

circles of support

a guide for family carers,
friends and advocates



contents



Inclusion Melbourne is a community support organisation that has worked with people with an intellectual disability for more than 65 years.

Unlike other disability day services, Inclusion Melbourne is not centre-based and doesn't ask you to select activities from a list, follow a group schedule or stay in a centre. Instead, Inclusion Melbourne supports you to live a fulfilled life, to participate in activities based on your own needs, wants and interests, and to develop meaningful friendships within your local community. In other words, Inclusion Melbourne offers fully personalised support in the community.

Inclusion Melbourne's vision is to provide people with the opportunity to live in an inclusive community and to take their place in society as respected citizens.



Inclusion Designlab is Inclusion Melbourne's engine room for research, innovation, communications and policy.

Our vision is to bring together people with a disability, community organisations, and the world's leading disability researchers to develop cutting-edge models of practice, choice and citizenship that shatter glass ceilings and promote a more inclusive Australia.

We do this by developing, trialling, and implementing new systems of support and communicating our insights through a range of publications and media. We are also significant contributors to public policy and government inquiries.

The products and services created by Inclusion Designlab contribute to the continuous development of the disability sector through evidence based practice, accessible materials, and vital training for families and collegiate organisations.

The Circles of Support pilot project was initiated through generous funding provided by



THE MARIAN & E.H FLACK TRUST



Gawith Foundation

Thank you to all the families, individuals and friends that participated in this project: Anna, Anne , Anna, Anthony, Brian, Brygida, Cindy, David, Dawn, Gail, Helen, Helen, John, Karen, Kurt, Louise, Lynette, Marley, Michelle, Morgan, Nancy, Olivier, Pam, Patricia, Paul, Rebecca, Robyn, Tess, Trevor and Trevor. Inclusion Designlab acknowledges the assistance of the following advocates of Circles of Support: Circles network UK, PLAN Canada, VELA Canada, Resourcing Families, Youniverse. Suggested Citation: Nicholas, A., Leighton, D., & Despott, N. (2015). Circles of Support: A guide for family carers, friends and advocates. Inclusion Melbourne, Melbourne. ISBN: 978-0-9922717-0-1

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preface

Inclusion Designlab commenced the Circles of Support project with support from The Marian & E.H Flack Trust and Gawith Foundation. The project sought to examine the benefits of establishing informal support networks to improve opportunities for people with a disability.

Initially eight people with a disability, as well as their families or support networks, were contacted for involvement in the project. From this cohort, three people successfully started and maintained their Circle of Support; one already had a Circle of Support; one withdrew from the project but took steps toward future engagement, and three people had complex support and resource needs that have resulted in ongoing engagement.

It was found that regardless of a person's level of support, Circles of Support have successful outcomes for the person and their networks.

This publication presents the experiences, evidence and findings from the development of each Circle of Support. It is a comprehensive guide to assist people with a disability, their families and carers, along with voluntary and community support organisations, to start their own Circle of Support or build on an already existing one.

