

Making Sense of Individualised Supports

Policy describes what its makers want us to accomplish. If its implementation is to benefit people with disabilities and their families, we have to work together to make sense of what the policy means for us. Our work should be consistent with the direction set by policy, but we need to make the direction our own by identifying the cautions we want to observe and the higher standards we want to achieve.

This paper offers an example of sense making. Taking the definition of individualised support offered by the disability policy review as his point of departure, Michael Kendrick offers critical and clarifying comments that identify important issues in individualising supports that call our attention beyond the policy document. His reflections, expressed in the notes that follow the quoted definition of individualised supports, can serve as a resource to the work each team needs to do for itself in order to agree a common sense of their task.

REPORT OF DISABILITY POLICY REVIEW

2.3.2 Individualised supportsⁱ

Individualised supportsⁱⁱ are a personal social service which includes a range of assistance and interventions required to enable the individual to live a fully included life in the community. Individualised supports require the provision of a flexible range of supports and services that are tailored to the needs^{iii,iv} of the individual, and are primarily determined by the person. This provision enables people with disabilities to live as full citizens instead of having to fit into standardised models and structures.^v

Supports include assistance provided by others, whether in the form of personal care, communication or advocacy support, learning support, therapeutic interventions, aids and equipment, adaptations to the physical environment, and so on.^{vi} Individualised supports are characterised as being primarily;

- determined by the person (in collaboration with their family/advocate as required and in consultation with an independent assessor) not the service provider or other 'experts';^{vii}
 - directed by the person (with their family/advocate as required)^{viii};
 - provided on a one- to- one basis to the person and not in group settings (unless that is the specific choice of the person and a 'natural' group activity, such as a team sport);^{ix}
 - flexible and responsive, adapting to the person's changing needs and wishes;
 - encompassing a wide range of sources and types of support so that very specific needs and wishes can be met;
 - not limited by what a single service provider can provide
 - having a high degree of specificity. Provision that is expressed in terms of residential, day or respite does not capture the specific nature of an individual's support needs.
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i **Beneficial** individualised arrangements are what we are seeking, not just any individualised arrangement. In other words, individual arrangements are only ultimately valuable if they bring people closer to "getting the good life".

ii Individualised supports are not necessarily good supports unless they are of good quality, as it is quite possible to poorly support people in otherwise individualised arrangements. **When a person is deeply seen and treated as a valued person it creates the opportunity for people to get many good things in life, whereas simply being in an individualised support arrangement does not by itself assure that such a life giving attitude will be present**

iii Based on a comment on this phrase from Irish persons with disabilities and Article 12 of the CRPD, it is suggested to amend it. Instead of focusing on needs we should base our development of individualized supports on the person's **preferences, choices, and abilities**.

iv An optimal individualised arrangement will necessarily require a **responsible engagement of both the person's need and their wants**

v **If congregate service models are not intentionally decreased in absolute numbers**, there will not be the resources available to increase the scale of individualisation at a systems level thereby trapping large numbers of people indeterminately in congregate settings...and thus not get to experience the good life that is possible for them.

vi Many might take the language of a "wide range of supports" to mean solely paid, staff type supports, so it is useful to heighten attention to natural supports as key sources of support for individuals. **Good individual supports typically include a beneficial mix of "natural" supports and formal supports** and these natural supports will require that the person be well connected to their community.

vii **Only when person centered planning is combined with decisive follow through** in terms of meaningful lifestyle development is there a realistic chance for beneficial outcomes for the person.

viii Though a significant level of self-direction is usually a desirable element in individualised arrangements, its importance in comparison to other priorities of the person needs to be factored into its comparative value on a person-by-person basis.

ix Given that it is possible to have persons remain socially isolated while being supported individually, it is imperative that preference be given to arrangements that **increase the degree to which a given person is assisted to obtain a greater degree of social inclusion**.