



# Local Area Coordination Information Paper

## **Local Area Coordination**

Local Area Coordination is an approach to supporting people with a disability and/or their families living in local communities. The Local Area Coordinator (LAC) works at the individual, the family and the community level. The LAC works collaboratively to facilitate positive changes that assist people with a disability to have valued and quality lives within the community and enable families to remain an important and enduring support. Its practice is defined by a charter and a set of beliefs and principles that underpin Local Area Coordination practice. This practice must be culturally appropriate and acceptable to the communities where Local Area Coordination operates.

Local Area Coordination is not a funding program. While all of the people assisted through Local Area Coordination require significant and ongoing support, most do not receive funding and many have been previously unknown to the Department of Communities (Disability Services) or non-Government disability service providers.

LAC represents a departure from the traditional approach of either providing or funding disability support services.

The Program acknowledges that disability specific services may be required by some people some of the time. LAC operates on the belief however, that this need can be reduced and in many instances even negated if people engage with or develop natural networks, have ongoing access to information, inclusive, flexible and responsive community services like education, health, youth services, housing, transport, employment and communities which are welcoming and supportive.

## **LAC Charter, Principles and Strategies**

### **Charter:**

to support people with a disability and/or their families to strengthen their connections with community and receive the support they require so that they can pursue their chosen lifestyle; and

to engage with, and support communities to become more welcoming and inclusive of people with a disability.

### **Principles:**

The purpose of LAC is to support people who have a disability and/or their families to access community opportunities that will enhance the capacity of the person with a disability to build supportive relationships, to enhance family life and to participate in and contribute to the life of their community.

The intent of Local Area Coordination is underpinned and affirmed by the following principles:

1. As citizens, people with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as all other people to participate in and contribute to the life of the community.
2. People with disabilities and/or families supporting a person with a disability are best placed to determine their own goals, and to plan for the future either independently, as a family, or supported by advocates of their choice.

3. Families, friends and personal networks are the foundations of a rich and valued life in the community.
4. People with disabilities and their families have natural authority and are best placed to be their most powerful and enduring leaders, decision makers and advocates.
5. Access to information that is timely, accurate and available in appropriate formats enables people to make appropriate decisions and to gain more control over their life.
6. Communities are enriched by the inclusion and participation of people with disabilities and these communities are the most important way of providing friendship, support and a meaningful life to people with disabilities and/or their families and carers.
7. The lives of people with disabilities and/or their families are enhanced when they can determine their preferred supports and services and control the required resources, to the extent that they desire.
8. Services and supports provided through Local Area Coordination complement and support the primary role of families, carers and communities in achieving a good life for people with disabilities. These services and supports should not take over or exclude the natural networks that already exist or could be developed.
9. Partnerships between individuals, families and carers, communities, governments, service providers and the business sector are vital in meeting the needs of people with disabilities.
10. People with disabilities have a life-long capacity for learning development and contribution.

*It is acknowledged that these principles have been adopted from the Local Area Coordination program of Western Australia and kindly approved for the Department of Communities (Disability Services) use by the Disability Services Commission of Western Australian.*

**Objectives:**

Local Area Coordination works with people with a disability and/or their families and community to facilitate positive changes that:

- assist people with a disability to have valued and quality lives within the community
- enable families to remain an important and enduring support
- result in communities becoming more welcoming and inclusive.

**Desired Outcomes:**

In pursuit of these objectives it is intended that Local Area Coordination achieve a number of outcomes for individuals, families and communities. These are:

- people with a disability and/or their families to receive a service that reflects a strengths based approach, is flexible to meet changing needs and supports valued roles for the person with a disability
- people with a disability and/or their families to have natural networks around them to assist them achieve their vision and their goals
- people with a disability and/or their families to have access to community services which are appropriate to their needs and goals
- people with a disability and/or their families to receive quality supports and services
- people with a disability and/or their families to have greater access to relevant information about available services, supports and funding.