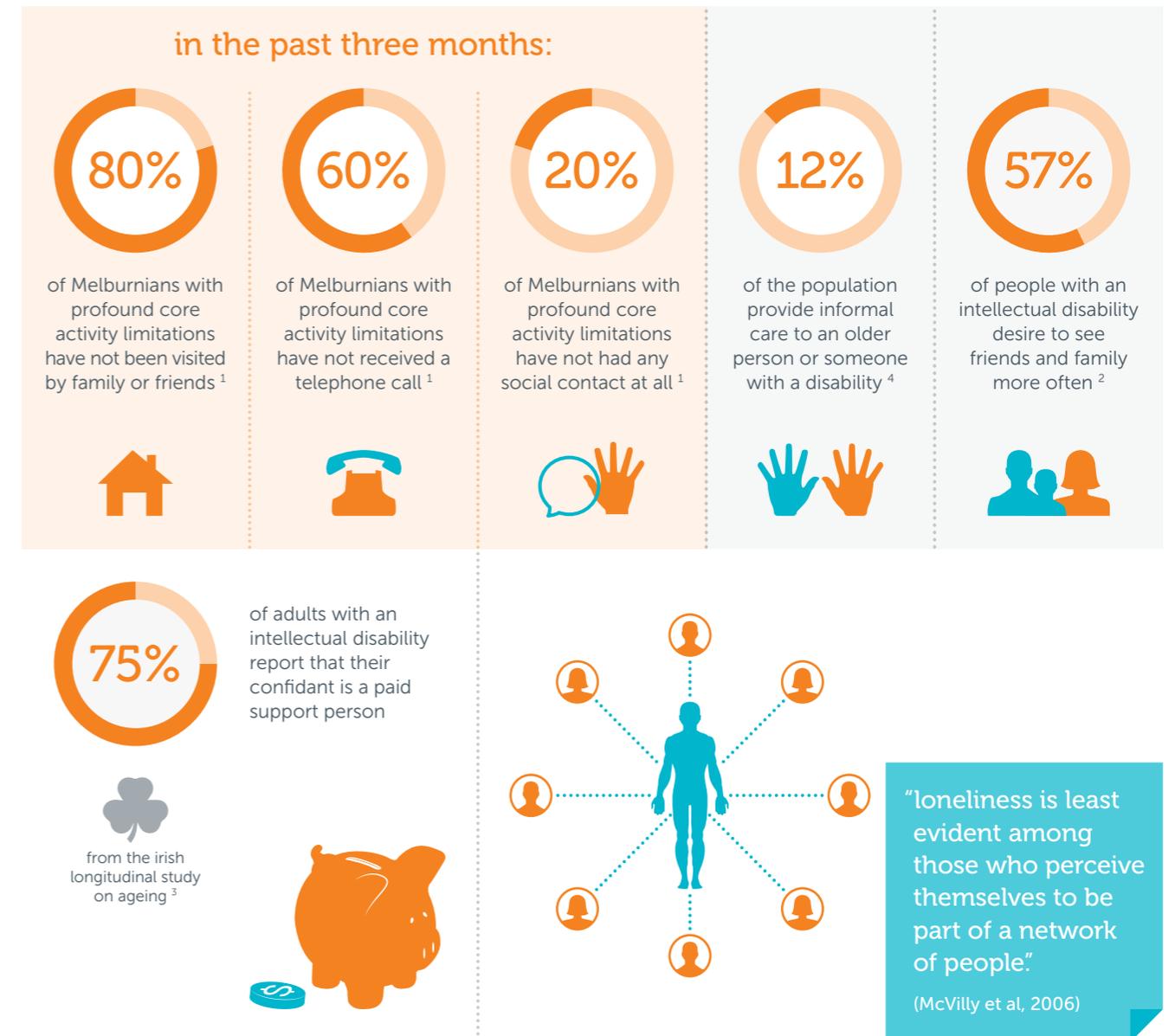
principles

The Circles of Support established by Inclusion Designlab were developed according to 5 principles. These principles reinforce Inclusion Melbourne's values of integrity, potential, individuality and relationships.

circles of support:

- 1 Are centred on the person, their goals and their dreams.
- 2 Provide a safe and supportive environment in which the person feels empowered to make informed choices about their life.
- 3 Are flexible, personalised and promote individual rights and wellbeing.
- 4 Provide a space where the individual can connect, reconnect and engage with friends, family and the community.
- 5 Are a sustainable support that will always be a part of the person's life.

why are circles of support important?





what is a circle of support?

A Circle of Support aims to formalise informal networks to provide valuable and authentic support to a person with a disability.

Communities and organisations around the world have had enormous success in improving the lives of marginalised and isolated people with a disability through the use of various models of Circles of Support.

Circles of Support are beneficial because they support the person with a disability over the long term, act as a mechanism that promotes communal responsibility, and support families, carers and advocates.

who is in a circle of support?

The group is formed by people who care for, respect and have a common wish to support the individual to achieve short and long term goals.

when do you start one?

Circles of Support can exist at any time in a person's life to support them long term, through both trouble-free and crisis situations.

Circles of Support generally take time to plan, establish and grow. It is never too late to start a Circle of Support. During childhood, adolescence, middle age or later in life.

what is a circle of support?

A Circle of Support is a group of people that come together, on a regular basis, to assist a person with a disability to develop, support and action their goals and aspirations.

what is a circle of support not?

- A temporary arrangement that serves one purpose for specific individuals.
- Intended to be a tool for one-off formal planning and service delivery.
- Contingent upon, or solely dedicated to, the management of funds.

who can start a circle of support?

