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LIVING WITH DISABILITY  
RESEARCH CENTRE



## Evaluation of a Structured Decision-making Framework used by the Public Trustee Queensland

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# Background

Paradigm shift in thinking about decision making by people with intellectual disabilities

UNCPRD 2006

- Persons with disabilities enjoy **legal capacity on an equal basis** with others in all aspects of life.
- Signatory nations agree to develop “appropriate measures to **provide access** by persons with disabilities **to the support they may require in exercising their legal capacity**”.

UN Committee 2014 recommended abolition of substitute decision making

Australia is reforming provisions for substitute decision making but not removing

For example – Victorian provisions for appointment of Supportive Guardian or Administrator

Changes in Qld - Amendments to Guardianship and Administration Act 2000.

- responsibility on Qld public sector – promotes and safeguards rights in ways that are least restrictive
- **Structured Decision Making** to be used when promoting rights - resembles supported decision making
  - Recognise and preserve right to make own decisions
  - If possible support the adult to make a decision
  - Take account of views, wishes and preferences
  - Use substituted judgement if cannot determine preferences

# Queensland Public Trustee and Decision Making

- Financial administrator for people with impaired decision-making capacity appointed by QCAT, also wills, deceased estates, manage investments and trusts

‘The Public Trustee is a socially and fiscally responsive Statutory Authority that helps to make decisions that enhance the dignity, rights and interests of Queenslanders.

We also help some of Queensland’s most vulnerable and are often appointed as financial administrator for people who have impaired capacity and no one else to help them manage their money.’

- Aimed to reorientate decision making practice as part of other changes to reflect the new human rights imperatives
- Developed a Structured Decision-Making Framework (SDM) based on La Trobe Support for Decision Making Framework
- SDM Framework aimed to assist frontline staff in making better decisions through stronger engagement with customers and their support network throughout the decision-making process (QPT Annual Report, 2020/2021)

# SDM Training

- QPT's training division in collaboration with the La Trobe team, adapted the La Trobe Framework to reflect the specific requirements of the 2019 amendments to the Guardian and Administration Act, 2000, (GAA Act) and the context of QPT).
- These adaptations did not substantially change the underpinning concepts, steps or principles of the La Trobe Framework but notably the primary term was changed from support for decision making to structured decision making.
- Begun in 2020 by mid 2021, all frontline staff across QPT had been trained in the new Framework, as well as supervisors and managers.





Some change of language

Step 3 Customer views, wishes and preferences, principles coordination rather than orchestration

Step 5 Understand the process – stop and reflect on HRs - rather than consider if formal process as hold authority

Step 7 Actioning and evidencing – need to document

# Evaluation Aims and Methods

- 1) What do QPT staff think about the introduction of the new SDM Framework?
- 2) Do QPT staff use the steps and principles of structured decision making in their everyday work?
- 3) How has staff practice changed as a result of the new SDM Framework and receipt of training in structured decision making

## Mixed methods

- Interviews to explore experiences of applying training in their work and perceptions of new ways of working
- Staff survey pre and post training
  - DSQ to measure change in practice – SDM Confidence Rating
- 3-6 months after training

## Participants

- Timing and impact of COVID reduced response rates
- 18 interviews

Measure	Time-Points – Number of Respondents		
	Pre-training	Post-training	Paired – pre- and post-training
SDM-CR	146	57	50
DSQ-sup	100	38	29

# Findings

## Confidence

- Significantly increased after training (M=7.0, SD=1.9) compared to (M=7.8, SD=1.3);  $t(49) = -3.92, p < .001$ .

## Support consistent with principles and strategies of SDM – DSQ

- Significant change ( $p < .05$ ) in the expected direction 12/19 items
- Non-significant change on the remaining 7 items

### More likely to

- consider the consequences of the outcome with the person
- seek advice from a colleague
- check the person wants to be supported to make the decision
- rely on what the person wants or prefers
- weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of options with the person
- check the person understands what is involved in the decision
- work through each of the steps involved in the decision with the person
- consider the significance of the decision for the person

### Less likely to

- make the decision with the person on the spur of the moment
- choose for the person based on their knowledge of the person
- take the option that the person will least resist
- wait and see what happens with time

