

BACKGROUND EVIDENCE

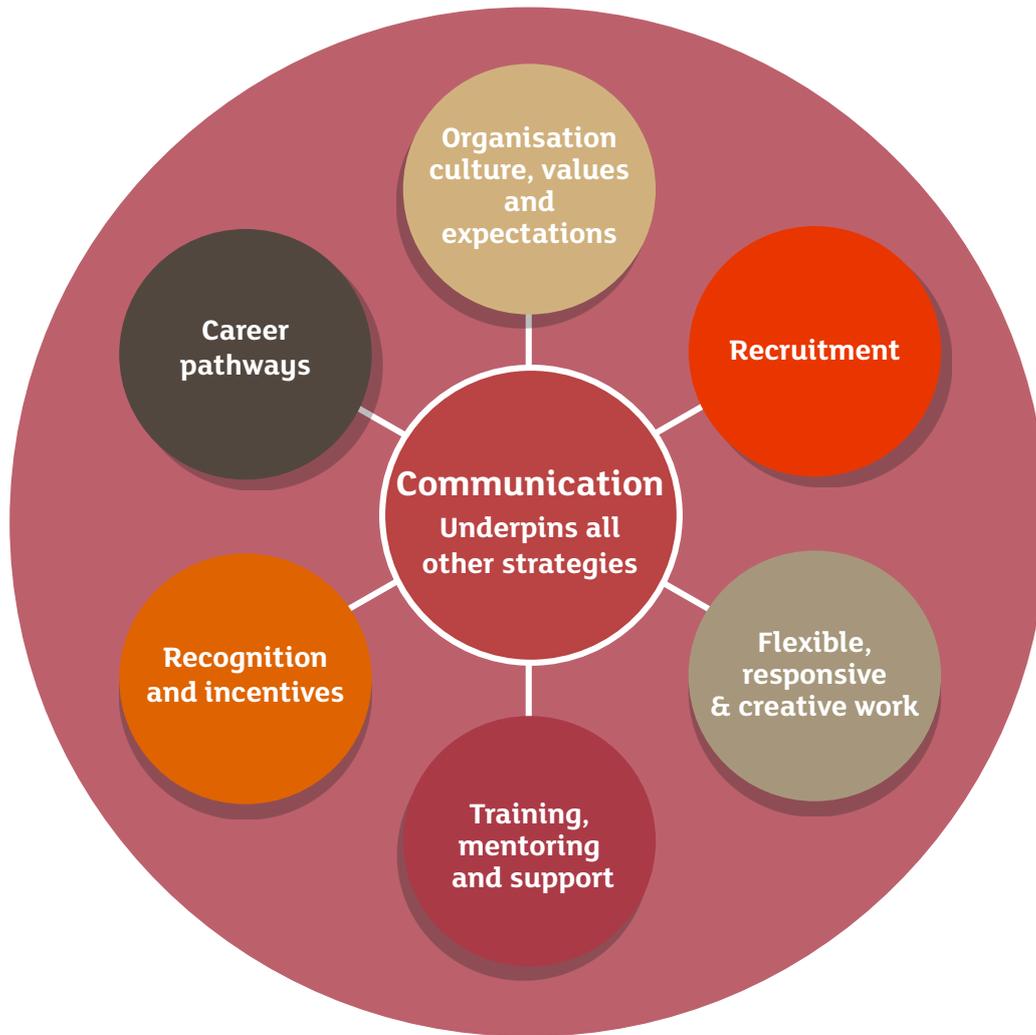
MAKING IT WORK

A WORKFORCE GUIDE FOR DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

A Practical Design Fund project funded by FaHCSIA to support the implementation of DisabilityCare Australia

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Summary of key themes

Introduction

This document provides background evidence for the “*Making it work*” workforce guide (referred to as the Guide) for disability providers. Both the Guide and the evidence are organised around the themes: communication; organisational culture, values and expectations; recruitment; flexible, responsive and creative work; training, mentoring and support; recognition and incentives; and, career pathways. These themes emerged from an analysis of 68 interviews with key stakeholders in Australia, England, Sweden and Canada when workforce challenges and opportunities in the DisabilityCare environment were discussed. This document provides evidence for the Guide by drawing on ideas, strategies and best practice found in reports, workforce studies and academic literature nationally and internationally. The themes have been organised to reflect critical elements of good practice in workforce planning and development, and they are intended to assist disability service providers meet the aims of DisabilityCare Australia. These aims are to enable people with disability to exercise choice and control in the pursuit of their goals and the planning and delivery of their supports; and to facilitate their independence and social and economic participation (*Commonwealth of Australia, 2013*).

