PEARLS OF WISDOM

Moving towards self-direction: a regional Host Provider perspective

Community Connection in Townsville has offered a Host Provider service for nearly three years to people directing their own support; most recently under Your Life Your Choice. The following notes offer some insight into their experience of working as a Host Provider in a regional town and of what it takes for an organisation to move towards a different way of working with people.

What's in a name?

Connecting Up is the name of the self-direction arm of Community Connection. The organisation felt it was important to name this aspect of their work differently to reflect the difference in philosophy between traditional service delivery and self-direction and also the difference in the working relationship with families and individuals.

From their experience, the staff and board of Community Connection feel that organisations with long histories of working in a service delivery mode will need to be quite clear about the different place a Host Provider has in the lives of people who are directing their own funding and support.

What is happening now?

Connecting Up currently works with 10 people who are self-directing. Most of these are in the city of Townsville but the organisation works with two people in Mackay and one person in Tully Far North Queensland and is happy to work with people from their wider Disability Services region.

What they offer

Connecting Up offers Host Provider support across the whole sliding scale of support for self-direction. For some people this means that the organisation takes responsibility for most of the tasks involved in self-direction. For others, Connecting Up is involved only in the reporting and accountability to the Department. Connecting Up is also happy to have conversations with people who are considering taking on the whole responsibility themselves through the Direct Payment model.

How it works

Making contact

Connecting Up works on a one to one basis with people who are involved in self-direction.

People interested are encouraged to contact the organisation for a personal conversation. This helps people to clarify what is involved in self-direction and to begin the process of deciding how much responsibility they wish to undertake.

Establishing the arrangement

The initial establishment fee covers everything to do with getting started including information about planning, recruitment and training, and support to decide what role the service will take.

Ongoing connection

The ongoing administration fee varies and is negotiated on a sliding scale according to the level of support negotiated with Connecting Up. Ongoing support could involve a minimal approach where Connecting Up would receive the funding, transfer the monthly support funding into a designated bank account and report on usage to Disability Services. Alternatively, the administration fee could include some on-going assistance with information on Fair Work requirements or advice on worker issues as negotiated.

The future

Community Connection will work with more individuals and families who wish to self-direct as the need arises.

Development of their website will enhance the methods of communication for people in areas outside the city of Townsville.

Learning from the experience of working with people now and from networking with other Host Providers will help in the development of the self-direction service that Community Connection offers through Connecting Up.

Issues to be considered

From their experience so far, Community Connection believe that self-direction offers a positive opportunity for people to shape their lives the way they want through directing their own supports and services. However, there are number of matters to consider, both for individuals wishing to engage in self-direction, and for organisations who move towards this way of working with people.

Rights and responsibilities

Host Providers need to be clear that they are offering support for self-direction rather than continuing to simply offer a menu of the same kinds of services they did in the past.

Individuals who direct their own support or direct on behalf of a family member need to be clear about the responsibilities they have towards any staff they engage, towards their Host Provider, if they work with one, and ultimately to the Department.

Succession Planning

From their experience so far, Community Connection regards succession planning as an important consideration for people who are self-directing and for the organisation.

People engaged in self-direction often have very successful systems established and may have other people involved at different levels in the individual's life. However, having an explicit plan for what might happen if the key person responsible for the 'self-direction business' can no longer fulfil their role, is crucial.

For some people this might mean using part of their funds to employ a person in a key worker or coordinator role, for others it may mean forming a collective with other like-minded individuals or families. Whatever the solution, the planning needs to happen.

From an organisational perspective, succession planning means safeguarding the operations of the organisation for the future. This involves taking steps to ensure that financial and legal obligations with the Department are met and that the financial viability of the organisation is ensured. This is particularly important in this transition time before more funding is available to people through the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Read more about this in Safeguards – an organisational and individual perspective in the article A journey with people towards self-direction.