

Intellectual Disability: Day Options—NorthLink

NorthLink is a community-based Day Options Service for clients of Disability Services with intellectual disability in the northern, northeast, and western districts of Adelaide.

NorthLink's purpose is to provide a service in which participants build on their post-school education, develop new skills through individual courses of study and develop and maintain community support networks.

Life after School

Having something meaningful in which to participate each day is an important part of everyone's life. Once we leave school, we all move onto other pursuits, developing skills in areas such as vocation, further education, and/or leisure. We also develop relationships and friendships with others, as well as personal and professional networks.

Like anyone else, people with intellectual disability need to continue their personal development throughout their lives. It is vital that this process is appropriately supported after a person moves on from traditional learning systems such as secondary school.

Without appropriate support, there is a danger that after finishing school people with intellectual disability will lose established support networks and clear future direction.

For some people, future direction and personal development is found in the workplace.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, many people with intellectual disability are unable to gain meaningful employment. For these people it is important they have a purposeful Day Options Program, such as provided by NorthLink. NorthLink's Programs are not only aimed at developing a participant's confidence, independence, security and positive self-image, but also facilitating community participation. NorthLink's Programs are sensitive to the needs of participants and their families/carers.

NorthLink's purpose is to bridge the gap for school leavers, enabling them to continue and build upon the educational curriculum developed during their school years. NorthLink also helps develop individual action plans and maintain community support networks, facilitating access to the local community.

Vision and Mission Statement

NorthLink's vision is to enhance the personal growth and independence of people with intellectual disability.

Our mission is to provide a high quality Day Options service that is person-centred, and has developmental, educational and recreational objectives based around participants' individual choices, needs and aspirations.

We are committed to the ongoing training and development of our staff to ensure that we are up-to-date with the latest methodologies supporting quality life outcomes and addressing the varying special needs of participants.

Program Overview

NorthLink is committed to supporting people with intellectual disability in their ongoing education, including:

- independence training
- fitness and health
- self-expression
- pre-vocational training
- community access/inclusion, and
- recreation.

The aims and benefits of these activities include:

- involvement in the local community
- learning new skills
- enjoyment, and
- making friends.

NorthLink engages the 'whole person', and in doing so, creates an environment that promotes independent living, intellectual stimulation, meaningful friendships and long-term relationships within the local community.

NorthLink's Programs are designed to provide a supportive environment in which each participant is challenged to achieve certain clear outcomes essential to future goals and long-term plans.

Programs are designed in consultation with participants, families, educators and specialists. We ensure that the unique interests, needs and goals of each participant are central to our work.

Program Structure

NorthLink caters for differing levels of participation. Goals are developed, implemented and recorded according to each participant's requirements.

An assessment is made of each participant's skills and strengths through consultation with participants, families/carers and educators. Appropriate goals and objectives are then developed and implemented.

Program Content

There are six main areas in the NorthLink Program that focus on developing participant's skills:

Independence training

Independence training includes self-help and functional skills in personal care, mobility (fine and gross motor skills, eye/hand coordination), transport skills, communication skills, numeracy and literacy skills, money management, and skills associated with day-to-day living (eg cooking).

Self-expression

Participants will have opportunities to explore and develop self-expression through the Arts—drama, dance, music, art and craft. There will be opportunities to create music CDs and video clips, take part in theatre productions and enjoy karaoke.

Fitness and health

Fitness and health are important aspects of people's lives. Fitness and health sessions feature prominently in the NorthLink Program with the aim of obtaining optimum health and developing mobility (gross and fine motor skills), physical fitness, body awareness and confidence.

Where appropriate, NorthLink also works alongside each participant's therapist to develop an individual Program. Health professionals such as speech pathologists and psychologists may also be consulted.

Pre-Vocational training

Where possible, participants may have the opportunity to participate in activities about work ethics. Knowledge in this area can lead to improved work prospects.

Recreation

Participants will experience a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities eg visiting places of interest like museums, Adelaide Central Market and wildlife parks, going to concerts and movies, practising strawberry-picking, playing sport and going bowling.

