



**Volunteer Programs of  
Support for Decision-Making:**  
*Lessons and recommendations  
from the OVAL Project*

# FOREWORD



The OVAL Project has been an important collaborative endeavour led by Valid with the assistance of the Office of the Public Advocate.

Funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency, the project's key aim was to explore the potential for volunteers to support the decision-making of isolated NDIS participants.

We are proud to bring you this resource, which draws together a description of the Oval Project's development, as well as the Project's key documentation, including the Project's model of practice.

Also included here are reflections about the national implications of the Oval Project, and thoughts on future reform possibilities.

We hope this resource proves instructive for future supported decision-making initiatives, particularly those involving volunteers supporting the decision-making of isolated people.



**Above**  
Colleen Pearce,  
Public Advocate  
and Kevin Stone,  
CEO (VALID).

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The artwork on the cover was created by Geelong artist Meghan Stewart-Snoad especially for the OVAL Project.

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# CONTENTS



Purpose of report.....	4
Aims of the OVAL Project.....	4
Executive summary of project outcomes.....	5
Executive summary of project recommendations.....	6
Terminology.....	7
Outline of project implementation	
Scope of the volunteer role.....	10
Staffing.....	14
Development of project resources.....	17
Volunteer recruitment.....	18
Participant recruitment, referral and engagement.....	20
Volunteer training and support.....	25
Model of practice.....	27
Participant training and support.....	29
Participant and volunteer matching process.....	31
Project governance.....	32
Risk assessment for future volunteer support for decision-making programs.....	33
Summary of practice implications from the OVAL Project.....	47
National implications of the OVAL Project.....	51
Summary of OVAL Project recommendations.....	52
Conclusion.....	52
Appendix 1: Scope of practice document for volunteers.....	53
Appendix 2: Promotional materials.....	59
Appendix 3: Volunteer recruitment materials.....	61
Appendix 4: Participant recruitment materials.....	76
Appendix 5: Volunteer training schedule.....	87
Appendix 6: Model of practice.....	92
Appendix 7: Participant training resource.....	103
Appendix 8: Participant and volunteer matching process.....	119



## Purpose of this report

The purpose of this document is to reflect on the experiences of the OVAL Project and provide the National Disability Insurance Agency with recommendations regarding establishing a volunteer based support for decision making program in other parts of Victoria and eventually across Australia. This report outlines the processes and resources developed to implement volunteer-based support for decision making and the strategies needed to address key areas of concern when rolling out this type of program elsewhere. It is hoped this report gives the agency confidence to expand volunteer-based support for decision making for isolated NDIS participants who are seeking relationships and support outside the service sector.

## Aims of the OVAL Project

The OVAL Project was developed collaboratively by VALID and OPA in anticipation that a number of people with cognitive impairments, such as intellectual disability, brain injury and autism, joining the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in the Barwon trial site would have difficulty participating in the planning and reviewing of their funded supports. It was anticipated they would be unable to participate as fully as possible in the life of the community, and exercise choice and control over their supports, because they did not have access to necessary support with their decision making. The OVAL Project aimed to address this problem by matching volunteers trained in the practice of support for decision making, with NDIS participants who wanted and needed this type of support. The project equipped volunteers to support participants to build their capacity to make decisions generally and become more engaged in choosing and controlling the support they receive from the NDIS.

More broadly the OVAL Project aimed to develop, implement and evaluate a model of practice for volunteers engaging in support for decision making, and make recommendations regarding the national implications of volunteer support for decision making programs.

## Executive summary of the project outcomes

The OVAL Project has demonstrated the community is a rich resource which can be engaged to support isolated people with disability. Community members of different ages, cultural backgrounds and genders responded generously when given the opportunity to develop a relationship with a local person with cognitive disability who wanted support with their decision making. The preliminary findings of an independent evaluation of the OVAL Project by Deakin University suggests the relationships established between OVAL Project volunteers and NDIS participants were highly valued by both parties. The support provided by volunteers led to significant changes in the lives of participants including changes to support plans, service providers, life stages (e.g. getting engaged), finding employment and commencing education. Participants highly valued having someone who was outside the service sector in their life. They perceived volunteers were on their side and wouldn't tell them what to do. Volunteers expressed satisfaction that they were able to get to know their participant and offer them support to achieve their goals. The preliminary findings of the evaluation suggests volunteers felt well prepared to support participants as a result of training in the support for decision making model of practice developed by the OVAL Project.

The OVAL Project matched 15 NDIS participants with 15 trained volunteers. While these numbers are modest, the outcomes of this project mirror the positive outcomes of other support for decision making projects trialled in Australia to date.<sup>1</sup> The current model is able to be scaled up to accommodate a significant increase in program size as long as the risks identified by the project in relation to volunteer supervision can be addressed. For the positive outcomes of the OVAL Project to be delivered in other jurisdictions, the NDIA will need to ensure adequate oversight of volunteers to ensure the safety of both volunteers and isolated participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, M. (2012). Evaluation of the Supported Decision Making Project. Office of the Public Advocate (SA), November, 2012.

ACT Disability Aged and Carer Advocacy Service. (2013). Spectrums of support: a report on a project exploring supported decision making for people with disabilities in the ACT. Canberra: ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service. WAIS Supported Decision Making resources. Retrieved from: <http://waindividualisedservices.org.au/wais-publications-and-resources/>

Bigby, C., Whiteside, M. & Douglas, J. (2015). Supporting People with Cognitive Disabilities in Decision Making – Processes and Dilemmas. Melbourne: Living with Disability Research Centre, La Trobe University.

Westwood Spice. (2015). My Life, My Decision: an independent evaluation of the Supported Decision Making Pilot. For the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, April, 2015.

Burgen, B. (2016). Reflections on the Victorian of the Public Advocate supported decision making pilot project. Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, DOI: 10.1080/23297018.2016.1199969

## Executive summary of the project recommendations

Volunteer-based support for decision making meets a number of the ILC Policy Framework goals and objectives. The volunteer model creates the opportunity for community members to become more involved in the lives of people with disability in their communities. It also uses resources within the community to support people with disability to build their capacity to make decisions and determine their own lives. The OVAL Project has shown community members are willing and able to engage with and provide meaningful support to people with disability with whom they may have never had contact previously. In the context of these informal relationships (friendships) volunteers supported people with disability to build their capacity to make decisions and achieve their goals.

The OVAL Project recommends the NDIA take the model of practice and resources developed by the OVAL Project and use them to establish a volunteer-based support for decision making program across an entire metropolitan Melbourne region (phase two). If volunteer supervision is able to be adequately provided across the region it would help determine the feasibility of rolling out the program nationally.

The OVAL Project also recommends proposals for future volunteer-based support for decision making initiatives should be encouraged and, where appropriate, funded through the ILC framework.

## Terminology

The OVAL Project uses the term “support for decision making” to describe the work done by volunteers. Before discussing the outcomes of the project this section clarifies why the project chose not to use the term “supported decision making” to describe its practice.

In 2006, the United Nations met to discuss the rights of people with disability internationally and drafted a convention aimed to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of people with disability. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states people with disability must be respected for their inherent dignity and individual autonomy, which includes their freedom to make choices and control their own lives. Australia is one of 160 countries who has signed the CRPD<sup>2</sup> agreeing to promote its principles and ensure our laws comply with the Articles of the convention.

The CRPD enshrines thinking about people with disability as holders of rights and equal citizens in our communities. It also places an obligation on governments to provide people with disability with the support they need to be able to exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. This support is called reasonable accommodation. People with disability have a right to equality of opportunity, respect for difference and full and effective participation and inclusion in society.

### A right to support for decision-making

In Australia the experience of people with disabilities has not reflected the equality and non-discrimination demanded by the CRPD. Fundamental to being able to exercise our right to autonomy and self-determination, is the ability to make choices and decisions that define who we are and determine our lifestyle. Many people with disabilities have had their right to make decisions questioned and been denied the support they need to be able to make the decisions that shape their lives.

*“Exercising our rights and making choices about how we live makes us all unique and ensures that our lives are directed by us – we are in control. Making decisions about our lives, like what to eat and drink or whom we want to live with is, for most of us, something that we take for granted and see as a fundamental basic human right. Decision making is the key to our autonomy and determines our lifestyle (p.2).”<sup>3</sup>*

Frequently people with cognitive impairments, such as intellectual disability, brain injury and psychosocial disability, have their ability to make decisions questioned. In part, this is because decision making has been viewed as an autonomous, cognitive process. However, more recently there is growing recognition that decision making is often a shared process, not done in isolation. All of us choose to receive support with decision making at various

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<sup>2</sup> Figure from UN Enable Website accessed at: [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-15&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&lang=en) on 3 February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Paradigm (2008). Supported Decision Making a Guide for Supporters accessed at [http://complexneeds.org.uk/modules/Module-4.2-Safeguarding--privacy,-dignity-and-personal-care/All/downloads/m14p050c/supported\\_decision\\_making.pdf](http://complexneeds.org.uk/modules/Module-4.2-Safeguarding--privacy,-dignity-and-personal-care/All/downloads/m14p050c/supported_decision_making.pdf) on 9 February, 2016.

times and if the support is helpful, it enables us to make difficult decisions and remain in control of our lives.

The CRPD has clarified that people with cognitive impairments have a right to be reasonably accommodated with their decision making. The support provided by OVAL Project volunteers enabled participants to build their capacity to make decisions and control their own lives. The OVAL Project therefore referred to the support volunteers provided as 'support for decision making'.

### A right to legal recognition

Historically, people with disability have had their legal right to make decisions removed through mechanisms such as guardianship and financial management. When this occurs, the person with a disability is found to lack capacity and their legal right to make some or all decisions is given over to a guardian or administrator who acts on their behalf. These are forms of substituted decision making. Article 12 of the CRPD states people with disability are entitled to 'equal recognition before the law'. The CRPD challenges legal mechanisms that remove a person's legal standing (recognition) and places an obligation on governments to provide people with disability the support they may require to exercise their legal capacity. Legal capacity is defined as both having legal standing and the ability to act under the law.

Discussions about how to support people with disability to exercise their legal capacity have focused on a new legal framework and practice called supported decision making. Supported decision making is an alternative to substituted decision making (guardianship and financial management). While it is not the subject of a formal definition 'supported decision making' tends to carry with it recognition of the legal capacity of all people and the need to provide support to people with disability to make decisions that affect their lives. 'Supported decision making' tends to be used to indicate the provision of support for decision making in a legal context that recognises the role of the supporter in the person's decision making on subject matter that has legal consequences. For example, an NDIS participant may have a plan nominee appointed who is able to assist the participant to decide whether or not they want to enter into a financial contract with a new service provider. In their role, a plan nominee would engage in supported decision making when they support the person to exercise their legal capacity when entering into the contract.

It is important to be aware that people with disability have important decision making rights that involve both reasonable accommodation and legal recognition. Support for decision making addresses people's right to reasonable accommodation in the decision making process and supported decision making addresses their right to exercise their legal capacity and be legally recognised.

### Implications:

- Support for decision making is a form of reasonable accommodation that involves providing support to people to make decisions. The provision of support for decision making enables some people with disability to make choices and determine their lives.

- Supported decision making tends to imply the provision of support for decision making in a legal context that recognises the role of the supporter in the person's decision making on subject matter that has legal consequences.

## Outline of Project Implementation

The OVAL Project has learned a significant amount about developing and implementing a volunteer support for decision making program. It has created a suite of resources which can be utilised by other agencies and organisations in the sector wishing to establish a support for decision making initiative which utilises volunteers. The following section outlines key aspects of implementing a volunteer support for decision making program such as the development of promotional material and resources, staffing, volunteer and participant recruitment strategies, training and matching. It explores the key lessons in each area including a summary of their implications and the relevant resources developed to address each aspect.

### The scope of the volunteer role

#### Support for decision-making and advocacy

As an advocacy organisation VALID had questions about the difference between support for decision making and forms of advocacy such as independent and representative advocacy. One of the earliest tasks accomplished by the OVAL Project was clarifying the scope of the volunteer role and differentiating between advocacy and support for decision making.

Advocacy is defined by the Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) as speaking, acting or writing with minimal conflict of interest on behalf of the interests of a disadvantaged person or group, in order to promote, protect and defend the welfare of and justice for either the person or group<sup>4</sup>. For VALID good advocacy involves the person and their advocate working in partnership, listening and communicating on an equal level and creating independence through empowerment.<sup>5</sup>

The key role of an advocate, as defined by DANA, is to represent the interests of the person receiving support. When considering the scope of the volunteer role the OVAL Project did not want volunteers to approach the support relationship with an intention to represent the person or their interests. Rather the support relationship needed to be based on equality, respect, trust and mutual knowledge. In the training manual we outlined how we wanted volunteers to think about the scope of their role.

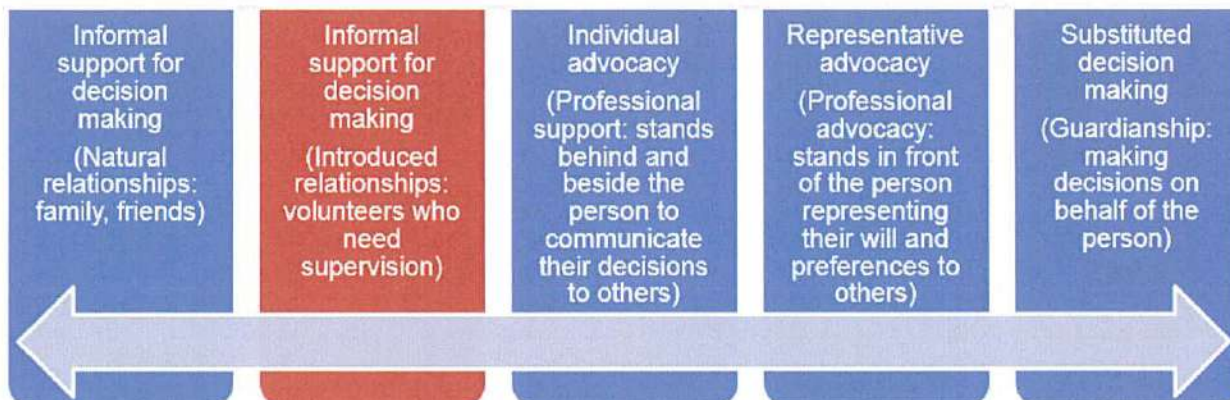
*"Volunteers can visualise the support they provide as standing behind the participant, empowering them to do things for themselves, or standing beside the participant, exploring issues and doing things together. However, if the support the participant needs involves standing in front of them, that is acting or speaking on the participant's behalf, it is moving outside the scope of the role. Representing a person and acting on their behalf is beyond the role of a volunteer in the OVAL Project, and is best done by a professional such as an advocate" (Volunteer Training Manual, p.36)*

The OVAL Project conceptualised the relationship between advocacy and support for decision making along a continuum of support relationships that started with informal

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dana.org.au/home/advocacy-groups/> accessed on 16 September 2016

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.valid.org.au/advocacy.htm> accessed on 16 September 2016

support in natural relationships at one end and ended with formal substituted decision making at the other.



The OVAL Project operated in the space occupied by the second box on the continuum, offering informal support for decision making for people without current, active natural relationships. The experience of the OVAL Project, was that professional advocacy was required to overcome a number of individual and systemic barriers participants faced implementing their decisions. This experience mirrored those of other support for decision making projects in Australia.<sup>6</sup> Previous pilots used the project coordinator or facilitator to advocate alongside the participant to ensure their decisions were respected and acted upon. The OVAL Project coordinator was able to draw on the significant expertise of VALID advocates to stand beside and behind participants who required individual advocacy. There seems to be a natural synergy between support for decision making and this type of individual advocacy. For example, one participant who was matched with a volunteer encountered an issue with State Trustees and required an advocate to stand beside him in a meeting to ensure his wishes were heard (see case study on page 11). There was also a woman referred to the project who had high communication support needs. After assessment it was ascertained that she needed representative advocacy to ensure the decisions being made on her behalf by group home staff reflected what was known about her will and preferences.

### Support relationship

The foundation of support for decision making practice was the relationship between the person receiving support and the person providing support. Volunteers were instructed to approach the participant as their equal with the same rights and responsibilities. They spent time getting to know each other's circumstances, life experiences, values, needs and

<sup>6</sup> ACT Disability Aged and Carer Advocacy Service. (2013). Spectrums of support: a report on a project exploring supported decision making for people with disabilities in the ACT. Canberra: ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service.

Westwood Spice. (2015). My Life, My Decision: an independent evaluation of the Supported Decision Making Pilot. For the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, April, 2015.

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priorities. This knowledge was critical to being able to understand how and when the participant needed support with decision making. Volunteers needed to respect and value what made each participant unique by listening to their preferences and being willing to respond to what they communicated. Volunteers worked to develop mutual trust and never attempt to control the process by telling the participant what they should do, trying to convince them of one perspective or limiting their options in line with the volunteer's own priorities. Volunteers were taught they needed to ensure the support they provided was focused on developing the skills and abilities of the participant.

## CASE STUDY

John was referred through to the OVAL Project by his support coordinator. John was a young man who made many decisions in his day sometimes without thinking of consequences. John was matched with a volunteer who needed to establish trust over time because John was sick of different people coming in and out of his life. Over time the volunteer identified John could benefit from support to slow down and think about the decisions he was making before jumping into problematic situations. The volunteer continues to work with John on developing these skills.

John's finances were managed by the State Trustee's office and John wanted to discuss with them changing the way his funds were managed. John wanted more money each week and to be able to pay his own bills and rent. John's support coordinator hadn't had much experience with State Trustees and asked if the OVAL Project could support John with his contact with State Trustees. John's volunteer did not feel equipped to provide this type of support so a professional advocate from VALID supported John to prepare for the meeting and attend with him. The advocate's role was to stand beside John and assist him to communicate his wishes.

John has made many decisions since being supported by the volunteer such as moving house, getting engaged, moving in with his partner, buying a dog, commencing study and seeking treatment from professional health services. John continues to seek the support of his volunteer in making decisions about his plans to get married and have a family.

### Type of support provided by volunteers

In the OVAL Project support for decision making involved enabling participants to develop their decision making ability through the development of confidence, skills and experience. At their initial training volunteers were informed support for decision making in this context would likely involve providing participants with support to:

- identify their hopes, dreams and goals in life
- build confidence in their ability to make decisions
- gain experience making decisions
- communicate their will and preferences
- access information
- understand and experience their options
- weigh their options (e.g. pros and cons list)
- understand the possible consequences of decisions (e.g. deciding to start a new job may mean losing a portion of their disability support pension)

- build a support network, make friends, expand their informal network of support
- communicate their decision to others
- work out a plan to implement their decision and
- implement their decision.

Volunteers were provided with guidance on how to explore and provide a variety of forms of support to their NDIS participant. The OVAL Project training assisted volunteers to be able to identify and creatively find solutions to the unique support needs of their participants. It also provided volunteers with guidelines as to when to seek advice and support from their coordinator.

#### Lessons learned:

- When supporting participants who had limited previous experience making decisions there was a need to provide individual advocacy as well as support for decision making. This may have been because the person lacked confidence in communicating their decisions to others. It may also have been because their paid supporters or others in their lives were not listening to them. There were occasions when others in the person's life were putting up barriers to the person implementing their decisions.
- Volunteers benefitted from guidelines regarding when they needed to contact the coordinator for guidance in their particular circumstances. Rigid rules were not flexible enough to cover the wide range of participant and volunteer circumstances.

#### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- having the capacity to provide individual advocacy and be able to refer participants on for representative advocacy when required.
- having a coordinator who is able to provide guidance to volunteers about the boundaries of their role in specific circumstances.

#### Resource:

- Scope of Practice for OVAL Project Volunteers (see Appendix 1)

## Staffing

The OVAL Project team consisted of staff across two organisations: the Self-advocate Facilitator and the Project Coordinator for most of the duration of the project were based at VALID; and the Project Coordinator (initially), Administrative Officer and National Implications Senior Policy and Research Officer were based at OPA. Both organisations brought important knowledge and experience to the project. VALID had significant experience building the capacity of people with intellectual disability to be able to make decisions and advocate for themselves. OPA had extensive experience recruiting, training and managing volunteers in programs involving highly skilled work.

The project team initially struggled with differing opinions about roles and different communication styles made reaching consensus difficult. Building a cohesive team was hampered by working across two offices that had very different practices and cultures. However, these challenges dissipated over time.

The project team recognised it was going to be challenging running a project based in the Barwon region from Melbourne. Fortunately, the Local Engagement Officer was based in Geelong and when she eventually took over project coordination VALID opened a local office. Having a local office gave the Project Coordinator the ability to have more regular informal contact with participants and volunteers, which improved communication and enabled issues to be identified and resolved quickly.

There were significant benefits to having a person within the team who was based locally. It helped facilitate introductions to local organisations, services and agencies. The coordinator was able to recommend services and supports available to participants in the local area that volunteers may not have been aware of otherwise. Volunteers appreciated being able to meet with someone in a local office to collect information and talk about their experiences informally.

The Self-Advocate Facilitator worked alongside the coordinator to ensure the information and processes used to recruit and engage with participants were accessible and supportive for people with disability. There were significant benefits to having a team member who identified as a person with a cognitive disability. The self-advocate provided important guidance in the development of resources and training material as well as evaluation tools for participants and offered a more informal avenue for participants to engage with the project team.