Consistent with the use of language in the Guide, service providers are referred to as ‘providers’, support workers as ‘workers’, and people receiving support as the ‘person’ or ‘people’, while recognising that some people have a representative act on their behalf.

The commencement of DisabilityCare Australia in July 2013 was the culmination of years of effort. Disability advocates had campaigned for better funded and more flexible services; the Productivity Commission’s (2011) *Disability and Care Report* found that “*The current disability support system is underfunded, unfair, fragmented, and inefficient, and gives people with disability little choice and no certainty of access to appropriate supports*” (p.2); the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) affirmed their support for a National Disability Insurance Scheme (2012); and the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act was passed in 2013 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

The Productivity Commission reported that a shortage of disability support workers existed in 2011, with this shortage predicted to worsen with the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (now DisabilityCare Australia). But the implementation of DisabilityCare Australia’s vision requires a quality workforce with the right set of skills, not just an adequate number of workers (*Cortis, Meagher,*

Chan, Davidson, & Fattore, 2013). This Guide provides suggestions for recruiting, developing and retaining a high quality workforce by sharing strategies used by service providers identified as leaders in workforce development. This document provides evidence supporting these strategies, outlines characteristics of the workforce and, describes the attributes, values and capabilities required in workers.

Two comprehensive reports documenting the characteristics of the disability workforce provide a workforce profile which is supported by observations made of the 20 service providers and disability organisations visited across Australia for this project *Martin and Healy (2010)* surveyed workers across a number of fields in community services including 1,507 from disability support workers *Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria (2010)* surveyed 107 Community Service Organisations (CSO), plus 2,089 Employee Review employees from 92 CSOs across Victoria.

Data from the two reports are generally consistent. The data showed that the disability workforce was approximately 80 per cent female and in the older age range. Martin and Healy reported that 7 per cent of disability services workers were Australian born, and *Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria (2010)* reported that 13.36 per cent identified as culturally and linguistically diverse. Martin and Healy stated that almost all workers were non-Indigenous Australians, while *Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria (2010)* stated that 8 per cent of workers had an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background (referred to as Aboriginal in this document). Service providers interviewed for this study said they had difficulties recruiting and retaining Aboriginal workers.

Leadership

Strong leadership was observed as important when interviewing the service providers for this study. Senior managers implemented their vision of support in ways that were clear to people using the provider and to staff at all levels. The importance of effective leadership in creating effective services is emphasised in a wide range of management literature, for example the Australian reference *Graetz, Rimmer, Lawrence and Smith (2011)*. Effective leadership is not the focus of this project and it will not be discussed in depth. However, it remains an important factor that needs to be considered when planning a workforce strategy.

1. Communication

Communication and interpersonal skills are perhaps the ‘most undervalued skill sets’ of disability support workers (Fattore, Evesson, Moensted, & Jakubauskas, 2010:82)

Good communication, between the person receiving support and their worker and between the worker and their supervisor in their employing provider, is essential to forming good working relationships and providing effective services (*Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013*). As the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) (2010) noted, people receiving support need to tell workers what they want before their needs can be met. Barriers that can restrict this communication need to be addressed. A cultural ambassador or interpreter may be needed to assist people from Aboriginal or culturally diverse backgrounds; people inexperienced in expressing their wishes need training and support; assistive technology may be needed for people with physical impairments; and pictorial and other aids may assist people with an intellectual disability (*Community Living Association Inc, 2007*). While this Guide is designed for providers managing their workforce, it includes suggestions for people using services also receiving communication support and training because they are the central point in the communication chain.

