



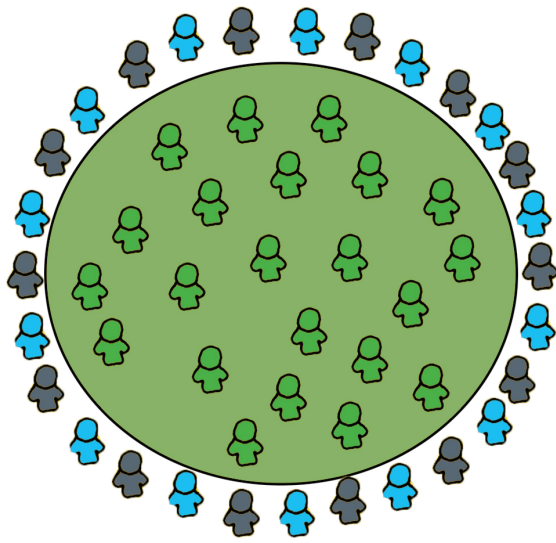
linkers

practice guidelines

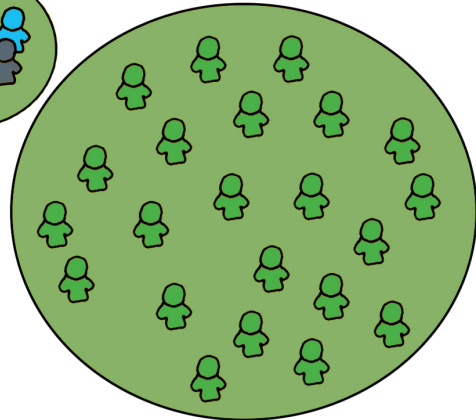
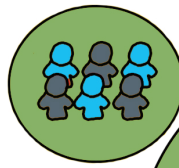
NORTH WEST ALLIANCE

linkers

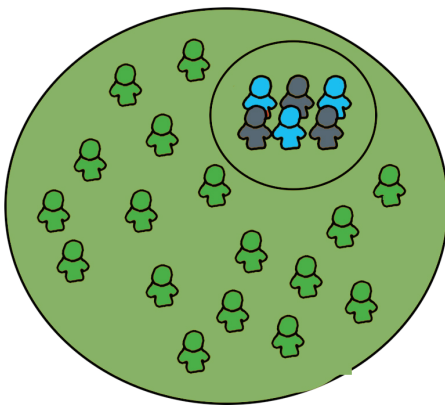
practice guidelines



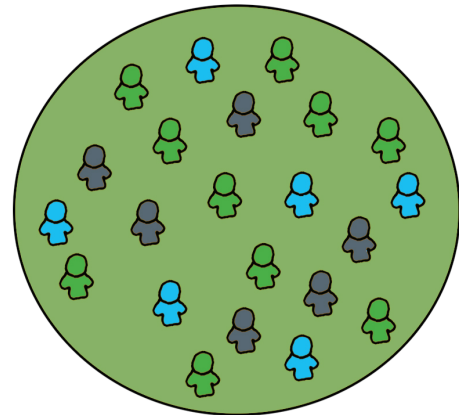
exclusion



segregation



intergration



inclusion

NOT about Disability
ALL about INCLUSION
‘...being at ease in the presence of difference’
PETE RITCHIE

Acknowledgments

The North West Alliance acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout NSW where our programs are delivered. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, water, sea and community. We pay respects to Australia's First Peoples, to their unique and diverse cultures and to Elders past, present and future.

The North West Alliance would like to acknowledge the input of everyone who contributed to these guidelines across the Alliance organisations and IncludeUs for developing this document



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Welcome & Introduction

As CEOs of the North West Alliance, we are very excited to introduce these guidelines. Ability Links NSW is a flexible and exciting way to work with people and their families and carers towards achieving people's goals and dreams and enhancing social inclusion. These Guidelines help to illuminate and define the broad spectrum of very diverse activities that make up the role of the Linker - right across the vast area of Northern and Western NSW. Providing a consistent quality approach to what we do supports the North West Alliance's mission to enhance local communities and strengthen regional Australia. The Alliance believes that good outcomes for regional, rural and remote communities in NSW and throughout Australia are best delivered by local organisations that are connected to their communities and offer high quality support and value for money.

Tony Davies, CEO Northern Rivers Social Development Council
Ruth Thompson, CEO Mid Coast Communities
Alan Brennan, CEO Pathfinders
Tim Curran, CEO CareWest
Sue Mathieson, CEO Intereach

This manual relies on the induction and orientation of each organisation within the Alliance having taken place with each new linker, and assumes that these areas have been included as part of the induction:

- Mandatory reporting
- Consent
- WHS
- Wellness in the workplace
- Abuse, neglect and trauma
- Guardianship
- Effective communication
- Augmented communication practice

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“Every single person has capacities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to the people around them and the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making”

JOHN MCKNIGHT

Glossary of Terms

Ability Links	Ability Links New South Wales
NW Alliance	North West Alliance of Ability Links
ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
PCP	Person Centred Practice
Linker	Local Coordinators who work with people and families
Lived Experience	Linker Local Coordinators with lived experience
ADHC	Ageing Disability and Home Care
FaCS	Family and Community Services NSW
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
Participant	A person who you are assisting with linking

WE ARE USING SYMBOLS THROUGHOUT THE PRACTICE MANUAL



CHECK YOUR LEARNING



WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU NEED TO ASK



ACTIVITIES TO HELP YOUR LEARNING



TIME TO REFLECT



TIPS TO HELP WITH YOUR PRACTICE



Indicates stories that will help illustrate the section being discussed. Please note that stories are loosely based upon stories provided by Linkers across the Alliance and are to exemplify what is and what is not the linking role.



Tools and Resources – We are using this symbol to identify tools or resources that might be useful to you. Some are provided within the body of the guidelines, others will be available on SharePoint.



LINKER STEPS/ROLE



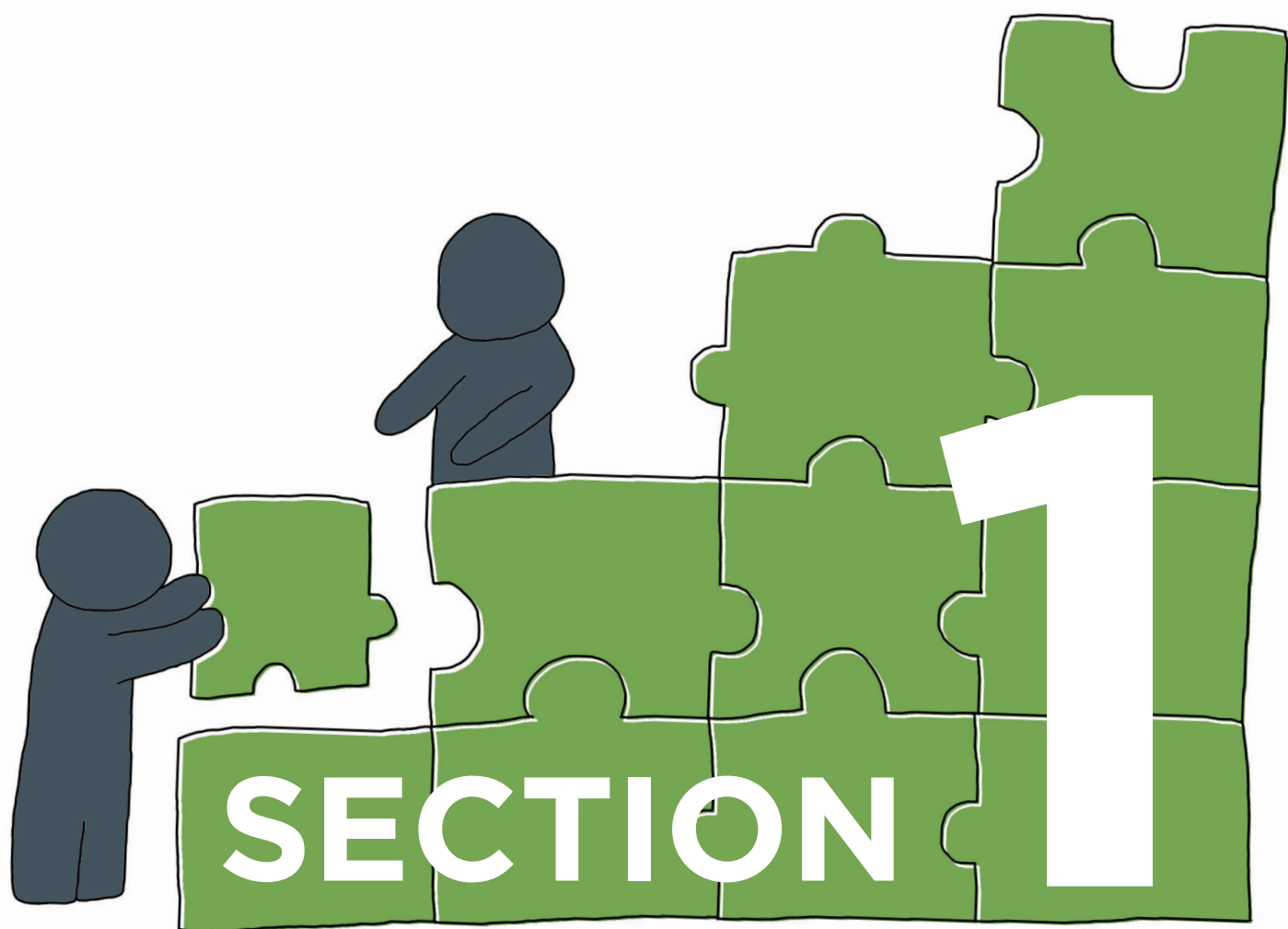
About these Practice Guidelines

The NW Alliance Practice Guidelines have been developed to provide guidance and support to Linkers across the Alliance so that there is a consistent, yet flexible approach to the work that linkers undertake.

- These guidelines have been developed by the team at IncludeUs, in collaboration and consultation with the Program Managers and Linkers across the Alliance.
- These practice guidelines should not be seen as the definitive guidelines for linkers, rather they form part of a collection of tools and resources which include organisational policy and procedures, federal and state legislation and Ability Links NSW guidelines.



When you read the policies and procedures from the organisation that has employed you, spend some time thinking about how they inform and support the role of being a linker.



Context



WHAT IS ABILITY LINKS?

Ability Links is an initiative of the New South Wales (NSW) Family and Community Services (FaCS), Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC). The NSW Ability Links (Ability Links) program is intended to link people with disabilities, and their families and carers, to knowledge, resources and opportunities in their communities, to enable them to live the life they choose. Ability Links is a critical component in the NSW Governments plan to reshape and improve the way people with a disability, their families and carers in NSW are supported by placing them at the centre of decision making, and facilitating the process of having their needs met within their local communities.

Ability Links is a commitment of the NSW Government under Stronger Together 2, and one of the ways the NSW Government is ensuring NSW is ready for the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

www.ndis.gov.au

The NSW Government move to establish Ability Links broadly aligns with other commitments to the sector including:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007, **www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml**
- The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous people 2008 **www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf**
- Closing the Gap – a commitment by all Australian governments to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians: **www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap**

There are now 16 providers and joint working arrangements in place across NSW. Of these, 12 are Aboriginal non-government organisations and joint -working arrangements who have Aboriginal identified Linker positions. This means there are now 268 Linkers, of which 47 are Aboriginal identified positions, for people to connect with.

Contact details for of the Ability Links providers can be found in Sharepoint.

<https://nrsdc.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>



Research some of the other Linker organisations to see what they are doing
Statewide Ability Links Website: www.abilitylinksnsw.org.au
North West Alliance website: www.nwalliance.org.au



Familiarise yourself with the NSW Disability Inclusion Act
www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/about_us/legislation_agreements_partnerships/nsw_disability_inclusion_act

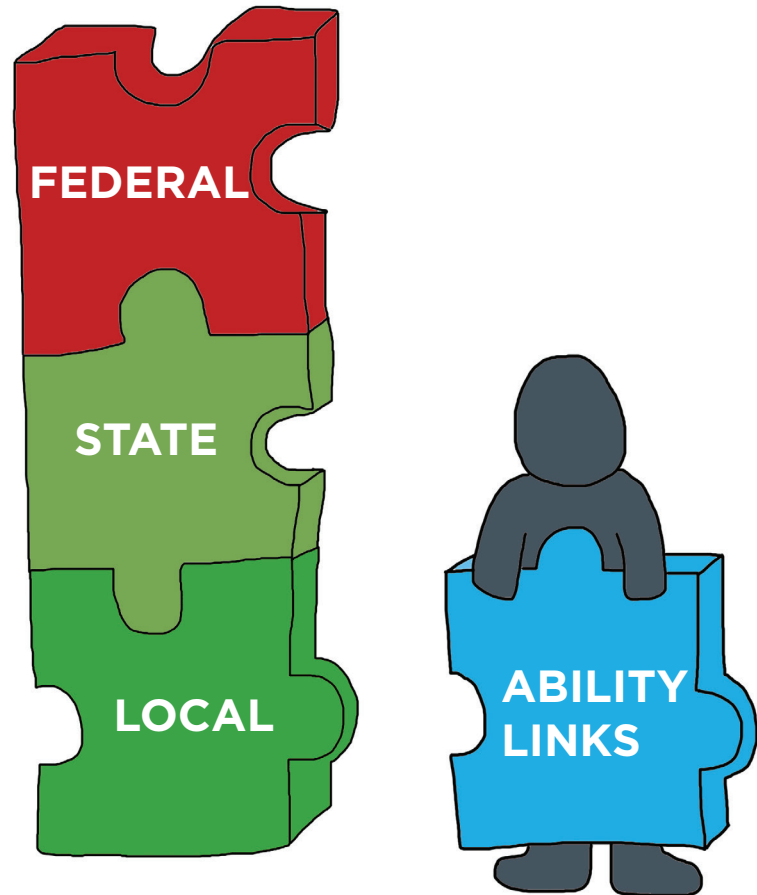


What questions do you need to ask your peers and supervisor about the Ability Links program and particularly about the target group and primary objective?

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES AND WHO IS ABILITY LINKS NSW FOR (THE TARGET GROUP)?

- Assist people with disabilities to meet their goals and live inclusive lives
- Assist Families and carers of people with disabilities
- Support local communities to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible

The primary objective of Ability Links is to assist people with disability, their families and carers to live the kind of lives they want to live, accessing the same supports in the community as every other person.



WHAT IS THE NORTH WEST ALLIANCE?

