

my circle of support

a guide for people
with a disability





The National Resource Centre for Circles of Support and Microboards is a national project involving organisations across Australia that facilitate high quality person centred Circles of Support and Microboards (COSAM).

The aims of the project are to work with partner organisations to conduct research and evaluation and develop publications and training materials.

The COSAM web portal collates and displays information about Circle facilitating organisations. Content includes a description of Circles and Microboards, their location and contact details and a comparison of what each organisation offers. There are a number of handy downloadable resources in formats that are accessible to people with a disability.

The National Resource Centre thanks its partner organisations and the National Disability Insurance Agency's ILC program for supporting this work.



Inclusion Designlab is Inclusion Melbourne's engine room for research, innovation, communications and policy.

Our vision is to bring together people with a disability, community organisations, and the world's leading disability researchers to develop cutting-edge models of practice, choice and citizenship that shatter glass ceilings and promote a more inclusive Australia.

We do this by developing, trialling, and implementing new systems of support and communicating our insights through a range of publications and media.

We are also significant contributors to public policy and government inquiries.

The products and services created by Inclusion Designlab contribute to the continuous development of the disability sector through evidence based practice, accessible materials, and vital training for families and collegiate organisations

Thank you to all of the Circles of Support, community members and individuals that participated in this project.

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contents

about circles of support	3
meet aaron	4
what is a circle of support?	6
who should you invite to your circle of support?	7
how to invite people to the circle	8
your first circle of support meeting	9
your role at your circle of support meeting	9
your circle	10



about circles of support

You may not have heard about a Circle of Support before, or maybe you have heard it called something else.

A Circle of Support can also be called a:



Circle of people



Circle of trust



Circle of friends



Circle of fun

Circles of Support have been running all over the world since the 1980s. There are Circles of Support in Canada, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. The purpose of a Circle is to support a person to have the life they want.

This guide has been made to help you understand what a Circle of Support is and how you might start your own Circle. This guide talks about who you might want to invite to your Circle, how to invite them, and how a Circle of Support meeting works.

This book works best when you have someone help you read through it.

a note for support and advocacy organisations

People with intellectual disability have fewer opportunities to connect with informal and unpaid networks on a regular basis. As part of the 2015-2016 Sector Development Fund (SDF) Community Inclusion Initiative, Inclusion Melbourne supported people with intellectual disability to create informal support networks through Circles of Support.

Your Circle of Support has been developed as a guide for people with intellectual disability to understand what a Circle of Support is and how they might start one. The use of a continuous comic and related material enables the reader to understand each aspect and step of starting their own Circle of Support.

This guide was written in collaboration with a person with an intellectual disability who developed the content and layout. We would like to express our gratitude to National Disability Services and the Department of Social Services for their support and funding provided through the Community Inclusion Initiative.

Meet Aaron! You will see and hear about Aaron throughout this book.

1

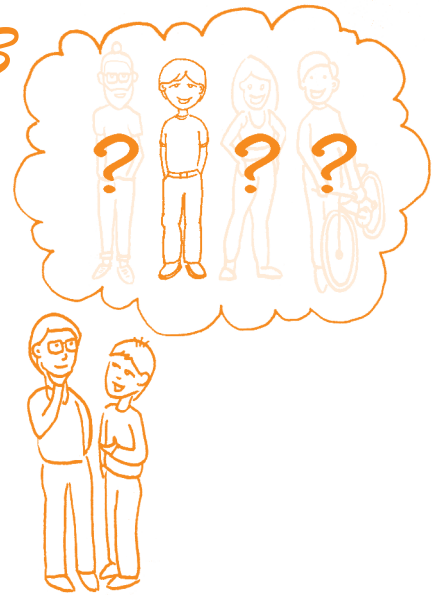


Aaron would like more time with people. Aaron has some wonderful people in his life who help him each week. A Circle of Support would be a great way to bring these people together. He hears about Circles of Support and would like to start one.

