

# MAKING IT WORK

## A workforce guide for disability service providers

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The opinions and comments expressed in this document are those of the authors and they do not necessarily represent the views of the Minister for Disability Reform and they cannot be taken in any way as expressions of government policy.

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This guide (Guide) provides strategies for disability service providers (providers) to draw upon when creating and sustaining a workforce of support workers to meet the aims of DisabilityCare Australia and implement the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013<sup>1</sup>. In particular, the Guide is designed to assist providers develop a workforce strategy that will enable support workers to:

- i) support the independence and social and economic participation of people with disability
- ii) provide reasonable and necessary supports, and
- iii) enable people with disability to exercise choice and control in the pursuit of their goals and the planning and delivery of their supports.

The essence of DisabilityCare Australia is to be supportive, responsive, flexible and creative. This Guide offers a wealth of ideas and practical suggestions without being prescriptive. It includes ideas relating directly to support workers as well as to their interactions with service users and their employing service provider, and there are varying cost implications. The Guide does not attempt to provide one integrated workforce management strategy. Instead, it is intended that providers will take away

ideas to develop their own unique workforce strategy relevant to their environment and provider type. The aim of this guide is to contribute to the development of enthusiastic, competent and satisfied workers who will embrace the aims of DisabilityCare Australia and provide excellent support to people with disability.

The Guide is organised around the following 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 interviews with key stakeholders in Australia, England, Sweden and Canada, where challenges and opportunities in a DisabilityCare environment were discussed. The themes were also identified in the literature and they have been organized to reflect critical elements of good practice in workforce planning and development. The support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and people receiving support (referred to as Aboriginal in this Guide), and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people are integrated throughout the Guide under relevant headings, with additional attention under specific headings. The Guide is designed to assist providers meet the aims of DisabilityCare

Australia regarding responsiveness, supportiveness, flexibility and creativity.

Each theme incorporates ideas from the 68 interviews conducted with managers, coordinators, support workers and people receiving support from leading Australian providers and disability organisations in New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia and across metro, rural and remote areas; and six telephone interviews with senior managers and researchers from England, Sweden and Canada. Providers were invited to participate in the study based on their recommendation by peers as leaders in the provision of flexible individual funding programs. The semi-structured interviews asked about: support workers' qualifications, experience, personal qualities and values; recruitment; regional and remote differences; training and support; changing roles with individual funding; Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S); workforce management; recognition and reward; career pathways; retention; individual budgets, and support for Aboriginal people. The Australian providers ranged in size from small operations with six full-time staff and one half-time administrator, to large national organisations. Almost all interviews were conducted face-to-face during site visits occurring over a four month period in early 2013. The Guide refers to support

workers as 'workers' and people receiving support as the 'person' or 'people', while recognising that some people had a representative speaking on their behalf.

An important finding from the interviews exploring workforce issues, was the central role that people receiving support must have in all workforce matters. They need to have the means to be active partners with their workers, and they need to be enabled to express their preferences clearly before their support needs can be met. Special efforts are often required to learn what people want, either because their disability impedes their ability to communicate or because their history and lack of previous opportunities has limited their capacity for exploring options and preferences. It is hoped that both people receiving support and workers will find the practical ideas in this guide useful.

Strong leadership was observed to be a central and necessary feature in the providers interviewed. Effective managers had a clear vision of the service model they provide and they were able to communicate their values and expectations to staff. While the service models, goals and underlying values varied considerably, effective leaders were able to implement their vision in ways that were clear to people using the services and to staff at all levels. It was evident that strong leadership,

vision and values, coupled with open and clear pathways of communication, underpinned the quality and consistency of provider operations. Related to leadership and communication was the importance of positive working relationships internally between staff, and externally between workers and people receiving support.

The interviews also revealed numerous tensions which need to be managed. The key tensions identified were:

- funding shortfalls that limited the time available for creative planning and sufficient support
- many people needed to ‘stretch’ their budgets to maximise their support, while workers needed a reasonable wage
- people needed flexibility to change the days and hours of their support as their circumstances changed, while providers and workers wanted predictable rosters
- some workers wanted permanent work and certainty to plan their lives, while some providers wanted a casualised workforce to maximise flexible rosters and to avoid fixed wage commitments when demand for services was unpredictable.

This Guide cannot resolve these tensions. Rather, it presents ideas from different types of providers as to how they are managing these tensions, and at times these ideas are contradictory. Readers are encouraged to approach the ideas and suggestions with an open mind and to take what is relevant for their context and community. The Guide is structured to give a brief introduction to each theme, with sub-themes included when the topic is broad. Stories and anecdotes are used to illustrate key ideas, and where required, explanatory notes are offered. Background evidence accompanies this Guide with broader evidence for the ideas presented.

# Summary of key themes



# 1. Communication

Good communication and positive working relationships underpin all the ideas included in this Guide. Managers emphasised that providing effective individualised services depends upon knowing what the people receiving support really want, including the personal and domestic details of their everyday lives. Often people need training and support to express their wishes, and workers and providers need training to provide this support as well as really 'hear' what people need and want. This Guide is designed for providers managing their workforce. It also includes ideas for communicating with people using services because they are the key focus in the communication chain.

Good communication between workers and their employing provider is another essential link in the communication chain. This begins with the provider making their values and expectations clear and listening to individual workers' preferences for the structure of their work, the support they need, the type of recognition they appreciate, and the career path, if any, are they looking for. Extra effort is needed to ensure mutual understanding when there are cultural differences between the provider and the worker. When the communication expectations of Aboriginal and CALD workers are different to those of the managers, cross cultural communication strategies can be useful.

*An Aboriginal representative said that it is important for providers to initiate communication with Aboriginal workers because some workers might lack confidence to express their ideas to authority figures due to historical discrimination; and because of the wide diversity of Aboriginal cultures across Australia.*

*The Swedish interviewee (academic, previously a support worker, studying 'personal assistance' programs promoting independent living) stressed that people with disability often need support to communicate their wishes to others. Workers cannot know personal preferences for disability support or broader goals if they are not told. However, training for people receiving support is often overlooked.*

## Ideas

- *Ensure that people using services are trained and supported to express what support they want. Be aware that if people have not been encouraged to make choices, they may need help to know what is possible.*

- *Keep a 'diary' regarding the person if appropriate, for team members working with one person to share information, detailing the person's preferences, plus household matters such as menus, shopping, budgets, activities and any concerns.*
- *Listen to workers' preferences about how their work is structured. This listening begins with the job interview and continues through induction and regular supervision and feedback. Open communication is key to positive relationships and workers feeling that they are being heard.*

*Note: An example of a lack a communication is that some managers did not know that their workers were distressed when they had been refused bank loans because of their casual status.*

