Handout 1: Steps in Assisting Someone to Identify their Needs and Wants

A key role that service providers play in the lives of many people with a disability is to support them to work out what they would like to achieve (i.e. their goals) and how they will go about doing so.

When people have a significant intellectual disability or are limited in their communication, it can be a challenge to ensure that you have accurately identified what they want.

To do this you have to use a range of methods. These methods include:

1. Talking with the people themselves. This may require using alternate forms of communication such as sign language, photos etc (go to Handout 2 to find out more about other Communication Systems). If you do not know the person well, communication may be more effective if you speak with the person when they have a support person available. This may be a parent or other family member or another service provider.

2. Speaking with other people who know the person well and so may be more aware of what the person may want. This can only be done if you have the person's consent to do so.

3. Consulting professional staff who have assessed the person's skills and abilities. For example, an occupational therapist assesses people's functional abilities and their environments; a speech pathologist assesses the person’s communication needs; a doctor assesses their physical and medical needs; a psychologist assesses their behavioural needs if they have challenging behaviours. There are many other people who can provide information that helps you to form a complete picture of the person’s skills, abilities, and interests.

4. Using all this information to determine what the person may need to do to achieve their goals. This will mean identifying what skills they may need to learn, what information they may need, what equipment and other supports they will need.