The initial Project Coordinator (OPA) and National Implications Senior Policy and Research Officer both had experience establishing volunteer recruitment processes and maintaining volunteer support for decision making relationships. Their expertise ensured relevant policies and procedures were in place to mitigate potential risks to participants and volunteers in the OVAL Project. These enabled staff to identify and screen out inappropriate volunteers and establish relevant participant eligibility criteria.

An Administrative Officer was needed to assist the project coordinator to ensure compliance with the risk framework. Many of the strategies in the risk framework require the completion of documentation to mitigate and monitor risks to participants and volunteers. The volunteer recruitment process involved application forms, police checks

and reference checks. The supervision of volunteers was assisted by the completion of monthly reports which needed to be followed up. A monthly newsletter updated volunteers on upcoming training, and communicated changes to practice guidelines or policy requirements. Event coordination and logistics was also supported by the administrative officer. Administrative support was a key aspect of volunteer engagement which was needed for volunteers to feel part of the community of the project.

#### Lessons learned:

- Being physically close to volunteers, participants and stakeholders was necessary.
- Project staff having relationships with a variety of stakeholders in the local community were important and useful.
- The involvement of a self-advocate was key to ensuring information and processes were accessible and enabling for people with disability.
- Administrative support was key to volunteer engagement and compliance with the risk framework.
- The project coordinator needed to have experience recruiting, training and managing volunteers. Knowledge of support for decision making could be acquired with appropriate training.

#### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- a Program Coordinator with expertise in volunteer recruitment, training and management as well as knowledge of community resources and capacity to provide advocacy and resolve individual and systemic issues that arise. Key performance criteria would be:
  - Volunteer management experience
  - Excellent interpersonal skills
  - Strong engagement with the local community – including knowledge of community resources, services, and contacts in the disability sector
  - Capacity to engage in individual and systemic advocacy
  - Capacity to develop knowledge and skills in the practice of support for decision making
- a Self-Advocate Facilitator who would be able to facilitate regular contact with participants, support capacity development through training and peer support groups and oversee the development of resources for accessibility and relevance. Key performance criteria would be:
  - Good interpersonal skills
  - Engagement with the local community
  - Ability to engage in self-advocacy training and help facilitate peer support groups
  - Ability to provide feedback on the development of resources and promotional material
- an Administrative Officer to ensure the completion of documentation identified in the risk assessment (e.g. application forms, police checks, reference checking,

newsletters, production of training materials, monthly reporting). Key performance criteria would be:

- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills
- Excellent computer and administrative skills
- Ability to coordinate events and program logistics

## Development of project resources

The OVAL Project developed a number of promotional materials to attract volunteers and participants. Posters, fliers, information sheets and advertisements required branding to identify the OVAL Project and assist stakeholders in the Barwon region to become more familiar the project. The OVAL Project engaged a local artist Meghan Stewart-Snoad who identified as a person with autism, to develop artwork to be used on promotional materials. The artwork depicts two people engaged in decision making about variety of issues which echoes the famous Rubin's vase image. The branding and development of promotional materials took a significant amount of time.

A number of important decisions had to be made prior to finalising these documents e.g. the scope of the volunteer, a communication strategy and expected outcomes of the project. A critical path was needed to help staff identify the order of key tasks that were necessary to completing the project in the shortest amount of time. The coordinator identified these key tasks and developed monthly work plans with time frames to assist the team to manage its time most effectively. This was vitally important in the first months of the project. The Administrative Officer provided invaluable support during this first phase of the project.

### Lessons learned:

- It was valuable to engage a local person who identified as a person with disability in the process of developing project promotional materials.
- The branding and development of promotional material took a significant amount of time in the first months of the project.
- The staging of resource development was critical to not holding up the recruitment of volunteers and participants. Identifying the project critical path and subsequent work plans allowed the team to meet important time frames early in the project.

### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- allocating adequate time and resources to develop appropriate branding and promotional materials
- seeking out opportunities to engage with artists who identify as people with disability in the program region to assist with developing artwork for branding and promotional material and
- having a C  
oordinator with project management skills.

### Resources:

- Posters, fliers (see Appendix 2).

## Volunteer recruitment

The OVAL Project developed a volunteer recruitment process to assist with the recruitment and training of appropriate decision supporters. Recruiting volunteers with suitable personal attributes and skills protected participants from harm and increased the likelihood of them receiving high quality support. The volunteer recruitment process used by the OVAL Project involved five parts:

- Identification of potential volunteers (position description)
- Promotion and advertising (fliers and advertisements)
- Obtaining information (application form)
- Screening to ensure appropriateness for the role (interview, reference check and criminal record check) and
- Providing information and clarifying the role (initial training session and code of conduct).

Volunteers were recruited using a variety of means including: a community radio advertisement; a newspaper article in the Geelong Advertiser; an advertisement on the Volunteering Victoria website; posters in local community centres and libraries; visiting local organisations and community groups, including the Men's Shed and CHAOS meetings; and through hosting thirteen information sessions. All volunteers were required to have appropriate interpersonal and communication skills as well as a willingness to learn about support for decision making.

People of different ages, ethnicity, and genders became volunteers with the OVAL Project. Seventy seven people expressed interest and requested further information about becoming a volunteer with the OVAL Project. Twenty-three went on to complete an application form and engage in the reference checking process. Twenty people were accepted as OVAL Project volunteers and completed the induction training and of these eighteen went on to await matching with a participant. There were three volunteers who were deemed ineligible for the project. The presence of a criminal record and poor interpersonal communication skills were the reasons these people were not accepted into the OVAL Project. Two volunteers also chose to withdraw after receiving training in support for decision making and recognising they would find the work more demanding than they were able to do currently.

### CASE STUDY

Terry was a middle aged man who wasn't satisfied with his employment as a truck driver and was looking for a new career path. Terry learned about the OVAL Project through reading an article in his local newspaper and attending an information session at the local library. Terry had limited knowledge and experience of the needs people with cognitive impairment however he had some key qualities the project was seeking in volunteers. He was flexible, non-judgemental, fun and a good communicator. Terry successfully completed the induction training and was matched with a participant. Through Terry's work with his participant he discovered he had a passion for supporting people with disability. Since joining the project Terry commenced working for a disability organisation escorting people with disability to travel interstate and overseas. He also starting working as a support worker assisting people in the Geelong area to access the community.



### Lessons learned:

- There are community members who are interested and capable of being skilled to provide support for decision making to isolated people with disability in their local communities.
- The type of volunteer support for decision making programs need are: flexible; have strong interpersonal and communication skills; are able to reflect on their own actions; and are non-judgemental. They need to have an interest in and commitment to the rights of people with disability and be capable of assisting people with disability to make and act on their own decisions.
- The recruitment process, which involved targeted information and questioning, was designed to find volunteers with these qualities. This was critical in helping to minimise the risk of paternalism and controlling forms of support.
- A broad range of recruitment methods were required to find volunteers. Successful methods included: an article in the local newspaper; the Volunteering Victoria website; posters in the local community centres and libraries; visiting community groups and speaking; hosting information sessions and posts on social media.

### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- being strategic about finding appropriate volunteers through utilising the OVAL Project volunteer recruitment process, and
- using a wide variety of recruitment methods continuously throughout the life of the program.

### Resources:

- Volunteer Recruitment Process (See Appendix 3)
- Volunteer Position Description (See Appendix 3)
- Volunteer Interview Form (See Appendix 3)
- Volunteer Reference Check (See Appendix 3)
- Volunteer Code of Conduct (See Appendix 3)

## Participant recruitment, referral and engagement

### Participant recruitment and referral

The OVAL Project developed eligibility criteria for participants that were drawn from the aims of the project and the experience of the previous volunteer support for decision making project run by the Office of the Public Advocate.

Participant eligibility criteria ensured the safety of participants, volunteers and staff in the OVAL Project and worked to ensure the success of support relationships. The eligibility criteria included: participants must voluntarily indicate they want to participate in the project; be willing to form a relationship with their volunteer and listen to what they have to say; and be in a situation that is free of conflict or coercion. The OVAL Project has learned when potential participants are in crisis (e.g. seeking emergency accommodation) they may desperately need decision support however they are not in position to be able to establish a new relationship in their life.

The complexity of some participants' lives led to their exclusion from the project. Participants who had complicated lives involving conflict, or when they required professional advocacy were not able to be successfully matched with a volunteer. The OVAL Project has learned this type of volunteer program will meet the needs of a particular group of NDIS participants with cognitive disability who would otherwise not have decision support. Younger NDIS participants experiencing life transition have been those most seeking the support of a volunteer.

The first attempts to recruit participants into the OVAL Project involved NDIA staff calling participants directly to provide them with information about the project, ask if they would like to know more, and seek their consent to pass on their details to the project. Here is a draft script developed by the NDIS in October 2015 for NDIA staff to use during these phone calls.

Would you be interested in being considered for the OVAL project?		
Yes	Maybe	No
Do you consent to the NDIA providing the OVAL project team with your name and contact information to arrange a time to meet you?	Would you be interested in more information or attending an information session about the OVAL project to help you decide?	Thank you, so much, for your time and consideration.
Yes	Yes	Maybe
Thank you for agreeing to be considered for a place in the OVAL project. A member of the project team will be in contact with you soon.	Thank you for agreeing to attend an information session. Do you consent to the NDIA providing the OVAL project team with your name and contact information?	Thank you for agreeing to find out more about the OVAL project. Do you consent to the NDIA providing the OVAL project team with your name and contact information?
	Yes	Yes No
	A member of the OVAL project team will be in contact with you soon.	A member of the OVAL project team will be in contact with you soon. I shall mail you some information about the OVAL project.
If you have any questions about the project contact the OVAL Project on P: 1300 309 337 or E: <a href="mailto:oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au">oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au</a>		



When the project team contacted the first participants referred using this process a number seemed unclear about what the OVAL Project was and could not remember agreeing to have their details shared with the team. One local advocacy organisation was angry to have been excluded from conversations about the participants' involvement and there were important aspects of the person's situation that had not been addressed. In general, NDIA staff calling participants to seek their consent over the phone did not result in successful first contact by the project team. These first experiences clarified participants needed support to engage with the project, and the team needed more information to be able ensure this support was in place.

A participant referral process was developed by NDIA and OVAL Project to try and resolve concerns about the limited amount of information the team had when contacting participants, the limited understanding participants had about the project, the lack of clarity about whether consent had been obtained to pass on participant details, and third parties not being aware a referral had been made. The referral form developed by both parties sought to address all of these issues.

Once developed the NDIA struggled to utilise the referral form to refer participants to the project. Initially this seemed to be because the staff members working with the project were incredibly busy. Multiple staff changes made developing momentum difficult. When the community engagement team allocated a staff member to the project more time was spent communicating information to NDIA support planners and external support coordinators requesting that referral forms be submitted directly to the OVAL Project. This strategy resulted in four referrals being sent through to the project in total. The OVAL Project was also provided with contact details for support coordinators to be able to follow up emails sent by the NDIA. While the OVAL Project did attempt to follow up on these leads the team had concerns about the appropriateness of this type of direct contact and whether it breached the confidentiality of participant information.

Alongside the efforts of the community engagement team the OVAL Project attempted to recruit NDIA participants directly from service organisations that provide accommodation, support coordination and assist families. The team facilitated three information sessions in the community, had meetings with key contacts at the major disability organisations in Barwon, sent hundreds of emails and followed these up with phone calls. In spite of these significant efforts the participant recruitment processes used to date did not result in the number of participant referrals that were expected. The OVAL Project received twenty two completed referral forms for potential participants all of which were followed up. Seven potential participants were unable to meet with the Project Coordinator or progress the referral for a variety of reasons (e.g. gatekeeping by parents, a change in priority and death). Fifteen potential participants were accepted into the project and matched with a volunteer.

### Difficulty connecting with participants

There are a number of possibilities to explain why the OVAL Project found it difficult to connect with NDIS participants. Firstly, it is possible that service organisations and families were overwhelmed with the expansion of the sector and were experiencing a flood of new options for participants. The Barwon region has been targeted for a host of new and innovative research-based projects and it was possible that NDIS participants in the region

were experiencing consultation fatigue. It was also possible referrers were overwhelmed and may not have had the time to learn and share about the OVAL Project with participants.

Another possibility was that potential referrers were concerned about the potential impact of having an independent volunteer supporting the person with decision making. Service organisations or families may have been concerned about the person making decisions to change their current situation which might impact on their service provision or family life. It may be possible that because NDIS participants in the Barwon have already developed two or three support plans they may have been sufficiently linked in with community services and supports which were meeting their need for decision support. However, it was possible service organisations were making it difficult for the OVAL Project to be able to reach potential participants out of fear that independent support could result in the person wanting to change service provider. An interesting insight the OVAL Project has gained is that of all the different stakeholders contacted in relation to participant recruitment, independent support coordinators<sup>7</sup> have been the most interested in referring participants.

## CASE STUDY

Katie was a young lady who was referred to the project by her support coordinator twice. The first contact the project had with Katie she was unwilling to engage. Katie lived in supported accommodation with 3 housemates and was extremely shy. On our second meeting with Katie she would whisper and not look at staff when engaging in conversation. Katie was having issues with the programs she was attending outside the home, and had been reluctant to get up in the mornings and go. This led to a discussion with her volunteer exploring what she liked, what she wanted to do and her friendships. From these discussions Katie started enquiring about another service provider for her activities. Katie was supported by her volunteer to explore her options and she eventually made the decision to change provider. Not long after changing provider the volunteer started seeing significant changes in Katie's confidence. She was not as shy anymore, she engaged in more eye contact during conversations and cut her hair shorter! Katie and her volunteer are now engaged in pre planning for her NDIS plan, and they have discussed a number of goals Katie wants to include in her next plan including further education, employment and travel training with the goal of travelling independently. Katie and her volunteer are also going to meet with health services in early 2017 to develop a care plan in case she is admitted to hospital.

## Support Coordination

One barrier to progressing participant referrals was support coordinators running out of allocated hours to facilitate a meeting between the participant and the OVAL Project. The OVAL Project experienced two support coordinators (from different organisations) making referrals and then being unable to engage further because they had used all of their allocated hours for the year. They explained the time it took to establish the relationship in

<sup>7</sup> Independent refers to support coordinators who were not employed by the same organisation that provides the participants' accommodation and/or day services.

the earlier part of the year meant they had no hours left to visit and support the participant in the final six months.

## Participant experience

Participants largely reported<sup>8</sup> they enjoyed spending time with their volunteers. Many made really strong connections and friendships with their volunteers. Participants engaged in a number of decisions which included:

- Pursuing further education,
- Purchasing furniture for a new home,
- Understanding the need for medical interventions,
- Seeking new employment,
- Changing service providers,
- Re-establishing communication with estranged family members,
- NDIA plan review,
- Obtaining a companion card,
- Purchasing a pet,
- Moving house,
- Deciding whether to move in with a partner,
- Exploring becoming a mother,
- Reengaging in activities after a negative experience and
- Seeking medical treatment.

The OVAL Project learned participants value the involvement of a volunteer as a friend who is there for them and does not tell them what to do. Volunteers were viewed differently to paid support staff who were perceived to be on the side of the participant. Participants thought of the relationship as a friendship where in the course of spending time together decisions emerged and were discussed. The perceived informality of the relationship on the side of the participant belies the complexity of the support provided by the volunteer. Volunteers frequently acted intentionally to offer the person support but when done in the context of a support relationship characterised by equality, respect, trust and knowledge of each other this support was put into place relatively seamlessly.

## Lessons learned:

- It took considerable effort to identify and engage with isolated participants. The project initially focused its efforts on the recruitment and training of volunteers believing they would be more difficult to find, however identifying and engaging with participants proved more challenging. Given this experience it is recommended future programs recruit participants early and target volunteer recruitment in response to the needs of participants.
- A formal referral process was needed to ensure relevant participant information was available to OVAL Project staff to ensure they understood the participant's needs and how to ensure their own safety during the first visit. It was also critical to ensure

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<sup>8</sup> Participants had regular informal contact with the support coordinator and participant engagement officer. Formal participant feedback was obtained by Deakin University.

participants were told about the project and consented to their information being shared.

- The OVAL Project fostered relationships with all of the disability organisations in Geelong but had limited success receiving referrals from organisations providing participants with direct services. Support coordination services seemed to be able to identify participants in need of decision support and had the requisite knowledge of the person to be able to provide necessary referral information.
- When potential participants were in crisis (e.g. seeking emergency accommodation) they may have desperately needed support with their decision making however they were not in position to be able to establish a new relationship in their life.
- Support for decision making was attempted with a participant who had high communication support needs. This match failed because of the expectations of the volunteer and the needs of the participant. If future support for decision making programs explore supporting people with high communication support needs it would be important to recruit and train volunteers with this expectation. This type of volunteer would need to be curious, creative, non-judgemental and willing to spend significant periods of time exploring getting to know the person and the way they communicate.

#### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- using eligibility criteria to identify appropriate participants
- recruiting participants early and targeting volunteer recruitment in response to the needs of participants
- using a formal referral process to ensure the risks to staff when meeting potential participants are mitigated (see risk assessment)
- establishing partnerships with support coordination services who have existing relationships with eligible participants who may be in need of decision support and,
- intentionally recruiting volunteers to work with participants who have high communication support needs.

#### Resources:

- Eligibility Criteria (see Appendix 4)
- OVAL Project Referral Form (see Appendix 4)
- Participant Application Form (plain language) (see Appendix 4)
- Participant Decision Making Assessment (see Appendix 4)

## Volunteer training and support

### Training

The OVAL Project provided a full day of induction training which covered a variety of topics including: community views about disability; human rights and disability; good communication; the support for decision making model of practice<sup>9</sup> – the support relationship, getting to know each other, exploring options, identifying and providing support, communicating and implementing decisions; and the NDIS. Volunteers were asked to do a journaling exercise where they reflected on their own experiences being supported with decision making and to what extent it influenced how they wanted to provide support to others. The project team used a variety of mediums including video, role playing, print media, PowerPoint presentations, case studies and the training manual to communicate information to the volunteers. At the conclusion of the day volunteers were given the opportunity to ask questions about the scope and expectations of the role.

Given the amount of information covered in the induction training additional information was provided at a later date on the NDIS support planning process. A representative from the NDIA explained how volunteers could provide their participant with support to prepare for an upcoming plan review. Once volunteers had met and started to establish a relationship with their participant they were able to contextualise what supporting the participant in regard to reviewing their support plan might mean. If the OVAL Project had more time further education would have been provided on ethical issues for volunteers, unpacking the process of support for decision making in more detail and exploring local services, organisations, and agencies of interest to participants.

### Support

Volunteers were provided support through a variety of means. The Project Coordinator made regular contact with volunteers on the phone to touch base and check on their progress. Volunteers were given the opportunity to meet with other volunteers at training sessions, formal debriefing sessions and informal social events such as the project Christmas party. Volunteers expressed they benefitted from talking with staff and other volunteers about the services, supports and processes they had encountered in their work with their participants. The sharing of information and experiences was helpful in working through issues and obstacles volunteers and participants were experiencing. Volunteers also noted that meeting with other volunteers helped them feel supported and part of a larger community of like-minded people.

Volunteers were also asked to formally document their contact with participants and send it in a progress report to the administrative officer each month. The progress report outlined when volunteers met with their participant, how much time they spent together and what they did while together. The report asked volunteers to nominate the amount of time they spent engaging in various aspects of the support for decision making model of practice. For example, they were asked to advise how much time they spent getting to know each, exploring options, providing support, and/or communicating decisions with others.

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<sup>9</sup> See page 27 for more information on the model of practice.

### Lessons learned:

- Volunteers came to the OVAL Project with varying levels of personal experience interacting with people with disability. Some volunteers had little if any experience of communicating and developing a relationship with someone with cognitive impairment. Training for this type of volunteer program needs to be structured to cater for community members with no prior knowledge or experience of disability.
- Volunteers needed to receive training on the documentation they were required to complete for the project (e.g. progress report). Emailing the reporting tool with an explanation and worked example was not adequate.
- Opportunities for both informal and formal debriefing were essential for volunteers to improve their practice and feel supported.

### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- structuring training for people with no previous experience in supporting a person with disability. Training should provide information in a variety of formats and involve the opportunity for reflective discussion and the development of relationships with other volunteers.
- providing ongoing training to volunteers on topics such as: identifying and resolving ethical issues; unpacking the process of support for decision making in more detail; and exploring local services, organisations, and agencies of interest to participants.
- providing volunteers with opportunities for formal and informal debriefing with program staff and between volunteers.

### Resources:

- Volunteer Guide on Providing Support for Decision Making (see accompanying USB)
- Training Schedule (see Appendix 5)
- Training PowerPoint presentations (see attached USB)
- Volunteer Progress Report (see Appendix 5)



## Model of practice

The OVAL Project developed its model of practice based on current research on supported decision making and the experience of previous trials of support for decision making in Australia.<sup>10</sup> The model needed to contain a significant amount of information in a format that was accessible to people with no previous experience interacting with people with cognitive disability. In practice people's decision making is often not a clean, linear process and the OVAL Project developed a model that reflected the fluidity of real life that could accommodate the diverse range of experiences volunteers would have supporting each unique participant.

