



A report by the

**Australian SRV Association – ASRVA**

Written by Greg Mackay

August 2021

**Research conducted by the Australian Social Role Valorisation Association**

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‘Fostering, safeguarding, and developing the theory and application of SRV’

We hope that readers will use and share this publication and its contents; we ask only that you cite the author and publisher as follows.

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## 1. WHAT THIS REPORT IS ABOUT

Those who use SRV have made comments such as ‘I am constantly surprised at the depth of the material and the clarity of the material’, ‘The SRV narrative is amazing!’, and ‘SRV indicates how the world functions; it speaks to social justice issues’.

However, ASRVA has recognised for some time that there are many threats to the long-term survivability of SRV in Australia.

By survivability, we mean an energetic learning and application of SRV, maintaining fidelity to the theory while ensuring its use creates significant, positive changes in the lives of people who experience devaluation.

One individual wisely observed, ‘SRV has to be alive for a reason. There has been a history of deep ambivalence about the worth of people with disabilities. Congregation and segregation have coexisted. We therefore need to “give life to aspirations of life”, a “decent and well-connected loving life”’.

This report presents an overview of the results of online discussions with individuals who are keen about the use of SRV. As discussions took place, it became obvious that we were getting repeating data. This indicated that there was significant agreement among participants.

ASRVA identified threats in its briefing paper (see [‘Intro to 2020 SRV Revitalisation Plan Context and Challenges’](#) at [asrva.org.au](http://asrva.org.au)). Several key threats are that:

1. there is low dispersal of the written theory and limited access to the material.
2. hosting of formal events is done by only four voluntary community organisations with occasional events hosted by several funded organisations
3. the formal teaching of SRV is limited to accredited Senior Trainers. For a host of reasons, there are now only two currently working and both nearing retirement
4. the accreditation, planning, monitoring, developmental, and other non-teaching supports needed to ensure SRV theory and practicum events does not occur in partnerships but sits solely with the Australian SRV Association
5. apart from local groups, whose focus is primarily on hosting workshops, there are no SRV networks of practitioners across Australia.

On a positive note though we were confident that there is sufficient interest from current family members, people experiencing marginalisation, workers and so on to act to redress this situation.

ASRVA is convinced that using a Community of Practice schema as the basis for the development and operation of an Australian SRV Community will bode well for the future.

The Community of Practice schema follows.

Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

A Community of Practice has three chief characteristics.

1. the Community: its membership, the relationships and interactions – SRV enthusiasts – are members of a specific domain who interact and engage in shared activities, help each other, and share information with each other. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
2. the Domain or context: its identity and focus – assisting people get the good things of life – is defined by a shared domain of interest; membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
3. the Practice: its methods, knowledge and expertise (SRV) are used by members of a community of practice and are ‘people who use SRV’ or less preferably, ‘practitioners’, (whether informal or formal). In other words, they *use* SRV. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

The following are essential too:

- the value it brings to its members – see ASRVA’s paper on Benefits of ASRVA membership
- the willingness of its members to contribute and share their knowledge and expertise.

The engagements with individuals were arranged as one early step in developing the Australian SRV Community. They included several online opportunities to both brief people and to gather their reactions, ideas, cautions, and willing contributions.

## 2. THIS IS WHAT WE DID

Our engagement with individuals took the form of ten online semi-structured discussions, each having up to ten participants with two discussion leaders from ASRVA.

This engagement with SRV-experienced people aimed to achieve three things:

1. alerting people to the threats
2. getting a sense of people's level of concern about the threats and interest in taking action
3. presenting our approach, the Community of Practice schema, to create an Australian SRV Community which would lead to a range of strategies aimed at SRV's survival and growth in Australia.

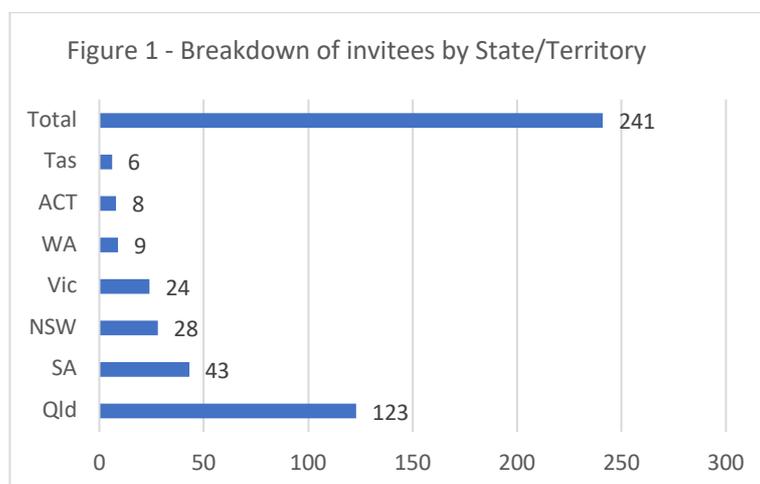
### 2.1 The People

Using our own knowledge and that of several well-placed colleagues, we drew up a list of 241 people who are very keen about SRV, who use SRV deliberately, and/or who have shown strong interest in SRV and its continuation.