- *Use IT to SMS the group of workers about last minute changes and work opportunities e.g. an emergency shift.*
- *Use IT such as online roster systems to post rosters and work opportunities that are transparent to all workers and afford opportunity to manage their own schedules.*
- *Use IT Facebook for workers to exchange information and peer support*
- *Use IT for people receiving support to access IT applications to post the shifts they need or to inform of changes or cancellations.*

*Note: With IT options increasing, some workers felt frustrated because they were expected to fund private internet access to see rosters or they would miss out on information and opportunities. Consider partially reimbursing IT costs when mobile phone or home computers are required for work, and encourage tax expense claims. Workers not familiar with IT need orientation and assistance.*

*"You really have to get to know the person first. You can't walk into someone's house and expect you are going to be a part of it ... Some people are used to people coming in and they open up quickly, but sometimes it takes time to unpick the layers. Listen to the body language and let the relationship evolve. Ask questions, and it is okay not to have the answers when people ask questions in return, help them find their ideas. Also, you need to share something of yourself as well, if you expect others to share with you. Know the person, not their disability."*

**(Provider community facilitator)**

*A family member of a person receiving support said that they have a structured process for open communication. The person, the family and the coordinator meet fortnightly to discuss plans and any concerns. The coordinator then meets with the team leader and the team of workers at their regular meetings. Additional opportunities for communication between the fortnightly meetings are via email, Skype, phone or face-to-face meetings.*

## 2. Organisation culture, values and expectations

### Organisation culture and change

Each provider has a unique culture based on its values, vision, goals, workforce structure and the local context. Providers need to clearly communicate to workers what they are required to do to meet the organisation's expectations. Workers who had worked at different providers said there were stark differences in expectations across providers regarding the extent to which providers' aims are aligned with DisabilityCare Australia. Much change is needed for some providers, at the organisational and individual worker levels, for the sector to successfully transition to the DisabilityCare Australia principles of choice, control, and social and economic participation.

Culture and organisational change is inherently stressful, and workers face additional challenges in the new environment as they become more accountable to the people they support, while also managing their obligations toward their employing provider. Some workers welcome the new opportunities, while others feel unsettled by the new expectations.

- Provide training and support to those workers who are learning to take a broader role and assist people to take more control and have more choice and participate in social and economic activities

### Orientation to values and expectations

There is a wide range of values and practices among providers so it is important that each provider explains its approach to people wanting support and to prospective workers. It cannot be assumed that people and workers know what values and expectations the provider holds. It is important for all parties (providers, workers and people receiving support) to understand the shared expectations. For example, one provider interviewed is committed to having each worker support only one person, with the aim of providing a person centred service. Other providers strive to match the needs of people and their workers, while also providing the worker with sufficient hours to earn a reasonable wage. All providers attended to the personal needs of people they supported. Some placed greater emphasis than others on giving people choice and control

and facilitating social and economic participation. Practices to fulfill the aims of DisabilityCare Australia are still being developed.

*A young man receiving support, who had an intellectual disability said, "I want respect and help to follow my dreams". He had a long term supportive relationship with his worker and appreciates the support given, especially when he is challenged at times about his behaviour. He said that he was treated in a 'real way' which gave him confidence to manage conflict.*

## Ideas

- *Review the provider's overall purpose, aims and strategic planning documents to consider whether they have to be updated to align with those of DisabilityCare Australia.*
- *Invite people supported by the provider to participate in a review of the provider's aims and procedures.*
- *Develop a change management strategy if required.*
- *Use advertising, 'Open Days' and individual interviews to communicate to people and prospective workers about the provider's values, beliefs, expectations and the opportunities that result from these.*
- *Include people supported by the provider to present at recruitment forums to train workers about the service provided and what is expected of them.*
- *Train workers that people have the right to respect, to have choice and control over their support, and to participate in the social and economic life of the community to their full potential.*
- *'Buddy' a new worker with an experienced worker who is fully aware and practices the provider's values and expectations.*
- *Introduce the provider's values and expectations during recruitment and reinforce in ongoing supervision and mentoring.*
- *Model required values, attitudes and behavior at senior management level.*

*A community facilitator said that they look for the right values when they recruit. The values needed are to be patient, to see the person, to look past disability, not to judge, not to push the worker's values on the person, not to be mothering and to be honest.*

*A support worker said of her work in a residential group home, "I love my job, it is awesome". Each person in the home has their own key worker and lives in their independent unit, while sharing the communal area for shared cooking and activities. The people in the house pool their money which results in cost efficiencies from sharing workers, electricity and other bills and they have money left over for social activities. The worker much preferred this arrangement to working in private homes where people were often isolated and lonely.*



### 3. Recruitment

Recruitment strategies varied greatly. The key differences were whether specific groups of potential workers were targeted, the working conditions offered, and the efforts made to 'match' the person and the worker. These factors are

interrelated in practice. The ideas and examples given are presented in three headings: general and specific targeted recruitment; working conditions; and, matching person and worker.

*A service provider in England said that she actively recruits people she thinks will make good workers. When a cashier at the supermarket or a salesperson in retail shows an interest in a person with disability she gives the person a business card and an invitation to an Open Day or an individual interview. At the Open Days, people looking for a support worker, and sometimes their families, meet prospective workers in a structured 'speed dating' format where they speak together for a few minutes before moving on to the next person. Her experienced support workers are there to answer questions candidly about the work. When a person is interested in a prospective worker, she holds a follow-up meeting using a more standard interview approach. If the person is unable to speak, she might ask the prospective worker to do some activity with the person e.g. make a cup of tea or go out for a coffee so she can decide how they got on, usually with a staff member present. By carefully matching the two people's personality and interests, both people were likely to be satisfied, and the workers stay longer in the job.*

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#### General and specific targeted recruitment

The managers reported a variety of views as to whether formal disability qualifications were essential, preferred or avoided. Locations vary greatly as to the pool of potential workers available. In some areas providers are forced to employ unqualified workers when they would

have preferred qualified workers. Alternatively, some providers place more importance on workers' values and interpersonal skills and largely disregard formal qualifications. This Guide reports on ideas presented for managing a workforce and it does not judge the merits of employing

qualified workers or otherwise.

However, two issues are noted. First, the Background Evidence documents problems with employing workers on 457 Visas, which is included in the list of ideas below. Second, providers employing qualified workers have a

smaller pool of prospective workers from which to choose. These providers may be able to adapt some of the strategies suggested below by providing or supporting formal training after workers are employed.

