



Supported Decision Making



Getting to know the person

Understanding the person

Understanding the person's life now

Understanding the people in the person's life

Getting clear on the difference between what's important to the person and what's important for the person

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Understanding who the person is

If people we support are to achieve the lifestyle they desire, we need to understand them.

Understanding requires insight, time and empathy.

~ *Michael Smull*

Good support is all about really understanding people. Giving people support in a way that is right for them can only be done if we work alongside them and really listen and hear what is important to them. Understanding a person's unique perspective on life can be difficult as we are all unique and our history, interests, passions, likes and dislikes will differ for each one of us. In developing good relationships with people, we share information about ourselves to deepen our understanding of each other.

Begin by exploring what we know and understand about the person, which may be included in a person centred plan. We want to develop a deep and rich understanding of who the person is. It is important that we aim to gather person centred information; information about who the person is, their gifts, passions and interests, not simply a list of the person's impairments or perceived difficulties. We are not looking for typical 'service descriptions'.

The following gives an example of the difference:

Mary is 38 with intellectual disabilities and epilepsy. Mary likes to be in charge and likes to spend time with her peers.

Mary is a determined woman with a passion for living life the way she wants to. Mary is fun to be around. Mary likes her support to follow her lead.

Good person centred questions can help us learn about people in a way that keeps them in control. The questions can help us build a rich picture of who a person is and how they choose to live their life.

We are in a better position to support people in decision making if we really understand who they are.

Exploring answers to the following questions can help deepen our understanding and build meaningful relationships with people.

- What do we like, admire and respect about the person?
- What does the person offer those around them?
- What really lights up the person, their passion and love?
- What are their interests, hobbies?
- What's really important to the person?
- What's important to know about the person's story that makes them who they are today?
- Who are the people and places that matter to the person?
- What are their highlights and achievements so far?
- What would a good future look like for the person?
- Thinking back when have been the best times in the person's life and why – what does this teach us about what's important to the person?

What is life like now?

Asking people to think about how life is now for the person is really important. We are listening to how life is now so we can learn about essential areas such as:

- What does this tell us about what's important and should stay the same in the person's life?
- What does this teach us about important relationships?
- What does this teach us about pace of life and purpose?
- How does life now match with who the person is?

For most people life is more than a series of activities or a filling up of their days. In services we focus on these things because they look like the sorts of things that we can manage and demonstrate openly to others what our support looks like - i.e. We have some capacity to support Mary as she looks for work and we can assist John with the everyday tasks of life, but working with Mary in a way that meets her deepest needs, the need for purpose and fulfilment, the need for love and belonging, to know the things that make for Mary's happiness, not just the things that bring her enjoyment is a little harder to do. Yet, these are the things that make us human and add richness and quality to our lives and become our platform to explore more in life.

Listening to Learn

An important element of these conversations is learning to listen in a way that is helpful and supportive. Often what we hear when exploring what life is like now with someone, there are areas of the person's life that are identified as being really important to them and must remain in their life in the future. We can also hear inconsistencies with what we have learnt about who the person is and how they are living their life. For example: Judy was described as the life and soul of the party – a real people person who loved socialising with others. In listening to how her life is now – there are very few opportunities for Judy to celebrate and party with others, or for being the host of these gatherings. This is inconsistent with who we know Judy to be and what is important to her. We can use this learning in how we support Judy making sure she has plenty of opportunity to host her own parties.

Understanding the important people in the persons life

We all have important relationships in our lives, with people we like, respect and love. We draw upon these people when facing important decisions. Sometimes it's as simple as getting some feedback on ideas you might have about the decision you are considering and other times it is specifically asking them for their perspective and advice.

It is important to remember that we don't always use everyone in our life to help make a decision. We often choose people depending on the decision being faced. Some people may need support to figure out who these individuals are. Different people can offer us their perspective, in the context of knowing and understanding us well.

It is vital that we know, acknowledge and draw on the important people who are in the person's life. If people need support to make decisions it is crucial to work alongside them to establish their own relationships circle. For some people a circle of support may be a couple of people, and for others it may include more – however what's important is that there is someone who has a positive relationship and understanding of the person and someone whom the person would want to be involved.

Explore what it might take to develop and establish a circle of support alongside the person. The circle will have a role to support the person's decision making.

Step 1 - Understanding who is in a person's life

There are many ways to capture who is close to the person, and this chart is one way to do that.

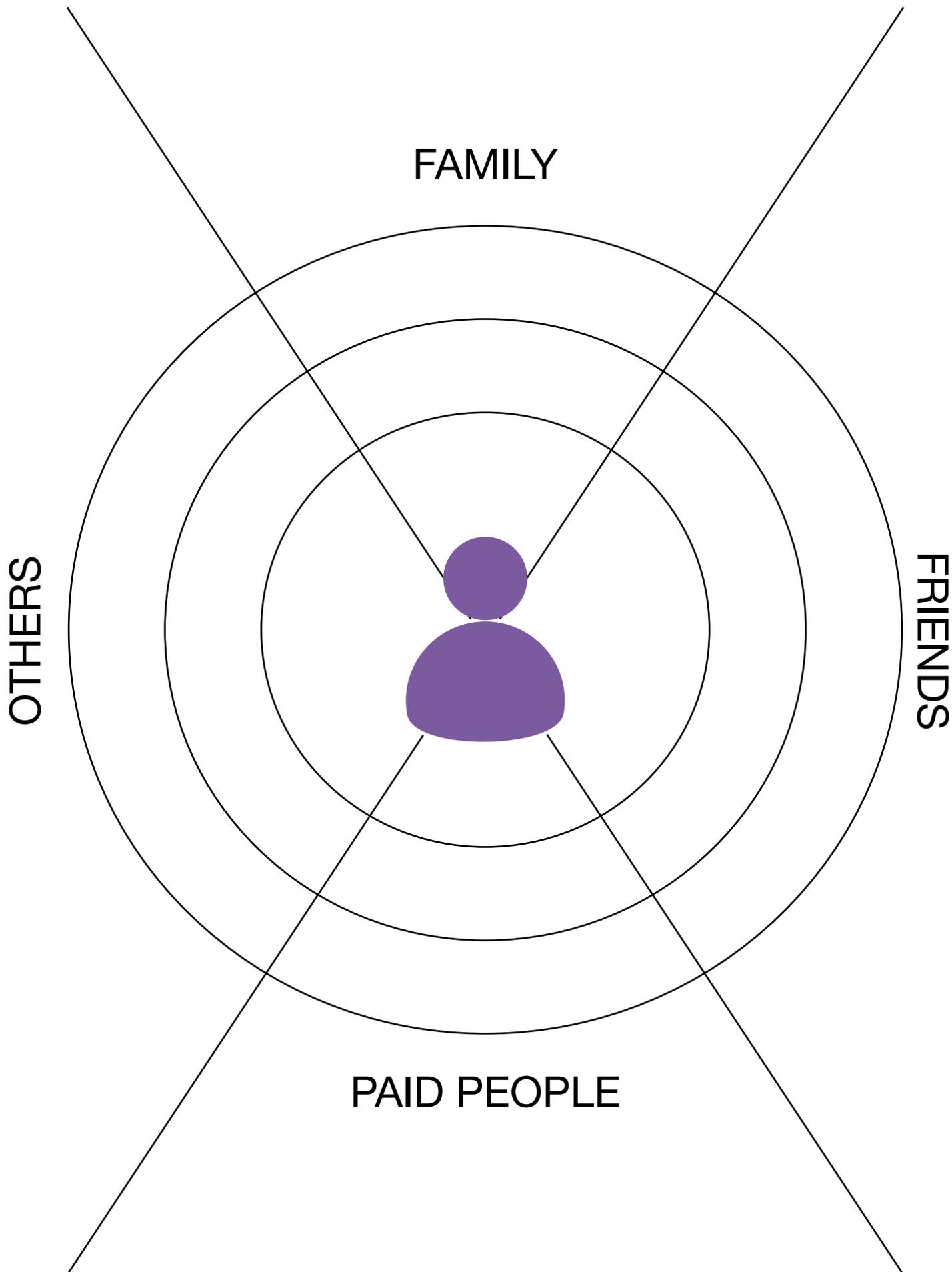
Together explore who are the important people in the person's life. This includes people who have a positive relationship and who understand the person well. It is important that we think about people who have knowledge of who the person is, has some meaningful involvement with the person, and whom the person would choose to be involved.

We need to consider what do these people we have identified teach us about the kind of people the person gets on with – what are the traits the person likes about others, and what's important to the person about these traits and why.

This exercise is to note the people who are closest to the person by placing their name or a photo (whatever works for the person) nearest the middle of the circle. Place those people who are connected, but not so close, further to the outside of the circle. Explore what it would take for the people further out to be part of the person's circle of support. Asking questions such as 'who can we invite into the person's life?', and 'how can we strengthen and expand these current and future potential relationships?'

Ask:

- Who are the people you are close to you, those people who you could not imagine living without? People in your family? People at work? Neighbours?
- Who are the people you do things with? Talk to? Work with? Acquaintances?
- Who do you spend the most time with? Who are the people that know you best?
- Who are the people you trust, and who you can turn to?
- Who are the people that support you to live your life?



Step 2 - Understanding what the circle of support may offer the person

Together with the people identified as important, explore what they may offer the person in relation to decision making. For example someone may love the person and will always try to make sure the person's voice is heard, or someone may have expertise in areas such as housing and if the person faced a decision in relation to housing, could have some expertise to offer.

A good conversation about this is all that is needed – however the following chart may help deepen your understanding in terms of what each person could offer.

Exploring the contributions of people in your life

People	Possible Contribution / Support
<i>Example</i>	
Kate – Johns mum	Love John to bits and will protect his interests. Wants John to be in control of as much of his life as possible – so will support John to be heard. Decisions such as day to day living, future planning, housing, work.
Ted – a long time supporter	Has a good understanding of what matters to John and what would make a good support for John. Has supported John to make decisions in the past. Decisions such as day to day, good support.

Getting clear on the difference between what's *important* to the person and what's *important for* the person.

Michael Smull (Essential Lifestyle Planning for Everyone) described a useful approach for exploring what's important to people.

“What is important to a person is what they say through their own words and behaviours about what really matters to them.

What is important for people are the things that help people become or stay healthy and safe, whether it is important to them or not.

The balance between the two is the compromise that all of us experience in life: between wanting to eat chocolate and maintain weight and between having lazy evenings and wanting to get fitter at the gym. We all need to find a balance so that our lives are not just about what we choose, but also what we know needs to happen for us to be safe and healthy.”

<http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/reading-room/how/person-centred-thinking/person-centred-thinking-tools/sorting-important-tofor.aspx>

It is important to know and understand that very often people who rely on support can have much of the focus on what’s important for their health and wellbeing – things that will keep the person safe or healthy, as opposed to a strong focus on the things that are important to the person. A balance of what’s important to you and what’s important for you is what we are aiming to understand and support people to explore.

Working out the difference is really important when assisting people with decision making.

Balance



Important to / Important for

Important to

- People to be with /relationships
 - Things to do
 - Places to go
 - Rituals or routines
 - Rhythm or pace of life
 - Things to have
- Includes what matters the most to the person –their own definition of quality of life
 - What is important to a person includes only what people “say”:
 - with their words
 - with their behaviour
- When the person’s words and behaviour are in conflict, listen to their behaviour

Important for

- What is important for people, includes only those things that need to be kept in mind regarding–
 - Issues of health or safety
 - Physical health and safety, including wellness and prevention
 - Emotional health and safety, including support needed



Supported Decision Making

Resources

Discovering who the person is

- What do we like, admire and respect about the person?
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- What's really important to the person?
- What's important to know about the person's story that makes them who they are today?
- Who are the people and places that matter to the person?
- What are the highlights and achievements so far?
- What would a good future look like for the person?
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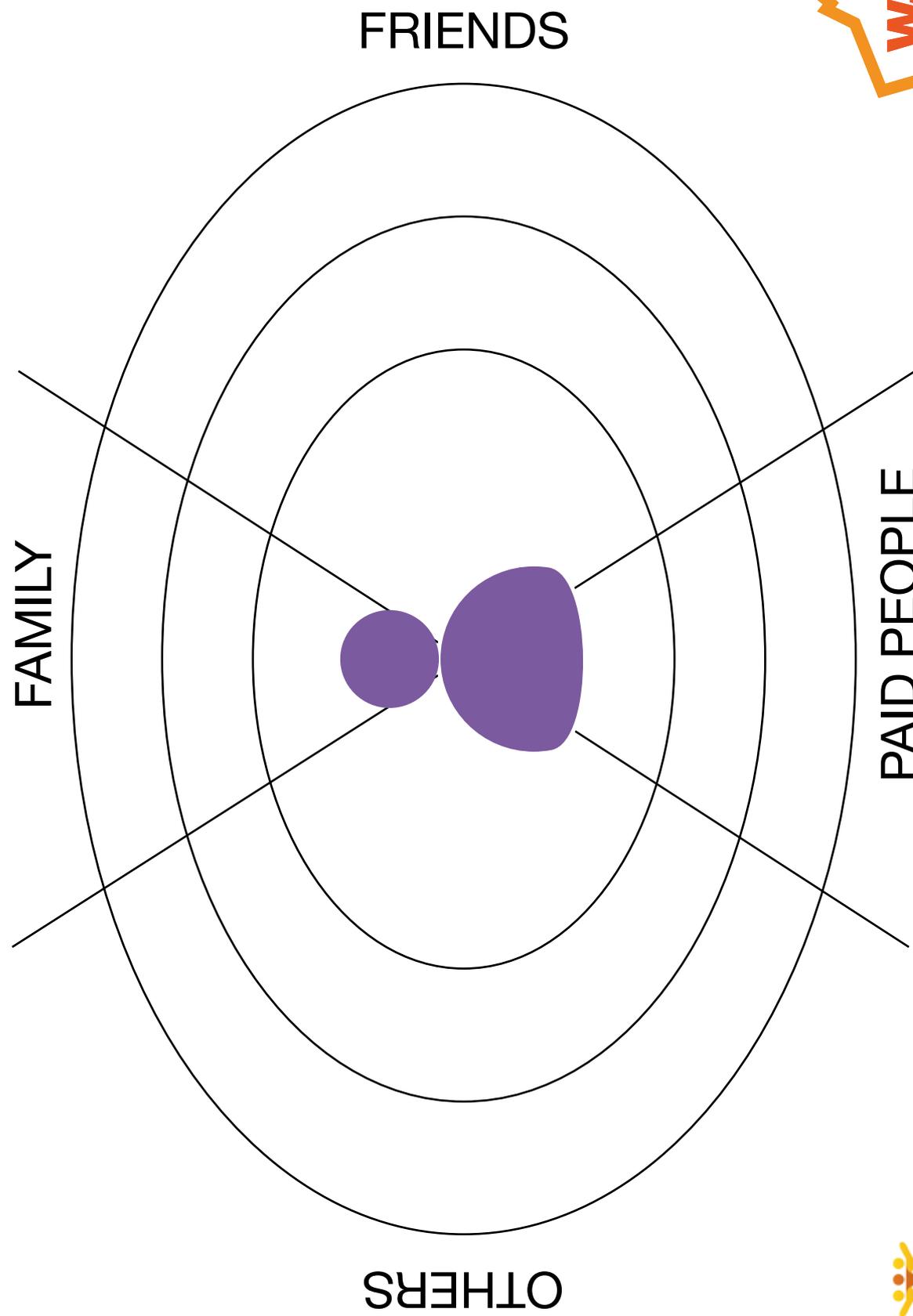


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www.waindividualisedservices.org.au

Exploring the Important people in the person's life



Exploring the contributions of people in your life

People	Possible Contribution / Support



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Important to

Important for



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