The support for decision making model used by the OVAL Project has four phases:

- 1) Getting to know each other;
- 2) Exploring options;
- 3) Identifying and providing support; and
- 4) Communicating and implementing decisions.

The first and ongoing phase in the model of practice is the volunteer and participant getting to know each other. The second phase is supporting the participant to explore possibilities and options before making any decisions. The third phase is identifying the support the participant needs to make a decision and providing it when necessary (or finding others who can provide it). The fourth phase is supporting the participant to communicate their decision to others and in certain instances to implement it.

At the volunteer induction training volunteers were provided with training on all four aspects of the model and provided with a manual outlining everything discussed in the training. Feedback from the training session indicated volunteers found the training useful and they felt equipped to use the model when supporting their participant with decision making. Volunteer monthly reporting indicated volunteers were engaging in various aspects of the model moving between the phases as required. Some support relationships progressed beyond getting to know each other quickly, while others took time to build the requisite respect and trust. A debriefing session held on 23 November 2016 indicated volunteers had been using the model and found it helpful in guiding various aspects of the support they were providing. The needs of participants varied significantly (as expected) which meant volunteers spent significantly longer in certain phases depending on the needs of the

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Watson, J., & Joseph, R. (2011). People with severe to profound intellectual disabilities leading lives they prefer through supported decision making: listening to those rarely heard. A guide for supporters. A training package developed by Scope. Melbourne: Scope.

Wallace, M. (2012). Evaluation of the Supported Decision Making Project. Office of the Public Advocate (SA), November, 2012.

ACT Disability Aged and Carer Advocacy Service. (2013). Spectrums of support: a report on a project exploring supported decision making for people with disabilities in the ACT. Canberra: ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service.

WAIS Supported Decision Making resources. Retrieved from: <http://waindividualisedservices.org.au/wais-publications-and-resources/>

Bigby, C., Whiteside, M. & Douglas, J. (2015). Supporting People with Cognitive Disabilities in Decision Making – Processes and Dilemmas. Melbourne: Living with Disability Research Centre, La Trobe University.

Westwood Spice. (2015). My Life, My Decision: an independent evaluation of the Supported Decision Making Pilot. For the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, April, 2015.

Burgen, B. (2016). Reflections on the Victorian of the Public Advocate supported decision making pilot project. Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, DOI: 10.1080/23297018.2016.1199969

Watson, J. (2016). Assumptions of Decision Making Capacity: The Role Supporter Attitudes Play in the Realisation of Article 12 for People with Severe or Profound Intellectual Disability, 5:6, DOI: 10.3390/laws5010006



participant. For example, one participant had acquired significant physical disabilities after a stroke that impaired his ability to get out of his home and explore his decision options. This volunteer spent significant amounts of time supporting him to access the internet to find alternative accommodation options and they visited places together. Another participant was very clear about her decisions but encountered a large number of environmental barriers to be being able to implement them. This volunteer supported the participant to communicate her decisions to others and to work through how to break down the barriers to implementing her decisions.

#### Lessons learned:

- Community members with little experience working with people with cognitive disabilities gained confidence in their ability to support NDIS participants through receiving training in the support for decision making model of practice.
- Volunteers reported they found the model helpful in guiding the support they were providing.
- Practice looked very different for different participant and volunteer pairs.
- Volunteers were flexible in the way they applied the model to their practice moving between various phases as required by the participant.

#### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- using the model of practice developed by the OVAL Project.

#### Resources:

- Model of Practice (see Appendix 6)

## Participant training and support

### Training

The OVAL Project ran three training sessions for participants during the project on: support for decision making; rights; and self-advocacy. Much of the material used was derived from the expertise of VALID as an advocacy organisation that regularly runs training for people with intellectual disability on rights, citizenship and self-advocacy. The training on support for decision making focused on what decision making is and why it is important. It framed decision making as a right and important aspect of controlling one's own life. The training session used videos developed by Speak Out Tasmania and Western Australia's Individualised Services (WAIIS) and written material from VALID. During the training session on rights a few participants became emotional remembering experiences of discrimination and project staff needed to be available to offer these participants support. The session moved people through these challenging experiences and ended by focusing on the ways in which they were developing their own ability to speak out against discrimination and exercise their rights as citizens and self-advocates. Participants provided very positive feedback on the material developed by VALID.

### Support

Project participants were supported by the Self-Advocate Facilitator and the Project Coordinator. The self-advocate made contact with participants to informally check on how things were progressing with their volunteer. This allowed the self-advocate to identify any early signs of problems which were passed on to the coordinator to follow up. Participants tended to contact the coordinator if they were experiencing issues more broadly in their lives. Sometimes the contact related to their volunteer and decision making but at other times contact was more broadly about changes to their lives which they wanted to share with someone as well as their volunteer. The capacity of the Project Coordinator to provide this type of support became limited as the number of participants in the project increased.

### Lessons learned:

- As participant recruitment took longer than expected the project was unable to provide participant training until fairly late into the life of the project.
- Participant feedback after the completion of two training modules on rights and self-advocacy were positive for those who completed them. However, a few participants had to leave part way through the second module. Two sessions in a row involved the provision of too much information in one afternoon. It would have been preferable to make the training sessions shorter and run over a series of weeks. This would have created more opportunities for participants to spend time together and learn from one another. For future programs, if time permits, trialling this alternative format may be beneficial.
- Participants received regular phone contact from the Self-Advocate Facilitator. They also sought out contact with the Project Coordinator if issues arose. Participants expressed they felt well supported by project staff.

### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- using the resources developed by VALID to build the capacity of participants to know their rights, be able to advocate for themselves and make decisions;  
and
- participants having the opportunity to engage in education and training as early as possible when joining the program.

### Resources:

- VALID training material on rights, responsibilities and self-advocacy (see Appendix 7)

## Participant and volunteer matching process

The OVAL Project engaged in a structured process when it matched eligible participants with trained volunteers. The use of a structured process increased the likelihood of supportive relationships forming between participants and volunteers that were necessary for successful support for decision making. The matching process used by the OVAL Project involved four steps:

- collecting and considering relevant information and using it to identify potential matches,
- discussing a potential match with both parties,
- facilitating an initial meeting, and
- evaluating the success of the match and taking appropriate steps in response.

The project coordinator respected the preferences of participants and volunteers when matching pairs. Participants voiced preferences such as having a volunteer in a certain age group and gender. Finding volunteers with similar interests to participants led to an ease with communication and the formation of strong connections.

### Lessons learned:

- A robust matching process was central to the success of the OVAL Project.
- Participant and volunteer matching was based on the complex interaction of a number of factors which included:
  - personal information (e.g. age, gender, disability, location)
  - preferences (e.g. for a participant to work with someone in a particular age group)
  - interests that may be shared (e.g. love of animals or football team)
  - skills that may be useful (e.g. a participant wanting someone who has a specific type of experience)
  - level of support the volunteer is comfortable to provide (e.g. a volunteer with professional experience may be more comfortable supporting a participant with complex communication needs)
  - type of support the participant needs (e.g. support to explore a specific experience)
  - availability and
  - personality type

### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- a structured approach to participant and volunteer matching which considers the complex interaction of the factors involved.

### Resources:

- Participant and Volunteer Matching Process (see Appendix 8)

## Project governance

The OVAL Project benefitted from the wealth of expertise steering committee members brought to our regular meetings. The Steering Committee included:

- Judy Huett Chairperson of Our Voice Committee (lived experience of cognitive disability) supported by Julie Butler
- Professor Christine Bigby from La Trobe University (support for decision making)
- Mary Mallett from DANA (advocacy)
- Genevieve Nihill from VCAT (decision making in the context of the law) and Representative from NDIA (National Disability Insurance Scheme)

The Steering Committee provided invaluable guidance in the establishment of the scope of the project and the development of recruitment processes and resources. The committee met on two occasions early in the project to provide advice on the development of participant and volunteer eligibility criteria, branding and the model of practice. The third meeting provided guidance on the development of a more formal referral process when concerns were raised about participant privacy of information and ambiguity of the consent process. The steering committee provided a variety of suggestions to resolve the challenge of engaging with prospective participants and engaging with the NDIA as a large organisation experiencing significant change. The advice provided contributed significantly to resolving challenges faced by staff engaged in the overseeing a new model of practice.

### Lessons learned:

- The OVAL Project significantly benefitted from the advice, guidance and expertise of steering committee members.
- Advice was of greatest assistance in the establishment phase of the project and later when challenges became evident in the implementation of the model of practice.
- It was helpful to time meetings according to the need of the project rather than an arbitrary amount of time.

### Implications:

Future support for decision making programs would benefit from:

- the support of an advisory group with expertise in a variety of areas which include support for decision making, lived experience of cognitive disability, advocacy, and decision making in the context of the law and the NDIA.

## Risk assessment

The OVAL Project has identified the key risks which will need to be addressed in future volunteer-based support for decision-making initiatives. The most significant risk to volunteers and participants is program staff being unable to provide adequate supervision across large geographical areas. The NDIA will need to take seriously the capacity of any future program to informally and formally monitor the relationships between participants and volunteers. The risk assessment over the page details the strategies the OVAL Project employed to successfully mitigate these risks within the Geelong area and the resources and action needed (e.g. a policy on transporting participants) to ensure volunteers and participants know how to respond if critical incidents occur.

# Risk Management Assessment for Volunteer Support for Decision-making Programs

November, 2016

## Aims

The aims of this risk management assessment are to:

- identify risks to participants, volunteers and employees in future support for decision-making programs that utilise volunteers;
- encourage quality service delivery and improve contingency planning for dealing with risks and their impact.

## Principles

Operating principles that support this risk management policy are summarised below.

The program will actively:

- identify and assess all potential or real risks;
- ensure risk management becomes part of planning & management of events, training and community visits;
- provide staff and volunteers with the policies and procedures necessary to manage risks;
- encourage staff and volunteers to identify report and manage risks appropriately;
- ensure staff and where relevant volunteers are made aware of risks and how to manage them; and
- monitor our strategic risk profile and implement a continuous improvement approach to risk management.

## Terms

Two terms that are used in this procedure are:

- **Hazard** is anything (including work practices or procedures) that has the potential to harm the health or safety of a person.

Hazards can arise from such things as the workplace environment, the use of equipment, poor work design or practices, inappropriate management systems and procedures, and human behaviour.

- **Risk** is the chance of something happening that will have a negative impact on the health or safety of a person.

## Keys of terms used in Tables

**Ranking (R)** is based on a combination of the:

- a. **(L) Likelihood** – of the risk occurring; and the
- b. **(C) Consequences** – if the risk occurred.

### (R) Ranking – Level of Risk Key

- **(E) Extreme** – these are unacceptable risks and must be eliminated.
- **(H) High** – these are borderline risks and must be eliminated or have stringent controls in place.
- **(T) Tolerable** – these are acceptable risks and should be looked at after attending to the high-risk issues – these need a control in place.
- **(N) Negligible** – these are insignificant risks and may be ignored in the planning phase.

## Assessing risk and ranking key

Use the Risk Ranking Matrix, by plotting the—**A. Probability (likelihood)** of the occurrence vs. the—**B. Consequences** of the occurrence.

Where these have the following meanings and ratings:

### A. LIKELIHOOD of the hazard occurring

**Rare (A)** = Likely to occur in very exceptional circumstances – 1

**Unlikely (U)** = Could occur at some time – 2

**Possible (P)** = May occur at some time – 3

**Likely (L)** = Will probably occur at least once – 4

**Almost Certain (A)** = Is expected to occur in most circumstances – 5

### B. CONSEQUENCES / Impact of the risk/hazard on organisation and/or people

**Insignificant (I)** = No impact on organisation / no personal injury that requires treatment e.g. scratch – 1

**Minor Injury (Min)** = Minor impact on organisation/Loss or issue easily resolved with no lasting impact / injury requiring minor first aid – 2

**Moderate Injury (Mod)** = Moderate loss e.g. could put funding at risk / injury requiring hospital / emergency treatment – 3

**Major Injury (Maj)** = Major impact on organisation &/or finances e.g. loss of grant / multiple injuries or serious injuries requiring hospitalisation – 4

**Catastrophe (C)** = Serious impact causing loss of a major funding source &/or irreparable damage to organisation / injuries resulting in death(s) – 5

Risk Ranking Matrix					
Likelihood = Consequence	Rare 1	Unlikely 2	Possible 3	Likely 4	Almost Certain 5
Insignificant Injury – 1	1 Negligible	2 Negligible	3 Low	4 Low	5 Tolerable
Minor Injury – 2	2 Negligible	4 Low	6 Tolerable	8 Tolerable	10 High
Moderate Injury – 3	3 Low	6 Tolerable	9 Tolerable	12 High	15 Extreme
Major Injury – 4	4 Low / Tol.	8 Tolerable	12 High / Ext	16 Extreme	20 Extreme
Catastrophe – 5	5 Tol. /High	10 High	15 Extreme	20 Extreme	25 Extreme

## Level of risk ranking

The assessed risk level will determine what ACTION is required for each risk or hazard.

- **15 to 25 = Extreme** – these are unacceptable risks and must be eliminated.
- **10 to 14 = High** – these are borderline risks and must be eliminated or have stringent controls in place.
- **5 to 9 = Tolerable** – these are acceptable risks and should be looked at after attending to all of the high-risk issues – these need a control in place.
- **1 to 4 = Negligible** – these are insignificant risks and may be ignored in the planning phase

If a risk or hazard is ranked as High or Extreme the relevant staff member should take appropriate action, including developing strategies to minimise risks, documenting these & informing/training staff and volunteers on changes to practices.

# Volunteer Support for Decision Making Program Risk Assessment – 2 November 2016

L - Likelihood C - Consequences R - Risk Ranking

1. RISKS TO PARTICIPANT		L	C	R	Resources/Action Needed
<b>Potential Risks</b>					
1.1	<p><b>Personal information shared inappropriately</b></p> <p><b>Strategies IN PLACE to minimise the risks</b></p> <p><b>Personal details about potential participants and their key supporters given to volunteer program without their knowledge</b></p> <p>The program has a referral process whereby the participant is asked whether they consent to have their personal details provided to the program.</p> <p>The program will seek and only accept referrals from agencies who are able to engage in a referral process that respects the importance of participant consent and the privacy of their information.</p>	L	Min	8 Tol	
1.2	<p><b>Participant or volunteer unhappy with their match</b></p> <p><b>Participant or volunteer communicates to the program they are unhappy matched with their volunteer or participant.</b></p> <p>Relevant information from participants and volunteers is collected to assist staff to match participants with volunteers who share similar interests.</p> <p>Program staff use "Participant and Volunteer Matching Process" guideline when matching participants. The guideline outlines a variety of factors that are to be considered when matching the participant with a volunteer.</p> <p>Participant needs and volunteer skills are assessed during the recruitment process.</p> <p>Volunteers undergo training in the support for decision making model of practice and interpersonal communication skills such as active listening</p> <p>The program self-advocate contacts participants once a month to check on their satisfaction in the program (including working with their volunteer).</p> <p>Volunteers are required to send a monthly progress report to the program updating on their progress getting to know the participant and other aspects of the support for decision making model.</p> <p>When welcomed into the program participants and volunteers given verbal and written information on how to make a formal complaint about any aspect of the program.</p>	P	I	3 Low	<p>Participant referral process which requires participant consent/assent to provide information to program.</p> <p>"Participant and Volunteer Matching Process" guideline</p> <p>Volunteer induction training</p> <p>Self-advocate phone calls</p> <p>Volunteer monthly progress report</p> <p>Complaints policy and procedure in plain language</p>

<p><b>1.3 Inappropriate relationship</b></p>	<p><b>An inappropriate relationship develops between the participant and volunteer (e.g. dependency, financially exploitative, sexual)</b></p> <p>The program conducts a criminal record check on potential volunteers and will not accept a volunteer with a relevant criminal history that may place a participant at risk.</p> <p>Program staff have regular contact with volunteers and participants to identify any issues of concern to either party. Informal conversations as well as structured debriefing and reporting provide opportunities to identify the start of an inappropriate relationship between the participants and volunteers.</p> <p>The program conducts training for participants and volunteers on "the support relationship" and what they can reasonably expect from the other party. The volunteer training manual provides written guidance.</p> <p>Participants and volunteers are given verbal and written information on how to make a formal complaint about any aspect of the program.</p>	L	Mod	12 High	<p>Volunteer recruitment process – criminal record check</p> <p>Informal conversations</p> <p>Structured debriefing</p> <p>Participant capacity building training</p> <p>Volunteer training</p> <p>Volunteer training manual</p> <p>Complaints policy and procedure in plain language</p>
<p><b>1.4 Participant is unwell</b></p>	<p><b>Participant becomes unwell when out in the community with volunteer or program staff.</b></p> <p>All volunteers and program staff are familiar with the policy on "Participant Safety" which outlines what to do if out in the community and the participant becomes unwell.</p> <p>As stated in the policy every participant and volunteer has an emergency contact number that can be called if they become unwell.</p> <p>Program staff collect relevant information on participant health when speaking with support staff and provide volunteers with information when appropriate and necessary (e.g. participant who is diabetic needs to take insulin and jelly beans on all outings)</p>	L	Mod	12 High	<p>Policy on "Participant Safety"</p> <p>Emergency contact details for participants and volunteers</p> <p>Relevant health information collected on participants</p>

<b>1.5 Participant is aggressive/abusive</b>	<b>Participant becomes verbally or physically aggressive/abusive with a volunteer or staff member.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>10 High</b>	Verbal
	Any potential participant with a history of aggressive/abusive behaviour is not eligible to participate in the program (criteria - behaviour that would place a volunteer at risk). If coordinator identifies any risk of challenging behaviour when assessing the eligibility of the participant they would examine whether they could be mitigated. One successful strategy used to mitigate the risk of challenging behaviour was having a staff member present during all visits with a volunteer. All volunteers and staff are aware of what to do if a participant becomes aggressive having read the program policy on "Volunteer and Staff Safety". Volunteer safety is discussed at Volunteer induction training	<b>P</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>6 Tol</b>	Physical Participant eligibility criteria Risk assessment tool
<b>1.6 Participant displays challenging behaviour</b>	<b>Participant displays challenging behaviour while with volunteer or staff member.</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>4 Low</b>	Policy on "Volunteer and Staff Safety" Volunteer safety discussed at induction training
	Any potential participant with a history of aggressive/abusive behaviour is not eligible to participate in the program (criteria - behaviour that would place a volunteer at risk). If coordinator identifies any risk of challenging behaviour when assessing the eligibility of the participant they would examine whether they could be mitigated. Any participant who is known to exhibit challenging behaviour must have an appropriate support plan in place to be able to participate in the program. For example, a participant who had a tendency to call emergency services when anxious needed to be linked in with mental health services and have a mental health support plan to be able to remain in the program. Program staff must familiarise the volunteer with the support plan and any strategies they need to be aware of prior to meeting the participant. If the volunteer was not willing or able to follow the support plan they would not be matched with the participant.				Participant eligibility criteria Risk assessment tool Support plan in place for participants with challenging behaviour

1.7 Participant is verbally or physically assaulted	Participant is verbally or physically assaulted by another participant, a volunteer, staff member or community member.	U	Min	4 Low		
<b>By another participant:</b>						
From initial interview/assessment program staff are aware if any participant needs support to interact with others. Participants that need additional support are required to have paid support staff with them at training/debriefing sessions.		Initial interview with participants				
Staff monitor participant interactions closely and act strategically when seating participants at training/debriefing sessions.		Training and debriefing sessions with volunteers and program staff				
Where a participant becomes disruptive or inappropriate staff are to intervene immediately. Staff are to discuss the participant's behaviour in private and advise them they will be asked to leave if their behaviour continues.						
Staff will ask a participant behaving aggressively to leave the training/debriefing session and if necessary accompany them out.						
It is important that staff act in accordance with the Staff Safety policy when managing incidents with participants. Staff need to be aware of the importance of their own safety in managing challenging situations with participants.		Policy on "Staff Safety"				
<b>By volunteer/staff member:</b>		P	Mod	9 Tol		
All volunteers go through a rigorous recruitment process involving interviewing, reference checking and a criminal record check.		Volunteer recruitment process Policy on "Volunteer Recruitment and Training"				
Volunteers and staff members sign a code of conduct and receive training outlining appropriate behaviour and conduct as a program volunteer/staff member.		Code of conduct Volunteer induction training				
If any staff member observes any inappropriate communication or behaviour that raises concern about risks to participants or staff these concerns should be acted upon. The program policy on "Participant Safety" outlines specific strategies including speaking with the volunteer/staff member about inappropriate behaviour, providing education and terminating the volunteer/staff from the program if necessary.		Policy on "Participant Safety"				

L - Likelihood C - Consequences R - Risk Ranking

2. RISKS TO VOLUNTEER		L	C	R	Resources/Action Needed
<b>Potential Risks</b>	<b>Strategies IN PLACE to minimise the risks</b>				
<b>2.1 Volunteer is concerned about the participant's welfare and/or their own welfare</b>	<p><b>Volunteer is concerned about the participant's welfare or their own welfare during their visits.</b></p> <p>Program staff meet with participants and their support staff prior to acceptance into the program. Staff use a risk assessment tool to identify if there are any risks to the safety of the participant or volunteer/staff. Strategies to mitigate the risks are discussed with the participant, volunteer and support staff.</p> <p>The volunteer receives direction on how to respond if they are concerned about their own or the participant's welfare through relevant policy documents (Participant Safety and Volunteer/Staff Safety Policies) and the volunteer induction training.</p> <p>Volunteers have contact details for program staff and the participant's emergency contact in the case of an emergency.</p> <p>Volunteers are aware of the occupational health and safety policy and complaints procedure if they want to formalise their concerns.</p> <p>Volunteers receive training on and have the opportunity to discuss the scope of their role at induction training. They receive written explanation about their role in the Volunteer Training Manual. Program staff provide volunteers with guidance as to when it is appropriate to support the participant to advocate for themselves and when professional advocates may be needed.</p>	L	Min	8 Tol	Participant's welfare
		U	I	2 Neg	Volunteer's welfare
					Risk assessment tool
					Policy on "Participant Safety" Policy on "Volunteer and Staff Safety" Volunteer induction training Participant interview Emergency contact details
					Program complaints procedure Policy on "Occupational Health and Safety"
					Volunteer training manual – scope of the volunteer role.

