

NOTES: PROFESSIONALS WITH SCI NETWORK (PROWSCI)

Attendees:

Spire Project Team:

Harin Corea (*Development Coordinator*), Emma Bloom (*Project Officer*), Naz Erdem (*Team Leader*), Sal Dema (*Manager, Peer Support & Creative Therapies, Royal Talbot*)

PROwSCI Attendees:

John Koumourou (*IT industry/Project Management, HP*), Charles Heerey (*Stockbroker, Baillieu Holst*), Dean Richards (*ISP Coordinator/Disability, DHHS*), Gerard Stevenson (*Sales/Marketing*), Grant Cleary (*Writer/Tech*), Martin Heng (*Media & Comms, Lonely Planet/RMIT*), Raelene West (*Researcher, RMIT*), Susana Valdes (*Volunteer, short courses/workshops*), Lachlan McLeod (*Blogger, Journalism*)

Apologies:

Campbell Message (*Leisure Specialist/Client Liaison, Royal Talbot*), Colin Johanson (*Ergonomics/Design, Self-employed*), Linda Barclay (*Academic*), Matt Lennox (*Public Policy & Business Intelligence, Taxi Services Commission*), Paul Mariager (*Financial Services, Superpartners/RMIT*), Sharyn Craven (*Project work, NDIA*), Trevor Alan Carroll (*Human Rights, Disability Justice Advocacy*)

Pathways to Employment:

Pathways to Employment is a project that focuses on the importance of finding one's way to meaningful activity whether it's work, study, volunteering or community participation in a person's life. Spire is seeking to utilise individual's lived-experience, to identify common facilitators and barriers and to develop targeted supports and resources to help widen the flow of people navigating their own pathways to employment.

It is from the Pathways Advisory Group that an idea of a network group for Professionals with SCI (PROwSCI) was formed. The initial gathering for PROwSCI took the form of a planning meeting, facilitated by John Koumourou, where the participants were given the chance to share their thoughts and ideas around how the group could work effectively; highlighting possible contributions through a diversity of resources and networking opportunities. Discussion took place around the reasons why the group has come together, its goals, objectives and general planning.

It is important to note that PROwSCI is not defined by the Pathways project, rather inspired by it.

Proposal / Scoping the project:

John Koumourou, also a member of the Pathways Advisory group facilitated the session.

John was involved in a government funded project over ten years ago, made up of representatives from various major computer companies and the big banks including IBM (Mark Bagshaw) and HP (John), to help get mature age and disability into the workforce. While a great initiative, it fizzled and ever since John has been passionately searching for a Professionals with SCI/Disability group to join. Until now he hasn't found the right fit but through his search discovered a group in Canada with a good model. The reasons for formation, purpose and goals for this session have been based on the Canadian model.

General discussion:

- Look at what other disabilities are working on or a part of in regards 'pathways to employment' to return to work; important to network into these wider groups.
- Utilise the value of community networks and the degree of lived-experiences that can be shared with others.
- Spire will support and resource the group with the expectation for it to be organic and self-sufficient as it grows. Spire will continue as a member of the group on a partnership approach.
- Not expecting to come out of the first planning meeting with an exact plan, rather an agree ideas, direction and purpose which can be refined over time.
- Defining group branding will be important, as good branding will help move the group forward, and reduce the probability of it declining.
- Spire uses video content, shared via its website, YouTube and Social Media, to reach a little further into the community than its immediate networks; will utilise this for the PROwSCI group also.

Factors / Reasons for Formation:

- There is a lack of information available, e.g. can get all-day parking in the CBD (disability allocated spot or not) if you have a letter from your employer, place of study. Job Access source and organise workplace modifications such as new doors, ramps etc.
- IDEA: start an information database, allowing for a broader reach (beyond rehab). Could get someone from an organisation like Job Access to speak with the group; might provide a good starting off point to building an information resource.
- Advocate to large business for multiple reasons including to show that people living with a disability can fill roles beyond the basics (e.g. call centres) and that there are actually many benefits to hiring a person with a disability.
- While it has value and purpose, going beyond an information database; actively support individuals to get back to work. There are some information resources already available but they have a tendency to 'dry up' without the motivation and impetus behind them.
- Group members can open up their own employers.
- Could look at partnering with a recruitment house.
- INFORMATION: Due to lots of travel for work John wrote a business case to travel business class instead of economy as it makes a big difference for health & wellbeing. Some people in the workforce have thoughts and ideas that have been internally approved to make their work life easier/more satisfying but there isn't a platform in which to share these ideas.
- Could look at there being different redundancy packages for people living with disabilities.
- There are many personal aspects that impact the everyday work/life of someone living with a SCI, e.g. health, appointments, time consuming funding applications – many of which employers cannot account for 24/7. Work days are also much longer due to the extend time getting ready and travelling.

- Important to be upfront and honest; communicate your needs with your employer as generally they are otherwise oblivious (how do you communicate this but still come across as an appealing candidate). Support from others – tips and tricks.

Purpose:

- An open group; not limited.
- Networking is very important.
- Volunteering can be just as rewarding as paid work, and can often lead to paid permanent positions.
- Open the group up to organisations and employers that may want to attend.
- Look at involving ‘educating’ the *Top 20* e.g. big banks, phone companies, government bodies as they often have whole departments or groups dedicated to disability employment; however are not well versed in the area.
- If the group reaches this point need to ensure that the agenda and key points are agreed upon and driven strongly.

SUGGESTION: Charles thinks his organisation would open up a meeting room that the group could use; a good starting off point to get them involved.

Meeting logistics:

- To meet once a quarter.
- Sub-groups may emerge between the quarters, allowing for a bit more fluidity should there be people that are particularly motivated/have the time.
- To meet late in the afternoon, around 3-4pm as it still allows people to work part of the day. This would also allow for post-meeting drinks or dinner.
- AQA is always an option for meeting location but the CBD may be more central, especially as the main public transport hub (many also work in the CBD).
- Won't invite others, such as employers and organisations, to the first official meeting as want to ensure the goals, directions and purpose are more solidified.
- Share emails of everyone in the group and/or set up a Facebook Group/Google Plus so that thoughts and ideas can continue to be shared.
- Spire will share notes from the meeting with the group. Spire will also upload an article to their website which will get shared on Facebook as this helps push the message beyond the immediate.

Meeting wrap-up/outcomes:

- Will need to refine and simplify the purpose, goals and objectives of the group over the coming weeks – as it was a rough draft for discussion, alter the wording to make it the groups own.

- As the meeting concluded the group agreed that a good framework has been set in which to move forward; ensuring it doesn't end up taking the form of a support network.
- It is clear that the group is a 'powerhouse' of knowledge, different backgrounds and experience which will allow for a multi-faceted and focused approach of its goals.

Next steps:

- The notes from the meeting will be circulated via email.
- An article will be uploaded to the Spire website and shared via social media.
- Planning for the first official meeting.