Handout 5: Professional and Personal Values Conflict

Our values and attitudes have been developed over a lifetime of cultural, social, educational, and religious experiences. For some people, working in the disability sector can challenge their personal values and attitudes. Issues around sexuality, death, disability, and cultural practices are just some of the many issues that can be confronting.

The values on which most services are based are drawn from a social justice framework which supports personal freedom and rights around many of these areas. This may mean that some people have to somehow balance their personal views with the values of those with whom they are working. This may create feelings of discomfort or inner conflict.

This can become a problem if it means that a person cannot work effectively with the people they are supporting. It is the responsibility of the person to do something about addressing this. Some options may include:

- Learn more about the issue that is causing a conflict in your values so that you understand it from a variety of points of view. You can talk with the person concerned about the issues, debate issues at team meetings, attend professional development or training, seek supervision.

- Decide if you can provide a service that will meet the client's needs despite your values.

- If you cannot provide such service, refer on to someone else to provide it instead.

These days workers are often careful not to express their personal values if they are in conflict with their work role. However they may still be evident in the language they use. These include referring to people collectively and focusing on their disability rather than on them as individuals with their own strengths and qualities e.g. "the moderates", "the Downs kids".