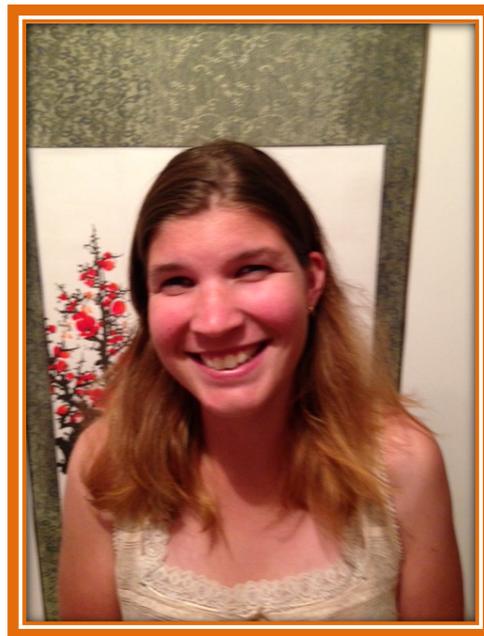




Establishing a support group for Young People with disabilities in Alice Springs

By Olivia Johnson



December 2013

Please note: The Chief Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians is an independent advisory body. The views expressed in this report are those of the author and are not necessarily reflective of those of the Office of Youth Affairs or the Northern Territory Government.

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- Ms Michelle Castanga – President, Disability Advocacy Service, Alice Springs
- Ms Sharon Floyd – Mentor, Leaders for Tomorrow
- Mrs Elizabeth Johnson – my Mother.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AYAC	Australian Youth Affairs Coalition
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
NT	Northern Territory

Terms Used in this Report

- Youth: Individuals aged 12-25 years of age.
- Young Territorian: A person aged between 12-25 years who lives in the Northern Territory.
- Disability: A disability is defined as a limitation, restriction or impairment which has lasted or is likely to last for a period of six months or more, and which restrict a person's every day activities. ¹

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¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2013, "Australia's Welfare 2013", Australia's welfare series no. 11, Cat no AUS 174, Canberra

Executive Summary

Disability can adversely affect a young person's ability to engage in social activities, recreation, education and employment, and can limit their opportunity for development and social inclusion.² They often face significant barriers in gaining information about services as well as social isolation. The aim of this project was to identify whether the young people of Alice Springs were aware of what services are available for people with a disability, and whether they would be interested in forming a support group.

During the research stage of my report, I conducted a survey at Centralian Senior College in both their supported learning class, Gateways, and in three classes made up of Years 10, 11 and 12. In total, 59 survey responses were collected. The survey showed that 12% of survey respondents stated that they have a disability, and 42% of those surveyed had an idea of where to find what services were available.

The survey responses showed that there was some interest in establishing a support group, with 19% of total respondents indicating that they are interested in joining. Of the seven people surveyed who had a disability six (85%) indicated that they would like to join; the remainder who answered indicated that they would get involved in the support group but do not have a disability. This is illustrated in Graph 6 of this report.

The research confirmed that my personal experience was not uncommon, and helped to me to come to the conclusion that more information about the services available to people with a disability is needed. The recommendations in this report come from the results of the survey.

It is recommended that the Northern Territory Government:

1. assist with the establishment of a support group for people with a disability; and
2. assist services to ensure that young people with a disability know about what services are available to them.

² Groce 2004, "Report for Cerebral Palsy Alliance Evaluation of the Ignition Mentoring Program", pg. 11.

Introduction

The aim of this project was to identify whether young people in Alice Springs living with disability would be interested in forming a support group. People with a disability often feel isolated, and a disability support group would not only be a way of keeping young people informed but would also allow them to feel more connected with their community. This would help people with a disability to contribute more to the communities where they live and to feel that they have more purpose and value in society.

The idea for my project came from personal experience. I am a young person with a disability living in Alice Springs. When I was new to town I found it difficult to find out what services were available for young people with a disability, and how to access these services. I also found that it was difficult to access social activities that others take for granted, and that many of the social supports available in my previous town of Wodonga, were not available in Alice Springs. This report investigates whether this is an experience common among others living with a disability in Alice Springs.

The basis of this project was to determine if young people knew what services were available for people with a disability, and based on those findings, work out ways of improving their knowledge. I also wanted to find out whether young people would be interested in establishing a disability support group.

