



Disability Sector Case Studies

Case Study - Active Support

Active Support is a way of providing assistance to people that has a focus on making sure that individuals are engaged and participate in their own support.

The old welfare model of providing support, particularly in residential settings has meant that workers have become accustomed to doing things **for** the people they support. The Active Support model brings the focus back to doing things **with** people. The goal is for people to be interested and engaged in their own lives and the positive results that come from such involvement.

The Active Support model can be used right across the Community Services sector including Aged Care. It can be used to plan and provide support for people with an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, physical disability or age related loss of ability and disabilities.

The need for Active Support

If support workers do things **for** people all the time then a number of negative results can occur:

- The skill levels of the people supported can drop off because they are not practicing the skills they once had
- The opportunity for new skill development does not occur
- People are not participating in activities that directly relate to their lives, they are excluded from aspects of their own lives
- People cease to participate, they lose confidence, they lose motivation
- The worst case scenario is that people can become withdrawn and depressed

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The risk for workers doing things **for** people is that the focus on supporting people could be lost. The focus can shift to become task oriented. Workers become housekeepers, instead of support workers. The people supported can become part of the furniture, and not people.

Benefits of Active Support

In the Active Support model workers work **with** people to support them. If people are supported to participate more in the activities of their own lives then they will gain the benefits that go with this.

These include:

- increased self esteem
- improved opinion and value by others
- increased happiness
- a sense of involvement
- a sense of achievement

These are the same results that everybody gets from meaningful participation in life and life tasks.

The Active Support model can help workers to **plan** with the people they support the ways to increase their involvement in their own lives.

This might be in life activity areas such as:

- independent access to the community,
- seeing family
- having and seeing friends
- participating in self care such as shaving
- house cleaning
- planning and cooking meals
- planning and doing the shopping
- looking after personal finances
- having a hobby
- caring for a pet
- going to a club or planned activity
- gardening
- putting out the rubbish.

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How to provide Active Support

The model requires staff training in Active Support ideas.

These include:

- planning with people the activities they want to be involved in and how they want to be involved
- documenting this so that all workers can provide support the same way
- supporting the person at just the right minimal level
- recording how things are going, checking, and reworking goals and/or levels of support to suit the person

Planning, lifelong learning and record keeping are all central to Active Support.

Planning

Planning is an important part of the Active Support model. Plans are made about the types of activities that clients want to be involved in. This can be part of Person Centred Planning or other types of planning that is done with clients in the organization. The person receiving support must be provided with the opportunity to discuss how they want to be involved, what activities they would like to be involved in and how. As support workers we need to be providing our clients with a wide range of ideas and suggestions. This can start with questions as simple as:

- “Would you like to help get the lunch ready today?”
- or “Can we make your bed together? How about you pull up that side of the doona?”

The process of questioning and providing options continues right through to finding an activity in the community that a person might like to be involved in and offering that opportunity.

This helps workers to understand what interests the person has, and what goals they want to achieve. Then workers look at the opportunities that exist in every day life and in the community for the person to become more involved.

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Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning for all people is an idea behind Active Support. This is the idea that we can all keep learning, and enjoy new opportunities, all our lives. One of the best places to get lifelong learning is in the person's own home. Clients are encouraged to participate in all the activities that take place in their homes. Meaningful involvement is possible for everyone. It is a question of the worker helping this to happen.

The support provided is the **least** amount of support that each person needs, to be able to participate in the activity.

Record keeping

Keeping records and working to a plan assists the worker to see if they are actually achieving what they set out to do. For example, it might be the wish of a client to go out for dinner once a week. Or it might be that another client is encouraged to peel the potatoes for dinner twice a week. If records aren't kept, and a number of support workers are involved, then no one will know if this person is receiving the opportunities they have asked for.

It is also important to document exactly what support is required for the individual. This might vary from hand-over-hand support to peel a potato or shave, through to verbal prompts and encouragement. This way, all workers will be able to provide just the right amount of support to each person.

Results

The results of Active Support should be that people receiving support are able to participate more fully in all aspects of their lives. This includes community activities, friendship and family networks, domestic tasks and their own personal care. Increased participation means increased confidence, self esteem and general happiness from life.

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Links

- The Victorian Department of Human Services information on Active Support can be found at www.dhs.vic.gov.au On the home page hit “Search DHS” and then enter Active Support in the search space. A number of articles, resources and case studies will appear.
- <http://www.cdds.med.usyd.edu.au/> This site contains a number of presentations on Active Support in NSW.
- The same paper can be found along with a selection of publications and policies at www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au This is the website of the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. On the home page enter “Active support” in the search area and the articles will come up.
- www.kent.ac.uk/tizard The Tizard Centre is one of the leading UK academic groups working in learning disability and community care. This website has a section specifically on Active Support .

Conference presentations

- ASSID 43rd Annual Conference Papers - Melbourne 2008
[McVilly et al Active support: a guide to those planning implementation, based on the experiences of previous implementations.](#)
- ASSID 43rd Annual Conference Papers - Melbourne 2008
[Riches et al Active Support and the Sunshine State \(QLD\).](#)
- ASSID 43rd Annual Conference Papers - Melbourne 2008
[Stancliffe & McVilly Outcomes of Active Support: Increased participation and adaptive behaviour, reduced depression and challenging behaviour.](#)
- 8th Disability Support Worker Conference - Melbourne 2008
[Walker Active Support](#)

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