



# **Co-designing resources with, and for, people with disability: A qualitative research evaluation**

D'Cruz, K., Oliver, S., Topping, M., Witts, L., Aimers,  
N., Winkler, D., & Douglas, J.



# Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The Summer Foundation  
acknowledges the Traditional  
Custodians of country throughout  
Australia and their connections to  
land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to their Elders  
past and present and extend that  
respect to Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander peoples today.



# Background

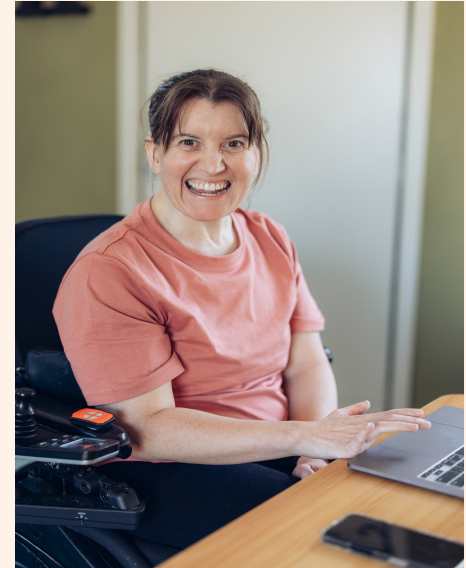


- Access to housing that meets one's needs is a fundamental human right (AHRC, 2024)
- Australia has a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) that funds over 331,000 adult participants with disability (NDIS Act, 2013)
- As of 2025 more than 15,000 NDIS participants live in specialist disability accommodation (SDA) (NDIS, 2025)
- SDA is specifically designed housing to enhance independence and provides on-site, and individualised support



# Background

- Having choice, control, and awareness of rights is critical for people with disability to live free from the risk of violence, abuse and neglect (CoA, 2023a,b)
- Essential that people with disability are informed consumers