2.2 Volunteer is aggressive or abusive	Volunteer becomes verbally or physically aggressive or abusive with a participant or staff member.	U	Mod	6 Tol	
	<p>Volunteers with a criminal history of aggressive/abusive behaviour are ineligible to become volunteers in the program according to volunteer recruitment policy and eligibility criteria.</p> <p>If program staff identify any concerning behaviour during the recruitment process (interview, reference checking) they will be closely monitored during induction training. If concerns persist after volunteer training, the program manager will communicate the program is not appropriate for the volunteer and direct them to another more appropriate volunteering opportunity.</p> <p>All volunteers sign a code of conduct and are aware that any breach in the code of conduct will result in disciplinary action and may result in the termination of their role.</p> <p>Participants are contacted regularly by the program self-advocate who asks about their experience working with the volunteer.</p>				<p>Criminal record check Volunteer eligibility criteria</p> <p>Interview Reference checking</p> <p>Code of conduct</p> <p>Participants have regular informal contact with program staff</p>

<p><b>2.3 Volunteer is verbally or physically assaulted</b></p>	<p><b>Volunteer is verbally or physically assaulted by the participant, a staff member or community member.</b></p>	<p>P</p>	<p>Min</p>	<p>6 Tol</p>	<p>Volunteer</p>
		<p>U</p>	<p>Mod</p>	<p>6 Tol</p>	<p>Participant</p>
	<p>Any history of aggression and/or challenging behaviour by the participant is thoroughly explored with the participant and their support staff during an initial interview prior to a participant's acceptance into the program.</p>				<p>Initial interview with participant and support staff</p>
	<p>Participants with a history of aggressive/abusive behaviour are not eligible to participate in the program</p>				<p>Participant eligibility criteria</p>
	<p>If program staff identify any potential for challenging behaviour they would assess the risks. A strategy used to mitigate the potential of challenging behaviour was having a staff member present during all visits with a volunteer.</p>				<p>Risk assessment tool</p>
	<p>Volunteers have read the policy on "Volunteer and Staff Safety" which explains how to respond if they are verbally or physically assaulted while participating in the program. This is also discussed at the volunteer induction training.</p>				<p>Policy on "Volunteer and Staff Safety"</p>
	<p>Volunteers have contact details for program staff and the participant's emergency contact in the case of an emergency.</p>				<p>Volunteer induction training</p> <p>Emergency contact details</p>
	<p>Volunteers are aware of the incident reporting policy and procedures.</p>				<p>Policy and procedure on "Incident Reporting"</p>

2.4 Car accident	Volunteer/staff member is in a car accident with participant, volunteer and or staff member	P	Mod	9 ToI	
	<p>The program encourages volunteers and participants to use forms of transport that build the capacity of the participant to be able to access the community independently where this is appropriate (e.g. walking, catching the bus/train).</p> <p>Any staff member or volunteer intending to drive participants must have a valid driver's license, third party comprehensive vehicle insurance and be able to confirm their car is properly maintained.</p>				<p>Need to check volunteers have a valid driver's license, third party comprehensive insurance and car is maintained.</p>
	<p>Staff provide any volunteer intending to drive with the program 'Transporting Participants Policy' which encourages safe driving practices such as following the road rules and wearing a seat belt.</p> <p>Any accident involving volunteers, staff members and/or participants will need to be reported as an incident in accordance with the Transporting Participants policy.</p>				<p>Policy on 'Transporting Participants'.</p> <p>Incident report</p>

L - Likelihood C - Consequences R - Risk Ranking

3. RISKS TO PROGRAM STAFF		L	C	R	Resources/Action Needed
<b>Potential Risks</b>					
<b>3.1 Emotional burnout</b>	<p><b>Strategies IN PLACE to minimise the risks</b></p> <p><b>Program staff may burn out from long hours and other pressures.</b></p> <p>Program staff have regular supervision and informal debriefing with manager. Timesheets notify manager of work hours and will be discussed if excessive. Team meetings allow staff to discuss workload pressures and develop strategies to resolve them.</p>	L	Mod	12 High	Staff supervision Team meetings
<b>3.2 Safety issues from office environment</b>	<p><b>Program staff experience health and safety issues from working in an office environment.</b></p> <p>Program staff receive training in Occupational Health and Safety. Program staff assess and report hazards or unsafe equipment and are familiar with the Occupational, Health and Safety Policy.</p>	L	Min	8 Tol	Risk assessment tool Policy in "Occupational, Health and Safety"
<b>3.4 Safety issues when meeting potential participants</b>	<p>Program staff discuss OHS issues at team meetings and follow up agenda items raised to ensure action is taken on reported hazards and concerns.</p> <p><b>Program staff feel unsafe when meeting potential participants who are unknown.</b></p> <p>Program staff will not meet potential participants without relevant information contained on program referral form. Before meeting participants risk will be assessed by speaking with the person's key contacts to determine whether there are any safety issues. Program staff will always have a second person with them to meet potential participants (e.g. the person's support coordinator, another program staff member) Program staff will initially endeavour to meet potential participants in public places such as cafes, libraries. The program will not accept potential participants with a history of violence or challenging behaviour that would place a volunteer or staff member at risk.</p>	L	Min	8 Tol	Participant referral form Risk assessment tool Participant eligibility criteria

L - Likelihood C - Consequences R - Risk Ranking

4. RISKS TO THE PROGRAM		L	C	R	Action
<b>Potential Risks</b>					
<b>4.1 Volunteer acts outside the scope of their role</b>	<p><b>Strategies IN PLACE to minimise the risks</b></p> <p><b>Volunteer acts outside the scope of their role.</b></p> <p>All volunteers receive training (induction and ongoing) and written documentation that clearly outlines the scope of their role (volunteer training manual).            Every participant and their support staff receive information about the program which outlines the scope of the volunteer role. During first contact and the initial interview there are opportunities for participants and staff to ask questions and clarify the boundaries of the volunteer role.            Program staff are in regular contact with volunteers and participants informally monitoring the support relationship and work of volunteers.            Volunteers complete monthly reports that flag potential concerns regarding volunteers moving outside of the scope of their role.            Support staff who work with participants in other organisations also have regular contact with program staff and can report any perceived misconduct to the team.</p>	A	I	5 Tol	<p>Volunteer induction training            Volunteer training manual            Initial interview with participant and support staff            Informal contact with volunteers and participants            Volunteer monthly report</p>
<b>4.2 Program unable to recruit volunteers or participants</b>	<p><b>The program is unable to recruit appropriate volunteers and participants.</b></p> <p>The program has volunteer and participant recruitment strategies that outline a range of approaches including: broad community engagement and promotion, the use of multiple forms of media and the development of strong links with key disability service organisations in the region.            Job descriptions for program staff highlight the importance of staff being proactive in the ongoing recruitment and training of volunteers and identification of potential participants. It is skilled work that is difficult and needs continuous focused effort. Staff are employed with relevant skills in volunteer recruitment, training and supervision; and the capacity to develop and maintain relationships with key disability organisations.</p>	P	Maj	12 High	<p>Volunteer recruitment strategy            Participant recruitment strategy            Program staff job descriptions</p>

<p><b>4.3 Program unable to provide adequate supervision across large geographical areas</b></p>	<p><b>Program staff unable to provide adequate supervision to volunteers and participants across a large geographical area.</b></p> <p>The program recognises the importance of regular verbal, written and face to face contact between program staff, volunteers and participants to ensure risks to participants and volunteers are minimised.</p> <p>Program staff call volunteers and participants monthly and receive a written report monthly. These are staggered so that there is only two weeks between each form of contact.</p> <p>The program offers four face to face debriefing sessions to volunteers and participants each year because the program recognises formal debriefing is necessary to ensure risks to participants and volunteers are identified and mitigated through reflective practice.</p> <p>The program manager ensures adequate staffing is in place (including leave coverage) to ensure appropriate supervision and oversight of participant and volunteer activities at all times.</p>	<p>A</p>	<p>Maj</p>	<p>20 Ext</p>	<p>Volunteer monthly report Self-advocate phone calls</p> <p>Quarterly face to face debriefing sessions</p> <p>Policy on "Staff leave"</p>
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## Summary of practice implications from the OVAL Project

### Staffing

*Future programs would need the support of a highly skilled coordinator.*

A future program coordinator needs to be able to: develop a critical pathway for the program (project management skills), provide practical guidance to volunteers about the boundaries of their role in specific circumstances; engage in individual and systemic advocacy; recruit, train and manage volunteers; identify and engage appropriate participants; develop strong links with the local community; and develop knowledge and skills in the practice of support for decision making.

*Future programs need a self-advocate facilitator or peer mentor.*

A future program needs the involvement of a peer mentor who can facilitate regular contact with participants, support capacity development through training and peer support groups, and oversee the development of resources in terms of their accessibility and relevance.

*Future programs need administrative support.*

Many of the strategies in place to mitigate risk require the completion of documentation (e.g. application forms, police checks, reference checking, newsletters, production of training materials, monthly reporting). The OVAL Project needed the support of an administrative officer in overseeing the production and management of these documents.

*Future support for decision making programs need to have the capacity to provide individual advocacy and be able to refer participants on for representative advocacy when required.*

### Volunteer recruitment

*Future support for decision making programs need time allocated to develop appropriate branding and promotional materials.*

*Future support for decision making programs need to be intentional and strategic in finding appropriate volunteers.*

The type of person support for decision making programs need as volunteers are: flexible; have strong interpersonal and communication skills; are able to reflect on their own actions; and are non-judgemental. They need to have an interest in and commitment to the rights of people with disability and be capable of assisting people with disability to make and act on their own decisions.

*Future support for decision making programs need to use a wide variety of recruitment methods.*

Successful methods of volunteer recruitment that were used by the OVAL Project included: an article in the local newspaper; volunteering Victoria website; posters in local community centres and libraries; visiting community groups and speaking; hosting information sessions and posts on social media.

## Volunteer training

*The model of practice and training materials developed by the project are recommended for use by other volunteer support for decision making programs.*

The OVAL Project has learned the model of practice developed by the OVAL Project has been successful in enabling volunteers to support participants to clarify their goals, explore their options and make a wide variety of decisions. OVAL Project volunteers spoke about the benefit of receiving training in the support for decision making model of practice and the confidence it gave them to get to know their participant, identify their support needs and assist them to make decisions. Volunteers reported they felt well supported by the project and informed about how to identify and provide support to participants.

*Training sessions for volunteers need to be designed for people with no previous experience supporting people with disability and involve opportunities for reflective discussion and the development of relationships with other volunteers.*

## Participant recruitment

*Future support for decision making programs must use eligibility criteria to identify appropriate participants.*

Participant eligibility criteria ensured the safety of participants, volunteers and staff in the OVAL Project and worked to ensure the success of support relationships. Recommended eligibility criteria include: participants must voluntarily indicate they want to participate in the program; be willing to form a relationship with their volunteer and listen to what they have to say; and be in a situation that is free of conflict or coercion. The OVAL Project has learned when potential participants are in crisis (e.g. seeking emergency accommodation) they may desperately need support with their decision making however they are often not in a position to be able to establish a new relationship in their life.

*Future volunteer support for decision making programs would benefit from recruiting participants early and target volunteer recruitment in response to the needs of participants.*

The OVAL Project learned it takes considerable effort to identify and engage with isolated participants. The project initially focused its efforts on the recruitment and training of volunteers believing they would be more difficult to find, however identifying and engaging with participants proved more challenging. Given this experience it is recommended future programs start recruiting participants and then seek out volunteers in response to the needs of eligible participants. Concurrent participant and volunteer recruitment will be necessary in spite of the challenges it creates for program staff.

*Future support for decision making programs must use a formal referral process to have adequate knowledge of potential participants and their circumstances to be able to mitigate risks to staff when meeting for the first time.*

*Future support for decision making programs would benefit from establishing partnerships with support coordination services who have existing relationships with eligible participants in need of decision support.*

The OVAL Project fostered relationships with all of the disability organisations in Geelong but had limited success receiving referrals from organisations providing participants with

direct services. Support coordination services seemed to be able to identify participants in need of decision support and had the requisite knowledge of the person to be able to provide the necessary referral information.

*Intentionally recruiting participants who have high communication support needs would allow future support for decision making programs to determine the feasibility of providing volunteer support for decision making with this group of NDIS participants.*

This type of support for decision making was attempted by one volunteer and participant but failed because of the expectations of the volunteer and the needs of the participant. If phase two explored this type of support for decision making it would need to train volunteers specifically to work with participants who use forms of AAC. It would need to seek volunteers who were curious, creative, and non-judgemental and had a willingness to spend significant periods of time exploring getting to know the person and the way they communicate.

### **Participant training**

*Participants in future support for decision making programs would benefit from receiving education on their rights, decision making and self-advocacy as early as possible when joining the program.*

Participants enjoyed the training provided by the OVAL Project that was not able to be provided until later in the life of the project. The self-advocate facilitator identified through her contact with participants that commencing this education earlier and offering it over a longer period of time would have helped participants to engage with the material more and have more opportunity to put what they were learning into practice.

### **Support planning**

*The OVAL Project recommends the NDIA provide participants with a copy of their support plan and provide them with more notice regarding planning meetings and review dates.*

*The OVAL Project recommends participants are given more opportunity to develop their plans prior to them being reviewed. Giving people more time to prepare would assist the review process to be more productive.*

### **Participant and volunteer matching**

*Future support for decision making programs need a structured approach to participant and volunteer matching which considers the complex interaction of a number of factors.*

Participant and volunteer matching should consider the interaction of a number of factors including: personal information; preferences; interests; skills; support needed; availability and personality type.

### **Volunteer supervision**

*Future support for decision making programs must have high levels of volunteer supervision which includes regular informal and formal contact.*

Volunteers needed a high level of supervision which involved lots of informal contact, formal debriefing and written reporting. This supervision was critical to mitigating risks to both participants and volunteers given the isolation of participants and the informality of the work

in the community. The OVAL Project learned having a coordinator within close proximity to participants and volunteers was essential to ensuring risks could be identified and mitigated quickly. This is an important consideration when thinking about scaling this project across Melbourne and nationally.

#### **Governance**

*Future support for decision making programs would benefit from the support of an advisory group with expertise in a variety of areas which include support for decision making, lived experience of cognitive disability, advocacy, and decision making in the context of the law and the NDIA.*

## National implications of the OVAL Project

The OVAL Project has shown volunteer support for decision making programs meet a number of the ILC Policy Framework goals and objectives. The volunteer-based model creates the opportunity for community members to become more involved in the lives of people with disability in their communities. It also uses resources within the community to support people with disability to build their capacity to make decisions and determine their own lives. The OVAL Project has shown community members are willing and able to engage with and provide meaningful support to people with disability with whom they may have never had contact previously. In the context of these informal relationships, which in some ways can be characterised as friendship, volunteers supported people with disability to build their capacity to make decisions and achieve their goals.

The project has had some very positive impacts on the lives of a small group of participants and volunteers. Engaging in the project has allowed us to identify the key risks to consider when expanding volunteer support for decision making in the future. As summarised in the previous section, it has also identified implications for practice in a number of key areas including: staffing, resource development, volunteer and participant recruitment, training, support and matching. Given the time limitations of the project, and the challenges experienced recruiting participants from a limited catchment, it is difficult to assess how scalable a volunteer based model of practice would be without testing it across a larger area (e.g. an entire metro region).

Therefore, the OVAL Project recommends the NDIA fund a second phase of the volunteer support for decision making pilot, using all the materials developed by the OVAL Project, to test whether adequate supervision can be provided across an entire region of metro Melbourne. If the second phase is able to achieve similar positive outcomes for participants and volunteers, while mitigating the risks identified in the risk assessment, it is highly likely the model would be able to be rolled out nationally.

The OVAL Projects recommends the NDIA fund three positions in phase two of the trial:

- 1) 1.00 Program Coordinator,
- 2) 0.80 Administrative Officer, and
- 3) 0.50 Self-Advocate Facilitator.

The NDIA should consider carefully where phase two of the trial should take place. The OVAL Project has learned it takes three to six months for most support relationships to be ready to engage in decision making such as preplanning for support plans. It has also learned setting up a program takes a minimum of six months to develop program resources, establish a program brand, and to recruit, train and match eligible participants and volunteers. Taken together, it should be expected that it will take a minimum of eight months from the date the program commences for participants and volunteers to be engaging in preplanning work. Therefore, for phase two to achieve the best outcomes possible the NDIA should select a metro region where an eight month lead time is possible.

The OVAL Project recommends future volunteer-based support for decision making initiatives are funded through the ILC framework. Volunteer-based support for decision making meets a number of the ILC Policy Framework goals and objectives including

building the capacity of individuals and the community to engage with isolated people with disability.

The OVAL Project suggests the NDIA consider funding support for decision making as a line item in NDIS support plans. Volunteer support for decision making is not appropriate for NDIS participants with complex support needs such as challenging behaviour, complex communication support needs or who are experiencing crisis. For isolated NDIS participants who require professional, independent support with decision making having support for decision making as a line item in support plans would ensure all isolated participants have equal access to the benefits of support for decision making.

Finally, the OVAL Project recommends the research conducted by Deakin University of the matched pairs in Barwon is funded to continue to until 30 June 2017 to monitor the impact of volunteer support over a longer period of time.

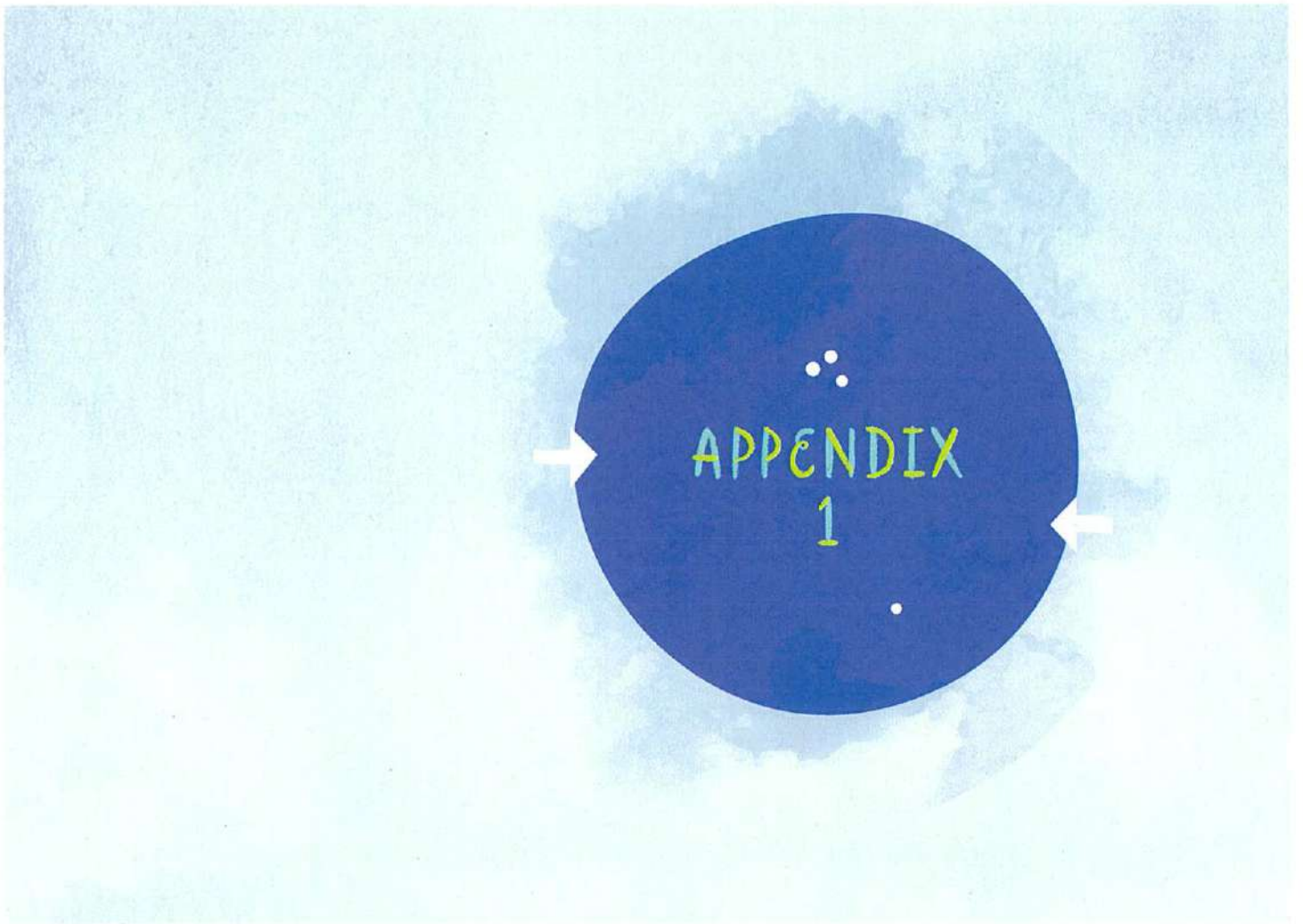
## Summary of OVAL Project recommendations

The OVAL Project recommends the following:

1. The NDIA should fund a second phase of the volunteer support for decision making pilot across an entire region of metropolitan Melbourne.
2. Proposals for future volunteer-based support for decision making initiatives should be encouraged and, where appropriate, funded through the ILC framework.
3. The research conducted by Deakin University of the matched pairs in Barwon should be funded to continue until 30 June 2017.