Communication in support work can be highly complex and demanding, especially when behaviour management skills are required and violence and abuse is evident, particularly against women (*Fattore et al., 2010; Frohmader, 2012*). Communication is a two way process and workers and service providers need to be open to hearing what people are saying. Workers need communication training to be receptive to different forms of communication including body language. As DisabilityCare Australia enables more people with disability to have greater choice and control, and more social and economic participation (*Commonwealth of Australia, 2013*), the demands on workers will increase (*Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), 2010*). It is expected that workers will need higher level communication skills and they will need to be responsive to expanding their role (*Cortis et al., 2013*). Australian evidence regarding the challenges workers face transitioning to the DisabilityCare Australia environment is still limited, however, it does show that this transition is challenging for workers (*Laragy & Ottmann, 2011*).

2. Organisation culture, values and expectations

Providers need to clearly promote their values and mission statement because each organisation is unique and workers and people receiving support can only know what to expect when these are clearly relayed. Each provider's values and culture has a powerful effect on developing workers' understandings of their role and standards expected (*Ageing Disability and Home Care, 2011*). Providers need to continually reinforce and promote their values and mission because workers and people receiving support often have differing understandings (*Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), 2010*). The human rights of people with disability need to be clearly conveyed (*United Nations, 2006*). Human Rights are central to DisabilityCare Australia's vision, in keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and providers need to promote these values.

DisabilityCare Australia is introducing major changes to the disability sector and any change is stressful. The move to more flexible services and working arrangements is particularly stressful (*Australian Institute of Management, 2012*). Effective change management to manage the stresses requires clear leadership and ongoing support for workers (*Disability Services Commissioner, 2009; Graetz et al., 2011*).

3. Recruitment

Building a quality workforce with the capabilities to respond sensitively and appropriately to people in an individualised environment has many challenges. *Cortis et al. (2013)* pointed out that underfunding in the disability sector, low wages and insecure employment deter workers from entering and remaining. They argued that it is cost effective in the long term if a stable workforce can be developed and sustained, in preference to “having *multitude of atomised and inexperienced employees, which would be extremely costly to monitor and regulate*” (p.40).

Workforce conditions play an important part in attracting workers. Low pay and insecure employment deter workers from entering the disability workforce (*Martin & Healy, 2010; Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria, 2010*). In particular, the casualisation of the workforce with insecure employment and uncertain hours, the lack of sick pay, holiday leave and limited opportunities for career advancement are disincentives (*Cortis et al., 2013; Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria, 2010*). In Victoria, 35.3 per cent of the workforce are casual (*Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria, 2010*). Flexibility can be a double edged sword offering benefits and disadvantages.

Permanent part-time work gives providers flexibility around rosters and it is attractive to some of the workforce. Over half (55 per cent) of support workers across the country are in permanent part-time positions (*Martin & Healy, 2010*). This high proportion leads to concerns that some workers want more hours of work than is available. Low pay, casual and part-time positions are likely to contribute to the feminisation of the disability workforce because men are less likely to accept these conditions (*Cortis et al., 2013*).

Providers often recruit casual workers, either because no other workers are available or because it suits the providers' financial flexibility. However, there are concerns that short-term and casual workers do not have the opportunity to build long term relationships with the people they support. Permanent employment is likely to support a positive relationship with the person receiving support and the worker that is open, mutually respectful, trusting and collaborative, based on shared decision making and partnership, which is considered essential to service quality (*Department of Human Services and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012*). A particular concern is the use of workers on 457 Visas. Chan and Cortis (*Chan & Cortis, 2013*) argued that recruiting workers on 457 Visas ‘blunts the vision of the NDIS’ because of their dependency of their sponsoring employer for their residency visa. Workers in precarious employment are more likely to

be reluctant to raise any concerns over pay, conditions and health and safety. Although the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has the responsibility to monitor employers' compliance with industrial laws, the authors argued that they have not always had the capacity to fulfil this responsibility.