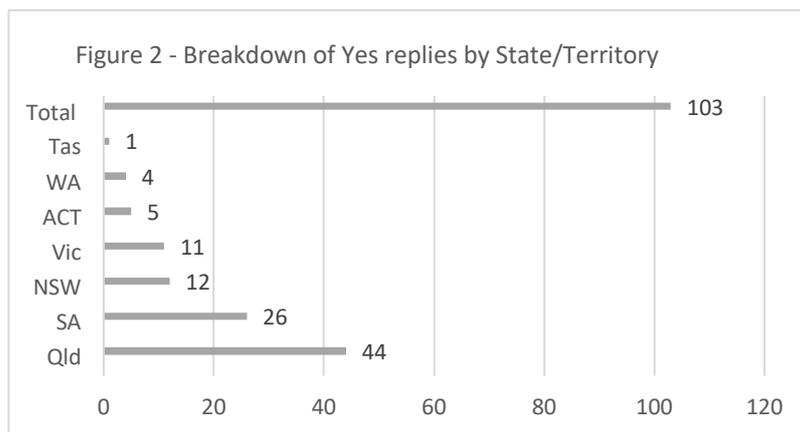
We then invited the 241 to a conversation, saying that we *'anticipate you might well have an interest in initiatives to secure the future of SRV in Australia'*.

Of those 241, a total of 103 (43%) accepted the invitation. A total of 72 people participated, which is 30% of those invited and 70% of those who accepted. These are remarkable figures and we believe it shows the importance and/or attraction of the topic to those invited.

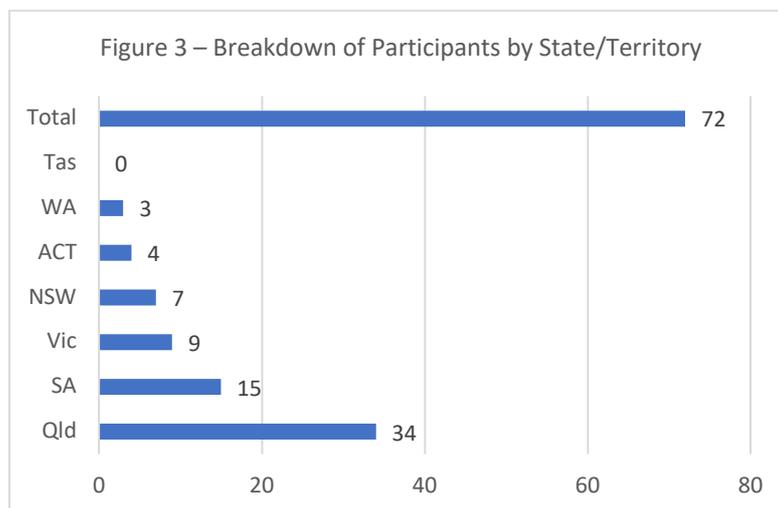
Figure 1 – Breakdown of invitees by State/Territory



**Figure 2 – Breakdown of Yes replies by State/Territory**



**Figure 3 – Breakdown of Participants by State/Territory**



## 2.2 The Process

Accompanying our invitations was a copy of the briefing document ASRVA prepared to highlight what we aimed to do and why, 'Introduction to the 2020 SRV Revitalisation Plan: Context/Challenges, Our Plan, & Roles'. See the website for a copy:

<http://www.asrva.org.au/the-srv-community-securing-the-future.html>

### 3. THIS IS WHAT WE ASKED PEOPLE

We conducted ten online discussions, facilitated by two people from ASRVA with up to ten people in each group, averaging 7.2 per group.

Each session had three parts.

The first part was 'Engaging with the issue', comprised of:

- briefly reiterating the big threats to SRV's future as identified in the briefing document
- asking participants for 'any other threats you can see?'
- hearing the participants' reactions to these threats to the future of SRV

The second part was 'Imagining better', comprised of:

- introducing the Community of Practice schema as what ASRVA would draw on as its approach to developing an SRV Community
- providing two examples of a Community of Practice from ordinary life (Culturally Valued Analogues)
- asking participants, 'Why would you join an SRV community?'