Anyone can support a person with a disability to start a Circle of Support. The people best equipped to support this process are parents, family members, friends, or people that have a meaningful and constant relationship with the person. These people are known as Primary Supporters. Paid facilitators can also be used to assist with the establishment of a Circle.

what are the benefits of a circle of support?

for the person

Relationships and Support Networks

- Enables the person to reconnect with old friends and strengthen current relationships.
- Builds new networks through people in the circle and the community.

Choice and Decision Making

- Empowers the person to make informed decisions and take control of their own life.
- Provides opportunities for valuable and deeper choice about their own lives.
- Maintains focus on the person and what they want.
- Gives the person independence.
- Enables a person to improve their quality of life.

Safety and Sustainability

- Creates a group of people that protect and value the rights of the person.
- Builds a solid network to support the person in the long term.

for the community

- Protects and advocates for the rights and dignity of the person in the community.
- Develops relationships in the community through networks within the Circle.
- Encourages communal responsibility.
- Promotes community inclusion for people with disability, leading to enhanced diversity in the local community.

for family carers, friends and advocates

- Alleviates the pressure of providing all the person's supports.
- Allows time to plan for the future as a collective.
- Utilises the skills that family and friends already have to assist the person.
- Fosters a network of support that knows the person, understands what they want and cares for them.

for circle members

- Provides an opportunity to get to know someone beyond isolated encounters.
- Creates a sense of community among Circle members.
- Develop problem solving, advocacy and transferrable skills that contribute to knowledge about inclusion.

for the service provider

- Provides opportunities to overcome hurdles that cannot be solved through conventional supports.
- Establishes communication pathways for all people and services in the person's life.
- Builds networks of voluntary and informal support.
- Acts as an efficient and valuable planning tool that is person centred and directed.
- Mitigates risk and enhances networking for service providers that deliver community-based personalised support.

"it's great having the group because it makes you feel more gung-ho again, because sometimes you just want to give up."

Michelle's Mother



how to start a circle of support

Before you build a Circle of Support, there are a few things that need to be considered and actioned. Though there are many variations of Circles, following these steps will ensure that the Circle of Support gets a head start to success.

- 1 commitment and consent**
Ensure the person wants a Circle of Support and you understand the benefits for the person and the community.
- 2 guiding principles**
Acknowledge and agree on the guiding principles that support the person.
Acknowledge Circle members' expectations.
- 3 planning and developing goals**
Look at what the person does now and what they want to focus on. Develop an initial plan that can be refined by the Circle once members have joined.
- 4 identify members**
Think about who should be part of the Circle and why they would be a good Circle member.
- 5 invite members**
Think about the best way to invite people, considering the person and their preferences.
- 6 meet**
Decide how you will run the first meeting, in order to achieve the Circle objectives and make plans for regular meetings.
- 7 sustainability**
Establish mechanisms for the longevity of the Circle of Support. This may include a funded facilitator to support the Circle.

The following pages will guide you through each of these steps.

1. commitment and consent

To ensure the Circle of Support gets off to a good start, the person needs to acknowledge that they understand and want a Circle of Support. The family and other supporters also need to be committed to the Circle.

consent from the person

- Have a conversation with the person
- Discuss what a Circle of Support is
- Discuss what it will do for the person and how it will benefit them.

[Click here for information on informed consent and how to have the conversation](#)

considerations for family, carers and advocates

Think about:

- Why am I starting a Circle of Support?
- Ideally, in what way will the Circle help the person?
- What do I want the Circle of support to do for me?
- Am I ready to trust and share some of the responsibility of the person's support?
- What kind of commitment do I want to make to the Circle of Support?

It is imperative that the process of starting a Circle of Support is a deliberate strategy that enables the primary supporter to trust others, bring others into the fold and share some of the caring responsibilities.

commit

- Who drives the Circle?
- Are you motivated and committed to the success of the Circle?

Inclusion Designlab has found that the success of a Circle is determined by the motivation of at least one primary supporter.

Roles and responsibilities may vary depending on the person and their support networks, however the motivation and drive of the Circle is what will enable success. Someone needs to be the active motivator and organiser.

Go to page 20 for more information about Circle stages of development, hurdles and tips for success.

2. guiding principles and setting expectations

Guiding principles are necessary for any Circle of Support. They act like an informal code of conduct for all members and adhere to:

- Support the individual and their personal choices.
- Support all the members of the Circle.
- Guide and direct the Circle on courses of action and pathways for the individual.
- Balance the roles and relationships that exist within the Circle.

There should be an agreement with each Circle Member that they will maintain a relationship with the person, be active in the Circle and maintain the integrity of the Circle as a team.

