

The Mattering Framework



Life Your Way

**From Being Supported
to Knowing You Matter**

Foundational Framework Document

Contents

Introduction: The Human Experience Beneath Quality..... 3

Mattering Creates the Conditions for Growth 4

The Cost of Feeling That You Do Not Matter 6

Being Seen: Attention Before Intervention 7

Being Heard: A Voice Must Be Able to Influence What Happens..... 8

Being Valued: Dignity Is Demonstrated Through Standards 9

Being Needed: Contribution Completes the Experience of Mattering 10

From Mattering to Belief..... 11

Mattering Across the Life Your Way Community 12

Mattering in Programs and Everyday Practice 13

Leadership: Mattering Is Built in Small Moments 14

Measuring What People Experience..... 14

The Strategic Connection..... 15

The Evidence That We Matter 16

Introduction: The Human Experience Beneath Quality

Quality in disability support is often described through systems. Organisations measure whether services were delivered, records were completed, risks were managed, goals were reviewed and regulatory requirements were met. These things matter. They create accountability, safeguard rights and establish the conditions for reliable support.

Yet systems alone cannot describe the full experience of quality.

A person may receive every funded hour in their plan and still feel invisible. They may attend activities without feeling included, complete goals that were selected for them, or spend significant time in the community without ever becoming known within it. A staff member may follow every procedure and still feel that their judgement, strengths and effort are unnoticed. A family may receive regular updates yet remain uncertain whether anyone truly understands the person they love.

The difference between receiving a service and experiencing quality often rests in something more human: whether people feel that they matter.

Mattering is the experience of knowing that we are noticed, valued and significant to others. It is the belief that our presence has meaning, our voice carries weight and our contribution makes a difference. It is related to belonging, but it is not identical to it. Belonging tells us that we are part of something. Mattering tells us that the something would be different without us.

This distinction has profound implications for Life Your Way.

We do not want clients to simply belong to our programs. We want them to know that their preferences shape those programs, their progress inspires others and their presence contributes to the community around them. We do not want families to feel that they are peripheral sources of information. We want them to experience genuine partnership, while preserving the voice, adulthood and autonomy of the person being supported. We do not want staff to feel interchangeable. We want them to understand how their judgement, strengths and daily behaviours influence the quality of another person's life.

Mattering is therefore not an additional program or initiative. It is the experience that should sit beneath every program, interaction and decision.

The Life Your Way Belief Framework establishes that people are capable of more than they currently believe. Values in Action defines the behaviours through which we express that belief. This framework identifies the experience we seek to create as a result: people feel seen, heard and valued; they know they are needed; and over time, they begin to believe they can influence the direction of their own lives.

Mattering Creates the Conditions for Growth

Human potential does not develop in a vacuum. People need opportunity, but they also need relationships and environments that make opportunity psychologically possible.

A person is more likely to attempt something uncertain when they believe someone sees their effort rather than only the outcome. They are more likely to express a preference when experience has shown that their voice will be taken seriously. They are more likely to persist after a setback when they know their value has not been reduced by failure. They are more likely to contribute when they understand that what they bring is genuinely useful to others.

This is why mattering is central to the Life Your Way philosophy. It creates the relational conditions in which participation, confidence and capability can grow.

Consider the difference between telling a person that they can do something and helping them gather evidence that their actions matter. Encouragement can be useful, but encouragement without experience is fragile. A person develops stronger belief when they make a choice and see it acted upon, complete part of a task and see that it contributed to the whole, offer an idea and watch the group use it, or take a risk and discover that support remains present even when the result is imperfect.

These experiences gradually alter identity. The person moves from seeing themselves as someone for whom things are done to someone whose choices, effort and contribution influence what happens next.

This progression is particularly important for people who have spent long periods in systems organised around deficit, diagnosis or dependence. When most conversations focus on what a person needs, it can become difficult for that person—and the people around them—to recognise what they offer. Mattering rebalances that picture. It does not deny support needs. It ensures those needs do not become the entirety of the person's identity.

At Life Your Way, support should therefore achieve two things at once. It should provide the assistance required in the moment, and it should strengthen the person's belief that they remain an active participant in their own life.

