do after school.

Employment is the typical, valued role that young people are expected to pursue once school is over. With this in mind, Jayde completed a number of work experience placements. This enabled Jayde to learn different work skills, prepare for adult life and meet lots of new people. Work experience led to part-time work in a solicitor's office and at a bakery.

Jayde is now assisting in two kindergartens and is establishing her own business, The Bendigo Bickie.



# Dale is a housemate



**Dale has learned many skills, living in his own home and sharing with a mate. He has learned that it takes negotiation and compromise to live well and in peace with somebody else.**

This includes not yelling at the football on TV, or at PlayStation in the middle of the night.

Dale has learned how to get around the kitchen stove more skilfully and, like most young people, has become much more familiar with the washing machine and dishwasher than when he lived in the family home. There are also responsibilities to learn around rental leases, shopping, household expenses and sharing living space and furniture.

House-sharing has given Dale the opportunity to learn more about friendship, and the support he can provide. He now understands that friendship is a mutual thing and that he can give as well as take. Dale also has the opportunity to be a good neighbour in the unit block by taking out the bin for someone who has difficulty with the stairs.

Sharing a house has its challenges, but Dale can live his own life and there is nothing better than having friends over for drinks without parents being around.



# Dreams of the future

Do family members with a disability typically get asked questions that consider their future? Often not. The nudge is missing as many others often remain uncertain as to what one might expect to see and hope for. Only in recent times have we seen the examples of people, some with significant disabilities, obtaining roles that previously we would never have dreamed of. It has given rise to an increasing optimism about the future for people with disabilities.

Can we dare to dream? Can we listen and take notice of their dreams? Could my son or daughter, for instance, attend university?

And the answer for an increasing number is, 'yes!' Certainly not everyone wants or needs to go to university, but this simply illustrates what can be achieved.

Without the dream of what we can be and become, we would never harness the impetus and the courage to seek answers to the question. What could stop us? Put simply, narrowness. Narrowness of experience, narrowness of expectations, narrowness of belief and hope. It might be born of a fear that it will fail and a misguided notion that one will be safer if one does nothing.

John Armstrong





Nathan



# is a social entrepreneur

"He'll never learn maths... they never do."

"He'll never get a job... they never do."

"He'll never have a sense of humour... that requires intellect."

These were some of the things that were said about Nathan as a small child. He was referred to as 'they' because in the speakers' minds, 'children like him' are all the same.

Nathan's family had a different vision. They believed Nathan should be encouraged to discover his unique identity, passions and dreams for his life.

Nathan is a social entrepreneur, motivational speaker, assistant filmmaker for a creative team, and administration assistant at Nova Radio station.

At Nova, Nathan can fulfil his desire to work with celebrities. He is often part of the meet-and-greet team when famous people come in for a radio interview.

Nathan's motivational speaking engagements have taken him around the world to share his message: that everyone should be given their chance to explore their potential and achieve their dreams. One of his goals is to create open employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability.

Nathan needs assistance to achieve his goals, but he sets the bar high. He is constantly challenging himself to achieve more and make positive change in the lives of others.



# Mala the

“Every child has a different learning style and pace. Each child is unique, not only capable of learning but also capable of succeeding.”

Robert John Meehan

Mala and her brother, Chay, have been encouraged to be active in their garden all their lives. They started learning about how food is grown through a paddock-to-plate experience of sowing, growing, harvesting, washing, cutting, cooking and eating their own organic potato chips. They have also attended lots of farmers markets as a family, to learn more about where their food comes from and how it is produced or harvested.

Mala and Chay each have their own garden bed so they can choose and take care of what they decide to grow. In their new home there is a plan to build raised garden beds to wheelchair height so that Mala can have better access to her crops. The children continue to cook and eat what they grow, or set up stalls to sell their bountiful harvest.





# Organic Gardener







# Rachael is a power chair driver

"I am always doing  
that which I cannot  
do, in order that  
I may learn how  
to do it."

Picasso

Some people thought Rachael couldn't learn  
to use a power chair.

**They know better now!**

# Karim is a performance artist

**Karim first demonstrated his love for performing when he was in preschool. He loved the toy microphone and was the first to volunteer to get up on stage, even though he had no language. He revelled in taking a bow!**

Over the years, Karim's family actively nurtured and developed this strength. Now an adult, Karim has been working on developing his business of presenting disability awareness workshops. He is currently working with an actor to develop a performance called Karim's Mojo Disco. Karim tells his personal story and gives the audience practical ideas for becoming more inclusive of people with disability. Most importantly, it's Mojovational!

