



Community Disability Alliance Hunter stands in solidarity with the traditional custodians of the land. We pay our respects to Elders past present and emerging. We acknowledge that this land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

## About CDAH

At CDAH we are committed to building the capacity of peers to develop, organise and lead peer groups and develop peer mentoring relationships that enable peers to share their experiences and learn together.

We are an independent, collective voice committed to full inclusion and active citizenship. We are the first peer-led organisation established to prepare people for the national disability insurance scheme and we are forging new directions!

## President's Report

Dear CDAH members,

I have again had the privilege of leading this organisation for another year. I would first like to thank the wonderful staff and members for their incredible hard work this year. On behalf of the Board I thank you.

The board has been working very hard for the past year. Our goal has been to create an inclusive organisation that is professional, but never forgetting that we are a grassroots community of individuals who just want to make life a bit easier and a bit fairer for one another.

The board has been very busy making sure our policies (including governance policies) and procedures are updated. We have been working hard on a new constitution that we hope better reflects the organisation that CDAH is now. We have moved into more spacious offices which will help in our growth. The most exciting thing however, is our new venture the Disability Co-operative or Disco which will allow us



to make CDAH self sufficient and not have to rely so much on grant funding.

I think we are going to do great things and I can't wait for our next chapter.

Kristy Trajcevski

## From the Chief Executive Officer

This year has been one of growth and direction for CDAH. Strategically, we have begun forging new directions and strengthening our governance structures, built solid external relationships and networks and commenced the development of our DisColived experience change consultancy. We developed and provided nationally accredited training to a group of nine peers, completed a large-scale inclusion education program for a major disability service provider and said farewell to our long-term home at Hunter Workers building. What a big year it was.

I wish to conclude by thanking Kristy and the CDAH Board for their support, time and effort during the year, our members, volunteers and staff for all that they have collectively done to keep CDAH going in such a positive direction during what has been a most challenging year. Also, thank you to all of the family members, allies and community supporters for your continued support and interest in this amazing organisation.

Andrew Vodic

## CDAH Training

In growing a stronger peer movement, we've learned that not only it is most important to create learning opportunities with peers to learn and practice peer support, but also, we must have peers skilled up ready to facilitate the training. With the demand of the training, not only has this



year been about offering opportunities to new facilitators, but our current peer facilitators have been eager to build on existing skills, to deliver educational opportunities. It is always Incredible to observe how each peers respond to the training and how they choose to use the tools they have acquired at the end. This is where change happens!

This year we've seen everything from one peer graduate, putting their hand up to do facilitation themselves, to another peer doing fantastic peer support and mentoring, sharing advice and expertise to equip others to interview, produce and share a podcast series.

As the new Learning Hub Coordinator, Cayt is also focused on developing new workshop packages and reviewing and updating existing workshops.

## CDAH Research

Over the past two years, the Community Disability Alliance Hunter, in conjunction with our partner organisation, Diversity Disability Alliance, conducted a study titled "Peer Support: A Way Forward" with our lived experience researchers. This study provides an in-depth understanding and evaluation of the impact of peer support across the Hunter and Sydney. To kick off 2023, the researchers presented our interim findings at the "Together We Can Conference" and the "International Qualitative Report Conference," where we also emphasised the importance of being a lived experience researcher.

As we wrap up the year, the researchers have completed our final in-depth report of all our work, along with an easily read version to match, which will be available on our website.

This has been an exciting and vital journey to ensure that the voices and experiences of peers in peer support have been amplified, and true co-design through lived experience has been captured. There is nothing about us without us, so towards the end of this year, we tied up our hard work and presented what we found to the peers themselves at CDAH's "Peer Support: A Way Forward" workshop.

Thank you to everyone for all their hard work over the past two years!



## CDAH Events

The newly formed Events and Engagement Team have started with a bang, in September and October, with an action-packed schedule of expos and events including the successful hosting of five Count Us In events and three expos!

With the support offered by the Events and Engagement Team there have been great engagement experiences including more than 200 connections with peers, community members and service providers.

The Team have had a strong focus on developing event management processes that support CDAH to identify, plan and facilitate events. This not only has this ensured CDAH is in a strong position to engage with peers, community and partners, it has also enabled increasing opportunities for peers to be mentored in event organising using a considered and tested approach. The experience and processes developed by the Events and Engagement team places CDAH in a strong position to continue to connect and engage new peers in 2024 and beyond.

## Hunter Deafblind Project

The Deafblind project has gone from strength to strength over the last 12 months.

Our project aims were and continue to be raising awareness of the DB community, providing individual and sector capacity building, supporting and developing peer connections through the Deafblind hub and with DB peers living in group homes and networking with community and partners.