The Cost of Feeling That You Do Not Matter

To understand why mattering must be deliberately cultivated, it is useful to consider its opposite.

People experience a lack of mattering when they feel ignored, unheard, undervalued or unnecessary. This may occur through overt disrespect, but it more often develops through repeated small interactions. A person is spoken about while sitting in the room. A worker completes a task without creating any opportunity for participation. A preference is requested but not acted upon. A family raises a concern and receives no clear follow-up. A staff member contributes an idea that disappears without acknowledgement. A leader only makes contact when something has gone wrong.

None of these moments may appear decisive in isolation. Together, however, they communicate something powerful: your presence does not meaningfully affect what happens here.

Within disability support, this can lead to withdrawal, passivity or dependence. If a person repeatedly experiences that choices do not change the outcome, there is little reason to continue making them. If attempts are constantly interrupted or taken over, effort becomes less worthwhile. If a person is included physically but not relationally, participation can become performative rather than meaningful.

The same dynamic affects staff. Workers who feel invisible or interchangeable may stop offering ideas, raising concerns or bringing their full strengths to the role. They may do what is required while disengaging from the deeper purpose of the work. Families who feel unheard may either withdraw or escalate because ordinary communication has not created confidence that concerns will be recognised.

A culture of mattering cannot be built through occasional recognition campaigns. It is created or weakened through everyday interactions. The question is not whether Life Your Way tells people they matter. The question is whether our systems and behaviours provide repeated evidence that they do.

Being Seen: Attention Before Intervention

To feel seen is to experience that another person has noticed us accurately. It involves more than physical visibility. It means someone recognises our preferences, communication, strengths, emotional state and changing circumstances without reducing us to one characteristic.

In disability support, seeing the person requires deliberate attention. Staff may have access to support plans, behaviour support strategies, medical information, goals and family context. These documents are necessary, but knowing information about someone is not the same as knowing them.

A person is seen when staff understand how they express comfort, uncertainty, enthusiasm or fatigue. They are seen when their interests are remembered and used to create meaningful opportunities. They are seen when a change in behaviour prompts curiosity rather than judgement. They are seen when support reflects who they are today rather than an outdated assumption about who they have always been.

This form of attention is especially important in group settings. Groups can create community, friendship and shared momentum, but they can also make it easier for individual experience to disappear into the activity. A successful group is not one in which the schedule was completed and everyone remained physically present. It is one in which staff continued to notice who was participating, who was withdrawing, who needed a different entry point and whose strengths could help the group succeed.

Being seen also requires staff to arrive prepared. Reading notes, understanding goals, knowing current risks and being aware of changes are not merely administrative expectations. They communicate respect. When a person has to repeatedly explain information the organisation should already know, or when support starts without adequate preparation, the message is that their experience has not been important enough to remember.

The strategic pillar **Showing Up Is the Standard** begins here. Turning up is not only attendance. It is the decision to arrive attentive, informed and ready to encounter the person in front of us.

The test is simple: does the person experience that we know who they are, notice what is happening for them and remain interested in who they are becoming?

Being Heard: A Voice Must Be Able to Influence What Happens

People may be listened to without being heard.

Listening describes an action by the receiver. Being heard describes an outcome for the person communicating. Someone feels heard when their communication influences understanding, decision-making or action.

This distinction is essential at Life Your Way because communication takes many forms. People may express themselves through speech, behaviour, body movement, facial expression, silence, assistive technology, routine, withdrawal or repeated actions. Staff need to understand how each person communicates and avoid treating spoken language as the only credible form of voice.

Being heard also requires time. In fast-moving environments, staff can unintentionally fill silence, repeat questions, answer on behalf of the person or offer choices so quickly that no real choice can occur. The pressure to keep activities moving can become more important than the person's opportunity to process and respond.

Mattering asks us to resist that pressure. It requires enough patience for the person's communication to emerge and enough humility to check whether we have interpreted it correctly.

This does not mean every expressed preference can always be followed exactly. Disability support regularly involves competing rights, safety considerations, funding constraints and the needs of others. Being heard does not guarantee that every request produces the preferred outcome. It does require that the preference is taken seriously, explained honestly and incorporated into decision-making wherever possible.