*A manager said that he looks for both values and qualities rather than qualifications when recruiting. He looks for workers who value the person they are supporting, no matter what their support needs. They have to be open minded, person centred, have a positive outlook, be good communicators, able to act as advocates and to see opportunities, possibilities and strategies.*

*A team leader said that informal networks are often effective for recruitment. He told the story of a community member attending pottery classes at a local art centre when a member of the class asked if anyone would be interested in a job supporting someone with disability. The speaker had been the person's worker and was soon to leave. This person was known to the art community. The community member first met with the person needing support and his mother, and after they accepted him, he was interviewed and employed by the provider.*

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## Ideas

- *Encourage workers to tell their friends about the work, as many people enter the sector after hearing about it from a friend.*
- *Use informal and professional networks to recruit workers using word of mouth, especially in rural and remote areas and in Aboriginal and CALD communities.*
- *Advertise for a worker to support a specific person by promoting the advantages of working with them, e.g. a person has a special interest in football and is looking for support to attend matches.*
- *Target people with disability to provide specific areas of expertise.*

- *Target workers with the interests the provider wants to promote, e.g. professional retirees have successfully assisted with social inclusion activities.*
- *Target workers who share the provider's vision, values and interests.*

*A manager said that she successfully recruits graduates from physical education programs for her recreation activities.*

*We recruited suitable workers by running an ad that said "Are you good at working with people and looking for a rewarding position?" without mentioning disability (Provider manager who recruited for values and personal attributes rather than formal qualifications)*

- *Target workers with the known personal attributes of effective workers.*  
*Notes: Many people receiving support said in different ways, that they wanted workers who were respectful, empathetic and open to their ideas. Workers must respect their right to be self-determining, while also encouraging and supporting them to be involved in the community and lead a full life.*  
*A summary of workers' capabilities includes: Creative and innovative; Determined; Positive attitude; Self-disciplined; Analytical; Flexible; Resilient; Person focused; Culturally aware; Honest; Inclusive; Ethical; Collaborative; Supportive<sup>2</sup>.*
- *Target potential workers who are available in the local area e.g. retired professionals interested in supporting social participation activities; parents through school newsletters; community members through church groups; and new migrants.*  
*Note: There are extra challenges employing workers short-term, as discussed in the Background Evidence document. However, some providers consider that they have no alternative, especially in rural and remote areas*
- *Target potential workers who can offer different benefits e.g. bilingual; university students who may prefer mornings, nights and weekends (especially studying health courses); parents at home with young children who are interested in work during school hours; 'grey nomads' who are available for part of the year; migrants on Temporary Work Visas for a few months.*

- *Develop recruitment strategies that suit the area and workers targeted e.g. websites such as Gumtree and SEEK are effective in metropolitan areas; speak at universities and TAFE colleges and post notices on their websites and notice boards to attract students; advertise in local newspapers for older workers; hold recruitment forums for target groups such as parents at home with young children, middle aged women with grown children, older workers, and retirees.*
- *Develop a volunteer program and recruit from volunteers who demonstrate the necessary attributes.*
- *Liaise with education and training facilities to have students on placement / work experience and recruit from students who demonstrate the necessary attributes.*

*The Swedish interviewee said that many Swedish artists work part-time as personal assistants and find the work rewarding while pursuing other interests.*

*A manager said that they accept anyone of any age. "Sometimes they have a Cert 3 or Cert 4, which is sometimes good. If they have no qualification it doesn't matter. We give them basic skills training over a 6 week program. After 3 months if we think they are suitable, we support them to do a Cert 4 Community Services course with a suitable RTO."*

*A manager said that all their applicants apply on line. "We screen for a shortlist by phone, where we ask why they want the job. If they sound promising, we interview them face to face. We look for values of respect and whether we think they will treat the person as an individual. We assess if they will be empowering, rather than trying to take over and do everything for someone. We also look for empathy so they can understand the person's point of view. Of the values and attitudes we look for, respect is the most important."*

## Working conditions

The effectiveness of recruitment strategies, no matter how creative and flexible, is restricted by low wages and poor working conditions (see Background Evidence). The workers interviewed came from providers selected for good practice and most workers 'loved' their work supporting people to live exciting and fulfilling lives. The majority of workers planned to continue in their

job, although a number expressed concerns about being employed casually. Casual work suited some workers, particularly students and workers with other interests. These workers preferred the flexibility and higher rates of pay from casual work. However, other casual workers were distressed by their insecure positions and irregular working hours and they wanted more job security. Some

were looking for work elsewhere. One CEO also raised the concern that the disability sector could not compete for recruits with similar fields if most of the work is casualised and the workers have no career prospects.

Providers have to manage the tensions of balancing workers' needs for security, providing maximum flexibility to people receiving support, and financial viability. Causal work and job security are likely to remain contentious issues.

For many workers permanent part-time work is preferable to casual work without security. Guaranteed minimum hours can be organised on a fortnightly, monthly or annual basis. A number of providers interviewed guaranteed their workers minimum hours with regular additional hours that suited their varying demand for services. Comparison was made to practises in the fruit picking industry to guarantee workers' hours annually and accommodate seasonal variation.

*A CEO said that they have successfully addressed a number of work conditions challenges. "We needed more workers, and we needed workers from diverse backgrounds because the people we support are culturally diverse across metro and rural areas. Previously we recruited permanent part-time workers with a low number of guaranteed hours, and as a result we employed mainly married, middle aged women. Other workers needed longer hours and a higher income, and it was a challenge to give them the hours they needed. We are careful to find the right worker for the person, with the right skills and values, and we decided to develop our existing workers rather than keep looking for new workers. First we invested in all workers attending person centred values training. Then we developed a supervision structure to ensure that workers were providing strengths based support. We now have team leaders providing close supervision and support with a ratio of one supervisor to nine workers, plus workers are mentored through buddying. Contracts are permanent part-time and we offer more hours per week than previously. We negotiate flexible hours with workers because we offer people flexible support, with a one hour minimum service if required."*

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## Ideas

- *Ask prospective worker what work times suit them e.g. students are often available for evenings and weekends, retirees often commit to ongoing work if they can have three months leave each year to travel.*
- *Ask prospective workers their preferences for casual/permanent work, part-time/full-time work, hours of work each per week.*

*Notes: Many workers preferred to be on a contract so that they had better working conditions to get bank loans; payment for gaps between appointments, administration, travel costs between appointments, staff meetings, late cancellations, holidays and sick pay. The Modern Award and Enterprise Bargaining Agreements' may determine the working arrangements that can and cannot be offered.*

- *Give a probation period of one to three months when offering permanent work to ensure the worker has the values, attitudes, skill and capabilities needed.*

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## Matching person and worker

The importance of matching the person and the worker was emphasised. Successful matching of the person with an appropriate worker results in positive experiences, with implications for service quality, job satisfaction and staff retention. DisabilityCare

Australia's aims for people with disability to exercise choice and control in the planning and delivery of their supports; and encourages providers to involve people in the selection of their workers. Some providers already use this practice in Australia, Canada and England.

