

STORIES FROM THE

**PAY IT
FORWARD
PLAN**

**GIVING YOUR
SUPPORT GROUP A HAND
TO CONNECT TO BETTER MENTAL HEALTH**



ConnectGroups
helping support groups & individuals



**Government of Western Australia
Mental Health Commission**

"Connection with others is fundamental to our mental wellbeing; it fulfils our need for social recognition and allows us to feel a sense of belonging. Over the years, the Pay it Forward Plan has been an invaluable support to Bi+ Community Perth in our work to facilitate connection for a group of people that often feel shame because of persistent invalidation and disapproval. Our work has helped members to accept their bisexuality and often become more comfortable with the idea of coming out to the important people in their lives. It has also created increased visibility of the unique issues we face within the broader community. As our group has grown and evolved over the years, the ConnectGroups team has provided consistent advice and offered a range of easily accessible funding opportunities that would otherwise not be available to an unincorporated organisation like ours. I don't know where groups like ours would be without them!"



Misty Farquhar, Bi+ Community Perth

Thank You

The Mental Health Commission's Sarah Green and Elena Cope for their steadfast support.

ConnectGroups Support Groups Association WA Inc.

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ConnectGroups is a
Mental Health First Aid
Gold Skilled Workplace.



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The Pay it Forward Plan

The Pay it Forward Plan (PIF) has been an effective ConnectGroups initiative supporting the sustainability and community-based mental health and wellbeing of peer Support Groups in WA since 2011. In that time, 300+ projects have been awarded to over 200 Support Groups building sector capacity and strengthening groups' service delivery.

Project planning and delivery is informed by 'The Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025'.

PIF targets peer Support Groups with a mental health focus and projects needed to:

1. Empower peer Support Groups to achieve positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes for their members.
2. Contribute to the prevention of mental distress and/or illness, and the recovery of mental health and wellbeing for peer Support Group members, families and/or carers.
3. Further peer Support Groups' mental health and wellbeing supports to their members.
4. Promote good mental health and wellbeing, a community of belonging and reduce social isolation.
5. Encourage peer Support Groups' mission, governance, and sustainability.

Continuous improvement and relationship building are critical components of the Pay it Forward Plan, optimising stakeholder access to the program, articulating the value of the small grants program to the sustainability of peer Support Groups, creating confidence in the collaborative approach to the submission process, and encouraging projects to further the PIF Plan's goals to positively impact mental health and wellbeing across WA.

The Results Based Accountability (RBA) evaluation tool generated the metrics needed to demonstrate the Pay it Forward Plan as evidence-based and a good practice model.

These stories reflect projects awarded from 2019 through 2022

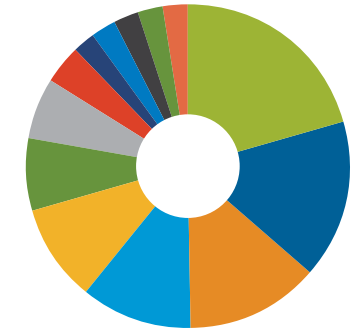
\$4,394	\$281,241	64	82	19,250
Average \$ Awarded per Support Group	\$ Awarded	Number of Support Groups Funded	Number of Projects Funded	Individuals Impacted



Priority Population

Other	20.73%
Mental Illness/Recovery	15.85%
LGBTIQ	13.41%
Carers	10.98%
Victims of Trauma	9.76%
Perinatal	7.32%
CaLD	6.1%
Addiction	3.66%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	2.44%
Criminal Justice System	2.44%

Men's Group	2.44%
Veterans	2.44%
Women's Group	2.44%



The Pay it Forward grants sustained Support Groups to improve mental health and wellbeing service delivery to their membership and the wider community, provided the tools to increase group recognition and membership, and improved mental health literacy contributing to reduced stigma and strengthened interventions.

The Pay it Forward Plan is a unique opportunity for mental health-focused peer Support Groups to obtain small grants funding. By promoting best practice at every stage, the Pay it Forward Plan continues to demonstrate that limited funds can lead to exceptional outcomes.

These are some of their stories.

Story 1

Albany Pride

Albany Pride campaigns for the visibility and acceptance of the LGBTIQ+ community within the City of Albany and surrounds, offering peer networking and support for people of all ages who identify as LGBTIQ+, their families and friends, locals, and visitors. The group provides a voice for LGBTIQ+ people in the Great Southern and fosters local support, acceptance and celebration of minority sexualities and gender identities.



