

Issue #1

Stories from



Give it Forward

Small grants for the Support Group Sector



ConnectGroups
helping support groups & individuals

lotterywest



“The Give it Forward Program enables Support Groups the opportunity to access funds for the long-term improvement and sustainability of their group. Through the grant, Support Groups can focus on growing their group, increasing their capacity, and expanding the work they do to better support others impacted by the work of their group. The Program enables sustainability and longevity for the essential work Support Groups provide in our community. Groups who access these grants are supported by expert guidance and extensive knowledge in Support Group management and improvement under the team at ConnectGroups. These grants enable Support Groups to do what they do best – support others, without worrying about the financial to do so! The flexibility of the grant means groups with a range of different purposes and structures can all benefit from this program. The long-term capacity building, increase in support offered, and encouragement of innovation among Support Groups can be attributed to the Give it Forward Program.”
 Jake O’Brien – Chair, Type 1 Diabetes Collective

Thank You:

LotteryWest for your unwavering belief in our sector

ConnectGroups Support Groups Association WA Inc.

Dr Vicky Vass, Chief Executive Officer

Nadia Suwignjo, Small Grants Community Officer

Member:



**ConnectGroups is a
Mental Health First Aid
Gold Skilled Workplace.**



Contents

Introduction to the Give it Forward Program	2
Story 1 Aphasia WA	4
Story 2 Black and C.U.T.E	6
Story 3 GAIN	8
Story 4 iDareDream	10
Story 5 Ninnox Cancer Support Crew	12
Story 6 PFLAG Bunbury	14
Story 7 Prime Timers WA Inc.	16
Story 8 PROST! Exercise 4 Prostate Cancer Inc.	18
Story 9 Southwest Migrant Women’s Group	20
Story 10 Trigeminal Neuralgia Support Group WA Inc.	22
Story 11 Type 1 Diabetes Collective	24
Story 12 Vitiligo Australia Association (VAA)	26
Collective Impact – Building the Support Group Sector	28
Acknowledgements	32

The Give it Forward Program

The Give it Forward program (GIF) is a small, flexible, innovative grants program open to ConnectGroups members, managed by ConnectGroups and supported by Lotterywest. GIF has awarded \$524,418.76 to 153 projects since 2019. The objective of GIF is to help peer Support Groups to grow, increase their capacity and capability, and remain robust and sustainable.

GIF targets peer Support Groups with a health focus or assessed as non-mental health focused. Projects needed to:

1. Promote awareness of the existence of peer Support Groups into the wider community; to increase membership through branding, marketing, and partnership-building
2. Improve peer Support Groups' internal administration systems, sustainability, and governance
3. Upskill their membership in areas valuable to the group's purpose and goals

Continuous improvement and relationship building are critical components of the GIF program. They optimise stakeholder access to the funding, articulating the value of the small grants program to the sustainability of the peer Support Group sector, creating confidence in the collaborative approach of the submission process, and encouraging projects to further GIF's goals to positively impact capacity building within the peer Support Group sector in WA.

Each successful project was subject to impact evaluation and service outcome measurement through application of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) evaluation tool. RBA generated the metrics to demonstrate the GIF program as evidence-based and a good practice model.

GIF grants differ from traditional grants in that ConnectGroups liaises directly with goods and services providers, allowing peer Support Groups to concentrate on the business of organising and fulfilling their projects. This model eliminates the need for grant recipients to acquit or directly handle any funds, and the group does not need to be incorporated to be supported through the program.



Grants Awarded from June 2021 – July 2022

\$353,000
requested from 80 submissions

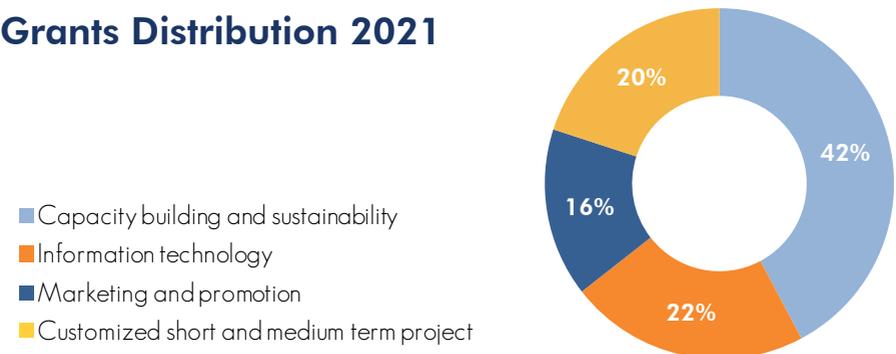
80
applications received across 3 funding rounds

\$199,735.25
funds awarded to 56 grants

56
grants approved inclusive of 4 collective impact projects

\$43,187
awarded to four collective impact projects benefitting 32 Support Groups

Grants Distribution 2021



These are some of their stories...