The results of my survey reveal that less than 45% of survey respondents know what services are available for people with a disability. If Alice Springs percentages are similar to those in the wider Northern Territory (NT) and Australia, then raising young people's knowledge of available services needs attention.

This is an issue because unless young people know what services are available they will not be able to access them, which means that money spent on services may not be reaching their target group. It also suggests that because they are not accessing all the services available, young people with a disability are not living to their fullest potential.

Discussion and Major Findings

In 2009, it was estimated that 204,000 young people (7%) reported some form of disability. Of these young people, 56,000 (or 27%) reported experiencing severe disability. This number also represents 1.8% of all young people.³ According to the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) “young people with disabilities are often disadvantaged not only by their disabilities, but by the communities lack of understanding of what it means to live with a disability... [They] are often excluded from employment and education, and often miss out on meaningful opportunities for participation in social and community life.”⁴

Australian society is stronger when everyone is able to contribute positively to the community. A support group is needed to help young people living with a disability in Alice Springs feel more connected with each other and with the wider community. A support group will not only be a way of sharing knowledge but would provide opportunity to meet with others in a supportive environment.

The support group would be designed for young people living with disabilities (and their carers). They would meet once per month to share their experiences and their knowledge, and to develop relationships. Attendees with a disability would be supported by volunteers. The agenda for meetings would be determined by the support group, based on their needs and feedback.

Young people would benefit from the support group because it would help them to be aware of the services that are available to make their lives better. It would also help to reduce the social isolation of people with a disability. Service providers would benefit because it would provide a way for them to get information about their services out to their target group.

As part of this report I accessed the Internet to find statistics, definitions, and information about Disability Services for young people, both in the NT and the wider Australia. I accessed the websites of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AYAC, NT Government and Youth Advocacy Victoria.

³ AIHW 2011. “Australia's welfare 2011”. Australia's welfare no. 10. Cat. no. AUS 142. Canberra: AIHW. p.18

⁴ Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, “Disability”, <http://www.ayac.org.au/uploads/Disability.pdf> Accessed 20/11/2013.

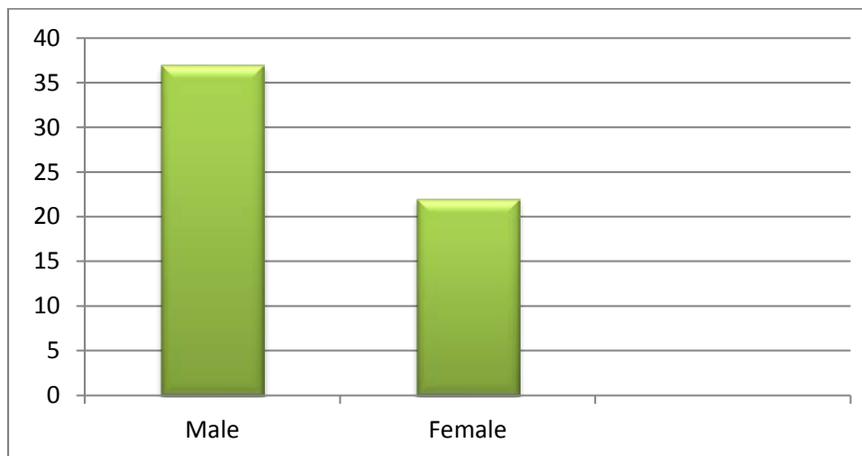
In total, 59 students from Centralian Senior College were surveyed in Term three 2013. This group was made up of students from Gateways (supported learning unit) and three classes made up of years 10, 11 and 12. The key questions that I asked were:

- Do they feel that there was enough support for people with a disability?
- What services were available for them to access?
- How would you find out what services are available?
- Would they be interested in being part of a support group?
- How often would they like to meet?

The survey has revealed that very few young people in Alice Springs are aware of what services are available for people with a disability and where and how to access these services. A disability support group for young people would provide a way of sharing information while at the same time providing peer support and social interaction for people who may otherwise be quite isolated.

