



Linking people and communities with opportunities

SSI Ability Links NSW Wellbeing Outcomes Research

Executive Summary

Background and objectives

Ability Links NSW is a program funded by the Department of Family & Community Services to support people with disability aged 0 to 64 years, their families and carers to identify their goals and connect with their community and mainstream services.

Settlement Services International (SSI) is one of the largest providers of the Ability Links NSW program and has also established the EmployAbility program to create pathways toward employment for SSI Ability Links NSW participants.

In April 2017, SSI started the Wellbeing Outcomes research as a pilot project to measure the difference SSI Ability Links and EmployAbility is making in the lives of people with disability, their families and carers. This research has been developed to enable participants to share their experiences anonymously, provide feedback on the program, input into its direction, and highlight what is important to them. This feedback allows SSI to measure and report on wellbeing outcomes for individuals involved in the Ability Links and EmployAbility programs.

Approach and participants

Ability Links participants were asked to participate in a series of three in-depth interviews over six months. The interviews used the Social Impact Measurement Toolkit (SIMT), a resource developed by National Disability Services (NDS), to support NGOs to measure, demonstrate and communicate their social impact. The SIMT measures 21 outcomes across seven wellbeing domains: physical wellbeing, personal wellbeing, independence, social wellbeing, living environment, learning and growth, and making a contribution.

At baseline, participants indicate which outcomes are a focus for them and rate each outcome on a six point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. During the three month and six month follow up interviews, participants rate the same outcomes to determine if their experience has improved, declined or remained the same. Participants

shared their experiences with the SSI Ability Links NSW program, focusing on what changed for them as a result of the program, factors that contributed to a positive experience and what could be improved.

Between June 2017 and January 2018, 132 interviews were conducted. Participants represented a mix of age, gender, cultural background and geographic locations across metro and southern NSW, with 65% of the sample being from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Fifteen per cent of interviews were conducted through an interpreter.

Key findings

- 70 per cent of SSI Ability Links participants reported that they had achieved one or more wellbeing outcomes as a result of the program(s)
- The majority of participants continued to experience a positive change in their focus wellbeing areas over six months, suggesting that Ability Links has a lasting impact on participant's lives
- Strong outcomes were achieved evenly across all wellbeing areas, suggesting that Ability Links successfully supports participants in whichever wellbeing area is a focus for them
- Participants highlighted that SSI Linkers are providing motivation and encouragement, acting as a friendly guide to help navigate services and build connections within the community. This is especially true for participants from non-English-speaking backgrounds, as bicultural and bilingual Linkers are able to translate and explain information
- Participants made suggestions for further enhancement of the impact of both programs, particularly in the area of communication

Conclusion

The Social Impact Measurement Toolkit has provided a useful framework to begin measuring the difference SSI Ability Links and EmployAbility programs make in the lives of people with disability, their family and carers.

The findings from this research suggest that SSI Ability Links is having a positive impact on participant's lives across almost all wellbeing outcome areas (social wellbeing, independence, personal wellbeing, learning and growth, making a contribution and physical wellbeing).

For the 70 per cent of participants that experienced a small positive change after three months, this positive change was not only sustained but further increased at six months, suggesting that Ability Links has a lasting impact on participant's lives.

A number of strategies are currently underway at SSI to continue achieving positive outcomes for participants. As part of continuous improvement, SSI Ability Links creates regular opportunities for people with disability, their family members and carers to provide meaningful feedback on the program and input into future direction.

Further information

To find out more about SSI Ability Links or to locate your nearest Linker, call (02) 9685 0293 or email abilitylinks@ssi.org.au.

To communicate in another language, please call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450.

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can contact us through the National Relay Service.