

The Making of SQuAD

The Sydney Queer and
Disability Community Group



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This resource was developed by Ability Links NSW, St Vincent de Paul Society. It sets out why and how SQuAD, the Sydney Queer and Disability network for people who live with a disability and identify as LGBTIQ+, was developed. It aims to support anyone interested in developing a similar group or network by setting out how SQuAD was established and developed, and to share resources, lessons and tips.

The document contains questions for the reader as a point of reflection/action, *highlighted in green italicised type*, which are also summarised in the “Tips and Lessons” section on page 22.



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Why? SQuAD in summary

The establishment of a network for people who identify as being LGBTIQ+ and living with a disability began with the day-to-day work of Ability Links NSW. Ability Links is a NSW State Government-funded program aimed at people with disability, their families and carers, and promotes accessibility and inclusion. It does this by linking people and communities with opportunities.

Through their work with individuals, Ability Linkers learned that people who identify as being LGBTIQ+ and who have a lived experience of a disability felt specifically marginalised – they felt isolated from the disability community for identifying as LGBTIQ+, and apart from the LGBTIQ+ community for having a disability.

In addition to this working knowledge, Ability Linkers participated in training provided by the ACON (AIDS Council of NSW) which focused on LGBTIQ+ inclusion. This informed Linkers of the need to directly engage with this community, which was recognised as having unique cultural needs. Linkers also attended the LBQ women's health conference which highlighted the specific needs and significant barriers for LGBT people, and identified a gap in services and supports for LGBT people with disabilities.

To better understand what people were telling them, and the broader context of the issues raised, Ability Linkers conducted a scan of existing research. Their scan turned up a study which identified that the intersectional identity of being both LGBTIQ+ and having a disability can create unique barriers. According to a 2018 LaTrobe University study, up to 23% of LGBTIQ+ people who identify with having a disability report disproportionately higher levels of stress and anxiety.



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The study highlighted the importance of community ownership to reduce those barriers, by enabling peer support, empowerment and community development. That concept was also supported by a University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre report on peer support practice in Australia, prepared for the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Australia New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). It can be found online, here:

<http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:51693/bina4185a59-199e-4811-87eb-8c6e82ef2a95?view=true>

This was where Ability Linkers' work, specifically-related to SQuAD's establishment, really began. Ability Links' first job was to identify if, how and to what degree the need for more specific support and a network or group might exist more broadly in the community. If the need was sufficiently established, the next step would be to engage the community to identify the best way/s to address that need.

Through engaging with individuals known to Ability Links, interested organisations, potential partners, and representatives of existing forums and groups engaged with people in the relevant communities, Ability Linkers established that there was indeed a need in the community. The feedback gathered from the range of sources as outlined above suggested that a support network would help answer some of those needs and, through creating a platform for further discussions, work towards a series of goals which they went on to identify.



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Ability Links' role was to support and facilitate the establishment of a network or group, through linking interested parties together with existing supports and resources and working together with them, with a view to building the community's capacity to continue operating in a sustainable and independent way.

In response to those findings and all of their research, a small team of Linkers brought together people from the community to form a working party, later named the Rainbow Working Party. The working party continued to consult with the community, further exploring the concept and value of a peer network.

An expression of interest was issued, including to other Ability Links providers such as Settlement Services International (SSI), as well as to known individuals with lived experience, the Rainbow Bridge Social Club (a social group for LGBTIQ+ people with intellectual disabilities), the Council for Intellectual Disability, and others.

A series of meetings and events were then held to gather information, and define the group's aims, desired outcomes, and agreed actions. Events were planned and well-attended and the network's profile continued to grow.

The group now involves more than 250 members via a social media platform (Facebook), many of who meet regularly face-to-face, with up to 30 people at each meeting, as well as attending events. The Facebook group page is private and people wishing to join answer three questions relevant to their lived experience, which is then vetted by admins/moderators of the page.



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Facebook group members post daily with stories about their experiences, their disability and their sexuality and gender identity, creating an online cultural and community hub - a safe space for peer support, advocacy and social connection. A code of conduct is listed on the Facebook groups page. All posts are monitored and approved by SQuAD administrators.

As at December 2018, Ability Linkers had worked with SQuAD members to create an organising/steering committee, known as SQuAD Core, which went on to allocate a series of more formal roles to better manage the group's needs.

SQuAD Core has identified several areas of focus, and potential ways forward, and have determined to explore options including applications for grants, creation of a business entity with its own an ABN (Australian Business Number), the staging of future events including participation in Mardi Gras 2019, and the design and creation of a logo.

