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Participant Views of the Frontline Leader role

Ability First Australia has partnered with the Department of Social Services to undertake a project that defines the role, competencies, and capabilities of the Frontline Leader. Spread over 4 stages, and scheduled for completion by June 2021, we anticipate this project will have a profound impact on the long-term viability of the NDIS: facilitating career pathways, informing recruitment practices, and increasing capacity for leaders to be successful in their roles.

FRONTLINE LEADERSHIP ROLE CLARITY PROJECT: A PATHWAY TO ATTRACTING, RETAINING AND GROWING A SKILLED NDIS WORKFORCE.

The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has brought significant change to providers, workers and participants in the disability sector.

As part of these changes, the roles and responsibilities for the Frontline Leader and many other positions in provider organisations have changed considerably. Frontline Leaders are essentially staff in a provider organisation who directly manage/lead the delivery of services by Disability Support Workers (DSW's) and associated frontline staff.

Ability First Australia (Ability First) and its members believe that investment in frontline leadership is crucial to the long-term viability and success of the NDIS. In 2019, Ability First was funded through the Department of Social Services' NDIS Jobs and Market Fund to undertake a project to define the role, capacity and capabilities of the Frontline Leader to inform organisation and job design, recruitment practices and training methodology. The project has four stages and it will be completed by June 2021.

THE FIRST STAGE of the project documents the "Current State" role for the Frontline Leader. This document is one of six resources on the "Current State" published on the Ability First website:

- Project background
- Major changes since the NDIS was introduced
- Current daily, weekly and adhoc tasks of Frontline Leaders
- Participant and carer views on their interactions with Frontline Leaders
- Frontline Leaders views on how their role will change in the future
- Generic position description for the Frontline Leader

THE SECOND STAGE of the project will include developing a Position Description for the future Frontline Leader role as well as a Capability Framework. There will also be tools developed to help Frontline Leaders assess any skills and knowledge development that will be needed as their role evolves.

THE THIRD STAGE of this project will focus on developing a series of online tools as well as a career and training framework for Frontline Leaders. These tools will be tested by a number of providers before they are publicly released as part of stage four. A series of resources will be published on the [Ability First website](#) throughout the life of the project.



How we collected the views of participants

The Ability Forum is a national online consumer panel which has the ability to gain real-time market insights from people with disability and carers. Launched in 2018, Ability Forum is a world-first online community that disability service providers can use to seek consumer insights in real time to better target their services and products. Members are recruited from across Australia without regard to the service providers they use. Putting consumers at the centre of service provider decision making, the Ability Forum aligns exceptionally well with the NDIS and its emphasis on consumer choice and control in a market context. The Ability Forum runs regular consumer sentiment and advocacy surveys, the outcomes of which allow providers to better understand the views of people with disability and their carers on a range of subjects such as current services, possible new services and products, and the implementation of the NDIS.

The Ability Forum online consumer panel contains members who are either participants or carers for NDIS participants. The online survey was drafted with the assistance of staff who work for Edentify.com.au, and it contained a small number of questions that sought both quantitative and qualitative answers.

The questions for this survey were structured to collect and screen respondents, and then once qualified, the questions sought respondent views on the types and mode of interactions they have with Frontline Leaders. The questions also included an opportunity for respondents to rate the importance of their interactions and how satisfied they were with the knowledge and assistance provided by Frontline Leaders.

The survey was released to the Ability Forum members in February 2020 and most respondents completed the survey in 7 minutes. The survey screened respondents so that only respondents that had interactions with Frontline Leaders completed the entire survey. Approximately 100 respondents completed the survey.

Customer Journey and Frontline Leader touchpoints

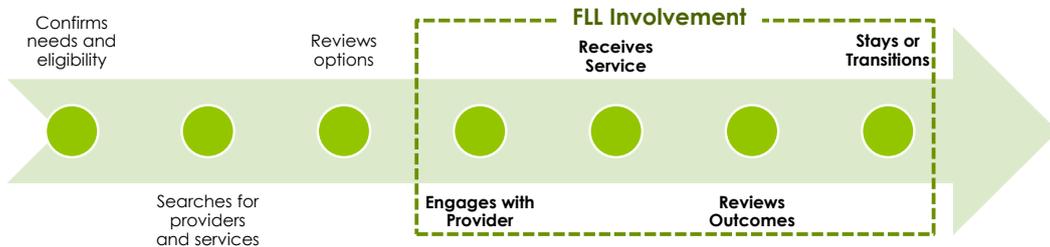
The customer journey is a term that describes the experiences of participants while they interact with a company and their staff. The experiences are normally measured and then feedback is provided to the company and staff so that the experiences participants have in the future can be improved. It also provides an opportunity for a company to immediately address major issues or poor experiences and potentially retain the participant.

Customer Journeys are usually broken down into several stages and these are mapped either as a complete journey or as segments of the overall journey.