The North West Alliance (NWA) is a consortium of six NSW organisations including:

- Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC) in the Far North Coast Region
- Mid Coast Communities in the Mid North Coast Region
- Pathfinders in the New England Region
- Care West in the Central West and Orana Far West regions
- Intereach in the Riverina/Murray region and
- Murrumbidgee Medicare Local, representing Medicare Locals across the Northern and Western Regions

WHY WAS THE ALLIANCE FORMED AND WHAT ARE THE ALLIANCE'S PRINCIPLES?

The Alliance was formed by a group of organisations with shared values, including social inclusion, respect for the diversity of local communities and accountability.

We share a vision for strong regional, rural and remote communities and are committed to working together with like-minded organisations to achieve this goal and protect existing services.

SOME OF THE VALUES THAT UNDERPIN LINKING PRACTICE ARE:

A value is:

Something you hold dear

A strong belief

A principle

Some measurement of worth

VALUING

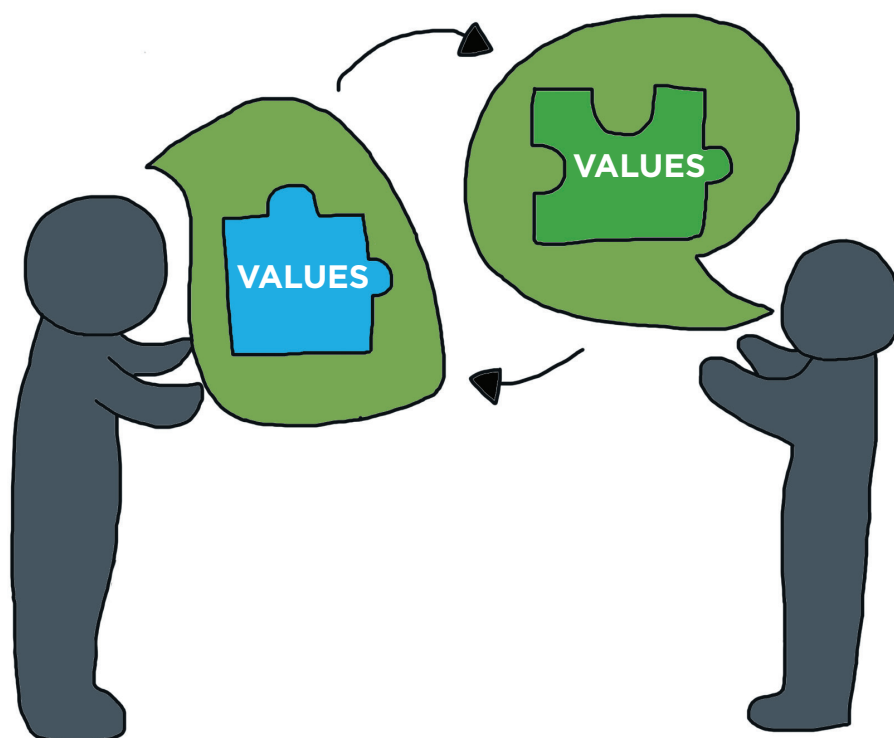
Every person has value and can be included when we creatively respond to the choices people make

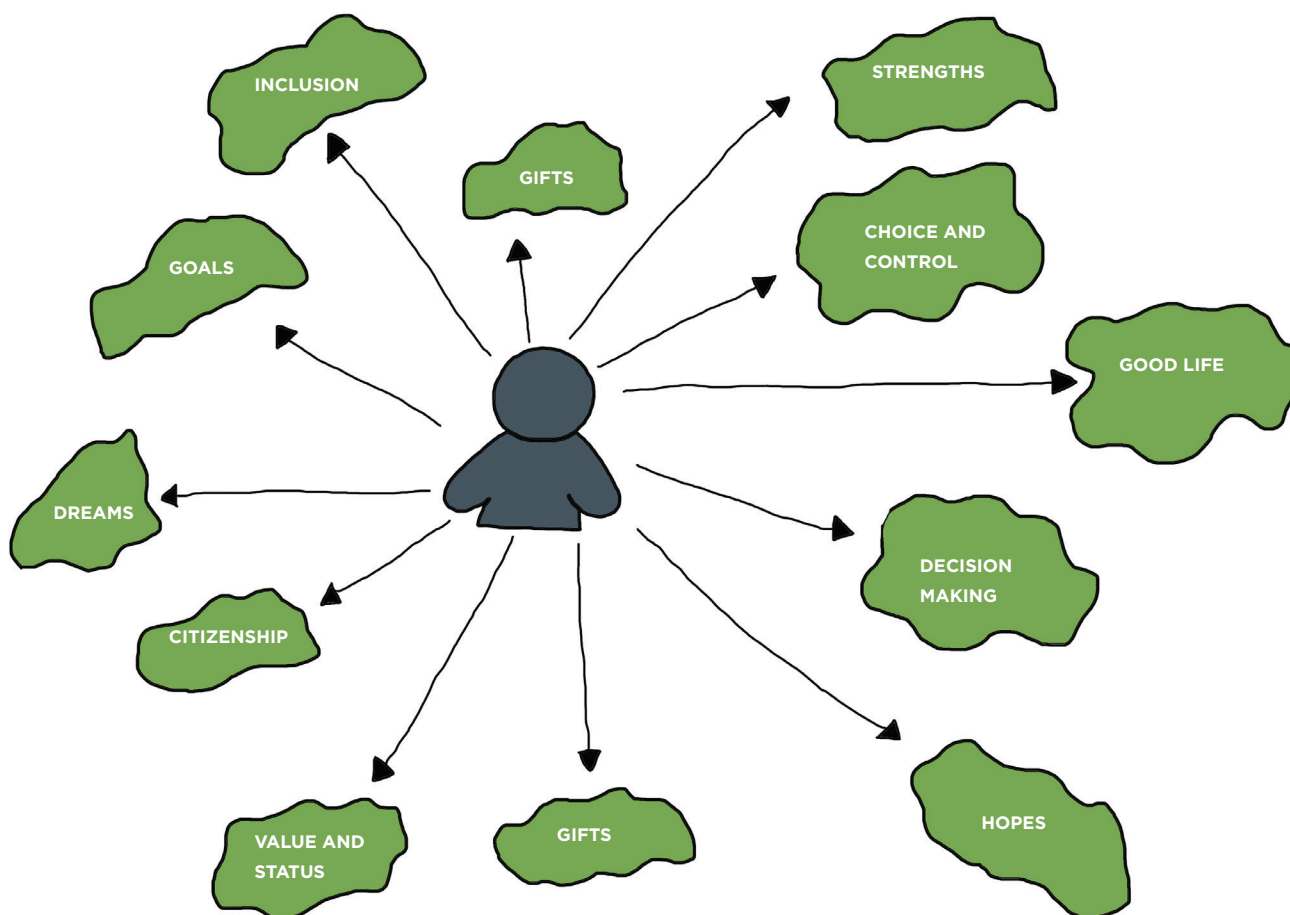
NUTURING

Nurturing hope by appreciating and respecting who people are by affirming, inspiring and understanding motivations and linking people within their community.

CONTRIBUTING

Every person can contribute when the community is flexible, equitable and believes in them.





WHAT IS PERSON CENTRED PHILOSOPHY?

It is seeing an individual as their own unique person, a citizen of the community with everything that comes with full citizenship.....True and Meaningful Inclusion.

Being person centred relies on the personal qualities of a person supporting someone to build a respectful, honest, open and empathetic relationship.

In action it is learning and understanding about a person, their values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, wants and needs

It is supporting the person to live their own defined good life/work life (whatever that might be for them)

It is about deep listening, thinking together

It is about inclusion of family, friends, work colleagues working towards goals as they evolve and change

Person Centred Practice is the cornerstone of self directed support and or individualized funding or workforce development

Being Person Centred - the 5 Key elements:

- ★ Treating people with dignity and respect
- ★ Empowering people to set and reach their own personal goals
- ★ Recognising the right of individuals to make informed choices and take responsibility for those choices and related risks
- ★ Recognising the right to simply experience the diversity of all that life can offer...the good, the bad, the highs and lows
- ★ Builds on the strengths, gifts, talents, skills and contributions of the individual

These 5 key elements must work together in a holistic way, individually they cannot help to make a whole life, but together they can.

Person Centred Practice is **NOT**

- ★ Being/giving all things to a person, making promises to give them everything they want, need or hope for
- ★ Focusing solely on a persons choice over all other elements of their lives
- ★ A magic wand that fixes everything
- ★ Doing for them

WHO ARE YOU WORKING WITH?

You could be working with an:

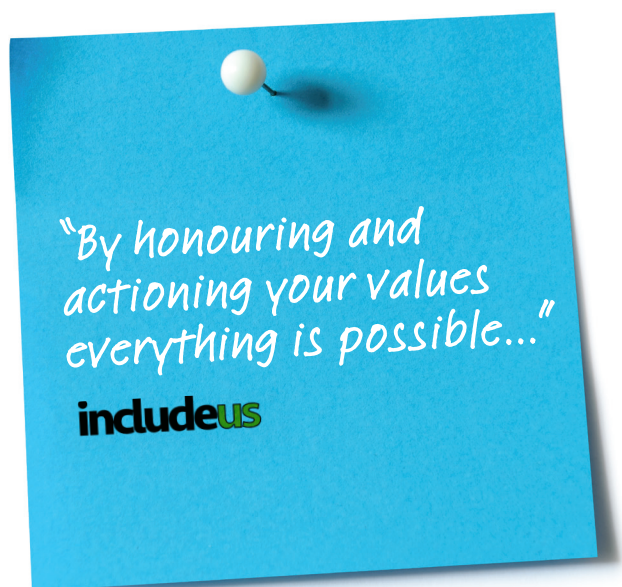
- An individual;
- A family, (biological and/or chosen);
- Carers and support networks;
- Community groups and or community;
- Service providers;
- or all of these groups at once.

As a Linker your work is the same, because it's all about people and inclusion, respecting and honoring that we are all unique and important for a community to be whole.



There has been a lot of confusion and different interpretations of person centred practice. Reflect on what you have heard before and now what you have read.

How will person centred philosophy and practice guide your work as a linker? Discuss with your colleagues



YOUR VALUES, ATTITUDES AND PHILOSOPHY

Everyone has different values and attitudes and life philosophy.

What a person may value may be different from another person.

A person's attitudes are reflected in their response to situations, activities or people.

They are the actions or thoughts about others that reveal what a person values or does not value.

A person's actions are often unconscious.

Attitudes can be viewed as positive, negative or neutral.

As a Linker it is important to have a positive attitude towards people with a disability, their families and carers and your role is to ensure that your actions and thoughts are enhancing. Many people do not fully understand their own attitudes or values until those values are challenged. Values are the beliefs that guide your behavior. They are influenced by a range of things including family upbringing, cultural background, religious beliefs, education etc.

We have the ability to influence people with our own values and attitudes often without even knowing it. Sometimes we influence consciously, when we might be a role model to someone, or try to influence the wider community for change or even just raising children.

Now think about your own values, attitudes and philosophies.

1. List five values that you think you live by (in all aspects of your life)
2. How do you think you got these values?
3. How do you think your own values and attitudes are influenced?

THE VALUES OF INCLUSION

- ★ Everyone is born in
- ★ All means ALL
- ★ Everyone needs to be in
- ★ Everyone needs to be with
- ★ Everyone is ready
- ★ Everyone needs support
- some more than others
- ★ Everyone can communicate
- ★ Everyone can learn
- ★ Everyone can contribute
- ★ TOGETHER WE ARE BETTER

“We do not believe the world would be a better place if everyone was the same. We believe that diversity does bring strength and that we can all learn and grow by knowing one another”

HEATHER SIMMONDS



Watch this You Tube Video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK-daA6giRA



Do you think that your values/attitudes ‘fit’ with your organisations and the values that underpin linking practice? Do you see any challenges for yourself in being able to be true to yourself but also be bound by the values and philosophy of your organisation and linking? The Alliance also has a set of values and principles, you can look at these on Sharepoint <https://nrscd.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>



What do you think about the 10 values of inclusion? Do any of them challenge you? If so why? Do you think there are exceptions to inclusion? Please discuss with your peers.



WHAT ARE LINKERS AND LIVED EXPERIENCE LINKERS

Linkers and Lived Experience Linkers will work with people and their families to find out what is important to them, help them act on their needs, interests and dreams, by facilitating access to knowledge, resources and opportunities within the community. Linkers will engage with a wide range of mainstream services and businesses, organisations, groups and networks in their communities so that they can easily link people to local opportunities and can work with the community as a whole to help it become more accepting and inclusive.

Linkers and Lived Experience Linkers will work with individuals and community to identify and support people with disability to build informal support networks, plan for the future and support arrangements and to enhance their participation and contribution to their local community.

Lived Experience Linkers can be seen as distinct from the wider workplace linker roles, their acknowledged lived experience of disability issues and the impact this has on people's lives. Lived Experience Workers can also be people who have had the role of carers of people with a disability.

Lived Experience Linkers should be acknowledged for:

- Their lived experience skill to support themselves and others to achieve and sustain wellbeing for people with a disability
- The rapport they are able to establish with people with a disability and their family/carers/support networks based in empathy, mutuality and shared experience.
- The ability to directly model wellbeing, recover and embody hope.