Pay it Forward funded Albany Pride with Public Liability Insurance, marketing and promotion collateral, and media advertising to build wider awareness of the group and its activities in the region, promoting the inclusive peer support, social engagement, and targeted professional support offered.

The promotional campaign also resulted in reaching the broader, non LGBTIQ+ community, creating greater visibility and promoting Albany Pride's services to those who wouldn't ordinarily seek them out through social media. The campaign built a referral pathway from other support services and encouraged awareness and acceptance of the LGBTIQ+ community in Albany.



Story 2

Bi+ Community Perth

Bi+ Community Perth is the only group in WA offering a safe place for bi+ people of all genders to engage in discussion and form community. The group is volunteer-led supporting over 2,000 members and holds monthly events including two large events for Bi Visibility Day and Pride.



Pay it Forward funded the design, delivery and recording of an online Binary Busting workshop as well as inclusion of the expert guest speaker during the Stand Bi Us 2020 conference. The workshop was an opportunity to take the Binary Busting workshop previously funded by Pay it Forward virtual, developing a resource to build awareness of the issues faced by bisexual people in mental health service providers and other LGBTIQ+ organisations.

As a result of the project, bi+ people unaware of the existence of Australian bi+ community groups connected with Bi+ Community Perth, including extremely socially isolated people and those in regional areas. The group also experienced significant engagement from allies.

"I wanted to thank you (and Hanna) for the fantastic presentation you did yesterday. I learnt so much!"
Bye Bye Binaries attendee





Story 3

Blind Citizens of WA

Blind Citizens WA is a peer support organisation for those who are living with blindness, which has been operating for over 50 years and is the only blindness organisation with a Board comprised of people who are blind or have low vision. Their work is principally in the area of peer support and systemic advocacy.

Pay it Forward funded a project to convert Be Connected modules to improve members' daily use of online banking, MyGov, and the wider internet. Tasks included converting visually-based instruction (click on the paper clip to open an email) to keystrokes and adaptive instruction, as well as building an extensive interactive user guide to ensure that all links operated with screen readers and Apple and Android mobile phones, clearly articulating accessibility features, voice over gestures, and complex functionality.

The project has empowered group members to access training, learn safe online skills and assist them with tasks and technology to facilitate their daily lives.

Story 4

Carers Wellbeing

Carers Wellbeing is a carer Support Group based in Perth's northern suburbs and focuses on the holistic wellbeing of carers, meeting fortnightly, and creating a community based on connection, peer support, information sharing and encouragement for carers to focus on their own health and wellness.

Pay it Forward funded a series of self-care opportunities for the group's membership including yoga and sound healing, art therapy, kinesiology, mindful mastery and energy practice, drumming, and a carers week outing. In addition, funding was provided to support group venue hire and public liability insurance to continue to provide support to their membership.

The group continued to operate during COVID, mitigating the risk of carer isolation and becoming disconnected from friends and the wider community due to their caring role. The group frame their activities around the concept of mental wellbeing, as distress is a frequent group topic of conversation. Forging friendships and a support network supports the wellbeing of both carers and those being cared for.

"I started coming to carers wellbeing to create friendships with people on a similar journey to mine. Although I've only been coming to the group a short while, I've found a lovely group of ladies who listen without judgement, offer support when needed and have fun together."





Story 5

Chapman Valley Menshed

The Chapman Valley Menshed is a very active community group in Nabawa in the Shire of Chapman Valley, which is located 420km north of Perth and 35km east of Geraldton in the Midwest. The group formed in 2013 and meet weekly, regularly hosting mental health training as well as self-care workshops. Because of their remoteness, the group also focuses on delivering outreach events.

Pay it Forward funded part of the Shinema project - (Shed + Cinema = Shinema) updating the projector and the movie screen. In partnership with WAPHA, the Shinema bus travelled to rural and remote communities in the Midwest, providing live entertainment and movie screenings. As part of the event, mental health/suicide prevention resources were introduced, and short public service announcements screened.

In the last 4 years, the Shinema project has reached over 2,300 people - battling isolation, providing a reason to come together, have a chat, enjoy a film, and learn about available wellbeing supports.



