

# VOLUNTEERS' CONTRIBUTION TO ACHIEVING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED BY PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Australian  
Volunteers

## Introduction

The Australian Volunteers Program conducted research to find out what partner organisations have achieved in progressing disability inclusion in their programs; and what, if any, has been the contribution of the program to those outcomes.

The objectives of the research were to:

1. Document stories of change relating to the developmental outcomes of partner organisations working on disability inclusion.
2. Highlight achievements of partner organisations, and how Australian volunteers have supported them.
3. Make recommendations as to how the program could provide greater support to strengthen partner organisations to include disability inclusion in their program.

## Methodology

This research was conducted by CoLAB and the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) from March to June 2022. The research used a largely qualitative approach based on the views and perspectives of key stakeholders and triangulating findings with relevant program documentation, or other external sources of information where appropriate and available. Nineteen stories of change were collected. Twenty-four interviews captured the perspectives of partners and staff across 15 countries. Three virtual sense-making workshops were held; two with partner organisations; and one with the Research Steering Group comprising program staff.

## Key Findings

### Progressing development objectives in disability inclusion

The research found that partner organisations are progressing their development objectives in disability inclusion. Partner organisations have strengthened their capacity in multiple areas. Through their strengthened capacity, partner organisations are transforming the lives of people living with disability at community, national, and policy levels.

Key areas where partner organisations report progress towards outcomes include:

- Promoting inclusive, barrier-free environments for people living with disability through increased advocacy and accessible programs and services.
- Improved health and wellbeing for people with significant disabilities.
- Improved education outcomes for children with disabilities.

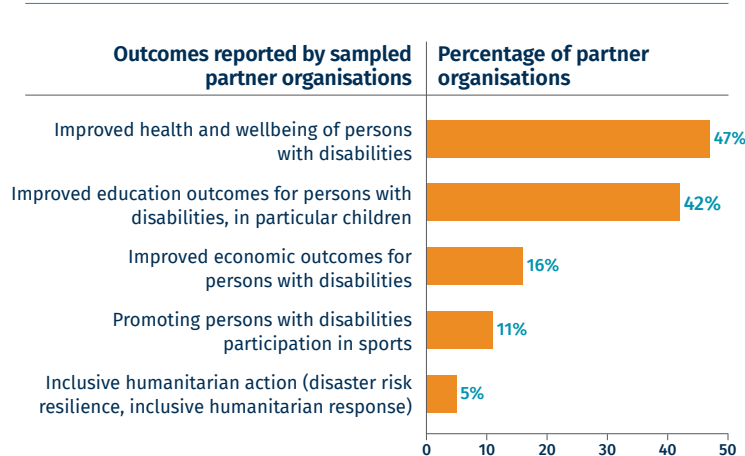
- Improved economic outcomes for people with disabilities.
- Improved care and protection of children with disabilities.
- Increased capacity and visibility of Organisation of People with Disabilities (OPD's) in advocating the leadership and decision-making roles of people living with disability in society.

As a cross-cutting theme, a majority (18 out of 19) of the partner organisations report being able to strengthen their advocacy efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities to participate meaningfully in barrier-free societies and communities.

*'How does it [disability inclusion] happen? It has to be a partnership approach. As with many NGOs around the world, in particular those working on disability, we are under-resourced. The benefit of an added resource – you can't put a price to it and especially when it is has been a quality resource (like the volunteer was). By providing a resource you allow an organisation to grow and to learn.'*

