

circles of
support



what is a circle of support?

A Circle of Support is a group of people who are invited by a person with a disability to meet regularly and focus on their goals and aspirations.

Circles of Support work well when they are person-centred and members focus on strengthening formal and informal networks in a person's life.

A circle of support is not:

- A temporary arrangement that serves one purpose for specific individuals.
- Intended to be a tool for one-off formal planning and service delivery.
- Contingent upon, or solely dedicated to, the management of funds.

who joins a circle of support?

Any person who cares for, respects and is willing to support and build a relationship with the person at the centre of the circle.

when do you start a circle of support?

Circle members are likely to need training and guidance to work towards person-centred goals. The amount of training will be different for each Circle of Support.

Some Circles of Support may only take a few weeks to form and start achieving goals. Others may take several weeks and sometimes months before they are doing the same. It does not matter how long this takes, it is more important that all Circle members are empowered to support the person at the centre of the circle.

how do you build a circle of support?



Work out the role the Circle will play in a person's life and who would be the best people to invite.



Invite 4-8 people along. Friends, family or people you know.



Go out, socialise and do fun things together.



Meet once a month.



Make goals and work towards making them a reality.

what can a circle of support achieve?

Meeting and connecting with people to form friendships.

The person feels empowered to take risks and try new things to reach their goal.

Reaching the person's goals and meeting their needs.

Reduce stress on families that provide significant support.

Empower Circle members to meaningfully contribute to the person's life.

circles of support and the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS)

Circles of Support can play a vital role in assisting NDIS participants to get the most out of the Scheme. The diagram below outlines some of the benefits a Circle of Support can provide to NDIS participants.



starting a circle of support?

step 1: learn more

Learn more about Circles of Support by visiting the National Resource Centre for Circles of Support and Microboards at www.cosam.org.au or call the Cosam Info Line on 1800 462 635.



step 2: contact an organisation

Contact an organisation that can connect you to a Circles of Support facilitator. The National Resource Centre can help you find an organisation that may suit you.



step 3: explore

The facilitator will meet with the person at the centre of the Circle to:

- > learn more about them
- > discuss what the Circle of Support might look like and achieve



step 4: support

Circles of Support can look different depending on the needs and resources in the person's life.

The person and the circle facilitator will work out the amount of training and support the Circle will need, and is important to know when requesting NDIS funding to establish and maintain a Circle of Support.



step 5: recruit

The facilitator will help a person find and invite people to be a part of the Circle of Support.



Step 6: meet

The facilitator will help a person arrange, organise and run meetings.



step 7: plan

The facilitator can help the Circle make plans and achieve goals.



step 8: sustain

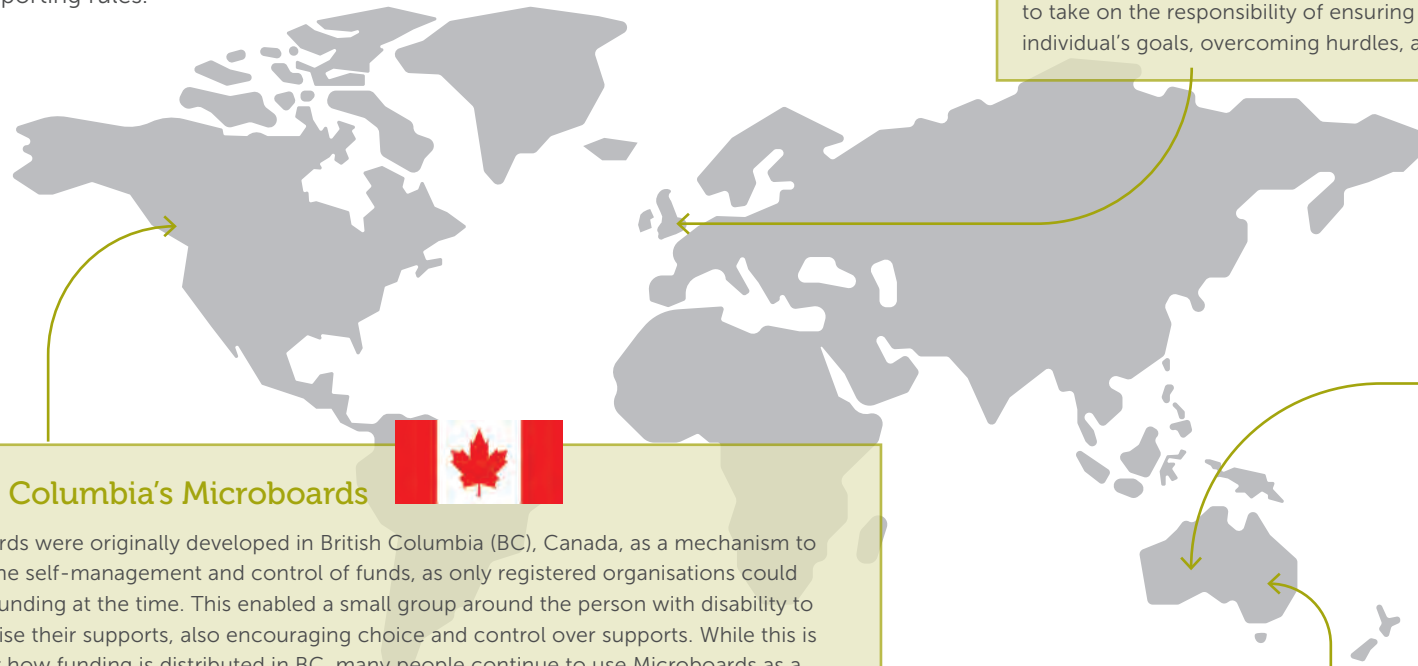
The facilitator will support the Circle to become sustainable, and will ensure that they are adequately resourced for the future.



