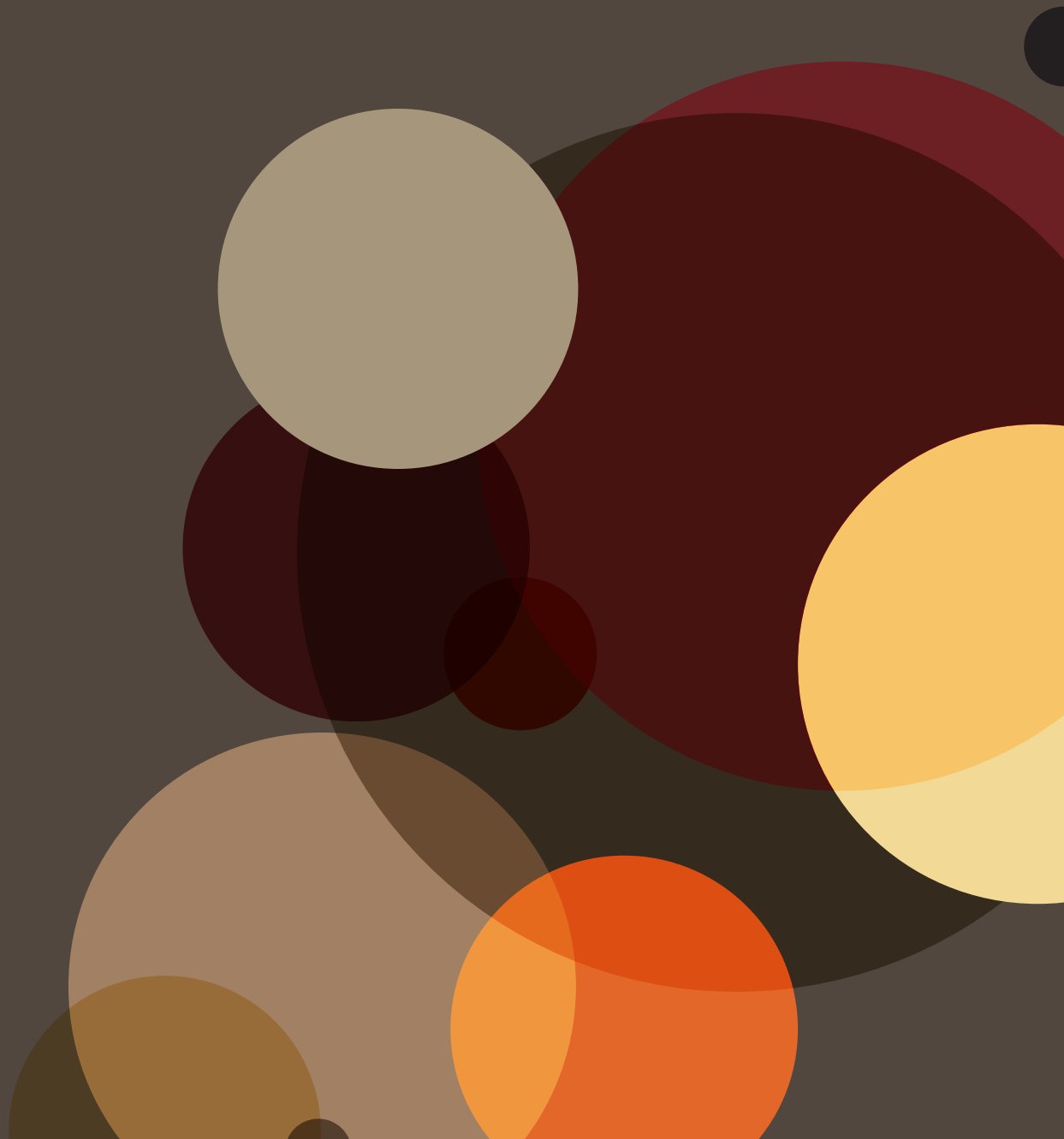# BACKGROUND EVIDENCE

MAKING IT WORK

A WORKFORCE GUIDE FOR DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

A Practical Design Fund project funded by FaHCSIA to support the implementation of DisabilityCare Australia

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Summary of key themes

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Introduction

This document provides background evidence for the **"Making it work"** workforce guide (referred to as the Guide) for disability providers. Both the Guide and the

Chan, Davidson, & Fattore, 2013) This Guide provides suggestions for recruiting, developing and retaining a high quality workforce by sharing strategies used by service providers identified as leaders in workforce development. This document provides evidence supporting these strategies, outlines characteristics of the workforce and, describes the attributes, values and capabilities required in workers.