Analysis of survey responses

Graph 1: Gender breakdown of survey respondents

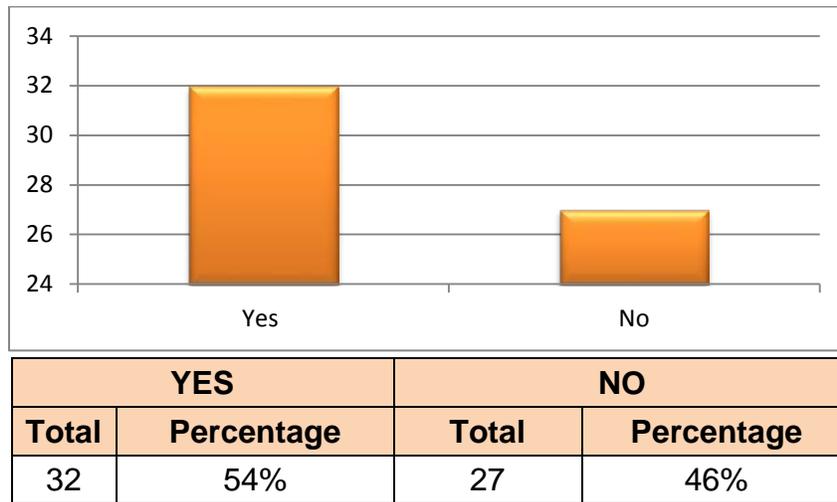


MALE		FEMALE	
Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
37	62.7%	22	37.3%

Summary

The majority of survey respondents at 62.7% were secondary school aged males who live in Alice Springs totaling 37 young men. A total of 22 secondary school aged females completed the survey.

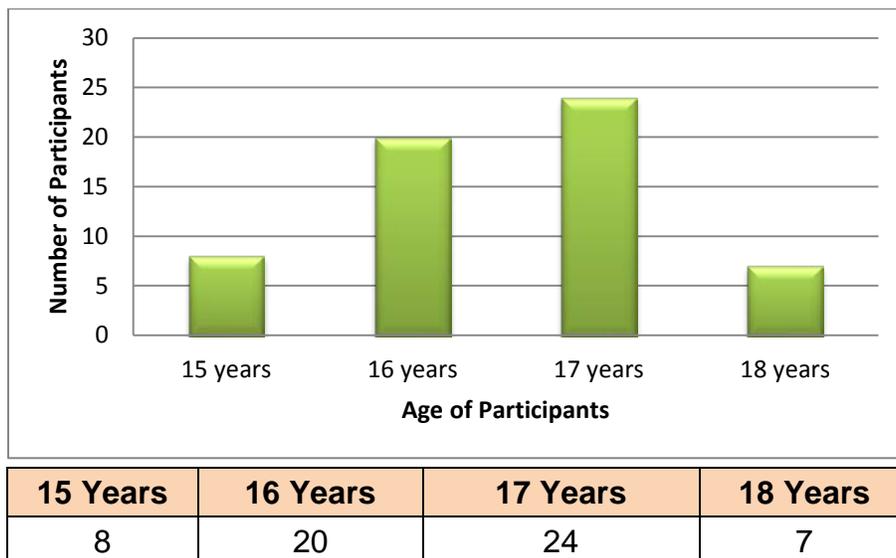
Graph 2: Breakdown of Indigenous and non-Indigenous survey respondents



Summary

The majority of survey respondents, a total of 32 young people identified as Indigenous.

