

Peer network meeting topic: Talking about supported decision-making

Introduction

Peer networks can help people understand their choices and make decisions for themselves. Sometimes it can be useful to have a conversation about what it means to make a decision.

This is important because sometimes a person living with disability may have someone else making the decisions for them, maybe a family member or a professional person.

The problem with that is that sometimes it can mean the person doesn't always have a choice about what they want.

This quick guide looks at how peer networks can talk about this, including something called supported decision-making.

Let's make it happen

Using your peer network meeting to talk about supported decision-making

Some people have types of disability that can make other people worry that the person might not make good decisions for themselves. It then becomes more likely that other people make decisions for the person. This is called **substitute decision-making**. Sometimes this is *informal*, where for example a family member decides to do it. Sometimes this is formal, where a Guardian is formally appointed to make decisions for the person. This could be a family member or a professional worker.

When someone is appointed as a Guardian for a person, their job is to make decisions for the person as though they are that person. Their job is to make decisions in line with the person's rights and preferences.

A problem with substitute decision-making is that it is very hard for a family member to make decisions as though they are the other person because they are not. They have their own needs and wants as a parent/partner/sibling, and it can be hard to separate this out. A Guardian who is a professional worker may be less emotionally invested in the person so there may be less conflict there, but a professional worker does not always know each person deeply, and they will also be influenced by professional rules about duty of care.

However, the main problem with having a formal Guardian is that a person's decision-making has been taken away from them and given to somebody else.

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Supported decision-making

Sometimes abbreviated to SDM, is a way of supporting a person to make decisions without that person losing ownership of their decisions.

A peer network can have a good conversation about decision-making, and there is much people can share. Here is a sample list of questions that could be used to run a conversation about decision-making.

- Why is it important to each of us that we make our own decisions?
- Some people living with disability may need help to make decisions. Do we think this means they have to give up being a decision maker and making their own choices?
- (For family members) what are the challenges in being the decision maker/Guardian for your adult son or daughter? Is it possible to make decisions for your adult son or daughter without including your own emotions and views?
- People often turn to friends and other trusted people to help them when they are thinking about a decision. Could this happen if someone has a Guardian?

The peer network facilitator could also bring to the meeting some information about supported decision-making. Take a look at the links below. They include a rights-based summary that could be printed and taken into the peer network meeting for discussion. There are also guides to supported decision-making, and again these could be good to take into a peer network for discussion.

Where to find more information

The Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) has a good summary of Supported Decision Making, and links it to the NDIS and to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The link is here: <http://www.advokit.org.au/decision-making/supported-decision-making/>

In South Australia, the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) worked with community organisation JFA Purple Orange and philanthropic fund the Julia Farr MS McLeod Benevolent Fund to design and run an SDM pilot. You can read about the pilot here: http://www.opa.sa.gov.au/resources/supported_decision_making

SDM is also being tried in **Victoria**, in a partnership between the Office of the Public Advocate and local advocacy agency VALID. You can read about that here: <http://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au/advocacy-research/supported-decision-making>

There are two guides worth downloading; one from South Australia and one from Victoria and you can find them on the peer network website by clicking here:

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<http://peerconnect.org.au/resources/me-and-my-choices/supported-decision-making/>