A range of strategies have been proposed to maximise opportunities for recruiting suitable workers. Strategies notes were partnering with training organisations and utilising student placements; becoming a Registered Training Organisation; local newspapers and websites for local jobs; 'word of mouth' through formal and informal networks; target special groups such as parents at home, retirees (*Department of Family and Community Service, 2011; National Disability Services (NDS) ACT and Valmar Support Services Ltd., 2009a*)

A critical factor in meeting the needs of people receiving support and workers is matching their needs and interests (*Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2012*). Matching needs to occur with respect to times and location, gender, age, cultural background and interests. Attracting future workers may depend need a multi-pronged strategy. Providers can consider recognition of workers' experience and training, their needs and preferences for the type of work as well as the times and conditions of work.

4. Flexible, responsive & creative work

Work that allows workers to manage their work/ life balance is attractive to workers (*Australian Government, 2013; Pocock, Skinner, & Williams, 2012*). A key feature in attracting and retaining disability workers can be the availability of flexible working arrangements, if the conditions also meet the workers' need for job security and sufficient income (*Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria, 2010*). Some workers like flexible working hours, a rostered day off, time in lieu, leave without pay, and a 48 / 52 working year. Flexibility is particularly important in the DisabilityCare Australia environment which seeks to meet the diverse needs of people with disability. However, maximising flexibility for people receiving support and for workers is challenging for providers. There are practical rostering problems, although research into flexible work identifies that the skills, experience, resources and attitude of managers are the crucial factors in creating successful flexible work practices (*Australian Institute of Management, 2012*).

Aboriginal and CALD people receiving support

The principle of understanding each person's needs applies universally, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse people in Australia. The *First Peoples Disability Network Australia (FPDN) 10 Point Plan* for implementing DisabilityCare Australia guides the implementation of this principle when working with Aboriginal people.

The 10 Points are:

- 1) Recognise that most Aboriginal people with disability do not self-identify as people with disability
- 2) Raise awareness via a concerted outreach approach. Direct face-to-face consultation is essential to inform people about their rights and entitlements.
- 3) Establish an Expert Working Group with Aboriginal and prominent disability leaders. DisabilityCare Australia is an opportunity to create practical and meaningful partnerships between the Aboriginal community, government and the non-government sector.
- 4) Build the capacity of the non-Indigenous disability service system to provide culturally appropriate support and legislate an additional standard into the

Disability Services Act requiring disability services to demonstrate their cultural competencies

- 5) Research the prevalence of disability and culturally appropriate supports in partnership with Aboriginal people with disabilities.
- 6) Recognise that many Aboriginal people already work informally providing disability support and look for ways to create employment opportunities in some communities.
- 7) Recognise that many communities have appropriate ways of supporting people with disability. However, they need current technologies, technical aids and training for family and community members.
- 8) Recruit more Aboriginal people as workers.
- 9) Build the capacity of the social movement of Aboriginal people with disability. Develop leaders and networks that break down stigma that may exist in some communities and be conduits for change.
- 10) Establish Aboriginal 'Launch' sites for DisabilityCare Australia in remote, very remote, regional and urban settings.

(First Peoples Disability Network Australia, 2013)

Non Aboriginal workers need training in supporting Aboriginal people appropriately. It is important when providing support to Aboriginal people to understand the person's kinship network and engage with the community as well as the individual *(Department of Human Services and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012)*. Entry to an Aboriginal community needs to be negotiated with the assistance of a local Elder or other appropriate person who can be employed as an ambassador and respect needs to be shown to the people and their culture. It often takes considerable time to develop a working relationship and gain entry to an Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal and CALD workers

There is a disproportionately small number of Aboriginal support workers compared to the high number of Aboriginal people with disability (*Martin & Healy, 2010; Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria, 2010*). Aboriginal health workers experience limited career development opportunities with contributing factors including a lack of workforce information and, at times, a lack of respect and recognition by other health professionals and employers (*Health Workforce Australia, 2011*)

People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are also underrepresented in the disability workforce. Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) found that only between 2 per cent and 5 per cent workers identified as originating from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Developing and providing appropriate training for workers from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds is a strategy proposed to address the needs of these workers, in addition to providing culturally appropriate support when they are in the workforce (*Ageing Disability and Home Care, 2011*).