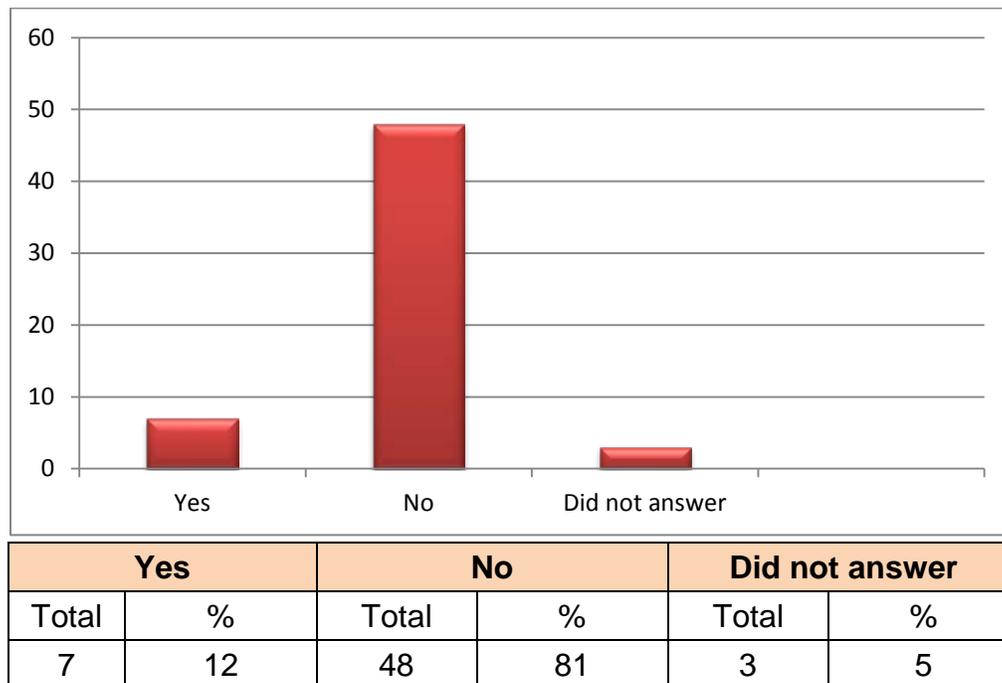
Graph 3: Age of survey respondents



Summary

The large proportion of survey respondents were aged 16-17 years with 25% of respondents falling outside of this age bracket. As the survey was conducted at Centralian Senior College, only young people attending school were surveyed. Attempts to organise to survey young people aged 12-14 through Centralian Middle School were unsuccessful. No attempt was made to survey young people aged 19-25 (who had left school.)

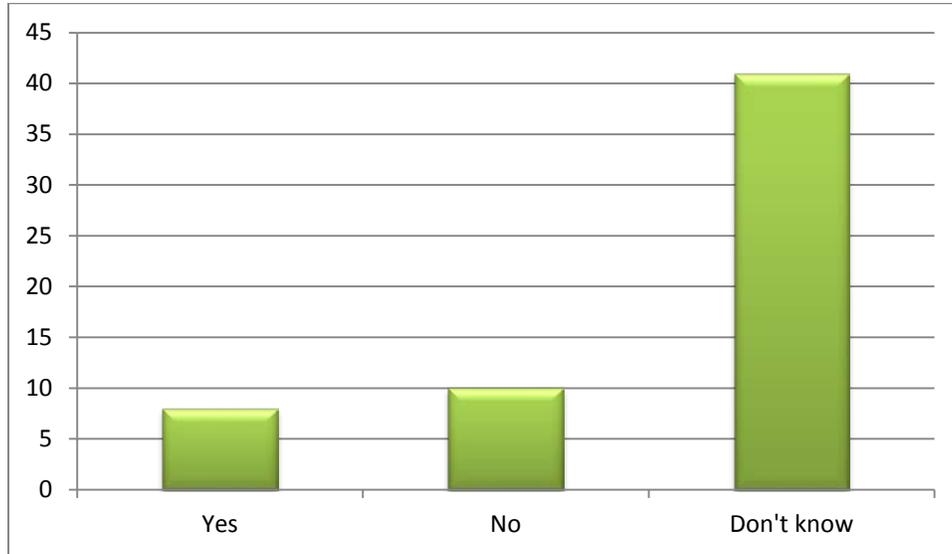
Graph 4: Survey respondents who identified as having a disability



Summary

The majority of survey respondents did not have a disability. Only 12% of respondents indicated that they have a disability. This is slightly higher than the Australian average of 7%. Given the small number of respondents with a disability, the survey may not accurately indicate the true desire of young people to establish a support group for disabled people.

Graph 5: Do you think there are enough support services for young people with disabilities in Alice Springs?



Yes		No		Don't Know	
Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
8	14	10	17	41	69

Summary

Only a small number of respondents, a total of eight believed that there are enough support services for people with a disability in Alice Springs.

Question 6: What services would you like to be available locally?

Summary

Only 10 respondents suggested services that they would like to see available in Alice Springs. This included more education services and testing and therapy centres, horse riding, activities and recreation, more wheelchair ramps, signs in larger print, a zebra crossing in Hartley Street, more funding for disabilities, a mental health clinic for young people, additional services for paraplegics and transport.

Question 7: How do you find out what services are available?