Community access

We endeavour to forge strong community networks and link participants into the wider community.

We do this by:

- using local community facilities (eg libraries and community recreation centres)
- participating in community events (eg 'Come Out Festival'), and
- becoming members of special interest groups (eg 'No Strings Attached').

Long-term goals may include:

- producing theatre shows
- being part of specific events (eg the 'Come Out Parade'), and
- participating in local events such as art and video exhibitions.

A Focus on Individual Development

Within these six main areas, NorthLink maintains a strong focus on improving participants' personal, social, and physical development.

Personal development

Improved personal development leads to:

- greater self-knowledge and a positive self-image
- greater problem-solving skills
- increased ability to learn new skills
- greater self-confidence, self-determination and self-direction.

NorthLink supports each participant as a valued member of the local community.

Social development

Improved social development leads to:

- natural team-building
- greater co-operation and participation
- easier interactions with peers
- increased social awareness
- developing friendships
- developing communication skills: listening, self-expression and conversation
- more taking turns and giving others space.

Physical development

Improved physical development leads to:

- better stress management and emotional stability
- greater levels of fitness.

Personalised Curriculums

When a person joins NorthLink, the first ten weeks are used as a time for assessment. While NorthLink assesses the person's strengths and needs, the person has time to familiarise themselves with the Program, staff and other participants.

During this period, our staff will meet with the participant, their family/carer and their school teacher (if appropriate) to develop goals and objectives. An individual curriculum is developed for the participant, which is then integrated into the overall Program.

Records are kept regarding the progress of each participant in relation to their individual goals. Every participant receives a written annual report reviewing their achievements in relation to their individual curriculum and evaluating the overall effectiveness of his/her Program.

A meeting is held annually with each participant and their family/carer to discuss the person's individual curriculum and future goals.

Input from the family/carer is an integral part of NorthLink's service.

Eligibility

Participants must be registered with Disability Services to be eligible for this program. Participants must also have a funding allocation via the Day Option Program.

Transport

Transport can be provided from the family home to the program and back, via negotiation. The provision of transport is dependent on distance from the program and available seating in one of our vehicles.

Families/carers are welcome to provide their own transport arrangements to and from the program.

Each NorthLink program has vehicles allocated to provide transport to/from various community venues and activities.

A daily charge is made for transport and the amount is dependent upon whether transport to and from the program is provided. Transport charges can be offset by the mobility allowance, available from Centrelink specifically for this purpose.

Staffing/Volunteer Support

Program staff are employees of Disability Services (a division of the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion). All have been appropriately trained and selected by strict criteria including police checks.

Volunteers also provide support within the Program, assisting participants with activities, driving vehicles etc. As with paid staff, all volunteers are required to undertake a police check before working with participants.

Certain duties (including personal care practices, administration of medications and supervision during mealtime) are only undertaken by paid staff.

Hours of Operation

NorthLink offers each participant a service that operates:

- five days per week (excluding public holidays)
- 48 weeks per year
- 6.5 hours per day of Program time (9am–3.30pm)—excludes travelling time to and from the Program.

Referral

Referral to the NorthLink Program is made via a Service Coordinator. Once a referral has been received, a member of the NorthLink staff will make contact to discuss the participant's needs. Potential participants are welcome to visit one of the venues before making a decision about whether or not to take up an offer of placement.

'Come 'n' Try'

NorthLink offers people who are thinking of joining the Program up to two days attendance at the Program at no cost. This allows the person to 'Come 'n' Try' some of the activities before deciding if NorthLink is the right service for them.

This service is not available to people who are leaving school and have access to transition funding.

Transition from School

Most schools offer transition Programs for school leavers who are moving on to employment or a Day Options service the following year. Transition Programs allow people to try various options before making a decision about their activities the following year.

Those people leaving school at the end of the year who are considering the NorthLink Program may attend up to three NorthLink sessions during terms three or four. This is arranged in conjunction with the school, which generally provide a staff member to support the person during this period (depending on support needs).

More Information

For more information please contact the Program Manager on: 8266 8689 (or fax 8266 8698).