2



3



Aaron does not know who to invite. He asks for help.

7



When Aaron has his Circle over, he likes to do things to make them feel welcome.

8



Next time, Aaron meets his Circle in the park near his home.

9



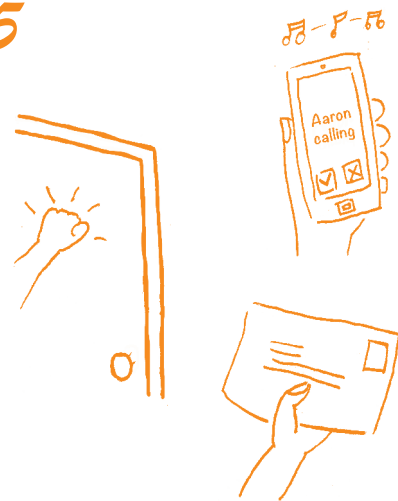
Everyone listens to what Aaron has to say and what he thinks.

4



Aaron and his dad sit down and make a list of all the people Aaron knows. They talk about who he might invite.

5



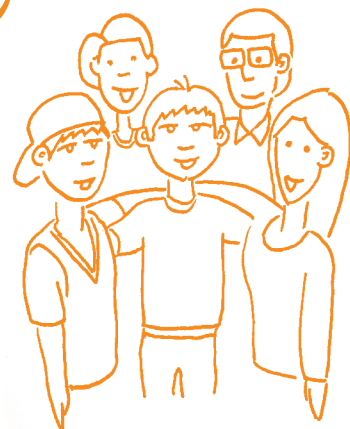
Aaron invites some people in person, on the phone and by mail to a Circle of Support meeting.

6



Aaron meets with his Circle at his home. They all talk about what a Circle of Support is and what they can do with Aaron.

10



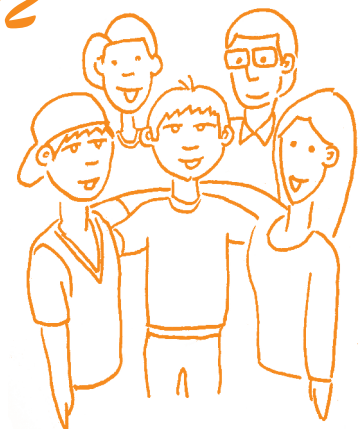
Aaron feels accepted and welcome in his Circle.

11

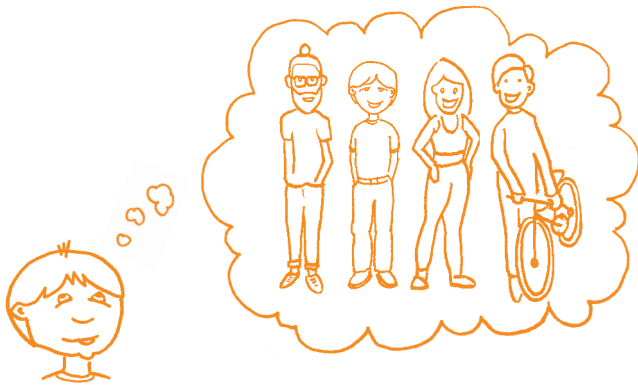


Aaron's Circle of Support helps him with things that he needs or wants to do.

12



Aaron feels supported by his Circle.



? what is a circle of support?

A Circle of Support is about you and what you want to do in your life.

A Circle of Support is a group of people that supports you with what you want and need.