Story 6

Courageous Women Multicultural Network

The Courageous Women Multicultural Network (CWMN) was established in 2015 in Gosnells and includes women from multiple nations. CWMN empowers women from CaLD backgrounds to overcome their social isolation and to be active members of the community, reducing the risk of social isolation and mental distress.



Pay it Forward funded a series of swimming classes for the women to develop their swimming capabilities, build their self-confidence around water, encourage a healthy lifestyle, and lessen their isolation and loneliness. Engaging in the classes supported the women's independence and community inclusion as well as forged belonging within the group.

The group promotes mental and physical health awareness, and the women have reported that their participation in group activities has had a significant impact on their mental health distress/challenges, and that the social and

physical activities during the swim classes have improved their energy and stress levels. They enjoy the comfort, laughter and story sharing that is a natural part of their group engagement.

“CWMN ladies shared that they enjoy the comfort and laughter with each other during aqua and sewing classes. Some of the ladies stated that CWMN group activities provides opportunities for members to interact and share their stories and regain strength to overcome their stress level, reduce their anxiety and depression, and improved their sleep patterns. Members are able to share tips and information about stress management strategies with the CWMN group.”



Story 7

EndometriosisWA

EndometriosisWA is a volunteer-operated organisation supporting over 4,700 Western Australians affected by endometriosis. They provide people affected by endometriosis with access to the best quality information and support and coordinate and deliver programs and activities to provide quality services and supports to people managing endometriosis.



Studies have demonstrated that endometriosis impairs sufferers' quality of life and mental health including moderate levels of depression, anxiety and stress. The peer Support Group not only supports members through the physical symptoms of endometriosis but also supports members with mental illness and mental health challenges.

Pay it Forward funded upskilling facilitators' mental health literacy through delivery of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. The training contributed to the group's sustainability by educating key members of the team to identify and confidently support people experiencing mental health distress. All group meetings now include a facilitator with MHFA training to support members.



"MHFA training gave me the confidence and skills required to effectively engage and support our members, particularly at in person events."



Story 8

Families 4 Families WA

Families 4 Families WA (F4FWA) is a peer-based, recovery-focused, support and education group for families and supporters of individuals who experience multiple, unmet needs which may include ongoing mental distress, compromised physical health, alcohol and other drug use and criminal justice involvement.



Pay it Forward funded delivery of self-advocacy training for families impacted by the strengthened Treatment, Support and Discharge Plan section of the revised 2014 Mental Health Act (MHA14), a key area of reform which empowers individuals, families and mandates services to complete this work under the Act.

Family members and supporters frequently share about the high levels of helplessness and distress they experience when someone they care for/about is detained under the MHA14 and their rights are not upheld leading to poor outcomes. By identifying and asserting their rights, family members and supporters have the opportunity to feel and be more empowered, hopeful and to take meaningful and helpful action for both their own mental health and that of the person under detention. This empowerment in turn supports an early intervention of the mental health challenges experienced by families and supporters.



Story 9

Men of Hope

Founded in 2016, Men of Hope (MoH) is a social network that provides men with opportunities to regularly connect with each other in an informal and safe setting, both in person and online and where wellbeing is encouraged by breaking the cycle of social isolation and supporting men to restore fractured relationships with family and friends. MoH is co-designed by participants for participants and more recently is convened through Black Swan Health.

Pay it Forward funded Men of Hope professional supervision to support the group's peer facilitators to debrief, share knowledge and experiences, discuss group improvements, and provide emotional support. Funding also provided marketing collateral for the group to increase group promotion and awareness.

"The supervision we received assisted me greatly to complete a Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Support. The supervision assisted me to hone my skills, as Milly who is a professional peer support worker, could guide me with best practice. The supervision both one-on-one, as well as the group supervision in particular the Workplace WRAP were excellent. I found the supervision invaluable. It grounded me as a person and focused and stimulated me to live out our goals."

Providing support for the group's peer Support Facilitators discourages burnout and provides an opportunity to discuss challenges, in particular issues related to boundaries and health and safety issues. Supervision also built Facilitator's skillsets around early intervention and crisis management.



Story 10

Mental Health Matters 2

Mental Health Matters 2 (MHM2) is a volunteer community action and advocacy group which was convened in February 2010 in Perth. It was created in response to concerns by family and community members about their own experiences and those of loved ones with mental health and or alcohol and other drug challenges who were 'falling through the gaps' and into the criminal justice system. These families and supporters saw the need for systemic advocacy and action.