The same principle applies to families and staff. Families should understand how information they provide has been considered, even where the final decision differs from their preferred approach. Staff should be able to raise concerns without being dismissed or treated as difficult. Feedback should not disappear into the organisation without acknowledgement, ownership and a clear next step.

The strategic pillar **Communication Creates Safety** is therefore about more than information exchange. Communication creates safety when people know they can speak, communicate differently, ask questions, raise concerns and receive a respectful response.

People feel heard when their voice leaves a trace.

Being Valued: Dignity Is Demonstrated Through Standards

Being valued means experiencing that our worth is not conditional on convenience, performance or similarity to others.

For clients, this requires support that preserves dignity on both good and difficult days. A person does not become less worthy of respect because they are anxious, dysregulated, uncertain, slow to respond or unwilling to participate in a particular activity. Their behaviour may require boundaries, support or intervention, but their value remains unchanged.

This is one reason language matters. Words shape how people are perceived and subsequently treated. Describing someone as difficult, non-compliant, lazy or attention-seeking turns a moment or behaviour into a judgement about character. More respectful practice describes what happened, considers what the behaviour may communicate and remains curious about what support is required.

Being valued also means that goals are not imposed simply because professionals, families or staff consider them desirable. The person's preferences, aspirations and experience must remain central. Support may include encouragement, challenge and exposure to new possibilities, but it should not quietly replace the person's journey with someone else's vision for their life.

For staff, being valued means more than being thanked. It means having strengths recognised, receiving useful feedback, being given development opportunities and understanding how their work contributes to the organisation's purpose. It also means being held accountable. Avoiding feedback is not an act of kindness. When leaders allow someone to continue without clarity or coaching, they communicate that the person's growth or the quality of their contribution is not important enough to address.

Professional standards and human value are not opposites. Clear expectations can demonstrate value because they show that the work matters and that the person is capable of meeting a meaningful standard with the right support.

This is where **Professionalism Is Empowerment** becomes part of mattering. Professional practice creates environments that are safe, predictable and respectful enough for growth. When scope, boundaries, communication and accountability are clear, people can participate with greater confidence.

To value someone is not to remove all discomfort. It is to preserve their dignity while supporting them through it.

Being Needed: Contribution Completes the Experience of Mattering

Feeling seen, heard and valued is essential, but mattering becomes deeper when people also know they are needed.

To be needed is not to be made dependent upon, nor is it to carry an unhealthy burden for others. It is to understand that our presence and contribution make a meaningful difference. It is the recognition that we do not simply occupy a place in a group, workplace or community; we add something to it.

This element is particularly significant for people with disability because many support systems position individuals primarily as recipients. Services are provided to them, decisions are made for them, and progress is reported about them. Even well-designed support can remain one-directional if it does not create opportunities for contribution.

Life Your Way seeks to change that dynamic.

A person may contribute by completing a role in a workplace, helping prepare a group meal, welcoming someone new, sharing knowledge about a personal interest, supporting a peer, offering feedback, volunteering, leading part of an activity or demonstrating persistence that encourages others. Contribution does not need to be economically productive or publicly impressive. It needs to be authentic and recognised.

This connects directly to the belief that a rising tide lifts all ships. A person's attempt may create learning for others, even when the original goal is not achieved. Their experience may expose a flaw in a program, help staff adapt their approach or create a pathway that another person can follow. Their courage may expand what families, peers and staff believe is possible.

When contribution is recognised, people begin to see themselves differently. They are not simply the person who needs help. They are someone whose actions help shape what happens around them.

This is also true for staff. A support worker should understand not only what tasks they are responsible for, but why their presence matters. Their calmness may create emotional safety. Their knowledge of fitness, cooking, art, music or community may open opportunities. Their willingness to speak up may prevent harm. Their consistency may be the reason a client finally trusts the process enough to try.

Leaders create mattering when they make this contribution visible. General praise has limited value. Meaningful recognition connects a specific behaviour to its

effect: because you did this, this person grew, this family gained confidence, this colleague succeeded or this system improved.