[Click here to access a printable version of the Guiding Principles and expectations](#)

tips for success

Circles of Support are most beneficial when they adhere to the Guiding Principles.

The Circle needs to be a part of the process in writing, confirming and understanding the guiding principles. Discuss and add to them as you see necessary. Collectively the Circle members need to commit to the values of the Circle and what they represent.

the fundamentals

Members of the Circle of Support understand:

It is about the Individual — The individual is respected, acknowledged and everything that is done is approved and consistent with their wants and needs.

Person centred planning — The Circle constantly works with the individual in the centre and all planning involves and revolves around them.

Choice — The individual is provided with opportunities to experience individual and informed choice.

Self determination — The individual has the ability and motivation to make choices without undue interference from external influence.

Community bridges — The Circle creates, facilitates and connects the person to the community.

3. planning and developing goals

Planning and developing goals is an ongoing, long term and continuous process. The process needs to be collaborative and involve all people and services in the person's life. The relationships established by the Circle of Support with service providers, paid staff and other organisations will ensure that planning implementation is thorough and beneficial for all.

the planning process:

- 1 think about the person's needs and goals**
What does the person want to do now and in the future?
- 2 meet with the planner**
As a Circle of Support, communicate with the planner. Discuss how the Circle of Support can be involved, assist and contribute to the planning process. If you want to engage a paid facilitator to assist with the circle, ensure the planner includes this in the plan.
- 3 develop a plan and consider how to manage the person's supports**
Work with the planner and relevant parties to plan how the Circle of Support will be involved. Ensure that all supports are considered and are in the best interest of the person.
- 4 implement the plan**
Work with the planner to develop implementation strategies, the actions to undertake and allocate responsibilities.
- 5 review the plan**
As a Circle, independently review the plan regularly, celebrating achievements and evaluating issues to successful plan to overcome hurdles.



The Seven Approaches Guide can assist you to plan and develop goals collaboratively. While aiming to link the person into the community.

[Click here for the Seven Approaches Guide](#)

4. identify members

The key to building a good Circle of Support is choosing the right Circle members. This process takes time and continuous consultation.

what is the criteria for a good circle member?

- The prospective Circle Member cares about the person and has a valued relationship with the person.
- The Circle is not just about the person, but having the right combination of members. The Circle should contain a diversity of skills, activities, roles and experience. Ask yourself: Why invite this person? What relationship do they have with the person? What kind of expertise will they bring to the Circle?

what is a valued relationship?

It is not the amount of time a person spends with a person, but the relationship they have with that person. If they do not see the person every week, it does not mean they cannot contribute to a Circle of Support.

Evidence shows that for authentic supported decision making to occur relationships need to encompass the following elements:

- Equality between the two people.
- Know each other well.
- Supporters need to be self aware and reflective of themselves and their actions.

who can be in the circle?

Who is invited to become a member of a Circle of Support will depend on the individual. Friends, relatives, or anyone that has interest in the person or who is prepared to develop a relationship with them can be invited. The person chooses the members and has the right to not invite someone.

Paid staff members can be Circle members, as long as they are not attending the meetings on a paid shift, and have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of the person. If paid staff attend as part of their shift, they should be invited to one-off meetings and for a specific purpose.

[Click here for detail on paid staff & Circles](#)

how many people should be invited?

A Circle should consist of a minimum of five Circle members, not including the person or a paid facilitator. It is suggested not to have more than seven people as such a large group can become overwhelming and difficult to manage.

“people in David’s life know him in different contexts. By getting these people together, we all get to learn more about David from each other.”

Circle Facilitator

circles of relationships

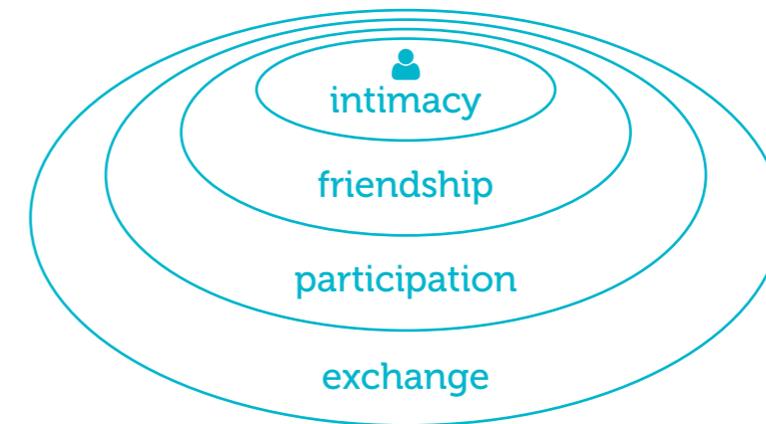
Prospective Circle members can be found in many areas of a person’s life and often where you least expect. A Circle of relationships is a helpful guide to discover the relationships in a person’s life.