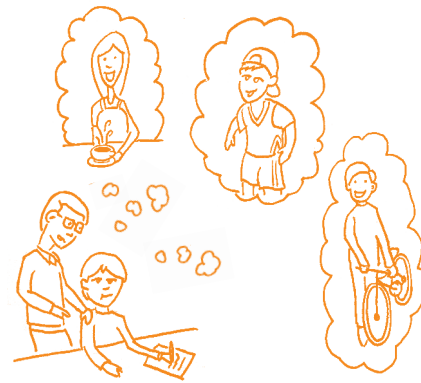
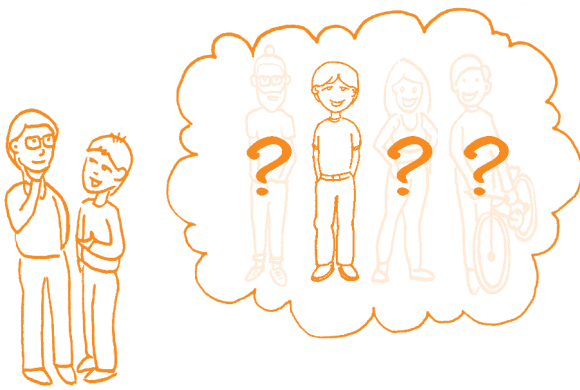
You can start a Circle of Support whenever you want.

👍 circles of support can:

- ➔ Help you make friends and meet new people
- ➔ Advocate or help you advocate for yourself
- ➔ Support you to make decisions
- ➔ Support you to make changes or make things better in your life.

Things to think about:

- > Why do you want a Circle of Support?
- > What do you want a Circle of Support to help you with?



who should you invite to your circle of support?

A Circle of Support is made up of people that you know well or want to get to know better. People you invite might come from...



Your family



Your school



Your work



Your daily activities



The local store

You can invite 4 to 8 people to a Circle of Support. 🧑🧑🧑🧑 ➔ 🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑 This is a good number of people for a Circle of Support, but you can start with less people and invite more people in the future.

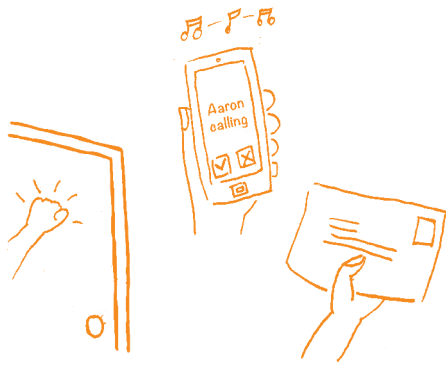
how to choose people to invite

1. Find someone to help you, if you need it.
2. Make a list of people you know
3. Talk about who you would like to invite
4. Talk about why you would like to invite them.
5. Make a list of things you would like your Circle to help you with.
6. Choose 4-8 people to invite to the Circle.

Remember to keep your list safe so you can use it if you need to find someone else to invite.

Things to think about:

- › What do you do during the week?
- › Who do you know who goes to these places with you?
- › Who else do you know that you like spending time with?
- › Who else do you know that you would like to get to know better?
- › Do you want a Circle of Support for a particular reason?
- › Do you know someone who is good at something you want to do or learn.



how to invite people to the circle

You can invite people by:

phone @email letter in person

Talk about and practice what you will say to people when you invite them.

Things to think about:

- > How do you want to invite people to your Circle of Support?
- > What will you say when you invite them?

Here is an example of what you might say to a person you are inviting.

What is a Circle of Support?

A group of people that meet together to help me with my goals.

How often do we meet?

Once per month

What is my Circle of Support about?

I want my Circle to help me with...

Examples:

My Home

My Relationships

My Health

My Work

My Social Life

My Rights

Why do I want you in my Circle?

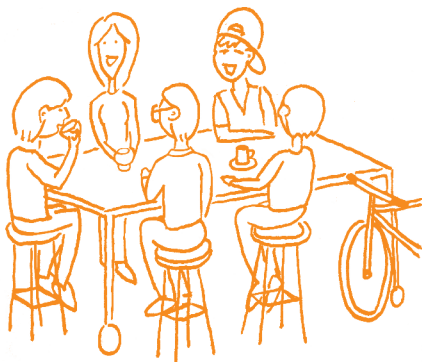
I want you in my Circle because...

