

## **A collaborative, collective insight into Supported Decision Making and Inclusion.**

Good advocacy involves supported decision making, by ensuring information is available in format that enables an individual to be as included in all decisions about themselves that impact on themselves as far as they are capable and we all have an obligation to support this.

From decades of interface and involvement across education, social care, health and occupational inclusion, re autism, learning disabilities and associated comorbidities, I have over the years come to realise more and more that there are few people who have a near 100% intellectual incapacity. This is anecdotally confirmed from my fellow IntAPA members from across the globe, especially from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and other parts of UK and Ireland.

Some of you have attended some of my training sessions will be well aware of my focus on person centred inclusion, respecting individuals wishes and rights, and through these workshops short courses, there is a general appreciation of 'Skippy'.

Skippy is a fictional character where the group of participants create their own Skippy with a mix of characteristics and challenges, and we collectively work through these challenges always ensure, often by different means of communication and use of communication tools capture the individuals views, without such views from the individual we either a single support person or a team around an individual are in breach of the fundamentals of human rights.

### **What is Supported Decision Making or SDM?**

**Supported Decision Making** (SDM) is the process of supporting an individual who experiences restricted capacity, because of learning disability or cognitive impairment to express preferences and make choices about their own lives with the support of people they choose, or who are appointed by networks they know and trust. Supported Decision Making is composed of several fundamental elements which incorporate the following core principles;

- respect for a supported person's preferences,
- maintaining the supported person's right to autonomy,
- objectively reviewing options with full participation by the supported person,
- honouring the supported person's decisions once made and promoting the supported person's self-determination at all stages in the SDM process.

### **Benefits of supported decision-making: (For Supporting People)**

Benefiting Individuals, families, services and society

The benefits of supported decision-making are:

- It upholds and protects individual autonomy and the universal nature of personhood.
- It benefits individuals, families and society -
- SDM helps individuals to feel less excluded and marginalised from their communities, be less isolated and promotes their independence.
- Individuals are more likely to be happy with outcomes where their views have been fully incorporated into the decision-making process
- Supported decision-making enables the individual to participate as effectively as possible in decisions relating to them. It encourages supported people to be fully informed
- The Supported Person's voice is kept at the centre of all decisions that concern them.
- The Supported person makes the choice of the person(s) they want as their supporter.
- The supporter fully understands and embodies SDM principles.
- The supporter adopts a positive approach to risk as a vital element in living good lives;
- The supporter has time to source and provide adequate information, as well as provide direct relational support.
- The supporter is equipped with the confidence and competence to identify sources of assistance and support in the community to help the individual to achieve their goals.

#### **Positive outcomes for decision-makers:**

- increased confidence in decision-making – which for some extended beyond the specific decisions/goal chosen;
- greater experience in decision-making;
- participation in a wider range of activities.

Aligning with the application of co-production principles within other areas of service delivery, some positive outcomes identified by advocates include:

- Satisfaction derived from increased autonomy of the Supported Person
- changes in work practices to encourage autonomy i.e., to engage the person in building up their experience and self-confidence in making choices;
- offering the individual more choices in day-to-day life;
- Reduced need for formal guardianship which, at it's worst can be disguised institutionalised practice.
- increased involvement of a guardian – demonstrated the feasibility of including people under guardianship as participants in SDM projects.

However as with any developing practice we face barriers and challenges, for example but not limited to:

#### **Barriers and Challenges to Supported Decision Making practice:**

- The absence of a representative body to promote and showcase positive outcomes reached via SDM practice.
- The need to extend the range of potential choices open to supported people via the creation of resources.
- The lack of accredited SDM training and awareness programmes for Supporting Services and individuals.
- The need for ongoing staff/advocate development to assure quality of service provision.
- The absence of a regulatory body to produce codes of conduct, and oversee compliance with published guidance relating to standards and ethical SDM practice.

By overcoming the above the advocate will be better equipped in helping the decision-maker weigh up options and arrive at choices, supporting their ability to make financial, health, social care, accommodation or life style decisions.

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AISee – Advocating, Identifying, Solutionising, Educating and Empowering.

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