Pay it Forward funded the engagement of a consultant to successfully navigate the group through the process of registration as a Company Limited by Guarantee and charity. Registration as a company and achieving Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status as a charity were deliberate sustainability initiatives to provide MHM2 with the governance to pursue and lead innovative projects which it was previously required to do in auspicing arrangements with other agencies.

The presence of a niche agency focused on the needs of people 'at the pointy end' benefits the sector and challenges the idea that this population is 'too hard' to engage or work with. It also provides a clear point of contact for government or other agencies with people with lived and living experience in these areas to inform effective co-design, delivery and review of services. Registration of MHM2 is supporting better outcomes for individuals with experiences of mental distress, and alcohol and other drug use who may also be involved in the criminal justice system.



Story 11

Miracle Babies

Miracle Babies supports premature and sick newborns, their families and the hospitals that care for them. Their vision is to create better, healthier outcomes for newborns and their families challenged by prematurity or sickness. Founded in 2005 by a group of mothers, Miracle Babies develops and provides programs and resources to support and enhance a family's experience from a threatened pregnancy to the hospital journey, the transition to home and beyond.



Pay it Forward funding supported Miracle Babies to build their mental health literacy by providing Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to 12 staff and volunteers. Increasing mental health knowledge improves outcomes for families by responsibly supporting their emotional wellbeing, acting as a protective factor against postnatal depression and increasing the effectiveness of Miracle Babies' peer support model.



MHFA training provided better understanding around the value of listening and empathy, and the knowledge to suggest interventions, and to help parents

realise their strengths and resilience. These are all key to early intervention and de-escalation of mental health issues.



Story 12

Multiple Birth Association Western Australia

Multiple Birth Association Western Australia (formerly Perth Districts Multiple Birth Association) is a not for profit run by a committee of volunteer parents of multiple birth children and supports over 500 families throughout Western Australia providing peer support services, advice, and education to multiple birth parents.



Pay it Forward funding supported the Association to build their mental health literacy by providing Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to their Management Committee. Supporting the mental health literacy of the group was an important opportunity to upskill key members and address Multiple Birth's mental health support strategic priority.

Multiple birth parents often experience isolation in the early months, increasing anxiety and mental health risk. MHFA training provided group facilitators with a better understanding of the signs of mental distress, providing effective intervention and better supporting the wellbeing of parents and families frequently overwhelmed by their experience.

"For me it was an eye opener. My mum has had a history of depression lasting as long as I can remember - I know her signs and triggers now. But to see the other ways it can show in a person as well as the progression from stress was really useful for me. I also found it very useful to learn how to communicate better with someone with mental health issues."





Story 13

MyLocalMind



MyLocalMind is a grassroots community wellbeing initiative with a mission to change the way mental health is viewed and treated in a community setting by being responsive to the needs of the local community; and to fill gaps in existing community mental health systems by creating an accepting space for community members to access evidence-based mental health and wellbeing services co-delivered by individuals with a lived experience of mental health issues and registered mental health professionals.

Pay it Forward funded the provision of mental health, psychoeducational training, and suicide prevention training to MyLocalMind community volunteers involved in Support Group service delivery, sustaining the organisation's capacity to provide evidence-based mental health support services to the community. Volunteers are more capable of identifying and managing psychological distress. The training also resulted in identification of community mental health champions who can effectively promote wellbeing into the wider community.

"Thanks for the MH training today. Was great to get a deeper understanding and I took away some valuable info."

Story 14

Open the Gate



Open the Gate is a Support Group operating in the Scott River, Karridale, Augusta and Nannup regions of WA working to increase prevention, intervention and accessibility to those impacted by suicide and mental distress. The group acts to increase community awareness and education, to reduce the stigma associated with mental distress while promoting help seeking behaviours to community members, and to improve access to local resources.

Pay it Forward funded the development of marketing materials, a website and social media content, and practical support for Open the Gate to travel across the region to promote their support services, and to deliver free training in suicide intervention and mental health awareness.

The roadshow concept resulted in increased community awareness of mental health, provided local clear information of how and where to access support, provided a counsellor on-site (at country field days), and resulted in increased Open the Gate membership.

"I've seen a lot of my mates suffer over the years from depression. It was nice to talk openly about depression in front of other people and not feel embarrassed about it. I fully support Open the Gate."