There is evidence which indicates that the introduction of Lived Experience Linkers into workplaces have many benefits including:

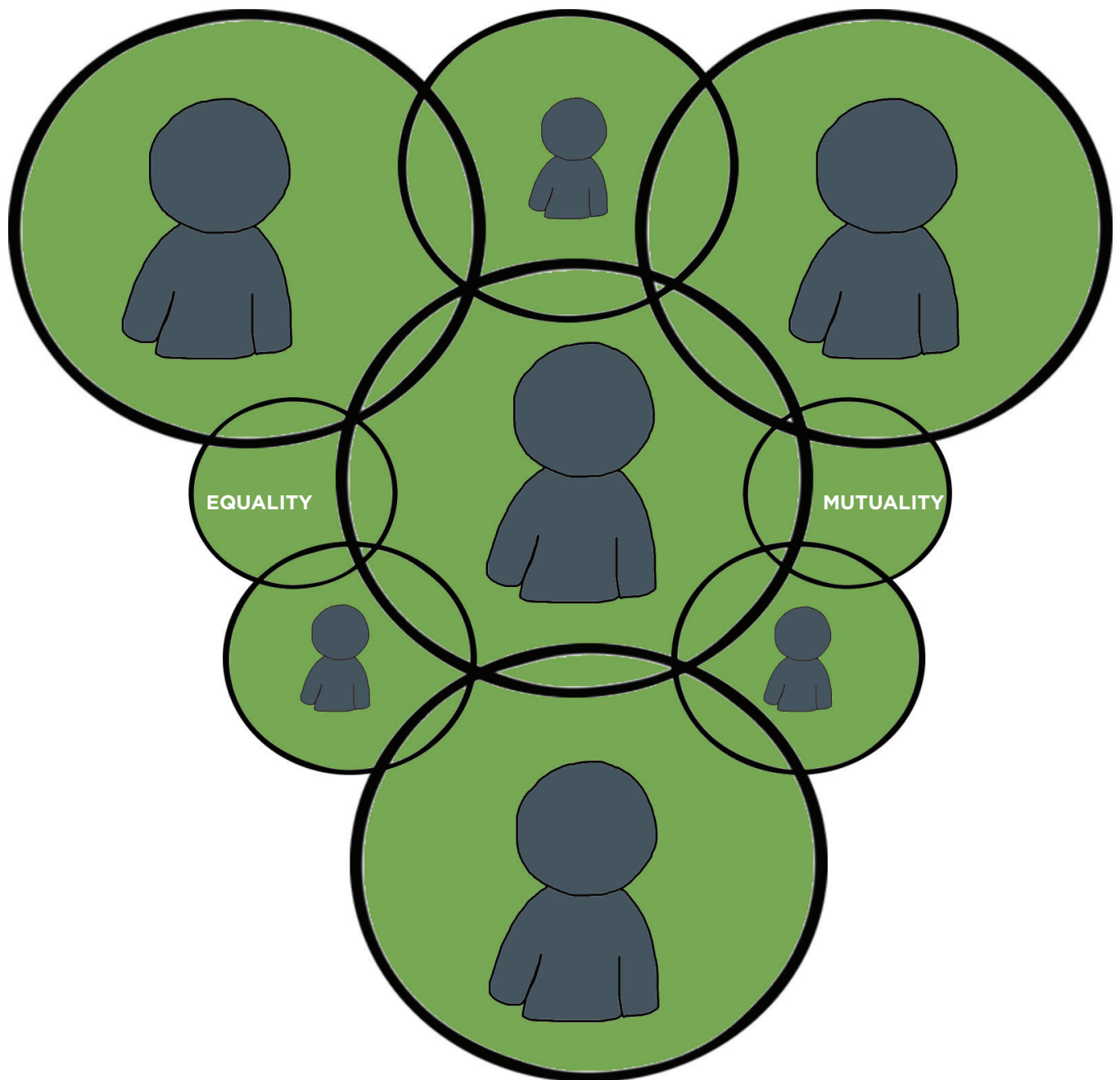
- Improved risk management
- Improved self-management and responsibility by people with a disability for own self-care and wellbeing
- Effective role modeling for people with a disability and families/carers/support networks
- Actively promoting, and nurturing the inspiration of hope, wellbeing and inclusion
- Effective establishment of rapport and communication with people with a disability, families/carers/support networks
- Improved social and employment inclusion and function
- Improved integration of people with a disability into the community
- Positive shift in organisational culture for people with a disability
- Reduction of stigma and discrimination for people with a disability
- Improved cost effectiveness of organisations
- The inclusion of lived experience carers to advocate for the inclusion of the carers in all areas of the program
- The potential to inquire into the wellbeing and needs of the carer and refer to appropriate services

There is a small but growing body of evidence in Australia of the benefits of employing a Carer Lived Experience Workforce.



For more information on Lived Experience workplace agreements for both physical and mental health disabilities (WAIP and Ulysses) have a look on Sharepoint <https://nrsdc.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>

LIVED EXPERIENCE LINKERS



Lived Experience Linkers have an understanding of:

- Situations that may be triggering while working with people with a disability, carers and the community
- Wellness planning and awareness of their own boundaries that support themselves and others
- Renegotiating relationships
- Concerns about potential judgement and informal assessment by colleagues which could lead to feelings of pressure to perform to compensate and prove worth
- Acceptance and value of their lived experience in the workplace

Wellness planning:

Lived Experience Linkers within supervision may require extra support dependent on their disability and could seek support from external peer linkers to assist if needed. Lived Experience Linkers may choose to complete a simple workplace agreement, that includes:

- Early signs of un-wellness
- What they can do to manage this themselves and workplace supports they may need
- Who to contact if unable to self-manage
- What staff and managers should or should not do as this may further exacerbate a triggered situation
- Who in the workplace will undertake the implementation of the wellbeing plan



WHAT ARE THE MAIN ROLES OF LINKERS?

The main roles of linkers are:

- ★ Working with people with disabilities, families and carers to make their own choices and realise those choices in their lives through accessing the knowledge, resources and opportunities in their communities.
- ★ Promoting the rights of people with a disability to live inclusive lives in all spheres, community, social, public and private.
- ★ Building Capacity within communities to expand inclusion of people with disabilities.
- ★ Participating in local planning activities to improve the responsiveness of, and access to, local services by people with a disability.
- ★ Developing strong, effective relationships with diverse communities and a wide range of mainstream, Aboriginal and Culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- ★ Providing a locally based first point of contact for information about referral to the disability system if required.



While networking in the community the Linker developed a relationship with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. They became interested in the Sports Ability program delivered to local schools (originally initiated by Ability Links) and indicated an interest in trialling vision impaired sports activities for customers of the local Guide Dogs service. Together plans were made for a "Meet and Greet the Blues" event where Guide Dogs customers met the NSW RL Blues and participated in a range of promotional activities with the players, Linkers provided a series of inclusive sports games from the Sports Ability kits for vision impaired children and their families. The day provided a great promotion of inclusiveness in practice, increased awareness about sporting activity options, and established a relationship between families and Ability Links NSW. The Blues may not have been successful this year but the day with kids in Coffs Harbour created great links!



If we say we are treating People with dignity and respect, this means families, staff, boards, management, friends.....everyone

“Its all about PEOPLE”

includeus

GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO HELP US HAVE CLEAR BOUNDARIES AROUND OUR WORK AND MOST IMPORTANTLY DO NO HARM?

Guiding Principles of the NW Alliance

PERSON LED – Linkers are led and directed by the people they link
INCLUSIVENESS – Linkers promote all people to actively participate in their community and hold valued roles of their choice to the best of their abilities
CITIZENSHIP – Linkers believe that as Citizens, people with disability have the same rights and responsibilities as all other people to participate in and contribute to community life.
AUTONOMY – Linkers encourage and support people to make their own informed decisions and take reasonable risks to reach their goals. People with disability and their families have natural authority and are best placed to be their most powerful and enduring leaders, decision makers and advocates.
TIMELY INFORMATION – Access to timely and accurate information enables people to make appropriate decisions and have greater personal control in their lives.
NATURAL NETWORKS – Linkers work with people to broaden their natural community networks and believe that families, friends and personal networks are the foundations of a rich and valued life in the community.
CAPACITY BUILDING – Linkers build sustainable links and options for people and community
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE – Linkers appropriately respond to the needs of participants including Aboriginal People and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities
COMMUNITY – Linkers seek to find a community response from all the natural assets that may be within community, including individuals, families and carers, communities, governments, service providers and the business sector to achieve a good life for people with a disability.
SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES – Linkers look for opportunities in systems as well as gaps and problems with the current systems and structures and work with local planning activities to improve responsiveness and access.

Guiding Principles of Linking to support NDIS

People with disability should be supported to participate in and contribute to social and economic life to the extent of their ability.
People with disability should be supported to exercise choice, including in relation to taking reasonable risks, in the pursuit of their goals and the planning and delivery of their supports.
People with disability have the same right as other members of Australian society to be able to determine their own best interests, including the right to exercise choice and control, and to engage as equal partners in decisions that will affect their lives, to the full extent of their capacity.
People with disability should be supported in all their dealings and communications with the NDIA so that their capacity to exercise choice and control is maximized in a way that is appropriate to their circumstances and cultural needs.
People with disability should be supported to receive supports outside the NDIS, and be assisted to coordinate these supports with the supports provided under NDIS.
People with disability should have their privacy and dignity respected



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE? The participant was alone and unable to leave her home due to a deteriorating degenerative disease at the time that she met with a Linker. After listening to the participant it became clear to the Linker that she had a critical need for a range of responses. The Linker supported the participant to access NDIS support. To also assist to get out of her home the Linker enabled her to access Taxi Vouchers via the NSW Transport Subsidy Scheme.



Be mindful when assisting people to access NDIS support that your role is to LINK and not do for, you should find someone in the community to support the person to fill out forms and communicate with relevant government representatives if they would like that level of support.



With your Supervisor, discuss where you see your current skills, gifts and strengths fitting and being able to be applied to the 6 main roles of the Linkers on page 18. Where do you think you will need to build your skills and strengths and where do you see that there might be challenges for you? (NB: when you read through the how to link sections of the manual you will gain a better idea of how your own skills, gifts and strengths will support you to link, but right now its important to think about what you can offer straight away and identify where you might need support to build your skills)



What is your overall reflection on the context section of the manual? Do you feel clear about Ability Links and the work of the NW Alliance and Linkers?



Useful information can be found on these websites
www.ndis.gov.au
www.ndis.nsw.gov.au

Where do you think you will need to build your skills and strengths and where do you see that there might be challenges for you?



The Linking Steps



LINKER STEP 1

Determining Suitability for the Program



LINKER STEP 2

Building rapport and being in relationship



LINKER STEP 3

Developing a mutual agreement



LINKER STEP 4

Exploring Goals



LINKER STEP 5

Mala's Gift Entries



LINKER STEP 6

Research



LINKER STEP 7

Beyond working with a participant



LINKER STEP 8

Next steps



LINKER STEP 1

Determining Suitability for the Program

Determining suitability with Individual/Family/Carer/Service (Based on the criteria outlined in the context section of this manual) as well as discussing the Disability which is diagnosed or undiagnosed (through some basic questions you can understand how their disability impacts on their level of need and the types of goals they might have rather than you using labels like, the person is Autistic) is an important part of your role, and using questions can assist with this.

Examples of questions you could use are:

“To help me understand how I might be able to assist you, tell me about an average day for you, what works well what are some of the challenges”

There are clear boundaries to suitability based on the service specifications for the Ability Links program. Please refer to the context section of this manual for details of assessing suitability of potential participants for Linking.



- What have I learnt about the potential participant?
- Are they in the right for the linking program?
- Has my informal assessment helped me understanding of their disability and the positive and negative impact it has on their lives?



Key things to remember on your first contact

- ★ This is a conversation not a commitment
- ★ You are not obliged in anyway to take the participant on at this stage
- ★ Make sure you find out what other services and support they are receiving throughout the community
- ★ Remember AL is not for everyone
- ★ Are you helping them with a goal/goals from a plan or are you being asked to do planning
- ★ Are they in crisis? If so who do I need to refer them to? Linkers do not work with people in crisis

A **CRISIS:** A decisive moment, a time of danger or great difficulty, the turning point
(The Concise Oxford Dictionary 9th Edition, 1995)



Are there any other red flags that I might have missed?

- Homelessness or risk of homelessness
- Acute mental health issues
- Not ready for Linking yet
- The person needs deeper/longer support to understand what is possible and maybe need support for intensive planning and decision making



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE - RED FLAGS

The Linker was approached by a worker from Housing NSW. The Housing NSW worker believed that the Ability Links program was for all people with disability and therefore wanted the linker to take up support of this person who 'didn't fit' into anything Housing NSW could provide. When the Linker asked a few questions about the person being potentially referred it became apparent that the person was homeless and had been moving around the northern nsw region for a period of months.

Recognising that the person was in housing crisis (homeless) the Linker informed the Housing NSW worker that the Linking program was not designed to work with people in crisis, but could potentially provide assistance once the person had some additional housing supports in place.



Be careful here to ensure that a service worker is not trying to steer a person into the Linking Program who may not be ready or eligible or ready for the program. Keep talking to your Team leader about these situations to help you understand what can and can't be done.

Understanding potential participant motivation

As part of determining suitability, it will be vital to assess what motivation you think the potential participant may have for being part of the linking program and indeed being linked. This is an area where linkers have felt they can easily fall into a 'doing for' or advocate role because the motivation for participation has not been properly assessed prior to linking beginning.

Lack of motivation on the participants part can be for a range of reasons and it is worth exploring these with the participant if you have any concerns that they may not be ok with the linking journey they have agreed to.



THINGS TO BE AWARE OF AROUND PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION

- ★ **Participant may have never had the experience of having choice or decision making in their life before (See page 30 for a graphic and description of 'service land')**
- ★ Participant has developed a goal, dream or aspiration that they think is unachievable
- ★ Participant has not been able to appreciate the steps needed to begin the journey toward their goal, dream or aspiration and is frustrated with not jumping straight to the goal outcome
- ★ Participant might need some further support from a different link to support them on their first steps, perhaps like a mentor
- ★ It is not the participants dream, goal or aspiration, rather one that has been directed or influenced by you or a family member/carer.



Reflect on your first discussions with the potential participant, do you think at this point that they have the motivation and support to move into the Linking program? If not, what could you do to find them supports to prepare them for the linking program?



INTERNAL REFERRALS: You and your team will need to work out who is the best Linker for the participant. Matching people with a Linker helps manage the workload as well match up skills, gifts talents and strengths. Also be careful here that just because someone is from a similar cultural background e.g. Aboriginal, that they are just matched with an Aboriginal worker, this simply may not be the best match for this potential participant.



LINKER STEP 2

Building rapport and being in relationship

One of the key challenges for Linkers is the requirement to build a rapport and relationship with the participant so that you have a foundation to work from together. For many participants, entering into an agreement about how you will work together will be a new experience, so it is good to seek feedback from your fellow linkers about what they have learnt about this critical early step in linking.



TO HELP YOU, HERE IS A CHECK LIST TO HELP YOU PREPARE.