### **Major Strategies:**

In order to achieve these desired outcomes the LAC will:

- establish and support effective working relationships with individuals, families and communities
- assist people with a disability and/or their families to clarify their strengths, goals and plan for the future
- assist people with a disability and/or their families to engage with or develop natural networks and community connections
- assist people with a disability and/or their families to navigate and link with their community
- assist people with a disability and/or their families to access the supports and services that will enable them to meet their identified goals
- work with local communities, organisations and people with a disability and/or their families to build inclusive and welcoming communities
- promote self advocacy, provide advocacy and support to people with a disability and/or their families, or facilitate access to an alternative advocacy source
- provide accurate and timely information and assist individuals, families and communities to access information through a variety of means.

### **The LAC Approach:**

#### **Natural Networks vs. Community and Disability Specific Services**

Local Area Coordination makes a distinction between natural networks, community and disability specific services. Natural networks are those freely given relationships that exist within and across communities.

Natural networks could include immediate and extended family, friends and neighbours together with the relationships that form around work, study, mutual needs, social and recreational interests, spiritual and other activities. Families and

people with disabilities may already have these natural networks in place or establish them as a consequence of the planning process they have engaged in with the Local Area Coordinator.

Local Area Coordination acknowledges that for most people most of the time it is these natural networks that are the basis for meeting personal and interpersonal needs and developing valued roles. The nature and experience of living with a disability, or supporting a person with a disability, can isolate a family and the person with a disability from these natural supportive relationships. A significant part of the work of the LAC is to assist people with a disability and/or their families identify, and in turn engage with these natural networks.

An example might be: A person with a disability going to the home of friends or family after school, during evenings or at weekends as opposed to accessing an in-home or centre-based disability specific respite service.

Other examples of how natural networks are able to assist could be: the provision of transport to a recreation activity by a person in the neighbourhood who also attends that activity; family and/or extended family, friends, neighbours, other persons known to the individual joining in events such as family/community picnics, school presentations, birthday celebrations; friends or others helping out with home modifications such as changing door handles, changing light bulbs and any other odd jobs that neighbours/friends would help with.

At the same time Local Area Coordination acknowledges that natural networks will not be able to assist with all of an individual's personal or interpersonal requirements.

In these situations the LAC supports individuals and families to navigate and link to the community or disability specific services they may require. These community services may be the type of services available in a community to all of its citizens, such as access to community facilities and resources, education, housing, transport, health services, employment and recreation services.

Where individual and/or family goals are determined by them to best be met through disability specific services the LAC would provide information on available disability specific services and funding sources if required.

Local Area Coordination focuses on developing the natural network system and on access to adequate and appropriate community or disability specific services that will complement but not take over or exclude the natural networks that already exist or could be developed.

### **Self Determination**

Self determination involves people taking back power in their lives, and for many people with a disability and/or their families this process is enhanced by personal motivation, confidence and competence<sup>1</sup>. The Local Area Coordination approach seeks to develop self motivation and in turn competence and confidence within individuals and families.

The LAC also works to develop leadership skills within and between people with disabilities, families and communities which will result in better recognition of and

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchison and McGill, 1998; Leisure Integration and Community.

response to the rights and needs of people with disabilities to live a full and empowered life.

The LAC assists individuals and families to have a vision for the future via planning processes and to become more aware of the importance of their natural networks and community connections. More informed, confident, mutually supportive and less isolated individuals in communities are potentially better at making their own decisions, exercising more choices and gaining greater access to and control of the resources required to pursue their chosen lifestyle.

### **Community Building**

Local Area Coordination recognizes that social conditions and social structures can impact upon the lives of people with a disability and/or their families. The LAC works with individuals, families, community and allies, to encourage change in societal beliefs and structures, so that people with a disability/families feel empowered and valued.

These types of changes may occur through assisting with access to such things as information, education, training, employment, financial and other resources.

Examples of the types of action that might result could include:

- assisting individuals and families to come together to explore local issues or concerns, attend or present at conferences, workshops, training events
- assisting people with a disability to navigate and access community services and facilities
- challenging and shifting negative attitudes which deny equal access to the same services as other people in the community.