circle of intimacy

People closest to you. Your life would be significantly impacted if they were not there. E.g. Parents, siblings, primary carer.

circle of friendship

People you see on a regular basis. You are friends, spend time together, and enjoy each other’s company. E.g. Friends and relatives.



circle of participation

People within a group that you see as part of regular activities. It is in this Circle that relationships can be strengthened through a Circle of Support.

Example: Mick has played soccer with a local team for two years. After every game, the team has a BBQ in the park. Everyone knows who Mick is. When Mick started his Circle of Support he asked another player from his team to be part of his Circle. Now they spend time outside soccer games hanging out.

circle of exchange

People that you see daily or on a regular basis where money is exchanged in the process. E.g. Hairdresser, shop keeper.

Example: Lucy has gone to the same hairdresser every week for six years. Lucy now knows Sheila the hairdresser really well because they talk about everything. Lucy asked Sheila to be in her Circle of Support because Sheila knows more about some areas of her life than her family does.

[Click here to a copy of the Circle of Relationship map](#)

5. invite members

Inviting people to become a Circle member can be difficult. Do not underestimate the relationships a person has in their lives and their willingness to contribute. Where possible, encourage the person to invite the Circle member in the way that is most comfortable for them.

how to invite people

@ Email ✉ Letter 👤 In person ☎ Phone

tips for success

- Remember: There is no harm in asking.
- Get the person to have the conversation with the Circle members.
- There is nothing more powerful than the person telling someone why they want them in their Circle.

what to talk about

When inviting members, provide as much information as possible about the Circle of Support. Circle members can be involved in various ways.

A *casual Circle member* is a person that attends meetings on an irregular basis, however keeps up to date and sees the person on a regular basis outside of the meetings.

A *permanent Circle member* attends almost all of the meetings and is considered a primary pillar of the Circle of Support.

[Click here for information about how to invite members](#)

what about family and parents?

Active involvement as the primary supporter of the Circle can hinder the Circle outcomes if the ultimate goal is to create a long term network outside of the family.

Consider: How does your involvement as a parent hinder or enable the processes of the Circle in achieving meaningful outcomes for the person?

“don't be afraid to ask, there is no harm in asking.”

Michelle's Mother



6. meet

meeting 1

- Meetings can be chaired by a facilitator, the person with a disability or a Circle member.
- Distribute an agenda before the meeting.
- One person should take notes and another should chair the meeting.
- Focus on introductions and getting to know the Circle. It should be centred on the person and look at what is happening in the person's life.
- At the end of the first meeting give each member a copy of the Guiding Principles to review.

[Click here for an outline of the first meeting Agenda](#)

meeting 2

- Follow up any tasks that were discussed at the first meeting.
- Go through each Guiding Principle. Make sure they are clearly understood.
- Sign / commit to / acknowledge the Guiding Principles and the Circle expectations.
- Ensure that all people have an opportunity to speak.
- Depending on the group, it is suggested to keep the same chair for the first two meetings to allow for consistency.

meeting 3

- Ask another two people to be chair and note taker. Start to rotate this responsibility.
- Add to the list of goals and ensure that everyone has a role and action items.
- Assess what has been done.

[Click here to download the general Agenda and Minutes template](#)

when and where

Circles of Support are held wherever and whenever is most convenient for the Circle.

It is recommended that meetings are held at least once per month.

7. sustainability

the basics

Culture: The challenge is to create a supportive and positive culture within the Circle. This will empower the Circle members and be the reason why they invest time in the person and in the Circle.

Let the Circle grow naturally: Don't force the Circle to be something that it is not. It may end up taking on a role in the person's life that it did not intend to, but that is OK.

Momentum is key: In the first six months commit to regular meetings and keep motivated. Hold meetings monthly or fortnightly.

Get creative: Think outside the box and try new things!



Make it fun: At each meeting, make it something to look forward to by doing things together, that are enjoyable for everyone. If necessary, have casual catch ups for the first 3–4 meetings to get into a routine.