## Conclusion

This report has reflected on the experiences of the OVAL Project and provided the NDIA with recommendations regarding expanding volunteer programs of support for decision making in other parts of Victoria and potentially across Australia. This report outlined the processes and resources developed to implement volunteer-based support for decision making and the strategies needed to address key areas of concern when rolling out this type of program elsewhere. The OVAL Project has made three key recommendations to the NDIA to expand how it meets the needs of people with disability across Australia who need support with their decision making. The team behind the OVAL Project hopes the NDIA embrace the positive outcomes achieved through this initiative and will consider funding the continuation of the work in phase two of a volunteer support for decision making pilot.



## → SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR OVAL PROJECT VOLUNTEERS

NB: The case studies used in the scope of practice document are taken from the volunteer based support for decision-making project run previously by OPA. Brenda Burgen who coordinated the OPA project developed these case studies together with Michelle Browning for use in the OVAL Project volunteer training manual.



# The OVAL Project

## Scope of practice for OVAL Project volunteers

This section of the training manual seeks to clarify the scope of practice for OVAL Project volunteers by:

- outlining the responsibilities of the role
- clarifying situations that are beyond the scope of the role and
- explaining when volunteers should contact the OVAL Project team for additional guidance and support regarding the role.

### Background

NDIS participants who are invited to take part in the OVAL Project have been identified as socially isolated and unable to find people in their lives who can offer them support with decision making. The volunteers who will work with these NDIS participants have an important role to play in their lives, providing the support they want and need with decision making. OVAL Project volunteers offer these NDIS participants the opportunity to take control of their lives by providing opportunities for decision making, self expression and self advocacy.

### The support relationship

When a volunteer is matched with a participant from the NDIS, it is important they get to know each other. It may take some months to learn about each other's circumstances, life experiences, values, needs and priorities. Knowing about the participant's experience and circumstances will help the volunteer understand how and when to support the participant with decision making.

Volunteers should approach the participant as an equal with the same rights and responsibilities. Volunteers must respect and value what makes each participant unique by listening to the preferences of participants and being willing to respond to what they communicate. In the support relationship there needs to be mutual trust. Volunteers will need to build trust with participants over time through shared experiences and honest and open communication.

### Support for decision-making

The core work of OVAL Project volunteers is to help participants control their own lives by providing support to make decisions. To do this, volunteers will be trained in the practice of support for decision making. This will involve providing participants with support to:

- identify their hopes, dreams and goals in life
- build confidence in their ability to make decisions
- gain experience making decisions
- communicate their will and preferences
- access information
- understand and experience their options
- weigh their options (e.g. pros and cons list)
- understand the possible consequences of decisions (e.g. deciding to start a new job may mean losing a portion of their disability support pension)

- build a support network, make friends, expand their informal network of support
- express their decision to others
- work out a plan to implement their decision and
- implement their decision.

The type and amount of decision making support participants need will change over time relative to their circumstances. They may only need support with one or two things from this list, or a number of support strategies. If the participant is stressed, or is going to a new place they may need more support than usual. Volunteers will need to observe and listen to participants to assess the type and amount of support the participant needs.

## Enabling control

Support for decision making is about enabling people to control their own lives by supporting them with their decision making. Volunteers need to be aware that they should only provide as much support as the person needs. The participant should control the decision making process to the greatest extent possible, and volunteers should not control the process by telling the participant what they should do, trying to convince them of one perspective or limiting their options in line with the volunteer's own priorities.

### CASE STUDY: TELLING SOMEONE WHAT TO DO

#### Take one:

A volunteer was concerned that a participant had very poor eyesight from a condition that could easily be corrected by surgery. The participant was adamant that she was afraid of doctors and injections, and would not discuss having the surgery. After a couple of months, the participant had a small fall down the stairs. The volunteer told the participant that if she did not let her take her to talk to a doctor about having eye surgery, she would stop visiting her.

#### Take two:

A volunteer was concerned that a participant had very poor eyesight from a condition that could easily be corrected by surgery. Although concerned, the volunteer accepted that the participant wanted to work on other goals and decisions. In getting to know each other, the volunteer spoke about her brother, who had successfully undergone the surgery the participant needed. The participant became curious and began asking questions about the brother and his experience with the surgery. Over a period of six months, the participant's attitude shifted and she asked for support to undergo surgery on one eye. She was so happy with the result, she immediately arranged to have the surgery on her other eye.

## Developing skills and abilities

Support for decision making involves providing support that will develop the skills and abilities of the participant. Volunteers need to ensure the support they provide is enabling and empowering. Sometimes, it may take the participant longer to do a task for themselves but, if it allows them to develop skills for the future, it is time well spent.

## CASE STUDY: DOING MORE THAN WHAT IS REQUIRED

### Take one:

A participant had decided with support he would look into volunteering to gain experience working with animals. The participant decided on an organisation and found he needed to apply online. He only had access to the internet once a fortnight through his day program. On the day he was meant to have access, the day program staff told the participant they had given his time to someone else and he would need to wait another fortnight. The participant told the volunteer, who said he would complete the application for him.

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### Take two:

When the participant told the volunteer what had happened, the volunteer suggested finding internet access somewhere else. The volunteer asked the participant if he was a member of the local library. The participant had never been to the local library but was interested in going. The volunteer and participant met at the library, where the participant filled out the online application form, with help from the volunteer when he asked for it. The participant and volunteer then met at the library occasionally to use the computer. After a while, the participant decided he would become a library member and started borrowing books.

## Not engaging in representation

Volunteers can visualise the support they provide as standing behind the participant, empowering them to do things for themselves, or standing beside the participant, exploring issues and doing things together. However, if the support the participant needs involves standing in front of them, that is acting or speaking on the participant's behalf, it is moving outside the scope of the role. Representing a person and acting on their behalf is beyond the role of a volunteer in the OVAL Project, and is best done by a professional such as an advocate.

## Support to implement decisions

Some participants will need support to be able to implement their decisions. Volunteers can provide support to implement a decision if the support will empower and enable the participant to take control and realise their decision. Part of supporting participants to implement their decisions may mean supporting the person to ensure others hear and acknowledge their decisions. There may be times when the participant needs the support of others in their network, such as service providers, financial administrators and case managers, to implement their decision. Volunteers are encouraged to work alongside the participant to speak to these people and enlist their help, but if the volunteer is being asked to speak on behalf of the participant, they are moving outside their role and should contact the OVAL Project team for direction. Similarly, if the participant is encountering strong opposition to their decisions, professional advocacy and support may be required.

In all situations where support for implementation is required, the OVAL Project team should be consulted to ensure:

- the volunteer is comfortable in offering such support
- the support being offered is appropriate
- the relevant professionals are involved where necessary.

### CASE STUDY: OVAL PROJECT TEAM ARRANGING EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

A participant who frequently used taxis told a volunteer that she found it very stressful to use the NDIA taxi ordering system, and would instead contact taxis directly and pay for the fares herself. The participant told the volunteer she had decided not to use the NDIA taxi ordering system, and asked the volunteer to support her in expressing this decision.

At the participant's request, the volunteer attended a meeting with the participant's NDIA Case Coordinator. The participant explained she found the booking system too difficult and the volunteer shared her supporting observations. However, the case coordinator insisted the participant could use the system, and ignored their requests for alternatives.

The volunteer contacted the OVAL Project team and explained the situation. The team also spoke with the participant and together they decided to get in touch with a local advocacy organisation. An advocate became involved with the participant and attended a second meeting with the case coordinator. The advocate requested the participant's NDIA plan be reviewed and the participant be provided with specialist training to use the taxi ordering system. The case coordinator agreed to these actions and to also explore other alternatives if the training was not successful.

### Role and responsibilities of a volunteer supporter

Volunteers engaging in the OVAL Project have a number of responsibilities, including:

- engaging with, and building, a constructive relationship with the participant
- facilitating the participant's autonomy, independence and skill development
- meeting or contacting the participant by phone at least once a fortnight
- supporting the participant where needed with any aspect of their decision making, including
  - support to identify as a decision maker; explore options and make a decision
  - support to express and implement the decision following consultation with the OVAL Project team
- sending a written update of decision making progress to the OVAL Project team at least once a month
- attending volunteer training sessions as required
- taking direction from the OVAL Project team regarding your role and responsibilities
- not providing support that other professionals in the participant's life are responsible for providing.

### CASE STUDY: SITUATIONS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE VOLUNTEER ROLE

After several months of working with a participant, a volunteer was contacted by the participant's group home supervisor who requested the volunteer take the participant to a dental appointment. The volunteer explained her role was to support the participant with making decisions about their NDIS support plan, and not to assist with attending appointments that carers would usually attend. When the group home supervisor persisted, the volunteer suggested the supervisor should contact the OVAL Project team to clarify whether this was her role, and said she would wait to be directed by the team about what she should do. The OVAL Project team clarified with the group home supervisor that this was not the volunteer's role.

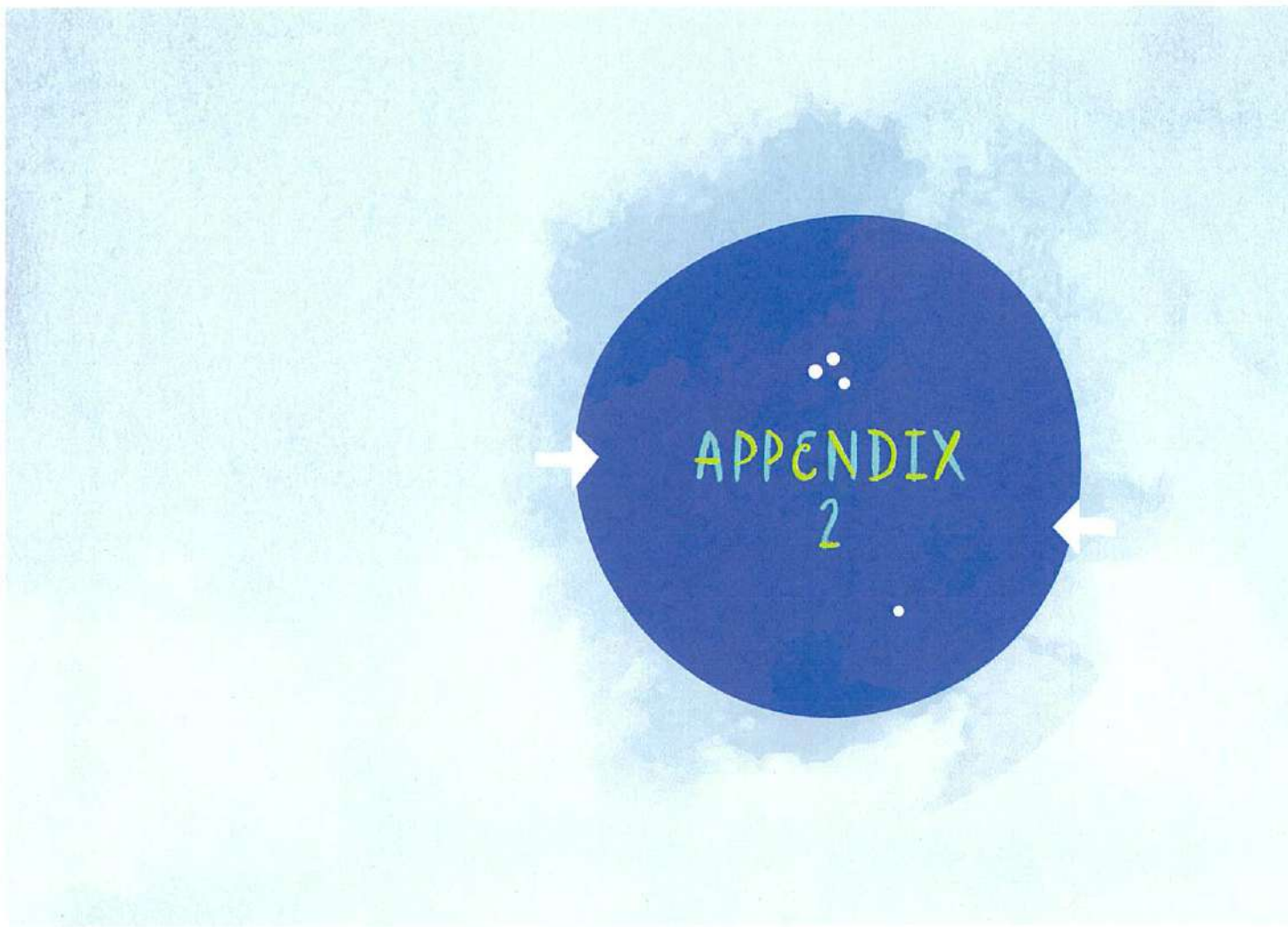
## When to contact the OVAL Project team for further guidance

If volunteers have any doubts or concerns about their role, they are encouraged to contact the OVAL Project team for help to work through the situation. The OVAL Project team is available on weekdays between 9am and 5pm on either 1300 309 337 (OPA) or 03 9416 4003 (VALID).

Volunteers must contact the OVAL Project team if they:

- have concerns about their safety
- have concerns about the treatment or welfare of the participant
- have concerns about the boundaries of their role and how they should work with other professionals in the participant's life
- have concerns about developing or maintaining the relationship with the participant or the participant's support staff
- believe the participant needs a lot more support than the volunteer can or should provide
- believe implementing the participant's decision may compromise their working relationship with others
- believe professional advocacy is needed to obtain services or support for the participant
- experience some barrier to being able to do their role
- experience conflict regarding the choices or decisions the participant is making
- are asked by professionals or others involved with the participant to do something outside their role
- are asked to become involved in financial or legal decision making.

It is important for OVAL Project volunteers to understand the responsibilities of their role, recognise situations that are beyond the scope of their role, and know when to contact the OVAL Project team for further guidance. This is because greater clarity will ensure participants receive the right support from the right people to be able to make and implement their decisions.



- NEWSPAPER ARTICLE
- PROMOTIONAL POSTER

# Volunteers for NDIS help Project to aid choice

COURTNEY CRANE

AN Australian first volunteer program aimed at supporting people with a disability to make decisions will get its start in Geelong.

The OVAL project, an initiative of the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID) and the Office of the Public Advocate will see volunteers trained and matched with socially isolated people with a disability in the Barwon region, helping them to make decisions about their National Disability Insurance Scheme support plans.

Volunteers will support the person as an equal, helping them understand the choices available for things such as their lifestyle, accommodation and health care, and how to take action on those choices.

VALID self-advocate and OVAL Project staff member Heather Forsyth said the project would help people with a disability without access to support networks, such as family.

"We all have to make decisions in our lives, but for people with disability it is a lot harder," McIntyre said.

A good volunteer for this project would be someone who is a good listener and who will encourage a person with disability to make decisions about their lives.

Up to 60 volunteers are required for the project, which has been developed to meet the needs identified in the NDIS.

Many of those seeking support will have a cognitive disability, including intellectual disabilities, brain injury, autism or cerebral palsy.

Acting Public Advocate Michael Wells said supported decision-making was crucial to ensuring people with disability could make their own choices about how they use their NDIS funding.

Information sessions for prospective volunteers will be held on Tuesday, January 19 and Wednesday, February 17 at Simons Stadium.

Contact OVAL Project staff on (03) 309 337 or email [oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au).

Office of the Public Advocate
**VALID**

## The OVAL Project



**Are you interested in getting to know a person with disability?**

**Do you think you would be good at supporting a person with disability to make their own decisions?**

**Do you have two hours a fortnight for up to 12 months to commit to this new relationship?**

**We need people like you!**

The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) and the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID) are seeking volunteers to join our exciting new OVAL Project in Barwon.

To find out more, contact the OVAL Project Team  
**Phone:** 1300 309 337  
**Email:** [oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au)

This project is funded via the NDIS Community Inclusion and Capacity Development Grant.

Artwork by Meghan Stewart-Snoad, a local artist on the Autism Spectrum.



## APPENDIX 3

- VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT PROCESS
- VOLUNTEER POSITION DESCRIPTION
- VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW FORM
- VOLUNTEER REFERENCE CHECK
- VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT



## The OVAL Project

### Volunteer Recruitment Process

The aim of this document is to assist staff engaged in the recruitment and training of volunteers for the OVAL Project to identify and recruit appropriate decision supporters. Recruiting volunteers with suitable personal attributes and skills will protect participants from harm and increase the likelihood of them receiving high quality support. The volunteer recruitment process used by the OVAL Project involves five parts:

- Identification of potential volunteers (position description)
- Promotion and advertising (fliers and advertisements)
- Obtaining information (application form)
- Screening to ensure appropriateness for the role (interview, reference check and criminal record check) and
- Providing information and clarifying the role (initial training session and code of conduct).

#### Identification of potential volunteers

The type person the OVAL Project is seeking as a volunteer is someone who is flexible, has strong interpersonal and communication skills, and is able to reflect on their own actions. They need to have an interest in and commitment to the rights of people with disability, and be capable of assisting people with disability to make and act on their own decisions.

Every person will approach decision making differently and will have different needs when receiving support. OVAL Project volunteers will need to be able to identify their participant's needs and tailor the support they provide to meet them. Therefore, someone who needs a lot of structure and prefers to have specific tasks to do may find the role challenging. OVAL Project volunteers will need to be comfortable accepting uncertainty and be comfortable supporting participants to try things and potentially fail or change their mind. The ability to be flexible and non-judgemental is very important. If a potential volunteer presents as being very concrete, inflexible in their thinking or controlling this should raise a red flag about their appropriateness for the role.

OVAL Project volunteers will be matched with people who are socially isolated and have a cognitive disability that affects their decision making. Each volunteer will need to get to know their participant and learn about their lives and goals for the future. To be able to develop a supportive relationship with their participant volunteers will need strong interpersonal and communication skills. Volunteers may need to work hard to engage with their participant and support them to remain focused on the decisions they want to make. If potential volunteers are not strong communicators, they may be unable to offer participants the support they need with communication, which can be an important part of their role.

Support for decision making requires supporters to have the ability to step back from the assistance they provide in the decision making process and reflect on their actions. OVAL

Project volunteers will be asked to reflect on their own decision making and the support they have received and provided in the past. If a potential volunteer is unable to talk about what they have learned from their previous experience, they may not be appropriate for the OVAL Project.

While potential volunteers may or may not have experience working with people with disability they need to have an interest in and commitment to the rights of people with disability. The language people use to talk about people with disability is important and if potential volunteers speak about participants in terms of 'us' and 'them' it should raise a red flag regarding their suitability for the project. Similarly, if potential volunteers express difficulty with the idea of supporting participants to make their own decisions it should immediately raise concerns.

### Advertising and Promotion

The advertising and promotion of the OVAL Project should be targeted towards finding and attracting people who have the qualities and skills outlined above, and live in the area in which the project is taking place. A variety of methods should be used in order to obtain participants from diverse backgrounds and across a range of ages.

The branding of promotional material is important to attract potential volunteers and help them identify relevant information in different contexts. Using a strong colour and/or image assists people recognise material relating to the project. Successful methods of advertising and promotion can include fliers & posters on community notice boards, radio advertisements, newspaper articles, advertisements on volunteering websites, interviews on local radio, presenting to community organisations, charitable groups and educational institutions, and stalls at community events and conferences.

When the promotional material attracts the attention of potential volunteers it needs to explain how volunteers can obtain further information about the project and include a phone number, email address and website.

### Obtaining Information

Once potential volunteers make contact with the OVAL Project team to obtain further information specific questions can be answered on the telephone or via email, and written information provided via email or post. If interested, potential volunteers complete an application form to express their interest in joining the project. The application form assists the OVAL Project team to obtain personal details of the potential volunteer, learn about their previous professional and volunteering experience, their availability and any potential conflicts of interest.

The OVAL Project needs to be mindful of potential conflicts of interest. The OVAL Project has decided it is a conflict of interest for NDIA staff to work as an OVAL Project volunteer. A red flag is raised when potential volunteers identify they work for disability organisations that service the same areas OVAL Project participants live in. The OVAL Project needs to be aware of volunteer affiliations so that if a volunteer is asked to support a participant to explore new service organisations the team can oversee the process and ensure all options are presented to the participant in an unbiased manner. Registering people's affiliations and interests is important so that they on record and can be disclosed in meetings with service organisations or the NDIA if required. This information is obtained from volunteers early in the recruitment process on the application form.

