



Image credit: Ability Centre

Frontline Leader views on their **future role**

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](http://www.abilityfirst.org.au) throughout the life of the project.



How we collected the data

A total of twelve workshops were held with Frontline Leaders and People and Culture staff from providers. The workshops were undertaken in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. More than 100 staff participated in the workshops and they represented different service lines, but they were all were leaders of frontline workers or people and culture staff. The Frontline Leaders who participated in the workshops were located in urban, regional and remote areas of Australia

The project team adopted the **Head, Heart and Hands (HHH) Framework** with the addition of Environment for this research project. Environment was included as it directly impacts an individual's ability to evolve in their knowledge, motivation and skills.



Head represents the behaviours that the leader uses to understand their business, plan the future, solve problems and for decision making. From a change perspective the Head represents understanding the strategic direction of the organisation, and the reasons change is occurring. It answers the questions of why we are changing, where are we going to and how will we reach the destination.



For change **Heart** represents emotions, and it considers motivation, attitude and commitment. The problem with these areas is they are often hidden, unspoken and unrevealed so bringing emotions to the surface is an important step. For leadership Heart is related to enabling others, enabling ourselves and influencing the organisation and other groups.



For leadership **Hands** represents holding people and processes accountable for achieving our goals, while for change it represents behaviours that demonstrate change is occurring, and in helping staff to understand what has to be done differently in the future.



In our workshops we asked the Frontline Leaders to work in small groups to identify the key requirements for each of the four areas. The groups invested time completing their list for each area before moving around the room to complete all four lists. At the completion of the task a roundtable discussion was held with all Frontline Leaders to ensure the project team understood all the requirements that had been listed.

Once all the workshops had been completed the project team combined the individual lists to identify the frequency that each requirement was listed.

The most frequently identified requirements in each area were as follows:

Head: Knowledge (goals and objectives, setting direction)

- They need an extensive understanding of NDIS, NDIA and the role of the public guardian.
- They need a deep understanding of the disability sector, disability types, laws, privacy and human rights
- They need knowledge of what drives customer choice and service delivery options
- They need a deep knowledge of positive behaviour support and restrictive practices
- They need to better understand consumer behaviour
- They need to acquire commercial acumen

Heart: Emotions (how to enable others)

- They need to have empathy
- They need to be respectful
- They need to care
- They need to be self-aware and reflective
- They need to be trustworthy, honest and fair
- They need to be passionate, friendly and enjoy their work
- They need to have patience and be calm

Hands: Skills (execute, tactical tools and skills, achieving goals)

- They need to be active listeners and understand people
- They need to be good people managers and able to help staff perform well
- They need to manage their time well
- They must be able to use IT systems competently and to train others
- They need to be able to adapt their communication for different audiences

- FLL's need to become great coaches and mentors
- FLL's need to understand the components of financial reports and how to monitor their team's performance
- FLL's need to be able to manage stress and be resilient while supporting others when needed
- FLL's need to be highly skilled at resolving disputes and negotiating workable solutions

Environment: (business systems and culture)

- Organisations need to embed a culture of collaboration, sharing of knowledge and open communication
- Organisations need to ensure that there is a safe learning environment for staff
- Organisations need to resource Frontline Leaders adequately so the span of control approaches or is better than 11:1
- Organisations need to provide Frontline Leaders and their teams with suitable facilities and office space
- Organisations need to work with their Frontline Leaders to embed appreciation and reward programs for staff
- Organisations need to build a person-centred capability approach for Frontline Leaders and other staff
- Organisations need to encourage Frontline Leaders to collaborate with other service areas and build strong relationships with key staff
- Organisations need to encourage and resource continuous learning and development for staff
- Organisations need Frontline Leaders to work closely with their HR departments to ensure recruitment and performance management processes are working effectively

Image credit: Annecto



What this means for Providers

The role of the Frontline Leader is changing and is likely to continue to evolve over the coming years. Organisations need to review the current skills of their Frontline Leaders and identify any skills that will need further development. These skills are likely to include the core areas of IT skills, writing and other communication skills, as well as time management. By simply tackling these areas, Frontline Leaders can be more effective and their engagement with participants can be improved.

Other areas that could be prioritised would be knowledge such as the NDIS, privacy, human rights and positive behaviour support and restrictive practices. A further area of focus would be understanding consumer behaviour and how improve participant outcomes while improving marketing and commercial outcomes.

Reducing the span of control for Frontline Leaders would also be very beneficial for the provider and Frontline Leader, however this may not always be a financially viable option for providers. The project team identified that a substantial proportion of Frontline Leader hours are consumed by administrative work, so any streamlining of processes, support by reallocating administrative activity or training will help reduce their workloads.

The effort for organisations also extends into ensuring that communication is open and informs staff on the current performance and any current and future challenges. Organisations who pursue this will tend to build higher levels of trust with the workforce and potentially increase staff retention levels.

What this means for Participants

Frontline Leaders accept that their role and responsibilities are evolving as the NDIS transition continues. Providers are working closely with their Frontline Leaders to support them during this time, and to provide training and skills development. You can be assured that Frontline Leaders continue to be deeply committed to building a more responsive team of skilled staff delivering high quality services to participants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

please visit www.abilityfirstaustralia.org.au
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