

Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23

Investment Proposal – Community Circles Australia - Pilot

28 January 2022

Executive Summary

Problem	The need for increased informal community support to help people live more connected lives, addressing the impacts of isolation and loneliness for vulnerable people impacted by COVID.
Solution	Community Circles Australia will apply the UK model of Community Circles developed by Helen Sanderson to build circles of support for people who are at risk and vulnerable. The Community Circles initiative is a way of bringing people together around an individual with the support of a trained facilitator, in order to support the person to achieve an outcome or change that they would like to see happen in their life. The Community Circle solution is to help people improve their lives through increased intentional community connection, increased eyes and ears on their lives and increased social capital available to support people to live well in the community.
Investment	\$1.5 million over 3 years to support 6 LGAs communities and reach approx. 400 people in receipt of a circle with significant increased social capital and impact on 2000 others who choose to join a circle as a volunteer.

Introduction

Community Circles Australia is a partnership between established Australian charity Touched By Olivia Foundation and Community Circles UK (CC UK). CC UK was founded by Helen Sanderson, the founder of Wellbeing Teams, UK, (inspired by Buurtzorg model) where the Provider team involves everyone in the person's life as the solution to increased support and improved wellbeing. The model involves training in using Helen Sanderson and Associates Person Centred Thinking tools and planning, along with skills building for facilitators and volunteers, with a focus on coaching, mentoring and a community of practice to provide critical skills and connections across facilitator communities. These tools are a critical component of Community Circles to help people understand what's working, what matters to people and what might make a difference in their lives, to remain living well independently at home. It also builds the capacity of facilitators and entire communities to support each other both purposefully and intentionally, addressing specific safeguards and risks relevant to each unique individual. Each circle is a co-designed relationship of support with the person at the centre.

Community Circles is a proven model of social care which assists people to live their best life. All sorts of people can benefit, including older people, people at risk and vulnerable, young people who may be disengaged with work and life, people with a disability, people with mental health conditions, carers and families. Community Circles does not discriminate – anyone at any age can be part of Community Circles.

Community Circles help people with everyday activities and sets them up to connect to family, friends and other people from the community. Community Circles help people with social connection, reducing loneliness, pursuing interests and exercise, volunteering and community contribution and finding work. Circles help knit family and community back together and also collaborate with professionals, experts and paid services, to reimagine the support needed to help someone live well.

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated both positive and challenging examples of social care. This includes a reduction in choice and control for some people, increased burden placed on unpaid family carers and a disproportionate impact on groups drawing on social care including marginalised and vulnerable people and older Australians living in residential aged care.

What we are proposing in this submission is based on a model that is proven and aligns with best practice. It is designed with the person at the centre and works in genuine collaboration with communities, families, providers and State and Territory and Federal Government.

Background

The Aged Care and Disability Royal Commission identified the current risk for people living in the community, relying solely on paid services for their wellbeing. The Commission's final report recognised that family, friends and community are a crucial part of the social care system, integral to the wellbeing of people, ensuring safe and high-quality care. Community Circles also help to support, sustain and maintain Carers in the important role they play.

The Commission's final report also noted the absence of a strong consumer voice being lost in aged care, that the design and delivery of the system does not take account of people's needs, preferences and circumstances, but rather excludes and alienates the people it seeks to assist. The report found that the task-based focus of work in aged care does not sufficiently allow consideration for the person who is being cared for, their wants or social and emotional needs.

The Disability Royal Commission and the inquiry into the death of Ms Ann Marie Smith confirmed the urgent need for solutions for increased community connection, safety, social prescribing and technological innovation. The more 'noticing', the more eyes and ears on a person, the more contact they have with the community, the safer and more confident they will be to remain living well at home. Community Circles Australia, with embedded accountability enabled by technology, provides a significant solution.

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission 2021 recommendations has identified that there is a critical necessity to strengthen natural supports' as a developmental measure and notes "**Natural supports (family, friends and community connections) provide an important informal safeguard for people with disability**".

Community Circles provide an intentional strategy to bring or renew informal support into a participant's life and produce significant safer outcomes. These networks increase developmental safeguards for participants and also reduces the risk of undue influence of one family member, engaging different people who care for a person, supporting them in their decision making. The facilitators and mentors provide a sense of belonging, identity, security, and self-esteem and meet emotional, physical, and spiritual needs.