The third part was 'Exploring ideas about what happens in the SRV Community', comprised of:

- asking what types of activities participants thought an SRV community could engage in
- hearing from participants what roles those activities might mean for the SRV community members

We also included two polls (held during the online discussion) of participants:

1. 'What attitudes and skills do you bring to the SRV community?'
2. 'What is your sense about what ASRVA is trying to do?'

Towards the end of the discussion we asked participants,

'From the information about ASRVA being informed by the Community of Practice approach, what is your reaction? You might wish to use one of these: 'I LIKE', 'I WISH', 'I WONDER' (what did you like, what does it make you wish for, what does it make you wonder about?).

People's responses were recorded on the online whiteboard for later analysis and theming.

## 4. THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT:

### what other threats there are to SRV

We needed people to feel a collective concern for the issues confronting us. One individual cautioned that ‘sustaining SRV must be thought of as the clear intention of enabling better lives’. ASRVA leaders began with a reminder of several previously identified threats: the impending loss of STs, little of no application support, low levels of connection among SRV users, and the invisibility of SRV and it not being used widely. So we asked participants, **‘What are the big threats to SRV and what is your reaction to these?’**.

#### THREATS TO SRV

Comments have been loosely themed and some shown here to give a sense of the overall

##### Accessibility of SRV

- \* There aren't too many formal events
- \* Big gaps between theory events so knowledge dwindles, need constant reminders, we won't be insulted
- \* SRV isn't in TAFES, Uni's, RTOs
- \* Accessibility's the issue: way it's taught, few opportunities, no alternatives

##### People aren't connected

- \* We don't all have access to STs and they're probably too busy for all of us!
- \* Who do we go to, how do I get collegial support in the work I'm doing
- \* We need champions or mentors, how do we find them

##### SRV and other theories

- \* The government is pushing the social model of disability; how do we fix that
- \* What are all the science theories in SRV; we could use that knowledge for it to gain credibility
- \* SRV isn't shown to be a way of working with other approaches

##### How SRV is taught

- \* Lecture format problematic – modern way is learning online, bite-sized chunks, videos, podcasts. How to do this and still gain depth and understand the complexity
- \* People engage in different ways and paces so need an array of entry points & offerings
- \* There's been an abject failure to modernise the theory and the way it is taught

##### Perceptions of SRV

- \* There's also perception issues which are challenges - the biggie is that SRV is old hat
- \* How we respond to perceptions of SRV needs to improve, eg, show positively why it is fantastic
- \* Real perceptions of an outdated theory – how we react is very important

##### 'SRV can realistically be lost'

- \* This is a serious threat; anyone committed to using SRV must commit to keeping it going
- \* No action, no surprise when it goes

## 5. THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT:

### why they might join an SRV community

Having engaged with the issues, people were then asked to ‘imagine better’.

We introduced the Community of Practice schema as ASRVA’s approach to developing an SRV Community and provided two examples consistent with the Culturally Valued Analogue.

This led to us asking participants,

***‘Why would you/might you join an SRV community?’***

One individual reinforced the appreciation that a Community of Practice ‘enables members to have shared goals and tasks and that collaborative tasks lead to relationships’. Four themes emerged. Illustrative quotes are provided to give a sense of how people expressed their motivations. Additional ideas are included in the final/fifth section, entitled ‘Other Ideas’.

**CONNECTION** – this theme was the most often mentioned and indicated the value of relationships within an SRV community

1

#### Why join? CONNECTION

Connecting with like-minded people  
*‘It’s exhausting when you’re disconnected’*

#### Networking

*‘I’d like to be connected with others who understand SRV’*

#### Informal contact

*‘It would be great to connect outside of workshops, to “chew the fat” so to speak’*

#### Connecting with like-minded people

*‘I want to be with like-minded people & sharing values & beliefs’*

#### Participation

*‘If we were better connected, it would be pretty easy to participate in a range of things’*

#### Belonging

*‘The way I know I belong is when people miss me, or ask me how to do stuff, or help me out’*

1

## More on CONNECTION

### General collegial support

*'It's not about being super-clever at SRV, I often just need to chat with colleagues'*

### Connecting with like-minded people

*'It would be inspiring to be with people on the journey'*

### Connecting with like-minded people

*'A major safeguard is for us to be connected with each other and with vulnerable or marginalised people – simple, single, relevant'*

### Belonging - connection to local SRV groups

*'I can imagine how important it is in all this to be connected to a local SRV group'*

**DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING** – this theme, in various forms, was mentioned almost as often as 'Connection', and offered helpful ideas to strengthen the understanding and use of SRV.