- ★ Before you think about your first 'formal' meeting with the participant it is good to think through how you actually host a conversation. It is really important that you know who you are going to begin your conversation with, in presenting terms this is called 'knowing your audience'. In the Linker work this is being clear who or whom you will be working with, is it an individual person, an individual and their support person or advocate or indeed an entire family? (You will hopefully have been able to establish this as part of your first contact) Knowing your audience is critical to you understanding what stepping-stones you might need to begin hosting the conversation.
- ★ You will need to gather as much as you can about who or whom you are meeting, what their journey has been so far, what they might want from you, what their disability might be, but most importantly what communication needs there might be. Your gathering needs to also check in on what is the best sort of venue to meet in, does it matter if its noisy or busy, or is a more private, quiet space with less distractions more appropriate. If you are dealing with an individual who may or may not want family members present, what preparation will you need to do for this?
- ★ Once you have gathered all of your information it will then be important to think about the 'pitch' of your hosting, this will be different for each person or group of persons and you will need to think about communication needs, where people are at (e.g. have they always been in service land and never experienced choice in their life?) and think about how you might adjust or prepare for your approach.
- ★ It will also be really important for you to think about what person centred tools you will need to help you with your first meeting, like 'The Tree'. You will also need to think through what resources you should take, such as value cards, iPad, Tree Template, visual aides.
- ★ Once you have got all your gathered information and identified tools and resources you will then need to develop a plan, which should include venue and time for the meeting, open questions if needed etc. On the next page is a self reflection guide that might assist you with you planning.

SELF REFLECTION GUIDE TO ASSIST WITH PLANNING

1. AM I CLEAR AFTER FIRST CONTACT WHO I AM WORKING WITH?

2. IS THERE ANYTHING I NEED TO WATCH FOR IN TERMS OF MANAGING BARRIERS AND ASSISTING THIS PERSON TO MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES?

3. WHAT DO I ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THEM FROM THE FIRST CONTACT?

4. WHAT DON'T I KNOW AND NEED TO FIND OUT?

5. AM I CLEAR ABOUT WHAT SUPPORT THEY MIGHT LIKE AND HOW THAT MAY AFFECT OUR FIRST MEETING?

6. DO I KNOW WHAT IS THE BEST ENVIRONMENT FOR ME TO MEET THEM IN?

7. WHAT COMMUNICATION SUPPORT MIGHT THEY LIKE?

8. WHAT PERSON CENTRED TOOLS AND RESOURCES DO I NEED FOR THE MEETING?

9. HAVE I DEVELOPED A PLAN FOR THE MEETING? ☐ YES ☐ NO

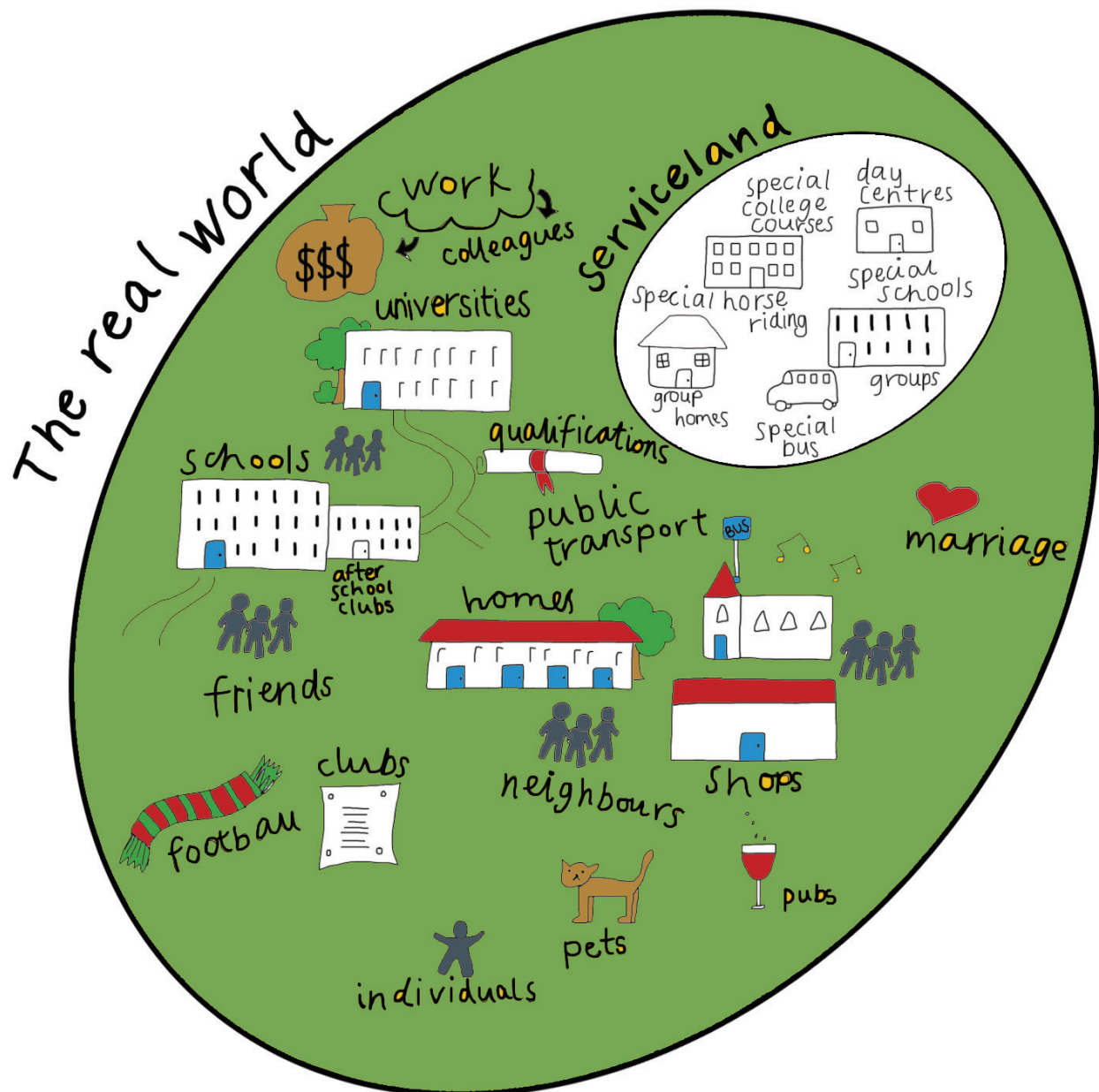
10. HAVE I HAD MY PLAN REFLECTED ON BY A PEER OR SUPERVISOR? ☐ YES ☐ NO

11. WHAT PREPARATION DO I NEED TO DO ABOUT MYSELF?



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE – From first contact the Linker worked with the participant and with their permission, a family member, to have a conversation about what support the participant might like to enable the first meeting to be as comfortable and helpful as possible. Through this initial research the Linker found out that the participant had spent most of his life in 'Service Land' and was very dubious about another 'new' program and also liked to have an Auslan interpreter present to support his communication, preferably meeting somewhere relatively quiet. The Linker realized that it may take several meetings to establish some trust and build the relationship and made sure that the first meeting was not scheduled until the participant was able to book an Auslan interpreter.

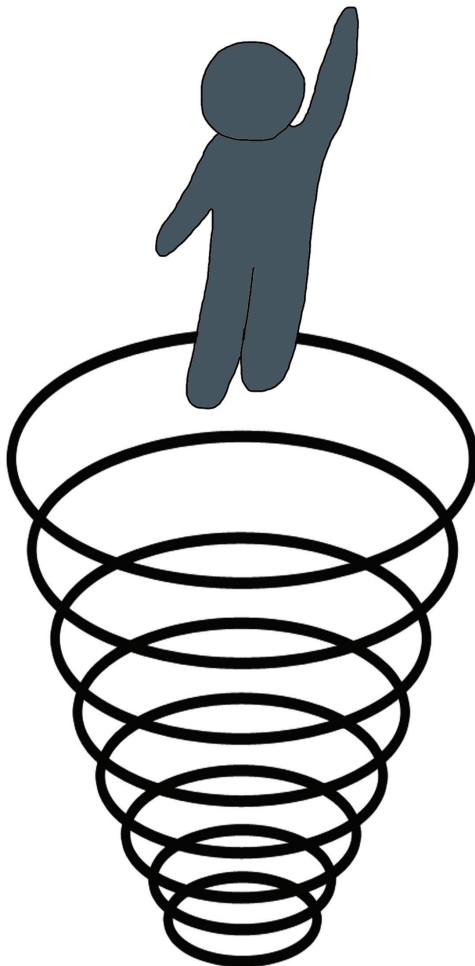
As a Linker you will need to be establishing respectful and honorable relationships with potential participants, families/carers and support networks. You will need to be listening and looking for the possibilities in what you are hearing. For many people with a disability, they have heard throughout their lives that they 'can't' do things because of their disability or they simply have been institutionalised for so long, or been part of what we call service land, that they have either never had the opportunity to explore opportunities or have never been able to make decisions for themselves about their lives.





UPWARD SPIRAL THINKING

Be really careful to monitor yourself and also listen for words from family, friends, carers and support networks about the potential participant, language we use about ourselves or other people so that we can keep on an upward spiral of thinking.



UPWARD SPIRAL THINKING

- This will work...
- Lets try again...
- She can change...
- This is helpful...
- It's no-ones fault...
- Help us understand...



There are some key tips that can be useful when you are beginning being in relationship.

- ★ Is this the right place and the right time to be meeting the potential participant?
- ★ Deeply listen to the stories you are hearing
- ★ Be open and honest about the boundaries of your Linking role
- ★ Ask yourself if you are in anyway trying to direct or control
- ★ What are the possibilities I am hearing
- ★ Listen for any values or beliefs that the potential participant might have
- ★ Are there any cultural issues I need to be aware of



(See tools and resources for CALD and Aboriginal Responsiveness Strategies)
For books and resources visit Inclusion Press Publishing www.inclusion.com
<https://nrsdc.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>
St Luke's resources www.innovativeresources.org/



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE – BUILDING RAPPORT AND RELATIONSHIP

A Linker received a long call from a participant who lives in a remote locality and wasn't sure she could cope. Upon meeting her in her home, the participant identified her difficulties keeping her house going and her yard tidy, problems with Centrelink recognition of her disability, and how she was finding it difficult to manage her finances after being used to holding down three jobs most of her life. After being heard by the Linker the participant exclaimed, "no one has ever just listened to me before." The Linker connected her to a financial counsellor to assist her with plans for the road ahead. The Linker also introduced her to a young dad and his son who had been looking for opportunities to help out his community and teach his son about being part of a community. They are now mowing the lawn and keeping her yard tidy.



Deeply listening and 'hearing' a participant's story is a key part of building a relationship and rapport with participants.



LINKER STEP 3

Gaining consent and developing a mutual agreement

Gaining consent

It is critical for legal and ethical reasons that you gain consent from the potential participant to work with them and research and potentially seek a link/links within community on their behalf.

Why is consent important?

The underlying reason for consent is to ensure that people have full choice and control over their lives and that includes their personal information that you have been privy to. It also allows you and other agencies to provide the participant, family and carers with the best possible services, you will need to collect and use some of their personal information. Your first entry into Mala's Gift requires you to tick the consent box and record the conversation that you had with the participant around their understanding of what consent in the Linking context means.

When is consent required?

Consent is required for personal information to be:

- Provided by one agency to another agency for the purpose of referring the participant, family or carers for services, or
- Sought by one agency from another agency to

assist with the assessment of the participants, family's needs and which services would be the most appropriate for them.

Additionally consent can be asked for:

- Using digital images for promotional activities to inform the community about Ability Links and what we do.
- External Auditors to access participant information and get information from participants, to ensure the quality of the services they receive from us.

How do I get consent?

You can have a conversation with the participant to discuss consent and seek their approval. You can then record this conversation in Mala's Gift as your 'evidence' of the consent gained.



Discuss with your supervisor how you might have a conversation with a participant around consent and check if there are any specific additional organisational requirements around consent that you might need to follow.

MUTUAL AGREEMENTS

Once you have agreed on a set of values to work with (See step 2) you can also further develop a mutual agreement on the key tasks, what is and what isn't your responsibility and what sits outside of the agreement.

WHY DO WE NEED A MUTUAL AGREEMENT?

Like establishing the values foundation for how you will be in relationship with the participant, the mutual agreement effectively lays out how you the Linker and the Participant will work together. The agreement will clearly identify what tasks you are given to work on by the participant, what is not your responsibility and also importantly what sits outside of the Linking task



You can find a wide range of tools to help you develop a mutual agreement with your participants. These are all available on Sharepoint

<https://nrsdc.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE - DEVELOPING A MUTUAL AGREEMENT

A Linker was asked to meet with a participant who was living in an isolated rural area and who was experiencing increased mental health issues. The participant had not been in any part of 'service land' before and was very distrusting of strangers and 'do gooders'. The linker spent the first meeting explaining what Ability Links was and could do for her and suggested that they might meet again to discuss how they might work together if the participant wanted to. At the second meeting the Linker worked with some tools and they agreed on a set of values that would underpin their work together, the participant really wanted honesty as a key value. On the third meeting the Linker and the Participant developed a mutual agreement on what the Linker would be assisting the participant with, ensuring that the participant had their goals, wishes and ideas as the core of the agreement and also she was able to state what she thought was outside of the Linkers role (she didn't want any family members spoken to as she had some bad experiences with them taking over before). The Linker used the mutual agreement to check in with the participant to see if anything had changed and they were still working on the direction that the participant wanted to go.



Make sure that you keep checking in with the participant that your original mutual agreement is still the direction that the participant wants, do they want to amend or change their goals? Check that you haven't somehow 'taken over' and that the participant is still leading the process.



LINKER STEP 4

Exploring Goals

One of the most fundamental parts of your Linking Role is to involve the participant to explore their goals they may want to achieve in their life and to help them identify how that might happen through the knowledge of the participants and linkers networks and communities as well as your understanding of the assets that lie in the broader community in your region and beyond.

Using some of the already developed person centred tools can be useful in this part of your work with a participant.