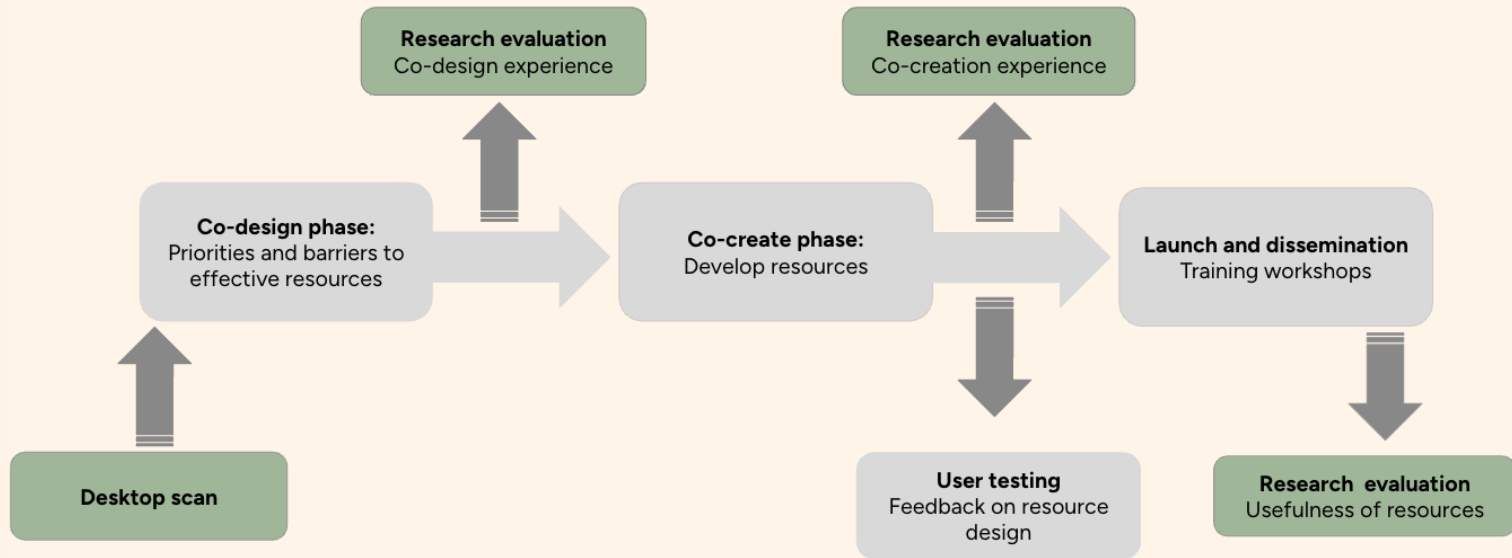


# Context

- The Feedback in Supported Accommodation and Resources (FISAR) project was conducted over 18 months
- FISAR aimed to create resources that support people with disability living in SDA to be informed consumers and to exercise their rights
- A co-design partnership approach with people with disability, their supporters and housing and support providers
- Funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Commission in Australia



# FISAR co-design project



# FISAR co-design project: 12 resources



## **Understanding rights & responsibilities**

Roles & responsibilities sheet, escalation chart & knowledge builder



## **Building a positive culture**

Video explainer & knowledge builder



## **Understanding & developing service agreements**

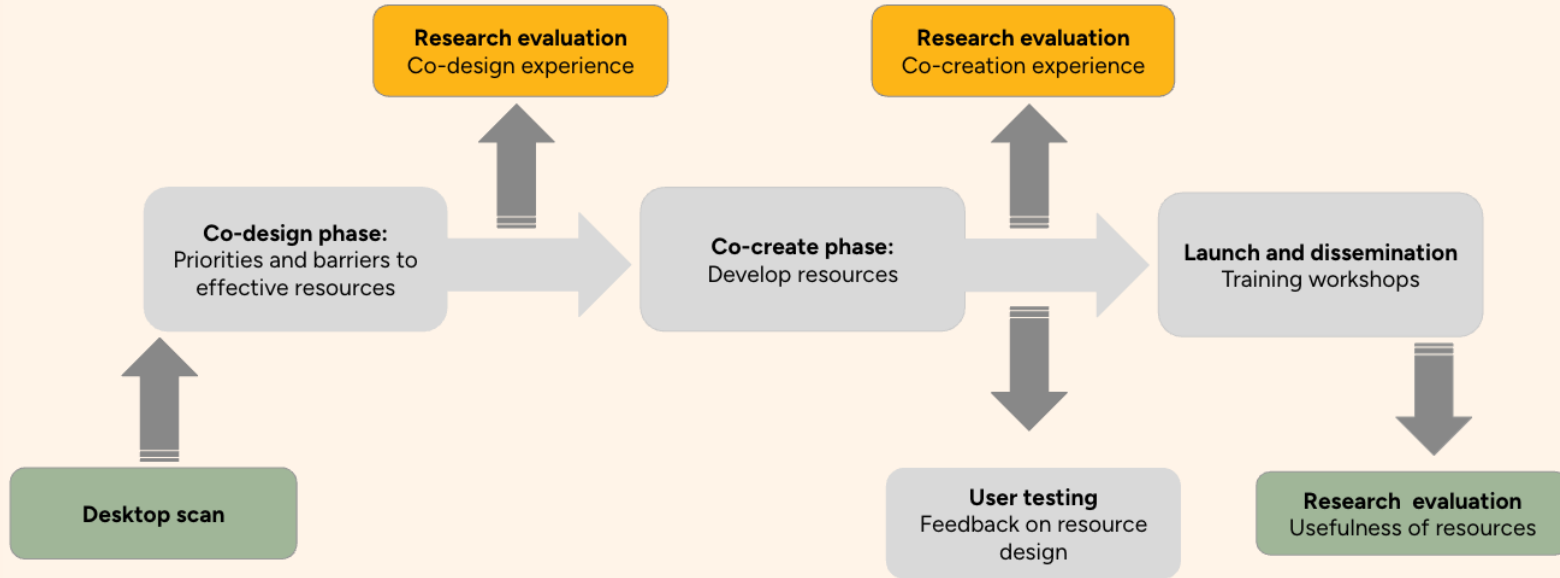
Service agreement guide, service agreement conversations & video explainer



## **Understanding shared support**

Tenant advisory committee checklist, knowledge builder & video explainer

# Research evaluation: experience of co-design



# Research aim

To better understand the experience of participating in co-design

1. Co-design contributors
  - People with disability
  - Supporters
  - Housing and support providers
2. Co-design facilitators

# Research methods

- Purposeful recruitment
- Online in-depth interviews & surveys
- Data collection at two time points
- Qualitative analysis using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2024)
- Pseudonyms to protect anonymity
- Double coding and analytical conversations
- Researchers with and without lived experience of disability

# Research participants

- 13 people with disability (7 females; 6 males)

Disability type: Spinal cord injury, paraplegia, progressive neurological, acquired neurological and developmental disability

Age range: 24-66 years

Range of cognitive and communication needs

Housing type: SDA


- 7 co-design facilitators (all female)

Range of co-design experience

With and without lived experience of disability



# Findings



**Sharing lived  
experience**



**Having real  
world impact**



**Inclusive &  
authentic**



Summer  
Foundation



**LA TROBE**  
UNIVERSITY

# Findings

Good to be able to share...hopefully things will grow out of it (Indra)

It's been great. It's like opened up a lot, I guess knowlege and allowed me to learn from others in different areas that I never thought it would (Kasey)

I found the workshops amazing...we could listen to each other's problems and experiences, and I got the feeling we weren't alone...that we were being a voice for others (Imashi)

Having real  
world impact

# Findings

Being part of a team that has input to try and improve the process (Bernard)

I feel like the stuff that I said [in the co-design workshops] I would actually see in the [produced] materials (Jack)

It was really clear that the group was having more ideas and producing better things than what one person would have done (Sarah)

Inclusive &  
authentic

# Findings

I think the role of the facilitators was perfect...they were just enabling us to make the decisions as opposed to running the show (Jack)

They [facilitators] were the ones who made sure people gave me time to talk (Romme)

I liked it.... if I was too tired to read all the information, I would just listen to the audio.... It was a lot easier to take in (Maeve)



# Key insights

Co-design



Enables collaboration across key stakeholders to create resources that meet the needs of the user group

**Role of facilitator is critical** (D'Cruz et al. 2025)

- Design of workshops
- Relational approach



**Sense of community**

# Conclusion

1. Building the evidence
2. A model for systems change- when lived experience is genuinely integrated into design and decision making
3. Continuous refinement and evaluation
  - Resources. How are they used in practice?
  - Co-design. What is working and what is not working?

# Resources

12 co-designed resources to help NDIS participants living in SDA



Research evaluation of the usability and usefulness of the resources



# Literature

D’Cruz K, Rothman R, Oliver S, Antonopoulos S, Douglas J, Winkler D. (2025) Co-designing with adults with acquired neurological disability in the community: a scoping review and thematic synthesis. *Brain Impairment* 26, IB25027.

<https://doi.org/10.1071/IB25027>



D’Cruz, K & Gee, E. (2025). Co-designing plans to access, initiate and sustain occupational participation. In M. Curtin, M. Egan, Y. Prior, T. Parnell, R. Galvaan, K. Sauve-Schenk, & D. C. Da Cruz (Eds.), *Occupational therapy for people experiencing illness, injury or impairment: Promoting occupational participation* (245–253). Elsevier.





## Contact

[kate.dacruz@summerfoundation.org.au](mailto:kate.dacruz@summerfoundation.org.au)