2

## Why join? DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING

How to influence services/organisations

How to personally deal with challenges

### Other Sectors

*'I believe we could learn a lot from seeing how people use SRV in other sectors'*

### Life Milestones

*'There doesn't seem to be much on life milestones in SRV; I know there's the developmental model but we need to understand relevance of SRV at key life point changes – I'd join just for this sort of thing'*

### A Shared Forum

*'In terms of learning, we need a forum for sharing stories and underpinning of SRV concepts'*

### Guest speakers

*'We need to hear from different people who use SRV – have a regular time for a Guest Speaker to talk about their work or even in a panel'*

### Learning Opportunities

*'I'd join to gain opportunities for learning as there are currently very few'*

**APPLICATION** – this theme indicated that members want to learn to apply SRV, not just learn about it.

3

*Why join?*  
**APPLICATION**

**SRV & Challenges**

*'Learn from each other as to how we've dealt with challenges and how SRV has helped'*

**SRV & Other Marginalised Groups**

*'There must be much to learn across other groups where SRV is used, aged care, mental health etc'*

**Application Peer Groups**

*'I'd like to see regular meetings on different topics about SRV use, by each other and by experts'*

**Keeping Application Going**

*'I'd be very happy to have regular, ongoing training re application, like in-service training'*

**Strengthening Application**

*'How do we make using SRV worthwhile – how to make it happen!'*

**CREDIBILITY** – this theme reflected that the existence of a collective of those involved in learning and using SRV provides a level of credibility.

4

*Why join?*  
**CREDIBILITY**

**Credibility of SRV**

*'I'd join to help enhance the credibility of SRV'*

**Voice – Influence – Authority**

*'There's power in bringing peoples' voices together to challenge others; gives opportunity to influence through using [the] authority [of a theoretical and practice framework]'*

**Authority**

*'We sometimes need to influence through using the authority of an SRV collective'*

**Safeguarding the Theory**

*'It is essential to safeguard the theory; we need the groups' authority and presence'*

**Credibility of Those Who Use SRV**

*'Whether we say it is professionalising or positioning, we need the credibility even as parents'*

A range of other reasons for joining the Australian SRV Community were raised; here are a few.

5

*Why join?*

## OTHER IDEAS

### Other Skill Areas – Reflective Practice

*'I'd like to see us using reflective practice so we learn to use SRV better; many people are just trying, it's hit and miss'*

### Other Skill Areas – Reflection

*'I'd like to get lightbulb moments to improve my SRV work when I join'  
'Be great to get set time for us to come together and devote to reflection'  
'The SRV Community would offer the opportunity from time to time to "take a breath"  
'We need to be able to get to deeper thinking'*

### Mentoring

*'Finding the ideal mentor'  
'I'd like mentoring and ways to get nurturing opportunities'  
'There needs to be place for advice and support, not just going to busy Senior Trainers'*

### Networking

*'Being in the SRV Community means we can nurture and expand existing connections and organisations as well as establish new ones'  
'We could have regular networking events and have time to devote to relationships'*

### Personal Accountability

*'The SRV Community would provide a level of personal accountability; a form of self-reflection, "am I on the right track?"'*

### A Framework

*'The SRV Community will make an ideal vehicle for younger/newer people to give them a framework'*

### SRV Resources

*'I would hope it would give us access to much more SRV content and resources, or, at minimum, bring it all together so we can find stuff easily'  
'A resource of organisations or connections that use SRV or are underpinned by SRV'  
'Finding all the many SRV resources and centralising them – including the digital/online ones'*

### SRV Resource Development

*'This presents a great opportunity for more content creation and the development of resources that can be widely used, while making sure it isn't bastardised!'*

### Membership

*'Need a Membership Charter, give clarity both ways, but still part of a community'  
'Need principles and values spelt out so people know how to behave, critical but with respect'*

## 6. THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT:

### the types of activities an SRV community could engage in

We then sought to ‘Explore ideas about what happens in the SRV Community’, in relation to using a Community of Practice schema as the basis for that community. We wanted to find out what types of activities participants saw as desirable for an SRV community to engage in.