Rural and remote areas

There are challenges attracting workers to rural and remote areas and a range of strategies have been suggested to address this shortfall. The strategies centre around harnessing the potential labour that exists in local communities (*Council of Regional Disability Services (CORDS), 2012*). Specific strategies include forming collaborations and partnerships to establish local training facilities, providing flexible working arrangements, and, promoting the work through formal and informal networks (*Department of Planning and Community Development, 2010*). The Department of Planning and Community Development also noted that new technologies offer potential for communication and support in rural and remote areas.

5. Training, mentoring and support

DisabilityCare Australia offers both new opportunities for people with disability and there are associated new risks. These risks can be managed if workers are adequately trained (*Department of Health, 2007*). The English Department of Health produced a best practice guide for workers to balance the rights of people to take risks with their duty of care to protect people from harm. When considering risk, the worker's safety and Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) issues also need to be considered and workers and their employers need to be made aware of their legal obligations.

Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) reported that 8.41 per cent of full-time and part-time workers, and 23.36 per cent of casual workers received no formal induction training; and 51.4 per cent and 48.6 per cent respectively received only one day of formal induction training. This low level of induction training raises queries about the service quality.

Induction and training needs will depend to some extent upon whether workers come with formal disability qualifications or whether they were recruited for personal attributes. The disability training organisation *Field* has produced a comprehensive induction guide (2009). This resource provides detailed induction material plus checklists for planning, implementing and evaluating induction. Each worker has r individual training needs and some providers develop a formal professional development plan.

'Buddying' with a skilled experienced worker is a strategy widely recommended to induct a new worker to the organisation and for ongoing support (*Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2012; Department of Human Services and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012; National Disability Services (NDS) ACT and Valmar Support Services Ltd., 2009b; Precision Consultancy, 2011*). 'Buddying' orientates new workers to the organisation's values and culture and develops specific skills. Many workers report isolation in their work as a concern (*Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2012; Disability ACT, 2010*), and 'buddying' and peer supervision are ways to address this issue. Peer supervision is also widely recommended as an effective way to support workers (*Cortis et al., 2013; Department of Human Services, 2012; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2012*).

Regular supervision is a means for the provider to ensure that all legal and procedural requirements are met, and that services are provided in accordance with organisational values. Regular supervision and performance reviews also offer workers guidance, support and feedback and the research shows that it is valued by workers (*Ageing Disability and Home Care, 2011; Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2012*). Workers often face complex situations and may observe abuse and neglect, especially against women. When this occurs, workers need timely direction and guidance regarding the ethical and legal issues involved (*Healey, Howe, Humphreys, Jennings, & Julian, 2008*), as well as personal support. Supervision is an opportunity for two way communication, providing both parties the space to reflect on their work and exchange feedback. Exit interviews also provide an opportunity for worker feedback.

6. Recognition and incentives

Workers develop greater attachment and commitment to their organisation when they feel valued (*Department of Family and Community Service, 2011*). Recognition and incentives demonstrate to workers that they are valued and contribute to job satisfaction and retention rates (*National Disability Services (NDS) ACT, 2009*).

Incentives include salary sacrificing and sponsored training, as well as smaller gestures such as monthly draws for fuel vouchers, movie vouchers, a monetary bonus for employee of the month and opportunities to join in social events organised by support worker groups.

7. Career pathways

Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) reported that 75.7 per cent of providers in their study offered career advancement opportunities to their workers. However, *Fattore et al. (2010)* argued that the disability sector has limited career opportunities, especially for workers in the non-government sector. This is a concern for workers seeking a career pathway. Workers are appreciative when there are opportunities to vary their work and take on more responsibilities. They gain personal satisfaction and financial security, and they are more likely to remain in the disability sector (*Australian Government, 2013*).

Conclusion

This paper provides evidence and discussion from reports and the academic literature to support the ideas presented in the accompanying Guide called 'Making it work: A workforce guide for disability service providers'. A key principle that underpins all the work reviewed is the importance of considering each individual's preferences and needs in their particular context. This principle applies to all people receiving support and to all workers across the country. Each person will determine their priorities and the extent to which they include their family and community. Some people from Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities may place greater importance on including their extended networks when making their plans than other Australians, and workers need to be aware of cultural differences. The guiding principle for workers is to find out what each person wants. This approach is consistent with the values and vision of DisabilityCare Australia.

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