## Screening Volunteers

The OVAL Project screens volunteers through their interview process, reference checking and criminal record checks. When the team interview a potential volunteer they review the person's overall behaviour to identify whether they are a strong communicator, respectful and comfortable engaging with a person with a disability. Two OVAL Project team members, one of which is a self-advocate who has an intellectual disability, conduct the interviews. The team members use an interview schedule that asks specific questions of each volunteer.

### Interview Process

The interview starts by asking the potential volunteer why they would like to be involved in the OVAL Project. This question is an opportunity to help the person relax, talk about him or herself and share why they are considering being part of the project. If the potential volunteer only talks about future job prospects, it may be a concern. Often potential volunteers will discuss wanting to give back to society. If the person does not have any background in disability, it may be helpful to ask them specifically why they are interested in this project. It may lead to gaining a greater insight into their beliefs about people with disability.

The interview probes the potential volunteer about their experience of people with cognitive disabilities. It is important to pay attention to what the person says as well as their use of language. Statements that reflect an underlying belief in inequality and a lack of respect are a red flag. Even if the person does not use politically correct terms if what they are saying respects and empowers the person with a disability it demonstrates a positive attitude.

The interview explores the sort of issues a person with an intellectual disability might face such as negative community views, stigma, isolation, inaccessible services, limited income and a lack of understanding about intellectual disability in the community. Potential volunteers are asked to identify some of the barriers to independent decision making people with intellectual disability encounter. These barriers include information and services not being accessible, isolation and not having people to discuss ideas with, limited encouragement and support, not knowing how to get started, not knowing their options and not knowing where to get help.

Potential volunteers are asked to provide an example of when they assisted a person with a cognitive disability to understand a complex idea, situation or decision. The interviewers are hoping to hear about the strategies they used to support the person such as checking for understanding and getting the person to repeat things back in their own words, breaking down information into smaller pieces and using visual aids. The interview invites potential volunteers to explore if there are any situations or types of decisions they would find difficult to support. These questions assist the team to match volunteers with participants and identify any concerns regarding judgemental support. They can also facilitate discussion about the boundaries of the volunteer role.

Finally, the interview schedule leads the potential volunteer through a scenario that elicits whether the potential volunteer is likely to be overly protective in their approach to providing support or willing to support their participant to try new things and learn from their experiences. The scenario asks the potential volunteer to explain how they would go about

problem solving and overcoming barriers to making the decision. The final question in the scenario explores whether the potential volunteer is aware of potential conflicts of interest and ethical concerns.

#### Reference checking

After the interview, when a potential volunteer is considered suitable the referees on their application form are contacted. Talking to referees is also important when the OVAL Project team are unsure whether the person is suited to the role. When it is clear after the interview that the person is not suitable it is not necessary to contact their referees. Instead, a letter is sent explaining the application was not successful in the next step of the recruitment process.

When speaking with referees a set of questions have been designed to explore the person's experience with disability, how they relate to others, their ability to problem solve, ethical behaviour such as confidentiality and any other relevant information. Most referees speak very highly of potential volunteers but occasionally they raise issues that provide important information about the suitability of potential volunteers.

#### Letter Explaining Status of Application

Everyone who applies to become a volunteer with the OVAL Project receives a letter outlining the status of his or her application. The letter states whether the person has successfully completed their interview and has moved into the next stage of the application process or not. It is a requirement that all prospective volunteers undergo a National Police Check and agree to a Code of Conduct. When the potential volunteer is successful the letter invites them to attend a training session where they can complete this documentation. When potential volunteers are not successful, the letter states they were not considered an appropriate fit for the role. The letter provides the contact details of the relevant OVAL Project team member who can provide more information on the decision if desired.

#### National Police Check

All OVAL Project volunteers must pass a national police check before they can be accepted into the project. If the check identifies any previous criminal activity the offences will be considered in light of the potential risks, they pose to OVAL Project participants and staff. The criminal record check is an important safeguard in protecting OVAL Project participants.

#### Providing Information

The final stage in the recruitment process is providing volunteers with the information they need to ensure they can do their role. Initial volunteer training, that includes outlining the scope of the volunteer role, the model of practice and code of conduct, assists volunteers to learn about what is required of them. The training is an opportunity for volunteers to understand in more detail what is involved and a few volunteers have pulled out of the project at this stage realising "it's not what I thought it would be".

The information contained in the Code of Conduct is important because it is a guide for volunteers as to appropriate behaviour and conduct. As volunteers commence supporting participants if the OVAL Project team have concerns about a volunteer's attitude or actions it can be helpful to refer to the Code of Conduct as an agreed standard of behaviour.

## Conclusion

Strategic volunteer recruitment and training is essential for the success of the OVAL Project. Recruiting volunteers with suitable personal attributes and skills will protect participants from harm and increase the likelihood of them receiving high quality support. The volunteer recruitment process used by the OVAL Project has five parts:

- Identification of potential volunteers (position description)
- Promotion and relevant advertising (advertisements, articles)
- Obtaining information (application form)
- Screening to ensure appropriateness for the role (interview, reference check and criminal record check) and
- Providing information and clarifying the role (initial training session and code of conduct).

By implementing this volunteer recruitment process, the OVAL Project team seeks to uphold and respect the rights and safety of both participants and volunteers engaging in the project.

## The OVAL Project

### OVAL Project Volunteer Position Description

#### About the OVAL Project

Supported decision making is the United Nation's preferred mechanism to assist people with impaired decision making capacity to exercise their legal capacity.

The OVAL Project matches trained volunteers with socially isolated people with disability in the Barwon region who want help to make decisions about their National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) support plan. This 12-month project is funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency and is operated by the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with a Disability (VALID) and the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA).

#### The volunteer role

The OVAL Project volunteers are known as 'volunteer supporters' and the people with disability they assist to make decisions are known as 'participants'.

Volunteer supporters may assist participants with making decisions about their lifestyle, accommodation, health care, and accessing services, but not financial and legal matters.

The volunteer will provide the participant with support to make and act on their own decisions. The participant will have requested assistance with decision making.

The volunteer may assist the participant by:

- providing impartial support to review their NDIS support plan, in which the participant has indicated the areas or decisions they want assistance with;
- breaking the decision making process into understandable and achievable steps;
- obtaining information relevant to the decisions being considered by the participant and presenting it in an accessible way;
- explaining and assisting with weighing up relevant information and considerations relating to the decision making process;
- assisting the participant with problem solving issues relating to the decisions being considered by the participant;
- accompanying the participant to initial appointments as necessary to help them identify options to facilitate their decision making; and
- helping the participant connect with self-advocacy or other support as appropriate.

The volunteer will respect and value the rights and dignity of the participant, their autonomy and independence.

#### Key volunteer qualities

The volunteer supporter must have:

- an interest in, and commitment to, the rights of people with disability

- good communication and interpersonal skills
- an understanding of, or the ability to develop an understanding of, the NDIS and disability service systems
- the ability to assist and support people with disability to make and act on their own decisions
- the skills and ability to identify decision making issues, and to be able to work towards the outcomes identified by the participant
- the ability to work collaboratively with the OVAL Project team to monitor the decision-making process, including decision making agreements.

### Key volunteer accountabilities

The volunteer must:

- commit to a 6-month relationship with the participant
- engage with, and build, a constructive relationship with the participant
- always work with the aim of facilitating the participant's autonomy, independence and skill development
- meet or contact the participant by phone at least once a fortnight
- send a progress report to the OVAL Project team at least once a month
- contact the OVAL Project team to discuss any difficulty or concern
- attend volunteer training sessions as required.

### Volunteer time commitment

The time commitment required will vary according to the specific situation of each participant. The participant and volunteer supporter will need to establish an agreement about how often they will meet, where to meet and their preferred form of communication. If the decision making process becomes too complicated, or appears to be moving beyond support for decision making to requiring advocacy or requiring professional support, the volunteer must contact the OVAL Project team to discuss the situation.

### Support for volunteers

The OVAL Project Coordinator is available to talk through situations and provide support to all volunteer supporters. The project coordinator will accompany volunteer supporters on their initial visit with the participant, at the three-month point, and towards the end of the support agreement. Further visits can be arranged on request.

### Expense reimbursement

Volunteer supporters can claim reimbursement for their travel and telephone costs. Claims for travel reimbursement are limited to one per fortnight.

### Further information

For further information, please contact the OVAL Project team on 1300 309 337, or email [oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au)



# The OVAL Project

## Volunteer Interview Form

Name of applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview panel members: \_\_\_\_\_

**General introduction:**

- VALID HF
- OPA KF
- Overview of the OVAL Project (about decision making not a/care) KF
- Not a role for everyone and we may not be accepting everyone who applies to join the project KF

**Introduction question:**

1. Why would you like to be a volunteer in the OVAL project? HF

*(Follow up if needed, what are you hoping to gain from this experience?)*

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2. This project will match volunteers with people who have cognitive disabilities and may have other disabilities, as well. What is your experience of people with cognitive disabilities? KF

*(If no experience: tell us about your interest in volunteering to support somebody with an intellectual / cognitive disability)*

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3. What sorts of issues might a person with intellectual disability face? HF

*(negative community views, stigma, isolation, inaccessible or lack of services, being on a pension / money, poor understanding of disability)*

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4. What might be some of the barriers to independent decision-making for a person with an intellectual disability? **KF**

*(Information and services not accessible, isolation / no one to discuss ideas with and no encouragement, what the good and bad things are, not knowing how to get started, what the steps are, who or where to go to)*

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5. Can you give us an example of when you assisted a person with cognitive disability to understand a complex idea or situation or decision? **KF**

*(Or, what experience and skills would you bring to support a person with cognitive disability to make their own decisions?)*

We want to hear about:

- how you assisted the person to understand ( what strategies did you use to make information accessible?)
- how did you know that the person understood

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6. So the person you are supporting asks you to do something you are not comfortable with, what would you do? **HF**

e.g. you are asked by paid staff to take the participant to the dentist  
*(we want people to tell us they will contact and consult with the OVAL team)*

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7. Are there any types of decisions that you would personally find difficult to support e.g. women's health, men's health, looking for a partner? **KF**

*(This information will help us make a good match with a participant)*

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**8. Scenario:**

Tim has a moderate intellectual disability. Tim has asked for your assistance to obtain his driver's licence. Tim has told you that he has been asking for help for years but that everyone tells him that he should not be on the roads or that he could not pass the test to obtain a Learners' Permit. Tim does not seem to have the capacity to gain his licence and you think he will almost certainly fail.

a) Will you support Tim even though you think he will fail?

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b) What sort of information would you seek out?

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c) What other steps or services do you think would be useful?

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d) What issues / barriers might you anticipate?

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e) What would you say if Tim offered to pay you to give him driving lessons?

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**Volunteer supporter's requirements:**

We want to make a good match between you and the participant. Do you have any strong thoughts about who you would like to work with? **HF**

- a. Female or male
- b. Age
- c. Interests
- d. Types of decisions
- e. Anything else

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Are you able to commit to the project until September 2016? **HF**

- a. Are you able to commit to fortnightly meetings?
- b. Are you able to write a short monthly report back?
- c. Keep in contact with the project coordinator (**KF** to explain)

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**Interview conclusion: KF**

- Do you have any questions?
- THANK YOU for your interest and time
- explanation of what will happen next
  - referee checks and then
  - police check
  - training date

## The OVAL Project

### Volunteer Referee Check

Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Referee: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Nature and duration of relationship with applicant

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2. Knowledge of applicant's experience with disability

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3. Communication skills – how they relate to others

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4. Ability to problem solve

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5. Confidentiality

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6. Any other information

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The OVAL Project

### Volunteer Code of Conduct

Each person who carries out the functions of a Volunteer Supporter is asked to sign a Code of Conduct as a pledge of commitment to their role.

Principles and values underlying the Code of Conduct are respect and valuing the rights and dignity of people with disabilities, and supporting their autonomy and independence. The Code of Conduct incorporates the values of fairness, objectivity, integrity, honesty, conscientiousness, commitment to the public interest, respect and confidentiality.

#### The Code of Conduct

I understand that, as a Volunteer Supporter, I have a commitment to act in a way that:

- respects and values the participant's rights and wishes;
- assists the participant to make and, if necessary, express a decision;
- assists the participant to obtain relevant information; and
- explains relevant information and considerations.

#### In particular:

- I will adhere to the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) Volunteer Charter, that is, to sustain the case of people with a disability where their rights, choices, opportunities, interests or safety are prejudiced.
- I will perform my role as a Volunteer Supporter to the best of my ability and, at all times, faithfully perform my duties and responsibilities.
- I will not discriminate on the basis of any preferences I may hold that relate to religious or political beliefs, age, gender, disability, race or sexual preference.
- I will demonstrate respect for colleagues and public officials by ensuring freedom from discrimination, harassment and bullying.
- I will demonstrate integrity by being honest, open and transparent in my dealings, using powers responsibly, reporting improper conduct, avoiding any real or apparent conflicts of interest and striving to earn and sustain public trust of a high level.
- I will undertake not to use information, knowledge or contacts acquired by me as a Volunteer Supporter for financial or personal gain. In addition, I will report any requests from participants that could be seen as providing a benefit to me, to the OVAL Project Coordinator.

I understand that there may be times where, in the course of acting as a Volunteer Supporter, that it may be in the best interests of the participant for their case to be reallocated back to the OVAL Project Coordinator. Where such situations arise, I will respect the decision made by the OVAL Project Coordinator.

- I will undertake mandatory training as required and, in particular, use my best endeavours to attend all required training.
- I understand that, in the course of my duties, I will be privy to confidential information regarding supported decision-making participants, service providers and government. I will comply with the Victorian Information Privacy Principles, the Health Records Privacy Principles and the policies of OPA in my collection, handling and storage of this information.
- On leaving the OVAL Project, I will return my identification badge, files and all documentation pertaining to the project and OPA.

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Print Name in block letters

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Signature

Date

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## APPENDIX 4

- ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
- OVAL PROJECT REFERRAL FORM
- PARTICIPANT APPLICATION FORM  
(PLAIN LANGUAGE)
- PARTICIPANT DECISION  
MAKING ASSESSMENT

## The OVAL Project

Participant Eligibility Criteria as endorsed by OVAL Project Steering Committee on 8 September 2015

- Participants will be referred through the NDIS
- Participants will have a cognitive impairment that impacts on their decision making ability,
- Participants will be socially isolated, having few or no informal supports
- Participants must voluntarily indicate they want to participate and that they can choose to leave the project at any time.
- Participants need to be willing to listen to the volunteer who is helping them
- Participants should be people with disability who have trouble making decisions – not people who can make a decision that other people don't like
- Participants must be in a situation that is free from conflict or coercion, and where the volunteer's input will not be undermined and therefore unlikely to succeed in forming the trusting relationship
- Where a proposed participant is unable to give consent, they are able to indicate assent and have staff that is supportive and agreeable to the volunteer's involvement.

# OVAL Project Referral Form

## Identifying and Background Information

<b>Participant's Name:</b>			
<b>Address:</b>			
<b>Date of Birth:</b>		<b>NDIA Number:</b>	
<b>Phone Number:</b>		<b>Date Scheduled Support Plan Review (if known):</b>	
<b>NDIA Staff member key contact details:</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>Phone</b>
<b>Service Provider key contact details:</b>			
<b>Disabilities:</b> <i>E.g. Physical, mental illness, cognitive impairment</i>			
<b>Living Situation:</b> <i>E.g. Who with, what supports</i>			
<b>Activities/Interests:</b> <i>E.g. Work, community access, interests</i>			
<b>Important Relationships:</b> <i>E.g. Family, friends or degree of social isolation</i>			
<b>What has led to this referral for Supported Decision Making?</b> <i>E.g. Past poor decision making, participant vulnerable to exploitation</i>			
<b>Risk Assessment &amp; Mitigation</b>			
<b>Risk</b>	<b>Current Mitigation</b>	<b>Recommended Strategies</b>	
<i>E.g. No risk detected, communication difficulties</i>	<i>Use interpreter, meet in secure environment</i>	<i>Professional present</i>	

### Decision Making Information

<p><b>Is this referral for general support with decision making or for help to make a specific decision?</b></p>	
<p>Please explain:</p>	
<p><b>Are there other formal supporters in the participant's life? Please describe their role:</b></p> <p>Support Coordination:</p> <p>Plan Management:</p> <p>Advocacy:</p> <p>Legal Guardian:</p> <p>Public Advocate:</p>	
<p><b>Does the participant agree to be contacted by the OVAL Project team?</b></p> <p>Yes, they agree <span style="float: right;">No, they don't agree</span></p>	
<p><b>Does the participant consent to their information being shared?</b></p> <p>Yes, they consent <span style="float: right;">No, they don't consent</span></p>	
<p><b>How did the participant communicate their agreement and consent?</b></p> <p>Signature below <span style="margin-left: 100px;">Verbal consent</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;">Non-verbal assent</span></p>	
<p><b>Name of Referrer:</b></p> <p><b>Signature:</b></p> <p><b>Date:</b></p>	<p><b>Name NDIS Participant:</b></p> <p><b>Signature:</b></p> <p><b>Date:</b></p>



# The OVAL Project

## Application Form

First name \_\_\_\_\_

Last name \_\_\_\_\_



Telephone or TTY \_\_\_\_\_



Mobile \_\_\_\_\_



Email \_\_\_\_\_



Address \_\_\_\_\_

Are you an NDIS participant?

YES

or

NO



Who helps you make decisions now? Tell us about them.  
It might be your mum, friend or support worker.

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Why do you want a volunteer to help you make decisions?

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Do you have any problems you want the volunteer to fix?

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Are there decisions you want to make?

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What activities do you like to do?

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I **allow** the OVAL Project to talk to my family, friends and support services to find out more about the help I need making decisions.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**I do not allow** the OVAL Project to talk to my family, friends and support services to find out more about the help I need making decisions.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I would like someone from the OVAL Project to call me and tell me more about the OVAL Project.

**OVAL Project Team**  
Phone: 03 9416 4003  
Email: oval.project@opa.justice.vic.au



## The OVAL Project

### Participant Decision-making Assessment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How does the participant currently spend their time? (E.g. Day program, work, study, volunteering, doing hobbies)

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What type of decisions does the participant want support to make? (E.g. changes to their weekly activities, achieving life goals such as travelling, changing career/job)

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In the past, has someone helped the participant to make decisions? If so, what did they like/didn't they like about the way they were helped? (E.g. They liked someone who took time to explain things a few times, they didn't like being told what to do)

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**What does the participant find difficult when they need to make a decision? What has been a problem in the past?** (E.g. they rushed into things, they didn't know what to do, they didn't know where to start looking for information or they couldn't get started.)

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**Has the participant mentioned any barriers to them being able to make decisions?** (E.g. Financial limitations, lack of confidence, limited experience, negative attitudes of others)

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**Would the participant like to share their current NDIS support plan with the OVAL Project team?** (E.g. are they comfortable for the volunteer to see the plan, for the team to have a copy of their current plan? To discuss one aspect of the plan they would like to change?)

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**Does the participant have specific communication needs?** (E.g. uses a communication aid, has a medical condition such as social phobia, prefers a specific mode of communication – text message, call, email)

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**Does the participant need professional advocacy or support?** (E.g. have communicated their decisions to others and they have not been respected.)