Examples:

- You are my friend.
- I have known you for a long time.
- I trust you.
- I enjoy your company.
- I would like to get to know you better.
- You are an important person in my life.

Would you like to come?

If they say yes, let them know where the meeting will be and when.



your first circle of support meeting

how do you get ready for the first meeting?

Tell your Circle the date, time and location of the meeting. This should be a time that is best for everyone.

Ask a Circle member to help write notes about what you want to talk about. Have the meeting somewhere you feel comfortable. This could be your home, a cafe, the park, or somewhere else.

what happens at your first meeting?

- ➔ Everyone introduces themselves to each other
- ➔ Everyone talks and gets to know each other
- ➔ You explain what you want your Circle of Support to help you with
- ➔ Everyone talks about what we can do together



your role at the circle of support meeting

You need to be part of your Circle of Support meetings

You should always be included in conversations and decisions

You should help out where you can to make the people you invite feel welcome.

You can do this by...

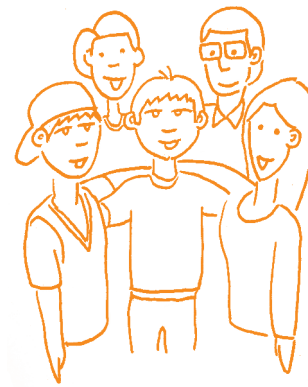
- ➔ Greeting people at the door
- ➔ Getting people drinks and food to eat
- ➔ Being in charge of the meeting



Aaron's Circle of Support helps him with things that he needs or wants to do.

There are lots of things that your Circle can help you with. A Circle can support you with:

- ➔ Making and going to appointments with doctors or dentists
- ➔ Making new friends
- ➔ Filling in forms
- ➔ Finding a housemate
- ➔ Getting a job
- ➔ Trying new activities
- ➔ Planning for the future



your circle

You are the centre of your Circle of Support.

People should not talk about you without you.

It is important that you are included in your Circle.

your circle should:



Understand your communication style.

Listen to what you say.

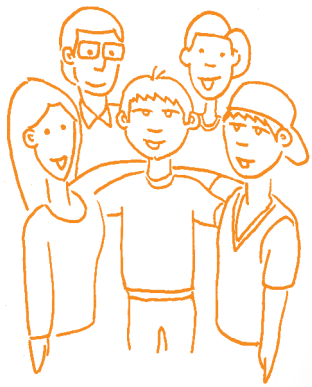


Ask you questions and ask your opinion.

Think about what you say and what is important to you.



Speak one at a time.



your circle

Should make you feel



- ➔ Like you have a voice
- ➔ Happy
- ➔ Confident
- ➔ Safe and comfortable
- ➔ Included
- ➔ Accepted
- ➔ Proud

Should **NOT** make you feel



- ➔ Excluded
- ➔ Stressed
- ➔ Like you do not want to participate
- ➔ Embarrassed
- ➔ Humiliated
- ➔ Left out
- ➔ Sad





If you want to know more about Circles, go to www.cosam.org.au

other recent guides from inclusion designlab



circles of support

A guide for family carers, friends and advocates who want to start a *Circle of Support*.



your dental health

A guide to oral hygiene, dental health and the dental system for people with a disability, their families and carers.



taking that extra step

Taking That Extra Step (2nd Edition) offers all organisations the opportunity to become more inclusive of people with intellectual disability.



i can vote

A dual-read guide for voters with intellectual disability who want to learn more about democracy, politics and elections.



it's my choice! toolkit

A guide to decision making and planning tools for people with disability, families, advocates and organisations.



seven approaches

Guide to support people, identify opportunities and connect with their community.

visit inclusiondesignlab.org.au



PO Box 8093 Armadale VIC 3143

T. 03 9509 4266 F. 03 9576 0378

E. projects@inclusiondesignlab.org.au W. inclusiondesignlab.org.au W. cosam.org.au



Inclusion Melbourne Inc.



InclusionMelb