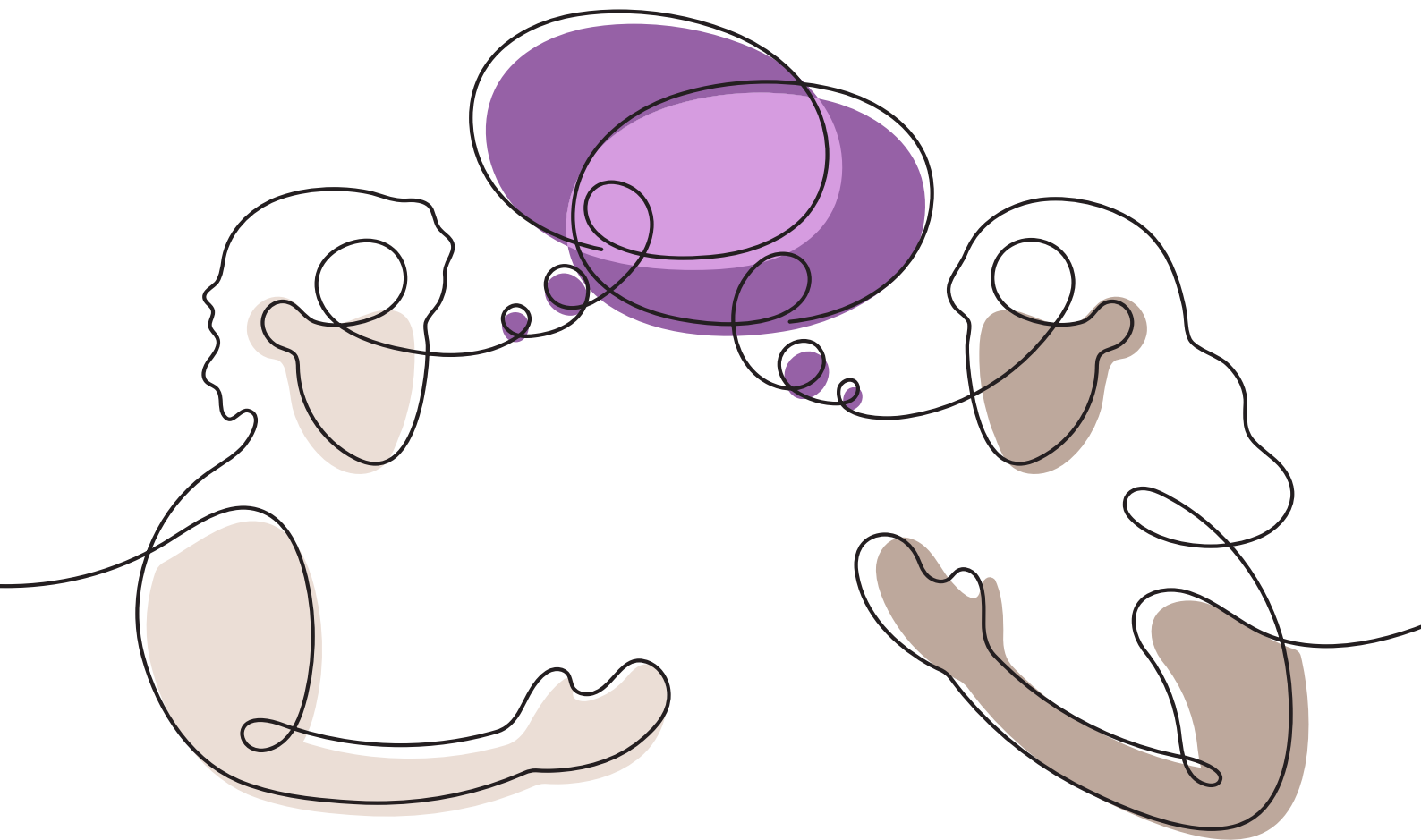


Let's Communicate!

A Toolkit to Breaking Down Communication Barriers



Acknowledgment of Country

We proudly acknowledge Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and water on which we rely and embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.



Acknowledgment of People living with Disability

We acknowledge the diverse experiences and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, including communication barriers. We are committed to creating an inclusive environment where everyone's needs are understood and respected. We celebrate the strengths, abilities, and contributions that individuals with disabilities bring to our community.

