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As Australians are now adjusting for a new way of life during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a Perth-based disability provider has found a creative way to connect people within the disability community.

Valued Lives is a registered service provider with the NDIS and was recently awarded a grant through the NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grants program, to support people with disability to create their own microenterprises.

Valued Lives had been supporting 60 people at different stages of setting up their own business, but due to the changing landscape in Australia, decided to move their services online.

“We had a couple of people from interstate that we support remotely, so we were already used to working in this way, but we felt that online support would be a big emerging need for people with disability,” Project Leader Clare Gibellini said.

“We recognise this is a really trying time for people, and we thought why not use the technology we’re already using to set up these groups.”

Recognising a need for connection in a time of isolation, Valued Lives has set up virtual lunch catch ups, and an evening ‘PJs’ catch up, which are now open to people with a disability, their families and carers all around Australia.

Some sessions will focus on microenterprise, and will welcome guest speakers on a range of topics, while others are more informal, and will host cooking and craft workshops, informal discussions and a place to interact with others.

“This is a free service available to anyone across Australia, and it’s really about connection and trying to battle the isolation that we know is coming for people,” Clare said.

“People with a disability already face extensive isolation in their everyday lives, and with something like coronavirus where their normal activities are greatly reduced or completely shut, we wanted to provide an outlet so they can still connect.

“We want people to have someone to talk to, and someone to help them understand what’s going on, and we think it will help things like managing their anxieties.”

Catch ups will run daily from 11am-1pm WST, and 7:30-9:30pm on Wednesdays.

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