*"The power and control of recruitment must rest with the person being supported, with the focus in the recruitment process on matching the needs of the individuals ... The process of matching is crucial for successful recruitment."*

**(Person receiving support)**

A team leader said that one woman complained about her workers and demanded changes until she took an active role in recruiting, interviewing and choosing her workers. Now she has a stable team of workers and no issues. She feels in control and has ownership of her support.

A team leader said that they recruit workers who were able to relate to the person needing support and share their interests. If the person needing support likes swimming, a worker is sought with this interest. Formal qualifications are not as important, although workers with qualifications who have a deep understanding of a person centred approach and values can be excellent workers.

A representative from Women with Disabilities Victoria who reviewed the draft of this report, told of inappropriate matching of women with male workers from cultures where menstruation was viewed as unclean, so both the women and workers were uncomfortable when they assisted with changing pads. In extreme situations, pressure was put on the women to use oral contraceptive to stop menstruation.

## Ideas

- Discuss with the person to be supported their requirements and preferences regarding the type of workers they prefer, acknowledging the limitations.

*Notes: Some women want a female worker to provide intimate care for reasons of personal privacy, culture or fears of violence or abuse.*

*People often prefer workers with whom they have something in common e.g. gender, age, cultural background or shared interests, such as music, cars or craft.*

- Include the person to be supported in the selection process so that they can select workers with the skills they want and begin to develop a positive working relationship from the beginning. This process also demonstrates the person centred values of the provider and an empowering approach.
 

*Note : People and their workers often feel a greater commitment to each other if they choose each other.*
- Target workers who match the demographic profile that people prefer e.g. Aboriginal and CALD workers for people who want workers from their ethnic group; older / younger workers as preferred.
- Discuss with the person receiving support the relative merits of having one, or a small number of workers, compared to having a larger pool e.g. the person might prefer one worker to provide personal care at home and another to support their social activities.
- Discuss with the prospective worker what type of work they most enjoy. Retirees may want to support people with social participation but not bowel care or peg feeding; a worker may prefer to work with people their own age or another specific age group.

- *In a large provider, use IT to match the preferences of the worker and the person, with the team leader / coordinator making the selection. Preferences can include gender, skill set, training, language, geographic location and interests*

*Note: A young woman interviewed had asked for over 12 months for a worker who could assist connect her iPad to the internet at home. This highlights the importance of matching interests and capabilities required, and also the challenges of equipment and technology that require particular skills. As equipment becomes ever more complex, the worker's role might include finding and directing people to appropriate experts rather than having the array of skills required.*

*“The key is matching the needs of the person receiving support and the worker’s skills, training, preferences, ambitions ... A lot of workers don’t want to use a hoist or do bowel work or work with people with dementia, or respite, but others are good with that ... We have an IT system to match skills and availability, which generates a list of possible workers ... Then the coordinator works out a schedule, so the coordinator needs to know the support workers very well. This relies on a localised model to know the support workers ... We target workers with the same culture as the person to be supported and try to match ages and interests. Students, particularly nursing students are often good. It is good experience for students, so we speak to courses and put up notices at TAFE and university.”*

*(Provider CEO)*

## 4. Flexible, responsive and creative work

DisabilityCare Australia aims to promote independence, social and economic participation, and the capacity of people with disability to realise their potential through exercising as much choice and control over their lives as possible. Two conditions are needed to meet these aims. First, the wishes of the people supported need to be known; and second, the workers must be skilled and empowered to respond flexibly and creatively to peoples' needs. Providers have to manage the tensions between ensuring workers comply with legislation and policies that maximise safety and manage risk, while also developing workers' confidence and initiative to respond flexibly and appropriately. Workers who perform a rigid routine of tasks are not well placed to provide the support needed. Requirements for flexible and responsive work arrangements in general, as well as the more specific needs of Aboriginal and CALD people and workers are discussed below. Special needs in rural and remote areas are also discussed.

### Flexible work arrangements

Prioritising social inclusion activities indicates more demand for workers

to be available during evenings and weekends. Creative rostering of workers is needed, while also recognising that it may not be possible to meet all requests for support. Flexibility from both the person and the worker maximises opportunities. The worker's role might be to encourage community groups to actively include people and offer them transport.

A caution needs to be applied to flexible work arrangements because workers can be under explicit or implicit pressure to contribute unpaid time. Some workers said they see the person they support outside work hours. Sometimes they do this willingly when they choose to include the person in their family's activities, such as a local fete. However, some workers also feel pressure to drop in on the person on weekends to provide personal contact and to check that all was well. Some workers resented this pressure to extend their professional work into their private time. Providers and workers need to communicate expectations and negotiate professional boundaries.

A person with intellectual disability said he goes out to a movie on Friday nights sometimes, but mostly he goes shopping during the day.

He wants to go out with his friends to live bands and dancing in the

evening, and needs workers available then too.

## Ideas

- *Negotiate duties, rostered times and the flexibility required with workers and the people they support as much as possible, e.g. some workers preferred developing a long-term relationship with one person, while others preferred short-term contacts and more varied work.*

*Notes: Workers reported greater satisfaction when they have input into the design and structure of their work.*

*Most people and most workers preferred having long term working relationships. To avoid risks of becoming overly dependent on a single worker, or a small number of workers; it may be best for managers to address any problems on an individual basis and encourage other consistent arrangements.*

*Workers said that their work was more satisfying and they were more effective in assisting people to reach their goals when they were given the autonomy to respond flexibly to peoples' needs.*

- *Devolve authority to people and their individual workers or team of workers to negotiate roster changes to the extent that is appropriate to maximise flexibility.*

*Note: There needs to be caution when devolving authority to change rosters because workers can be asked to do additional tasks such as pick up medications or shopping in their own time. They needed training on how to manage requests.*

- *Prepare workers to take an expansive role assisting people to exercise choice and control, develop their potential, participate in the community and pursue their goals. This may include attending formal planning meetings.*
- *Allow time-in-lieu and 'nine day fortnights' to enable workers manage work / life balance.*
- *Allow workers to do administrative work at home to assist with work / life balance*

*Note: While providers allowing workers to do paperwork at home thought that the time claimed might be exaggerated, they thought the gains outweighed any potential risks.*

- *Use IT smart phones and other technology to clock in and clock out*

*A CEO emphasised that "flexibility is the key to keeping staff". For example, a manager with flexible hours and opportunities to work at home stays in the job because he can accommodate his family's needs even though he could command higher wages elsewhere.*