There have been some incredible highlights and major achievements over the last 12 months including but not limited to:

- Disability Royal Commission with private sessions organised at CDAH office and several written submissions provided.



- Four Deafblind peers obtain employment through project initiatives such as the Deafblind Awareness art installation in collaboration with Lake Macquarie council.
- Delivering information workshops including: LGBTQI+ community, Social Haptics, The Referendum, Australian History and Coffee Making.
- Deafblind peers are developing their skills and confidence by presenting their stories at the DB Hub which sees an average of 25-30 people in attendance each fortnight.
- Mentoring opportunities to Auslan students and interpreters thus growing the supports available to the DB community which is critically under resourced.
- The critical lack of interpreters has been raised with CDAH's "MAG" for support.
- Continued engagement with DB peers living in group homes and providing learning opportunities for their support workers when they attend the Hub.

The works of the project team including the deafblind hub have provided a space for genuine and authentic inclusion where people feel valued and belong as is shown in one of our members quotes below.

“Our communication styles require an interesting and complex mix of interpreters and support but despite the challenges we all enjoy the group so much. Over the last four years we have built strong, supportive relationships with each other that have helped boost our confidence and self-esteem. Our vision for the group is to see it continue to develop the social relationships between members, to increase knowledge and skills of group members, to improve exchange of experiences and ideas but also to promote confidence, reduce isolation and loneliness and to act as peer mentors to each other and other people who are deafblind.”

## Peer 2 Peer Project

The Peer2Peer Project has achieved significant milestones in its mission to support peers in the Hunter region to enhance their employability and careers as peer workers and mentors.



Some of the milestones include:

1. Hosting a Pitch Event to connect local employers with people with disabilities in the Hunter region. This event provided a platform for CDAH to showcase the unique skills and strengths of peer support, allowing employers, stakeholders, and industry to engage with CDAH around reasonable adjustments and employment supports
2. In partnership with Response Employment and Training and the Coordinator, nine CDAH peers progressed through a skills recognition process where Peers were formally reconsidered for their expertise and lived experience as peer workers and mentors, receiving accredited recognition five in modules.

This was a pivotal piece in what is now becoming a part of CDAH's new arm, DisCo. This training included a framework for mentoring Mentees, enhancing their career confidence, and increasing opportunities.

3. The project successfully designed, developed and offered 30 peers the opportunity to complete a skills audit. The purpose of skills audits was to ensure peers, through peer mentoring, were supported to recognise their employment capabilities. Skills audits extended to include tailored profiles, bios, and resumes providing peers with a clear understanding of their skill set, often missed by traditional job agencies and employment support systems.

This has now led to a talent pool of highly skilled and targeted peer workers for CDAH and DisCo to draw on in the future.

## Community Connections Project

It has been another exciting year for the Community Connections project. Seven CDAH peer connectors have been employed in peer mentor roles to build and grow their connections with people living in group homes, who experience isolation.

Each week the Community Connection team have worked on building



solid and trusting relationships with people living in group homes, learning about the ways people communicate, spending time to get to know interests and goals and working collaboratively with group home staff to educate, advocate and expand opportunities beyond the group home and paid support.

This year has seen some amazing breakthroughs and highlights for the team including, but not limited to:

1. CDAH peer connector Cayt, recounted a moment where she was able to advocate alongside the peer she had been connecting with and championed the use of a communication device, working with the peer to add new words into the device that previously had not been utilised or updated in years – What a win!
2. CDAH peer Chelsie experienced a breakthrough with one of the peers she connects with also, building trust with the group home staff to be able to take the peer directly into the community and explore his interests and facilitate connections outside of his home.

This year has seen the Community Connections team change as previous Community Connections Co-Ordinator Jarrod Sandell-Hay transitioned into a new role in CDAH and I (Alex Peck) joined the team. On behalf of myself and the Community Connections team we would like to thank Jarrod for all of the great work he did whilst in the role, for the team-building, relationship building and networking that he did. I would also like to personally thank the Community Connections team for all of their amazing work and commend their continued resilience in working through the systemic barriers that are apparent when connecting with peers in group homes.

Thank you team!

## Peer Mentoring



Peer support was strong this year, seeing over 80 peer mentoring relationships supported this year. This is on top of the peer support and mentoring that is always occurring within existing peer groups, supported by the exceptional peer group facilitators who continue to ensure peer groups are available regularly. A wonderful demonstration of CDAH's Pay It Forward value in action.