Celebrate: The achievements of the person, and the achievements of the Circle members.

Do things outside the Circle: Meet outside the Circle, do things together as a group or one on one.



It's not always what you know, but who you know: If the Circle cannot find a way to reach a goal or come to a solution, use personal connections to make it happen.

Connect with paid staff and service providers: Build relationships with the paid staff, coordinators and service providers. Let them know about the Circle of Support, its functions and your aims. Be open with communication and work together on shared goals.



Continuing without parents: When family or parents choose to or are no longer able to be a part of the Circle of Support, develop an exit strategy or transition plan.

[Click here to download suggestions on withdrawing from a Circle](#)



Conflict is not always bad: Conflict shows that people are really voicing their opinions and can explore what the person needs and wants. It is important for the Circle to have a strategy to manage conflict. This can be individualised for each Circle and even include the involvement of an external person. The Circle should refer to and use the Guiding Principles to resolve conflict.

Facilitator: Consider introducing a facilitator to build your Circle of Support as a sustainable support network and planning tool. Inclusion Melbourne can help you do this.

what do circles of support look like?

Circles of Support transition through three stages of development. These stages are based on the quantity and quality of relationships that a person has with unpaid supports. Each stage has particular features and levels of support that need to be acquired before the Circle can start to make pervasive change in the person's life. At each level there are additional complexities based on the person's communication and support networks.

To allow the Circle of Support to succeed, evaluate the person's networks and discover the stage of development that might represent the person's situation. Use the tips for success as a tool to mitigate risk and better support the Circle.

there are three types of circle:

foundation

best suited to:

- People who have more contact with paid staff than friends and family.
- People that are isolated and have deep disadvantage.

building

best suited to:

- People who have more contact with paid staff than friends.
- Those who want to connect or reconnect with people on a friendship level.
- People who need advocacy and assistance to reach goals and have a better quality of life.

thrive

best suited to:

- Families that want to start to build a support network for when they are no longer able to provide for their child.
- People who want more independence in their lives and different supports
- People that have specific goals and need assistance from a variety of networks to assist them to achieve.

The following pages provide more information about each type of Circle.



what do circles of support look like?



features:

- This stage is for people that may have few unpaid support networks in their lives and little to no family or immediate family support.
- The limited family support means the Circle may lack deep knowledge of the person. The Circle acts to discover unknown elements of the person's life to enhance engagement and understand more about the person.
- The Circle works together and takes the time to build reciprocal relationships.
- Goals can take time to develop and action due to the limited knowledge about the person.
- This Circle is the most difficult to establish and maintain, however, people in this stage benefit the most from a Circle of Support.
- Most successful with assistance from a facilitator as the primary supporter.

[Click here for information about your role](#)

facilitation / primary supporter time expectations:

Start up: 25 hours.

Ongoing: 10 hours per meeting (not including tasks allocated at each meeting).

objectives:

The objectives of the foundation stage are to:

- Find a group of people that want to join the circle and genuinely want to be part of the person's life.
- Establish a routine so the person meets with the Circle on a regular basis.
- Foster relationship through activities and socialising amongst the circle.
- Cultivate an environment of exploration and collaboration, allowing the Circle to discover and understand as many dimensions of the person's life as possible.

There are common hurdles that may be faced when constructing and maintaining a Circle of Support within the 'Foundation' stage. Listed below are suggestions to overcome these hurdles.

Hurdle(s)	Tips for success
No support networks In this situation it is hard to find people to be in the Circle because the person only has paid staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build a relationship with the person, spend time with them and get to know who is in their life.• Focus on the networks they currently have and make it enjoyable to meet.• Use the Circle of relationships to map out all the networks in the person's life.• Start a process of getting them in touch and involved in their community if they have none.• Case managers and Support Coordinators should use the Circle to help them support the person as well. (It is in their best interest as well to start a Circle of Support.)

Some networks, but they do not want to commit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gaining Support for any times and any networks is always better than no Circle or no networks.• Make the Circle informal to focus on building relationships.• Start by having regular social gatherings that are unstructured and informal.• Take time to develop the Circle.
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Considering the expected hurdles, there is a higher rate of success if the following fundamentals of creating a Circle of Support are considered in greater depth. Refer to the relevant steps for more information.