*A CEO said that her service supports recreation activities that often occur during evenings and weekends. Her six full-time permanent workers meet every Monday morning to decide the roster. They can negotiate any hours as long as the work is covered and their hours total 36 hours per fortnight. No penalty rates are paid and the advantage for workers is flexibility. "Young workers like to bank hours to go away on trips and mothers like to bank hours to be with their children."*

*“I conduct team meetings with the support staff periodically and I have developed a system of communication using an iPad so that each staff member knows what is happening about relevant details of my son’s life from one shift to another.”*

(Mother of young man with an intellectual disability receiving support)

*“Flexible arrangements work well for us and for the workers ... For example, one worker picks up her children during the shift ... We negotiate times during the shift when she is not paid so that she can manage her commitments.”*

(Family member of person receiving support)

*A manager said they have developed a smart phone app that shows rostering and workers can post their availability, accept or reject shifts online. Plus there are pop up broadcasts showing last minute shift opportunities.*

*A manager said that their organisation has invested in updating their computer system to do individual rostering and invoicing, which previously had been a nightmare. Now they have the capacity to carefully manage these areas.*

*A manager said that a young man with intellectual and other disabilities attending a Transition to Work program had the same consultant support him for two years. This continuity was very important to him because of the strong rapport and trust they developed and he could call his consultant any time during business hours and count on his help.*

## Aboriginal and CALD people receiving support

DisabilityCare Australia aims to establish good communication and support people to make their own choices. To achieve these aims when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it is necessary to have an understanding of the country’s history. The historical discrimination and abuse continues to impact on many Aboriginal people today who have high levels of disadvantage. An

Aboriginal advocate interviewed said that while the same principles should be applied when working with all people, it is necessary to allow more time to build trusting relationships with Aboriginal people, and responses to their needs must be highly flexible. This approach was proposed for metro, rural or remote areas and the needs of people in different areas may vary.

## Ideas

- *Consult the First Peoples Disability Network Australia (FPDN) 10 Point Plan for implementing the NDIS <http://fpdn.org.au/latest-news/2-fpdn-10-point-plan-for-the-implementation-for-the-ndis-in-aboriginal-communities> (Accessed May 2013)*

*Note: The 10 points are: 1) Recognise; 2) Awareness raising via a concerted outreach approach; 3) Establish NDIS Expert Working Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with disability and the NDIS; 4) Build the capacity of the Non-Indigenous disability service system; 5) Research; 6) Recognise that there already exists a workforce in many Aboriginal communities; 7) Recognise that it's not always about services – many communities just need more resources; 8) Recruitment of more Aboriginal people as workers; 9) Build the capacity of the social movement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities; 10) Aboriginal 'Launch' sites focused upon remote, very remote, regional and urban settings.*

- *Consider what historical, current contextual issues and environment factors are impacting on the person and the community*

*Note: Many Aboriginal people are uncomfortable speaking to people in authority because of historical abuse suffered by their communities*

- *Show respect by negotiating entry to an Aboriginal community through the assistance of a local Elder or other appropriate person who can be employed as an ambassador.*

*Note: There are many different Aboriginal cultures and customs in communities across the country and entry to each community needs to be negotiated with openness to its particular culture.*

- *Show respect by taking time to build face-to-face relationships until formally 'welcomed' and accepted into a community*
- *Show respect by acknowledging traditional ceremonies.*
- *Foster relationships with Aboriginal communities by inviting Elders and other relevant community members to be on the provider's advisory committees, attend the AGM, celebrate NAIDOC Week and other important cultural events and observe memorials such as Sorry Day.*
- *Ask communities, people receiving support and workers what they want.*

*Notes: For women in Aboriginal and CALD communities it may be culturally unacceptable to receive personal assistance from a male worker*

*Everyone has their own preferences. Some Aboriginal people prefer support workers from within or from outside their community. Some Aboriginal people prefer people from within their community because they feel a level of kinship, comfort and mutual understanding, while others prefer workers from outside their community to avoid traditional relationship restrictions, and because they want greater privacy.*

- *Actively link Aboriginal people with local Aboriginal community and services when appropriate.*

*A support worker said an Aboriginal woman, who had lost contact with her cultural heritage, has been assisted to reconnect with her community as part of her disability support service.*

- *Support people to attend their community cultural activities and celebrations when appropriate.*
- *Focus on the practical assistance needed to assist the person without relying on disability language or labels, for example ask what support the person needs to manage daily living tasks or mobility.*

*Note: Some Aboriginal and CALD community members do not use disability diagnosis and labels, which might be associated with stigma. These words are usually best avoided.*

## Aboriginal and CALD workers

There are few Aboriginal workers in the disability workforce. Aboriginal workers said that long term disadvantage and feelings of cultural isolation are major reasons why few Aboriginal workers join, and fewer stay, in the disability workforce.

Australia's history of abuse and discrimination of Aboriginal people has left a legacy of intergenerational disadvantage which is difficult to overcome. The interviews included discussion of many challenges faced as well as ideas for moving forward.

*A team leader said that a worker who did not speak English was employed to work with a person from the same cultural background. The provider employed an interpreter during the induction training.*

## Ideas

Seek culturally appropriate ways of recruiting and supporting Aboriginal workers

- *Create a support group of Aboriginal Elders to be associated with the provider who have strong community connections to advise on local customs and sensitivities and to support, mentor and debrief workers who often feel isolated.*
- *Recruit Aboriginal workers for both Aboriginal and mainstream work through networking in local Aboriginal communities. Use their expertise to train non-Aboriginal workers and managers about cultural competence.*

*Note: Aboriginal workers (and others) said that employment opportunities were often limited because they did not have a licence or a car. Driving lessons and the use of a car would help, with additional mentoring for young people*

*who are interested in becoming support workers but who have accumulated driving fines that prohibit them from driving and working. This support would also benefit prospective workers from CALD and other disadvantaged groups and newly arrived migrants.*

*An Aboriginal Liaison Worker said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers often feel isolated and unsupported when employed singularly or in small numbers.*

## Rural and remote areas

Providing services in rural and remote areas presents additional challenges, particularly in finding suitable workers and because of the travel distances involved. Interviewees said that a worker may have to drive one hour to provide one hour of service, and the demands are expected to increase as people want

to 'age in place' in rural and remote areas. On the positive side, one national provider interviewed said that workers in the country often show extra commitment because of their connection to the community. Their metropolitan workers learned good practice from the rural workers.