Ability Linkers are confident that the group will continue, and do so independently of Ability Links.

Evidence of the group's success and growing independence to date include SQuAD member's participation in a LGBTQIA+ conference in the Better Together Conference 2019 run by the Equality Project. The session was held on day 2, titled: "Queer & Disabled: Intersections, inclusions, solidarity, community, by Sydney Queer and Disabled group (SQuAD)". Other stories of success are shared on page 22.



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Who and How? Getting started

The concept of a network for people who live with a disability and identify as LGBTIQ+ came from conversations with people engaged with Ability Links. They talked about feeling marginalised and living on the fringes of both communities. Having become aware of that need, and participating in formal work-based training which exposed them to resources and ways of thinking, Ability Linkers conducted some research of their own. They wanted to establish what services already existed which might answer the community's needs, and what further evidence might exist to provide some context around the issues raised.

Ability Linkers also worked to better identify and establish the level and nature of need via a process of consultation and genuine engagement with people who identify as being LGBTIQ+ and who live with a disability. That work involved identifying key organisations and groups, as well as individuals.

Ability Linkers engaged with the Council for Intellectual Disability, and the Rainbow Bridge Social Club, as well as individuals known to Ability Links. The response was positive and an expression of interest in forming a working party was issued.

Expressions of interest came back from individuals as well as people representing organisations the Council for Intellectual Disability and the Rainbow Bridge Social Club, in response to which Ability Links facilitated a meeting to discuss and explore the issues.



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Q: What are the issues in your area? Reach out to people in your local community and start a conversation.

Through discussions at the first meeting the concept of a peer group/network to support increased connection and belonging members was raised, and the bare bones of a working party, then named the Rainbow Working Party, was formed.

Members of the Rainbow Working Party included Ability Links staff from St Vincent de Paul Society and Settlement Services International (SSI), and community members.

Q: Starting a working party helps ensure diverse and expert voices are heard. Who else could you include in your working party?



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What? Identifying the aims, desired outcomes, and actions

Aims: The Rainbow Working Party developed a tagline to sum up its chief aims:

“To establish and provide ongoing support to a self-sustaining, inclusive community group for people with disabilities who identify as LGBTIQ+, and their supporters. Run by the people, for the people.”

The associated aims identified by the working party were:

- To establish a community group/network for people who identify as being LGBTIQ+ and who live with a disability.
- To support the group to become self-sustaining, and led by people with lived experience
- Develop partnerships with stakeholders, such as services and organisations which could provide ongoing support to the Rainbow Working Party and established network/group
- To have people with disabilities/LGBTIQ+ people feel more like a part of the LGBTIQ+ community, disability community, and the wider community.



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As part of this process, the Rainbow Working Party held an event to unite the community in celebration of LGBTIQ+ and disability pride, and consult with them on their needs and wants. Those who attended highlighted gaps in services and supported the concept of a peer-led community group. At that meeting the idea of creating a Facebook page for social connection and event organisation was also raised.

During subsequent meetings, and as members became more involved, they expanded on, and fine-tuned their aims to include the following:

- To build capacity of members of the group to become advocates for change
- To identify and consult on gaps in LGBTIQ+ services, and disability services and to feed this back
- To determine direction, training and support needs
- To advocate/advise on needs and issues for people with disabilities who are LGBTIQ+
- To establish vision and group process/format
- To access social opportunities and support
- To raise awareness and visibility of LGBTIQ+/PWD issues and concerns
- To provide advice and feedback for organisations' Disability and Inclusion Action Plans (DIAPS)
- To improve access and inclusion at LGBTIQ+ venues and events
- To create a safe space for PWD who are LGBTIQ+



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Actions: The Rainbow Working Party went on to develop some broad areas for action to help drive the project forward, and ensure broader consultation with the community.

Key focus areas identified included the need for:

- Promotion
- Stakeholder engagement
- Continued consultation
- Sustainability

Q: Making a list of aims and issues together gives everyone a common purpose. What are the most important aims for your working party? What do you hope the group will have achieved in two years' time?

Promotion, consultation and stakeholder engagement:

Promotion was identified as being an important part of getting the word out to, and engaging with, potential members and stakeholders. The working party came up with strategies including: brainstorming places and events that were already LGBTIQ+ and/or disability friendly and inclusive (including online platforms eg: finding and contacting Facebook groups and pages directly proved to be the most successful strategy to get the word out about the group); reaching out to stakeholders including organisations such as: local councils, ACON, Twenty10, Northcott, CID, and Family Planning.