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**Does the participant have any preferences regarding who they would like to support them with decision making?** (E.g. male, female, younger/more experienced, someone with a specific type of knowledge)

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**Key Contacts** (E.g. who can provide the most helpful information about the person):

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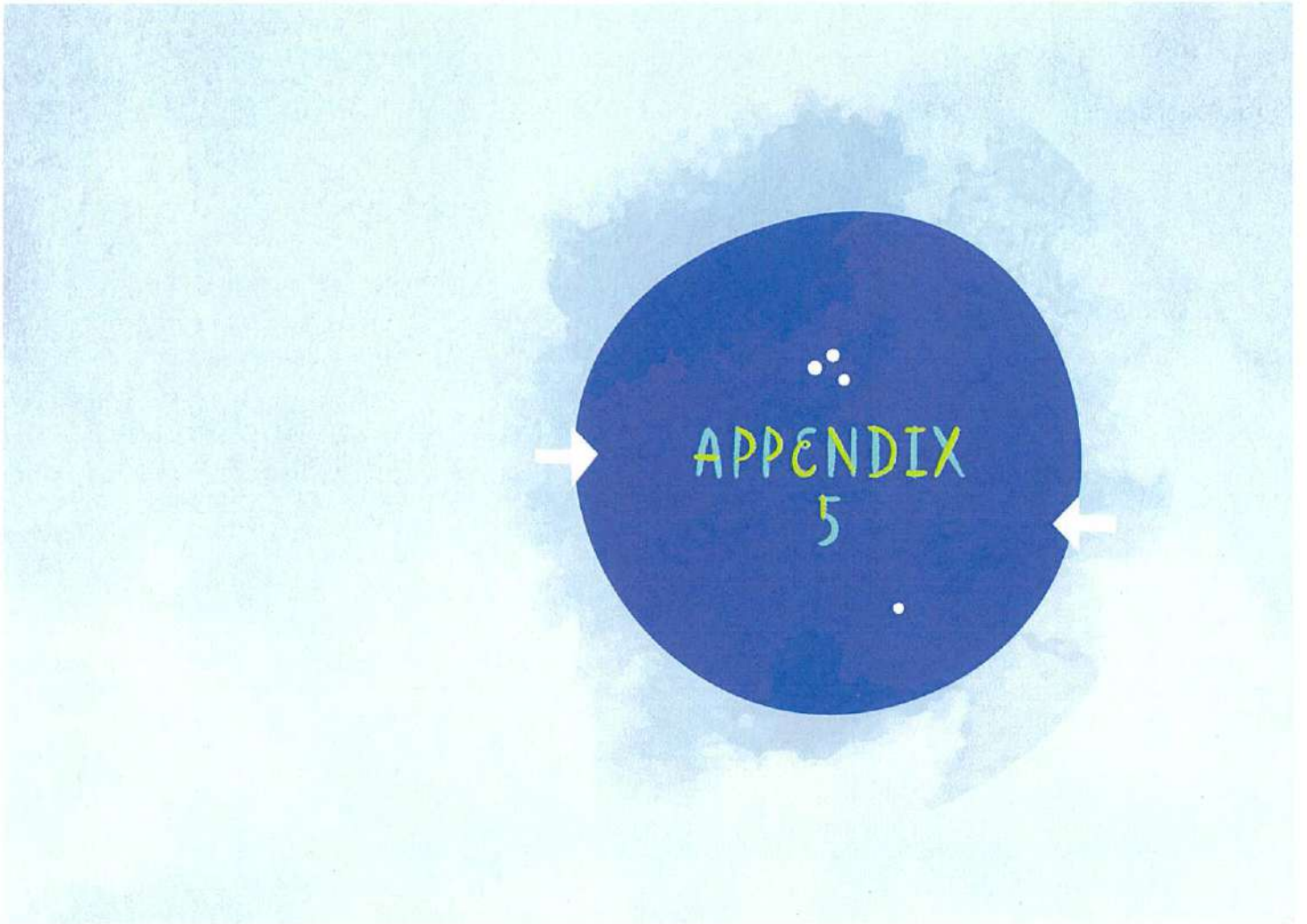
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- TRAINING SCHEDULE
- VOLUNTEER PROGRESS REPORT



## OVAL Project Volunteer Training Schedule

3 March 2016

Deakin CATS Community Centre, Kardinia Park Geelong

Time	Activity	Start Time	Hand Out
<b>9.30am</b>	<b>Welcome</b>		
	Introduction to the OVAL Project (mapping out what people hope to get out of the day) – (5 mins)	9.30am	
	Brainstorm session on Volunteers views on disability in the community – Heather and Kylie (10 mins)	9.35am	
	A Right to Support - Kevin Stone (20 mins)	9.45am	
	Good communication Two Role Plays – Kylie & Heather (15 mins)	10.05am	
<b>10.20 – 10.45am</b>	<b>Morning Tea</b> (Volunteers to complete baseline survey)	10.20am	Deakin Survey
	Supported Decision Making – Michelle (40 mins)	10.45am	Model of Practice HO Weighing options HO Getting to Know the Person WAIS Journal
	Reflection Activity Using Journal	11.30am	
	Exploring options in preparation for decision making: case study – Kylie & Heather & Michelle (20 mins)	11.50pm	Melanie Case Study
<b>12.15 – 12.45pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b> - Photocopying ID for police checks	12.15pm	
	Identifying and providing support with decision making Communicating and implementing decisions – Michelle (45 mins)	12.45pm	Values clarification tool
	Introduction of NDIS Support planning – Neroli Raff (60 mins)	1.30pm	NDIS Planning Document
<b>2.30 – 2.45pm</b>	<b>Afternoon Tea</b>		
	Completing paperwork: code of conduct, consent to participate in the program,	2.45pm	Code of Conduct Consent to join project Police Check – certifying ID

	verifying ID for police check (10 mins)		
	Revisiting Volunteering (expectations, roles and responsibilities, boundaries and difficult situations, when to refer matters on, matching) - Kylie & Michelle (15 mins)	2.55pm	Volunteer Job Description Scope Document Volunteer Charter
	Facilitating Questions – OVAL team (10 mins)	3.10pm	
	Where to from here (matching with participants, further training, newsletter and support) – Kylie (10 mins)	3.20pm	
<b>3.30pm</b>	<b>Close</b>		



# The OVAL Project

Please complete this progress report after each meeting with your participant. By filling in this information, you are helping us understand what you are doing with your participant and whether you need any additional support or help. **We ask you to email or post this progress report to the OVAL Project team on the first of each month.** Please send your reports to [oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au) or OVAL Project c/o Simone Parker Office of the Public Advocate Level 1, 204 Lygon Street, Carlton VIC.

(For example, say you visited your participant three times in June. Complete three columns in the table below outlining how you spent your time together during these visits. Use one column for each visit. At the end of June you complete the second page and email both pages to [oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:oval.project@justice.vic.gov.au) on 1 July.)

Name of Supporter: \_\_\_\_\_

Activities	E.g. 5/6/16		
1. Getting to know the person	1 hr		
2. Exploring personal goals	1 hr		
3. Identifying/defining problems/choice making opportunity	x		
4. Exploring options/alternatives	10 mins		
5. Exploring potential consequences	X		
6. Decision support (weighing up options)	x		
7. Advocacy (implementing decisions)	x		
8. Reviewing decisions	5 mins		
9. Other (please specify)	x		
Total Time Spent Together	2hr 15m		

Where did you meet with your participant?  Local cafe

What are the decisions you are currently working on with the participant?

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Are there any issues or problems that have come up in the past month?

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Do you need any support to work through the problem/issues?  
Would you like training or more information on any aspect of your volunteer work?

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Other comments:

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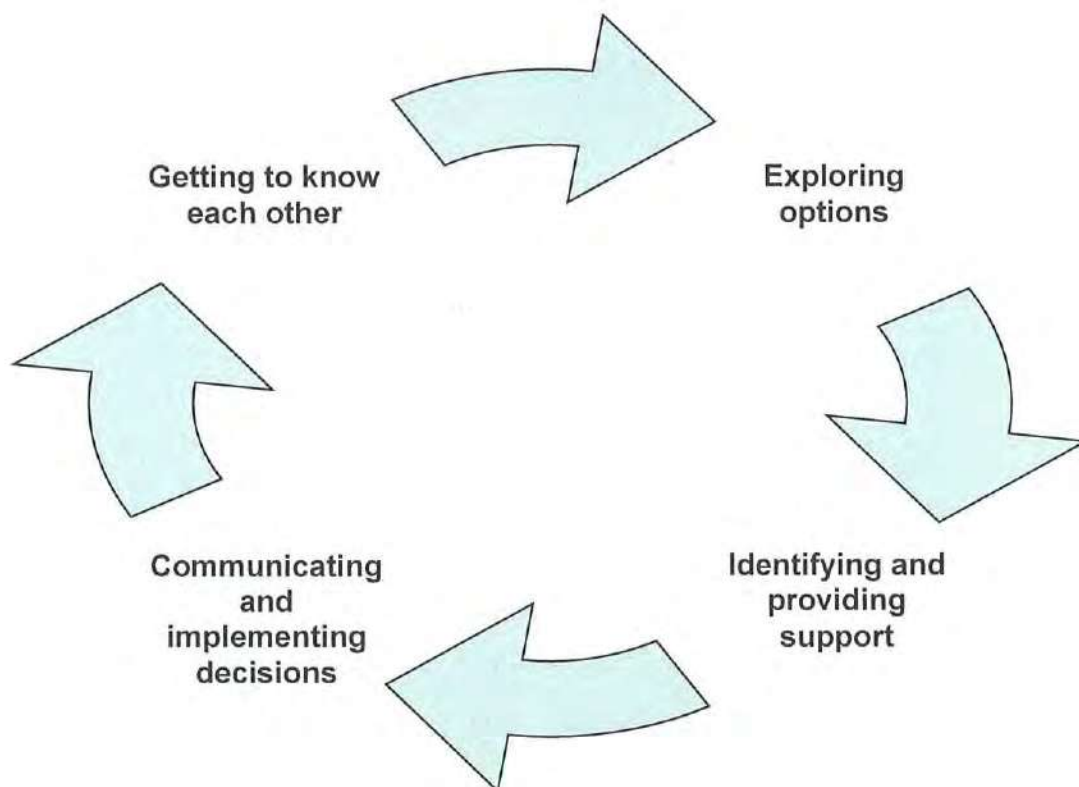


→ SUPPORT FOR DECISION-MAKING  
MODEL OF PRACTICE

## The OVAL Project

### Support for decision-making: model of practice

The OVAL Project has developed a model of practice to guide the work of volunteers engaging in support for decision making. The model has four phases that are outlined in the diagram below. The first and ongoing phase in the model of practice is the volunteer and participant getting to know each other. The second phase is supporting the participant to explore possibilities and options before making any decisions. The third phase is identifying the support the participant needs to make a decision and providing it when necessary (or finding others who can provide it). The fourth phase is supporting the participant to communicate their decision to others and in certain instances to implement it.



The four phases of the model of practice are not linear. Volunteers may need to move backwards and forwards between the phases when supporting the participant to make decisions. It is likely that volunteers will move through this cycle many times during their time supporting a participant throughout the OVAL Project.

## Getting to know each other

*“...the person holds their own expertise about who they are and what makes sense to them in their life.”<sup>14</sup>*

The first phase in the support for decision making model of practice is **Getting to Know Each Other**. The importance of volunteers getting to know their participant cannot be overstated. Mutual knowledge affects how open the participant will be to listening to a volunteer and be supported in the decision making process. Getting to know each other involves finding out about each other's life story, priorities, goals and preferences. The more volunteers know about the participant the better they will be able to recognise how the participant wants support and when they need it with their decision making.

Getting to know each other can take time and will be an ongoing process. Here are some questions that may assist volunteers to get to know their participant:

- What is important to the person?
- What are their passions, hobbies and interests?
- Who are the people and places that matter to the person?
- What are the highlights and achievements of their life so far?
- What does the person offer those around them?
- What would a good future look like for the person?
- Thinking back when have been the best times in the person's life and why – what does this teach about what is important to the person?<sup>15</sup>

### CASE STUDY: THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

David was keen to join the SDM project to receive help to connect more with the gay community. David had lived in institutions since he was young and had limited opportunity to socialise with other gay men. The volunteer supported David to connect with a LGBTI support group but after a while the volunteer identified there were a number of friends, family and social groups he had also lost contact with over the years. David missed these people and decided to reach out to his family and friends. While not all of these connections were successful David became much more engaged with friends and the LGBTI community through the support of the volunteer. While David's initial focus was very specific to the LGBTI community, through the development of their relationship it became clear to the volunteer that David actually wanted support to engage more generally in the community to combat his pervasive loneliness. It is common for volunteers to find that the decision or goal participants focus on initially may change when they get to know each other better.

### KEY CONCEPTS:

- Shared knowledge about each other is foundational to support for decision making.
- The more volunteers know about participants the better they will be able to recognise how and when they need support with their decision making.

<sup>14</sup> WAIS Supported Decision Making Manual, 2014, p.36 accessed at <http://waindividualisedservices.org.au/library/resources/wais-publications-and-resources/>

<sup>15</sup> WAIS Supported Decision Making Manual, 2014, p.3

## Exploring options

The second phase in the support for decision making model of practice is **Exploring Options**. Many people with disability have been denied the opportunity to make decisions. The low expectations of others have limited their life experiences and subsequently their ability to identify decisions they would like to make has been limited. Before being able to make decisions, participants may need support to identify and explore the decision making options available to them. They may need support to generate new ideas and discover new possibilities by meeting and talking to new people, visiting community organisations and exploring the internet. They may need support to overcome fears and a reluctance towards trying new things. This may require creativity, encouragement and persistence over time.

### CASE STUDY: GENERATING IDEAS

Simon had lived under his mother's care into his early 40s and when she died he moved into a SRS (boarding house). When Simon was matched with a volunteer, he had been living at the SRS for almost 10 years. Simon mostly spent his time either sitting in his bedroom or the SRS lounge room. He attended one external activity a week that took place directly across the road. It took the volunteer her entire visit to coax and encourage Simon to go for a walk in the park across the road. Simon said in the ten years he had lived in the SRS he had never been there. When Simon expressed an interest in photos of her dog, the volunteer sought permission to bring it to the SRS. Together with the dog, Simon became more motivated to leave the SRS. After six months spending time together, Simon became far more trusting and willing to try new things. The volunteer suggested he might like to try some new activities in his community and he agreed to meet with several local service providers to explore his options. Even when he did not like some of the services, he kept trying different activities to see what he liked. Simon eventually accepted several services and commenced participating in regular social activities with people outside the SRS.

When participants become more aware of their options volunteers may need to support them to try their options or engage in a new experience before they can make a decision about their options. To make an informed choice, participants need to have some knowledge and experience of what they are choosing. This is an important aspect of the work of OVAL Project volunteers.

Participants also may need support to be able to identify and overcome the barriers to them achieving their goals and dreams. Some participants may be unable to problem solve and work through their options individually. Volunteers can provide important insights when they identify barriers the participant is unable to see and work with them to find solutions to these problems. Through exploring different options, volunteers can assist participants to overcome the barriers to them achieving their goals.

Some participants might be quite clear about their goal but struggle to work out what to do to be able to achieve it. Volunteers may need to support the participant to break down their larger goal into smaller steps that are more achievable. The participant may need support to connect the steps and understand how each step in the process will bring them closer to achieving their goal. Developing a written plan or picture, table, poster or iPad graphic might help them understand and remember how the steps work together.

### CASE STUDY: BREAKING DOWN GOALS

Brian wanted to find paid work looking after animals. When he spoke to his volunteer about his goal the volunteer was able to help him explore all the different things he would need to do to be able to get paid work. They identified together that Brian did not have a CV and had never done any paid work. The volunteer suggested one option might be obtaining volunteer work with animals, which would give him the opportunity to demonstrate his skills caring for animals. In order for Brian to become a volunteer he needed to read a practice manual and sit a test. Brian lacked confidence with his literacy skills so staff from his group home worked with him to study the manual and practice answering questions. The volunteer also worked with Brian to work out how he would get to and from the animal shelter. They looked up the bus timetable together and worked out the route. Brian passed the test and went on to work regularly in an animal shelter. After an initial period of buddy shifts he was able to work independently. Brian enjoyed volunteering and hoped to apply for paid employment in the near future.

When volunteers support participants to explore their options, and experience new possibilities they may change their preferences. They might change what they want to do when they find out there are other options available to them. After receiving support that is empowering participants often develop a clearer sense of who they are and their preferences in general.

### CASE STUDY: EXPLORING OPTIONS

Jane had been living in Melbourne for 50 years and wanted help to decide whether she should move interstate to be closer to her family. She requested the support of a volunteer to help to work through the decision to relocate. Jane was matched with a volunteer who broke down the bigger question into a series of smaller questions. The first was how happy she was with her current accommodation and support in Melbourne. After exploring accommodation options interstate Jane learned if she was to move she would likely end up in similar accommodation so would that improve her situation. The volunteer also asked about her relationship with her family and discovered they were generally not supportive. In the process of exploring her options with the volunteer, Jane discovered alternative styles of accommodation in Melbourne. Jane clarified that she was unhappy in her current accommodation and it was unclear whether moving would improve the situation. Jane decided that to move interstate would not resolve the accommodation issues or improve the relationship she had with her family so she decided not to relocate. After seeing other accommodations options she realised it was the style of accommodation that she was in that she didn't like and the volunteer worked with Jane to apply for a change of accommodation in Melbourne.

### KEY CONCEPTS:

- Before any significant decision making occurs the person receiving support may need help to explore their options.
- Volunteers may need to support participants to generate ideas, experience new possibilities, engage in problem solving and break bigger goals into smaller steps.

## Identifying and providing support

The third phase in the support for decision making model of practice is **Identifying and Providing Support**. When identifying the type of support participants need and determining the best way to provide it volunteers need to be respectful of the diverse approaches people take to decision making. It is important volunteers are guided by how participants want to be supported as individuals. Many participants will be able to communicate their preferences and OVAL Project volunteers need to respect them in the way they approach identifying and providing support for decision making.

### Identifying support

Volunteers need to be able to identify the support participants need to be able to make decisions. Participants may communicate directly how they need to be supported or it may be helpful, with their permission, to speak with a trusted carer. They may need support to: identify the decision they want to make; access and understand information; identify and weigh options; manage stress and anxiety; understand environmental factors impacting on the decision; or the consequences of making or not making the decision. As stated previously, volunteers will need to observe participants closely as their need for support with decision making will change according to their experience and circumstances. Their need for support will also change according to the complexity and consequences of the decision to be made. Therefore, the support volunteers offer with decision making needs to be tailored to the participant for each specific decision.

#### Clarifying the decision to be made

As participants in the OVAL Project explore their options, many will identify decisions they want and need to make. OVAL Project volunteers are involved for a limited time so it will be important to the focus the time spent together to only a few achievable decisions. While some participants will easily identify the decision they want to make others will need support. They may be unclear about what they want in life generally. They may be able to identify what they want but are not clear about the actions they need to take to achieve what they want. When considering a decision to be made the participant may be very focused on one aspect of the situation and forget about other important details. In these situations, volunteers need to work to empower and encourage the participant to develop their own ideas, and confidence in their ability to have and express their own opinions.

#### Accessing and understanding information

Some participants will be able to process a lot of information and others only a limited amount at any given time. Determining the best way to present information to assist participants can be an important aspect of support for decision making. When participants are taking in new information it may be helpful for volunteers to ask if they can explain the meaning of the information. If participants are unable to restate the information, it may be an indicator that they have not understood it. If the participant has had difficulty understanding the information, it may be helpful to:

- go over it again more slowly to assist the participant to process the information;
- to find the same information in a simpler format that uses plain language and pictures;
- to stage information by not presenting all of it at once, which the participant could find overwhelming;
- relate new information to previous experiences;
- provide concrete examples or experiences to aid understanding; or
- develop visual aids to help the participant understand a concept including photographs, drawings or videos to explain important information in more detail.

Participants may have difficulty retaining information and in this case always check with participants what they remember from previous discussion. As volunteers get to know their participant over time they will find creative ways to support them to understand information that will support their decision making.

### Understanding environmental factors

Participants may need support to identify the environmental factors that are shaping the decision to be made. Constraints such as having limited time, a limited budget, the limiting beliefs and expectations of other people and physical barriers such as building accessibility can all significantly influence participants' decision making. Participants may need support from volunteers to identify these environmental constraints and understand the impact they may have on their options and the decision making process. While all people experience environmental limitations that affect their decision making, it is important to ensure people with disability do not experience unjust limitations as a result of discrimination. OVAL Project volunteers should work in a way that ensures the limitations placed on participants is no greater than it is for other people in the community.

### CASE STUDY: OVERCOMING PHYSICAL BARRIERS

Dean wanted to do volunteer work that required him to register his interest in the position online. His only access to a computer was at his day program once a fortnight. Although he booked to use the computer at his day program, someone else prevented him from gaining access to it. This occurred regularly and really frustrated him. Dean told his SDM Project volunteer about the situation and she helped him to explore his options. The option Dean liked most was going to the local library and using the computer there instead. Initially Dean required some support from the volunteer to navigate the new environment. However, after a few visits he understood the booking system and was able to access the computer with the internet independently. Dean registered his interest for the volunteer work and continued to visit the local library independently to access the internet.

### Identifying and weighing options

In phase two of the model of practice, volunteers support participants to explore their decision making options generally. In the third phase, volunteers may need to support some participants to identify their options in relation to the specific decision. For these participants it may be helpful to talk about each of the options, document them or visit them depending on the participant's situation. Once participants are aware of their options they may need support to choose between them. Volunteers can use a variety of techniques to help participants select from the options including: identifying their feelings about each option; identifying if they have any essential criteria for the options; prioritising the criteria in order of importance; and using a pros and cons list to weigh different options against one another.

### Understanding the consequences of making or not making the decision

A participant may need support to understand the possible risks and consequences of making the decision. Some participants may be unable to imagine what could happen if they chose a specific option. They may need support to understand how each option could affect them differently given the different possible consequences. Understanding the consequences of making the decision is necessary to being able to make an informed choice. Volunteers may need to ask targeted questions to ascertain whether participants understand the possible risks involved in the decision. Talking through different possibilities, meeting people who have experienced the possible consequences and looking up information online may all assist the person to understand the impact on their life of making or not making the decision.

## CASE STUDY: TALKING THROUGH CONSEQUENCES

June had needed hip surgery for a long time as her walking had deteriorated so that she could no longer use public transport and was becoming very restricted in her daily activities. June wanted to be able to move freely again but was very afraid to have an operation. June was matched with a volunteer who had personal experience of hip surgery. The volunteer listened to June's concerns about the consequences of having surgery go wrong. The volunteer asked June about her understanding of the consequences of not having the surgery. When June expressed she was unsure what would happen if she did not have the surgery they went through information online that her doctor recommended. They needed to read and discuss the information a number of times before June understood what it was saying. The volunteer was also able to share her own fears and explain the benefits she had experienced from having the surgery. After numerous conversations over several months, June decided she would undergo surgery on one hip. The volunteer assisted June to attend the pre-surgery appointment when a family member was too sick to take her. The surgery was a complete success and after her recovery June decided to go ahead with the second hip surgery.