Volunteers were also identified in the Royal Commission report as critical to people's wellbeing and an integral part of both the aged care, mental health and disability systems. Community Circles recognises the additional benefits and value of local unpaid relationships to facilitate increased belonging, social capital and inclusion. Volunteers, or community contributors are also important connections for people from marginalized and diverse backgrounds, recognising the importance of language and culture and connecting with them in their communities of choice.

Evidence

The UK model demonstrates significant quality of life impacts as Community Circle members universally reported they produced major social, psychological and practical outcomes for the individual and their family, as well as those from the community through both connection and contribution.

A 2020 evaluation report in Doncaster, UK, demonstrated significant outcomes from people who were attached to a Community Circle. The outcome reported for older People included:

- Almost all (96%) of Circles beneficiaries feel the project is helping them achieve their goal;
- (87%) of people supported by the project feel more confident about staying living independently; and
- Three quarters (76%) of people supported felt less lonely and 75% have improved mental wellbeing.

Outcomes reported for Volunteers highlighted:

- (92%) of Circles volunteers feel the project has increased their mental wellbeing;
- Two thirds (67%) say the project has helped them better understand how to maintain their own health and wellbeing in later life; and
- (58%) say the project increased their own social connections.

The model gathers further learnings from Hilary Cotton's Participle "Circle' work changing the social care landscape in the UK since 2015. The Circle's purpose was to support older people to live flourishing independent lives and foster a core set of capabilities. By meeting people where they live, Circles' social and practical offering fosters meaningful and sustaining relationships, working and learning together, and enables active contribution to the community.

Talking about community and interdependence taps into the current pandemic mood and resonates with older people specifically, who feel a sense of nostalgia about a more connected society. Building on relationships enables the growth of further capability supporting us to learn, contributing to good health and vibrant communities. People with a disability often have a paucity of unaid relationships in their lives to assist in their sense of belonging and inclusion, wellbeing and sense of value.

We have adopted, as a shared goal and vision, the UK statement from [Social Care Futures](#) " *We all want to live in the place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing things that matter to us*".

This reflects the desire of Australians to choose how and where we live our lives, whatever our age or stage of life. If we have a health condition or disability during our lives, we might sometimes need extra support to help us. Good social care is about being able to stay in control of our lives, about being cared about, and doing more of what matters to us, which Community Circles provides a strategy for.

Technology innovation – how the technology will support Community Circles

Community Circles is powered by the 'Community Circles Plus+ app. This has been developed and provided pro bono by Checked in Care, Australia's leading health technology innovator and developer of customer experience technology for person led services in aged care and disability.

This simple technology is led and owned by the person and helps keep everyone focused on the person, how to best support them, including a self-authored wellbeing plan, shared calendar to keep track of tasks and activities from paid and unpaid people, keeping everyone accountable for their role and peace of mind is provided for loved ones with an easy daily 'I'm OK' check-in function.

Solution

In response to this issue, Community Circles is recommending the Australian Government invests \$1.5 million over three years to pilot 6 sites and provide circles for 400 individuals, impacting over 1800 others, including circle members, volunteers, other family, trained facilitators and providers. Each circle will provide a significant increase in social capital for a person with donated hours of informal unpaid support.

Touched By Olivia has strong, existing relationships across numerous Local Government Areas (LGAs) throughout Australia so we are confident we will be able to get access to the people who need the support.

Applicability – Community Circles will target the following groups:

Older People

- People just starting to need some help to live well at home.
- People who are waiting for assessment with or without funded support.
- People in between assessment and assignment of their package- waiting for support allocation.
- People with a home care/CHSP package, to scaffold paid support with necessary assistance to reduce loneliness, whilst providing a bit more assistance with the 'every day'.

People with Disability/Mental Health Conditions

- Families, Children, Adults, people who are isolated/disconnected and lonely with mental health challenges.
- People without funding who require more support and connection to help them live safely and happily in community.
- People with an NDIS package - filling the gap between services, intentionally making connections and becoming the rhythm of community, making friends, increasing 'noticing' through unpaid support which occupies the largest portion of people's lives.

Carers

- Carers can have their own Community Circle to support them in their caring role, to provide much needed intentional respite- to enable carers to go to work, fill in gaps in the day and allow critical social activities for the carer and the person needing support.