Two comprehensive reports documenting the characteristics of the disability workforce provide a workforce profile which is supported by observations made of the 20 service providers and disability organisations visited across Australia for this project Martin and Healy (2010) surveyed workers across a number of fields in community services including 1,507 from disability support workers Rim re Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) surveyed 107 Community Service Organisations (CSO), plus 2,089 Employee Review employees from 92 CSOs across Victoria.

Data from the two reports are generally consistent. The data showed that the disability workforce was approximately 80 per cent female and in the older age range. Martin and Healy reported that 7 per cent of disability services workers were Australian born, and Rim re Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) reported that 13.36 per cent identified as culturally and linguistically diverse. Martin and Healy stated that almost all workers were non-Indigenous Australians, while Rim re Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) stated that 8 per cent of workers had an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background (referred to as Aboriginal in this document). Service provides interviewed for this study said they had difficulties recruiting and retaining Aboriginal workers.

Leadership

Strong leadership was observed as important when interviewing the service providers for this study. Senior managers implemented their vision of support in ways that were clear to people using the provider and to staff at all levels. The importance of effective leadership in creating effective services is emphasised in a wide range of management literature, for example the Australian reference Graetz, Rimmer, Lawrence and Smith (2011) Effective leadership is not the focus of this project and it will not be discussed in depth. However, it remains an important factor that needs to be considered when planning a workforce strategy.

1. Communication

Communication and interpersonal skills are perhaps the 'most undervalued skill sets' of disability support workers (Fattore, Evesson, Moensted, & Jakubauskas, 2010:82)

Good communication, between the person receiving support and their worker and between the worker and their supervisor in their employing provider, is essential to forming good working relationships and providing effective services (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013). As the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) (2010) noted, people receiving support need to tell workers what they want before their needs can be met. Barriers that can restrict this communication need to be addressed. A cultural ambassador or interpreter may be needed to assist people from Aboriginal or culturally diverse backgrounds; people inexperienced in expressing their wishes need training and support; assistive technology may be needed for people with physical impairments; and pictorial and other aids may assist people with an intellectual disability (Community Living Association Inc, 2007). While this Guide is designed for providers managing their workforce, it includes suggestions for people using services also receiving communication support and training because they are the central point in the communication chain.

Communication in support work can be highly complex and demanding, especially when behaviour management skills are required and violence and abuse is evident, particularly against women (Fattore et al., 2010; Frohmader, 2012). Communication is a two way process and workers and service providers need to be open to hearing what people are saying. Workers need communication training to be receptive to different forms of communication including body language. As DisabilityCare Australia enables more people with disability to have greater choice and control, and more social and economic participation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) the demands on workers will increase (Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), 2010). It is expected that workers will need higher level communication skills and they will need to be responsive to expanding their role (Cortis et al., 2013). Australian evidence regarding the challenges workers face transitioning to the DisabilityCare Australia environment is still limited, however, it does show that this transition is challenging for workers (Laragy & Ottmann, 2011).

2. Organisation culture, values and expectations

Providers need to clearly promote their values and mission statement because each organisation is unique and workers and people receiving support can only know what to expect when these are clearly relayed. Each provider's values and

3. Recruitment

Building a quality workforce with the capabilities to r

be reluctant to raise any concerns over pay, conditions and health and safety. Although the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has the responsibility to monitor employers' compliance with industrial laws, the authors argued that they have not always had the capacity to fulfil this responsibility.

A range of strategies have been proposed to maximise opportunities for recruiting suitable workers. Strategies notes were partnering with training organisations and utilising student placements; becoming a Registered Training Organisation; local newspapers and websites for local jobs; 'word of mouth' through formal and informal networks; target special groups such as parents at home, retirees (Department of Family and Community Service, 2011; National Disability Services (NDS) ACT and Valmar Support Services Ltd., 2009a)

A critical factor in meeting the needs of people receiving support and workers is matching their needs and interests (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2012) Matching needs to occur with respect to times and location, gender, age, cultural background and interests. Attracting future workers may depend need a multi-pronged strategy. Providers can consider recognition of workers' experience and training, their needs and preferences for the type of work as well as the times and conditions of work.