*"Workers in the country go the extra mile with what needs to be done because of their sense of community"*

**(Provider CEO)**

## Ideas

- *Create a new office centre in small towns with a team leader / coordinator to support local workers.*

*Note: A centre does not have to be in a formal office, it could be one person working from home.*

- *Use local community networks to recruit workers.*
- *Use local community networks for social participation in churches, clubs and other activities.*
- *Provide workers with a car to cover travelling costs.*

## 5. Training, mentoring and support

Training, mentoring and support incorporate all other themes included in this Guide, these being good communication and building positive working relationships, reinforcing the providers' values and aims with people receiving support and workers, providing recognition for work well done and creating career pathways where possible. Training, mentoring, support and supervision are important for all workers, and particularly for new workers who do not have disability qualifications. The providers that recruited workers for their values and personal attributes, rather than formal qualifications, generally also provided more extensive induction, mentoring and supervision than other providers.

Many workers are facing a major role change with the introduction of DisabilityCare Australia. While some people still need and receive only traditional in-home care, the emphasis on "high quality and innovative supports that enable people with disability to maximise independent lifestyles and full inclusion in the mainstream community"<sup>3</sup>, expands the role of many workers. Training workers about the new approach they are expected to adopt and ongoing support as they broaden their role is critical.

Many decisions that make all our lives expansive and satisfying are taken on a spontaneous day-to-day, or week-to-week basis and often not at the occasional formal planning meeting. Workers have a key role and a large influence in creating options for people and assisting them to take advantage of opportunities. This creative facilitation is outside the range of many workers who have only been required to provide personal care until now, and they need training and encouragement to help people find and take advantage of new opportunities. Many of the workers interviewed said that they gained satisfaction from their work by assisting the person plan and create opportunities that suited their interests. Some added that in some other places they had worked they were not expected or encouraged to look beyond personal care at home.

Expanding the worker's role into planning can also extend to including workers in formal planning meetings. Many providers do this because they recognise that in many instances the worker has valuable knowledge to contribute. Although judgement is needed as to when it is appropriate to include the workers, those who had been included often felt valued and appreciated.

*A team leader said that it is difficult finding workers who are good at assisting people to really become engaged in community activities. Most workers would only take people for a coffee, a meal, or maybe to a movie or park. They need training to understand community participation.*

## Induction

Induction is important in orientating workers to the provider's culture, values and expectations that direct their work, and instructing workers about OH&S and Duty of Care for

their protection and for the people they support. Some providers invest much time instructing workers on their particular practices because of their commitment to specific values.

*A service manager said, "We want to control the induction process as much as possible because we send new workers who represent our organisation to unsupervised environments in the community with vulnerable people, potentially without extensive training. To ensure the service is reliable, professional and responsible we make sure the duty statement is accurate and is being followed, our support workers can phone us anytime, the coordinators sometimes drop in to worksite and we provide regular plus supervision."*

## Ideas

- *Train people and workers about the provider's values and beliefs, the aims of DisabilityCare Australia, disability rights, and the expectations these place on workers.*
- *Train workers to facilitate people's independence and social participation with the least restrictive approach possible.*
- *Train workers, especially those without disability qualifications or specific disability knowledge, about the needs and human rights of the person they are supporting e.g. how to set professional boundaries that allow for warmth and personal relationships without intruding into private space; characteristics of specific disabilities; first aid, medications, manual handling, peg feeding and physical care etc.*

- *Train workers about people's right to the 'dignity of risk' and to choose their own lifestyle, while being mindful of the worker's duty of care to protect the person from injury.*
- *Train people receiving support, when appropriate, about legal responsibilities and OH&S guidelines relevant to them and their workers.*
- *Train workers about their legal responsibilities and all relevant OH&S guidelines.*
- *Train workers on how to respond if they are asked to do tasks that are unsafe and if OH&S incidents occur.*

*Notes: Workers gave examples about not knowing how to avoid requests for support that were OH&S risks or how to react to an OH&S incident, such as climbing and lifting, because the person needed the support. One worker asked, "But what am I supposed to do, leave a 90 year old lady sitting in the dark?" Good providers train workers about how to negotiate and respond safely to these inevitable situations.*

*Good providers train workers about how to negotiate and respond safely to these inevitable situations.*

- *Pay a training wage when extensive induction is provided.*
- *Hold regular performance review meetings with workers e.g. weekly at first and extending the time to fortnightly, monthly, six monthly and annually and include career planning goals.*
- *Arrange buddying with a long term worker for new recruits and extend this until the worker is competent with all duties and expectations.*

*Notes: Some people receiving support said that they wanted all their workers trained in their home so that their preferences were known and there was consistency from all workers in the way procedures were managed e.g. lifting and inserting a catheter.*

*Good providers offer individualised training and support about specialist skills, so that workers feel competent when they are responsible for someone's personal care e.g. peg feeding, bowel care. Some workers said that individual training in a person's home is invaluable to get to know what the person wanted and needed in everyday activities.*

*A young man with an intellectual disability and his team of workers had fewer OH&S challenges after they all worked collaboratively to set ground rules based on OH&S legislation, responsibilities and obligations. They identified issues and found flexible solutions before problems arose, and they all respected the agreed boundaries and limits.*

**(Mother of person with disabilities)**

*A community facilitator said that a young woman receiving support found herself a job in a massage parlour. She described to her worker how the men coming in for massages would 'ask for extra things'. When the woman was at work, the worker observed the men going in, so she suggested the young women come home, which she willingly did. They worked together to explore alternative job options and found that the young woman was a good swimmer. She has been supported to do training and is now a qualified swimming instructor.*

## Ongoing education and training

Ongoing training provides opportunities to reinforce the themes identified as important throughout this Guide. Carefully selected training reinforces the provider's culture and values and leaves workers feeling valued after being sponsored to attend. Workers also appreciate that training increases their employment options

and career prospects. The value of ongoing training is not disputed, although there can be challenges finding the necessary resources. As people receiving support are active participants in the service relationship, their ongoing training also needs to be addressed so that they can express their preferences.

*A team leader said that it is their practice to give workers the training in any area they want or need. Workers stay interested when they can choose what area they want to study, e.g. mental health, dementia and behaviour management.*

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## Ideas

- *Provide each worker with an annual training fund (one provider gives \$1,000) to spend on any training they consider relevant and is approved.*
- *Assist workers set professional goals and strategies to achieve a healthy work-live balance.*
- *Provide workers with ongoing learning opportunities to revisit the provider's values and expectations, and the expanding opportunities disability support offers through DisabilityCare Australia.*
- *Provide workers with learning opportunities to increase their skills and to prevent burnout e.g. in-house seminars with senior staff or external experts; become a Registered Training Organisation or partner with training organisations to provide Disability Certificate 3 or 4; sponsor conference attendance.*
- *Use a variety of training methods in addition to face-to-face instruction e.g. site visits, IT e-learning platforms, IT Moodle tutorials and multimedia resources.*
- *Provide workers with ongoing learning opportunities to learn how to assist people think broadly about their goals and social participation opportunities.*
- *Provide workers who have only worked in one area opportunities to expand their skills and knowledge, for example, assist workers who have provided personal care in the home to assist people become more included socially.*
- *Train workers to manage any new risks for themselves and for the people they support when the people participate in more social activities in the community.*
- *Share each worker's learning from courses, conferences and on the job experience with other workers in seminars and peer group discussions*
- *Ensure team leaders / coordinators have professional development and support opportunities because they play a pivotal role in supporting workers and creating opportunities for people.*
- *Provide ongoing learning opportunities to people receiving support to learn about the expanding approach to disability support through DisabilityCare Australia, and to resource them to communicate their ideas and wishes effectively to workers and others.*