People know they are needed when they can see the difference their contribution makes.

From Mattering to Belief

The Life Your Way model does not end with mattering. Mattering creates the foundation for something further: *belief*.

When people are repeatedly seen, they develop a clearer sense of themselves. When they are heard, they learn that their choices can influence outcomes. When they are valued, they become more willing to remain in the arena when things are difficult. When they are needed, they recognise that they have something meaningful to offer.

Together, these experiences help people develop a stronger belief in their own agency.

This is the developmental movement Life Your Way is trying to create:

Support creates the conditions for participation. Participation creates experience. Experience builds confidence. Confidence strengthens capability. Capability enables contribution. Contribution reinforces mattering. Mattering expands belief.

This movement will not always be linear. People may demonstrate confidence in one context and uncertainty in another. Progress may accelerate, pause or reverse during periods of change. Some people will require enduring support in many areas of life. Mattering does not depend on achieving independence in a conventional sense.

The goal is not to make everyone self-sufficient. The goal is to ensure that every person experiences agency, dignity, participation and contribution to the greatest extent possible for them.

A person may need significant support and still be the author of their preferences. They may need assistance throughout an activity and still make an essential contribution to it. They may communicate without speech and still exercise influence. They may not reach a particular goal and still leave a roadmap that changes what becomes possible for others.

Belief is not the denial of support needs. It is the conviction that support needs do not erase potential.

Mattering Across the Life Your Way Community

A mattering culture cannot be limited to clients. The experience must extend across the organisation because people cannot reliably create for others what they are consistently denied themselves.

Clients should experience that Life Your Way knows them, listens to them, respects them and creates authentic opportunities for contribution. Their programs should not simply occupy funded time; they should help each person build evidence that their choices, actions and presence matter.

Families should experience partnership without the person's autonomy being displaced. They should know their insight is respected, their concerns will receive a response and their role is understood. At the same time, family partnership must continue to support the client's own voice, adulthood and right to shape their life.

Staff should experience trust, clarity and development. They should understand what good looks like, how their strengths can contribute and where they need to grow. They should be able to raise concerns, receive honest feedback and see a future for themselves within the organisation. Mattering for staff is not the absence of standards. It is knowing that standards exist because their work has significance.

Leaders should also experience mattering, but leadership carries an additional responsibility. Leaders must create the structures and daily interactions through which other people experience significance. Their role is not to be indispensable. It is to build people, teams and systems that can carry the purpose beyond any one personality.

Community partners should experience Life Your Way as a contributor rather than merely a purchaser or referrer. Workplaces, volunteer organisations, gyms, clubs, venues and local businesses become part of the support ecosystem. Strong partnerships are created when all parties understand the shared value being produced.

A culture of mattering expands outward. It begins in an interaction, becomes a team norm and eventually shapes how the organisation participates in its community.

Mattering in Programs and Everyday Practice

The Life Your Way programs provide different environments, but the mattering test remains consistent.

In **Pathway to Purpose**, mattering is not achieved simply when someone attends a work placement. It is achieved when the person understands how their contribution helps a workplace, when their strengths are noticed and when they begin to imagine themselves as someone who can participate economically and socially.

In **Health is Wealth**, mattering is not limited to weight, exercise or nutrition outcomes. It includes the person learning what works for them, making informed choices, contributing to meal preparation and gaining confidence in managing their own wellbeing.

In **Get Connected**, mattering is not measured by attendance at events alone. It is reflected in friendships, shared responsibility, familiar community places, social confidence and whether a person becomes known beyond paid support.

In **My(best)self**, mattering is expressed through self-understanding, emotional regulation, identity and the belief that a person's internal experience deserves attention rather than judgement.

In **Visionary Ventures**, mattering is found in ideas becoming visible, strengths becoming useful and the person learning that something they create can hold value for others.

In **Daily Living Supports**, everyday tasks become opportunities for ownership and contribution. Shopping, cooking, planning, cleaning and travel are not chores completed around the person. They are parts of life in which the person can participate, build competence and influence the result.

During **retreats and major experiences**, mattering is built through shared responsibility, decision-making, challenge, friendship and the discovery that a person can navigate more uncertainty than they previously believed.