The tagline for Karim's business is 'motivational non-speaker – just because I can't talk doesn't mean I don't have a lot to say!' Karim's ambition is to help people think differently and positively about what people with disability have to offer.



“ Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it.

The time will pass anyway.”

Earl Nightingale

“ Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

Benjamin Franklin

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Resourcing Inclusive Communities is a capacity building initiative of Family Advocacy.

Please contact us if you want more information about any of the ideas in this booklet, to join our mailing list and be informed about our events.

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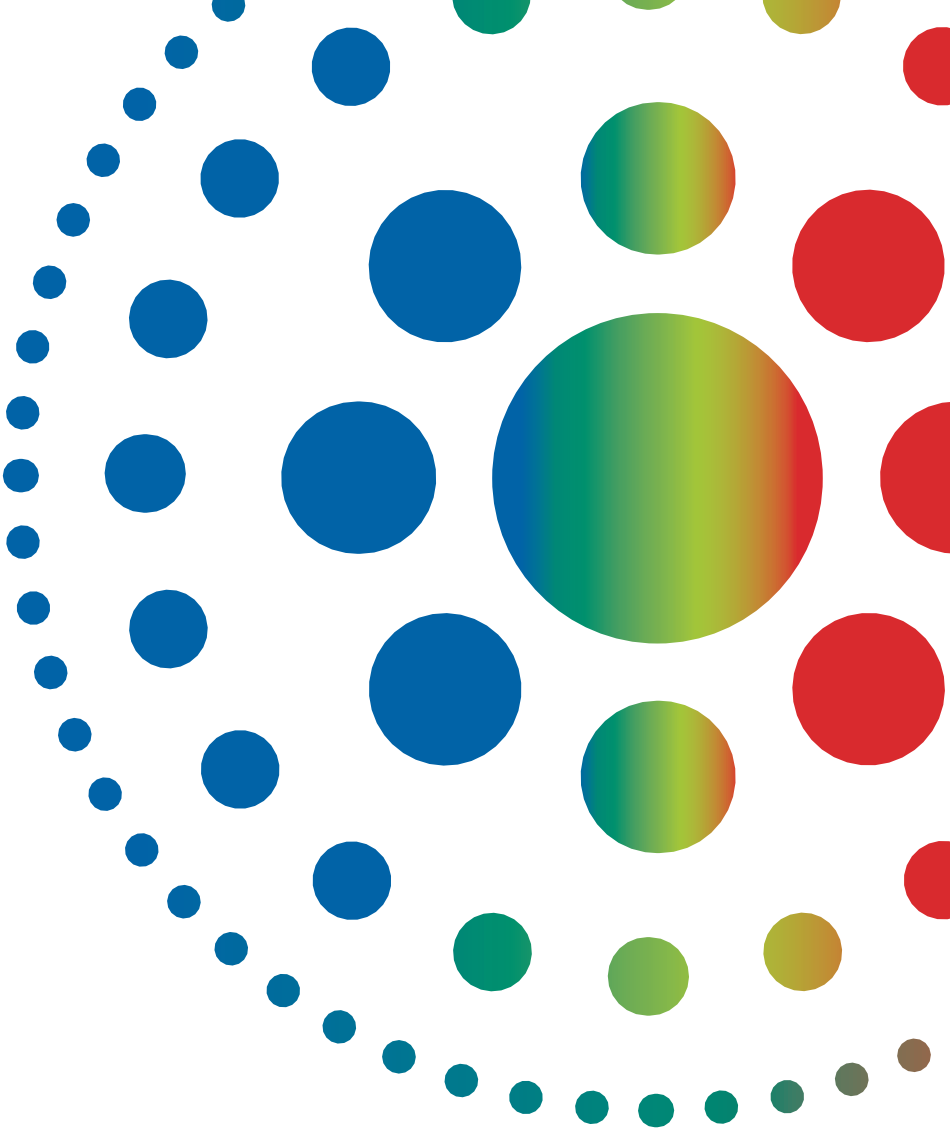
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Family Advocacy is an independent, impartial advocacy organisation that supports families across New South Wales to promote and defend the rights and interests of people with developmental disability\*. Our aim is to achieve positive social roles for people with disability through the development of advocacy by families and by strengthening the knowledge, role and influence of the family.

\*Developmental disability includes but is not limited to autism, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and multiple disability.

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