

Evaluation of Decision-Making Support Training for Disability Support Workers (May 2019)

Background:

People with disability, particularly cognitive disability, are often excluded from making decisions about things that affect their lives (for example, where they live, who they live with, how they spend their time). Instead, decisions are often made for them.

Decision-making support involves helping someone to express their will and preferences, have these preferences understood and then acted on. It is a way of supporting people with cognitive disability to make significant decisions. It relies on the support of others, often a network of people. It is an approach that is consistent with human rights principles.

Aims:

The aim of this research was to evaluate an online training course about decision-making support for direct support workers. Specifically the aim was to explore whether training had an impact on support workers' knowledge and attitudes about decision-making support, and the opportunities that they provided to people with cognitive disability to make decisions.

Method:

Online training was developed. Participants were disability support workers who worked with adults with intellectual disability or acquired brain injury. Disability support workers across Australia were recruited using different strategies (e.g., invitations through disability service providers, industry newsletters, social media).

Participation involved completing the training and a survey. The survey was completed three times: before the training (i.e., baseline), at the completion of training (i.e., post), and two months after the training had been completed (i.e., follow-up). The survey focussed on knowledge of and confidence in providing decision-making support, challenges and facilitators to providing decision-making support, and

types of situations for which participants provided decision-making support.

Ethics approval was obtained for the research. Participation was voluntary.



Results:

Baseline to post-training comparisons

99 disability support workers participated.

Immediately following completion of the training, there were improvements in:

- Knowledge about what decision-making support was.
- Knowledge about the role of decision-making supporters.
- Knowledge of the challenges of decision-making support.
- Confidence in providing decision making support.
- Positive changes to six of ten specific beliefs about decision-making support. For example, before training most participants strongly agreed or agreed that decision-making support involved determining whether or not a person with disability has capacity/ability to make decisions; after training most participants (correctly) strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement.

When asked about what sort of situations participants provided decision-making support for, every aspect of life was covered. Nearly all participants identified providing decision-making support for leisure, recreation and other social activities.

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Baseline, post to follow-up comparisons

36 support workers completed the training and all three surveys. Even two months after training there were differences in:

- Knowledge about what decision-making support was.
- Knowledge about the role of support workers.
- Knowledge of the challenges of decision-making support.
- Confidence in providing decision-making support.
- Positive changes to two of ten specific beliefs.



Barriers and enablers to providing decision-making support

The most common barriers to providing decision-making support were:

- Service providers and other supporters.
- Family of the person with disability.

The most common factors thought to facilitate decision-making support were:

- Having knowledge of decision-making support.
- Having knowledge and understanding of the person with disability.

Recommendations:

Overall, the online training had a positive impact on knowledge and attitudes about decision-making support, however, some of the changes seen reverted to baseline levels over time. The following recommendations are made:

- Make the online training available to support workers as well as other staff through Scope's E-Learning Centre.
- Include the online training (or at least Module 1) in Scope's induction training.
- Promote the online training through internal communications.
- Determine how else the training can be used internally.
- Explore opportunities to share the training with other service providers.
- Explore opportunities for the training to be used for teaching by the University of Melbourne (through our Partnership) and other Universities and TAFEs.
- Identify and address internal policies and practices, structural and systemic constraints that conflict with key human rights principles that prevent implementing decision-making support.
- Explore strategies that might facilitate longer-term changes, such as practice leadership.

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