The quality question across every program is therefore not merely, "Did the activity happen?" It is, "What evidence did the person receive that they were seen, heard, valued and able to contribute?"

Leadership: Mattering Is Built in Small Moments

Culture is often discussed as though it is created through large initiatives. In reality, people form judgements about whether they matter through small, repeated moments.

A leader remembers an earlier conversation and follows up. A staff member's idea is acknowledged and used. Feedback explains not only what needs to change, but why the person is capable of changing it. A client's progress is noticed specifically rather than praised generically. A family receives a response before they need to chase one. A worker is asked for their perspective before a decision is finalised.

These moments are inexpensive, but they require attention.

Leaders weaken mattering when people only hear from them after something has gone wrong, when decisions arrive without context, when contributions are taken for granted, or when feedback is avoided until frustration has accumulated. They strengthen mattering when expectations are clear, recognition is specific, conversations are timely and people understand how their role connects to the larger purpose.

Leaders should regularly ask themselves a more demanding question than whether their teams are performing: what evidence have people received this week that they matter here?

Measuring What People Experience

Mattering cannot be reduced to one numerical score, but it can and should be examined systematically.

Traditional quality data remains important. Attendance, incidents, complaints, goal reviews, cancellations, training, documentation quality and audit results all provide useful signals. However, these indicators tell us primarily what occurred. They do not always tell us how people experienced it.

Life Your Way should therefore combine operational measures with structured questions about experience.

Clients can be asked whether staff know what is important to them, whether their choices influence activities and supports, whether they feel listened to, and whether they have opportunities to help, contribute or take responsibility. Families can be asked whether communication is trustworthy, concerns are followed through and the person is becoming more confident or capable. Staff can be asked whether

their strengths are recognised, expectations are clear, feedback helps them grow and they can see how their work contributes to purpose.

These questions should not exist only in annual surveys. They can be incorporated into program reviews, supervision, client council discussions, family conversations, observations of practice and leadership dashboards.

Evidence of mattering may also be found in behaviour. A person begins initiating rather than waiting. Someone offers an opinion more readily. A client welcomes a new group member. A staff member raises an issue earlier. A family expresses greater confidence in allowing the person to try. A community partner begins relating directly to the client rather than only through the worker.

These changes may not fit neatly into conventional outcome measures, but they are significant. They reveal shifts in agency, identity and relationship.

The purpose of measurement is not to prove that mattering exists. It is to help Life Your Way notice where it is strong, where it is absent and what leadership action is required.

The Strategic Connection

The five strategic pillars are the organisational mechanisms through which mattering becomes repeatable.

Showing Up Is the Standard ensures people feel seen through preparation, reliability and presence.

Communication Creates Safety ensures people feel heard through timely, respectful and responsive communication.

Person-Centred Is a Verb ensures people feel valued by allowing their preferences, strengths and goals to shape support.

Professionalism Is Empowerment creates the competent, ethical and predictable environment in which people can safely grow.

Standards That Liberate ensures quality does not depend on personality or chance. Clear standards give people the confidence and freedom to act while preserving accountability to purpose.

The pillars are not separate from mattering. They are how mattering is built into the organisation rather than left to individual goodwill.

The Evidence That We Matter

Life Your Way begins with a belief in human potential. But belief from others, while powerful, is not enough. People need experiences through which they can begin to believe for themselves.

Mattering creates those experiences.

A person is noticed accurately. Their voice influences what happens. Their dignity remains intact when things become difficult. Their contribution is recognised as useful. Slowly, the evidence accumulates.

They learn that they are not simply present, but significant.

They are not simply receiving support, but shaping their life.

They are not simply included, but needed.

They are not defined by what others do for them, but increasingly by what they choose, attempt, learn and contribute.

This is the deeper standard of quality at Life Your Way. It cannot be captured by compliance alone, and it cannot be produced through slogans. It is created through thousands of ordinary interactions in which people receive the same message in different forms: I see you. I hear you. I value you. What you bring makes a difference.

Over time, that message becomes internal.

They believe.

And once people believe that their choices, effort and presence matter, the boundaries of the future begin to move.