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Frontline Leadership Role Clarity Project

Ability First Australia is undertaking 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. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Visit www.dss.gov.au for more information.

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.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the Frontline Leader project is to define the role, capacity and capabilities of the Frontline Leader to inform organisation and job design, recruitment practices and training methodology.

The project seeks to meet the following Jobs and Market Fund outcomes:

- Outcome 1 - increased capacity and capability of NDIS providers;
- Outcome 2 - increased number and capability of NDIS workers;
- Outcome 3 - increased capacity of NDIS participants to influence the market;
- Outcome 5 - increasing the evidence base for market and workforce.

Objectives of the Project

01

Define the role of the current Frontline Leader including the percentage of time spent on each activity to understand what is viable in an NDIS market.

02

Define the role of the future Frontline Leader considering capacity required to meet role requirements.

03

Define the capabilities of the future Frontline Leader to understand skill deficits and other sectors we may be able to recruit from.

04

Perform a gap analysis between the current situation and future requirements and seek ways to streamline, reduce or eliminate additional burdens.

05

Define a range of organisational design options for successful span of control for the sector.

06

Develop a range of tools to support providers in recruiting people with the right capabilities for Frontline Leadership.

07

Develop an evidence-based framework for the education and technology sectors to build solutions.

08

Develop pathways to increase capacity for leaders to be successful in these roles.

09

Facilitate career pathways in to and within the NDIS workforce to attract and retain quality professionals to the sector.



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Issues to be examined

There are a number of issues that will be examined as part of this project, and this will be undertaken from the viewpoint of participants, workers and providers.

Responsibilities of the Frontline Leader role

The project will firstly examine the current roles and responsibilities of Frontline Leaders and how these have changed since the NDIS was introduced. This will be undertaken through the engagement with Frontline Leaders, Providers and Participants. A number of tools will be used to identify the typical activities of a Frontline Leader, those activities that consume most of their effort, the training and skills gaps that Frontline Leaders can readily identify, and differences caused by the participant mix they serve. There are differences in the current Frontline Leader responsibilities identified as a result of operational approaches, the geographic distribution of Frontline Leaders and their staff, complexity of participants and services being delivered, and the size of organisation.

We are currently developing the future roles and responsibilities of Frontline Leaders for when the NDIS is completely rolled out. The roles and responsibilities will reflect those required for delivery of safe and high-quality services in accordance with the NDIS Code of Conduct and NDIS Practice Standards. A capability framework and possible organisational designs will also be developed as part of this work.

Span of Control

The operational changes associated with the NDIS and the compliance requirements of the NDIS Code of Conduct and Practice Standards Quality have increased the Salary on-costs for the Frontline Leader and added increased compliance, training and skills development costs for providers. The first of these costs is reflected, in part, in the NDIS Cost Model for Disability Workers, and in the NDIS Price Guides through the costs included for DSW's. The rates for disability service workers services includes an allowance for support and supervision and this accounts for part of the Frontline Leader costs.

The DSW Cost Model (June 2019) assumed a span of control of 11 to 1, however in July 2020 was updated to 15:1. The NDIS argue that this allowance is adequate for the Disability Sector as it reflects recent benchmarking data. The span of control is impacted by the size of the organisation, the geographic spread of staff, the number of staff who are working as casuals or part time workers, the stability of the environment, the complexity of the work being undertaken, and the maturity of processes and service delivery.

The NDIS Cost Model for Disability Workers suggests that this ratio assumes a mix of permanent and casual staff,

but it does not appear to adequately allow for the typically large number of DSW's working one to two days per week for providers. This impacts the costs of employment and increases the administrative and people management responsibilities of Frontline Leaders.

This project will continue to examine the variability of span of control for current Frontline Leaders in the Disability Sector, and the factors that influence this, and the potential impact this would have on the rates for DSW's.

Organisational design

The design of roles and the organisational structure that supports operations directly impacts the cost and quality of service delivery and as well as the retention of a skilled workforce. Given that change continues to be occurring in the NDIS environment then providers need to employ organisational designs that support sustainability, workforce retention and growth, safe and high-quality service delivery while maintaining a focus on their participants.

The preliminary review of organisational structures has shown that providers are experimenting with flatter organisational structures as well as distributing responsibilities so Frontline Leaders can remain focussed on the needs and performance of their staff. This project will develop several Frontline Leader related organisational designs for providers to consider when implementing change to the structure of their organisations.

Career Pathways

The growth in the number of NDIS participants has caused the workforce in the Disability Sector to grow substantially, but it will be a number of years before the NDIS is likely to reach maturity.

In May 2019 the NDIS forecast that over the next five years the disability sector workforce would grow a further 90,000 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions. While most of these new positions will be frontline workers there will be many new Frontline Leaders required to ensure staff deliver safe and quality services. It is not known how the current COVID-19 pandemic will impact this, but this will be monitored as part of this project.