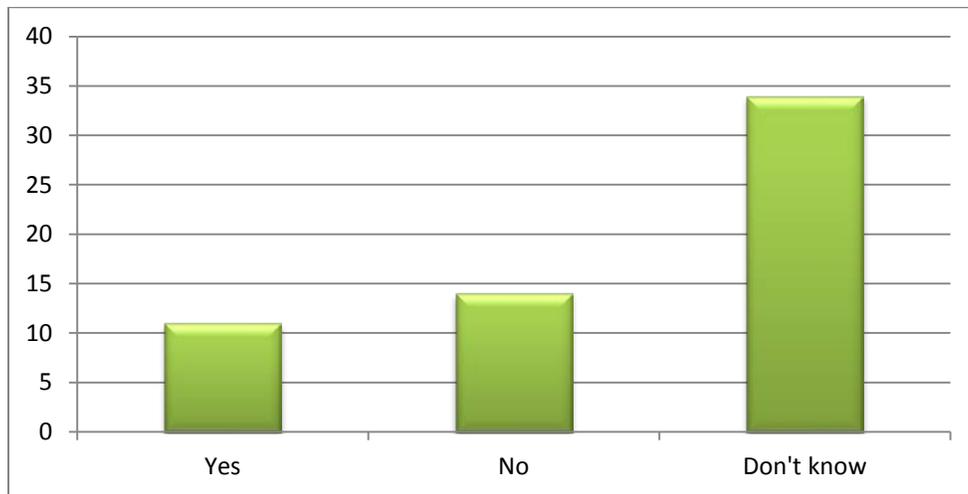
Summary

In total 34 respondents (58%) either did not know, were unsure or did not answer that they knew how to find out what services are available.

The other respondents said that they could find out through:

- the newspaper;
- school;
- family and friends;
- doctors and therapists;
- carers; and
- social media (facebook).

Graph 6: Would you join a support network for young people with disabilities in Alice Springs?



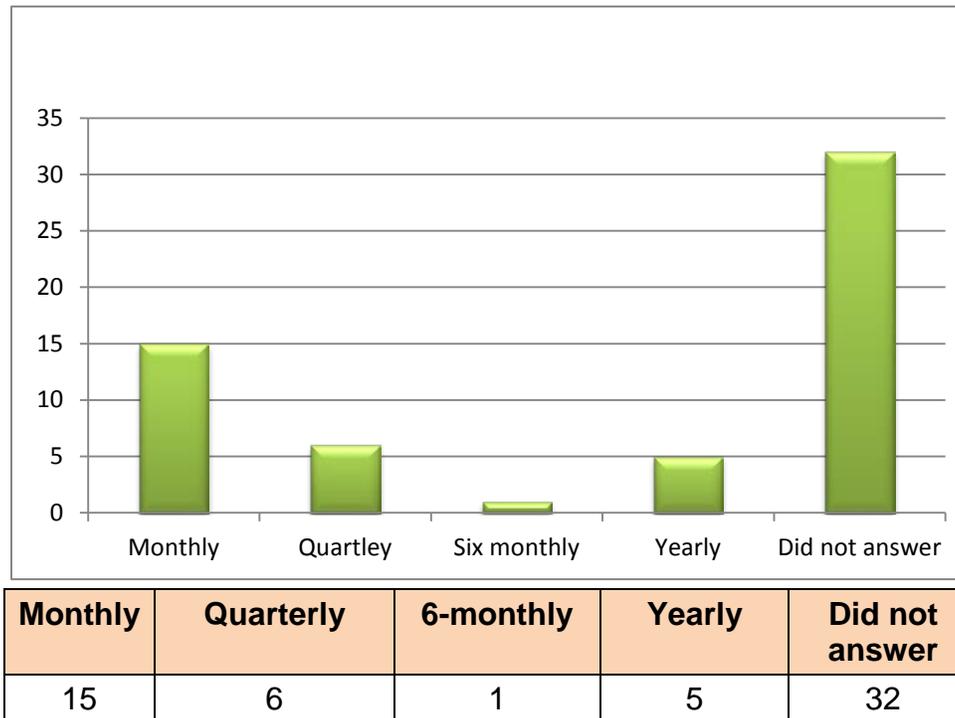
Yes		No		Don't Know	
Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
11	19%	14	24%	34	58%

Summary

In total 11 respondents said that they were interested in joining a support group, six of these were young people with a disability. Approximately 50% of respondents interested in joining the support group did not have a

disability, which indicates an interest in volunteering to provide support for young people with a disability. A total of 31 respondents were undecided, which suggests that more information would be needed before they would commit to being part of the group.

Graph 7: How frequently would you like the support group to meet?



Summary

The majority of respondents who answered this question preferred to meet once per month.

Summary of all Findings

In May 2013, I hosted a movie night at The Salvation Army, advertising the event through the local schools. Unfortunately the event did not go very well as only 12 people attended, and none of them were young people.

