



Supported Decision Making



Good Assistance

What makes a good life?

The right assistance

Conflict of interest

Recording decision making

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Contents

- What makes a good life? 2
- Good Assistance 3
- A shift in expertise 4
- Working on the Inside – Personal Checklist 5
- Conflict of Interest 8
- Getting clear on how to support the person with decision making 9
- Recording Decision Making 10

- Resources 11**

What makes a good life?

We all choose to live our lives in a way that makes sense to us based on our interests, what's important to us and what's important for our health and wellbeing. Having a good life is very individual – however, there are things that we have learnt that gives people a greater chance of having a good life.

In 1987 John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien embarked on a piece of research in Seattle on what makes a good quality of life. They developed a Framework that proposed five areas that appear to be important in shaping everyone's quality of life.

These areas include:

- Sharing ordinary places
- Making Choices
- Developing abilities
- Being treated with respect and having a valued social role
- Growing in relationships

John went on to advise the human services system about how they may consider their supports to people to ensure it supports people to have a good life and not get in the way.

These areas of a good life help us frame good support so the way we work needs to enhance the opportunities for people in these areas.

One way to consider this is thinking about support and how it works for people, does it get people closer to these areas or further away?

Working towards	A good life	Working against
	Sharing ordinary places	
	Making Choices	
	Developing abilities	
	Being treated with respect and having a valued social role	
	Growing in relationships	

This framework helps us consider the way that we support people and the way in which we enable people to make their own decisions.

Good assistance is of course, hugely dependent upon what makes sense for the person. People will often choose supporters who have similar interests, personality traits or particular skills and talents. Choosing who supports you is fundamental to good assistance which clearly has an impact on supported decision making.

Supporting people to consider who they would like to support them is vital.

Good Assistance

Kate Fulton shared her research in *Working on the Inside* which outlines areas that people and families have reported that makes good assistance for people who may rely on formal support.

The key areas include:

Be Present – focusing our attention on the here and now and really being present.

Check your intention –ensuring we see the meaning of our efforts and in particular being clear that your assistance is about supporting the person to make their own decision.

Explore your beliefs – understanding the beliefs you may hold that can impact on support to the person, particularly if you have a potential conflict of interest.

Be Positive – understanding how your attitude can shape everything and opens the door to positive change.

See Possibility – having the belief that people can and do make their own decisions and creativity can open the key to possibility.

Understand your impact – be someone who brings out the best in others, who understands their own impact on the person and learns to respond to this to ensure the person feels as comfortable as possible.

A shift in expertise

Many supporters coming into Human Services are taught both formally and informally about a range of theories and practices that can affect people and communities.

These theories and practices help us understand how certain factors can impact on people's quality of life and connection to community life. This may include topics such as the effects of discrimination, the likely consequences of segregation and the devastating effects of loss of power and control.

However this level of expertise or knowledge in understanding is not the same as an expertise in understanding the person, their family and their own circumstances.

People and families themselves are the experts on their own lives and the solutions that will work for them in their own life and context.

Getting clear on expertise is really helpful when considering good assistance in decision making. Understanding that the person holds their own expertise about who they are and what makes sense to them in their life.

Good assistance takes understanding and responding to this when supporting people in their own decision making. Offering support to explore and analyse the decisions in light of what's important to them and for their health and wellbeing.

People and families themselves are the experts on their own lives and the solutions that will work for them in their own life and context.

Workers who think they know the answer or solution for the person, or they 'know what's best' can clearly undermine people and families own expertise.

The following chart is taken from [Working on the Inside](#) and is aimed at helping people to explore how we can best develop these attributes for ourselves.



Working on the Inside – Personal Checklist

Approaches	Things to try and develop for yourself and your colleagues	Things I am going to try
Exploring Expertise	<p>How do you value and draw on people and families expertise within your work place?</p> <p>How do you support and enable the person to be and act as the expert?</p> <p>Think about the conversations you have with the people you support and your colleagues – do we acknowledge expertise?</p> <p>What would people and families say about this?</p>	
Being Present	<p>How do you stay present – what helps?</p> <p>How could you explore mindfulness and or meditation techniques?</p> <p>Take moments of your day to be really present and take time to notice when you're not.</p> <p>How can you help yourself and your colleagues be more mindful?</p>	

<p>Understanding your intention</p>	<p>Describe your own intentions – the bigger picture that you want to achieve.</p> <p>Look at your week and the activities you support people to participate in – are you clear about the overall intention?</p> <p>How do you help the team understand their intentions?</p> <p>Explore with people and families their intentions – what is their purpose?</p> <p>What does this mean for you and your role?</p>	
<p>Understanding your Beliefs</p>	<p>Explore the stories you tell yourself about the people you are connected to including your colleagues.</p> <p>Does the team have a team story about who you are as team – what you are supporting people to achieve?</p> <p>What are the stories about families telling you?</p> <p>How can you influence the stories that people tell about the people you support?</p>	

<p>Positive Attitude</p>	<p>Understand the things that help you be and stay in a positive frame of mind and make sure this is included in your day.</p> <p>Begin to challenge your own negative self-talk and replace it with at least one positive comment.</p> <p>Look for the positive qualities and attributes in others.</p> <p>How can you help yourself and the team see the positive?</p>	
<p>Seeing Possibility</p>	<p>Begin dreaming for yourself – what would an ideal life look like for you? What small steps can you take to get you closer to that image?</p> <p>Dream with and alongside the people you are connected to – what would a fantastic life look like for them – what small steps could you take to get closer to it?</p>	
<p>Understanding your own impact</p>	<p>Begin by asking for feedback from people you trust – do my emotions impact on others?</p> <p>Ask for feedback from colleagues, people and families.</p> <p>Reflect on your week explore how the way you were feeling may have impacted on the task or activity.</p>	

Conflict of Interest

The best support when supporting people with decision making is that the person assisting is doing so with integrity. This means being honest and upfront about any potential conflict of interests and exploring if there are other ways the person may get assistance to make this decision.

A conflict of interest means that the person offering assistance has a vested interest in the outcomes of the decision, so they may have a strong view on what the person should or shouldn't do. It may be that the supporter is affected by the outcome of the decision, so therefore has a personal interest in the outcome.

When we are supporting people in decision making it is useful to ask yourself:

- Do I have a vested interest in this decision?
- Explore and recognise what the conflict of interest is
- Explore how you can support the person impartially with this conflict of interest
- Explore if there is someone else around the person who may not have the conflict of interest

We have found being really upfront about potential conflicts of interest is very helpful. Exploring it within teams can also be helpful, as sometimes it can be hard to admit to some conflicts of interest. Many teams work on the following chart to begin opening up about potential conflicts of interest and to create clarity in who are the best people to assist with certain decisions.

People	Possible Contribution / Support	Potential Conflict of interest
<i>Example</i>		
Kate – Johns mum	<p>Love John to bits and will protect his interests.</p> <p>Wants John to be in control of as much of his life as possible – so will support John to be heard.</p> <p>Decisions such as day to day living, future planning, housing, work.</p>	<p>Johns safety and risk taking.</p> <p>I want john to be safe so can get frightened of new things that look too risky.</p> <p>I want to be involved in Johns life.</p>
Ted – a long time supporter	<p>Has a good understanding of what matters to John and what would make a good support for John.</p> <p>Has supported John to make decisions in the past.</p> <p>Decisions such as day to day, good support.</p>	<p>I think I know what good support should look like and be.</p> <p>I have views on different organisations based on my professional experiences.</p>

Getting clear on how to support the person with decision making

As previously mentioned everyone is unique and although we have some principles to guide supported decision making and some areas that we know help – it is largely based on what works well for the person. Having clarity around decision making is really helpful for the person and their supporters.

Recording and regularly reviewing the decisions that the person makes with support is essential. This provides an agreement on the decisions and how the person will be involved in them.

Recording Decision Making

What is the decision?	Who are the right people to assist the person with this decision? Where is the right place to explore it?	What's the right way to communicate the decision and explore it?	What's the right way to present the info? Key points (benefits, consequences, risks)	How can we assist the person to weigh it up?	How do we hear the person's decision/choice?	How do we support the person to act on the decision?
Be clear about the actual decision. Decision specific	What are the benefits/conflicts?	What do we know about the person's preferred way of communication?	What have we learnt works best for the person i.e. photos, real experience or expose?	What do we know is important to/for the person?	Be clear about how we will know the persons has made the decision or choice	How do we support the person to act and observe their response?



Supported Decision Making

Resources

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