# A seven-step process for self-direction

Margaret Ward, Research Fellow Griffith University

In a recent Australian study on the role of support-workers in self-directed arrangements, people with disability and their families identified **a seven-step process** which assists them to make decisions and solve problems. It also identified strategies to safeguard both the person with disability and support workers, and to prepare them for self-direction. These steps are outlined below.

## A seven-step process for self-direction

The process gives a logical sequence of steps which built on each other. When something went wrong, or was not working well, the process offers a way to identify and address the problem (See *Figure 1*).

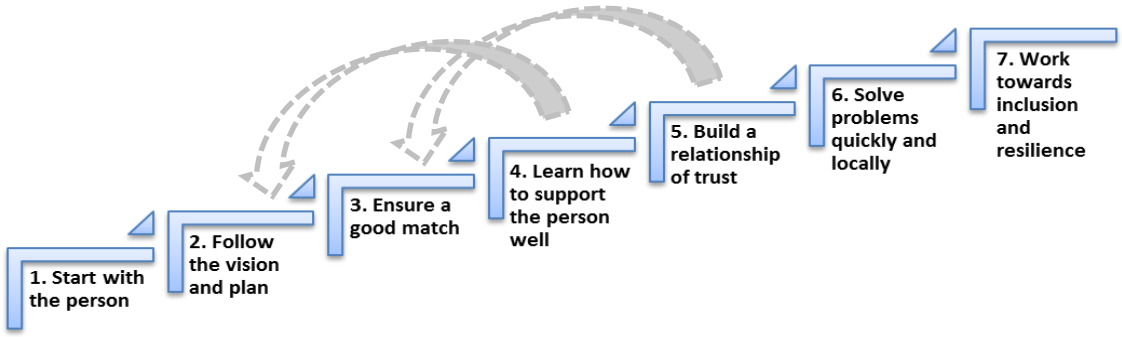


***Figure 1*** **Process of self-direction**

### *1. Start with the person*

Fundamental to self-direction is that the person with disability is the focus for the support. For true self-direction to begin, the design of the support should start where the individual is, without assumptions about how and where the support will be provided in the future.

### *2. Follow the vision and plan*

The person with disability, with his family and friends develops a vision for a good life, and to plan his service. The vision and plan may be modest to start. The Objects and Principles of the *NDIS Act (2013),* however, suggest that it is the responsibility of **everyone involved** to work towards goals of equity, social and economic participation, and personal growth. They

should not only honour the individual's initial vision and plan, but also provide opportunities to envision and plan for a better life over time.

### 3. *Make a good match*

The person with disability, with family and friends, will know best who will make a good support-worker and be a good match. The person with disability chooses his own staff and builds a personally-crafted team. The aptitude, interests, and values of support-workers and how they match those of the person with disability are considered to be more important than past experience or disability training.

### 4. *Get to know the person with disability well*

The person with disability, with family and friends, guides the support team on how he wishes to be supported on a day to day basis taking into account his goals, family culture and relationships. It takes time for support-workers to know the person with disability well and to become an expert in supporting that person. Professionals who bring specialist skills do best when they can integrate these skills within the personalised support that is already in place.

### 5. *Build a relationship of trust*

If the previous two steps, that is, the matching of support-workers to the person with disability, and getting to know the person with disability over time, are well-executed, trusting relationships are likely to develop. These trusting relationships allow support-workers to use their knowledge, discernment, and common sense and to work creatively with the person with disability towards his goals. They can make timely, informed decisions with and on behalf of the person with disability, particularly with regard to identifying opportunities for inclusion and for managing risk. Once trust is built, support-workers can also work collaboratively with the person's family, friends and informal networks.

### 6. *Solve problems quickly and locally*

Problems are inevitable, and are best solved quickly, creatively and locally. Problems can also be averted when support-workers meet regularly as a team with the person with disability and his family and friends, to revisit the vision and plan, and to share strategies and experiences. The person with disability with his family and friends might wish to seek advice to address problems concerning their ethical and legal responsibilities to the support team. Formal complaints and workplace incident claims are less likely when support-workers and

the person with disability have built a trusting and ethical relationship built on regular and respectful communication.

### *7. Work towards independence and resilience*

The process of self-direction has been found to develop the confidence, resilience and independence of the person with disability over time. Family, friends and support-workers can intentionally assist in this process by celebrating the successes, reflecting together on what has been learnt and taking action to do things better.

The seven-step process offers a way to identify problems and to take action when things are not working well—by going back a few steps (See *Figure 1*). For example, if a person with disability is not able to trust a particular support-worker, he may not have guided her well enough in how to support him, the support-worker may not be a good match, or may not understand or support the person's vision and plan. Once the problem is identified, the person with disability can take the appropriate action; say, provide more training, check her understanding about the purpose of the support, or find a new support-worker who is a better match.

## Issues for self-direction

The study identified two key issues for both the person with disability and the support-workers in self directed arrangements: the first is how to safeguard the person with disability and the support-workers within this process, and the second was how best to prepare for self-directed arrangements.

The study identified following strategies to **safeguard the person with disability** within self-directed service:

- Employ support-workers who show respect, have good personal values, common-sense and reliability; these attributes are part of the person's upbringing and cannot be acquired through training;
- Develop a network of people (in the service, informal networks and community) who know the person with disability well to remain vigilant about the welfare of the person with disability and keep the support team focused on the person's vision and plan; and
- Develop the resilience and capacity of the person with disability and their family to act confidently about problem-solving when issues arise.

The study identified the following strategies to **safeguard support-workers**:

- Hold regular meetings with everyone involved to keep focused on the vision and plan of the person with disability, and to review progress;
- Facilitate problem-solving to occur quickly, creatively and as close as possible to the person with disability;
- Ensure ethical, legal employment conditions where a sense of mutual trust can develop; and
- Develop good personal communication skills in managing staff.

The study suggested that, once given the opportunity to self-direct, most people with disability and their informal networks learn what best works for them by experience. The transition to self-direction can sometimes be challenging and **some preparation** for both the person with disability and the support-worker could be beneficial. This preparation could include employment responsibilities, communication and problem solving skills, and strategies for facilitating inclusion and participation in the person's community. The study also suggested that both support-workers and people with disability consider there is value in keeping in touch with others who are involved in self-directed arrangements.

For the full report of the study, I'm here to help: the role of the support-worker within the NDIS, see http://www.researchgate.net/publication/275224653_I'm_here_to_help_the_role_of_the_support_worker_within_the_NDIS

Contact Margaret Ward on margaret.ward@griffith.edu.au