Some useful questions are:

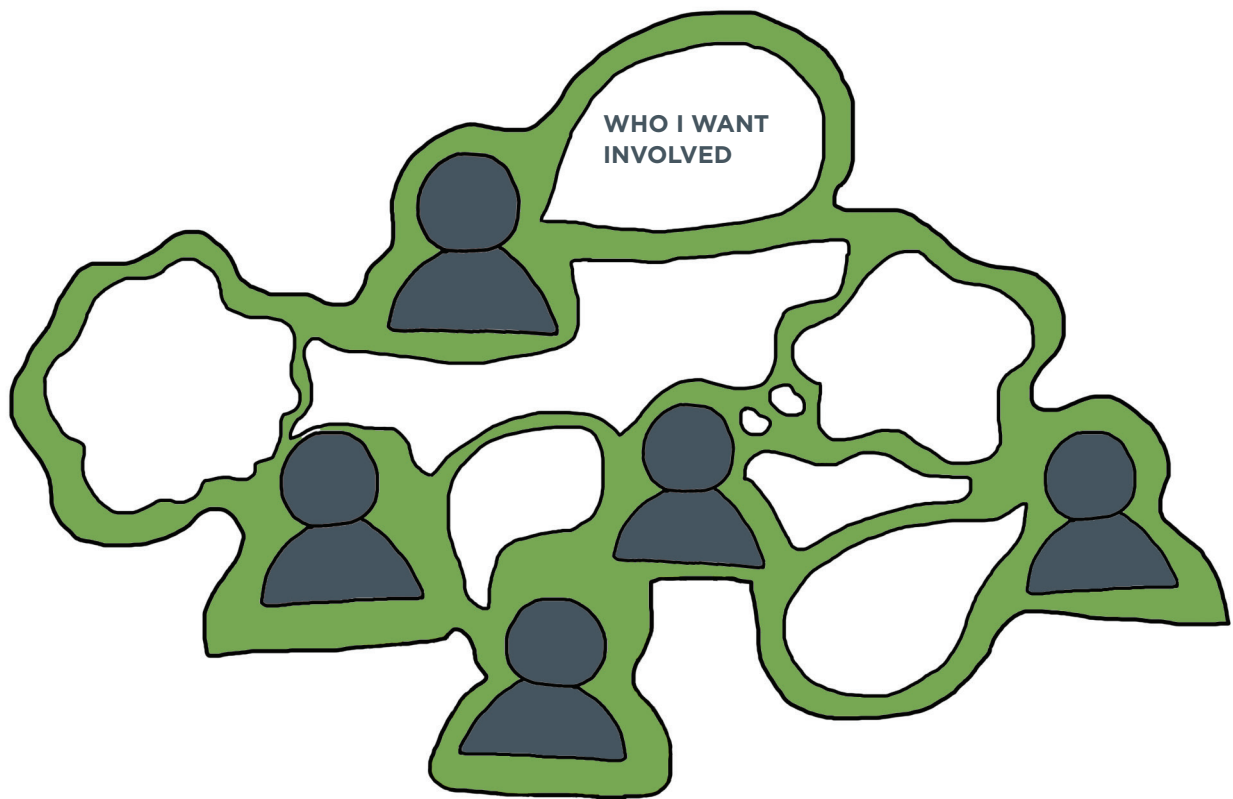
What does a Good day/bad day look like

What is Working/not working

What makes you happy

What makes you sad

Who do you want involved or not involved in our working relationship



There are a wide range of tools and resources that are available on Sharepoint.
<https://nrsdc.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>



LINKER STEP 5

Mala's Gift Entries

To ensure we meet quality and compliance requirements it is essential that you enter your first contact details as soon as possible after your first connection. This will ensure that the participant's details, including their gifts, strengths and skills will be documented and their stories recorded can be

built upon as you work with the participants. This will also mean that your work as a can be quality checked by your supervisor to ensure you are being supported to maintain the boundaries of linking work.



Here are a couple of cheat sheets to help you get started, and there is a Mala's Gift Manual which more fully explains how to use the program in Sharepoint.
<https://nrsdc.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>

Mala's Gift Cheat Sheet

Use this reference as a quick stop for tips on how to maximise your usage of Mala's Gift.

Unknown Firstname or Surname

If you are unsure of the surname or the first name, of the person whose details you are entering into Mala's Gift, type "(unstated)" into the field instead of leaving it blank. This will make it easier to locate them later.

First Name	Last Name
(unstated)	Jones
Lisa	(unstated)

(an)onymous entries for confidentiality requests

If the Participant has asked that their name remain anonymous, include the word "(anon)" in the Last Name field of the Participant form and in the First Name field, type in the Participant ID number:

Last Name (anon)	Linker	Record an Action
First Name 759	Nature of Contact	Close an Action
Suburb Cofts Harbour	Participant Type	View All Actions
Age 30-34	Date of First Contact	View / Add a Gift
Street Address	Gender	Record a Story
Postal Address	Landline	View Stories
Email	Mobile	Participant ID 759

You can then cross reference the number (e.g. 759) in the First Name field to a spreadsheet or paper file document that lives outside of the Mala's Gift system, ensuring that the confidential details about the participant are not available within Mala's Gift.

A participant is an individual with disability.

Consent	having their de
Tick if the person has agreed to:	sharing releve
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sharing inform	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> information welcoming feedback an	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> provided in a format that is likely to	

When requesting Consent from a Participant

Ensure that you document a Participant Conversation that includes the date of when the Participant provided their Consent. This is a NSW Quality Standards requirement. Include the comment "Expressed consent was given to share information about the person to the funding body, the team and as required to achieve a goal".



NO SHOUTING !

It is generally accepted that typing a message in UPPERCASE is considered SHOUTING. Avoid using UPPERCASE for making names, comments, notes. Use uppercase sparingly if you REALLY REALLY need to make something be noticed.

Helpful Tips

ESCAPE ESCAPE ESCAPE !!!

If you get stuck entering a record and you get a confusing database error message, you can usually hit the ESC button and back out of the problem

If you are still stuck, and you experience any strange database error messages, you are best to shut the system down completely ... and start again.

Stories and de-identifying

When writing Stories it is important to consider any privacy and confidentiality requests that the person has requested. Remember to de-identify the names of participants and carers where they have requested it.

Use an alternate name in your story to keep it sounding personal: "David Smith is a young man who contacted Ability Links for a ..." instead of: "A participant contacted Ability Links ..."



Irrespective of the software system that you are using, the same rule applies:

Garbage In = Garbage Out

No matter how clever a software system may be, if you type in poorly defined information ... when you go looking for it later (if you can find it!) you will find the same poorly defined information.

Avoid Abbreviations and Acronyms - PDNUT

While it might make sense to you, it might not to someone else. Avoid using abbreviations and acronyms.

Spell out the full names of organisations, locations and other labels. PDNUT (Please Do Not Use Them) !



Recording a Conversation

When you are recording an interaction, select an option for the Reason and Outcome that best fits your situation. Don't stress if it doesn't quite match. Close enough will be good enough in this situation.

When recording your time spent, you should include preparation time and travel time:

Time Spent = preparation time + travel time + the actual time with the person

Naming Conventions

Name of Group	by Linker:	Suburb	Like the User Manual says, title your groups and events with the most generic name first, down to the most detailed:
Chamber of Commerce - Brooktown	LGA	Brooktown	
Chamber of Commerce - Downtown	Outer Region	Downtown	
Chamber of Commerce - Uptown	Outer Region	Uptown	
ABC Child Care	Taree	Taree	Salvation Army Op Shop - Cundletown
Williams Shoes	Taree	Taree	Salvation Army Church - Smiths Hill

so that all the Salvation Army groups will be listed alphabetically one after the next



FEEDBACK

If you have suggestions for improvements to this cheat sheet, or to Mala's Gift, send your feedback to:

E: enablevictoria@gmail.com



LINKER STEP 6

Research

It is really important to note that whilst we have put Research in as a distinct step to help you identify what you need to be looking for, your research of your community people and assets should be a constant part of your work, outside of and part of individual participant linking.

The research that you will be doing for the participant about what opportunities there are for 'linking' should be well informed already by the information and data that has been gathered on the assets in your community and beyond as part of the work your fellow Linkers have done in the region. **This is where your role as a Linker is interwoven, as your knowledge through asset based community development, promotion of rights, participation in local planning and effective diverse relationships will be critical in ensuring the link that you find/create is going to be the most useful and sustainable.***

However there may well be very specific issues, activities or persons that you may need to research to ensure that you are finding the best possible link for the person to begin their journey towards reaching their goal/s.

What sorts of things could help?

- What is in Mala's Gift that can help?
- What community based services and organisations could help?
- Who or what in the broader education, private sector community could assist?
- What first steps are there in reaching the participants goals that might lead you to an 'initial' link eg. If a participant wants to return to work, your first steps may not be linking them to an employer but to someone who can support them in preparing to apply for work.



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE - LOOKING AT WHAT'S IN COMMUNITY

The participant is a young woman with significant mental health challenges, referred to Ability Links by a local refuge requesting a link to a supportive longer term housing option. The Linker used his community connections to create a solution. He found out the participant has a passion for designing clothes, and advised that Broken Hill Regional Development Authority (RDA) and Broken Hill Art Exchange (BHAЕ) were renting artist studios inclusive of mentorship to young artists under 25. Once the link was made, the Linker facilitated the participant to develop her own rapport with the RDA and BHAЕ. She was successful in gaining a residential placement with the BHAЕ, thus solving her housing situation and also providing her with support and mentorship. The participant is now visibly more confident with the support of BHAЕ, and able to more freely and proudly show her designs.

The research that you will be doing for the participant about what opportunities there are for 'linking' should be well informed already by the information and data that has been gathered...

*Section 4 of this manual helps you to build your understanding of the community assets available to you



LINKER STEP 7

Beyond working with a participant

It is really important that as part of the Linking discussion you ensure that you have talked about leaving the program in the early part of your involvement with the participant. When a participant leaves the program may change because the participant may wish to leave the Linking program earlier than foreseen.

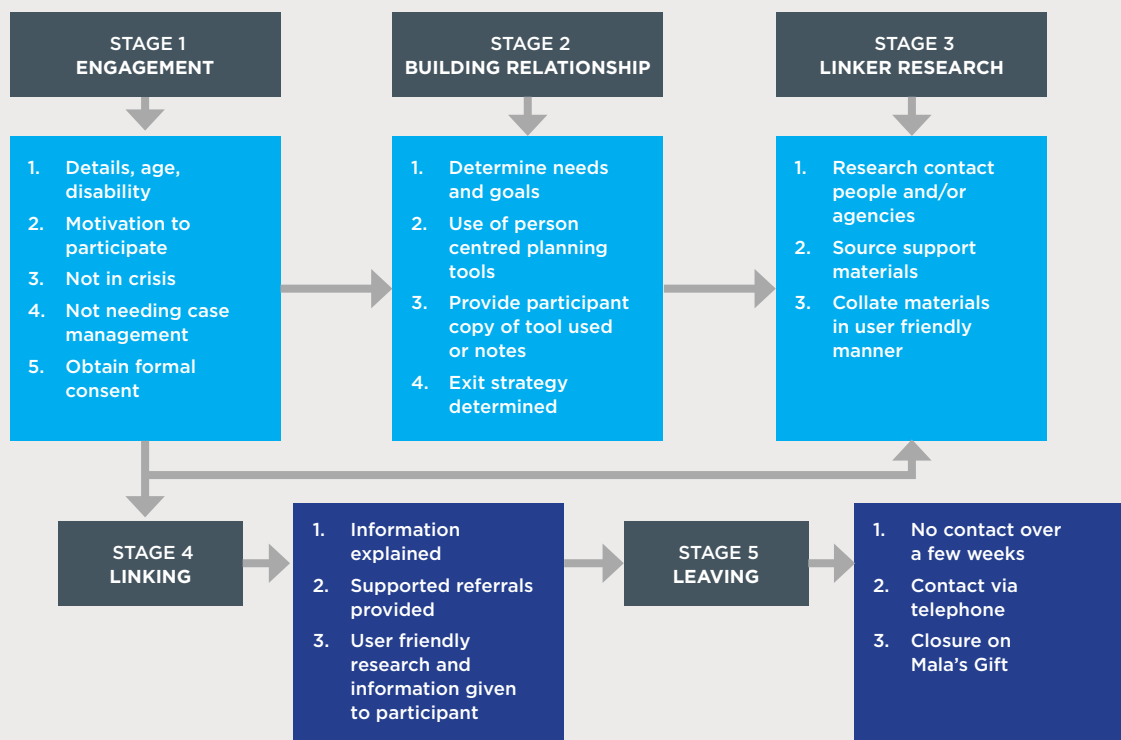
A few key things to consider are:

- Ensure there is a clear understanding by both parties of the proposed objectives and possible timeframe
- Be clear about the outcome goals for the participant so you can monitor the journey and how the goal is progressing
- Be sure the participant has a clear understanding on how to re-engage with program if needed
- Ensure the participant has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, lack of clarity may result in the exiting of a participant from the program.



The example of an engagement and leaving process below outlines where leaving the program fits and the kinds of issues that may trigger leaving or closure.

ENTRY PROCEDURE ABILITY LINKS

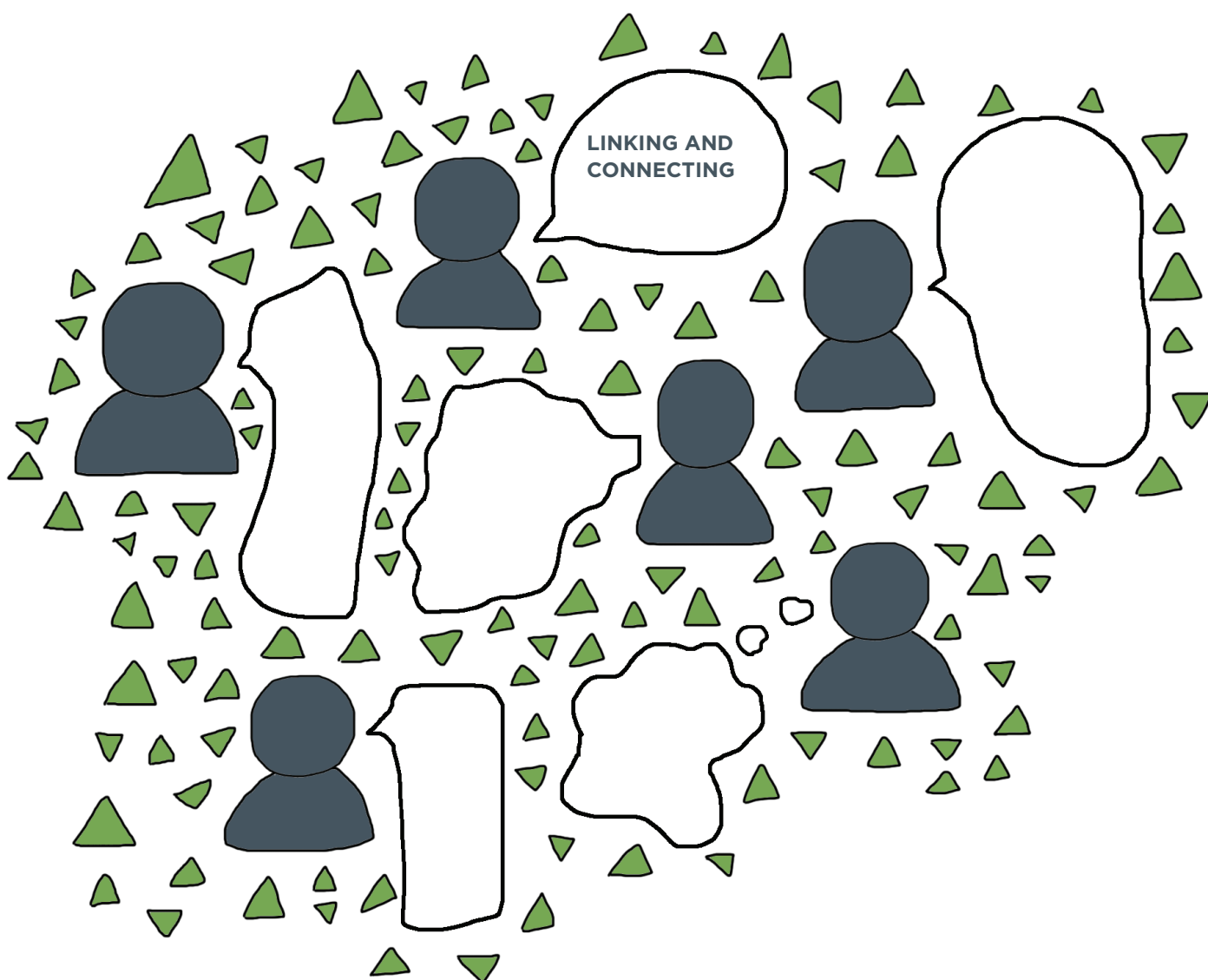




LINKER STEP 8

Next steps

The next steps are to work out the best approach to linking your participant to the person/s, organisations, companies or services in the community that you have found in your research.