Peer mentoring relationships have supported peers to:

- Navigate the NDIS whether it was accessing or preparing for a plan review or making a complaint
- Manage housing issues including moving out independently or making connections with people who are isolated, and their only communication is paid workers.
- Build skills, including facilitating a peer group, develop skills in facilitating training, presenting in front of groups, telling their stories around lived experience of disability.
- Often mentoring includes navigating every day life and some of the barriers and challenges that we have to overcome to be able to feel part of community.

Just to name a few...

It has been a great year for our peer community, I am really looking forward to next year and continuing to build our peer mentor network.

## Community Partnerships

We had a successful year in making strong partnerships including:

- Shibui and Jenny's Place - where peers codesigned a brochure for women and children who are facing family and domestic violence issues. This brochure is accessible and designed for women with disability, and the difference we face.
- Friends With Dignity - where Suzy presented the extra challenges women with disability face when escaping unsafe relationships. This was a great opportunity to share some insight, and educate community, so that they are more aware of what needs to happen, and how accessibility needs to be considered



- International Women's Day - where peers represented women with disability
- Reclaim The Night March - where peers engaged in the planning and facilitation of this important event. CDAH peers demonstrated their solidarity against violence towards women and women with disability.
- Homeless Connect - peers attended this annual expo which has now resulted in an extended partnership with Family Planning who are wanting to work with CDAH on barriers accessing health services. Women's Group will be hosting an information session about barriers around cervical screening.

There were so many other connections made in community, and we will be progressing with building those connections going into 2024.

## CDAH Peer Groups

We still have six peer groups available for peers to be part of. CDAH's Home Sweet Home and Employment group have changed to focus on offering peer mentoring and workshops, with opportunities for peers to have direct connection with peer mentors who can support them through any challenges, share lived experiences or respond to any questions peers may have.

A key achievement for 2023 must be the Count Us In Festival where CDAH 7 peer group facilitators, supported by the Events and Engagement Team, host five Count Us In events. These events were a huge success with 165 tickets allocated to peers and the boarder Newcastle community. Congratulations to all who were involved in this, your hard work and dedication to prompting your peer group, CDAH and inclusion was outstanding!

I'm excited to share that plans are underway to offer new peer groups including:

- Next Gen a peer group for young people between 18 to 25 who are living with a disability
- A peer group is for our aboriginal community who live with a disability.



These are very exciting, new groups and we will keep you up-to-date in the new year!

## Deafblind Connect Group

The Hunter Deafblind Social Group (HDBSG) continues to meet monthly in a variety of venues where they can connect with each other, try new things together, and engage with their local community to build Deafblind Awareness. Events have included: A Lake Macquarie Cruise, a visit to Oakvale Farm, and a trip on the Dungog picnic train. Geoff regularly attends other events to stay connected with other groups like the Sydney Ushers Group and Auslan social groups. This allows him to collaborate with these groups to organise future events for the Deafblind Social Group. These collaborative events have included: Vision Australia's Jet ski day, Deaf Awareness Week celebrations on the Foreshore, Auslan in the park social event, and Auslan in Cessnock Social event.

Geoff

## Women first peer Group

The women first peer group has been fantastic this year with lots of new women coming along. We are still meeting once a month and we were able to come together in person in August to enjoy lunch and then have our monthly meeting afterwards.

We are going to do this again in November where we will be hosting an information session facilitated by Family Planning.

We were grateful to receive a grant from the City of Newcastle for the count us in festival. The women first peer group hosted a high tea.

Where a lot of women with and without disabilities, attended and join in an activity to design a vision board and then enjoy the high tea.

We are looking forward to continuing our group next year, and hopefully being able to meet in person more often and add some more social activities and information sessions.

Suzy and Naomi



## Queer Peer Group

In March this year Bryson joined the Queer Peer Group as co-facilitator, he was soon called upon to quickly develop and facilitate with Owen an education session at the Together We Can Conference in Sydney. Owen and Bryson shared information about the diversity of Queer Peers.

One major highlight for 2023 was when Queer Peers hosted a Count Us In event at Bernie's Bar, planning and offering a fantastic, fun and educative trivia opportunity. Spreading awareness of LGBTQIA+, disability and LGBTQIA+ and disability cultures, the event engaged over 50 Newcastle citizens and was a great success!

The Queer Peers continues to regularly connect with a lot of new engagement. Queer Peers is looking forward to hosting Catch up Crew in February!

Bryson

## Speak Up Hunter

In the last 12 months Speak Up Hunter has hosted two Shifting The Line events- Shifting The Line Diversity Walk & Shifting The Line video premiere which was shown as part of the Count Us In Festival.

Speak Up Hunter also gone through some changes with Arron shifting his focus on producing a podcast series Our Voice Our Choice – funded by CiD, supported by CDAH, and developed to provide advice, stories and information on big themes like relationships, healthy living, rights at work and discrimination. All topics focused on supported decision making.