### Managing stress and anxiety

Some participants may experience stress or anxiety when they need to make decisions. Sometimes fear about smaller aspects of a decision can be a barrier to achieving the participant's larger goal. Volunteers will need to listen carefully to participants and look for signs of stress or anxiety that may diminish their ability to make the decision. Some non-verbal signs of stress or anxiety include redness in the face; fidgeting; clammy hands; trembling of the lips or hands; pacing; tightness in the chest; and rapid or mumbled speech. Every person has their own unique way of expressing stress and anxiety. In many cases participants will be able to tell volunteers if they are worried or feeling unsure about making the decision. If this is the case volunteers should ask the participant questions to try and ascertain what is causing the concern and work with them to resolve it. Are they unsure about what to do? Do they doubt their own ability to make the decision? Are they scared of making the wrong decision? If the participant is not able to communicate why the volunteer may need to suggest solutions such as how about we try x. Would it help if we tried y?

Volunteers can play a vital role in reducing the stress and anxiety of participants by identifying, listening to and validating their concerns. Sometimes using humour can distract someone from their concerns temporarily and enable them to come back to the decision feeling less anxious. Providing encouragement and focusing on the positive skills and ability of the participant can increase their confidence and reduce the stress and anxiety they experience making decisions over time.

### Providing Support

The way OVAL Project volunteers go about providing support is very important. Volunteers can significantly influence the decisions of participants by the way they present information, the tone of voice they use and whether they are enthusiastic about a particular option. The life experiences, beliefs and values volunteers bring to the relationship they have with participants shapes the way they provide support for decision making. Whether they see the participant as an equal, whether they respect and trust them and how well they know each other all shapes the way they approach providing support. The support volunteers provide needs to be non-judgemental and as impartial as possible. It is important volunteers do not tell participants what to do, try to get participants to agree with them, or only present certain options that volunteers think are best. This is difficult because decision supporters come to the decision making process with their own values, beliefs and priorities in life that create biases.

Volunteers will need to reflect on the way they provide support and in doing so reduce the impact of their biases on the participant's decision making. It is not possible to eliminate all biases from the

support volunteers provide but they can be minimised by becoming more aware of them and acting to reduce their impact on the support for decision making process.

### CASE STUDY: IDENTIFYING BIASES

Natalie was matched with a volunteer Lydia to help her make decisions regarding her accommodation. It was Natalie's desire to move in with her long term boyfriend Sam. After several months planning the move, Natalie asked Lydia for advice about having her contraceptive device removed and about she and Sam becoming parents. Natalie to her surprise felt quite uncomfortable about supporting Natalie to explore parenthood. When she reflected on her discomfort she realised she had an underlying belief that people with disability could not be good parents. Lydia did some research and found that was not necessarily the case and with adequate supports many people with disability are good parents. Lydia contacted the OVAL Project team for guidance and they recommended linking Natalie in with the local community health centre for contraceptive and parenting counselling.

Biases can be reduced by volunteers reflecting on their values and priorities and understanding how they influence their own decision making. Journaling can be a helpful way for volunteers to reflect on their experiences of providing support with making decisions, assisting them to identify when they are feeling tension or conflicted in their role as a decision supporter. OVAL Project volunteers are encouraged to contact the Project team to discuss how to best manage these types of situations. When volunteers become aware that they have a bias towards a certain decision making outcome they should tell their participant and suggest they speak to someone else who may have a different perspective on the situation. Volunteers may even try to find someone with a different view for the participant to speak to about the situation.

### KEY CONCEPTS:

- Each individual makes decisions differently and volunteers need to be guided by how participants want to be supported with their decision making.
- Volunteers need to be able to identify the support participants need to make decisions. It could be support to: identify the decision they want to make; access and understand information; identify and weigh options; manage stress and anxiety; understand environmental factors impacting on the decision; or the consequences of making or not making the decision.
- A participant's need for support with decision making will change according to their experience, circumstances and the complexity and consequences of the decision to be made.
- The way volunteers provide support needs to be non-judgemental and as impartial as possible.
- Volunteers providing support need to become aware of their biases in relation to the decision and wherever possible minimise the impact of those biases in the support for decision making process.

## Communicating and implementing decisions

Once a participant makes a decision they may need help to communicate it to other people in their life. This may include their family, NDIA support planner, case manager, financial manager or accommodation provider. The type of support volunteers might provide could include attending a meeting with the participant, assisting them to make a phone call, write a letter or send an email. The role of an OVAL Project volunteer is to provide support to the participant communicate the decision her or himself. Volunteers are encouraged to work alongside participants, but if it is identified participants are unable to communicate their decision someone may need to speak on their behalf. For OVAL Project volunteers, speaking on behalf of a participant is moving outside their role and volunteers should contact the OVAL Project team for direction. The team will be able to determine the best course of action and refer matters to professional advocacy organisations when required. Similarly, if participants encounter strong opposition to their decisions once communicated volunteers should contact the OVAL Project team as professional advocacy and support may be required.

Some participants will need support to be able to implement their decisions. When providing this support volunteers should be guided by the desire to empower and enable the participant to take control and realise their own decisions. The type of support volunteers could provide include breaking down the implementation of the decision into manageable steps, assisting the participant to identify barriers to implementing their decision, identifying the resources they need or supporting the participant to manage fears or anxieties that are holding them back from implementing the decision. It is important volunteers recognise they are not solely responsible for providing this type of support. There will be professional people in the participant's life who may have skills and expertise to contribute. Again, if volunteers believe the participant needs more support to implement a decision than they can provide please contact the OVAL Project team for guidance. For more information on understanding the scope and responsibilities of the volunteer role, please refer to the final section of this training manual.

### **CASE STUDY:** HELPFUL SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT A DECISION

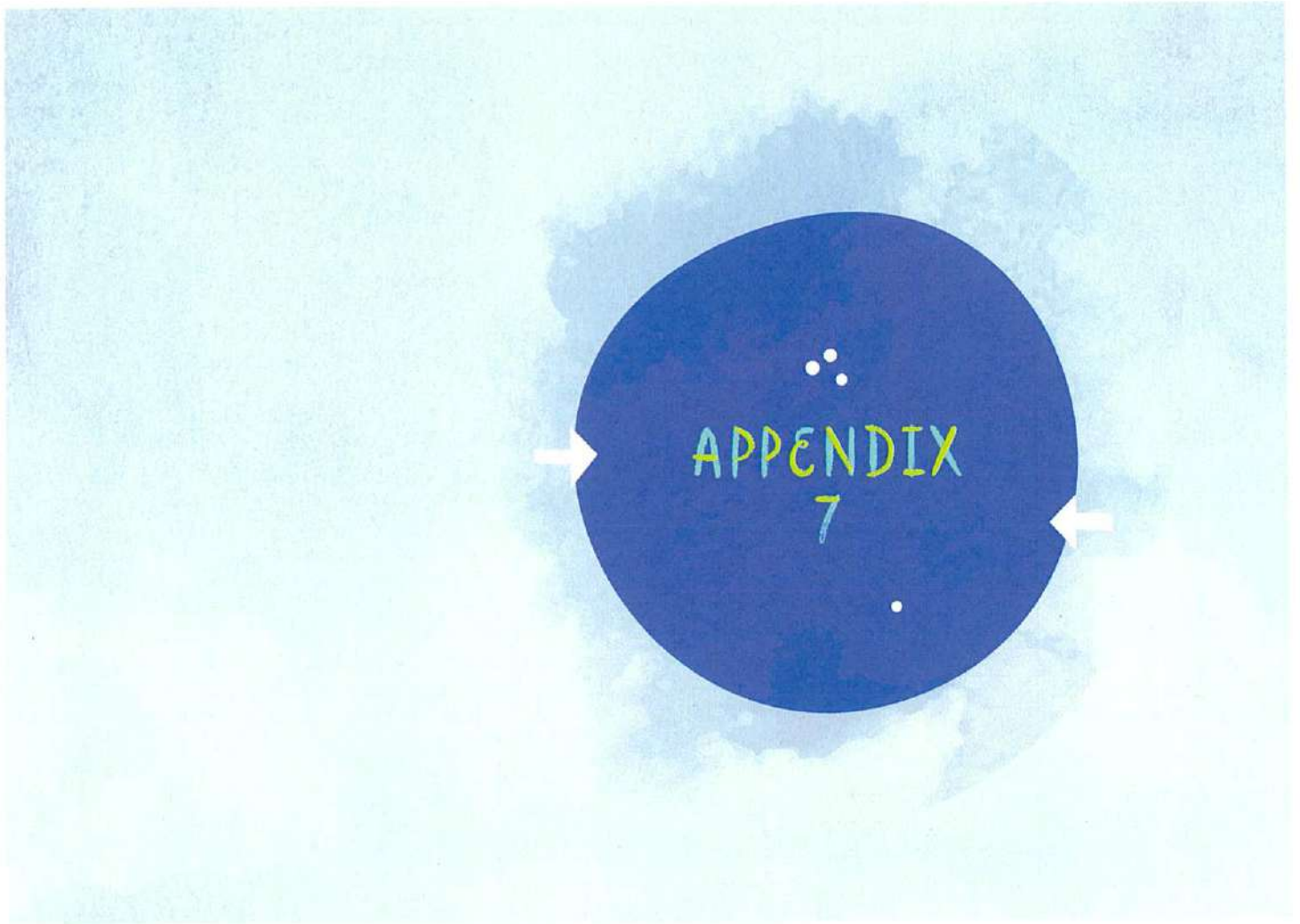
With the help of a volunteer, a participant had worked for months toward her goal of going on a beach holiday. The participant decided to pay for a private agency to assist her on holiday, as there was no support available through her accommodation. The participant sometimes had difficulty communicating her physical support needs, however, this was not a problem at home because most of her carers had known her for many years.

As her holiday neared, the participant became increasingly anxious and unsure if she really wanted to go. With much discussion and support, the participant said she had never gone away with strangers before, and was scared she might become lost or unable to communicate her needs. With the help of staff, the volunteer worked through strategies with the participant, such as developing cards with her home contact details she could give to people if she became lost. After working through these strategies with the volunteer, the participant decided to go on her holiday. She had a wonderful time and was very proud of having overcome her fears. She also decided to save up again to go on another holiday.

### KEY CONCEPTS:

- Participants may need support to communicate or implement their decisions.
- OVAL Project volunteers can provide support that will enable and empower participants to communicate and implement their own decisions.
- In some circumstances, professional advocacy or services may be needed and volunteers should contact the OVAL Project team to discuss their situation and obtain direction.





→ ONE MODULE OF THE PARTICIPANT TRAINING RESOURCE DEVELOPED BY VALID







## KEYS TO SUCCESS PROGRAM



### Rights and Responsibilities

Name .....



You live  
on Earth  
You are  
a human  
being



## Rights

Every human being has Rights. All people have equal rights, it should not matter who they are or what they do.

## Human Rights

In 1948, the United Nations Proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all people and all nations.



Human Rights are the rights and freedoms that all people are entitled to regardless of:

- Nationality
- Sex
- Race
- Religion
- Language
- or other status.



Can you think of two common Human Rights that are part of our everyday lives?

1. The Right to.....

2. The Right to.....

**Some other Human Rights:**

- Article 3** The Right to life, freedom and safety
- Article 5** The Right to live free from abuse and neglect
- Article 12** The Right to privacy
- Article 19** The Right to freedom of expression (to speak up)
- Article 21** The Right to vote
- Article 23** The Right to work
- Article 27** The Right to participate in culture



## What is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UNCRPD)

This convention protects the rights of people with disabilities all around the world.

Guiding principles of the UNCRPD means, you have the Right to:



### Individual Freedom

To be treated as a person who is able to make choices and decisions and be in control of your own life

### Respect for Dignity

To be shown by others that your ideas, wants and needs are important



### Respect for Difference

To be accepted and valued for your uniqueness and difference





**Autonomy and Independence** To do things for yourself and to be able to choose the things you do



**Participation and Inclusion** To be included in the community through participating and being valued



To live free from **Discrimination**  
To be treated the same as everyone else and not differently because of your disability

**Equal Opportunities**  
To have the chance to do the same things as anyone else



**Accessibility**  
To have an accessible society and environment and to be able to go and do things anywhere, anytime as equals with other members of society



## Important Facts

The following articles from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities may be very important in the lives of people with disability.

### Article 12

**Equal treatment before the law:** All persons with disability are recognised at all times and in all situations as persons with legal rights and duties.

### Article 14

**Liberty and security of the person:** Requires that people with a disability are not unlawfully deprived of their liberty.

### Article 15

**Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment:** Requires that people with a disability are not treated cruelly.

### Article 16

**Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse:** Requires that people with a disability are not subject to any type of violence.

### Article 19

**Living independently and being included in the community:** Requires that people with a disability have access to services that support them to live independently and be included in the community.

### Article 20

**Personal mobility:** Requires that effective measures are taken so people with a disability have the greatest possible personal mobility and independence. This can mean easy and affordable access to mobility aids and assistive technologies.

### Article 21

**Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information:** Requires that public information is provided in accessible formats.

### Article 22

**Respect for privacy:** Requires that people with a disability are not subject to unreasonable or unlawful interference with their privacy, or to unlawful attacks on their reputation. States should protect the privacy of information about people with a disability on an equal basis with others.



# You live in Australia, what are your Rights?



The Australian Government makes rules for people living in Australia.

These rules are known as laws. When the government makes new laws they have to make sure that they follow human rights.

There are a number of laws that protect the human rights of people living in Australia e.g. The Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

If a person feels that they have been discriminated against or their rights have been taken away from them they can make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission.





# You live in Victoria, what are your rights?



The Government of Victoria makes rules about the way people living in Victoria should be treated.

Where in Victoria is your Community? .....

## Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

The Government has made a law about Human Rights called The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. This act helps to protect the rights of all Victorian citizens.





## In Victoria you have the Right to:

### Freedom

You have the right to be free. If you break the law or do something wrong, you have the right to be treated fairly.

### Respect

You have the right to be treated with respect – as a fellow human being and citizen. You shouldn't be teased, bullied or discriminated against.

### Equality

You have the right to be treated as an equal citizen. You should be able to use all the services that are there for everyone else, like public transport and hospitals.

### Dignity

You have the right to be treated with dignity. You should be treated as an adult, not as a child. Information about you should be kept private and not spread around everywhere without your permission.



# FRED

## **F**reedom

- To be free and safe.
- To have your own ideas and express yourself.
- To move around freely and to choose your friends.
- To have your own things.
- To have and use rights in law.
- To be protected from unfair laws.
- To choose your own religion or belief.
- From being forced to work.

## **R**espect

- For the right to be alive (e.g. receive proper medical treatment to support you to live a good life).
- For families and children to be looked after and protected.
- For culture and religion, including recognition that human rights have a special importance for Indigenous people.

# HUMAN RIGHTS

## **E**quality

- To be treated as an equal citizen.
- To be treated as equal before the law.
- To be entitled to be part of the community and public life.
- To vote.
- To be treated fairly without discrimination.

## **D**ignity

- To be protected from medical or scientific experiments.
- To be protected from bad or cruel treatment.
- To have your privacy and reputation protected.
- To be treated with dignity if you are in jail or an institution.
- To be treated properly by the police, courts and laws.



# Disability Act 2006

In Victoria, there is a law called the Disability Act 2006.

The aim of the Act is to protect the rights of people with disability who use support services.



The Act talks about what services need to do. They need to:

## Give you information

- information should be provided in a format that people can understand.

## Keep you safe

- services must provide people with a safe environment and well-trained staff so that they can be supported free from abuse, neglect or danger.

## Help you plan

- people who use support services that are funded by the Victorian Government must have a plan that states how the service will support the person to reach their goals in life.



From 1 July 2006, the Disability Act 2006 (the Act) is the new legislation for people with a disability in Victoria. It replaces the Intellectually Disabled Persons' Services Act 1986 and Disability Services Act 1991.

- The Act provides for:
- a stronger role of government, advice of community response to the rights and needs of people with a disability, and
  - a framework for the provision of high quality services and supports for people with a disability.

The Act can be viewed on the Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary Documents website in the Victorian Statute Book section ([www.legislation.vic.gov.au](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au))

**Understanding people's rights under the Act**  
The Act requires that people with a disability be given information that explains their rights:  
— a person starts to use a disability service, the disc  
— information about the services to be



# Fix complaints

if people have a problem with a service they should have a quick and easy way to make a complaint.

The Disability Services Commissioner is an independent voice that can help to resolve complaints about disability services.

- People can complain about anything to do with their disability service
- Services must have a way to handle complaints
- Staff should listen to your complaints
- People should not get in trouble for making a complaint.



# Comply with the Disability Service Standards

In Victoria there are four Department of Health and Human Services Standards

DHHS will check if services are meeting the standards

All disability services must comply with the standards



# Victorian DHHS Standards

Department of Health and Human Services



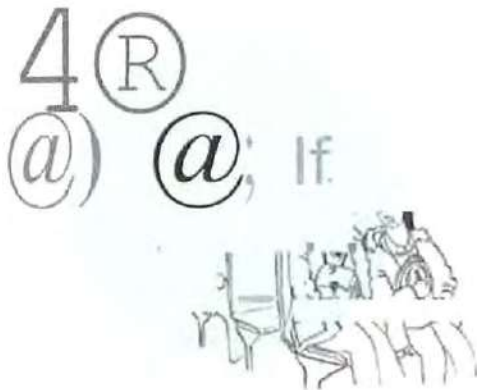
## Empowerment

Standard 1



## Wellbeing

Standard 3



## Access and Engagement

Standard 2



## Participation

Standard 4

Revised June  
2015

# Responsibilities

## Everyone has Rights and Responsibilities

Our responsibilities are to respect our own rights and the rights of other people.

**Rights** → **Responsibilities**

Rights and Responsibilities need to be in balance

No one can take



away your rights

## You can be responsible by:

- Respecting the rights of other people.
- Obeying the law.
- Not being a danger to yourself or other people.
- Treating everyone equally and with respect.
- Showing kindness, care and compassion.
- Making a contribution to the community.
- Respecting community property.





→ PARTICIPANT AND VOLUNTEER  
MATCHING PROCESS



## The OVAL Project

### Participant and Volunteer Matching Process

The aim of this document is to assist staff engaging in the matching of OVAL Project participants with suitable volunteers. By engaging in a structured matching process OVAL Project staff increase the likelihood of supportive relationships forming between participants and volunteers that are necessary for successful support for decision-making. The matching process used by the OVAL Project involves four steps:

- collecting and considering relevant information and using it to identify potential matches,
- discussing a potential match with both parties,
- facilitating an initial meeting, and
- evaluating the success of the match and taking appropriate steps in response.

#### Collecting and considering information

OVAL Project staff engaging in initial volunteer and participant interviews collect important information that is useful to the matching process. Information gathered relevant to the process includes:

- personal information (e.g. age, gender, disability, location)
- preferences (e.g. working with someone in a particular age group)
- interests that may be shared (e.g. love of animals or football team)
- skills that may be useful (e.g. someone who has specific experience)
- level of support the volunteer is comfortable to provide (e.g. a volunteer with professional experience may be more comfortable supporting a participant with complex communication needs)
- type of support the participant needs (e.g. support to explore a specific experience)
- availability and
- personality type

OVAL Project staff need to consider this information when seeking to match an appropriate volunteer to each participant. In the matching process the preferences and needs of participants need to be considered alongside the skills and availability of volunteers. Additionally, having regard to the personality and interests of individuals will greatly assist the likelihood of a successful match. From the pool of volunteers and participants, potential matches are identified.

#### Discussing the potential match

OVAL Project staff should discuss a potential match with the people involved prior to arranging a face-to-face introduction. For the majority of participants and volunteers having the opportunity to learn a little bit about their potential match will assist them to build rapport and feel more comfortable at the first meeting.

Discussing a potential match will likely occur via telephone. When communication barriers exist, and it is not possible to speak with a participant over the phone, OVAL Project staff

will decide the best strategy for introducing a new person into the participant's life. This could be to have a known support person speak with them about the potential volunteer, provide a photograph or progress immediately to arranging a meeting. Sometimes discussing people in the abstract may not be helpful. In this case, it is important to have a known support person present who is able to read the participant's non-verbal communication to ascertain their level of comfort.

### Facilitating an initial meeting

If both parties agree to meet, a face-to-face introduction is arranged at a location agreeable to the participant and volunteer. It is helpful for the first meeting to be in a place where they will likely meet in the future for example, the participant's home, library or local café. If the volunteer and the participant are comfortable, the staff member can withdraw from the meeting. If they are not comfortable, the staff member should stay and help facilitate conversation and the development of rapport. By the conclusion of the initial meeting, most participants and volunteers exchange telephone numbers and arrange their next catch up independently.

### Evaluating and taking appropriate steps

After the initial meeting, OVAL Project staff will speak with the volunteer and participant to find out how they felt about the introduction. Signs of a positive connection in the first meeting include talking easily, laughter, positive non-verbal communication (e.g. smiling, nodding, open posture, allowing the person into their personal space) and a willingness to share information or show objects of importance to one another (e.g. photos of important people).

If there was not an immediate connection OVAL Project staff should explore whether the participant and volunteer may be incompatible, or whether more time might assist the development of the relationship. Staff will need to use their discretion when determining whether to continue pursuing the initial match or explore an alternative. It may take more than one attempt to find a suitable volunteer for some participants. Ultimately, if either party is uncomfortable about the match alternatives should be explored.







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