Story 1 Aphasia WA - “Creating Conversations”

Aphasia WA offers support for individuals impacted by the condition by providing a safe space for them to connect and build friendships. Aphasia occurs suddenly, often following a stroke or head injury. It may also develop progressively, as the result of a brain tumour or neurological disease. The condition often results in increased risk of isolation due to an impaired ability to communicate, and challenges in maintaining personal relationships. Aphasia WA runs regular peer-led conversation groups across eight locations in WA.



Give it Forward funded a three-phase project to develop the capacity of people with aphasia to self-advocate, be supported to communicate confidently in their community and to raise awareness about aphasia in the wider community. The first stage of the project equipped members with public speaking and advocacy skills to regain their confidence to communicate effectively. The second stage involved the development of an advocacy package designed by speech pathologists specialising in aphasia. The advocacy package assisted people with the condition to self-advocate and speak about aphasia in the wider community and with government agencies. The final stage of the project was delivery of a Communicating With Confidence Forum. The Forum provided an opportunity to workshop communication skills with larger groups of people, encouraging people with aphasia to interact more confidently.

“The forum had a very warm, embracing, welcoming vibe on entering. The student volunteers were very quick to assist in the registration process and aid as required. As a person with aphasia supporter and previous events coordinator, I’m mindful of the ‘pitfalls’ forum events can experience, but especially so with program timing. This event ran on time and was very inclusive, compensating with program shifts when required to allow aphasia participants more time to complete their presentations and humorous audience interaction when the inevitable technology glitches arose. The workshops were also a great idea & gave participants options to consider attending & more freedom to move around the venue if they required. The forum organiser and MC for the day was terrific. A wonderful, inclusive experience for myself and for those that I spoke to. Loved it! Would like to see this as a regular bi-annual event.” Robyn Simcock – supporter of person with aphasia and committee member





“It was amazing to have some of our schoolmates attend our teen talk. At first we were shy but as the panelists encouraged us we got engaged in deep discussions. We look forward to more of these events. Our banner and t-shirts made us really confident and proud to be a part of the group.” Tadiwa Mutanga

Story 2 Black and C.U.T.E (Courageous Unstoppable Tenacious Earnest)

Black and C.U.T.E offers support to young African-Australian girls who live in the Kalgoorlie area to embrace their cultural identity and reach their potential. Their activities are centered around team building and self-empowerment and providing them with a sense of belonging.

Black and C.U.T.E addresses the dilemma that exists living across two communities and gives young, marginalised girls a voice. The group also welcomes parents, in particular mothers, to strengthen relationships within their own families.

Give it Forward funded the cost of acquiring a new set of banners and twenty group t-shirts for group members. The funding has improved community awareness of Black and C.U.T.E. and its capacity to attract new members because of increased visibility. Wearing the group t-shirts during community events and group meetings has elevated their community profile and promoted cultural inclusion.

Following the Give it Forward funding, Black and C.U.T.E held a Community Open Day in December 2021 inviting local youths to come together to connect and share their stories. The event included a panel of youth specialists to talk about common challenges and coping strategies for multicultural youth, followed with food and cultural dance performances.



Story 3 GAIN

(Gynaecological Awareness Information Network) Inc.

GAIN provides support and information to individuals living with gynaecological issues including pelvic pain, endometriosis, and gynaecological cancer. Their objective is to empower women to be aware and confident of their gynaecological and sexual healthcare as well as to reduce social stigma associated with the condition. GAIN has over 300 members registered with an average of 15 people attending bi-monthly peer-led meetings. GAIN has also worked in collaboration with other community organisations and the Department of Health, to implement the Pelvic Pain and Endometriosis Program (PPEP) in several secondary schools in Western Australia. This program improves gynaecological health literacy amongst young women, empowering them to be active participants in their own gynaecological health.



Give it Forward funded the cost of renewing Public Liability Insurance and Volunteer Accident insurance supporting GAIN to sustain its capacity to source and retain volunteers. GAIN was also funded for the cost of website maintenance and printing of marketing materials to promote their services and support. GAIN was also awarded to hold a community awareness event “Stories from the Stirrups” in September 2022. The event was curated to honour women living with pelvic pain conditions to share their stories in celebration of Women’s Health Week.



As a result of GAIN’s efforts, community awareness of gynaecological health and conditions has been significantly increased in the wider community and more women have come forward to connect with GAIN. The website had been effective as an online platform supporting members and affected individuals to access updated information and resources around gynaecological health conditions and management.

“It was lovely to speak with the team at the Gynaecological Awareness Information Network who understood how I was feeling. This connection gave me the opportunity to talk about what I was going through and the support I received was amazing.

After treatment I had a good outcome and I decided to become a member of GAIN and if needed to I can give hope and support to others in the same situation by telling my story.” Lauren Welburn, GAIN Member.

Story 4 iDareDream

iDareDream is a Perth-based charitable Not for Profit formed in July 2018 and run by a voluntary Committee. They run a peer Support Group welcoming grandparents who are the primary carers of their grandchildren and sponsor the children in activities fostering their self-worth, confidence and life skills necessary to make positive life-choices. The group has a current membership of 58 families raising 99 grandchildren ranging in ages from 2 – 19 years. iDareDream supports these children to rebuild self-esteem by providing opportunities and experiences where they can discover something within themselves to create a fulfilling and exciting future.



iDareDream was funded with the purchase of a laptop, the design and printing of marketing and promotional materials, a subscription to Zoom premium access and Public Liability Insurance.

“Just wanted to let you know how well Jesse is doing with martial arts. Having ASD & ADHD it’s very difficult for him to focus and commit in general and especially with something new. He really has found the ideal activity and is not only doing so well, but is now starting to remember training night, keep his uniform organised and get himself ready without any prompting. All I can say is thank you iDareDream a million times.”

The new promotional material significantly improved their visibility during group and community events, as well as increased a sense of pride amongst committee and members. The funding has enhanced iDareDream’s ability to deliver more support and services to members while adding a greater degree of professionalism and credibility to their organisation when engaging donors supporting future sustainability.





“Thanks so much for the GIF grant. We were able to produce much-needed booklets with age-relevant information for those affected by cancer (20-39yo), where none existed before, and also raise awareness of our group. We couldn’t have done it without your support.” – Erinna

Story 5 Ninox Cancer Support Crew

Ninox Cancer Support Crew offers support to younger adults in their 20s and 30s who are living with a cancer diagnosis or during any stage of recovery. Their purpose is to establish an inclusive and empowered community through shared experience and a mutual support network.



The group was funded to develop two printed resources for newly diagnosed individuals entitled “The Shitshow Booklets”. The first booklet ‘The Cancer Shitshow: a guide for the newly diagnosed’ provides a range of useful and practical strategies during the initial and often overwhelming stage of diagnosis and treatment. The second booklet ‘The Shitshow Companion: how to be a good friend during cancer’ provides information and practical

guidance to families and caregivers about how to provide a positive support system. The group was also funded with a range of marketing and promotional materials as well as social media content development to strengthen their community profile. The project has significantly improved Ninox’s capacity to offer more services and educate and increase community awareness in the hope of reaching more impacted individuals.



Story 6 PFLAG Bunbury

PFLAG Bunbury has been providing support to people in South West WA since 2016; helping families and friends understand and support their LGBTIQ+ loved ones with knowledge, acceptance, love, and pride.

The group provides a confidential, safe, and welcoming environment where people can share concerns and receive comfort and reassurance. PFLAG Bunbury provides families and friends with access to current information and resources to help support their LGBTIQ+ child or loved one.

“We recently enjoyed the Bunbury Pride celebrations, and we were fortunate to visit the PFLAG stall where I was met with accepting and kind faces! Our child is gender diverse and to know we have support from PFLAG Bunbury is priceless. To know we are not alone in this journey and have the support of PFLAG is wonderful.” - K.M.

Give it Forward funded marketing and promotional collateral distributed as an introduction pack at public events and through partnership with different community organisations. They were also funded to purchase additional resources for their library which are available for free to members.



The funding significantly boosted PFLAG Bunbury's ability to promote their group and enhanced their opportunities to reach out and promote their services at community. PFLAG Bunbury has promoted their services through Headspace, the Connecting Communities Expo, Bunbury Pridefest, and Busselton Pride Alliance. As a result of the funding, PFLAG Bunbury experienced a 51% growth in membership supporting their longer-term sustainability.





“Being one of the original members of Prime Timers, I have enjoyed the comradeship and company over the years this social group has had to offer. I have noticed the membership has steadily increased over this period and with the recent financial assistance of the GIF program, it has enabled the group to provide a great mix of functions for members, which I believe, has had an impact on increasing membership and getting our name out there in the community. A big thank you to the ConnectGroups Team for their financial assistance to our group” -
Richard Williams

Story 7 Prime Timers WA Inc.

Prime Timers WA Inc. is a social peer Support Group empowering mature gay and bisexual men to engage in social, educational, and recreational activities addressing social isolation and operating since 2003. They have 130 members registered in their group. The group runs monthly meetings, weekly meal outings, and at least a once-a-year regional outing.



Give it Forward funded the cost of Public Liability Insurance, design and printing of the group’s promotional materials, and the purchase of group polo shirts for Committee members.

Following Give it Forward funding, the group experienced a steady increase in membership. Public Liability Insurance has supported the group to continue hosting events improving group members’ health and confidence as they enjoyed the opportunity to socialise. The opportunity to travel supported members’ wellbeing post-COVID as many had experienced isolation for an extended period of time.

Give it Forward has allowed Prime Timers to offer a range of social events and engagement that appeal to existing and potential members.

Story 8 PROST! Exercise 4 Prostate Cancer Inc.

PROST! is a men's exercise group for those impacted by prostate cancer to help overcome residual issues resulting from treatment. It is an affiliated exercise Support Group of the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia and the only one of its kind in Australia. PROST! manages three exercise groups in Leederville, Crawley and Fremantle, with a fourth planned for Joondalup. The exercises are evidence-based from research undertaken by the physiotherapist founder of PROST!, Dr Jo Milios, and are supervised by university qualified Exercise Physiologists with a specific skill set in men's health. Each group activity is followed by an informal coffee catch up to allow members to connect, share and support each other through their prostate cancer journey. PROST!'s mantra is "Muscle, Mateship and Mood" providing both physical and mental health recovery for participants.

Since its inception 10 years ago, PROST! has helped over 300 men, with about 70 currently active members. PROST has received the support of the WA Football Commission to encourage local WAFL clubs to make their gymnasiums available for PROST!'s use. Venues in larger country towns are also being investigated to bring the exercise program to men in rural areas who also suffer the effects of prostate cancer.



"I have been on this journey for 7 years and it has helped me in coping and drive to keep on fighting towards a healthy future with the Prost support program. The group mateship I find is supportive for me and I am able to offer support to others who are on a similar health journey from my own experiences. This is especially so through a casual coffee club we have developed after each session should any one wish to participate." Bill van Didden

Give it Forward funded the development of PROST!'s online exercise program, inclusive of video recording, production and editing, allowing members to exercise from home. The project proved a great respite during the first year of the pandemic. PROST! was also funded to have its website updated to include integration of an online application and group promotional videos and photos to showcase their activities and to establish a stronger online presence.

In addition, Give it Forward funded PROST! to expand its services to establish the Fremantle branch. The funding has allowed PROST! to focus on establishing a strong membership base in Fremantle and to be self-sustainable post-award.

Story 9 Southwest Migrant Women's group

Southwest Migrant Women's Group is a female peer Support Group based in Bunbury, and supports newly arrived migrants to settle and overcome social isolation. Migrants frequently live in isolation due to cultural and language barriers. The group was established in 2018 and has been connecting and supporting over 200 culturally diverse women through their monthly arts and crafts activities. They host free social wellbeing group activities open to the public including Zumba classes, an annual picnic and a Christmas gathering. The group was nominated as the City of Bunbury Community Group of the Year 2022.



Give it Forward funded the cost of venue hire and the purchase of arts and craft supplies to support the group to continue its activities and supporting members to access a safe and welcoming environment to connect and form community and belonging. Funding supported the group to increase its visibility in the Southwest, broadening its reach and achieving success in engaging new members.



"I am satisfied with Southwest Migrant Women's group because make me feel a sense of belonging in Bunbury. Having a connection with other migrants support my understanding of multiculturalism and I feel happy about who I am and also I have the opportunity to contribute to the community – Maria Tinoco"





Story 10 Trigeminal Neuralgia (TN) Support Group WA Inc.

Trigeminal Neuralgia Support Group WA Inc. provides mutual support, information, and encouragement through shared experience for sufferers of TN and their families. Trigeminal neuralgia (TN or TGN) is a long-term pain disorder that affects the trigeminal nerve - the nerve responsible for sensation in the face and which controls motor functions such as biting and chewing. Due to excruciating pain, sufferers feel isolated and often lack knowledge around managing the condition. The Support Group has been running for over 25 years, supporting 80 members.

The Trigeminal Neuralgia Support Group was funded to pay for their website design and annual maintenance to ensure online TN resources are updated and accessible. The group was also funded to purchase an A3 printer to support them to continue printing and distributing their newsletter and information to TN sufferers. The printing of an additional 1000 copies of the "Understanding Trigeminal Neuralgia" booklet was also funded and benefits impacted individuals and carers with simple yet powerful guidelines on the early diagnosis of TN and access to the TN Support Group.

"Being Treasurer of the TN Support Group, I am happy to report that we are receiving donations, continued enquiries from sufferers and members offering assistance in carrying out tasks such as distributing our booklets to hospitals, GPs, Neurologists, Neurosurgeons, Pain Management, Dentists and other health care specialists. The great new printer allows us to print our newsletter and information ourselves and gives us more scope to improve our editions. An up-to-date website will be most beneficial in reaching sufferers and giving them the information and support they need. We are most grateful to Chad for the many years of donating his time to taking care of our graphics and IT work. To know he is paid something will make it possible to continue asking for his help and guidance." Julia McDonald

Give it Forward has supported the group by improving their capacity to reach more TN sufferers in WA. They were empowered to manage the production and distribution of their comms instead of relying on other organisations, ensuring quality control. Give it Forward support allowed the group to engage with a professional website graphic designer to keep all their comms professional and contemporary providing the group with the confidence to distribute them beyond their membership to Neurological and Neurosurgical Specialists and other specialist providers.



Story 11

Type 1 Diabetes Collective (T1DC)

The T1DC is a diabetes peer Support Group providing support and education to Western Australians living with Type 1 Diabetes. The group runs educational events introducing topics that are not commonly discussed at clinical appointments. Informal social meetings are held monthly, connecting impacted individuals to share their diabetes journey.



Give it Forward funded the cost of venue hire and presenter fees for T1DC members to speak at the Gut Health and Tech Summit events. Engagement at educational events is an effective way to engage those living with diabetes and grow their membership, encouraging T1DC's sustainability. The events contribute to on-going learning about diabetes and the emerging technology available to those living with the condition.

Participation in these events built group capability delivering informative and meaningful education to the wider diabetes community and building group awareness. T1DC was supported to deliver evidence-based presentations sharing wisdom and knowledge around Type 1 Diabetes navigation and providing an essential community-based allied service to those challenged every day with its management.



“Since 2017 the T1DC has consistently shown up for the type 1s of Perth and 2022 has been no different, despite the pandemic being its most chaotic. Delivering events (such as the travel webinar) virtually thanks to zoom events allowed us to connect with our audience safely and cohesively - it felt great to still be able to engage and share knowledge and wisdom about navigating T1D life with others without the anxiety of spreading covid. Thanks to the financial support from ConnectGroups, the calibre/quality of our events has significantly increased this year - one example of this is the multiple events featuring detailed, practical and evidenced based presentations from certified health professionals (dietitians, CDEs) who are also T1D.” -
Serena

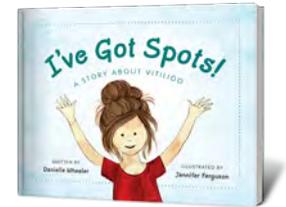


Story 12 Vitiligo Australia Association (VAA)

Vitiligo Australia Association (VAA) provides research-based support, public education, and advocacy to individuals living with the condition to improve awareness of Vitiligo in Western Australia. Vitiligo is a medical condition that causes white patches on the skin. The discoloured areas usually increase with time with significant impact on individuals' self-confidence and wellbeing. The condition is also associated with bullying, teasing and challenges with schoolwork and friendships. VAA strives to reduce social stigma of the condition by continuously educating and improving public awareness to accept and normalise the condition. VAA runs an adult peer Support Group which meets regularly with 107 members registered.



Give it Forward funded the cost of purchasing 50 copies of "I've Got Spots" books together with marketing materials distributed as part of an awareness package. The package was circulated through the Paediatric Dermatology department at the Perth Children's Hospital and supported by the Head of Dermatology, Dr Stephanie Watson. 50% of Vitiligo patients develop the disease in childhood. Consequently, the distribution of "I've Got Spots" books, which is a children illustrated book normalising the condition, will provide support for newly diagnosed children and their parents to access information that is available through VAA in Perth. The marketing materials include a QR code allowing access to free VAA membership and referral to VAA parent Support Groups in WA.



Collective Impact

Collective impact brings peer Support Groups together to work collaboratively towards a shared objective and to pursue addressing complex shared commonalities such as challenges, interest, or place. It is an approach that funds a solution by aligning community to achieve social change.

This model was integrated into the Give it Forward program as similar funding needs were repeatedly identified and pursued by multiple peer Support Groups. The collective impact model supported meaningful collaboration between peer Support Groups to collectively create a shared space and provide the resources to overcome common challenges.

ConnectGroups facilitated a consultation with the sector to explore shared challenges and identify collective solutions.



The collective impact initiative was divided into two principal streams, a Health Awareness Campaign and a Leadership Training Series.

The sector consultation identified key common challenges:

1. Lack of awareness in the wider community of local health-focused peer Support Groups and their services.
2. Inability to reach and support early diagnosed patients, their carers and family due to a lack of partnership with health clinicians.
3. Difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers. Long-term volunteers and members were reported as struggling with burnout resulting from addressing volunteer shortages.





Working Groups were formed to initiate two collective projects

A. Collective Health Awareness Campaign

In partnership with Tonic Media Network, this campaign targeted individuals as early as their GPs waiting room. This approach was analysed as the most effective to promote awareness of local peer Support Groups addressing specific health conditions. The campaign ran for a 12-month period from March 2022 to March 2023 and provided relevant information to 320 health service providers across WA.

B. Collective Leadership Training Series

This collective impact initiative involved partnering with a range of industry experts to deliver a tailored Leadership Training Series, targeted to meet the identified skills shortages of the health-focused peer Support Group sector. This training series aimed to better equip peer Support Groups to build essential skills and enhance volunteer management capacity. The sessions were delivered by Hancock Creative, Evolve Training and Volunteering WA (VWA) and ran from January 2022- August 2022. Key topics included systemic advocacy, effective volunteer management, grant writing, marketing, and social media use.

C. Joint Newspaper campaign – Albany Health-Focused Peer Support Groups

During ConnectGroups’ regional Albany tour, it was identified that health-focused Peer Support Groups had limited visibility.

Led by the Albany Prostate Cancer Support Group in collaboration with the Breast Cancer Support Group and Arthritis Group Albany, the groups engaged with a local Albany newspaper for a 12-month period of joint advertisement building community awareness of the groups’ reach and support. The campaign ran from January 2022- January 2023.

D. Shared digital library – PCaHELP

The pandemic resulted in many peer Support Groups’ rapid transition to digital engagement. Small grassroot prostate cancer groups were placed in a vulnerable position as they were not eligible to access funding for emergency IT equipment because of a lack of incorporation. PCaHELP, the representative organisation of Prostate Cancer Support Groups in WA, established a free digital library to access emergency laptops, shared Zoom accounts, Office Software and a mobile projector. This project benefited small Prostate Cancer groups to continue operating through COVID.

This collaboration model effectively brought the sector together and empowered groups sharing similar challenges and common objectives. The collective impact model demonstrated the strength of group collaboration for wider sector impact.

A total of \$43,187 was allocated to the four (4) collective impact projects benefitting 32 Support Groups, their membership, and the wider community.



ConnectGroups acknowledges the traditional carers of country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures; and to Elders past, present, and emerging. ConnectGroups acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation as the Traditional Carers of the land on which our offices stand today.

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