Short term health challenges

- Discharge from hospital response.
- Urgent but essential ongoing needs such as food delivery, taking to physio and appointments, taking kids to school.
- Waiting for funded services.
- Creating critical support around people to help them go home from hospital.

The outcomes we will deliver on include:

- Building the capacity of people by focusing on the person in need - building on strengths, supporting people to take control of improving their health, resilience and wellbeing;
- Maximising people's independence - recognises people's rights to live the fullest life they can, providing the best outcomes for people who may be older, have a disability, mental health challenges or a carer;
- Provision of critical safeguards for people, extra 'noticing' of people's circumstances, addressing potential abuse or neglect and addressing the risks identified in the tragic death of Ann Marie Smith;

- Collaboration- Working genuinely in partnership with people, families, communities and providers - engaging creatively to enable people to live well;
- Building capacity and skills of communities and volunteers -Circle Facilitators are trained by us and support every circle, with coaching and mentoring available. They meet every few weeks with circle members, working together to complement any paid support hours to fill in the 'everyday time' with things and people that create a better, happier life.
- Addressing everyone's needs regardless of funding stream. Working effectively within the private markets and NDIS and Aged Care package budgets - addressing underutilisation by acknowledging the benefits of a Community Circle and need for increased support innovatively - enabling creative scaffolding of paid support and unpaid support, more resources better used.

Implementation and Costings

Community Circles is seeking **\$1.5 million over 2 years** to fund 6 Community Circle pilots in areas of the Government's choosing. Community Circles would work with the Federal Government to identify the pilot sites. We have commenced soft trials in the Canada Bay/Drummoyne area, Hunters Hill and for the Hunters Hill Anglican Church due to immediate interest and demand. There is further commitment from Wingacarabee Council, on the condition of a Provider partner and several proposed trials with both aged care and disability providers across NSW in discussion.

Community Circles proposes a mix of sites including regional, rural and metro to demonstrate how Community Circles can reduce loneliness and isolation, increase safety and oversight and community engagement, filling that everyday time between services to keep people living well at home.

The below table sets out the indicative costing breakdown over two years.

The Community Circles Facilitator training and support program provides an ongoing annual membership to Community Circles Australia which includes a range of resources to enable best practice. It includes:

- online training of over 8 hours;
- 2 workshops in person or online to practice the tools, circle facilitation;
- a Community Coordinator matching the facilitator to a circle, providing ongoing support;
- Community of practice an hour a month and international webinars, shared information;
- Support of a Buddy; and
- Access to a hotline.

We are offering a workforce solution to enable the right people to take up a role whether independent or as part of an organisation, These are paid roles and people can chose to work either part time or full time.

Budget	Year 1	Year 2	Total
400 Circles over 2 years @\$2800 a circle	160 circles \$448 000	240 circles \$672 000	\$1,112,000
Program Management and training	\$180,000	\$145,000	\$330,000
Evaluation / Research	\$50 000	ongoing	\$50 000
Total	\$678,000	\$817,000	1,495,000

Return on Investment- Social Capital benefit

Circles may be created for people who currently have no allocated funding, are waiting for an increase in funding or not managing current funding allocations due to increased needs and or paucity of informal/family support.

- Community Circles will average 4 people a circle, providing approximately 3-5 hours of support to each person, enabled through the Community Circles + technology.
- Using a blended rate of \$40.00/hour - Provider (average \$58 an hour) and independent workforce of \$29.00/hour
- \$40x 4 hours/week= \$8320.00 a year
- Return on investment 400 circles- \$3 328 000.00 over 2 years or 122% return on investment.

Evaluation

We will measure the social impact of Community Circles on people's lives, we are pragmatic and we want to support and measure real change, we will set out core capabilities that we could focus on and measure and we would like to do this in conjunction with the Department. We will also measure inclusion and connection to community, along with resilience/wellbeing improvements.

The measurement framework would look at three dimensions: return on investment, quality of life, increased social impact by assessing outcomes (a comparison with a core set of outcomes) and evaluating capability data (a core set of indicators complemented with qualitative case studies). Collecting financial and outcome data is dependent upon strong collaborations with Circle members and their support network including Provider partners. We will measure the number of new connections in each Circle, increased participation in social activities and the hours of practical unpaid support provided.