Item	Pre-training Mean (SD)	Post-training Mean (SD)	Direction of change (more or less often)	Strength of change
Work through each of the steps involved in the decision with the person	1.55 (.50)	3.34 (.50)	More often	Extremely strong
Consider the consequences of the outcome with the person	2.10 (.90)	3.34 (.81)	More often	Strong
Weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of options with the person	2.38 (.82)	3.27 (.70)	More often	Strong
Consider the significance of the decision for the person	2.48 (.74)	3.41 (.78)	More often	Strong
Check the person understands what is involved in the decision	3.10 (.67)	3.58 (.62)	More often	Moderate
Rely on what the person wants or prefers	2.25 (.84)	2.82 (.90)	More often	Moderate
Seek advice from a colleague	2.06 (.96)	2.48 (.51)	More often	Weak
Check the person wants your support to make the decision	2.51 (.63)	2.90 (.90)	More often	Weak
Choose for the person based on your knowledge of the person	2.86 (.79)	2.03 (1.05)	Less often	Moderate
Take the option that the person will least resist	2.59 (.73)	1.76 (.74)	Less often	Moderate
Make the decision with the person on the spur of the moment	2.65 (.81)	1.38 (.62)	Less often	Very strong
Wait and see what happens with time	2.45 (.83)	1.49 (.51)	Less often	Strong



# Staff perspectives on change

## Refocusing on rights

- Training encapsulated ethos of focus on rights
- Mixed views about extent of change

*...it was more or less confirming what we did...*

*We tipped everything on its head and had a different approach to it...*

## Having a framework and being more accountable

- Structure and point of reference for first time

*...we've got a process in place and we can evidence that we followed that process and yeah, we're covered on both sides*

*...That wheel is extremely valuable. It everything and underpins all the general principles that we have to deal with.*

*..So, evidencing it and explaining... So, it's just making sure that we've said "Okay, well, this is the human rights we believe that we are limiting.*

# Reflections on training

- Well designed, Valuable, Participatory, Delivered with energy and enthusiasm
- Appreciated worked examples of QPT context

*I really enjoyed the training, and the feedback that I got from the other staff here in our office who did it was that they enjoyed it as well...I think everyone got something positive out of it, and particularly I remember the videos that were shown with particular case examples; I think they were very beneficial.*

- Could be more tailored to QPT work
- Could be more directive

*The people providing the training to us have never done this, I guess, and so it was maybe a little bit hard for them to relate to some of the issues that we have and some of the time pressures that we have.*

# Changing Practice – Applying the QPT SDM

Customers having ‘more of a say’

Different language, better listening, more careful exploration of options, and ensuring understanding

*...so, you're actually asking them [customers] and not telling them.*

*...a bit more conscious of making sure that the customer has been consulted where possible.*

*...definitely to make sure that we listen to the needs of our clients, make sure we understand not just what they're saying but all the circumstances surrounding it as well. That we respect their wants and their needs, not just listen but try to assist them*

More orchestration

*It's a big difference to how we have done things in the past... a lot of our clients can't provide input, and it's then finding relevant people that can provide us with input as to what their views, wishes, and preferences would have been*

# 1 Knowing the person

- Shift from customers regarded as “files”

*...it's drummed into us know the person, get to know the person...get to know their personalities and what their likes and dislikes are.*

- Multiple sources of information

*I initially look at the QCAT documentation... gives a little background into family history or how we became to be acting...I look to see what the current circumstances are...I look at if there's an NDIS plan ...what their goals are...I look at any notes or budget comments and things, and then I will speak directly obviously with the customer. ...And then it's just a conversation with them, getting to know what's important to them...asking who's important to them in their life...speaking with then those people that are those supportive relationships in their life, looking at whether they have any cultural or linguistic considerations, whether I need to adjust*

- Building relationships with help of new technology

*... they have phone, text, email, we now have teams; there's multiple ways that they can build a relationship with their Trust Officer.*



## 2 Identifying the Need for a Decision and Describing the Need

Ensure each request treated separately rather than just carrying over

*...you go back and revisit and think is there any money I can find to give them because it's important to them. We try to take that on board each time*

Predicting consequential decisions

*...this is a journey, so your one decision about you wanting to do this is going to have multiple optional decisions afterwards, and so we're going to need to keep working with you in relation to that, and we'll support you all the way through, but it is a long journey and it's not just one decision...*

# 3 Obtaining Customers' Views, Wishes and Preferences

## Central to changed practice

*it's probably just giving them the options whereas once a upon time that wasn't required".*

*...a real refocus on ensuring that we are exploring more options with our clients and making sure that we are really working with them to help them to understand what the decision entails, and what the outcomes might be, what their preferences are in relation to those, why they're choosing a preference over another.*

## Strategies

*I like to get them to repeat it back to me. I like them to use lots of questions so you can see whether they're actually understanding*

*some of our clients can't express themselves as well You have to ask more questions to get deeper into the meaning of what they want and why and all that.*

## 4 Identifying the Priorities and Constraints: Engaging with the Support Network

- Understanding financial realities and enabling risks

*for me it's trying to work out is there any other way of achieving what the customer wants that isn't quite what they perhaps came in with, but also isn't just us saying 'no, this isn't possible'.*

*...we've now got to make a decision and identify the consequences of what it's going to mean for her...moving on to what constraints there are around signing a lease, where she's responsible for the full amount of rent...there's quite a bit in that she's got limited financial means and a disrupted income from time to time. ...when I apply the framework it does make it clearer. Well, it's something that would need to be communicated to her, and the partner, clearly. And there is the risk that he won't pay half the rent, and then she could be, potentially, without a home to live in.*

# 5 Undertaking a Structured Process

## Using the wheel to remind about process

*...I have my wheel sitting up on my desk so I can see it, it's there. So, it's just a visual that's there and it reminds you as well*

## Some questioned whether this step was necessary

*On our wheel, it just says, "Undertake a structured process." So, it's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and that is step five...shouldn't that be step one? Does it even need to be on the wheel?...if that's a step on the wheel, what does that represent in a written decision? How do we show step five, undertake a structured process, when step one, two, three, four, six, seven are showing that we have undertaken a structured process.*



## 6. Reaching the Decision and Associated Decisions

Only important for a few staff where a decision involves something like taking legal action.

*...it's not just one decision and then it's done; this is one that's actually quite complex and there will be points of time where you'll need to make the decision about do you go A, B, C or D, and we will keep working with you on*

## 7. Actioning and Evidencing the Decision

- Mixed views about staff responsibility for actioning decisions
- Evidencing – recognising value but more onerous than previously

*So, our previous documenting ... may have only been two or three lines. Whereas now, we're documenting how we came about the decision. It's more important for not just that decision, but reference to it in the future, if the customer rings and requests funds maybe for the same reason – what has the previous Trust officer taken into consideration, that maybe I haven't taken into consideration when I've taken this request. So, I think documentation of our decisions, and how we get to that decision is very important, and probably what I took away from the training.*

# Principles – Coordination – Commitment – Reflection and Review

Few staff explicitly referred to principles but evident in comments

Involving support networks

*“a lot more, now, than I used to”*

*“more involvement in the decision-making by the customer, and their support network”*

Attention to language to convey rights

*we did do a lot of work around some wording...It's changing the wording so you're actually asking them and not telling them...So it is in the way you speak to them, so you don't want to be using words that could sound like you are influencing them to make a decision*

Valued reflection and review

*Sometimes I do ask for time, before making a decision, and just wait a little bit, have a think about the next day and then give them a call back, and that allows me time, and a different frame of mind.*

# Is the Framework Embedded

## Staff suggest so

- Discussed at staff meetings
- Used by supervisors to review decisions
- Embedded in templates and other documentation requirements

*...I've bounced back a lot more submissions where I've noted the Trust Officer hasn't made that attempt or effort to seek the views, wishes and preferences from the customer, customer's family members, where the customer can't be consulted.*

*We've developed our coaching tools around it, as well, so when we do our monthly coaching sessions with each individual team member we're talking about 'how is this working for you, and what are you finding difficult*

## Some not fully convinced of the new thrust

- Tensions between the rights and protection.

*I feel like we've lost our way a little, and we're just giving customers money every time they ring up and request*

- Need for additional training in working with people with mental health problems

# Summary and implications

- Participants perceived QPT had refocussed - becoming more customer centred and orientated towards rights.
- Perceived greater accountability of their decision making to both customers and the organisation.
- Valued clear processes and principles articulated in the new SDM Framework to guide their work.
- Small sample pre and post - statistically significant changes to the practice demonstrating greater confidence and increased use of decision support strategies commensurate with rights based supported decision making.
- Inherent tension between a procedural approach and being person centred which requires the application of principles and processes to the unique situation of each individual customer.
- Comments suggest the need to develop and work through further case studies focussed on some of the more complex issues that confront frontline QPT staff.
- Challenge to maintain momentum and embed over time, induction, refresher and advanced training
- Share with other Public Trustee organisations.
- Types of change found similar to those of earlier studies involved training in the La Trobe Framework for staff working as service coordinators with people with acquired disabilities and parents of adults with intellectual disabilities (Bigby et al., 2021; Douglas & Bigby, 2020).



# Free on line training resources

## The La Trobe Support for Decision Making Practice Framework Learning Resource

[ABOUT](#)[MODULE 1](#)[MODULE 2](#)[MODULE 3](#)[MODULE 4](#)[MODULE 5](#)[MODULE 6](#)[RESOURCES](#)[CONTACT](#)

### About this resource

This online learning resource is about support for decision making. It will present the first evidence-based framework to guide you through the process of supporting people with cognitive disabilities to make decisions. Using this framework will help you to enable the people you support to exercise choice and control in their own lives.

<http://www.supportforddecisionmakingresource.com.au/>

# Free on-line training resources

**Enabling Risk**  
*Putting Positives First*

ABOUT

MODULE 1

MODULE 2

MODULE 3

MODULE 4

MODULE 5

RESOURCES

CONTACT



## About this resource.

**Enabling Risk: Putting Positives First** is an online learning resource developed specifically for disability support workers.

<https://www.enablingriskresource.com.au/>

Practice Framework

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