Erin has joined Sarah in co-facilitating Speak Up Hunter peer groups!

## Writers Group

The CDAH Writers group started in February 2023. It's an interest group for peers with disability who are new or experienced writers in any genre or style. We share, discuss, and develop our writing and exchange ideas, information, and resources. We also have regular writing exercises with prompts to have a bit of fun with, and hope to have guest



writers join us in future. We have been invited by the Hunter Writers' Centre to have a live reading event in Disability Pride month in 2024 (July).

The Writers meet at 5.30 pm on the last Tuesday of the month via the CDAH zoom link on the CDAH website, [cdah.org.au](http://cdah.org.au). The group is facilitated by Cedar Whelan. Please contact Cedar on [cedarwhelan@gmail.com](mailto:cedarwhelan@gmail.com) if you're interested.

## The Hive

The Hive is a Mental Health Support and Advocacy group that was formed in 2017

The Hive is open to anyone who identifies as having some mental health lived experience; whether it be someone who finds life hard and stressful to someone who is living with psychosis. We are all peers! This year we celebrate our sixth birthday.

Great things this year were the support and friendship offered by hive members to hive members. We thank our members for this! Another great thing this year was discussing refocussing and honing our goals to support hive members and advocate to the community.

We look forward to continuing these goals in the coming year and expand our membership

We hold our meeting via Zoom, and we will continue to do so for the time being

We thank our members for their continued involvement and support and the management and staff for their support.

We welcome new members. Contact: [thehive@cdah.org.au](mailto:thehive@cdah.org.au)

Leah Lee

## Members' Action Group:

**Introduction:** The Members Action Group (MAG) has continued its dedication to promoting the aims of CDAH, with a particular focus on strengthening the peer movement and fostering inclusivity in the Hunter community. In the face of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, MAG's commitment to learning, growth, and mutual support remains unwavering.



## **Key Initiatives:**

**1. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability:** MAG has been actively engaged in advocating for the rights and well-being of people with disabilities through its support for the Royal Commission. The final report with 122 recommendations can be found here <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report> You can also call the National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 468 or 02 6146 1468 for telephone counselling support or to be referred to services in your local area. If you are currently experiencing any form of violence or abuse, or are concerned for your safety, call the police on 000.

**2. Citizenship and Inclusivity:** Our efforts extend to local councils, where we seek representation for CDAH members to ensure that the voices of those with disabilities are heard, and their rights are upheld.

**3. Accessibility of CDAH Information:** Ensuring that information is accessible for everyone remains a priority for MAG. We are actively involved in initiatives aimed at making CDAH's resources and information more accessible, reflecting our commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

**4. Members Action Group Terms of Reference:** MAG continues to refine and develop its Terms of Reference to provide clear guidance on the group's objectives, structure, and responsibilities, as we seek to enhance our effectiveness and impact.

**Conclusion:** The 2023 Members Action Group report reflects our ongoing commitment to advocate for the rights and well-being of individuals with disabilities, and our tireless efforts to promote a stronger



peer movement and a more inclusive Hunter community. Despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, MAG remains resolute in its mission to learn, grow, and support one another.

We look forward to another year of progress and advocacy as we continue to work towards a more inclusive society for all.

Text from Hub and Spoke image:

Each Peer Group has representatives on the MAG that can raise issues/project ideas.

MAG members discuss/vote/prioritise issues and projects and requests the support or resources from EO.

EO reports to CDAH Board

CDAH Board to consider any necessary actions

EO to report back to the MAG

MAG representatives to report back to peer groups

## Catch up Crew

This year catch up crew started with lots of engagement of regular and new peers coming out for dinner at the Wickam Park Hotel. It's always such a relaxed and lovely space to be part of, as there is always lots of conversation and laughs and connection happening.

The second part of the year has seen some changes with the relocation of the CDAH office. It has taken some time but we are excited to relaunch Catch Up Crew from a new location, being the Foghorn Brewery.

In November, our Speak Up Hunter peer group will be hosting catch up crew at the foghorn in King Street Newcastle starting at 5 pm.



## Statement of Financial Position as of 31 June 2023

Current Assets: How much money CDAH has: \$ 2,161,237

Total Assets: Dollar amount of all the things we own and money we have: 2,173,846

Total Liabilities: What we owe to others: \$ 1,611,872

Equity: this is how much we have at the end of the year if we sell everything we own and pay all the money we owe to others: \$ 561,974

## Statement of profit and loss for the year 31 June 2023

Revenue, how much money we got in this year: \$ 1,657,092

Expenses, how much money we spent this year: \$1,466,742.83

Profit for the year, how much money we have left over this year: \$ 190,349.17