One really useful tool to use here to help you visualize and plan the steps is the Linking Steps tool. Simply it helps you to map out the steps either visually or in writing that you think you need to undertake to enable the participant you are working with to be linked. It is really important to remember here that your role is TO LINK not BE THE LINK.



Have a look at the Linking Steps tool in Resources and Tools on Sharepoint
<https://nrsdc.sharepoint.com/North%20West%20Alliance/>



This is a good place to remind yourself that your role is **TO LINK**, not **BE THE LINK**. Your role is to find people in the community that you can **LINK** the participant to, who will support them on part or all of their journey towards their goal/s.



It is also a good point to stop and reflect on the professional boundaries you need to maintain as a Linker. Sometimes it can be difficult to manage personal and professional boundaries when working with people, especially when you feel that you or the person you are linking have formed an attachment of some sort. This is where being clear about your role and responsibilities is critical.

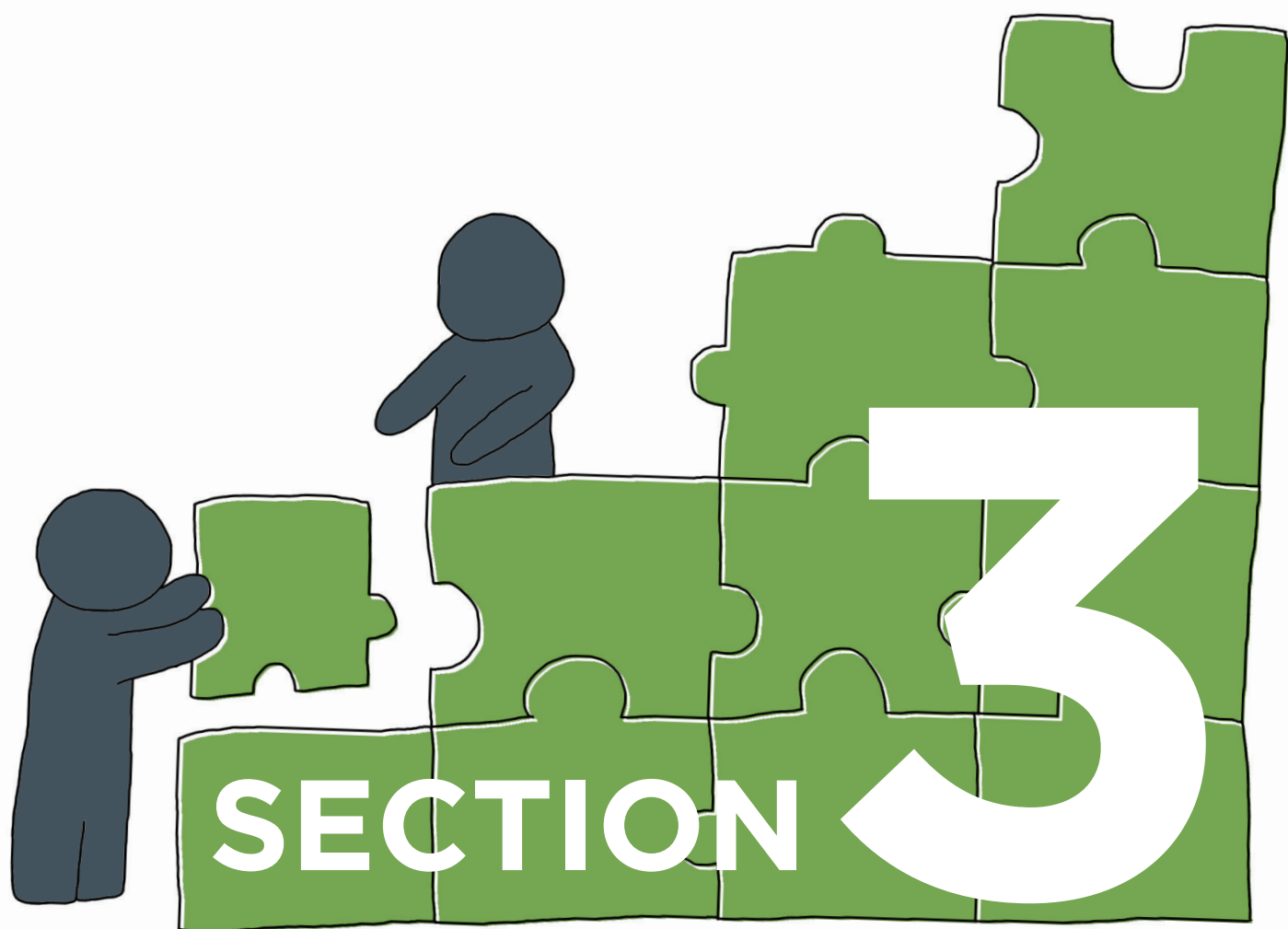


What have your experiences in previous roles been of managing (or not) personal/professional boundaries?



Talk to your Supervisor and peers about any concerns you have around managing personal/professional boundaries.

It is really important to remember here that your role is **TO LINK not **BE THE LINK**.**



Promoting rights

PROMOTE THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY TO LIVE INCLUSIVE LIVES IN ALL SPHERES, COMMUNITY, SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE.

More detail is provided in the context section of this manual, however here is some of the Policy and Legislative Context in relation to:

- People with a disability
- Human rights
- Social inclusion
- Social Value

People with a disability

The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (the DDA) provides protection for everyone in Australia against discrimination based on disability.

www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/guides/brief-guide-disability-discrimination-act

In New South Wales (NSW) The Disability Inclusion Act 2014 has 2 key roles:

1. Committing the NSW Government to making communities more inclusive and accessible for people with disability now and into the future. These commitments will continue even when the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is operating across NSW. Parts 1 to 3 of the Act contain the 'legacy' or continuing commitments.
2. Regulating specialist disability supports and services to people with disability in NSW and introducing better safeguards for these services until the change over to the NDIS. Parts 4 and 5 and Schedule 5 of the Act cover the 'transitional' or change over arrangements.

www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/about_us/legislation_agreements_partnerships/nsw_disability_inclusion_act

NATIONAL DISABILITY SERVICE STANDARDS (2013)

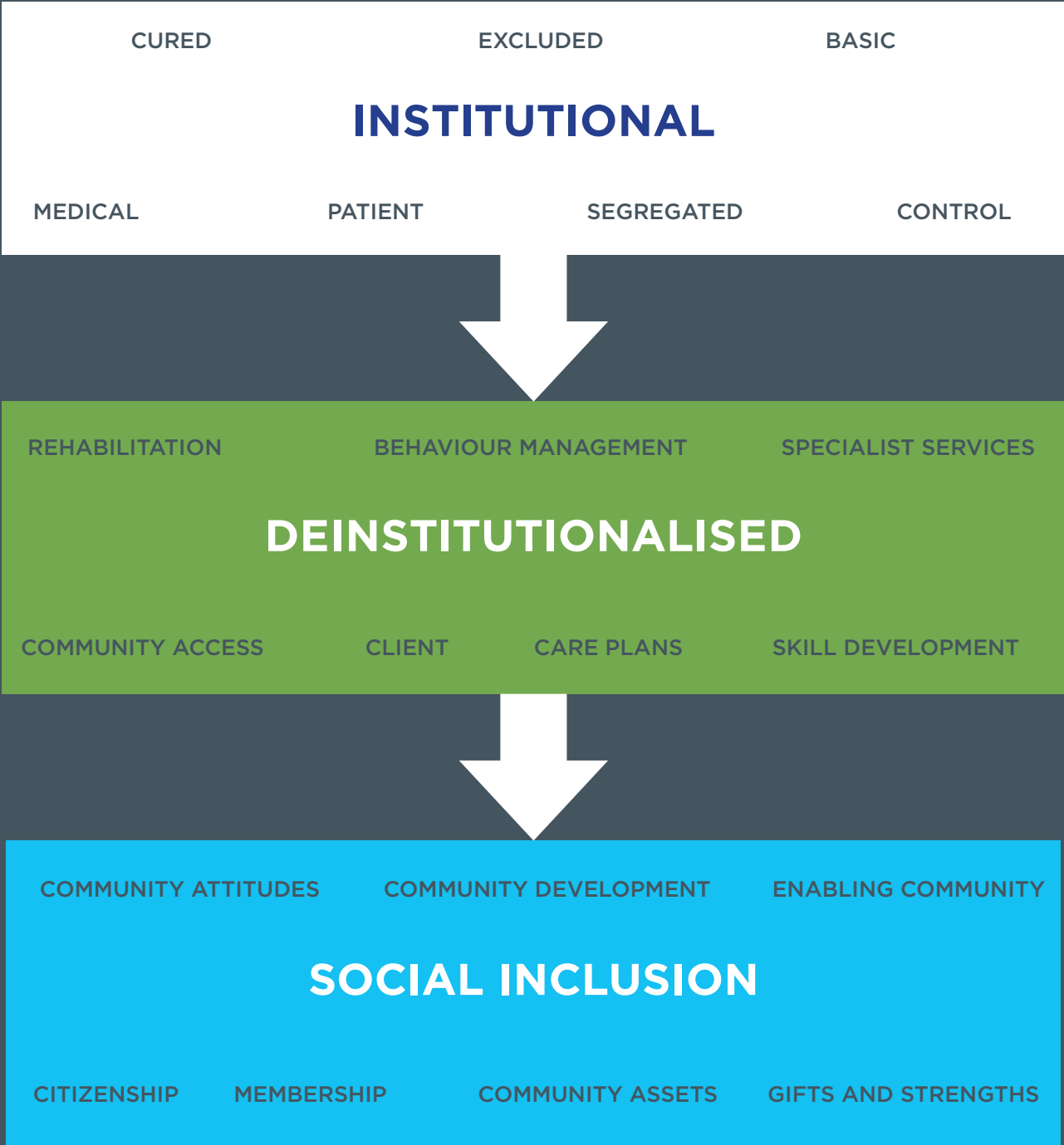
An overview of the National Standards

Six National Standards

There are six National Standards that apply to disability service providers.

- 1. Rights:** The service promotes individual rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making and actively prevents abuse, harm, neglect and violence.
- 2. Participation and Inclusion:** The service works with individuals and families, friends and carers to promote opportunities for meaningful participation and active inclusion in society.
- 3. Individual Outcomes:** Services and supports are assessed, planned, delivered and reviewed to build on individual strengths and enable individuals to reach their goals.
- 4. Feedback and Complaints:** Regular feedback is sought and used to inform individual and organisation-wide service reviews and improvement.
- 5. Service Access:** The service manages access, commencement and leaving a service in a transparent, fair, equal and responsive way.
- 6. Service Management:** The service has effective and accountable service management and leadership to maximise outcomes for individuals.

For those of you who are not from the human services sector or have not been working with people with disability before, the following graphic may assist in helping you to understand the changes that have occurred on the journey from Institutionalisation towards Social Inclusion of people with disability and, may assist you in better understanding participants motivation and background.



What challenges do you think there could be for you as a Linker working with people who may have been a part of all the approaches in the above graphic?

“Civic life depends on Citizens’ willingness to support one another’s membership despite apparent differences. All people will live better lives when we are all members of each other, shapes everyday life and collective decisions” **JOHN O’BRIEN**

So as Linkers, if we are looking at what can build social inclusion and what feeds exclusion, it is useful to think about inclusion in all spheres of life to help us understand issues that affect the ability of any person to be truly included. Three very important things to consider are Power, Status and Kinship.

What do we mean by Power, Status and Kinship?

People’s quality of life, their sense of identity and their safety is closely connected to:

- The power they have
- The status that society confers on them
- The strength of their kinship network

So where does status come from?

- Membership of particular groups (being missed if not there)
- Roles and responsibilities within particular contexts
- Talents/Integrity/Courage and Personality
- Particular actions or achievements
- Conduct over a long period of time

So where does power come from?

- Physical Strength
- Control of resources – money, facilities and organisations
- Who you know and importantly don’t know

- Legal authority invested by the state
- Particular skills
- Force of personalities

So what is Kinship?

- Personal ties and connections between people, not necessarily formal roles and responsibilities
- Friendships and relationships that are a vital safeguard against abuse and neglect

Citizenship, What does this mean and how might it feel to not be a ‘true’ citizen?

In the truest sense of the word, this means the same rights and privileges of everyone in community. If we then think about what that means for living together as diverse but inclusive communities we have civic life.

“Civic life depends on Citizens’ willingness to support one another’s membership despite apparent differences. All people will live better lives when we are all members of each other, shapes everyday life and collective decisions”
John O’Brien

If true Social Inclusion is what we are all working towards, then we must work from a place that people with disabilities are potentially Citizens at risk of exclusion?

Then if people with disability are at risk of being excluded citizens we need to explore how that might make them feel...



Think of times throughout your life where you may have felt EXCLUDED. This might have been in work, family or leisure, by friends at school to being discriminated against in a recruitment process. Importantly how did being excluded make you feel?