Useful Questions and Answers

Where is the Program located?

The Program operates from a number of venues in the northern, northeast and western suburbs. Each venue acts as a 'home base' and is the starting and finishing points for most days. Each venue is equipped to cater for personal care needs and offers a wide range of indoor activities.

Is transport to the Program provided?

Transport can be provided from the family home to the program and back, via negotiation. The provision of transport is dependent on distance from the program and available seating in one of our vehicles.

Is the Program centre-based?

No. The Program involves access to community-based activities as well as venue-based activities.

How many people participate in each Program?

There are 12 to 13 participants attending each venue, depending on group needs/compatibility etc.

Is the Program conducted in one large group, ie twelve people together?

The Program focuses on individual curriculums, with activities conducted in small groups of four to six people, assigned to groups on the basis of compatibility and common interest. There are some large group activities, like discos and barbecues.

Will the Program meet my son or daughter's individual developmental needs?

Each participant has an individually developed Program to meet his or her personal growth and developmental needs. These individual Programs are developed after discussion with each participant and their family/carer. School reports (teachers' advice, etc) are also taken into account. The first ten weeks of a participant's attendance at the Program is used as an assessment period during which individual Programs are further developed and confirmed.

Will my son or daughter's support needs be met?

Staff receive pre-service training to meet the needs of this group of people.

During the Program, personal needs assessments and personal assistance plans are developed. Staff are instructed and credentialed in meeting those needs.

How is the Program staffed?

NorthLink staff are employees of Disability Services (a division of the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion).

All have been appropriately trained and were selected by strict criteria including police checks.

Some volunteers assist with the Program. As with paid staff, all volunteers are required to undertake a police check before working with participants.

What is the role of volunteers with the Program?

Volunteers provide support within the Program, assisting participants with activities, driving vehicles etc. As with paid staff, all volunteers are required to undertake a police check before working with participants.

Certain duties (including personal care practices, administration of medications and supervision during mealtime routines) are only undertaken by paid staff.

What is the staff/participant ratio?

Generally there are four staff working at each venue, depending on participant numbers and support needs. Additional support is provided via the Disability Services Volunteer Service. This allows us to provide a more individualised service to each participant.

Who administers medication and/or attends to my sons/daughter's specific health needs?

All paid staff are credentialed by registered nurses to administer medications and/or provide specific health care Programs. Medications must be provided by families/carers, with clear instructions, in individually labelled bottles. Families complete a comprehensive 'Participant Profile', (including health/medical/behaviour needs) before each participant begins the Program.

What about snacks and lunches?

Morning and afternoon tea are provided, as are drinks at any time. Families/carers provide lunch with the necessary dietary and assistance instructions. Meals are prepared in accordance with special needs and mealtime assistance is individualised.

Are there any other costs associated with the Program?

Attendance at NorthLink is funded via the Day Option Program.

It has been determined that a person's funding allocation can not be used to subsidise other costs associated with the program, including costs associated with specific activities and transport.

NorthLink does have additional charges to cover costs associated with activities and transport.

Participants make a small, equal contribution each week to cover costs associated with the purchase of material for various activities (eg cooking, art and craft) and for the purchase of drinks etc while on outings.

There are extra out of pocket expenses to cover entrance fees to places of interest and specific activities (eg ten pin bowling, films). These costs are indicated on the timetables that are sent home each month.

A daily charge is made for transport and the amount is dependent upon whether transport to and from the program is provided.

Transport charges can be offset by the mobility allowance, available from Centrelink specifically for this purpose.

Payment of routine additional charges is made via a monthly invoice.

Further information is available upon request.

What can I do if I generally like the Program but there are some things I do not like?

Disability Services has a well-documented complaints procedure and is committed to resolving complaints raised by participants and their families/carers. We value feedback and the involvement of families/carers in the NorthLink Program.

If I am not happy, can I withdraw my son or daughter from the Program?

Yes—with the same notice as other Day Options Programs.

Can I visit the Program?

Parents and carers are welcome to visit at any time.

More Information

For more information please contact the Program Manager NorthLink Day Options service on 8266 8689.