

A Guide to Circles of Support

This information is from an article in Down Syndrome Australia's Voice magazine, April 2019.

Deb Rouget and Teresa Micallef wrote the original article. They work at Belonging Matters.



The article is about **Circles of Support**. These are groups of people who give ongoing friendship and support to individual people with disability.



There is also some information about **Microboards**. These are another kind of support circle. Jaquie Mills from Microboards Australia wrote the original information.



We have written this article in an easy to read way.



You can get help to read it.

Why are Circles of Support important?



People with disability these days have the chance to do more things as part of their community.

But lots of people only have one or two family members to support them with this.



People worry about what will happen when family members can't give that support any more.

Some people don't have anyone, except paid support.

They can get lonely, sad and feel there is no-one who cares about them and will be there when they need help.



People say that their Circles of Support have helped them in lots of ways to have a better life.



This includes being more independent, having more friends and doing things they want, such as studying or getting a job.



What do Circles of Support do?

Members of a Circle of Support help each person with disability in different ways.

The kind of help depends on what the person wants to do and what help they need.



Members of the Circle treat the person with disability as a friend and equal.

They can support the person to:

- Speak up
- Share their ideas and skills in the Circle
- Learn new information and skills
- Make choices and decisions about their life
- Do what they want in life
- Connect with other people



Who can be part of a Circle of Support?



People who take part in Circles of Support are **volunteers**. This means they choose to take part because they want to help. They don't get paid.



People might be asked to join a Circle because:

- They have good skills in a certain area. For example, they might be able to help the person look after their money, or manage their NDIS plan.
- They know lots of people in the community and can help the person to make friends, get a job or get involved in other ways.
- They know the person with disability well, such as family or friends.
- They want to spend time with the person

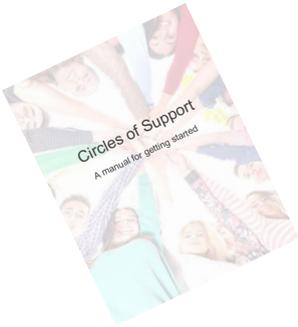


They often decide they want to be part of a person's Circle for quite a long time, to give the best support they can.



Tips to get started with a Circle of Support

Get more information and decide if a Circle of Support is what you want. They might not be right for some people.



Think about what you would want your Circle of Support to help you with.



Do you want a Circle to help you with a certain thing, such as getting a job, moving into your own home, or managing your support services?

Or would your Circle help you in different ways in your life?



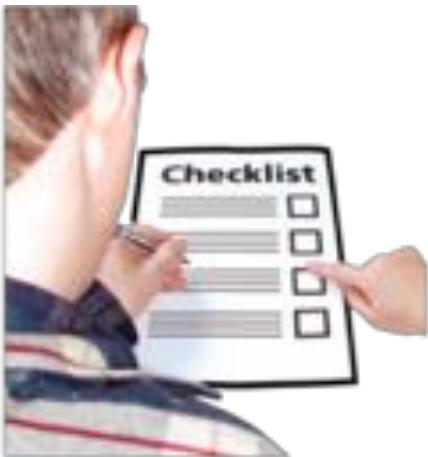
Think about what your Circle would be like when it is working really well. This helps you have a **vision**, like a picture in your mind, of the best Circle for you.



Think about people who you think would be good members of your Circle.

This can include family, friends and neighbours. But also think about other people.

It is useful to think about the kinds of help you need from people.



Then make a list of the **knowledge, skills and qualities** you want people in your Circle to have.

- Knowledge is knowing useful information.
- Skills are being able to do things.
- Qualities are things like being helpful, friendly, reliable, understanding, honest.



Think about meetings of your Circle of Support.

Where will they meet, how often and for how long?



For example, most Circle members find two hours every two months works for them.



Asking people to be part of your Circle of Support can seem hard.

But most people are glad to be asked to join a Circle of Support.

Give people clear information so they know what you are asking them to do.



Who organises and runs the Circle?

Sometimes, people and their families can't do this. So it can be a good idea to ask someone with the right skills to be the **Circle Facilitator**.



The facilitator's job could be to organise the meetings, keep people on track when they are talking and make sure everyone has a chance to put their ideas in.



They could also share out the jobs to Circle members. They can also get in touch with them between meetings to see how they are going.



Tips for Circle of Support meetings

1. Choose the right time and place.
2. At the first meeting, talk about why you have a Circle and how everyone will work.
3. Start and finish on time and stay on track.
4. Get to know each other and make it fun.
5. Include everyone. Discuss things in ways that work for everyone. You might use photos or Easy Read information.
6. Make the most of everyone's skills and knowledge.
7. Be creative. Use different ways to make the meetings interesting.
8. Write down the issues and give jobs to Circle members. They will tell everyone what happened at the next meeting. You can celebrate when good things happen.
9. Have a plan for inviting new members when someone leaves the Circle.



Microboards

Microboards are a different kind of support circle.

Like Circles of Support, they are a group of people who get together to support a person to plan and have the life they want.

The main difference is that Microboards are **incorporated**.

This means a microboard is a legal organisation, with a set of legal rules they have to follow.

Microboard members are a committee with set jobs.

This includes Chair, who runs the meetings and Treasurer who looks after any money.

Microboards can also hire staff and help people self-manage their NDIS plans and money.





You can ask for funding in your NDIS plan to run a Circle of Support or Microboard.



You can get more information on Circles of Support from:

Belonging Matters.

Email:

facilitator@belongingmatters.org

Web: www.belongingmatters.org

Phone: 03 9739 8333



You can get more information on Microboards at:

www.microboard.org.au

and

www.velacanada.org