SO WHAT IS THE ROLE OF LINKERS IN WORKING ON INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PROMOTING RIGHTS?

Your role in promoting rights:

- Walk along side a person, never doing for
- Supporting people with a disability to uphold their rights, its not about your rights
- Championing inclusion by your interactions, values in action
- Nothing about someone without them
- Understanding the rights as they are in law, and reporting, taking action etc when in breach
- Participating in community campaigns that support rights
- Advocating in community about the rights of people with a disability
- Exploring possibilities and opportunities to highlight the rights of people with a disability
- Capacity building of community,
- Seeking and taking opportunities to educate,
- Ensuring the voices of people with a disability are at the heart of any discussion about rights
- Creating spaces and connecting and linking people with disabilities to community advocates
- Ensuring the voices of people with disability are enabled to speak for themselves





Building Community Capacity

BUILD CAPACITY WITHIN COMMUNITIES TO EXPAND INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

Linkers take a capacity approach to community

- ★ That is a strong belief in the skills, gifts and assets of ALL community members.
- ★ Seeking out the opportunities for people to come together based on passions and interest
- ★ Focusing on what exists and can be built on rather than what is missing or wrong



- Capacity Building is used to describe intentional actions and initiatives that support us to become the best we can be – as individuals and as communities
- The word 'capacity' speaks of our potential – as people, and as communities. So, when we talk of capacity, we are talking about that which we have the potential to become.



Linkers are not service or capacity gap fillers, rather Linkers are there to build on what exists and what needs to be developed within community to support people being linked.

A key tool/theory/practice that is recommended by the Alliance is the use of the Asset Based Community Development model (you have probably heard the term ABCD being used by your peers and supervisors as the community development model being used)

So where did ABCD come from?

ABCD was developed by the Institute of Assets-Based Community Development in the USA and this approach has been utilised in the USA, Canada, the UK and is now being implemented across human service programs and services, not just within disability specific work, as it is all about PEOPLE and INCLUSION within our COMMUNITY.

ABCD has the following 3 key approaches:

- It starts from a position of understanding the strengths of community, rather than the issues and needs in a community (A strengths based approach)
- It stresses the importance of LOCAL investment and control
- It relies on the BUILDING OF RELATIONSHIPS between local people and organisations

What constitutes a strong and inclusive community?

A useful definition of Strong Community is from the UK, where ABCD has been used for community building, the following is from a community building statement from the UK Home Office.

Characteristics of a Strong Community

1. **A learning community**, where people and groups gain knowledge, skills and confidence through community activity.
2. **A fair and just community**, which upholds civic rights and equality of opportunity, and which recognizes and celebrates the distinctive features of its cultures
3. **An active and empowered community**, where people are fully involved and which has strong and varied local organisations and a clear identity and self-confidence
4. **An influential community**, which is consulted and has a strong voice in decisions which affect its interests.
5. **An economically strong community**, which creates opportunities for work and which retains a high proportion of its wealth
6. **A caring community**, aware of the needs of its members and in which services are of good quality and meet these needs
7. **A green community**, with a healthy and pleasant environment, conserving resources and encouraging awareness of environmental responsibility
8. **A safe community**, where people do not fear crime, violence or other hazards
9. **A welcoming community**, which people like, feel happy about and do not wish to leave
10. **A lasting community**, which is well established and likely to survive.

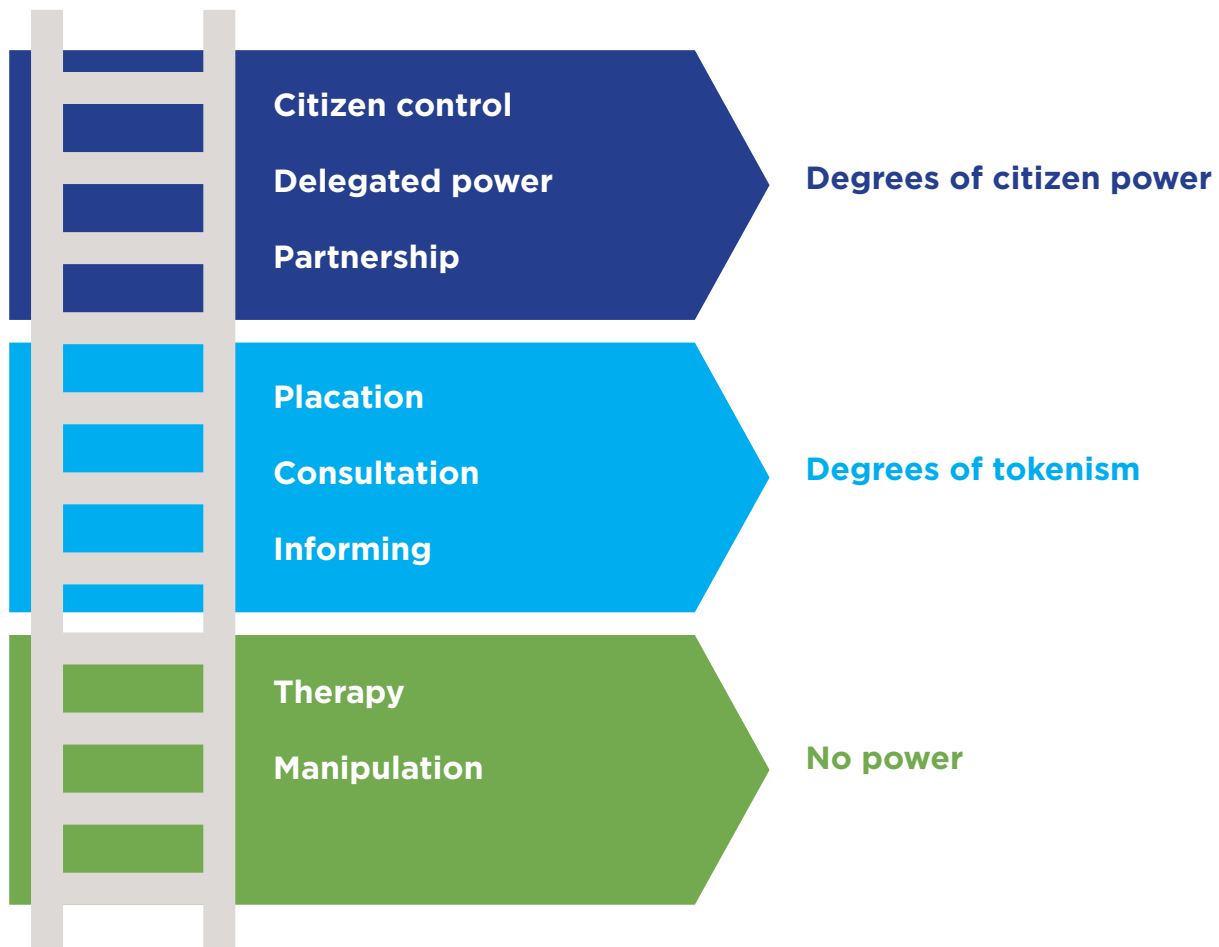
A key tool/theory/practice that is recommended by the Alliance is the use of the Asset Based Community Development model...



Asset Based Community Development tool kit
www.abcdinstitute.org/toolkit

THE FOLLOWING DIAGRAM FROM 1969 IS AS RELEVANT TODAY FOR LINKERS TO CONSIDER AS IT WAS WHEN IT WAS FIRST CREATED.

ARNSTEIN'S LADDER OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION



(Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation)



Reflect on what you have read about Citizenship and ABCD and think about how it is going to influence the work that you do as a Linker.

How is ABCD linked to Person Centred Practice and your everyday work as a Linker?

- ★ The foundational principles are the same: everyone has gifts, skills, strengths and abilities to share
- ★ Individuals, families, workforces, communities and organisations are full of resources – finding opportunities and possibilities supports empowerment making meaningful change
- ★ Community/organisational leadership can come in many forms- they can be anyone
- ★ Relationship building is at the core of strengths focused work



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE - COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING AND INCLUSION.

The Linker contacted the local Australian Army Cadets to see if some training around Inclusion and Discrimination would be useful for Cadets, following an incident involving exclusion of a person with a disability. The Officer in Charge of the Unit was extremely welcoming of such training, and together with a local training specialist, such topics as “Discrimination is not the same as not liking someone”, “It’s not ok to discriminate”, “Everybody belongs”, Appreciate difference/Appreciate self,” “Respect” and Bullying” were offered. The training prompted Army Cadets to look at ways the cadets and other groups can provide valued roles for people and reinforced the view that no matter what our abilities, everyone belongs and has a valued role to play in the community. There is now interest in taking the training around NSW, where there are over 12,500 Cadets enrolled in NSW.



MAPPING YOUR COMMUNITY ASSETS

Here is a table to help you map your community assets, the people, buildings, organisations etc

The table below is taken from the Disability Services Community Building Practice Guide (Victoria) and provides a framework for thinking and talking about the range of infrastructure and functions in communities that promote or constrain community participation and inclusion for people with a disability. This list is not intended to be definitive, but is a guide to thinking broadly about community assets and opportunities.

Sector Category	Examples
Access to Built Environment	Buildings such as recreation centres, theatres, shopping centres, health services Streets and accessible parking Mobility maps
Advocacy	Local self-help and advocacy groups Advocacy networks and resource units
Arts, Culture and Festivals	Visual arts, theatre, photography, dance, circus Cultural development activities and networks Festivals, including International Day of People with a Disability.
Children and Youth	National Youth week events, youth festivals, local events Youth strategies and working groups Children's Week activities
Community Awareness	Whilst the majority of projects have significant community awareness outcomes, this refers to specific projects aimed at raising awareness about people with a disability within the community.
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)	Ethno-specific groups and agencies Multicultural services and networks
Disability Support System	Self-directed planning and support Day services Share supported accommodation Respite Transition support Aids and equipment
Education & Training	Schools TAFE Universities Neighbourhood houses and community centres Adult, Community and Further Education Other training providers
Employment	Disability Employment Service providers Social enterprises Local learning and employment networks Centrelink Local business
Family & Carer	Self-help and support groups Education and training for carers Respite services/models

Sector Category	Examples
Health	Community health services, GPs, dentists, hospitals Primary Care Partnerships Local and Regional Health Plans Women's health Domestic violence Sexual health and education Aged care Nutrition and physical activity
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	Libraries, neighbourhood centres, community centres, internet cafes Adaptive equipment and software
Aboriginal	Local Indigenous Networks (LIN) Aboriginal controlled community health organisations Others?
Leadership and Civic Participation	Leadership training Mentoring activities Participation in working groups and advisory committees Volunteering
Sport, Recreation and Leisure	Regional sports assemblies Sporting clubs Leisure centres School holiday programs
Tourism	Tourism guides Venues such as museums, hotels and cafes
Transport	Taxis Public transport Community transport Active transport (cycling, walking)



Talk with your peers and supervisor about what community mapping has already occurred and what information on people, places, services and organisations can you access to help build your understanding of the diversity of community you will be linking people with.



Asset Based Community Development tool kit
www.abcdinstitute.org/toolkit



WHAT IS THE LINKING ROLE - COMMUNITY ASSETS, GIFTS AND STRENGTHS

The participant was feeling quite withdrawn from her old life following some health issues related to her disability, and decided she was ready to change things for the better. She wanted to increase her social confidence and find some meaningful things to do. The participant and her mum met with a Linker to help the participant on her journey. The Linker spent time with the participant and her mum getting to know about her and the kinds of things that interested her. She was quite creative and also a very selfless and giving person who loved to help others.

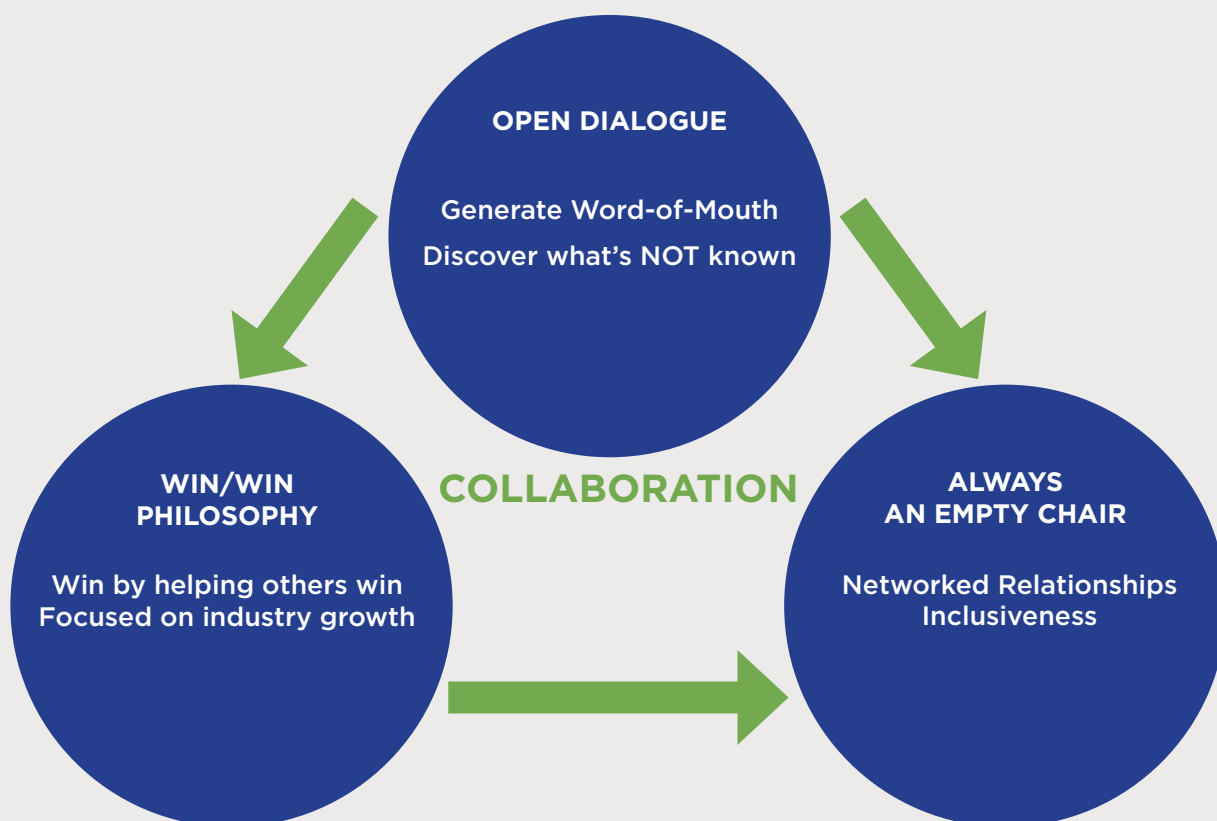
The participant went to a couple of art classes and began working on her art at home and said she really enjoyed having something meaningful to do. The Linker put forward the idea of the participant

becoming involved in the charity group 'Days For Girls' and she loved this idea. She went along to the sewing day for the group, on her own which was a huge step, and she absolutely loved it. She said it felt so great being able to help others while meeting new people and having fun. The participant has remained involved in the group.