circles of support and microboards

Circles of Support or Microboards have been used to support a range of people throughout the United Kingdom and Canada since the 1980s. Circles of Support are key to empowering people with complex needs in the community by supporting decision making and maintaining focus on goals for the individual.

A Microboard is similar to a Circle of Support, however is set up with the purpose of supporting a person to self-manage their disability funding package. Microboards function as a small organisation, and therefore also must abide by the state or national business reporting rules.



British Columbia's Microboards



Microboards were originally developed in British Columbia (BC), Canada, as a mechanism to support the self-management and control of funds, as only registered organisations could manage funding at the time. This enabled a small group around the person with disability to individualise their supports, also encouraging choice and control over supports. While this is no longer how funding is distributed in BC, many people continue to use Microboards as a supportive mechanism for managing funds. Vela is the pioneer of Microboards in BC, and has supported 1,100+ Microboards since the 1980s.

Similarly to Circles, Microboard members support the person with disability through freely given relationships based on an existing connection and a growing knowledge of the individual.

The United Kingdom's Circles of Support



In the UK, Circles of Support have been embraced by a range of sectors. Circles have been used in disability, mental health, criminal justice, and within school settings to support community members to reach their goals.

Circles of Support have been highly successful and have been rolled out to a wide group of people, and are supported by the government as a way to increase social engagement and improve outcomes for people in their communities. 'Circles Network UK' has supported the establishment of hundreds of Circles of Support. Circles for individuals with disability comprise people, usually known to the focus person, who freely give their time and support. The individual is in charge of their Circle, although a facilitator is usually chosen within the Circle to take on the responsibility of ensuring the Circle continues running. Circles focus on the individual's goals, overcoming hurdles, and increasing opportunities for the focus person.

Australia's Microboards



Microboards Australia has been supporting Australian families to start Microboards since 2007 and is endorsed by Vela, Canada. Microboards Australia has expanded on the work of Vela and offers a range of professional development programs for Microboard members as well as mentoring to set up Microboards. The role of a Microboard can include coordinating support services, facilitating friendships and relationships, finding and keeping a job, and much more. By incorporating, Microboards are financially and legally accountable, and protect committee members from most personal liability.

Australia's Circles of Support



Circles of Support in Australia strongly resemble the successful Circles that run in the UK. The Community Living Project (CLP), Mamre Association, UnitingCare QLD, Belonging Matters, and Resourcing Inclusive Communities support Circles to create and strengthen inclusive lives for individuals, by building relationships and participation in the community. Organisations that support Circles in Australia aim to support Circles to be long-term supports, providing consistent support across the individual's life alongside familial support.

References
Perkins et al (PSSRU) Circles of Support and Personalisation: exploring the economic case
Vela Canada. <https://www.velacanada.org/vela-microboards>
Resourcing Inclusive Communities. <https://www.ric.org.au/learn-about/building-support-networks/microboards/>
Microboards Australia <http://microboard.org.au/>
Circles Network <http://www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/>

Interested in Circles of Support or want to keep up-to-date on Inclusion Designlab's new projects? Sign up to our mailing list at inclusiondesignlab.org.au

For further information about Circles of Support and training opportunities for families and people with intellectual disability please contact us.

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