– Partner organisation, South Africa

Graph 1: Outcomes reported by sampled partner organisations



### Transformation of lives of people living with disability by partners

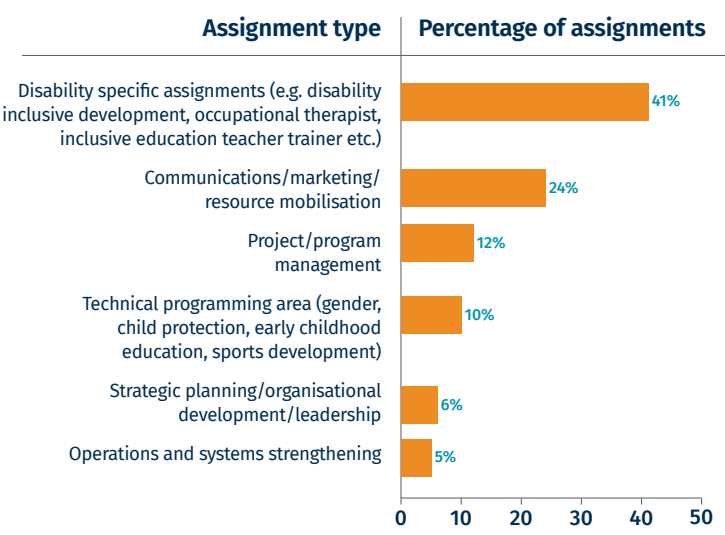
As a result of their strengthened capacity, partner organisations are transforming the lives of people living with disability. The research found that partner organisations are advancing the rights of people living with disability by addressing their practical needs through increasing access to quality services, and advocating for their right to influence more inclusive policies and systems. They are also changing community attitudes that discriminate against people living with disability.

During interviews with partner organisation representatives, the research team heard stories of the positive outcomes partner organisations are achieving to improve the lives of children living with disability and their families, as well as people living with disabilities based in remote, rural areas.

Support to partner organisations

Partner organisations are being supported to advance their disability inclusion development objectives. The majority (95%) of partner organisations attribute the key changes in their organisation to the support provided by the program. The support has enabled change that is directly relevant to partner organisations’ strategic goals and objectives. Volunteer support has enhanced individual staff capacity, improved organisations’ systems and processes, and strengthened organisations’ ability to network and partner with external actors.

Graph 2: Types of volunteer assignments supporting sampled partner organisations



Contribution of the Australian Volunteers Program

The research found that the Australian Volunteers Program has contributed in a significant way to partner organisations progressing their development objectives. The majority (89%) of partner organisations reported that the support provided by Australian volunteers has enabled them to progress disability inclusion in their programs. From the perspective of partner organisations, the program has contributed in two main ways: through skilled, culturally-aware Australian volunteers, and through other program components such as the Impact Fund, the program’s partnership approach and flexible assignment support.

In all the case studies, partner organisations highlighted the contribution of the volunteer’s interpersonal skills, attitude and approach. These personal qualities are a critical factor to enable positive change and are highly valued by partner organisations.

*‘The Australian Volunteers Program is filling a huge gap for OPDs [Organisations of People with Disabilities] who are usually under resourced to recruit many qualified staff. This is crucial support as many of the OPDs of and for persons with disabilities need capacity building and capacity development in order to better serve their members. For example, Samoa does not have specialists who can diagnose the impairment or impairment level of individuals and this is an area that they [volunteers] have supported us with.’*

– Partner organisation, Samoa

Recommendations

The research made several recommendations as to how the program could improve its support to partners working on disability inclusion, including:

- The program to support more disability specific assignments in specialist areas. This should continue to be coupled with organisational capacity strengthening support in key areas, based on needs assessment with the partner organisation.
- The program to facilitate networking between Australian-based organisations and partner organisations to support the partner organisation to establish strategic partnerships to help share practice, network, and strengthen their efforts to progress disability inclusion.
- Volunteers and partner organisations to agree on shared assignment objectives focused on disability inclusion to mainstream disability inclusion in all assignments.
- Utilise more fully existing program partnership processes like the partnership plan to support long-term partnerships with organisations of people living with disability.
- The program to consider various innovative ways to measure progress toward disability inclusion, continuing the qualitative story of change approach to capture contribution to long-term change, and engage Organisations of People with Disabilities to conduct research on disability inclusion outcomes and contribution of the program.

Next steps

The program warmly welcomes the findings of the research and recommendations. Disability inclusion continues to be a key focus for the Australian Volunteers Program and the research will be used to continue to improve work in this area.

Acknowledgements

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