



Circles of Support

'Circles of Support' is a method of bringing together a structured network of friends and relatives who give their support freely to a person with disability. Circle of Support members work collaboratively to build individual and group capacity to pursue the person's vision for an inclusive life. Independent research has found Circles of Support are effective in increasing community involvement, achieving life goals and reducing reliance on paid services.

Community Living Project's Circles Initiative

Community Living Project (CLP) is a family-led agency that has developed and improved the model for Circles of Support over 20 years. CLP is based at Christies Beach, and works with people in metropolitan and regional South Australia.

A number of long-term Circles provide evidence of a person with disability achieving life goals that may not have ever been imagined, realised or reached without the Circle of Support. [A short video produced by CLP gives insights into some of these relationships and outcomes.](#)

While CLP has built up significant expertise about the creation and facilitation of Circles of Support, funding stream changes for individuals and the organisation through transition to the NDIS have diminished opportunities to connect with new families to start them on a path to establish and sustain their individual Circle of Support.

The Circle effect

A person who has a robust Circle of Support has a diverse group of people around them who have a thorough and consistent understanding of the person's vision for their life. The vision has been articulated and is a focus for goal setting and action. Building capacity for self-advocacy is paramount. The vision and actions are revisited and revised regularly to remain relevant.

Circles of Support are based on an understanding of the importance of freely given relationships in people's life and the need for strong support networks to safeguard the future. This is especially important for someone who might be vulnerable because of disability. Most of us have friends or informal networks that we share good times with, but also whom we rely on when we need advice, when we are in crisis and when we want to celebrate our triumphs. For many people with disability, these typical connections may not exist automatically and need facilitation.

Circles of Support are a long established means by which people with disability can move from the role of passive care recipient to valued friend, contributor, citizen and creator of their own solutions. Through the Circle, the person is finding and celebrating their unique social identity. Their positive roles are elevated through their aspirations and contributions.

It is these outcomes that safeguard the person against the risk of abuse and isolation. They bolster the family's capacity to support the person and provide a foundation for succession planning.

The social distancing requirements which came into effect in response to COVID-19 in March 2020 quickly demonstrated the risk of reliance on paid support as social connection. During assessment of vulnerability, CLP identified that people with Circles of Support in place were in a better position to have their needs met during this period.

The role of a Circle Facilitator

The establishment of a Circle of Support requires planning and coordination. Skilled Circle facilitators work with the person to intentionally bring together people who are identified as willing and capable to contribute positively. The facilitator gets to know each person and their family well and works with them to deliberately invite other people into their life with a view that they might “look out” for the person with disability over the longer term. In the early stages the facilitator supports the Circle of Support to explore and express the vision of the person and ensure that the members of the Circle each share the vision. Circle of Support meetings are facilitated so that actions and issues are addressed effectively, and that each member of the Circle can make a long-term commitment to their role supporting the person with disability and safeguarding their future.

The Circle of Support, once established, is intended to exist throughout the person’s lifetime. The collaborative and collegiate nature of the group requires leadership skills with particular strengths in communication, mentoring and group facilitation. Facilitators work with members of a Circle to develop these skills and to anticipate and negotiate any potential challenges the group may have.

Please contact us for any more information:

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CLP services are targeted for people who are seeking highly individualised support to pursue their ambition of an inclusive life. Our values are important for people new to CLP to understand, and [are described in this short video](#). We suggest that people considering our services visit our website www.communitylivingproject.org.au to learn more.

While CLP office is based in the south, all our services are provided across the greater Adelaide metropolitan areas.



Creating an inclusive community where we are all valued