Community building work in the context of disability and Local Area Coordination could involve a range of activities including:

- *awareness raising* - educating the general community about disability issues, inequalities and the need for change
- *networking* - developing links between families, individuals, allies and organisations to enable a community to identify and tackle a problem together
- *self-help* - bringing families and/or individuals together to learn from each other through sharing stories which will then enable them to meet their own needs within the context of their communities
- *advocacy* - promoting self advocacy, providing advocacy and support to people with a disability and/or their families or access to an alternative advocacy source
- *participation* – facilitate the reduction/removal of physical, structural and other obstacles to participation in decision-making and service delivery and devising methods to encourage input from the wider community
- *resource provision* - support and encourage the provision of funds and resources to enable the development of structures within communities which contribute to meeting the needs of people with a disability and/or their families

- *information collection* – gathering information on community needs, attitudes and responses and providing accurate and timely information to individuals/families to ensure informed choice.

### **Strengths Based Approach to Planning**

An important role for the LAC is to facilitate planning with the person with a disability and/or their family. The Local Area Coordination approach recognizes the capacities, skills and strengths of the person with a disability and utilizes a strengths based approach to planning. This approach is respectful of the wide variety of contexts, circumstances and cultures in which people with a disability and/or their families live. This approach recognizes that a variety of “planning tools” will be required to develop a personalised plan.

The planning process will involve the person with a disability and/or their family. The person with a disability or their family may also wish to involve other persons of their choice and/or an independent advocate in the development of their personalised plan. Personalised plans will be reviewed at least annually or within time-frames determined by the person with a disability and/or their family, or as circumstances change.

### **Support Available through LAC**

There are two levels of support available through Local Area Coordination.

- **Level 1** support is the provision of information and/or limited support. There is no assessment or intake process. Anyone can contact the Local Area Coordinator for Level 1 support.
- **Level 2** support, is available for people who:
  - are assessed as being eligible for DSQ Services
  - are registered with DSQ
  - live in an area serviced by a Local Area Coordinator
  - who choose to become registered as a recipient of support from the Local Area Coordination Program.

## Essential Elements of Local Area Coordination

The Local Area Coordination approach has emerged from a continuing search for better ways to include people with a disability in society and ensure valued and quality lives. Local Area Coordination connects fundamental beliefs about how people with a disability and/or their families should be able to live in society with practical ways for making things happen.

The following essential elements of LAC have been identified:

### 1. The relationship as central

The Local Area Coordinator develops open and positive relationships with people with a disability and/or their families by:

- believing that individuals and families themselves have natural authority and are best placed to identify their own needs and plan for the future
- actively listening, providing opportunities for families/individuals to tell their story, honouring and respecting their journey and having a non-judgmental approach
- developing a true partnership with families and people with a disability
- focussing and building upon individual and family strengths
- taking the time needed to develop the relationship, understand needs and aspirations and plan any required response
- providing the information required for individuals and families to make informed choices
- keeping in regular contact with the individual or family
- committing to make a real difference in the lives of people with a disability and/or their families – believing that all people have a contribution to make to society and should have the opportunities to do this.

This means that any decisions to be made which effect people and their lives are made by the individuals and/or their families and that any authority for the LAC to act on these decisions is given by those individuals and/or families.

### 2. Working with families and individuals across all life stages

The LAC works with people with a disability of all ages<sup>2</sup>, their family and/or extended family. While working within the framework of the *Disability Services Act (2006)*, what triggers eligibility for assistance from the LAC is a persons' need for support. The main eligibility criterion for assistance is that the person resides within the community, either independently or with their family, the area is serviced by a Local Area Coordinator and the person meets the DSQ eligibility criteria for Level 2 support.

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<sup>2</sup> Local Area Coordination does not register people for support who are 65 years of age or older. At the same time Local Area Coordination does not stop providing assistance to people who are registered and subsequently turn 65.