Image credit: Ability Centre

Customer Journey



<p>Engages with Provider</p> <p>Customers engage with potential providers. This might include calls, visits, discussion with current customers, online Facebook or other groups. The typical interactions at this stage are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDIS Package planning • Discussing service offerings • Quoting for services • Exploring specific service options and staff • Building a trusted relationship • Educating customers on the operation of the NDIS • Draft service agreement/s 	<p>Receives Service</p> <p>Customers confirm and receive services from providers. This might include staff, calls, written communications, emails, SMS's, other technologies. The typical interactions at this stage are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing services in response to requests • Resolving service quality issues • Dealing with issues and incidents • Responding to Invoice queries • Working with Plan managers • Improving service delivery • Advocacy for customers 	<p>Reviews Outcomes</p> <p>The service/s provided are reviewed by customers. The services are measured against the outcome's customers are expecting. The typical interactions at this stage are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing outcomes and recommending future • Proposing changes to services • Assisting with package renewal • Organising for NDIS and other reports • Leading the resolution of complaints 	<p>Stays or Transitions</p> <p>Based on the experiences and outcomes achieved customers will decide to continue/increase services from the provider or to transition to a new service provider. The typical interactions at this stage are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for the renewal of customer packages • Undertaking exit reviews for customers who are transitioning • Celebrating success and implementing improvements
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For the Frontline Leader project we focused on the stages where the Frontline Leader interacts or could interact with the participant.

The customer journey includes the following stages:

- Engages with Provider;
- Receives Service;
- Reviews Outcomes; and
- Stay or Transition.

The customer journey has not been extended to the other stages as the Frontline Leader would not normally be interacting with participants at these points.

The Ability Forum was used to identify participant expectations and the extent to which Frontline Leaders provided value at these touch points. This knowledge is one of the inputs in the design of the future Frontline Leader role and responsibilities.

Respondent profile

The respondents included a similar number of people with a disability and carers/family members.

Answers	Responses	(%)	
I am a person with a disability	(45)	48%	<div style="width: 48%;"></div>
I am a carer or family member who is the primary decision maker for a person with a disability	(48)	52%	<div style="width: 52%;"></div>

Of those who are carers or family members, 85% were a family member or a close friend. Therefore, the findings are expected to reflect the views of people with a disability.

The next question sought information on the mix of services being received by the respondents. The list of services was derived from the services listed in the NDIS Price Guide.

The top five services and the percentage of respondents using these services were:

- Support coordination (65%)
- Therapy services (58%)
- In home personal care (62%)
- Community access (68%)
- Equipment or assistive technologies (56%)

Engagement Stage

The interactions with Frontline Leaders were mainly focussed on discussing service offerings, planning for NDIS packages and in quoting for services. These three interactions are closely related and reflect that participants are seeking to derive best value from their NDIS packages. The development of a service agreement is a subsequent component of these activities as it documents the agreed services and budget for the service the participant has agreed to purchase from the provider.

The survey found that one third of the respondents had no interactions with Frontline Leaders at the Engagement stage. This finding was discussed with providers and their common explanation was that contact would have been made through other channels such as their reception or intake staff rather than Frontline Leaders.

Of the respondents who interacted with Frontline Leaders, the frequency of interaction was low with only one third reporting it as weekly or less. This finding suggests that interaction is irregular, triggered by specific needs and it can be undertaken over an extended period.

Most of the interactions with Frontline Leaders were undertaken using phone calls, emails and face to face. These modes were also identified as the preferred ways of interacting with Frontline Leaders.

The analysis shows that 83% of respondents rate the importance of interactions with Frontline Leaders as being important or very important. The reasons participants gave for their ratings were mainly focussed on the delivery of quality service and on sharing NDIS knowledge. There were several other common answers, and these include providing explanations of the service menu, understanding participant needs and providing solutions.

The findings from the survey for the Engagement Stage are as follows:

- The interactions are predominantly regarding NDIS services and participant packages
- The interactions were infrequent
- The interactions occurred by phone, face to face or email and these are also the preferred methods of interaction
- The interaction is both important and valued by the participants

Q1	When researching about service providers, which of the following interactions did you have with a Frontline Leader?	Question Type:	Total
		Multiple Answer - vertical with other	93 (100%)
Answers	Responses	(%)	
NDIS Package Planning	(28)	30%	
Discussing service offerings	(38)	41%	
Quoting for services	(33)	35%	
Building a trusted relationship	(24)	26%	
Learning about the operation of the NDIS	(16)	17%	
Drafting service agreements	(19)	20%	
Other (please specify)	(1)	1%	
I have not had any interactions with a Frontline Leader when researching about service providers	(37)	40%	

Q7	When confirming and receiving services from providers, which of the following interactions did you have with a Frontline Leader?	Question Type: Multiple Answer - vertical with other	Total 93 (100%)
Answers	Responses	(%)	
Changing services	(30)	32%	
Resolving service quality issues	(26)	28%	
Dealing with issues and incidents	(24)	26%	
Invoice queries	(23)	25%	
Working with Plan managers	(20)	22%	
Improving service delivery	(23)	25%	
Complaints resolution	(18)	19%	
Other (please specify)	(3)	3%	
I have not had any interactions with a Frontline Leader when confirming and receiving services from providers	(37)	40%	

Service delivery Stage

The interactions with Frontline Leaders were mainly focussed on improving quality, changing the services that are being provided, dealing with issues and incidents, invoicing and working with plan managers. Sixty percent of respondents interact with Frontline Leaders during this stage.