4. Flexible, responsive & creative work

Work that allows workers to manage their work/ life balance is attractive to workers (Australian Government, 2013; Pocock, Skinner, & Williams, 2012). A key feature in attracting and retaining disability workers can be the availability of flexible working arrangements, if the conditions also meet the workers' need for job security and sufficient income (Rim re Resources & NDS Victoria, 2010). Some workers like flexible working hours, a rostered day off, time in lieu, leave without pay, and a 48 / 52 working year. Flexibility is particularly important in the DisabilityCare Australia environment which seeks to meet the diverse needs of people with disability. However, maximising flexibility for people receiving support and for workers is challenging for providers. There are practical rostering problems, although research into flexible work identifies that the skills, experience, resources and attitude of managers are the crucial factors in creating successful flexible work practices (Australian Institute of Management, 2012).

Aboriginal and CALD people receiving support

The principle of understanding each person's needs applies universally, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse people in Australia. The First Peoples Disability Network Australia (FPDN) 10 Point Plan for implementing DisabilityCare Australia guides the implementation of this principle when working with Aboriginal people.

The 10 Points are:

1) Recognise that most Aboriginal people with disability do not self-identify as people with disability

2) Raise awareness via a concerted outreach approach. Direct face-to-face consultation is essential to inform people about their rights and entitlements.

3) Establish an Expert Working Group with Aboriginal and prominent disability leaders. DisabilityCare Australia is an opportunity to create practical and meaningful partnerships between the Aboriginal community, government and the non-government sector.

4) Build the capacity of the non-Indigenous disability service system to provide culturally appropriate support and legislate an additional standard into the

Disability Services Act requiring disability services to demonstrate their cultural competencies

5) Research the prevalence of disability and culturally appropriate supports in partnership with Aboriginal people with disabilities.

6) Recognise that many Aboriginal people already work informally providing disability support and look for ways to create employment opportunities in some communities.

7) Recognise that many communities have appropriate ways of supporting people

Aboriginal and CALD workers

There is a disproportionally small number of Aboriginal support workers compared to the high number of Aboriginal people with disability (Martin & Healy, 2010; Rim re Resources & NDS Victoria, 2010). Aboriginal health workers experience limited career development opportunities with contributing factors including a lack of workforce information and, at times, a lack of respect and recognition by other health professionals and employers (Health Workforce Australia, 2011)

People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are also underrepresented in the disability workforce. Rimfire Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) found that only between 2 per cent and 5 per cent workers identified as originating from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Developing and providing appropriate training for workers from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds is a strategy proposed to address the needs of these workers, in addition to providing culturally appropriate support when they are in the workforce (Ageing Disability and Home Care, 2011)

Rural and remote areas

There are challenges attracting workers to rural and remote areas and a range of strategies have been suggested to address this shortfall. The strategies centre around harnessing the potential labour that exists in local communities

5. Training, mentoring and support

DisabilityCare Australia offers both new opportunities for people with disability and there are associated new risks. These risks can be managed if workers are adequately trained (Department of Health, 2007). The English Department of Health produced a best practice guide for workers to balance the rights of people to take

Regular supervision is a means for the provider to ensure that all legal and procedural requirements are met, and that services are provided in accordance with organisational values. Regular supervision and performance reviews also offer workers guidance, support and feedback and the research shows that it is valued by workers (Ageing Disability and Home Care, 2011; Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2012)Workers often face complex situations and may observe abuse and neglect, especially against women. When this occurs, workers need timely direction and guidance regarding the ethical and legal issues involved (Healey, Howe, Humphreys, Jennings, & Julian, 2008)

6. Recognition and incentives

Workers develop greater attachment and commitment to their organisation when they feel valued (Department of Family and Community Service, 2019) Recognition and incentives demonstrate to workers that they are valued and contribute to job satisfaction and retention rates

7. Career pathways

Rim re Resources & NDS Victoria (2010) reported that 75.7 per cent of providers in their study offered career advancement opportunities to their workers. However, Fattore et al. (2010) argued that the disability sector has limited career opportunities, especially for workers in the non-government sector. This is a concern for workers seeking a career pathway. Workers are appreciative when there are opportunities to vary their work and take on more responsibilities. They gain personal satisfaction and financial security, and they are more likely to remain in the disability sector (Australian Government, 2013)

Conclusion

This paper provides evidence and discussion from reports and the academic literature to support the ideas presented in the accompanying Guide called 'Making it work: A workforce guide for disability service providers'. A key principle that underpins all the work reviewed is the importance of considering each individual's preferences and needs in their particular context. This principle applies to all people receiving support and to all workers across the country. Each person will determine their priorities and the extent to which they include their family and community. Some people from Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities may place greater importance on including their extended networks when making their plans than other Australians, and workers need to be aware of cultural differences. The guiding principle for workers is to find out what each person wants. This approach is consistent with the values and vision of DisabilityCare Australia.

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