

# practice leadership

in disability support  
organisations





Inclusion Melbourne is a community support organisation that has worked with people with an intellectual disability for more than 65 years.

Unlike other disability day services, Inclusion Melbourne is not centre-based and doesn't ask you to select activities from a list, follow a group schedule or stay in a centre. Instead, Inclusion Melbourne supports you to live a fulfilled life, to participate in activities based on your own needs, wants and interests, and to develop meaningful friendships within your local community. In other words, Inclusion Melbourne offers fully personalised support in the community.

Inclusion Melbourne's vision is to provide people with the opportunity to live in an inclusive community and to take their place in society as respected citizens.



Inclusion Designlab is Inclusion Melbourne's engine room for research, innovation, communications and policy.

Our vision is to bring together people with a disability, community organisations, and the world's leading disability researchers to develop cutting-edge models of practice, choice and citizenship that shatter glass ceilings and promote a more inclusive Australia.

We do this by developing, trialling, and implementing new systems of support and communicating our insights through a range of publications and media. We are also significant contributors to public policy and government inquiries.

The products and services created by Inclusion Designlab contribute to the continuous development of the disability sector through evidence based practice, accessible materials, and vital training for families and collegiate organisations.

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NDIS Readiness Project Coordination: Tom Kielczynski, Nathan Despott, Daniel Leighton, Chris Fyffe, Alannah Smith.

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## meet the contributors



### bev murphy

Bev Murphy is the Practice Development Coordinator at United Response. Her area of expertise is developing person-centred approaches for the social inclusion of people with intellectual disability for which she has helped develop multiple resources on the topic.

United Response was founded in 1973 in West Sussex, England. It has grown to support 2000 people across England and Wales, with over 3500 staff members. This UK national charity supports people with intellectual disability, mental health needs, and physical disabilities that interfere with life. The organisation supports people to live as independently as possible in their own homes, to access their communities, get trained and seek work opportunities. United Response's philosophy is that people with disability are equal participants in society and should have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.



### professor julie beadle-brown

Dr Julie Beadle-Brown is a practicing Psychologist and Professor of Disability Studies in the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at La Trobe University, Australia. She is also an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society and is a Professor in Intellectual and Developmental Disability at the Tizard Centre, University of Kent. Dr Beadle-Brown's 20-year experience in the field of intellectual and development disability has led to the completion of her PhD focusing on children and adults with autism, and her recent publication of two books. Her research has now shifted to focus on understanding the factors that influence the implementation of support services such as practice leadership, the culture in services and their organisational systems, structures and the policies in place to support staff.

The Tizard Centre is part of the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent, Canterbury. It is one of the leading academic groups in the UK working in the field of learning disability and community care.

#### More resources from Julie Beadle-Brown and Bev Murphy

**A Valued Life: Developing person-centred approaches so people can be more included** (collaboration with Dr Julie Beadle-Brown)

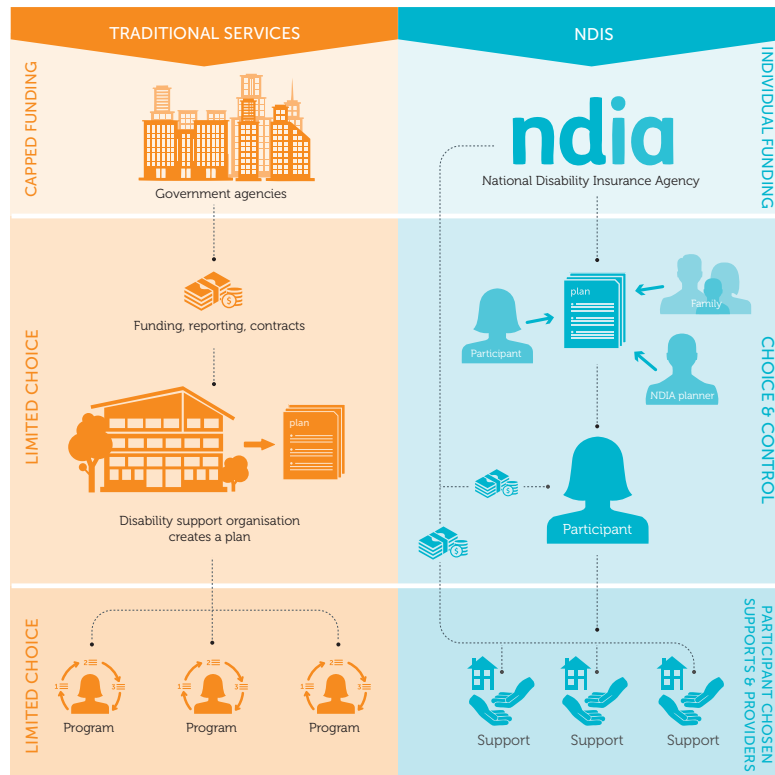
**Person-Centred Active Support** – A multimedia training resource for staff to enable participation, inclusion and choice for people with learning disabilities

**Transforming Care: New referral checklist** – United Response's approach to supporting people to move from Assessment and Treatment Units or Long Stay Institutions to their local community

# what is the NDIS?

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is an insurance scheme that offers all Australians with disability access to the funds and support required to live fulfilling lives as equal citizens and community members. The Scheme is managed by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and funded by the Federal and State governments. People who receive support through the scheme are known as participants and commence their engagement by developing a support plan with the assistance of a Local Area Coordinator. Unlike Australia's previous disability funding systems, in which an often insufficient amount of funding was distributed to support organisations, the NDIS will see funds go directly to participants in line with their reasonable and necessary supports.

The NDIS therefore offers people with a disability increased choice and control via self-management of their support funding and the ability to shop around for the most suitable supports. The scheme will establish a new partnership and transactional relationship between people with a disability and disability support organisations. More than ever, disability support organisations will need to function as enterprises – businesses – that exist in a free market environment and accordingly will need to offer value for money and have firm boundaries around their core business and strategic planning. This is a significant challenge for the hundreds of small to medium sized charitable organisations that form the current support system.



The NDIS website is [www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au) and the My Access Checker for prospective participants is <https://ndis.gov.au/ndis-access-checklist>



# what is a practice framework?

Practice within support organisations happens in different ways and with various degrees of consistency.

Stronger  Weaker

The collection of evidence based models, theories and practices upon which an organisation relies when delivering services. These frameworks are central to the organisation's vision and mission.

Staff members' practical experience of working and functioning in an organisation. This may be through a combination of observed behaviours. This may be developed through modeled behaviours, long standing organisational policies, or principles incorporated from tertiary qualifications and training.

The way an organisation works – sometimes conscious, articulated and widely understood, other times unconscious and varying from site to site and even from department to department within an organisation.

If an organisation's practice framework is not clearly articulated and communicated, the staff and stakeholders may have contradictory ideas about:

- ▶ what good support looks like
- ▶ the purpose of support
- ▶ how to provide positive behaviour support
- ▶ inclusion in the local community
- ▶ what to prioritise when providing support to people
- ▶ what to prioritise when assisting people with long term planning

"The lack of a person-centred practice framework that incorporates models such as Active Support can mean that seemingly utopian service systems with endless finance and the appearance of independence can offer no better support, choice, meaning and engagement than institutional systems of the past."

Prof Chris Bigby, La Trobe University

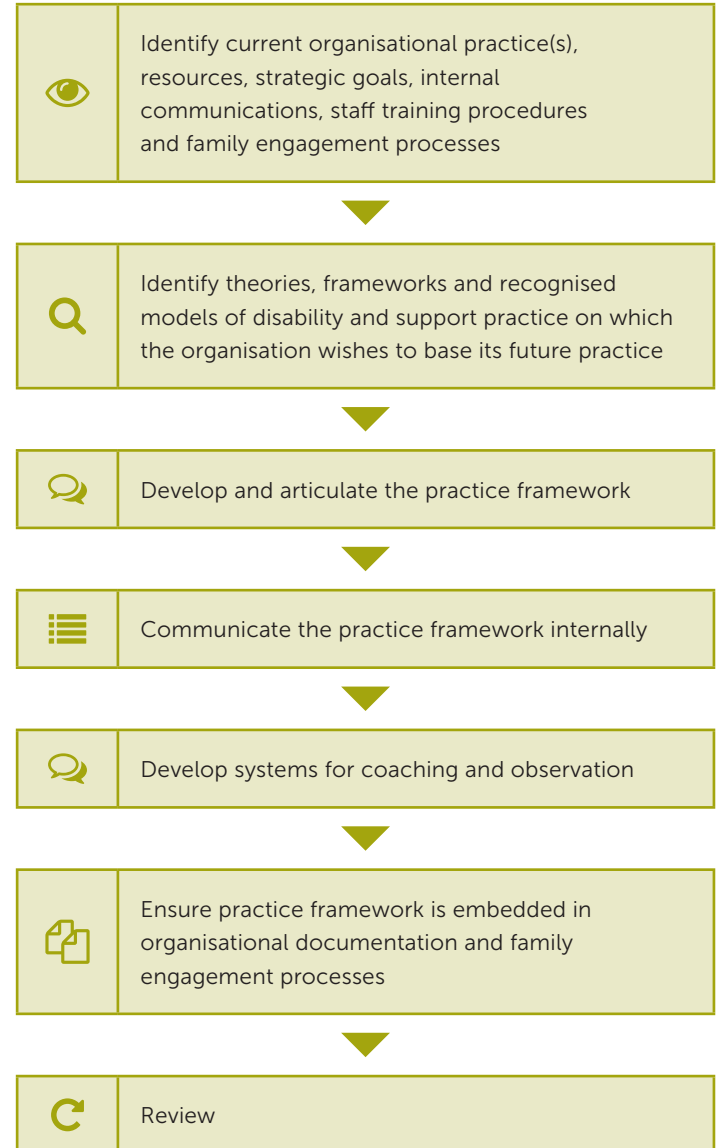
# the building blocks of practice

Research has found that the best organisational practice frameworks incorporate a combination of practices, values and techniques that ensure all key functions are grounded in an evidence base. Some of the components of strong practice are:

- ▶ Practice leadership and coaching
- ▶ Observation for practice coaching, service evaluation and continuous improvement
- ▶ Choice and choice-making mechanisms that include robust training, planning, Circles of Support and access to consultants who can provide advice for planning
- ▶ Personalised support that is focused on achieving the everyday, lifestyle and long term goals in the person's plan
- ▶ Family engagement strategies that include:
  - > Person Centred Active Support or a similar model
  - > Inclusive practices
  - > Training pathways
  - > Positive Behaviour Support and ASD focussed techniques such as the SPELL framework
- ▶ Robust person centred planning processes

Practice frameworks that include one or two of these components, such as good active support, will likely also employ others, such as positive behaviour support and an effective practice coaching system.

The journey to strong practice will follow a path similar to this:



## before implementation

The evolution of Australia's disability sector has meant that structural change has not always been matched by a consistent evolution in practice.

The following traits are often seen when a consistent, evidence based, clearly articulated practice framework is not present in an organisation.

- ▶ Strong value of inclusion without the fine skills that are required to make this possible
- ▶ A focus on being present in the community. Participating in local events and activities is a great step toward personalised support, however this needs to be accompanied by social inclusion. It is possible to regularly participate in community events but not build social capital.
- ▶ "Person centred" translates into doing things for people
- ▶ Lots of waiting around with minimal engagement. Engagement is a key component of Person Centred Active Support.
- ▶ Structure and routine treated with suspicion
- ▶ High levels of self-injury of service users
- ▶ High staffing with little positive impact
- ▶ Support plans that do not translate into actual lived experience
- ▶ Tasks are focussed on house administration (accommodation) or scheduling and convenience (day services) and concerned with "looking after people"
- ▶ The people being supported by the organisation are not encouraged to provide feedback. They may also swing between compliance and significant behaviours of concern

## did you know....?

### Supported accommodation

Small group homes formed during a period of transition following deinstitutionalisation.



### Day services

Day services have gradually transitioned from block funded sheltered environments featuring large scale programs with limited choice to a variety of different types of organisation. Unfortunately *personalised*, *person-centred*, and *choice* can all take on varied meanings depending on the practice and culture of an organisation.



For example, at *Inclusion Melbourne*, personalisation means a person chooses their own activities:

- ▶ based on their goals
- ▶ at a location of their choice
- ▶ at a time of their choice
- ▶ with the people of their choice
- ▶ with the supporters (volunteer or paid) of their choice



A photograph of two young men in their late teens or early twenties, smiling and posing for a photo outdoors. They are both wearing white short-sleeved polo shirts with the Canterbury Cricket Club logo on the left chest. The logo features three red 'C's and the text 'CANTEBURY CRICKET CLUB' and 'FOUNDED 1887'. The man on the left is holding a wooden cricket bat over his shoulder. The bat has a label that reads 'the ULSESSES' and 'FOUNDED 1887'. The man on the right is wearing a dark blue flat cap with the Canterbury Cricket Club logo on the front. They are standing in front of a black metal fence and trees. The background is slightly out of focus, showing a grassy area and some trees. The lighting is bright, suggesting it's daytime.

Research from the Tizard Centre, University of Kent, found that organisations with good implementation of Active Support and other models of practice were able to achieve markedly better outcomes, higher quality of life and increased engagement at the same cost and staff levels as prior to implementation.

# implementation

Before organisations embrace a consistent practice framework, components like training, person centred support, choice, practice leadership, management, leadership, accountability and ownership, and participant or business prioritisation may be inconsistent, haphazard or consistently failing.

Some of the **actions**, **observations** and **experiences** of community disability support organisations at the beginning of the journey to consistent practice leadership may include:

- ▶ Identifying and applying quality measurement to routines in supported accommodation or daytime support that consistently produce positive outcomes. This may be facilitated by increased interaction with direct support staff.
- ▶ Introducing a shift plan based on person-centred structures guided by informed choices of clients.
- ▶ Additional training and professional development in areas as diverse as: mental health, autism spectrum, quality, CALD (cultural and linguistic diversity) and LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer), positive behaviour support, and transitioning to new forms of intervention.
- ▶ Communication of successful strategies to the rest of the organisation.
- ▶ Adoption of Active Support as a way of working
- ▶ Introducing mandatory Active Support training for all staff from board to management to HR to staff.
- ▶ Introducing a practice development role or practice coaching system:
  - To coordinate complex staffing requirements
  - To model and grow practice leadership among front line staff
  - To improve two-way translation between practice and lived experience
  - To build and clarify expectations of how choice will translate into reality
- To allocate resources when they are wanted and needed
- To determine when and how staff will implement other person centred frameworks
- To inform HR, hiring and research partnership practices across the organisation
- To work with trustees, board members, and directors to promote and celebrate inclusion, personalisation, choice and good practice.
- ▶ Improved capacity for, and increased interest in, measurement, observation and evaluation processes.
- ▶ Prioritising good support of people over all other administrative obligations
- ▶ Embracing teamwork:
  - Consistency and predictability: Ensuring the balance between structure and “going with the flow”.
  - Adjusting the pace of work, support and interpersonal interaction to better align with the needs of service users, families and the support team.

Large staff teams can confuse service users, families and other staff if not working collaboratively. There are so many variations on how to make a cup of tea, how to do a weekly shop, and supporting a person with personal care activities. Imagine how many variations there are when engaging in a social interaction or getting involved in work or study! Learning the little things that matter to service users and sharing this knowledge are paramount in Person-Centred Active Support.

- ▶ Implementing coaching, with an increased emphasis on constructive observation and feedback:
  - > Good practice leaders are good coaches.
  - > Lots of training does not drive good practice to the same extent as constructive coaching with robust observation.
  - > Coaching is not about finding fault and creating a disciplinary environment.
  - > Coaching should employ observation, feedback, modelling and workshoping to grow staff who love their work and deliver positive outcomes in the form of better lives. Coaching includes supervision – at least two sessions per year.
- ▶ Transforming staff meetings to include:
  - > Collaborative problem solving
  - > Prioritising the people being supported over staff timetabling needs

Do you have staff meetings in which case managers meet with support staff to discuss practice and workshop real-world support strategies for supported individuals?

### A note about Positive Behaviour Support

Positive Behaviour Support is an evidence-based model that can be used to support people with complex or challenging behaviours.

Many organisations across Australia have incorporated PBS into their practice. Training from several organisations is readily available. To get started, take a look at these Victorian Government resources:

#### Getting it right from the start (2009)

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/positive-behaviour-support-getting-it-right-from-the-start>

#### Positive Practice Framework (2011)

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/positive-practice-framework-ppf>

You can read more about Person-Centred Active Support and Positive Behaviour Support at:  
[www.unitedresponse.org.uk/best-practice](http://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/best-practice)



# the principles of choice

Support for decision making is a central tenet of good practice. The following Principles of Choice were codified to embed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) in daily support delivery, as well as in significant areas of life such as political citizenship, voting, relationships and employment.

1

I have the right to make choices throughout my day.



2

I have the right to be who I choose to be.



3

I choose my hopes, dreams, and goals.



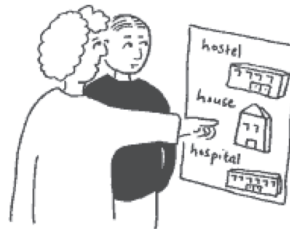
4

All my choices start with my ideas.



5

I make better choices if I have had a chance to try lots of options.



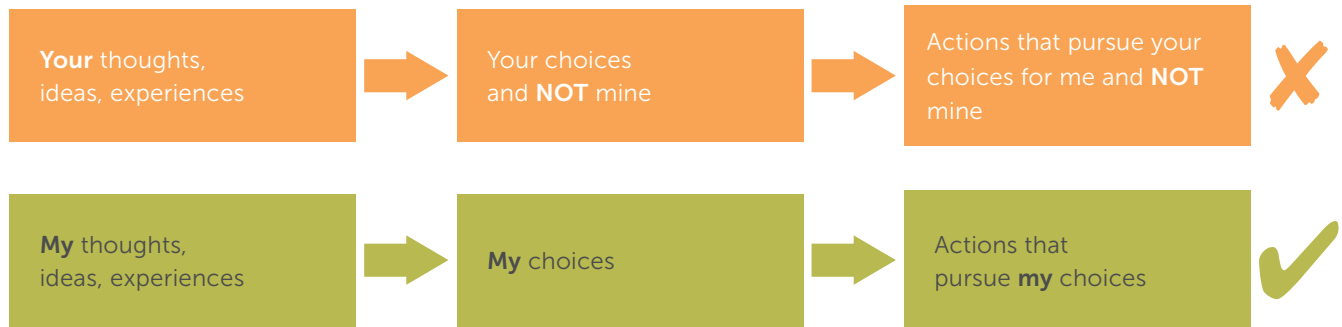
6

My experiences may be limited by money, experience or what is possible – but they should not be more limited than others just because I have a disability.

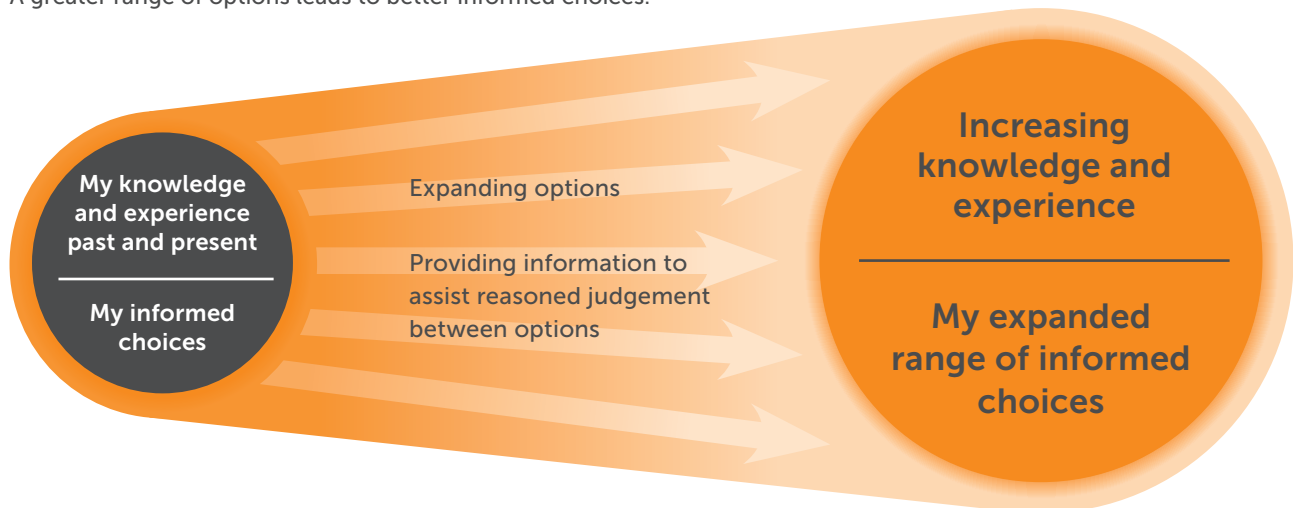




### The importance of origination



A greater range of options leads to better informed choices.



## a united response case study: doug's story



Doug lived in supported accommodation as one of eight housemates.

Prior to the implementation of the person-centred active support practice model, Doug displayed high levels of severe self-injury, including approximately 90 incidents per month. His injuries were sometimes life threatening and his placement in the house was threatened.

Some of Doug's self-injury seemed to be linked to frequent requests to go for a walk. While these requests were acknowledged by team members, they did not always result in action. Sometimes his violent behaviour would lead to staff taking him for a walk immediately, though at other times his requests were forgotten.

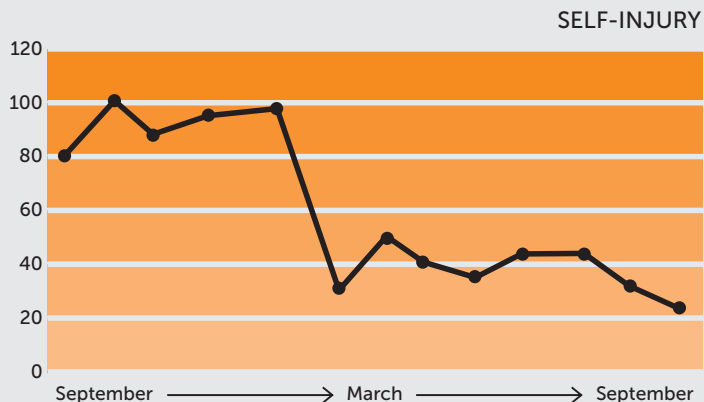
Developing structure and predictability was a key step in the implementation of Active Support at Doug's house.

A shift plan was developed. It took some time to balance the needs and wishes of each person being supported as there were four staff for eight housemates. The supervisor needed to ensure enough staff were available when people needed them. Incorporating existing programmes and activities in response to Doug's walking request, a walk was planned at 1pm and 7pm each day.



Support and communication were improved by involving people in a range of activities and interactions throughout the day.

A range of positive outcomes was experienced by all eight people living at the service when Active Support was introduced. The immediate changes in Doug's behaviour came as a surprise to his support staff and even to management. The graph shows the remarkable decrease in self-injurious behaviour in the first month of implementation which was maintained over time.



### results of good practice

Doug's great story is an example of the outcomes of good practice and good practice leaders, including:

- ▶ Reductions in self-injury
- ▶ Decreased anxiety for the people being supported thanks to more predictable structures
- ▶ Higher job satisfaction for support staff



# why is practice leadership important?

The development of a practice model that emphasises person-centred support requires empowered leaders who can spend time with staff coaching them to provide good support.

This practice leadership is vital for the successful implementation of the model and ensures the goals and aspirations of supported individuals are prioritised.

Person centred support is driven by example. Support staff are more likely to practice person-centred support when front line managers show effective practice leadership.

## 4 keys to success



An increase in score on the Active Support Measure (leading to an increase in engagement\*) is strongly related to and predicted by whether or not front-line managers provide strong practice leadership.

*\*Engagement is a core component of Active Support*



Managers need to regularly observe and model good support to staff and focus on engagement and person centred active support in team meetings and supervisions.



Working with effective practice leaders creates higher levels of job satisfaction for staff and better role clarity.



Practice leadership is important in the development of other person centred approaches including person centred planning and thinking and positive behaviour support.

## The Importance of Practice Coaching from Golden City Support Services, Bendigo

The Practice Coach has an advanced understanding of the practice expected within the agency. The Practice Coach works in a proactive manner by promoting the standard of service delivery expected within GCSS. The Practice Coach works with direct support workers, coordinators and managers in their respective roles. This is achieved by working in close partnership with staff through active participation at staff meetings, offering telephone consultations and support, by observing and coaching staff in their workplace/ environment, responding to specific incidents or by providing specific training for individuals. The Practice Coach also assists in the orientation of new staff members around their role, culture, communication, and practice.

The Practice Coach is the key resource within the agency for working with teams to support individuals displaying behaviours of concern using a Positive Behaviour Support framework.

### The steps to developing a practice coaching system

1. Have a clear practice framework in place.
2. Have a position description which is detailed in outlining the role of the practice coach.
3. Be clear about what is not the role of a Practice Coach.
4. Employ skilled staff who are able to transfer theoretical concepts into practical examples/skills.

### A quote from a practice coach regarding the benefits of practice coaching

*"With a strong practice framework in place, practice coaching enables us to support a team from wherever they have started to where they want to be, while developing their potential for the future."*

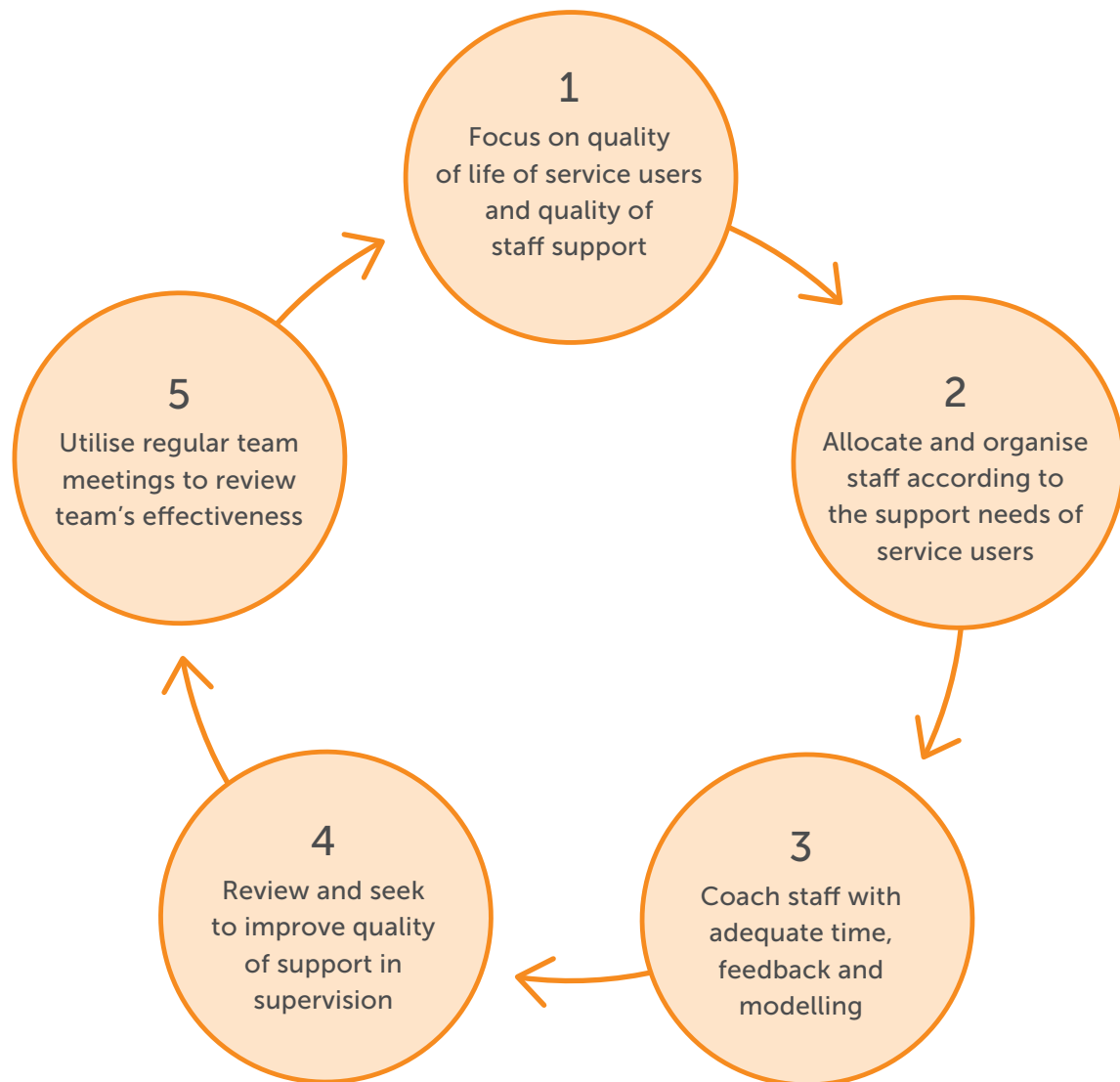
*"In other words, basically we support them with what they are struggling with while at the same time give them the skills to do what we want them to do".*

Linton Ashley – Practice Coach,  
Golden City Support Services.



## what do practice leaders do?

Practice leadership can be defined as the development and maintenance of good staff support for the people being supported. Practice leaders are the staff who are responsible for ensuring this development and maintenance occurs, either through direct coaching or organisational management. This model outlines the key concepts and activities required for effective practice leadership.



**1** In all aspects of their work, **practice leaders focus on the quality of life** of service users and how well staff support this. The practice leader needs to demonstrate through his or her actions and words that ensuring that the people they support experience the best possible quality of life is the primary task of the team. Practice leaders actively demonstrate that this is more important than activities such as managing resources, meeting standards or completing paperwork. These other activities are part of the manager's role and need to be completed, however they should not be seen as more important than the quality of life of the people the team supports.

**Practice leaders need to negotiate and communicate effectively in order to influence the competing demands of the wider organisation.**

**2** Practice leaders allocate and organise staff to deliver support when and how service users need and want it. Practice leaders need to support staff to work as a team, in such a way as to ensure they provide enabling support that is consistent, predictable for the individual and led by the individual's preferences and agendas.

- › **Consistency** – Ensure staff understand the importance of establishing the service user's preferred way of doing things and make it incumbent on them to adopt this.
- › Being treated in the same way by the different people providing support is important for most people. It matters because everyone providing support ought to be doing so in the way the person they are helping prefers or is most comfortable with. If different people do things in different ways, it can also make it harder for the individual to work out what he or she needs to do
- › PLs need to ensure staff understand the importance of establishing with the people they support their preferred way of doing things and make it incumbent on staff to adopt this pattern rather than expect the person to change according to who is on duty each day.

- › **Predictability** – Develop effective daily planning systems and ensure there is a balance between planned priorities and changes to routine, which are based on the needs and choices of the people being supported
- › Example: how do we make a cup of tea? Particularly complex with multiple staff members and multiple service users. From the perspective of SUs, they often have to learn multiple ways of doing basic tasks depending on the staff member
- › Everyone needs to know what is likely to happen and when at least to some extent. Predictability is important, both because it helps people work out what they need to do next and because it can reduce their anxiety
- › PLs and their teams need to develop effective daily planning systems which co-ordinate the support provided during each shift, assisting staff to ensure there is a balance between planned priorities and changes to routine, which are based on the needs and choices of the people being supported

Support provided by a number of staff is always vulnerable to variation. The inconsistencies that result can make it difficult for the people we support to successfully participate.

**3** Coaching staff to deliver better support by the practice leader spending time with them providing feedback and modelling good practice

 Watch Bev Murphy's presentation at [www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/ndisready](http://www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/ndisready) for more about coaching

Often this close presence may be interpreted as criticism or perhaps disciplinary action, however good practice coaching sees this close attention as helpful and vital. This may require some culture shift.

Without coaching, gains made through the implementation of an evidence based practice model can easily disappear. Coaching embeds good practice within organisations.

**4** Reviewing the quality of support provided by individual staff in regular one-to-one supervision and finding ways to help staff improve it

As part of supervision, practice leaders need to:

- > Ensure staff understand what is required and are committed to supporting people successfully.
- > Develop the individual's skills and confidence in working with the people effectively.
- > Provide effective leadership and motivate the staff member to continue to develop person centred support in all aspects of their work.
- > Provide regular feedback on performance and the development of consistent approaches based on direct observation and SMART (i.e. specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and timely) goal planning.
- > Help the staff member to filter and prioritise competing needs and responsibilities to ensure person centred support is the key task.
- > Identify person development needs in relation to practice and person centred support.

**5** Utilising regular team meetings to review the team's effectiveness in supporting people to engage in meaningful activities and relationships and to find ways to improve.

Team meetings provide a forum to:

- > Promote the importance of person centred support and engagement in meaningful activities and relationships
- > Give clear information about practice
- > Share information and solve problems
- > Acknowledge and celebrate successes and good practice
- > Give feedback on performance
- > Develop consistent approaches to support





## who are the practice leaders?

Although practice leadership is primarily the role of those providing day-to-day supervision and leadership of staff – all levels of management within an organisation have a role to play in leading practice.

Practice leaders are required throughout the organisation. Area managers and senior managers must also observe; problem solve with service managers and teams; model good practice; make allowances for resource allocation; recognise good practice.

### Area and senior managers lead practice by:

- › Problem-solving with service managers and teams
- › Objective evaluation and assessment of services and support
- › Modelling good practice in their interactions with the people we support and staff
- › Planning services and resources
- › Recruitment of staff with appropriate values, knowledge and experience
- › Recognising and praising good practice
- › Demonstrating, through words and actions that engaging with people and person-centred support is the most important part of the job.

### Trustees & directors lead practice by:

- › recognising and praising good practice
- › Demonstrating, through words and actions that engaging with the people we support and person-centred support is the most important part of the job.

*“Trustees, directors and senior management must demonstrate through words and actions that engaging with the people we support and person-centred support is the most important part of the job”.*

Different organisational structures and job titles mean it can be difficult to identify who the primary practice leader is – team leader, service manager or location manager, but it is important that organisations are clear whose job it is, that the individual is aware that it is a key part of their role and that they do it.

While frontline managers and supervisors have the most focused and critical practice leadership role, everyone in the organisation has a part to play in leading practice.

Directors and senior managers have a responsibility to create a climate in which staff know that the most important part of their job is providing effective person-centred support, in order to help people engage in meaningful activities and relationships.

Practice leadership at these levels is important because it links to staff’s motivation and commitment. If staff’s perception of their employer’s values is that despite what their mission statements and quality standards say about the importance of person-centred support, they only really care about finance or avoiding risks, for example, this will undermine their motivation to provide effective person-centred support.



## practice and the NDIS

The *National Disability Insurance Scheme* provides a market whereby the focus of support delivery is on achieving participants' goals. Funding is allocated to the supports and approved costs that are linked to these goals.

A practice model supported by practice coaching will be paramount at several points in the journey of service delivery.

The approach to practice outlined in this guide is based on Person Centred Active Support and strong practice is vital for consumers. The practice model outlined in this guide is based on person-centred active support and aims to place the choices, goals and needs of the person first.

The NDIS will allow for new combinations of accommodation and housing that will be entirely based on the purchasing choices of participants. This may include two people who are supported by staff from separate organisations co-residing.

Institutionalised care can still take place in supposedly individualised support settings. This is through the removal of choice and use of automated systems that have departed from good practice.

Here are some of the models and frameworks that may be employed by organisations to ensure practice is evidence-based:

- ▶ Positive Behaviour Support
- ▶ Person Centred Active Support
- ▶ Total Communication
- ▶ Recognising and responding to mental health issues
- ▶ Person centred planning and supported decision making
- ▶ Inclusive and supported accredited vocational education in literacy, numeracy and work readiness

Strong practice frameworks reinforce the centrality of a person's choices. They allow support accommodation and day service providers to realise the goals they have always had but may have never been able to put into action.





## more from inclusion melbourne and inclusion designlab



### driving up quality in disability support organisations

NDIS Readiness for Disability Support Organisations - Volume 2



### choice and control in disability support organisations

NDIS Readiness for Disability Support Organisations - Volume 3



### individualised supports

For more information about pricing and costing.



### it's my choice! toolkit

Guide to decision making and planning tools for people with disability, families, advocates and organisations.



### circles of support

Guide for family carers, friends and advocates who want to start a Circle of Support.



### seven approaches

Guide to support people, identify opportunities and connect with their community.



### your dental health

A guide to oral hygiene, dental health and the dental system for people with a disability, their families and carers.



[inclusiondesignlab.org.au](http://inclusiondesignlab.org.au)



[inclusion.melbourne](http://inclusion.melbourne)



67 Sutherland Road Armadale VIC 3143

PO Box 8093 Armadale VIC 3143

T. 03 9509 4266

E. [projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au](mailto:projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au) W. [inclusiondesignlab.org.au](http://inclusiondesignlab.org.au)



Inclusion Melbourne Inc.



InclusionMelb