- *Ask people receiving support to present at staff forums to encourage respect, responsiveness and to be aware of appropriate practice.*

*Note: Some people receiving support said they want 'friendly, but not too friendly' workers who respect professional and personal boundaries and do not become too familiar.*

*"When I attended a conference on individual budgets and flexible person centred services I found it motivating to be with like-minded workers and this affirmed my commitment to this provider"*

**(Provider support worker)**

## Ongoing support

Workers emphasised the importance of timely, affirming and ongoing support and supervision. Workers who do not receive regular management supervision and peer contact can feel isolated and unsupported. At worst, workers can face stressful and challenging situations involving abuse and exploitation and they need senior managers to make decisions about possible interventions and police involvement.

The interviews highlighted the importance of ongoing support,

including peer support and collegiality. It is likely that workers' needs for support will increase as they respond to the demands for greater responsiveness and creativity as part of the DisabilityCare Australia culture. Access to a co-ordinator or supervisor builds skills and confidence in workers and contributes to better and safer services for people with disability. While the focus of this Guide is on workers, people receiving support also need easy access to a team leader/coordinator to quickly address any concerns.

*Women with Disabilities Victoria gave examples of family members abusing the person with disability where no reports were made to the police or other authorities; and examples where police chose not to become involved in domestic issues. When workers enter homes where they observe abuse or neglect, they need support and guidance regarding their ethical and legal responsibilities, and senior managers need to assume responsibility for taking appropriate action.*

*One worker said that it was tricky deciding if a safety incident should be reported, even though she knew she was obligated to do so, because it would betray the person's trust and could change their relationship. Good providers trained workers how to negotiate with the people they support and how to seek advice from supervisors when they face a dilemma.*

*A manager in Canada said that the government in some provinces funds coordinators independent of a person's support allocation, and the coordinators have an ongoing role is to assist people plan, recruit and support workers. They provide ongoing support to both the person and the worker to resolve any issues that arise for either party. The people are the legal employers and they can use part of their funds to purchase ongoing administrative support.*

## Ideas

- *Provide workers with access to 24/7 telephone advice from a responsible team leader/coordinator.*
- *Provide regular supervision and support from a team leader/coordinator, through face-to-face, phone or IT opportunities, which may suit rural and remote areas. Support can be given in a formal meeting or informally, for example over a cup of coffee. This support needs to be given in a welcoming and safe environment where workers can express concerns and doubts.*

*Note: One support worker wanted professional support and debriefing from supervisors and peers, and the opportunities to make input into the design and running of the service, such as through staff meetings, organisational planning and training.*

- *Provide workers with access to supervisors when they have immediate queries about legal and OH&S issues.*
- *Create opportunities for ongoing peer support and education so that workers can overcome isolation and can exchange ideas and suggestions, especially when they are learning to support people to participate in social activities.*

*Note: Some workers said that they felt isolated working alone with one person all the time and they welcomed opportunities to speak to peers, e.g. in staff meeting and working in pairs.*

- *Create social opportunities for workers to mix together, for example: organise a lunch where workers are paid for their time; give film vouchers to a group of workers for a film night; create social networking groups on Facebook etc. that require a secure sign-in; create email groups.*
- *Create opportunities for particular groups of workers to form peer support groups, for example Aboriginal and CALD workers. Share their cultural expertise with other workers.*
- *Provide an Employee Assistance Program for support independent of workers' line supervisors.*
- *Use IT options to supplement face-to-face meetings e.g. video conferencing, Skype, an e-portal that houses a platform for workers to communicate with each other, make suggestions and give feedback.*
- *Ensure the organisational culture encourages and reinforces communication between workers and team leaders/coordinators and workers are not judged negatively when they ask questions and seek advice.*
- *Gain feedback from workers personally or through paper or electronic surveys.*

*A team leader said that supervision with workers was previously a formal meeting and it had become more like a casual conversation with individual workers, and sometimes with teams of workers who are supporting one person. The workers share more issues and make more requests for training since these changes were made. The annual performance review is a separate process. "It has worked well. It is a good way of monitoring if workers and people are a good match, and workers feel they have been heard."*

*"We have ongoing conversations with people providing support in shared living because they often need to be reminded of the values and goals the person is aiming to achieve."*

**(Provider manager supporting home share)**

## 6. Recognition and incentives

Many workers said they have great satisfaction working with the people they support and this satisfaction motivates them to continue. Some added that there are additional benefits of personal growth as they learn much in their work. Providers

need to build on the intrinsic satisfaction many workers feel by providing formal recognition and additional incentives to increase workers' job satisfaction and ensure their retention.

*“My work is challenging, meaningful and purposeful and I get far more out of it than I put in”.* (Provider support worker)

### Ideas

- *Provide financial rewards, for example salary sacrifice, pay above the award rate if possible, Christmas bonus, salary packaging, and early access to long service leave.*
- *Provide additional leave, for example extra paid parental leave on top of what is formally required, give extra paid annual leave and extra personal leave in emergencies.*
- *Award movie vouchers to workers who accept evening and weekend work or accept work at short notice.*
- *Award on merit with thank you cards, flowers, vouchers, attendance at conferences, special training, use of a ‘company car’ for one month.*
- *Randomly award vouchers for dinners, massages and movies.*

*Note: Some workers were confused when vouchers and rewards were given on merit and they did not understand the criteria, even when they benefitted. They did not have difficulties with the random allocation of vouchers, which improved high staff morale.*

- *Give formal awards, cards and gifts for good performance, birthdays and starting anniversaries.*

- *Provide positive feedback and appreciation for good job.*
- *Acknowledge good performance in a monthly newsletter.*

*“My greatest incentive and reward is being a valued person in my organisation”*

*(Provider support worker)*

## 7. Career pathways

*Happy workers give the best service – “I need to know that the worker is happy with the arrangement”*

**(Person receiving support)**

Career pathways are important to some workers and not to others. Some workers who look for varied work, more responsibilities and financial security appreciate having opportunities to work in different areas and to act in senior roles and they hope to be promoted to team leader or coordinator. These opportunities encourage them to stay in the industry. Some workers who want these opportunities look for work elsewhere if the opportunities are not available within their current workplace, especially if they are casual workers without financial security or career prospects. Some providers said they required a casualised workforce to provide flexible support and

remain financially viable, and other providers preferred having a permanent workforce and found it cheaper than employing casual workers.