Acknowledgment of Significant Contributors

Thank you to Department of Communities, Office of Disability for funding this pilot project.

Thank you to Developmental Disability WA Advisory Council, Ruah Youth Advisory Committee, Ruah staff and all clients who collaborated and informed this project.



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

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1 Purpose of Toolkit

The aim of this toolkit is to share Ruah's key learnings throughout the project and encourage the Community Services Sector to take positive steps towards a more inclusive and accessible community.

This toolkit will cover areas for broader changes to service provision and also provide tips and suggestions for working one on one with clients experiencing complex communication needs.

All the communication tools included in this toolkit have been developed and tested with clients and Lived Experience Advisory Groups.

This toolkit is designed for Key workers to:

- Identify if their client have complex communication needs.
- Identify tools and strategies to better support their clients.

This toolkit is designed to help leaders of organisations to:

- Advocate towards their staff to consider communication tools in their practice.
- Use as a source of inspiration for implementing communication accessibility strategies across their broader service provision.

2 About Ruah

One Ruah, Who We Are

Ruah leads innovation by delivering tailored, wrap-around support for people experiencing homelessness, family and domestic violence, and mental health challenges, along with legal advice and support in these areas.

2009	After 50 years in Perth, the Daughters of Charity officially relinquished control of the not-for-profit company and the organisation changed its name to Ruah Community Services.
2019	Ruah Legal Services was formed when the Mental Health Law Centre and Ruah Community Services joined forces.
2020	SuitsMe was established as one of the first providers in Australia, combining NDIS mental health supports and mobile technology.
2021	The Ruah umbrella brand was developed to represent the different business entities that combine to form Ruah (as a group).

About Ruah

Ruah is an ancient Hebrew word meaning vital breath, wind, air and spirit.

It was chosen in 2001 to honour the legacy of our founders, The Daughters of Charity, and it captures the spirit of the organisation we are today.

How we work

Ruah is a diverse and inclusive organisation and was one of the first community service providers in WA to be accredited to both the National Safety and Quality Health Standards (NSQHS) and National Standards for Mental Health Services (NSMHS). We are also proud to have Rainbow Tick accreditation, and certification under the National Accreditation for Community Legal Centres (Ruah Legal Services).

As community services and legal sector leaders and agitators for change, we are also actively involved in research and advocacy to drive change and end, not just manage, complex social problems.

Everything we do; who we are; and the way that we work, is underpinned by the Ruah Manifesto. The Manifesto is a philosophy that encompasses where we have been and where we want to go in the future. It is our mandate and how we measure our success.



3 Access and Inclusion Project: Overview

The Access and Inclusion Project, funded by the Department of Communities and delivered by Ruah Community Services, is a 12-month pilot project running from April 2024 until April 2025.

The objective of this project is to explore how the Community Service Sector could adapt their services to better meet the diverse communication needs of clients.

Throughout the project, The Access and Inclusion Project Team have worked alongside 20 clients and Ruah staff across Ruah Community Services three service areas: Housing and Homelessness, Family Services and Mental Health and Wellness, where communication challenges were being experienced.

From our work, these key areas were identified as challenges:

Key Themes Identified:

- Limited information provided in accessible formats such as Easy Read or Plain English.
- Limited staff understanding of how to identify someone who may be experiencing communication challenges.
- Barriers to communication secondary to communication environment accessibility.
- Limited confidence and understanding from staff to utilise alternative methods of communication.
- Many clients will not have diagnosed communication challenges.
- Many intersecting factors impact communication such as Disability, Physical Health, Substance Use, Trauma, Mental Health, or non-English speaking backgrounds.

The Access and Inclusion Project has been working to address these challenges by:

- Converting key client facing Ruah documents into an Easy Read Format in collaboration with people with lived experience of communication challenges.
- Providing staff with access to various communication tools, along with opportunities to upskill in their use.
- Providing advice and strategies to staff to assist in facilitating effective communication with clients.
- Integrating training on communication accessibility into Ruah's Learning Management System.

We are aware that this toolkit is only a snapshot of communication accessibility, and we encourage you to do your own research for further information. Here are some organisations who are doing amazing work in this space:

- Scope's Communication and Inclusion Resource Centre
- Communication Hub
- Access Ability Australia
- Developmental Disability WA (DDWA)

4 Communication Accessibility

Communication accessibility refers to creating environments where everyone, regardless of their communication abilities, can understand and be understood. It involves removing barriers that makes it difficult for people with communication challenges to fully participate in their community and accessing information.