So we asked,

***‘What types of activities do you think an SRV community could engage in?’.***

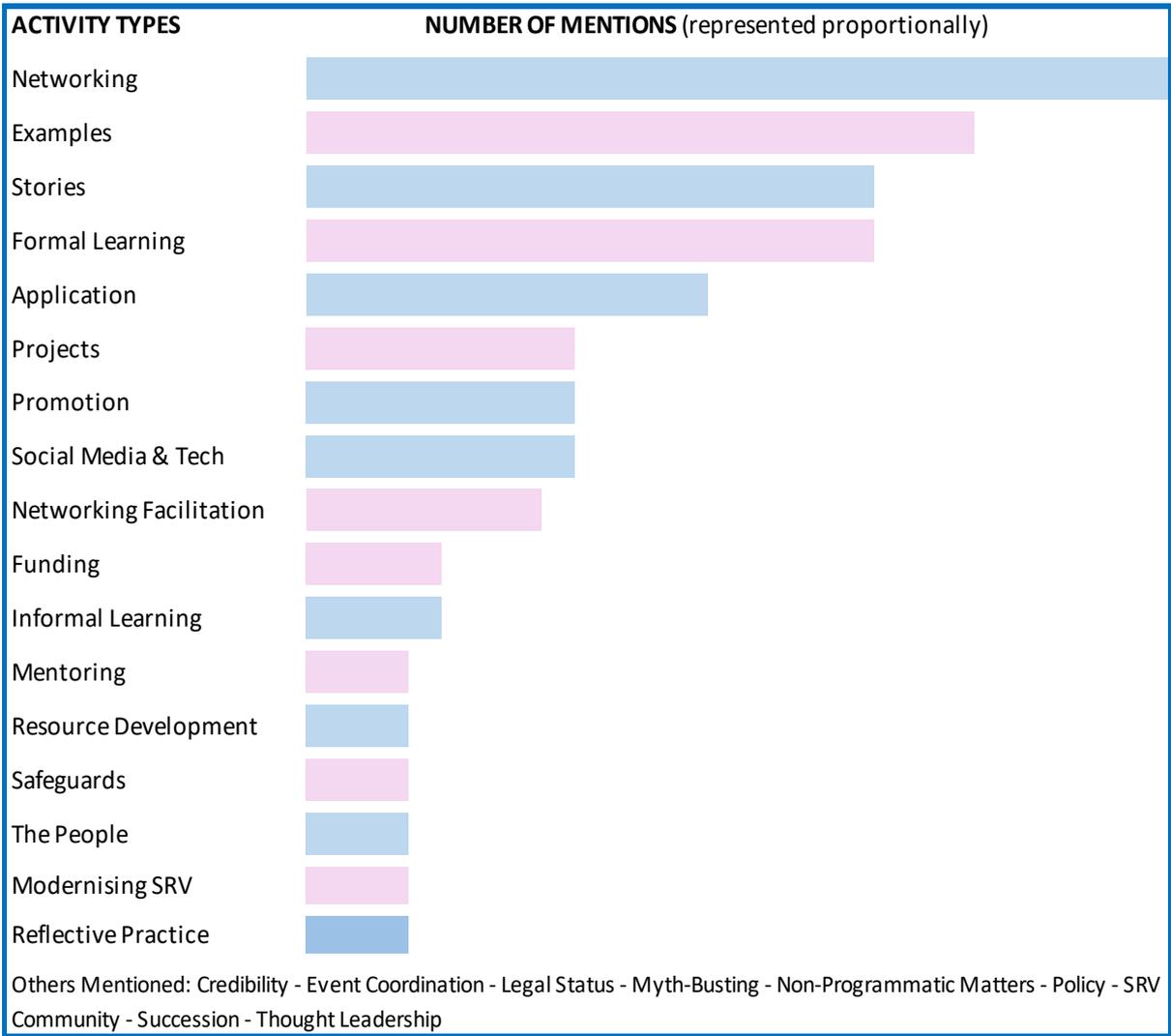
On the next page is a table that lists the activities that people thought would be helpful in an SRV Community. Firstly though, we present some observations about the activities.

In the previous section on ‘why people thought they might join’ the SRV community, we reported that the most frequently mentioned reason was to do with Networking. Within ‘Activities’, we again see that Networking is most frequently mentioned. Please note that this is so even with separating ‘Networking Facilitation’ which was mentioned seven times. ‘Networking Facilitation’ is used here to capture mentions of wanting to have someone facilitate networking activities.

Next in the list of frequently-mentioned activities is Examples and then Stories. In SRV learning environments, these are quite different things: ‘examples’ include more than ‘stories’. However, for most of us it is likely we would see that examples and stories are very similar. Indeed, they each help us to understand what SRV might look like when applied well.