1. Commitment and consent
4. Identify members
7. Sustainability

what do circles of support look like?



features:

- Does not yet have a primary supporter or person to organise the Circle of Support.
- Numerous friends and support networks that know the person but may not have family members involved in their lives.
- Goals can take time to develop and action due to the knowledge about all of the person's supports.
- Most successful with assistance from a facilitator.

[Click here for information about your role](#)

facilitation / primary supporter time expectations:

Start up: 15 hours.

Ongoing: 8 hours per meeting (not including tasks allocated at each meeting).

objectives:

The objectives of the building stage are to:

- Nurture the Circle so the focus person and the members feel supported and establish valued relationships.
- Cultivate an environment of exploration and collaboration, allowing the Circle to discover and understand as many dimensions of the person's life as possible.
- Create an environment that supports the focus person to feel comfortable to express their wants and needs.
- Plan regular activities that expand the person's experience and promote authentic choice.
- Support the members to build confidence and nominate someone as a primary supporter to lead the circle.

There are expected hurdles that may be faced when constructing and maintaining a Circle of Support within the 'Building' stage. Listed below are suggestions to overcome these hurdles.

Hurdle(s)	Tips for success
Not having enough Circle members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with the person on multiple occasions and find out about the people in their lives. • Start off with a small group and then invite more people as you come into contact with them, or as they are suggested. • Ensure that every time someone leaves the Circle, that they are replaced. • Remember that you have to start somewhere. A small Circle is better than no Circle at all. The Circle will take time.
Lacking the background knowledge within the Circle of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having support networks from all areas of a persons life really makes a difference. • Establish a process of collecting knowledge about all the paid staff in the persons life and their schedule/ commitments. • Develop goals from the information that you collect gradually.
Motivation / commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate the successes of the Circle. • Everyone should feel they have an equal opportunity and right to contribute to the Circle. • Make it fun. Do social activities. It allows everyone to build there relationships, whilst giving the group more purpose. • If a facilitator is involved, gradually give more responsibility to the Circle members and phase out your involvement.

Considering the expected hurdles, there is a higher rate of success if the following fundamentals of creating a Circle of Support are considered in greater depth. Refer to the relevant steps for more information.

1. Commitment and consent
2. Guiding principles
4. Identify members
7. Sustainability

what do circles of support look like?



features:

- A parent, family member or primary supporter is the main organiser of the Circle of Support and can provide a deeper understanding of the person in all aspects of their life.
- The person has numerous friends and support networks that know and support them.
- People whom the person knows are easily identified.
- Goals and aspirations are understood and easily identifiable.
- *Thrive* is the Circle that is most likely to succeed.

[Click here for information about your role](#)

facilitation / primary supporter time expectations:

Start up: 10 hours.

Ongoing: 2-3 hours per meeting (not including tasks allocated at each meeting).

objectives:

The objectives of the thriving stage are to:

- Create an environment that nurtures relationships and builds trust.
- Support the person to take the lead, be active and take ownership of the Circle.
- Foster relationships that empower the person to have informed choice and make decisions about their lives.
- Establish the Circle so that family and parents feel comfortable to remove themselves from the Circle.
- Maintain the Circle to be a consistent support in the person's life.

There are expected hurdles that may be faced when constructing and maintaining a Circle of Support within the 'Thriving' stage. Listed below are suggestions to overcome these hurdles.

Hurdle(s)	Tips for success
Maintaining motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find ways that suit the Circle to stay motivated.• Once you have established a Circle, share the leadership role and delegate roles to each person.• Organise Circle meetings on a regular basis, no more than 1 month apart. This maintains motivation and gets people comfortable with the Circle regularity.• Set clear expectations and ensure that everyone understands what the Circle of support is about. Use the Guiding Principles to lead this discussion.• Remember to celebrate your successes!
Family involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family and parents need to acknowledge their power and influence over the Circle before the Circle first meets.• Everyone should always feel they have an equal opportunity and right to contribute to the Circle. If this does not happen, Their needs to be an open discussion with the Circle members, and an agreed communication strategy. The Guiding principle should be used.• If the family or primary carer want to remove themselves from the Circle of Support, this should be done as a gradual process.

Considering the expected hurdles, there is a higher rate of success if the following fundamentals of creating a Circle of Support are considered in greater depth. Refer to the relevant steps for more information.

- 4. Identify members
- 7. Sustainability

case studies



michelle

Michelle is a performer, actress and a lover of music, particularly pop music.