Communication is a two-way process; both people are responsible for successful communication. We all need to be able to communicate (no matter how this looks) to have meaningful participation in one's life and feel connected to a community.

**Communication occurs in many ways;
and it is not just limited to verbal speech.**

An article by The Conversation notes that negative attitude and expectation is one of the biggest barriers to communication (Hemsley, B. et al., 2023).

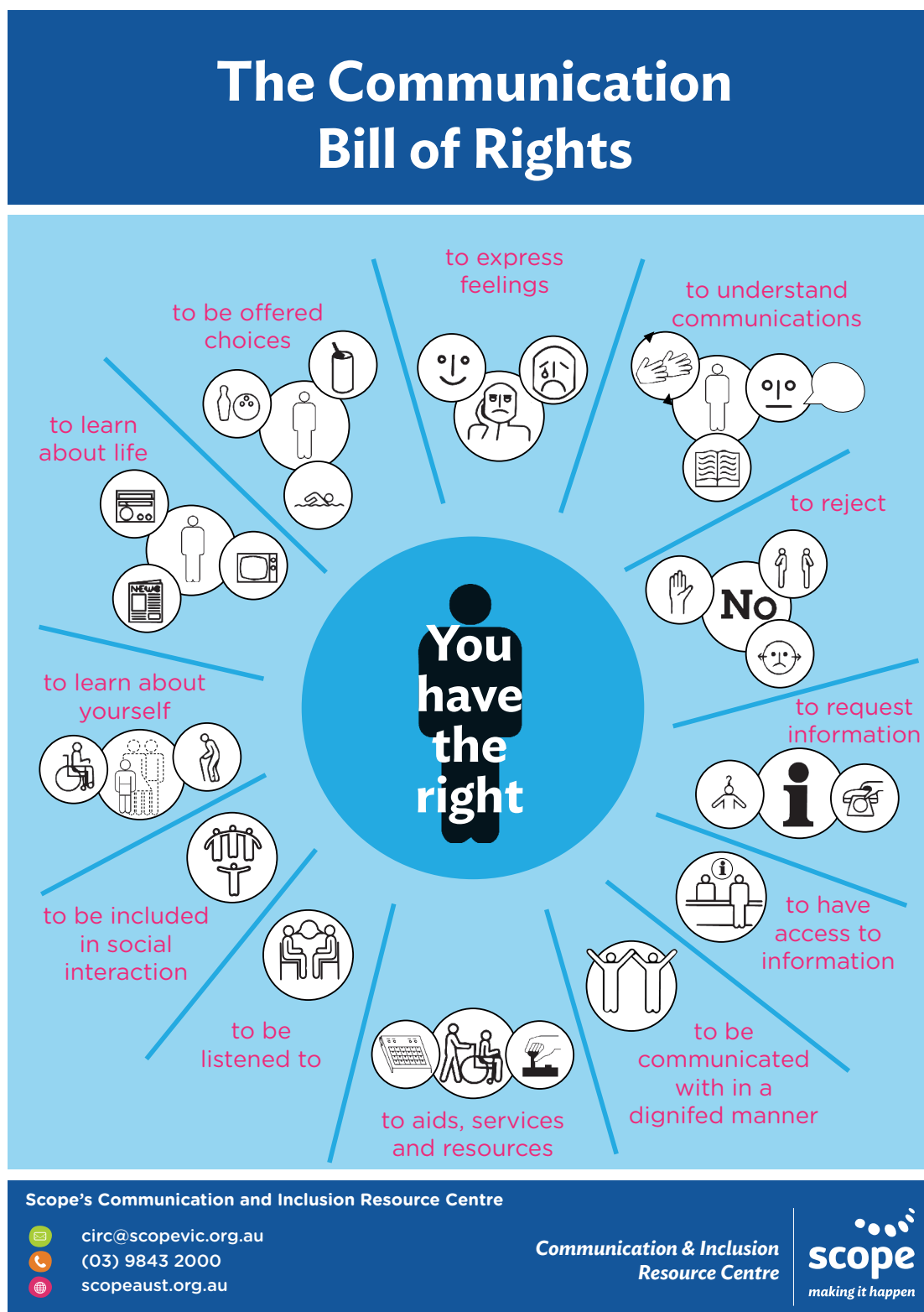
Throughout the project we are raising awareness to this barrier and are helping promote the notion that Communication is a Human Right. It is even more important that this is recognised and acknowledged for those that face communication difficulties. They should be afforded the chance to convey their needs or story using their choice of communication and with respect.

