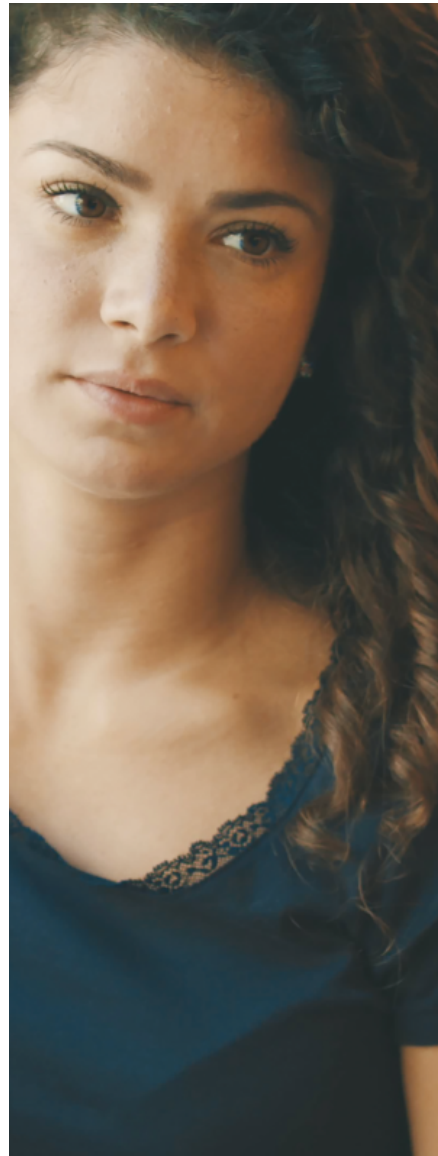


## Working with people living with disability and their family, carers and friends

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Relationships Australia Canberra & Region (RACR) are undertaking significant and innovative work supporting people living with disability, as well as their families, friends and carers.

We believe that people with disability have the right to have a voice and be heard. Our disability support programs are co-designed with those with lived experience to provide a safe and nurturing space so they can strive to achieve their common goal – to work and study, enjoy their citizenship and responsibility and be able to engage and contribute to their communities to the best of their abilities and enjoy the social diversity that this right brings.

An example of one of our innovative co-designed programs is the work we did with This Is My Brave Australia Inc. (TIMBA), through our Disability Royal Commission Counselling & Support program, funded by Department of Social Services.

RACR first met with Purple Chicken, a café based in Albury that trains young people with disability. While there we met a social work student who subsequently undertook a clinical placement with RACR. Her passion and knowledge was the catalyst for a more creative approach in developing a submission for individuals impacted by the Royal Commission.

Through our connection with the café RACR partnered with This is my Brave Australia to develop a program to support people wishing to provide information to the Royal Commission. The project faced significant challenges due to COVID. On a cold and rainy Sunday evening in May, eight participants provided their information to the Royal Commission via a performance, which was of great significance for each participant and

provided a humbling and confronting experience for the many people that attended. RACR was proud to be part of this wonderful and ground shifting event. Around 70 people attended, including the local MPs and media.

Individual and group submissions were prepared for the Royal Commission that will form part of their final report to government.

The common theme was Awareness, Inclusion and Equity. Participants highlighted the need for community education to challenge the stigma people living with disabilities experience daily. Workers observed participants' shift in confidence for group participation. Participants that were passive became active and shared their stories and experience.

RACR is also working with young women living with autism who often share frustrating tales of how difficult it was to get a proper diagnosis, while many women are not recognised as having autism until adulthood. For these women to thrive, it is important they have access to great peer support networks and practitioners who understand their challenges. The need for a safe and supportive network became even more important during the darkest days of COVID-related lockdowns.

We connected people who identify as female and autistic in a safe space and used creative expression to discuss aspects of identity and trauma. An online group provided a platform for individual and group submissions to the Royal Commission. This group has continued to provide a social and advocacy space and as such promotes RACR'S commitment to community capacity building.