Story 15

Peel ADHD Parent Support

Peel ADHD Parent Support was established as a community group in 2019 by two mothers raising children and adolescents living with ADHD and passionate about raising community awareness and supporting fellow ADHD parents. The group is located in the Binjareb (Peel) region and has a mission to provide parents and carers with a support network reducing the isolation and negative feelings which affect ADHD families.

Pay it Forward funded practical support including venue hire and marketing materials to support the sustainability and awareness of the group in the Mandurah area.



*“THANK YOU!
Such a great experience,
I met some wonderful
and insightful women
and learnt a lot. I am
inspired to move forward
and find myself to
nurture me as well as my
family. I feel I have made
some wonderful friends.”*

Pay it Forward also funded a respite retreat for parents providing ADHD parenting strategies, self-care practices, and other supportive therapies to build confidence and ADHD management skills.

Supporting a sustainable network of likeminded people provided families with the opportunity to learn from others' experiences. Providing a space where families feel connected, understood, supported, and accepted opened doors to increase parental confidence and wellbeing.

*“Thank you so much
for this retreat I really
needed to recharge and
feel like me again. Such
a beautiful place to relax,
destress and have fun.”*



Story 16

PTSD West

PTSD West was founded in April 2019 and is a peer-led Support Group for WA women diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The group's vision is healing through connection, and they offer a safe space where women can share ideas and information about the healing journey.



Pay it Forward funded PTSD West with supervision for their group leaders to address safety and mental health support as well as refining the vision, mission, and rules of the group, supporting group continuity. Funding was also provided for practical support to hold meetings and build organisational awareness in the wider community. In addition, PTSD West was funded to provide self-care activities including yoga and TRE (tension release exercises), craft, writing and speaking and art workshops and a wellness retreat.



The project series has supported the group to grow their membership, connecting women living with PTSD - an under-recognised cohort - through meaningful activities, support, and information sharing.

“I joined the PTSD West group a few months ago, and have found the group to be very positive, very active and very dynamic. I have already met other members at coffee catch ups, and also at a great creative writing workshop (although members may choose to participate online only and find lots of positive interaction). PTSD can be a very isolating condition. PTSD West offers the opportunity to break isolation and share experiences with others in a safe way, which is both validating and comforting.”



Story 17

SANDS

SANDS (merged with Red Nose in 2020) is a volunteer-based organisation providing individualised care for bereaved parents, including support and hope for the future, following the death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or newborn death.

The loss of a baby is an intensely painful and isolating experience and often leads to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. There is also significant risk of relationship breakdown, presenteeism at work and poor parenting outcomes for other children. Pay it Forward funded the translation of SANDS' Easy English services brochure into 10 community languages to improve access to support for bereaved parents from CaLD communities who often struggle to access health services.

Through engagement, SANDS' multicultural services families were encouraged out of isolation and to seek support for their grief. Families from diverse cultures are increasingly aware that there are support services available for them. SANDS has seen a significant increase in the number of CaLD community members engaging with them, as well as referrals from health practitioners who are pleased to promote the service for hard-to-reach communities.



Story 18

Solace Grief Support Group WA

Solace Grief is a peer-led organisation that offers support to those who have lost (by death) their husband, wife, partner or fiancé. The support provided to those in need is a safe and secure place to be able to talk about their loss, what their life now is and how this has impacted on them and in many cases their children.



Pay it Forward funded the production of a collective impact resources booklet which included a 2-year diary and contemporary resources supporting loss, grief, trauma, health, and wellbeing as well as Solace's services and activities.

Loss and grief can manifest into more serious mental health issues such as complicated grief, depression and anxiety and the booklet provided a tangible resource of coping strategies and supports. Pay it Forward also supported the capacity-building of the group by providing stable venue hire for four (4) of Solace's Sharing and Caring Support Group locations, maintenance of the group's website, and a Zoom subscription to support online connection with their members.

Story 19

South West Women's Health and Information Centre (SWWHIC)



South West Women's Health and Information Centre, in partnership with the Radiance Network South West, established mums and babies peer Support Groups in the South West region, addressing mothers at risk of post-natal depression, anxiety and stress; and filling a service gap for women in the Bunbury and Busselton areas.

Pay it Forward funded the pilot of a new mums and babies group in Collie, acting as an early intervention strategy for at-risk women. The group also encourages social connection for mothers living and raising families in this isolated town. Participants have shared that they feel less isolated and anxious and that being supported in a non-judgmental group environment

normalised how they were feeling as new mothers. They felt heard and validated and the peer support provided them with hope for recovery.

Confidence in parenting was a key outcome for participants, contributing to improved attachment to their babies, enhanced mental wellbeing, connection with others, and a sense of being better supported within their community. The Radiance Network South West now runs Support Groups in Bunbury Busselton, Collie and Margaret River and has expanded to include further services delivered across the South West region.

"Coming to the group has helped me to realise I'm not alone with how I'm feeling."



"It is a safe space, with no judgement, it helps so much with the mother guilt."

Story 20

SWEAR WA



WEAR WA (Sex Work; Education, Advocacy & Rights WA) is WA's peer-run and led sex worker organisation, providing peer support, peer education, outreach services, and advocacy and referral services to WA sex workers. SWEAR also provides community and government consultation, education and awareness on sex work issues, facilitates peer-only social events and online safe spaces, and lobbies for the complete decriminalisation of sex work in Western Australia.

Pay it Forward funded the delivery of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for SWEAR Committee members, the SWEAR website annual hosting and domain fees, and subscriptions to Canva Pro and Adobe Acrobat Pro to allow the group to continue producing materials and resources.

The SWEAR website keeps sex workers up to date with details of upcoming peer-only social events (which are very important as many sex workers are isolated or alienated from other informal supports such as friends and family), as well as providing invaluable updates on law reform, sexual health information, and sex work specific advice around COVID. The funding also supported the group to streamline administrative and communications processes, freeing up more time to provide peer support and outreach services.

"Sex workers often experience barriers in accessing essential services such as housing, employment and welfare because of the stigmatisation of sex work. These factors can understandably cause great distress and disadvantage and impact their mental health and wellbeing."



Story 21

The Inner Ninja Foundation

The Inner Ninja Foundation provides an open women's forum/group (18 years plus) that provides women a safe space to discuss and understand mental health issues through discussions and lived experience. The meetings encourage open communication and reduce the social stigma of mental illness issues including bullying, anxiety, bipolar, personality disorders, depression, self-harm, and suicide.

Pay it Forward funded Inner Ninja with marketing and promotional materials to build external brand awareness and encourage community interest in the group. Funding supported the group to consistently provide support during the pandemic.

The group's outcomes included improved mental wellness for women in the community and access to resources to support women to achieve better mental quality of life particularly during the challenges imposed by COVID-19.



"This group saved my life. I had nothing to look forward to but knowing I would have a group of women to support me each month made it that bit easier to keep going. Thank you Stef for always turning up for us."

Story 22

WA Autistic Adults Support Group (WA3)

WA3 is a peer Support Group for autistic adults providing peer-led support, information, and capacity building to all members. The group has a thriving closed Facebook group and there is a good level of engagement and interaction. Practical information is often sought or offered, personal issues are shared in a safe and supportive environment, and any subject can provide the opportunity for interpersonal connection which is often lacking in the lives of autistic persons.

Pay it Forward supported WA3 to action the diversity of ideas presented by members, building on previous work to ensure participation and inclusivity. Funding included providing a secure venue for the group, autism-friending games and workshop contributing to meaningful connection for WA3 members.

Reduction of the social isolation experienced by adults living with autism was the key outcome of the WA3 project.

"The grant helped with enabling me to meet other autistic people and to connect. Sometimes we shared stories about how we struggle in certain situations, and I didn't realise how much we would have in common. It was great to be able to see and speak to other autistic adults and to have that space."

Story 23

Women of World Stage (WOWS)

Women of World Stage (WOWS) supports multicultural women and their families through a diverse range of activities. WOWS focuses on encouraging a positive mindset by learning about other cultures, building friendships with others from different backgrounds, discovering their power and talents, and becoming confident and happier by feeling included, safe and with a sense of belonging through activities that are fun, uplifting, inspiring, informative, educative, creative, innovative and very multicultural.

Pay it Forwarded supported building WOWS' capacity by funding their website development, domain hosting and registration, and training for members to update their website content.

WOWS benefited from the project by building community awareness of the peer group and resulting in more community contacts supporting women seeking support and friendship. The website also allowed the group to better promote its activities, increasing participation and connection.



Beyond the Stories - Investing In Our Members Strengths

ConnectGroups is committed to demonstrating best practice and continuous improvement in order to best serve its members and ensure that Pay it Forward remains responsive, relevant, and effective. Innovative approaches to identified needs and mental health and wellbeing promotion are key program objectives.

The following initiatives represent strengths-based approaches that positively impact peer Support Groups, their members, their facilitators/leaders, and the wider community throughout WA.

Workforce Development/Cert IV in Community Services

ConnectGroups funds a scholarship program toward a Certificate IV in Community Services to improve sector job readiness and employment pathways in the Community Services sector, and to validate and upskill Support Group facilitators and leaders to effectively manage their groups. This tertiary training enhances group leaders' existing skillsets and strengths to safely respond to contemporary issues with their groups and within their employment.

The initiative launched in 2012 and more than 100 participants have benefited from the training. Data indicates that confidence within the cohorts to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of their membership is significantly higher following participation in the program with confidence levels increased across all measured indicators.



Funds are allocated from the Pay it Forward Plan, which supports the Mental Health 2020 reform to build a sustainable workforce and is aligned to "The Peer Workforce Report"¹, and the Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy².

¹ The Peer Workforce Report – Mental health and alcohol and other drug services. WAPSN: WA Peer Supporters Network 2018

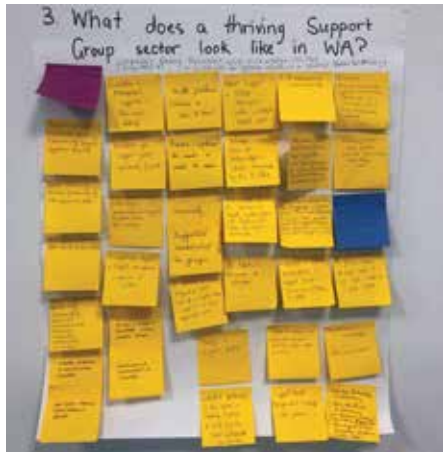
² WA State Training Board 2019



ConnectGroups Regional and Rural Strategy

Partnerships and Collaboration

ConnectGroups' Regional Strategy is an organisational priority in order to provide state-wide support through place-based responses to regional gaps in service provision. Regional engagement has identified significant unmet needs and opportunities for ConnectGroups as the Peak body to target sector development and stakeholder engagement in the regions. The strategy broadens the reach and influence of core business, identifies existing and emerging peer Support Groups and services, addresses unmet community need, and builds awareness and access to the small grants. Engaging and supporting regional groups builds capacity in the Community Services and peer Support Group sectors to address the unique issues and circumstances outside of the metro area.



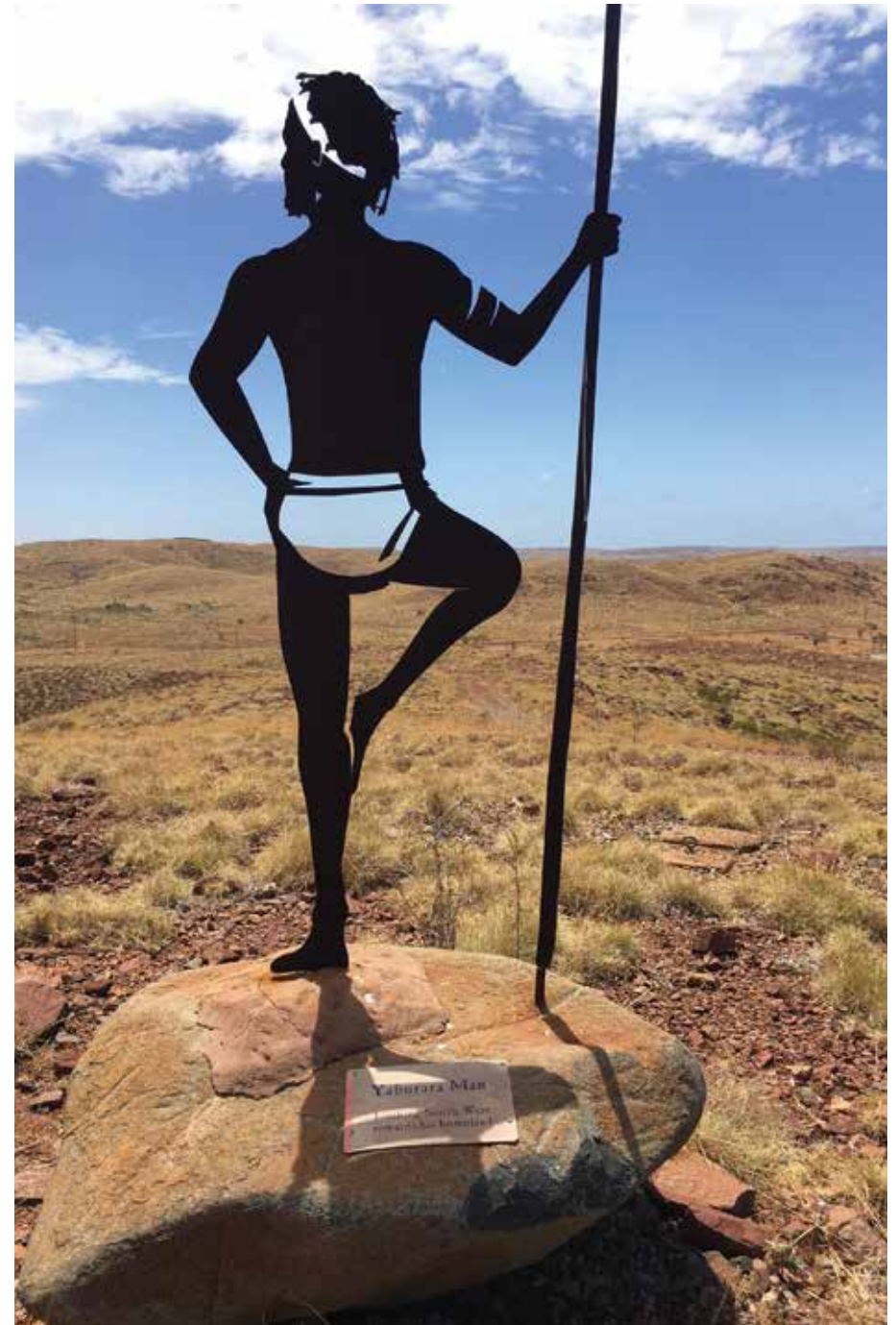
A key lever in the success of the Regional Strategy is to forge partnership with the relevant Shire or City. These regional partnerships are essential in the sharing of local knowledge, networking, and referrals about new and emerging groups, networks, and services.

As part of the Strategy, ConnectGroups focused on the Pilbara and the Southwest establishing significant traction in those two regions and addressing the following strategic objectives:

1. Maintain ConnectGroups' presence in the regions to support the needs of regional members.
2. Work closely with local government and community leadership groups.
3. Provide intensive support to new and emerging Support Groups in the regions.
4. Expand the number of ConnectGroups Associate and Affiliate memberships in regional WA.
5. Promote Pay it Forward in regional WA, to drive and increase regional and rural grant submissions and by extension meet the principle of state-wide representation.

ConnectGroups engaged with stakeholders and service providers in Karratha, Roebourne, Port Hedland, Dampier, Newman and Tom Price, reinforcing relationships and collaboration. Priority activities also included progressing post-engagement actions and continuing to strengthen partnership with the City of Karratha.

ConnectGroups continued to progress relationship-building and the delivery of sector development activities and intensive support across the South West, building local capacity and driving traffic to Pay it Forward while also strengthening alliances with the Shire of Augusta Margaret River and Cities of Busselton and Bunbury's Community Development teams, and effectively promoting the ConnectGroups leadership brand



ConnectGroups' Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

ConnectGroups was pleased to launch its first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) during NAIDOC week to demonstrate its pledge and commitment to First Nations Australians.

The Reflect RAP is a partnership and organisational strategy which articulates how ConnectGroups will work towards greater understanding, cooperation, and trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, and communities.

The beautiful artwork which illustrates ConnectGroups' RAP was developed as an act of reconciliation between Aboriginal students from St. Catherine's College Dandjoo Darbalung program in collaboration with St Hilda's School for Girls. Students and staff participated in a series of workshops run by Dandjoo Darbalung students where they discussed the importance of family while learning about the 6 Nyoongar seasons. Each student created their own interpretation of what family meant for them before recording it on the canvas. Together they created the giant canvas symbolising the importance of community and the sharing of knowledge.



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ConnectGroups acknowledges the traditional carers of country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures; and to Elders past, present, and emerging. ConnectGroups acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation as the Traditional Carers of the land on which our offices stand today.

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