If we were to use a forecast there will be 70,000 new frontline positions and assume that the span of control is 11:1 then this could result in the need to find an additional 6300 Frontline Leaders. Clearly many of these new Frontline Leaders will come from frontline workers, but there needs to be a clear career pathway so these staff can acquire the relevant educational knowledge and skills.

This project will develop and pilot a career pathway and training framework for the Frontline Leader. The training framework will assist the education and technology sectors to build and offer appropriate educational and skill development solutions.

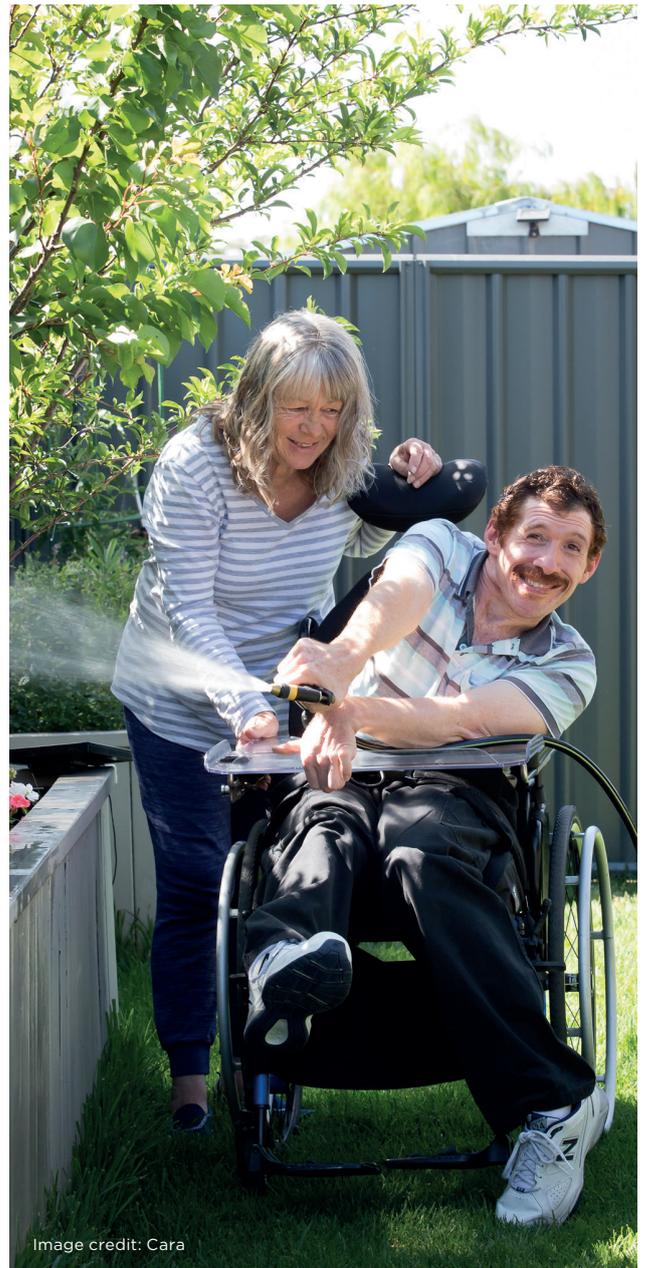


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Expected Benefits

NDIS Participants:

- NDIS participants will contribute to this project ensuring that frontline workers have increased understanding of the customer journey and the qualities NDIS participants are seeking in frontline service delivery.

Disability Service Providers:

- The knowledge and tools developed and made available to the Disability Sector will increase the sector's capacity to deliver safe and quality services under an NDIS funding framework.
- This investment will benefit all organisations who seek to recruit and retain their Frontline Leaders. The tools developed as part of this project are designed to support and streamline the recruitment of new Frontline Leaders, to allow existing and aspiring Frontline Leaders to develop their careers and remain in the Disability Sector.
- A further benefit is that by designing the Frontline Leader responsibilities to better meet participant and organisational needs then the safety and quality of services will be improved, while organisations can realise better returns for their investments in the workforce.

The Disability Workforce:

- This project will give people an opportunity to enter the workforce from a range of backgrounds with bespoke and intentional pathways to upskill.
- Service providers are already recruiting outside the disability sector with varied success but by defining the core competencies the sector will have a clear pathway to closing the skill gap.
- Frontline leadership teams will be better supported and trained which will result in improved frontline service safety and quality.

Other Stakeholders:

- The deliverables of this project will feed back strategic information to the NDIA, the education sector and others to inform evidence-based workforce development strategies. It will also inform changes to the NDIS scheme design thereby improving NDIS sustainability.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

please visit www.abilityfirstaustralia.org.au
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