### 3. Natural networks, Community and Disability Specific Services

The work of the LAC is mostly concerned with the creation and maintenance of natural networks and assisting with access to community services rather than disability specific services.

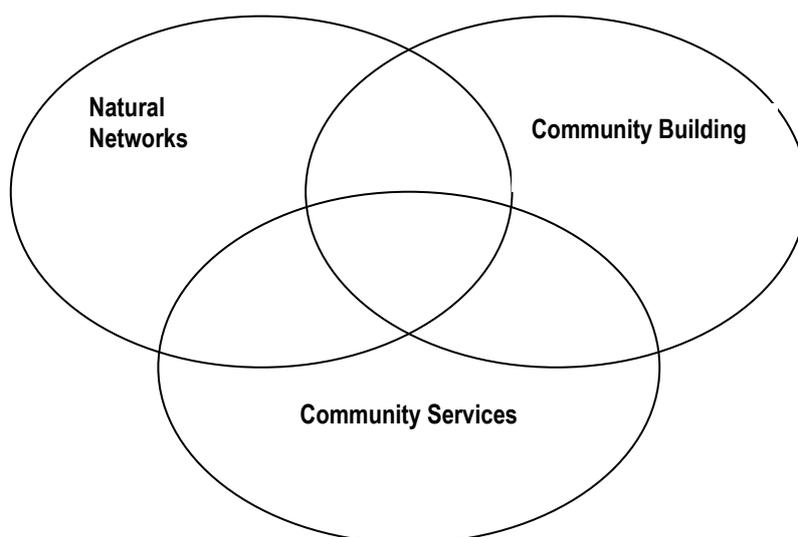
Local Area Coordination makes a distinction between natural networks, community and disability specific services as described in Section 2.1 LAC Framework.

### 4. Community building

Combined with a focus on natural networks and community services, community building provides the fourth essential element of the Local Area Coordination practice approach.

Community building is about working at the community level to achieve:

- neighbourhood, local and community resources as part of the natural support for individuals and families
- community awareness of and support for people with a disability and/or their families
- the development of leadership skills of community members, where these leadership skills are of benefit to people with a disability and families in the local community
- the full inclusion of people with a disability and families in all aspects of community life (the social, economic, cultural, environmental and spiritual).



**Figure 1:** The three connected components of the Local Area Coordination practice model.

These three components come together in a planned approach where both immediate and short-term requirements are recognised and responded to and longer term goals are acknowledged and planned for.

Local Area Coordination recognises that social conditions and social structures can impact upon the lives of people with a disability and/or their families. The LAC works with individuals, families and allies to assist them identify and reduce the impact of the disempowering and devaluing actions of any particular groups, services, organisations, and other social structures. The LAC also works to reduce or remove the social conditions which may lead people with a disability and/or their families to be, or to feel powerless and devalued.

These types of changes may occur through assisting with access to such things as information, education, training, employment and financial and other resources. Examples of the types of action that might result could include:

- assisting people with a disability and/or their families in a local area to come together to explore local issues or concerns, attend or present at conferences, workshops, training events
- assisting people with a disability and/or their families to navigate and gain access to community services or facilities
- challenging and shifting negative attitudes which deny equal access to the same services as other people in the community.

The main feature of community building action in Local Area Coordination is that any benefit for individuals and families derived through community action is also likely to be a benefit to other individuals and families in the community e.g. increased transport services that meet the needs of all members of the community, youth services that meet the needs of all youth, out of school care programs, holiday programs that meet the needs of all young people.

##### **5. A local community base, community connection and geographic boundaries**

The LAC works to build meaningful and supportive connections with and between people with a disability and/or their families and the communities where they live. Establishment of supportive networks is facilitated by LACs themselves being connected to the communities where they work.

Over time the LAC will know their communities, community strengths, opportunities and available and potential resources. They will come to understand what people's lives are like, the nature of need and something about people's dreams and aspirations. They will themselves have established an identity as a community resource that is connected to and part of the places where they operate.