The frequency of interaction during the service delivery stage varies but the range of responses suggests that interaction would be most commonly be weekly or monthly.

The type of interaction is different from the Engagement Stage, and it is predominantly phone calls and email. Face to face is considerably less frequent and suggests that the interactions can be accomplished without the need to meet with the Frontline Leader.

Interestingly the preferred method of interaction was email, with both phone call and face to face receiving about half the number of responses. This probably reflects the lower level of urgency to resolve service delivery issues or to change services.

More than 84% of respondents found the interactions to be important or very important, and more than 68% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the services provided. There were a number of respondents who identified good communication, service and the ability to resolve issues, however there are others who reported issues with communication, service quality and knowledge.

The findings from the survey for the Service Delivery Stage are as follows:

- The interactions are predominantly regarding resolving and improving quality, changing the services that are being provided, dealing with issues and incidents.
- The interactions were infrequent
- The interactions occurred by phone, face to face or email but email was the preferred method of interaction
- The interaction is both important and valued by the participants

Outcomes Stage

The top two interactions with Frontline Leaders were discussing service offerings and making recommendations based on reviewing outcomes. Two thirds of respondents interacted with Frontline Leaders during this stage.

As would have been expected the frequency of interaction was lower and most likely occurred close to the package renewal date, or when the service agreement needed renewal.

Phone calls and face to face were the typical method for comparing services provided to desired outcomes. The use of email was also reported to be frequent. The preferred method was email followed by face to face, while phone calls was the third preference for participants.

Approximately two thirds of participants viewed the interactions with Frontline Leaders to be important or very important. There was a slightly lower level of satisfaction with the services provided by Frontline Leaders due to the lack of or slow pace of communication.

The findings from the survey for the Outcomes Stage are as follows:

- The interactions were predominantly discussing service offerings and making recommendations based on reviewing outcomes
- The interactions were infrequent
- The interactions occurred by phone, face to face or email but email was the preferred method of interaction
- The interaction is both important and valued by the participants, but a number of participants reduced their ratings based on poor or lags in communication.

Q13		When measuring the services provided against your desired outcomes, which of the following interactions did you have with a Frontline Leader?		Question Type: Multiple Answer - vertical	Total 93 (100%)
Answers	Responses	(%)			
Recommendations based off reviewing outcomes	(25)	27%	<div style="width: 27%;"></div>		
Discussing service offerings	(36)	39%	<div style="width: 39%;"></div>		
Quoting for services	(16)	17%	<div style="width: 17%;"></div>		
Building a trusted relationship	(26)	28%	<div style="width: 28%;"></div>		
Learning about the operation of the NDIS	(17)	18%	<div style="width: 18%;"></div>		
Drafting service agreements	(19)	20%	<div style="width: 20%;"></div>		
Other (please specify)	(2)	2%	<div style="width: 2%;"></div>		
I have not had any interactions with a Frontline Leader when measuring the services provided against desired outcomes	(33)	35%	<div style="width: 35%;"></div>		

Stay or Transition Stage

The top two interactions with Frontline Leaders were renewing current packages and reviewing services offerings. It should be noted that more than half of the respondents do not interact with Frontline Leaders when reviewing or changing service providers.

The frequency of interaction was also much lower and more than two thirds of respondents reported it to be monthly or less.

Emails and phone calls are currently used more frequently than face to face interactions. The preferred method of interaction is email. It was also clear that phone calls and face to face are substantially less favoured by respondents.

Again, the interactions were seen as being important or very important (71%) and they had relatively high levels of satisfaction (65%). The reasons for these levels of satisfaction were reported to be efficient processes and good service delivery.

The findings for the Stay or Transition Stage are as follows:

- The interactions were predominantly focussed on renewal of packages and reviewing service offerings
- The interactions were infrequent
- The interactions occurred by phone or email and face to face, but email was the preferred method of interaction
- The interaction is both important and valued by the participants.

What this means for Providers

The responses to the Ability Forum have highlighted that Frontline Leaders are a critical part of the provider service delivery team, and that there are several capabilities required. These capabilities are as follows:

- A detailed knowledge of the NDIS and services provided to participants.
- Knowledge and the ability to construct a set of services that are affordable within the financial constraints of participant packages.
- The ability to identify and negotiate solutions to service delivery and other issues raised by participants.
- The ability to review the quality of services delivered and to develop and implement improvements that will improve quality.
- Detailed knowledge of the services provided by their provider and the capabilities of staff in delivery of services to participants with complex needs.
- Excellent communication skills, and the ability to adapt these to the participant and situation.
- The ability to build a trusted relationship with participants and their carers/family.
- Focus on participants with a desire to deliver improved service value and outcomes.
- Good written and spoken communication skills.
- The ability to build a relationship with participants when the interactions are infrequent.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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