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They decided to: promote the group with posters, establish a SQuAD Facebook page, link with the Council for Intellectual Disability for support and training, stage a community meeting, and engage with stakeholders. Plans for promotion, consultation and stakeholder engagement were documented in the following way:

Where e.g. local interagency, local cafes, specific publications	Mode / Media e.g. social media, web post, press release / face to face, poster etc	Whose Responsible
Visit Cafes & restaurants in areas where people who are LGBTIQ+ are known to go	Poster – created via a paid graphic designer or through free website Canva.	Rainbow Working Party
Attend Fair Day	Face to face outreach with posters, sign-up sheet	Rainbow Working Party
Attend Mardi Gras Film Festival	Speech at the cinemas, with flyers	Rainbow Working Party
Create a Facebook page group		



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Meeting Posters: This poster (below) was designed to catch the attention of potential new members and invite them to the community group's first official meeting:

- The access symbols which appear at the bottom of this “meeting poster” were developed by St Vincent de Paul Society- Ability Links NSW..



[Image description: Poster with blue and black text, with rainbow borders on the top & bottom. Image text: “Sydney LGBTIQ+ and Disability Community Group, Our first official meeting! When 26/04/2018, 6:30 – 8:30pm. Where: Rainbow Room, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre. Who: People with disabilities and / or mental health issues, LGTIQA+ people, and their allies. Why: If you’re interested in advocacy, peer support or want to make new friends! To RSVP and for any questions or requests for additional access needs please email qdcommunitygroup@gmail.com or call/text Troy on 0477 550 484]



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This poster (left) was developed to promote the community group once it was established and given the name SQUAD- Sydney Queer and Disability group.

*Q: What are some relevant organisations in your local area?
Brainstorm five!*

[Image description: Poster with blue and black text, with rainbow borders on the top and bottom. The text is as follows: “Are you LGBTIQA+? Do you have a disability and/or mental health issue? Do you have an interest in advocacy, peer support or want to make new friends? Join your new SQuAD! Find us on Facebook: ‘SQuAD – Sydney Queer and Disability community group’ or email qdcommunitygroup@gmail.com”]



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Fair Day: Rainbow Working Party members attended Fair Day, a day of celebration and connection for the LGBTIQ+ community and supporters, to promote the work of the Rainbow Working Party, and its aim to work with the community to develop a community group /

network for people with disability that identify as LGBTIQ+. There was significant interest in the idea with lots of people approaching the stall to find out more.

Q: Community events can be great ways of reaching new people and building a movement. What events could your group be part of?

[Image description: linkers smiling broadly with rainbow suspenders, in a stall for Ability Links NSW at Fair Day 2018.]

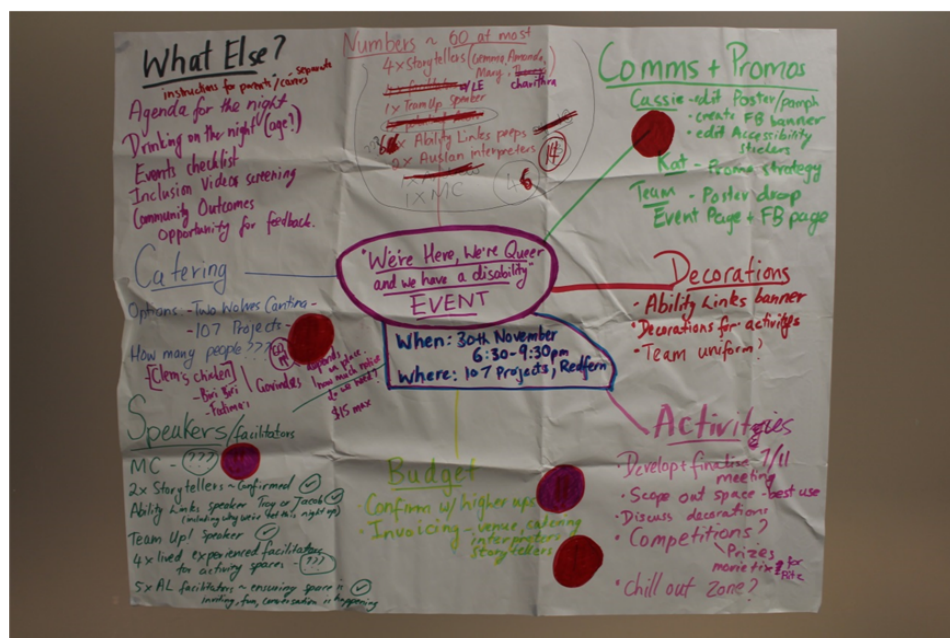


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The Launch: A significant amount of planning was put into designing and organising a community launch event to ensure it was promoted to those 'hard to reach people' and other marginalised groups and individuals. Below is the mind map that was developed as part of the planning:



[image description: A picture of large piece of butchers papers – a mind map of the event. In the centre is the name of the event, and when and where it would be held. A series of focus areas for organising the event are covered with arrows pointing toward each. Topics included:

- Catering
- Numbers of attendees & Volunteers
- Speakers & Facilitators
- Activities
- Comms and Promos
- Budget
- Decorations
- What else you need to think about?]

Resource Required	Estimated Cost
Venue	\$660
Storytellers	\$800
Auslan Interpreters	\$500
MC (performances & acknowledgement)	\$450
Catering	\$600
Decorations & Flyers	\$90
Total	\$3090

The following content was used to promote the community event: Ability Links presents:

“We’re Here, We’re Queer & We Have a Disability!” A free, community event for LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities, coinciding with Social Inclusion Week. Ability Links works with people with disabilities connecting them into opportunities, with a broader aim of creating a more accessible and inclusive community.

On Thursday, November 30, in the 107 Projects rooftop courtyard in Redfern, come and join us for a night of storytelling, creativity, discussions, competitions and more! Throughout the night we aim to help facilitate a conversation and advocacy around the intersection of disability and sexual diversity, while offering the chance for people to engage with their community in a fun and vibrant environment. (MC Nana Miss Koori)”



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The event was attended by 45 people who together created and enjoyed a welcoming environment. People introduced themselves and talked. Topics raised throughout the evening included sex and relationships, accessibility, attitudes, mental health and “what’s not being talked about”.

Ability Linkers chatted to those in attendance, some of whom talked about a “distinct lack of services” west of Sydney, citing the travel as a major obstacle, preventing them from easily attending events and interacting with their community.

The night ended with a call for those interested to join the community group. There was a lot of interest and momentum leaving Ability Linkers feeling very optimistic about the group’s value and potential.



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Budget / Resources

Members of the Rainbow Working Party also looked into the issue of an operating budget. The obvious ongoing cost to the group was the associated costs of meetings. The Rainbow Working Party came up with the following costing based on a two-hour meeting with 20-30 people in attendance.

Resource	Estimated costs	Who is responsible?
Auslan interpreters (please see Learnings section for tips)	\$60-\$120 an hour (Prices vary if you go through agency or freelancer) Minimum 2 hours WHS: Two Auslan interpreters required for over 1 hour work	
Room/Venue Hire	\$30-60	
Supplies for Activities Textas, pens, pencils, paper, butchers paper	\$50	
Catering - light refreshments	\$50	
Launch event	\$3090	



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Sustainability

Ability Links NSW, in all its community development activities, builds in strategies for sustainability beyond the program's involvement. It is an important part of Ability Links' work that all community development activities it becomes involved with are ultimately owned by the community. The following strategies for sustainability were developed:

- Identify and engage community groups which have crossover participants, and work together to cross-promote, and organise crossover events and meetings
- Ensure the Facebook group page is managed by group members
- Ensure resources are shared on Facebook group page, for example: posters, other community groups
- Enter into formal partnership arrangements for on-going support, e.g. ACON, Twenty10, Northcott, CID, Family Planning
- Identify natural leaders within the community group, support and build their capacity to take on a leadership role in the group.
- Partner with Council for Intellectual Disability to deliver group facilitation training for the community group members (this training is run state-wide).
- Share project information and resources with a broader audience to support the development of peer led LGBTIQ+ /Disability networks in other regions.
- Establish a core organising committee for the group. Community members who were identified as leaders sent out an Expression of Interest to the wider Facebook group page. They established SQuAD Core from this EOI. The organising committee ensures there are key



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people responsible for management of the group and its growing numbers, coordinating events, and engaging with stakeholders.

- Assist the group to scope out opportunities where they can advocate for their community - connect them into organisations that may need assistance to transform their disability and/or queer inclusion.
- Assist members of SQuAD Core to seek out leadership opportunities. As an example, Ability Links NSW provided funding for two members of SQuAD Core to undergo LGBTIQ+ Leadership Training provided by Melbourne based Equality Project - this training is run in different locations throughout Australia.
- Assist the group to get an ABN and research options for potential charity status or incorporation. Provide them with options, and let them decide which path they would like to take.

Q: How will you ensure the community group you create will continue beyond your involvement?



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Timeline of milestones

- Identifying the need – research and consultations: May '17 - August '17 – Ability Linkers SVDP
- Development of working party: August '17 – September '17 Ability Linkers SVDP & SSI
- Consultation with community members, event planning: September '17 – November '17 – Rainbow Working Party
- “We’re here, We’re queer, We have a disability!” community launch event and consultation – 45 people in attendance: November '17 – Rainbow Working Party
- Facebook group page set up by community member: February '18 – Rainbow Working Party and Community Member
- Fair Day and Mardi Gras Film Festival community group consultations and promotions: February '18 – March '18 – Rainbow Working Party
- First official meeting. New name for the group established: SQuAD: Sydney Queer and Disability community group. 30 people in attendance: April '18 – Community member and Linkers
- SQuAD received peer group funding from the Council for Intellectual Disability (CID), handled by community member with CID’s support: May '18 – Community members
- SQuAD planning meeting: June '18 – facilitated by Council for Intellectual Disability (CID)
- SQuAD and Ability Links’ meeting with Queer Screen Film Festival consulting about accessibility: August '18
- Sent out an expression of interest to be a member of the SQuAD organising committee – SQuAD Core: September - October '18 – Community Member



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- SQuAD Core first meeting – 9 members: November '18 - SQuAD Core
- SQuAD End of Year party – organised independently: December '18 - SQuAD Core
- SQuAD Core second meeting – 9 members: January '19 – Core
- SQuAD picnic at Camperdown Park January 27th '19 – Community members

Stories of success

- SQuAD has successfully initiated conversations around access and inclusion. They reached out to and had a meeting with Queer Screen – a non-profit organisation that holds two large film festivals a year. As a result, Queer Screen will provide improved signage, warnings for films that feature strobe lighting, and more closed/open captioned movies.
- SQuAD has independently organised its first general meeting, with the Bankstown-Canterbury Council providing a meeting space in Bankstown Library for free.
- SQuAD has established a code of conduct, and discussed future events and festivals to become a part of
- SQuAD also organised its first social outing – an open captioned screening of the film Antman and The Wasp, at The Ritz in Randwick.
- Ability Links NSW facilitated a connection for SQuAD with the City of Sydney Council, and the organisers of Wear It Purple – a national day for queer youth awareness. SQuAD planned to attend independently – and promote SQuAD to the community.



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Lessons and Tips

A lot was learned along the way, from the development of the Rainbow Working party, through the community engagement and the establishment of the network, and following the network's official launch. Some of the standout lessons, and our tips, include:

- Research your community to establish what services, key organisations and groups already exist that you can involve, consult and learn from, in both sectors – disability and LGBTIQA. This may include Social Media, social groups including MeetUp, LGBTIQA+ specific organisations, disability service providers, and community organisations that provide services to LGBTIQA+ people and/or people with disabilities
- When involving stakeholders for the group, consider involving local community members with lived experience and identified community leaders
- Have an understanding of the intersection of sexuality and disability
- Establish protocols to help create a 'safe space' before any event – protocol might involve an agreement outlining the rules of the group's engagement possibly emphasising the respectful, non-judgemental treatment of each other, or laying down some etiquette during housekeeping. It may also include the use of Rainbow signage, or access inclusion stickers.
- Development of a working party in the early stages is beneficial
- As a group, develop an aim to help stay on track – continually check back to ensure the actions the group are taking are in line with the group's aims. Your aim should be short and memorable



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- In determining outcomes, perhaps ask: “In 2 years what do you hope the group will have achieved?”
- You may want to develop an action plan to map out what you will do to achieve your aims. This can provide clarity around priorities and deadlines. In this project, the group chose not to develop an action plan, and instead identified a number of actions during each meeting. For ease of tracking, it is recommended to utilise an action plan
- Stakeholder Involvement: Whenever you contact someone new and they have proved helpful, and could potentially become a partner to support the working partner or the community group, list them here and let that list grow. Start by writing down any relevant organisations/groups you are already aware of.
- Community centres are low cost to hire. Always check accessibility of a venue in person – accessibility of a venue can be open to interpretation.