This can only be achieved if:

- there is a clear and agreed geographic boundary that defines the area where each LAC works
- within that geographic boundary there is an achievable work-load for each LAC
- Local Area Coordination is seen in the context of the community, and as a participant in community rather than be seen as a traditional service response approach.

There is no 'priority for accesses to people eligible for support through Level 2. Access may be limited though by the availability of Local Area Coordination in any particular community and by the capacity of the LAC to include additional individuals or families within their workload.

A community presence and increased connection and accessibility are facilitated by having an office that has a community feel and orientation. This is achieved through small community based offices not connected to other government business or other disability specific services.

## **6. A supportive management framework**

Local Area Coordinators work in the community with a high degree of autonomy and with a mandate to be creative and flexible in the way they respond to the needs and aspirations of the individuals and families they connect with.

Adequate and quality support and supervision establishes a consistently high standard of performance and accountability as a means of ensuring the quality and consistency of support to people with a disability and/or their families.

A support, supervision and management framework is designed to create and nurture a culture which supports and encourages learning, performance and high expectations of what is possible and what can be achieved.

The management framework includes:

- pre-service training for all new LACs
- regular meetings and workshops involving all LACs in the cluster (or Region at discretion of the Supervisor/s). These meetings provide an opportunity for reflective practice, dialogue around current issues and for new learning
- regular structured supervisory sessions between each LAC and their LAC Supervisor or as required
- a formal LAC Achievement Planning process built around six key initiatives and involving engagement with and feedback from people with disabilities and their families in each local area
- a commitment to meeting the identified learning and development needs of LACs
- each LAC reporting directly to a LAC Supervisor who manages no more than four or five LACs in a 'district' or 'cluster'
- the LAC Supervisors working with some people with a disability and/or their families so they stay in touch with the requirements and complexities of doing the job. The number of individuals/families supported by the LAC Supervisor will vary according to the unique characteristics/circumstances of each district and may range in number between five and fifteen.

(Determination about the number of individuals/families supported by each LAC Supervisor will be made in conjunction with the relevant line manager and will reflect the benchmarks outlined above).

## **7. Principles as the basis of decisions and actions**

While a broad set of strategies defines the type of work undertaken it is an agreed values base and a set of principles that determines *how* decisions are made and *how*

relationships are conducted with people, agencies and community. Agreed and communicated practice principles are the basis for decisions and actions. These provide the guidance for LACs to establish and maintain consistency and integrity in their practice.

For each of the principles, and for any others that may be developed over time, the LAC will ask, “Do my actions ensure that these principles are maintained?”

The following principles should be considered in relation to decision making:

- people with a disability have the same rights as everyone else
- LAC actions contribute to positive changes and benefits that are sustainable
- LAC work with individuals and families promotes self-sufficiency, not dependence
- the needs and aspirations identified by individuals and families themselves set the direction of LAC actions
- any support or service provided should as far as possible be controlled by individuals and families who continue to live interdependently within their own communities
- communities have the capacity to support all their members
- community building actions arise from the identified needs and aspirations of individuals and families
- valued and trusting relationships are central to the practice of LAC
- natural networks take precedence over disability specific services
- wherever possible community services are utilised in preference to disability specific services
- any funding or service provided should not undermine natural networks
- financial support should not displace the resources of other agencies that would reasonably be accessible to individuals and families in the local area
- any financial support aims to build individual, family and community self-sufficiency
- discretionary funding purchases are determined by individuals and families within the LAC agreed funding parameters
- funding is a strategy of last resort.

## **Qualities of an Effective LAC Program**

### **QUALITY SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND FAMILIES**



- effective organisation of time and resources
- effective administration and financial management skills
- understanding of and compliance with administrative procedures and quality standards



Highly developed skills in the areas of:

- planning with individuals and families
- community networking and building



The ability and willingness to develop and maintain positive and trusting relationships with people with a disability and/or their families



Understanding of and commitment to, the charter and principles of local area co-ordination



#### **A SOUND VALUES BASE**

Positive and contemporary attitudes towards people with disabilities