Application is also mentioned often and if we understand examples and stories being highly relevant to how we might learn to apply SRV, then the desire for real life examples of using SRV is strongly apparent.

One might wonder why some of the activities have low numbers of mentions. There might be several reasons for this. The major one is that we didn’t ask for ‘Priorities’; we asked for ‘Activities’. Also, participants were online with only 8-10 minutes to respond to the question, might not have had their minds in the space of ‘the activities in a community of practice’, and might have been focussing on micro matters. In short, low numbers of mentions should not be taken to assume low interest. A follow up survey of 20 members would be helpful in identifying ‘Priorities’ or providing other clarification.



## 7. THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT:

what roles those activities in an SRV community would mean for members

Having explored people's ideas on the sorts of activities that might be desirable for an SRV community to engage in, we focussed on the roles that could be held by members, through which those activities might occur.

We asked,

***'What roles might those [desirable] activities mean for the SRV community members?.'***

The most frequently mentioned (larger boxes below) were Social Media Contributor, Curator of Examples and Stories, Mentor, and Membership Officer.



## 8. THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT:

### the idea of ASRVA being informed by the Community of Practice approach

We wanted to gain a sense of people's reaction to the idea of basing the developing SRV community on a Community of Practice approach.

So, we asked,

***'From the information about ASRVA being informed by the Community of Practice approach, what is your reaction?'***

To shape the answers, participants were asked to choose just ONE of the following beginning phrases to express their reaction:

I like

I wish

I wonder

Here is a smattering of comments, selected to show a balance of reactions and of subject matter.

*I like that we are getting people together*

*I wish that this happens quickly, no pressure!*

*I wonder where these conversations will lead us, where will we be in 10 years' time?*

*I like the good response numbers – so many people that care*

*I wonder if it is actually communities of practice*

*I wish that there was a clear pathway*

*I like that we have all come together*

*I like that it's happening; together as a community*

*I wonder what it will look like without Senior Trainers*

*I like that there is some shape to the community of practice*

*I wonder what other countries are doing*

*I like the idea of an SRV community, who we can talk to – it's a real positive for me*

## 9. THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT:

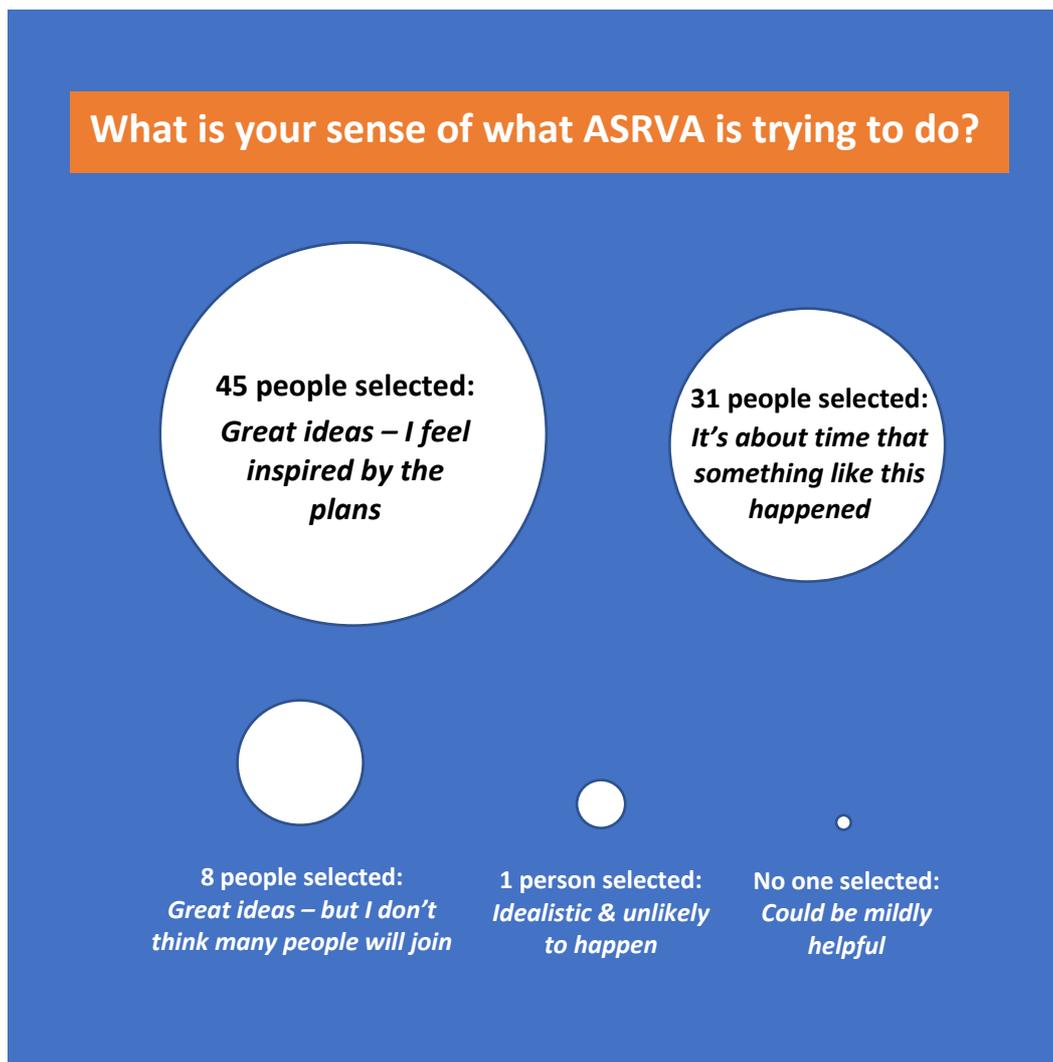
### their sense of what ASRVA is trying to do