The participant has also moved out of home and is loving life in her own place, has returned to work, and is also mixing socially with her old and new friends. The participant told her Linker how great life is and thanked her for her help, saying 'I couldn't have done any of this without your support, encouragement and positivity'.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Identifying a need
- Finding partners
- Enhancing abilities
- Understanding obstacles
- Developing strategies
- Building Knowledge
- Reflexive Practice





- Take part in events within the community with people with a disability
- Link participants to community
- Link community to participants
- Link gifts and strengths of participants to where they are to be most welcomed
- Build on existing community inclusion practice occurring in the community
- Linking participants to other like minded people
- Participation in community education opportunities
- Finding ways for voices to be heard, supporting connecting and getting out the of the way.



Far North Coast Ability Links Kyogle Gym 2015 <https://youtu.be/elIPfIOgzNY>

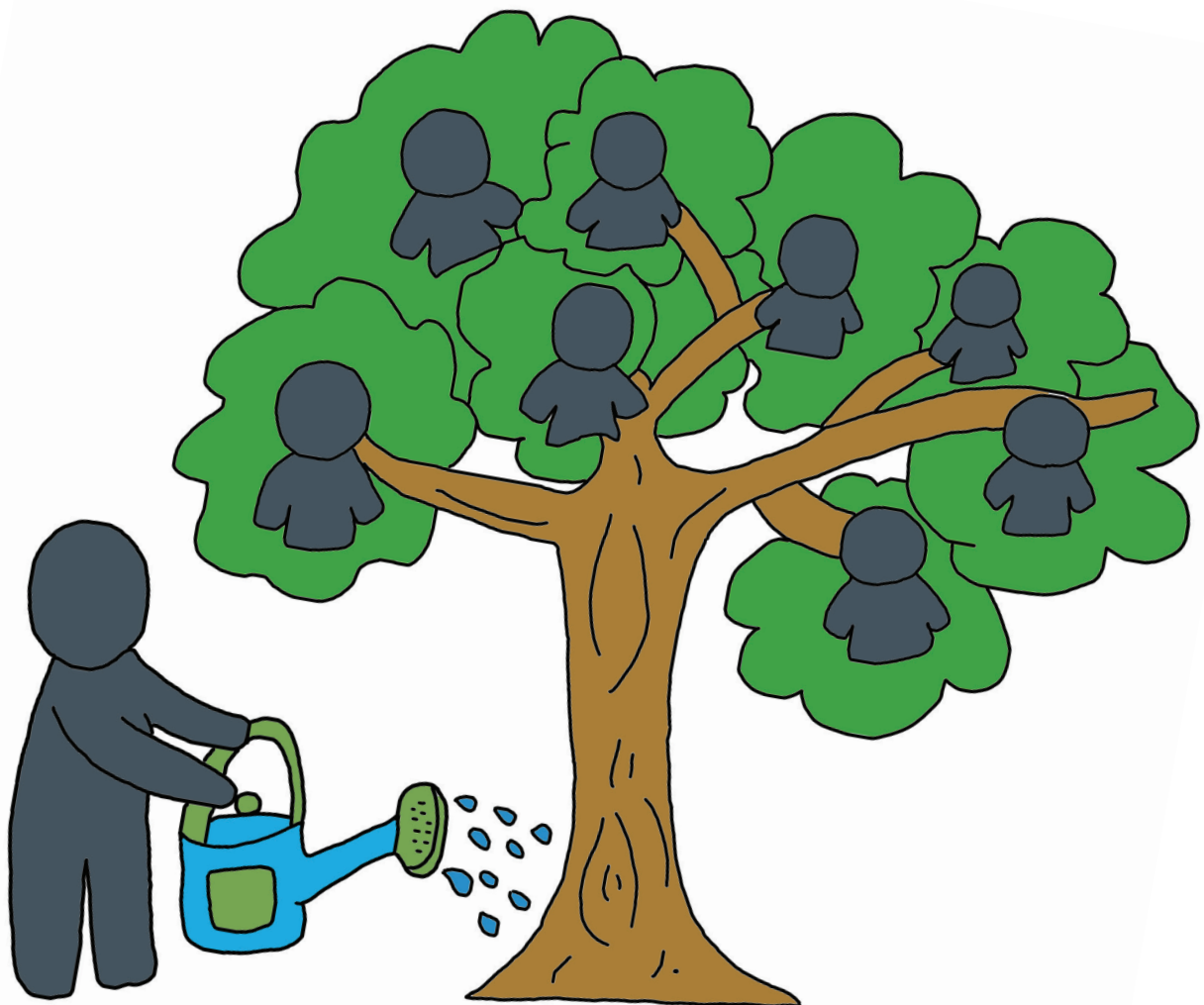
Far North Coast Ability Links Jennifer's Story 2015 <https://youtu.be/-r4fJGDvyYk>

Tweed Heads Cadet Story <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuCcxdlurtM>



- When I'm working with a participant, have I explored what the capacity and the opportunities are within community?
- Have I stopped to reflect on what is possible regarding capacity building?
- Could I instigate a brainstorming session to focus directly on capacity building?
- Am I creating a dressed up disability specific solution?
- Have I been inclusive in my work with participants and exploring possible community links?

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING



BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS



Local Planning Activities



PARTICIPATING IN LOCAL PLANNING ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE THE RESPONSIVENESS OF, AND ACCESS TO LOCAL SERVICES BY PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY.

Part of your linking role is to take part in activities around planning of services and activities within the local community to improve things for people with a disability. Your Program Manager will most likely coordinate the participation of you and the other linkers so that there is a strategic and planned approach to this.

Importantly your role will be to learn from the experiences of the participants you are working with to help inform discussions about service gaps, lack of responsiveness or access issues.

- Know what is occurring in your local community and explore how you can participate as a linker
- Finding activities that aren't about people with a disability, they are about people in community



A member of the Northern Community Reference Group highlighted that all local Councils are required to develop an Inclusion and Access Plan by the end of the year, but some were being done better than others. The Group agreed to each look at where these Plans were at in their local area, report back and share good examples. Linkers also took on researching the others, and all shared their findings. Through this process, members and Linkers have joined Access Committees, got involved with activities such as main street audits, and shared ideas and resources. There have been many changes as a result of this process - some Council Access Committees did not even have representation outside Council before the Ability Links involvement began.



INCLUSION FESTIVAL

Festival of Abilities held in Tamworth attracted over 2000 people of all abilities who came together to share experiences, participate in accessible sports, drumming and other activities. An interactive stall focused on the question 'What's your Ability,' prompting many community members to volunteer in sharing their skills and become more involved in their community. One visitor, Tracey, who had been in a wheelchair for seven years came from the festival excited to share her experiences by becoming involved in the local Access Group. "I am ready", she said. "Before now I couldn't think about it ... now I think I can help out."



The more you take part in these activities, the more understood the Linking Program will be, making referrals and access to improved networks more likely. We have also learnt that coordinated responses with the voices of participants clearly heard is helping to highlight where gaps in services are.



Here is an example of a local plan

<http://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/publications/good-access-is-good-business>



Diverse Relationships



DEVELOPING STRONG, EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AND A WIDE RANGE OF MAINSTREAM, ABORIGINAL AND CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES.

So what is the Linking role around developing relationships?

- Linking with Key Aboriginal and community elders
- Attending aboriginal interagency meetings
- Linking with CALD organisations both locally and state based resources
- Knowing what resources and support are available
- Linking to interpreter services



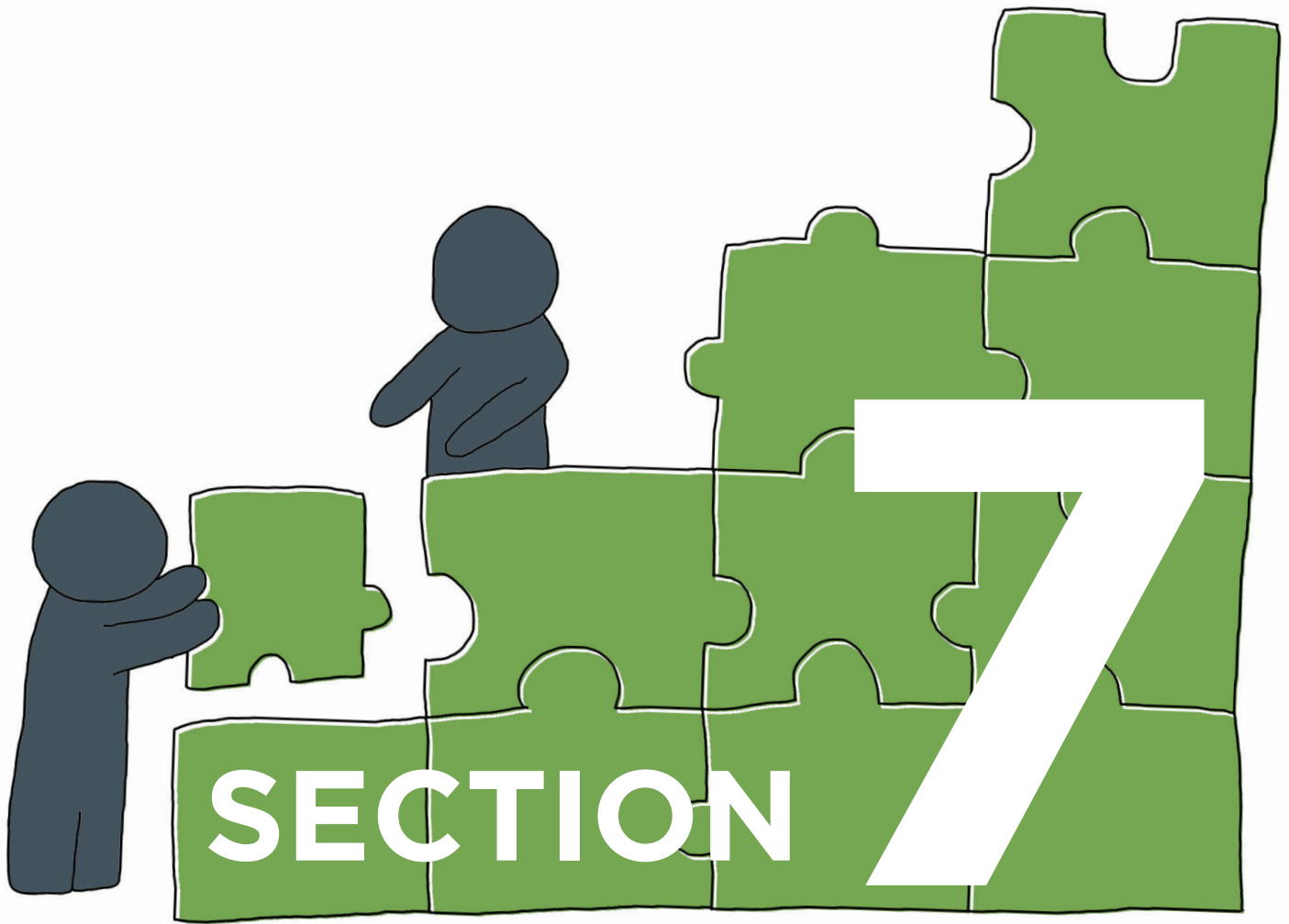
On the banks of the Clarence River a group of Nambucca Valley carers and people with a disability gathered with members of the Ability Links team to explore their values, gifts and aspirations. Uncle David and Uncle Roger identified that they are passionate about a positive future for their families and in particular for the children. The Uncles have a unique knowledge of local Gumbaynggirr stories, history and language, which they wanted to share. A Linker then met with the Principal of Bowraville Central School to see how Uncle David and Uncle Roger could share their gifts and assist the children. The Principal was very interested and indicated that they were seeking local Elders to play a supporting role with the children. (When school resumed, the Linker, the Uncles and the school got together to see how the aspirations and gifts of Uncle David and Uncle Roger can lead to a brighter future for the children of their community)



Think about what you think inclusive diversity is and what does it look like and why is it important?



CALD responsiveness strategy



Information Point



PROVIDING A LOCALLY BASED FIRST POINT OF CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT REFERRAL TO THE DISABILITY SYSTEM IF REQUIRED.

So what is the linking role with regard to being a first point of contact?

- Clear understanding of Disability services and assessment of needs
- Knowing what is Ability Links and what isn't
- Relationships and connections with Disability intake referral
- Understanding referral pathways
- Listening out for gaps, where to refer when there is nowhere
- Utilising Mala's gift
- Utilising Sharepoint
- Building relationships with first contact people in the disability sector



- Who do I have a relationship currently in the disability sector? If no one how can I build one?
- What do my peers know that I could benefit from?
- Who do I know that I could strengthen my relationship with?
- What do I need to know that will enable informed choice for participants ?
- What do I know about how NDIS is going to operate in relation to disability services?



Angela is 24 years of age and lives in Murwillumbah with her mother and 3 brothers and a sister, four of whom have a disability. When Angela was referred to Ability Links by FACS, her family had been isolated and struggling without assistance for a long time. Angela's only outing was doing the weekly grocery shop, and she was longing to make friends and find people she could hang out with. The Linker linked her in with a boutique day Program and with a little support from her Linker began a weekly outing program, expanding her world after many years of not leaving Murwillumbah. With support from her Linker she began a weekly drumming session, weekly volunteer work at the Palliative Care Op Shop, in a weekly session at Murwillumbah Community College learning about money and counting change and also been linked with a local pool very near to her home – along with her new friend Zoe whom she met at the Ability Links Flashmob dance rehearsal program.

References

Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne, Disability Services Community Building Program – Practice Guide 2010

Spina Bifida Association, Western Australia, Supporting Disability Support Workers – A Self Paced Learning Guide, 2007

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North West Alliance www.nwalliance.org.au

Ability Links New South Wales www.abilitylinksnsw.org.au

Ageing Disability and Home Care New South Wales www.adhc.nsw.gov.au

National Disability Insurance Scheme www.ndis.gov.au

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linkers

practice guidelines