Many providers interviewed did not rely on tertiary qualifications and promoted workers to higher positions only as they gained experience. In contrast, one family member of one person receiving support encouraged providers to sponsor their workers to undertake tertiary education. This family member had years of experience managing a team of workers and was of the view that tertiary education provided team leaders and coordinators with enhanced strategic planning abilities.

*“Tertiary education provides team leaders and coordinators with the capacity to apply principles across a range of situations and not be trapped in a particular mode of thinking and responses.”*

**(Family member of person receiving support)**

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### Ideas

- *Encourage and assist workers gain recognition of prior learning (RPL) to enhance their qualifications.*
- *Encourage and assist workers to gain a variety of work experience and have periods of increased responsibility including supervision and mentoring, project work, and planning with people.*

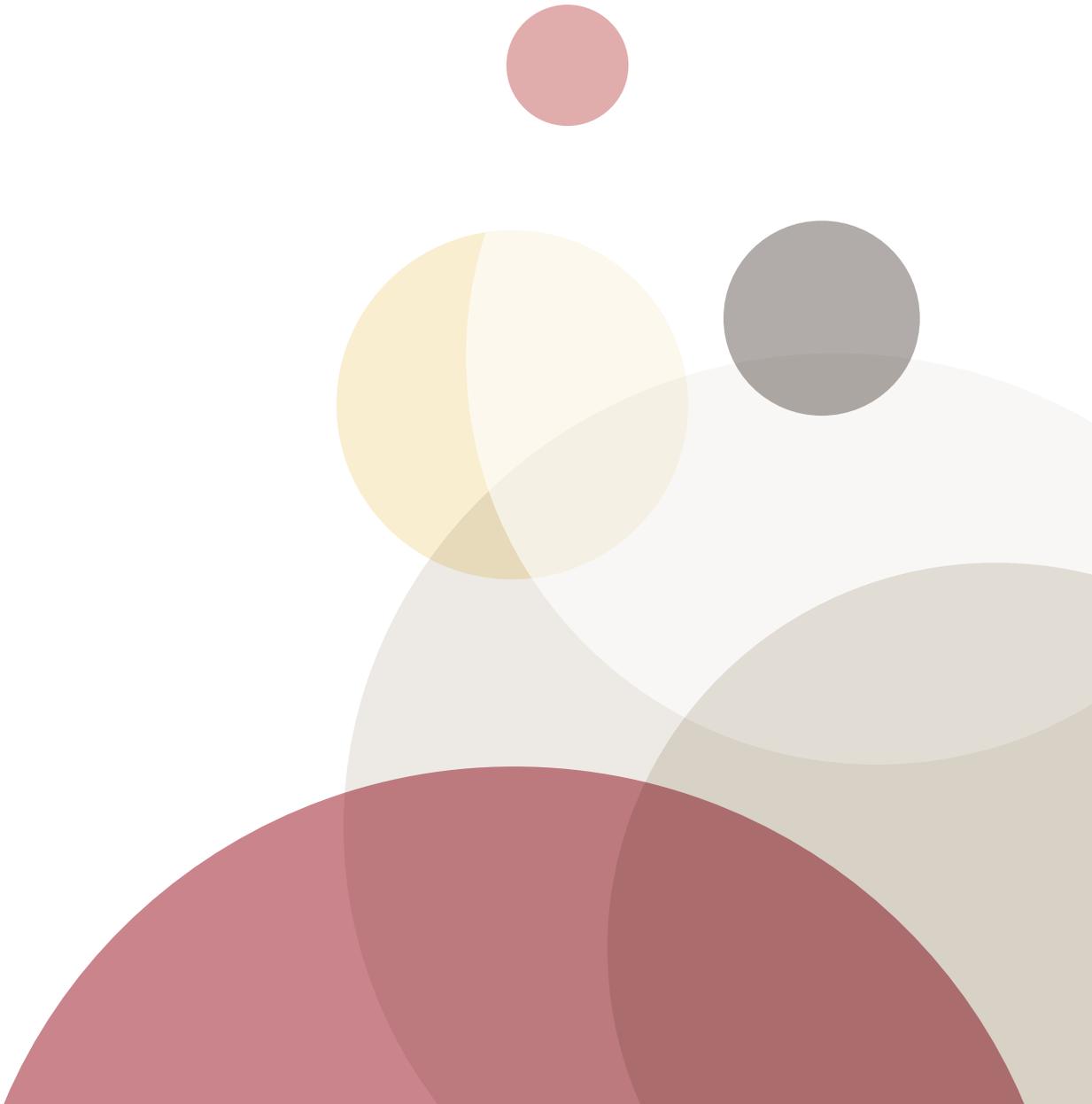
- *Encourage and assist workers gain or upgrade their qualifications and provide study leave opportunities when appropriate.*
- *Promote workers to positions as team leaders and coordinators when they demonstrate they are capable, organised, and good at time management, communication and are a supportive team member.*
- *Allow workers to act in higher positions when others are away on leave to see if it suits them and the provider.*

*“We use an individual approach to training so all staff have an individual plan about their goals, preferences, what they are interested in and we try to create a career path.”*

**(Provider manager)**

## 8. Conclusion

The ideas listed above are for providers to consider when developing a workforce management strategy that suits their unique circumstances and prepares them for the requirements of the DisabilityCare Australia. Workforce strategies differ in detail across the country, with the uniform aim to develop and maintain a responsive and creative workforce that supports the independence and social and economic participation of people with disability and enables people to exercise maximum choice and control in their lives.



## 9. Appendix

### Organisations consulted

#### Australia

Aboriginal Disability Network, NSW  
Alzheimers Australia, NT  
Annecto, VIC  
Breakthru, NSW  
Cootharinga, QLD  
Community Connections, QLD  
Community Living Project Incorporated (CLP), SA  
Disability, Department of Health, NT  
HPA Disability Services, NT  
Independent Disability Services (previously HRSS), VIC  
Just Better Care, NSW  
Karden Disability Support Foundation, VIC  
Kare One Pty Ltd, VIC  
Karingal, VIC  
National Disability Services (NDS), NT  
Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, NT  
Perth Home Care, WA  
Somerville, NT  
Tech4Life, QLD  
Total Recreation, NT

#### Canada

In The Company of Friends (ICOF),  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Thompson Okanagan Community Services Co-op (TOCSC), Kamloops,  
British Columbia

#### England

In Control

Social Care Workforce Research Unit

United Kingdom Home Care Association

#### Sweden

Disability Researcher, Malmö University