Michelle started her circle with her mother, her Aunt, and two volunteers that visit her every week.

Michelle meets with her Circle on Sunday evenings at a local restaurant and they have their Circle meetings over dinner. Her Circle is very supportive and encouraging and a keen advocate in all areas of Michelle's life.

The Circle of Support aims to improve Michelle's health so she can participate in the community more, and recruit more members to replace her mother and aunt.

"This Circle will help both of us."
— Michelle's Mother.



david

David is very social and has a busy weekly schedule of activities. He loves to socialise, drink cappuccino's, craft beer and practice photography.

David's Circle has no family involvement and is made up of his support networks. A Leisure Buddy he has known for more than fifteen years, his art mentor, volunteer mentor and his best friend, who lives around the corner.

David's Circle of Support meet on Saturday afternoon every 4-6 weeks at a pub over a beer. David and his Circle prefer a very informal format, and like to chat and progress goals at each meeting.

"We are the closest thing that David has to a family." — Circle Member.



aaron

Aaron lives independently in his own flat with his cat, Baby. Aaron is a public speaker, performer, dancer and works at a nursing home a few days a week.

Aaron started his Circle with two family friends, a friend from his drama program, his cousin and his mother. Aaron's Circle meets every second Thursday of the month at his house, and the Circle helps with a range of matters, including his budget, lifestyle, health, and grant applications.

One of the first goals of the Circle was for Aaron to become more independent and for his mother to hand over some of her role as a carer. Aaron's mother no longer attends and Aaron notifies his Circle of the meetings, chairs each meeting and is very happy with his new-found independence.

"It gives Aaron a change to have other people in his life." — Aaron's Mother.



more about circles

Circles of support have existed in various forms since their emergence in the 1980s. Originally created as planning strategies for people with a disability who have ageing parents, Circles of Support have since been successful with people in areas as diverse as drug, alcohol and mental health rehabilitation, as well as mainstream schools. These models can also be referred to as Circles of Friends or Support Circles.

Another variation of a Circle is a Microboard, which functions as a not-for-profit organisation whereby the Circle of Support is the organisation, the person with a disability is the business focus and their funded support package is the revenue. This involves mandatory reporting, annual general meetings and allocated roles and responsibilities, just like other charitable organisations.

Outlined below is a comparison of different organisations that have Circles of Support or Microboard programs.

	VELA Canada 	Microboards Australia 	PLAN Canada 	Circles Network UK 
Type	Microboard	Microboard	Circle of Support	Circle of Support
Number of members	5-8	8-10	No def. N°	No def. N°
Organisational membership	✓	✓	✓	✓
Registration with external organisations	✓	✓	✗	✗
Facilitation / mentoring	✓	✓	✗	✓
Networking opportunities	✗	✓	✓	✓
Website	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training / info. sessions	✓	✓	✗	✗
Available resources	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fee for service	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recorded accountability	✓	✓	✗	✓
Not-for-profit / charitable organisations	✓	✓	✓	✓

further information

Organisations	Website
Circles of Support	
Inclusion Designlab (VIC)	www.inclusiondesignlab.org.au/circles
Belonging Matters	www.belongingmatters.org
Circles Network (UK)	www.circles-uk.org.uk
Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (UK)	www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/our-work/family-friends-community/circles-of-support
In Charge (NSW)	www.incharge.net.au/services/networks-of-support
Mamre Association (QLD) – Pave the Way	www.pavetheway.org.au
Uniting Care – Life Assist	www.lifeassist.org.au
Microboards	
Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN – Canada)	www.plan.ca
VELA Canada	www.velacanada.org
Microboards Australia	www.youniverse.org.au
Further information	
Inclusion Network	www.inclusion.com
Southern Cross University Design Project – Living a Good Life	www.vimeopro.com/user6314524/living-a-good-life-personal-support-networks
Resourcing Families	www.resourcingfamilies.org.au
WA's Individualised Services (WAIS)	www.waindividualisedservices.org.au/library/resources/wais-publications-and-resources

other recent guides from inclusion melbourne and inclusion designlab



it's my choice! toolkit

Guide to decision making and planning tools for people with a disability, families, advocates and organisations.



choosing the right support provider

An accessible information guide for people with a disability who are choosing a service provider.



seven approaches

A workbook that guides the development and planning of goals that connect people with a disability with their community.



your dental health

A guide to oral hygiene, dental health and the dental system for people with a disability, their families and carers.

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