Case Studies

Mario's Circle supports him to stay well and connected to his community. He is caring for his wife Amelia who has dementia. Mario needs help between paid services to stay well himself, and his daughter Bella also needs support to help her parents remain living well at home. With the support he gets from his Community Circle Mario can continue his interests, such as bowling and contributing to his community by doing the bookkeeping at the Bowling Club. All this whilst knowing Amelia has companionship at home, can go for a walk, knit or cook with a neighbour. It also means that his daughter isn't as worried about her parents as she knows they have neighbours and friends supporting them intentionally to live well at home.

Leila's circle helps her to move out of home and live alone. Its purpose is to support her to live well and improve her mental health by feeling connected and not lonely. She wants to meet other young people, join a 'Glee' choir, get some help with her TAFE course and learn to cook Greek food. She also wants to have more people in her life and not just because they are paid to be there. Leila is now cooking for volunteer groups through the local council with a neighbour, she attends a fun choir, and a new friend helps with driving her there. She has a social life now, is accessing extra support at TAFE from a mentor and is part of a street committee that is organising a party for Christmas.

About us

Touched by Olivia is a leading Australian charity that drives community connections to help create a more inclusive society. Community is at the heart of everything we do, through partnering with councils, government, businesses and people to achieve better outcomes for communities. Over the last 15 years, TBO has developed a unique collaboration model working with communities, councils and developers to build more than 40 inclusive play spaces across Australia and operates a social enterprise cafe providing work experience opportunities for people facing barriers to employment.

Checked in Care is providing the technology to enable Community Circles connections pro bono as an experienced technology platform and Australia's leading health tech innovator and developer of customer experience to respond to the needs and expectations for person led services in aged care and disability.

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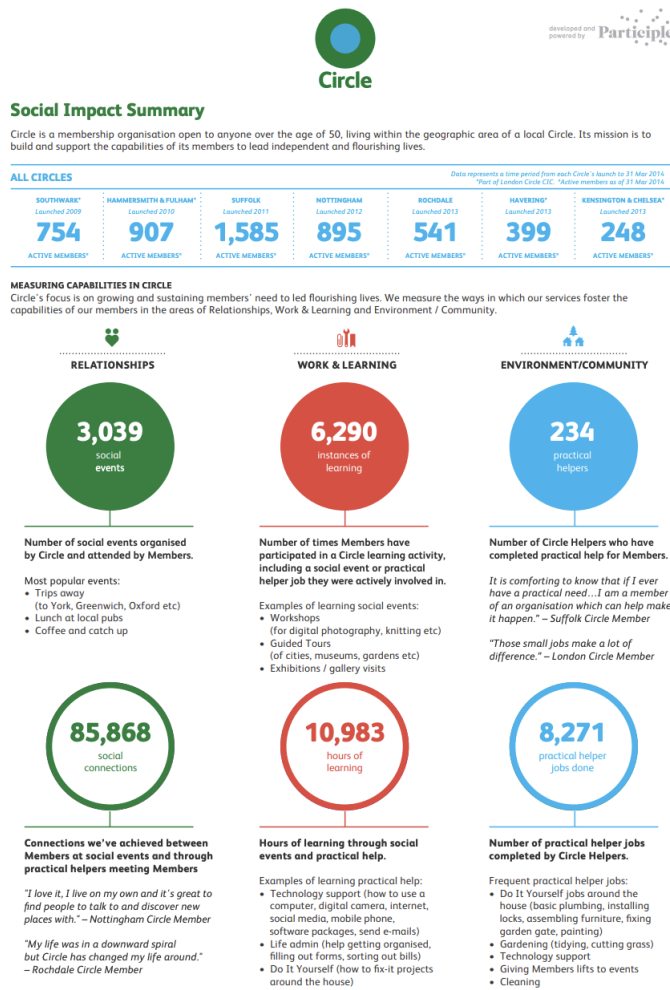
Appendix

Evaluation: Age UK Doncaster-Circles for independence in later life Four year evaluation: Oct 17th 2016 - Oct 16th 2020

Circles of support and personalisation: exploring the economic case

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/65651/1/Perkins_Circles%20of%20support%20and%20personalisation%20.pdf

Hilary Cottram



Innovations in Dementia Helen Sanderson and In ControlUK