I organised the movie night because the Alice Springs Youth Action Group arranged a similar event as part of National Youth Week which was very successful, but which did not have many people with a disability attending. I thought that this would be an opportunity for people with a disability to enjoy an evening together. I did not do any follow up after the event, other than debriefing with my mentors.

Through the research stage of my project I found that while young people with a disability in Alice Springs are supported through their schools and accessing the day programs at Life Without Barriers and Bindi Inc., there is not a support group for people living with a disability. Unfortunately I was unable to find any support groups specifically for young people with a disability in the NT.

There are examples of support groups in other parts of Australia. In Wodonga, Victoria (my previous home) there is a group for High School students called Interchange. Funded by the Victorian Department of Youth Affairs, Interchange is operated by volunteers and provides activities where young people with disabilities can meet together and participate in social activities, sport and leisure activities. This includes activities such as excursions, games nights, movies and bowling. There is also a group for adults, called Volunteer Friends, which young people with a disability who have finished school are able to attend. Both these groups provide monthly social activities. They work well, but are very dependent on adult volunteers and on external funding. This model might be difficult to establish in Alice Springs where it is difficult to recruit volunteers.

The NT Government could benefit from the group because it increases social inclusion for people with a disability. Social inclusion is an indicator of a strong society, which is a priority of the *NT Government's Framing the Future blueprint*.

Framing the Future's vision of a Strong Society is a society that:

- values an individual's right to freedom and ensures everyone has the same access to opportunities and resources to make a contribution to, and participate in, society and the economy;
- supports the most vulnerable; and
- is safe for all – at home, at school, in the workplace and while travelling.

Objective 3 of Strong Society within *Framing the Future blueprint* also describes a society that is safe, connected and encourages participation which aims to:

- increase community connections: increase opportunities for people to participate and volunteer in the community.

Conclusion

This report examined whether young people in Alice Springs know what services are available for people with a disability, and whether they would be interested in establishing a disability support group.

The research found that 12% of survey respondents had a disability (higher than the Australian average of 7%); 58% did not know where to find out information about services for people with a disability; and 19% indicated they would like to establish a support group.

The project set out to determine what young people in Alice Springs know about disability services and whether there is a need for a support group. I believe that these outcomes have been met.

Recommendations

I recommend that the NT Government:

1. assist with the establishment of a support group for youth with a disability who live in Alice Springs; and
2. support local organisations who provide services for young people with disabilities in Alice Springs in more effectively promote their services

References

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Evaluation

I was able to successfully undertake a survey of young people in Alice Springs regarding their knowledge of support services for people with a disability, and to establish whether there is a need to set a disability support group for young people.

Some obstacles that I encountered were finding sufficient young people willing to participate in the survey; it was difficult to liaise with the school staff to have the survey processed; I was not aware of the time limit on Survey Monkey and so some surveys were done on paper not via internet; I also had difficulty writing the report and needed considerable assistance from my mother to achieve this.

I have learned that I need to work on my time management skills, as it was not easy to juggle work as well as community involvement, especially when it required me to have time off during working hours to attend the school, and I had trouble meeting my deadlines. My disability meant that I have needed significant support with the written component of the project, teaching me that I will need to have these supports in place when I return to study to ensure that I am able to complete my units.

Appendix A: Support Group for Youth with Disabilities and Available Support in Alice Springs survey

Olivia Johnson is a member of the 2013 Chief Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians (Round Table) and is investigating ways to improve the wellbeing of young people with a disability living in Alice Springs through the creation of a support network group. Your comments will remain anonymous and will be used for the purpose of data collection. Olivia would really appreciate your help with her project. Please complete and submit this survey by 13 September 2013.

1. Gender

2. Are you Indigenous?

- Are you Indigenous? Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

3. How old are you?

- 15 years
- 16 years
- 17 years
- 18 years

4. Do you identify as having a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

5. Do you think there are enough support services for young people with disabilities in Alice Springs?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

6. What disability services would you like to be able to access in Alice Springs?

7. How do young people with a disability find out about events and activities?

8. Would you join a support network for young people with disabilities in Alice Springs?

- Would you join a support network for young people with disabilities in Alice Springs? Yes
- No
- Maybe

9. If yes, how frequently would you like to meet?

- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Twice a year
- Once a year

Other (please specify)

10. If you would like to receive more details of the establishment of the support network please provide your contact details: