

Person-Centred is a Verb



Life Your Way

**Turning Choice, Goals
and Participation into
Lived Practice**

Foundational Framework Document

Contents

Introduction: Person-Centred Practice Must Be Something People Experience	3
Nothing About Me Without Me.....	4
Goals Are Alive	4
Choice, Control and the Dignity to Try	5
Participation Before Performance	5
Be Curious Not Judgemental.....	6
The Life Your Way Practice Rhythm: Notice, Invite, Scaffold, Reflect, Adapt.....	6
What This Looks Like in Practice	7
Green Flags and Red Flags.....	8
Measurement and Leadership Dashboard Signals.....	9
Reflection Questions.....	10
The Journey Belongs to the Client.....	10

Introduction: Person-Centred Practice Must Be Something People Experience

Person-centred practice is one of the most widely used phrases in disability support and one of the easiest to misunderstand. It can appear in plans, policies, intake forms and marketing language while still failing to shape the actual experience of the person being supported. A goal written on paper does not make support person-centred. A choice offered without time, understanding or real influence does not create control. An activity attended without meaningful participation does not necessarily improve quality of life.

At Life Your Way, Person-Centred Is a Verb means person-centred practice must be observable in the way support is designed, delivered, reviewed and adapted. It is not a static description of our intentions. It is an active discipline that must show up in everyday moments: how staff speak, how choices are offered, how goals are pursued, how risk is navigated, how setbacks are understood and how people are supported to build lives that feel like their own.

This is the flagship practice guide within the Life Your Way Quality Framework because it connects the organisation's deepest belief to daily support. If we believe people are capable of more than they currently believe, our role is not to decide the journey for them. Our role is to help create the conditions in which they can choose, attempt, learn, contribute and believe.

Beyond Paperwork: The Problem with Passive Person-Centredness

Many organisations can produce person-centred documentation. They can list interests, identify goals, record risks and describe preferences. These are useful tools, but they can become a substitute for practice if staff and leaders treat the document as the achievement rather than the starting point.

Passive person-centredness occurs when information about the person exists but does not meaningfully shape support. The plan says the person wants employment, but daily supports rarely build work readiness. The profile says the person enjoys music, but staff do not use that interest to create connection. The goal says independence, but tasks are consistently completed for the person because it is faster. The family identifies a concern, but the approach does not change.

Active person-centred practice asks what the person's goals and preferences require of us today. It turns information into decisions, and decisions into support. It treats each shift, program and interaction as an opportunity to connect the person's current experience to the life they are trying to build.

Nothing About Me Without Me

The principle of nothing about me without me is more than consultation. It is a reminder that people are experts in their own lives, even when they require support to communicate, understand options or make decisions. The person's voice must remain central to planning and practice.

For some people, this voice will be verbal and direct. For others, it may be expressed through behaviour, routine, facial expression, body movement, choices repeated over time, or the interpretation of people who know them well. Respecting a person's voice requires staff to understand communication, wait long enough for preferences to emerge and check whether their interpretation is correct.

Family input is often essential, particularly where the person communicates in subtle ways or where history matters. However, family partnership should strengthen the person's voice, not replace it. The task is to build a fuller picture of the person and support them to exercise choice and control to the greatest extent possible.

Goals Are Alive

Goals should not sit in documents as compliance artefacts. They should live inside daily practice. A goal becomes alive when staff can see how today's support contributes to it, when progress is noticed, when setbacks are treated as information and when the goal can evolve as the person grows.

Life Your Way supports people through programs such as Pathway to Purpose, Health is Wealth, Get Connected, My(best)self, Daily Living Supports, and Visionary Ventures. Each program can easily become a schedule of activities if the goal connection is lost. The strategic challenge is to ensure that the activity remains a vehicle for development rather than the endpoint.

If a person attends the gym, the purpose may include health, confidence, routine, body awareness, emotional regulation, social comfort and self-determination. If someone volunteers, the purpose may include workplace identity, contribution, stamina, communication and community belonging. If a person joins a social event, the purpose may include friendship, travel, budgeting, decision-making and comfort in uncertainty. Person-centred practice requires staff to hold both the activity and the developmental purpose at the same time.

Choice, Control and the Dignity to Try

Choice is central to person-centred practice, but choice must be meaningful. Offering a token option between two pre-decided activities is not the same as helping a person understand possibilities, express preferences and experience the consequences of their decisions. Meaningful choice requires information, time, communication support and respect.

Control also develops through practice. A person may not immediately know what they want if they have had limited exposure to options. They may choose what is familiar because the unfamiliar feels unsafe. Staff should not interpret this as a reason to stop offering new experiences. Instead, they should scaffold exposure carefully, provide reassurance, revisit options and respect the person's pace.

The dignity to try is essential here. Person-centred support should not protect people from every discomfort associated with growth. It should help them navigate uncertainty safely. This means staff may need to encourage, prepare, prompt, step back, debrief and try again. It does not mean forcing participation. It means refusing to mistake fear for incapacity.

Participation Before Performance

Life Your Way's belief framework is built on the idea that growth is created through participation. This has practical consequences. The goal is not always for a person to complete an activity independently or perfectly. Sometimes the goal is that they participate meaningfully in one part of it, for one moment longer than last time, with a little more confidence or a little less support.

This aligns with the logic of active support. Everyday tasks, routines and social interactions all contain opportunities for engagement. Staff should look for the part of the activity the person can do, the decision they can make, the role they can hold or the step they can attempt. Support should be graded so the person experiences success without unnecessary takeover.

Participation before performance helps protect dignity. It allows people to enter the arena before they have mastered it. It recognises that confidence may be built through the attempt itself.

Be Curious Not Judgemental

Person-centred practice requires staff to remain curious. When a person withdraws, refuses, becomes distressed, reacts strongly or appears disengaged, the first question should not be what is wrong with them. The better question is what the behaviour may be communicating and what support might be needed.

Curiosity does not remove boundaries or responsibility. It simply prevents judgement from becoming the lens through which the person is understood. A person may need clearer information, a quieter environment, more time, a different staff approach, a break, stronger preparation, more predictable routines or a goal that better reflects what matters to them now.

This approach is also important when goals change. A person who once wanted a particular path may no longer want it. A client may begin with employment as a goal and discover that confidence, health or social connection needs to come first. Another may resist TAFE but engage strongly in a practical work environment. Person-centred practice adapts because the person is not static.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x0PzUoJS-U>



The Life Your Way Practice Rhythm: Notice, Invite, Scaffold, Reflect, Adapt

Person-centred practice can be supported by a simple practice rhythm. Staff first notice the person accurately: their communication, energy, interests, goals, support needs and changing context. They then invite participation in a way that preserves choice and dignity. They scaffold the opportunity by adjusting the type and amount of support needed. They reflect on what happened and what it revealed. Finally, they adapt the next approach based on learning.

This rhythm prevents support from becoming either passive or controlling. It reminds staff that the person should be actively involved, but not abandoned. It creates a bridge between structured support and individualised practice.

What This Looks Like in Practice

In Pathway to Purpose, person-centred practice means work exposure is shaped by the person's interests, strengths, readiness and real feedback from the environment. It does not assume that one pathway fits everyone. It helps people discover what kind of contribution feels meaningful.

In Health is Wealth, it means health is not imposed as a moral judgement. Support helps the person understand what works for them, participate in meal planning, movement and routines, and build ownership over wellbeing.

In Get Connected, it means events are not simply entertainment. They become opportunities for friendship, social confidence, travel, budgeting, shared responsibility and belonging.

In My(best)self, it means emotional regulation and identity are supported with dignity. People are helped to understand themselves, not judged for the ways they cope.

In Daily Living Supports, it means tasks are not completed around the person. They are broken down, shared and used to build competence.

In Visionary Ventures, it means ideas, creativity and micro-enterprise opportunities are treated as genuine pathways for contribution.

In retreats, it means shared experience, challenge, downtime, decision-making and natural social connection are all treated as developmental opportunities.

Staff voice	Strategic translation	Practice implication
Achieving clients goals with them	Goals are co-owned and actively pursued.	Daily support links to what the person is trying to build.
Following goals	Goals must be alive, not filed away.	Notes and programs show progress, attempts and learning.
Taking interest in hobbies	Interests are pathways into connection and growth.	Staff use interests to create meaningful participation.
Be curious, not judgemental	Behaviour and disengagement are understood as communication.	Staff ask what support is needed before labelling the person.
Goals can change	Person-centred support evolves as the person evolves.	Plans and programs adapt with feedback and experience.

Green Flags and Red Flags

Green flags Behaviours that strengthen this pillar	Red flags Behaviours that weaken this pillar
Connects daily support to client goals and interests.	Completes activities without linking to goals.
Offers meaningful choices with time to respond.	Makes choices for the person because it is easier.
Encourages participation before stepping in.	Takes over tasks unnecessarily.
Uses prompts and graded support matched to the person.	Uses one approach for everyone.
Treats setbacks as learning.	Labels the person as difficult or lazy.
Updates understanding as goals and preferences change.	Keeps pursuing outdated goals because they are in the plan.
Celebrates progress in specific, dignity-preserving ways.	Praises in ways that infantilise or miss the person's actual effort.

Measurement and Leadership Dashboard Signals

Signal	What to look for	Possible source	Leadership response
Goal connection	Daily notes and programs show connection to current goals.	Shift notes, program plans, plan reviews.	Coach staff to document meaningful participation and outcomes.
Choice and control	Clients are offered real options and supported to express preferences.	Practice observation, client feedback.	Review communication methods and decision-making supports.
Participation quality	Staff scaffold participation rather than completing tasks for people.	Observation, supervision, family feedback.	Model graded assistance and active support.
Adaptation	Support changes in response to new learning, goals or circumstances.	Review meetings, incident/feedback logs.	Adjust plans and communicate rationale.

Reflection Questions

For staff, the key question is whether the person had genuine influence over the support. Did the activity connect to their goals? Did you create opportunities for participation? Did you provide enough support without taking over? Did you learn something about the person that should shape next time?

For leaders, the question is whether programs remain purposeful. Are activities vehicles for growth or simply events on a calendar? Are goals visible in practice? Are staff being coached to see participation opportunities in everyday moments?

The Journey Belongs to the Client

Person-centred practice is not the soft part of quality. It is the discipline that prevents services from becoming self-centred. It reminds Life Your Way that the person's life is not a program to be managed, but a journey to be supported.

When this pillar is strong, people do not simply receive support. They participate in shaping their own lives. They gather evidence that their choices matter, their efforts count and their future remains open.