Towards the end of each session we ran a confidential poll, asking questions about people's reactions to what ASRVA is trying to do.

The following chart shows:

1. Overwhelming support for the efforts
2. An expression of the timeliness of the efforts
3. A sense that what is proposed can and will happen.

The size of the circles indicate the strength or reaction.



## 10. IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

### 10.1 Following the sessions

The final section of each session was an opportunity to let people know what we would do following the sessions. Specifically, ASRVA will:

1. collate and theme the results of these sessions [this report]
2. develop a Masterclass Course for experienced people as outlined in the briefing paper (see '[Intro to 2020 SRV Revitalisation Plan Context and Challenges](#)' at [asrva.org.au](http://asrva.org.au))
3. run an SRV10 event (in conjunction with a State SRV Group) – this is the 4-day SRV theory event, much more comprehensive than the 2-day Towards A Better Life event. Because of the unpredictability of COVID-19, it has been decided to run this course online. This has been successfully done in the U.S. Contact us at [asrva42@gmail.com](mailto:asrva42@gmail.com) for more details.
4. prepare for The 2022 Gathering to bring like-minded people together to further the SRV Community – The Gathering will be as application-oriented as possible and is scheduled for the last Friday and Saturday of 2022
5. thereafter look to offer The Gathering in March every two years (assuming COVID-19 doesn't hamper plans)
6. offer several online topics for SRV community members [the Conversation Series you will hopefully have seen advertised in the [ASRVA July Update](#)]
7. send a survey of interest areas/topics
8. share a list of the range of roles that members might take – comprised of an existing list created by ASRVA with additional roles identified in these conversation groups.

We also recommended how members of the SRV Community might go about connecting with each other:

- ASRVA Facebook group
- Database of members hosted by ASRVA
- Promoting any projects members might want others involved with by an entry in the regular ASRVA Updates, or, where more sensible, ASRVA would connect people by emailing the distribution list with a particular/pressing request (though this would not be a frequent approach).

We also advised people that we would assume that they are 'members' even though the legal entity is not yet formed – people can opt out with a very simple email request.

## 10.2 Longer term implications for action

We see actions to be taken falling into several categories:

- what ASRVA needs to do to establish the basics
- what ASRVA needs to do ongoingly
- what members might do to ensure both their own and the Australian SRV Community's health and vigour.

### 10.2.1 Here is what we think ASRVA needs to do to get the basics set up

1. Explicate what we believe and want to achieve (establish common language, values, and assumptions)
2. Formation (potential and coalescing) - discover existing networks and common grounds & invent new opportunities; build relationships & generate value
3. Integration (maturing, stewardship) - focus on own topics & admit new members; develop own tools, methods, approaches (instruments) & welcome new ideas
4. Move towards forming as a legal entity in order to create a national legal identity, better be able to enact future initiatives, and manage its funds with accountability
5. Create a membership directory so that members can find each other – for example, finding a mentor, identifying others who might join your project
6. Start editing the webpage to reflect members' needs, for example, providing resource centralisation
7. Identify forums/processes/media platforms/other, for members to use
8. Create a survey (or similar) to identify people's interests in various learning topics, problems to solve, common issues, useful tools, processes and approaches to application
9. Determine what to do in relation to facilitating networking
10. Start the matching of Community members with roles and activities identified as necessary or at least useful to the Community
11. Determine members of a small group of clearly identified people to take responsibility for:
  - a. Planning and organizing activities, presentations, etc
  - b. Sharing information
  - c. Facilitating connections
  - d. Taking care of the membership resources (\$s and others)