Auslan Interpreter Hiring Tips

- Auslan Interpreters are in high demand and low supply
- Book them a minimum 2 weeks in advance – the sooner the better. They are often an afterthought for a lot of event organisers.
- If they are needed for more than one hour, you will have to have a second interpreter for WHS reasons
- They typically cost \$60-\$120 p/h, these rates change depending on time of day and day of the week
- Send them as much detail about the work as possible, including any notes used for speeches, slides etc. This gives them time to prepare and give the highest quality interpreting



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- If hiring through an agency, specify that you would like a LGBTIQ+ friendly interpreter
- Always ask the interpreter what they need to provide the best interpreting. Ensure the space is adequately set up – set aside space for the interpreter and people who will need to see the interpreter. If workshop situation, ensure that everyone can see one another's faces.
- Ensure all videos shown have captions and are on regardless of who is in the room.

Risk Management Plan

- Ensure a risk management plan is in place prior to any event
- Have information available on mental health services, where needed.
- Ensure privacy of members e.g. BCC any emails to the community group members
- Establish a code of conduct or group agreement to help create a positive group culture
- Where possible, have someone in attendance that has accidental counselling skills and who understands trauma informed approaches and mental health first aid. There are times that this is needed.

Event Planning

- Lock in a date and event/meeting space asap- it relieves stress and gives you a place and date to work toward
- Ensure you have your project plan complete well before the first meeting and/or event
- Map out priorities and set deadlines



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- Venue accessibility – Ensure clear directions are obtained from staff at the site on any access requirements
- Geographic location – try to hold meetings at a centralised location with the option to move around if the geographical area for the group is large
- Consider a back-up plan for catering
- Plan extra activities as a back-up if needed when an activity that is planned doesn't pan out
- Be flexible with the running format and activities

Promotion

- Ensure promotion in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and different languages – ensure there is some thought put into how you can engage communities that are often marginalised
- Create a Facebook Page in addition to the Facebook Group – this can be used to further promote the group and its achievements to the public, without people requiring to join the group
- Contacting Facebook groups and pages directly proved to be the most successful strategy to get the word out about the group.
- Posters can be made using the free website CANVA.
- The access symbols shown on the bottom of the “meeting poster” were developed by St Vincent de Paul Society- Ability Links NSW. If you would like to have your business or organisation mapped for access give us a call or drop an email and we can provide you with further information.
- Resources to be shared on Facebook group page, for example: posters, other community groups.



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Partnerships

- Where there are partnerships formed ensure there is clear communication and transparency about budgets, financial contributions, and member involvement/responsibilities.
- Create your own stakeholder engagement strategy outlining the roles of each stakeholder
- Enter into formal partnership arrangements with existing organisations for on-going support, e.g. ACON, Twenty10, Northcott, CID, Family Planning
- Identify natural leaders within the community group, support and build their capacity to take on a leadership role in the group.
- Partner with Council for Intellectual Disability or similar organisation in your area to deliver group facilitation training for the community group members.
- Share project information and resources with a broader audience to support the development of peer led LGBTIQ+ /Disability networks in other regions.



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A big thanks and acknowledgement to the Rainbow Working Party who in the beginning took the initiative to explore access and inclusion issues across the LGBTIQ+ / Disability communities which resulted in the formation of the SQUAD Community Group.

Community Representatives: Charlie Zada, Charitha De Silva, Mary McMahon

SSI Ability Links NSW Representatives: Nicole Watkins, Amanda Aldermann, Noor Al-Sahir, Aiyub Torin

St Vincent de Paul Society Ability Links NSW Representatives: Troy Byrnes, Bonnie Pocock, Charlotte Vann, Sally Menzies

Canterbury & Bankstown Council: Jacob Andrew

For further information on designing or delivering community-based inclusion projects with people with disability see the Ability Links NSW Community Development Resource Package –

https://www.abilitylinksnsw.org.au/documents/ability_links_CD_RP_accessible.pdf



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Project Templates

Table 1 – Meeting Activities

Date	Objectives of Activity	Strategy / Activity I.e. Icebreaker / game, discussion, event, meetings, art making, task etc.	Resources Required I.e. Handouts, art materials, signage, stationary etc.	Who Will Deliver



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Table 2 – Action Plan for working group

Action i.e. meetings, consultation opportunities, engagement strategies, planning opportunities.	Who is Responsible?	Due Date	Status / Date Completed

Table 3 – Stakeholder List

Name	Organisation	Contact Details	When & Why to Contact



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Table 4 – Resources/Budget Template

Resource	Estimated Cost	Who is Responsible?

Table 5 – Promotional Strategies

Where	Mode / Media	Who is Responsible
interagency, local cafes, specific publications	media, web post, press release / face to face, poster, etc HOW	



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