### 10.2.2 Here is what we think ASRVA needs to do hereon

12. Consult with members on design of events, presentations, etc, starting with The 2021 Australian SRV Gathering
13. Conduct in-Community surveys regularly to identify areas for development or improvement and to identify what events we might offer

14. Use the Facebook group (and possibly other social media platforms) regularly and in a targeted, helpful manner
15. Connect people across the Community around knowledge topics and increase trust and motivation (enhanced networking)
16. Link, coordinate, organise, develop activities and initiatives by interested member in similar knowledge domains (such as theory, application, mentoring, and so on)

### 10.2.3 Here is what we are hoping members might do to ensure both their own and ASRVA's health and vigour

17. Volunteer for roles and activities needed to keep the Community relevant and potent
18. Provide personal details including SRV interest areas so that the Membership Directory becomes useful
19. Contribute to the Facebook Group; posting and/or responding.
20. Participate in The Gatherings, online activities, surveys, and so on.
21. Collaborate with others on shared projects to further the understanding and use of SRV
22. Explain their work
23. Discuss their needs
24. Discuss their aspirations
25. Share information
26. Share hints & tips
27. Share advices and insights
28. Help/support each other
29. Consult each other
30. Discuss their approaches
31. Discuss their expectations
32. Look for examples that highlight both positive and negative impacts on the lives of people with a devalued status
33. Identify stories that reflect the use of SRV.

## **11. THANKS**

We at ASRVA are very grateful to the many people who willingly, even keenly, contributed their time, thinking, and honesty to the discussions. We also thank the people in the background such as other family members and employers.

The way people participated has given us good learning, raised new ideas, and reinforced some of our assumptions about what an Australian SRV Community could best do to further SRV through meeting the needs of members or those involved in the Community.

This process has given us the confidence to proceed, clarified what our direction looks like, and raised all sorts of possibilities for the future.

## 12. About Social Role Valorisation

The theory of Social Role Valorisation (SRV) is a combination of important ideas drawn from the social sciences. The themes within SRV are helpful in responding to the needs of individuals and groups with a devalued status, so that they might have access to the good things of life and in order to influence how they are perceived.

Though SRV was developed as a theory by Dr Wolf Wolfensberger in the early 1980s and based on his highly relevant work in the preceding decades, SRV still has many practical implications and so is used as a practice framework as well as a guiding theory. It is also helpful in both the design and in the analysis of support arrangements.

The theory rests on a deep understanding of social devaluation and its impacts, a societal dynamic that explains why it is that certain groups in our society are likely to experience significant marginalisation and prejudice.

One definition of SRV is

*'the enablement, establishment, enhancement, maintenance, and/or defense of valued social roles for people, particularly for people at value-risk, by using, as much as possible, culturally valued means.'*

Thomas, S 2017, Social Role Valorization Theory: Wolf Wolfensberger, updated April 2017, viewed 16 July, <<https://www.wolfwolfensberger.com/life-s-work/social-role-valorisation>>.

## **13. About the Australian Social Role Valorisation Association (ASRVA)**

ASRVA commenced in 1993 as the Australian Social Role Valorisation Group (ASG). The name changed to Australian and New Zealand Social Role Valorisation Group (ANZSG) in 1999. The change to the current name occurred early in 2019.

ASRVA exists to foster, safeguard and develop the theory and application of SRV – its principal points of influence are the content of SRV Teaching, the processes used, and the people who apply and write about SRV.

### **13.1 About the Author (he/him)**

Greg Mackay, a member of ASRVA since 2008 and President of the Qld-based SRV Group, 'Values in Action' since 2001, has been actively learning about and applying SRV (and its predecessor Normalisation) since 1973 (starting in mental health). He holds a Masters of Business Administration including a specialisation in Association Management, following a degree in Sociology & Psychology. SRV has informed his work and personal engagements with people with disabilities, older people, people experiencing homelessness, First Nations Peoples, people in social housing, people seeking asylum, people experiencing domestic family violence, and with survivors of the incarceration system, for over 48 years. In all of those areas, SRV has been the most relevant lens to use for understanding vulnerabilities, needs, and service design.