Through this project, we have encouraged and promoted communication accessibility by fostering openness to learning and understanding, recognising that communication is a two-way process. We aim to create a positive environment for using alternative communication methods.



**Communication is
a two way street**

Scope's Communication and Inclusion Resource Centre has developed a Communication Bill of Rights Poster which outlines the rights of those who experience communication challenges.



Scope Communication Bill of Rights Poster

5 Identifying Communication Support Needs

It emerged from staff consultations that one significant barrier present was recognising when an individual has Communication Support Needs.

Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation.

In the Community Services Sector, individuals often present with multiple intersecting factors that affect their ability to communicate effectively and to feel genuinely heard and understood. Awareness of these overlapping factors is essential to providing accessible and responsive support tailored to a person's communication needs.



An example of intersectionality is a person seeking assistance from a housing and homelessness service may face multiple intersecting challenges, including mental health difficulties, a history of trauma, and low socioeconomic status, all of which contribute to communication barriers.

Mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression, can impair focus, emotional regulation, and the ability to articulate needs, while trauma may lead to avoidance, mistrust, or heightened emotional responses, making it hard to engage with service providers. Additionally, low socioeconomic status can add stress, limit access to resources (e.g., transportation or documentation), and contribute to cognitive overload, further complicating communication.

When combined, these factors compound communication barriers, making it difficult for the individual to effectively communicate their needs and navigate the service system.

The below checklists may indicate that someone is experiencing a communication challenge, and we may need to adapt our communication style.

Challenges with Comprehension and information processing

- ☐ Understanding words and sentences.
- ☐ Understanding long statements.
- ☐ Understanding complex statements.
- ☐ Integrating information.
- ☐ Misunderstanding or misinterpreting discussions.
- ☐ Focusing attention on discussion.
- ☐ Staying on track.
- ☐ Holding thoughts in mind while listening and talking.
- ☐ Remembering new information.

Challenges with Functional Daily Communication

- ❑ Difficulty with family or social interactions.
- ❑ Difficulty with communication in community (store, services, internet, phone, medical).
- ❑ Difficulty with workplace communication.
- ❑ Difficulty with problem solving/decision making or self-advocacy.

Challenges with Expression and Social Communication

- ❑ Speech sounds, muscle movements, voice, fluency, stuttering
- ❑ Word finding, word retrieval, thinking of the word, vocabulary, word choice.
- ❑ Sentence planning, sentence construction, grammar.
- ❑ Initiating conversation.
- ❑ Generating topics of conversation, thinking of what to say, elaborating, adding.
- ❑ Vague, nonspecific, disorganized conversation.
- ❑ Overly talkative, rambling conversation.
- ❑ Socially unsuccessful comments (impulsivity, anger, swearing, joking, topic selection).
- ❑ Nonverbal skills (eye contact, personal space, facial expression, tone of voice, mannerisms, gestures).
- ❑ Perceiving or understanding conversation partner cues, emotions, context, views.

Challenges with Written Expression

- ❑ Physical aspects of writing.
- ❑ Writing words.
- ❑ Constructing sentences.
- ❑ Organising thoughts in writing.
- ❑ Spelling difficulties.

Challenges with Thinking Reasoning, Problem Solving, Executive Functions, Self-Regulation

- ❑ Insight, awareness and recognising a problem.
- ❑ Making decisions and being able to tell you.
- ❑ Discussing things without getting overwhelmed.
- ❑ Filtering out less frequent information.
- ❑ Summarising, getting the gist or drawing conclusions.
- ❑ Brainstorming, generating ideas, alternatives, thinking creatively.
- ❑ Planning, prioritising, implementing, following through, evaluating, self-monitoring of communication.

Adapted from:

MacDonald, Sheila (2015) Cognitive Communication Checklist for Acquired Brain Injury (CCCABI) CCD Publishing; Guelph, Ontario, Canada, N1H 6J2 , www.ccdpublishing.com

6 Communication Tools

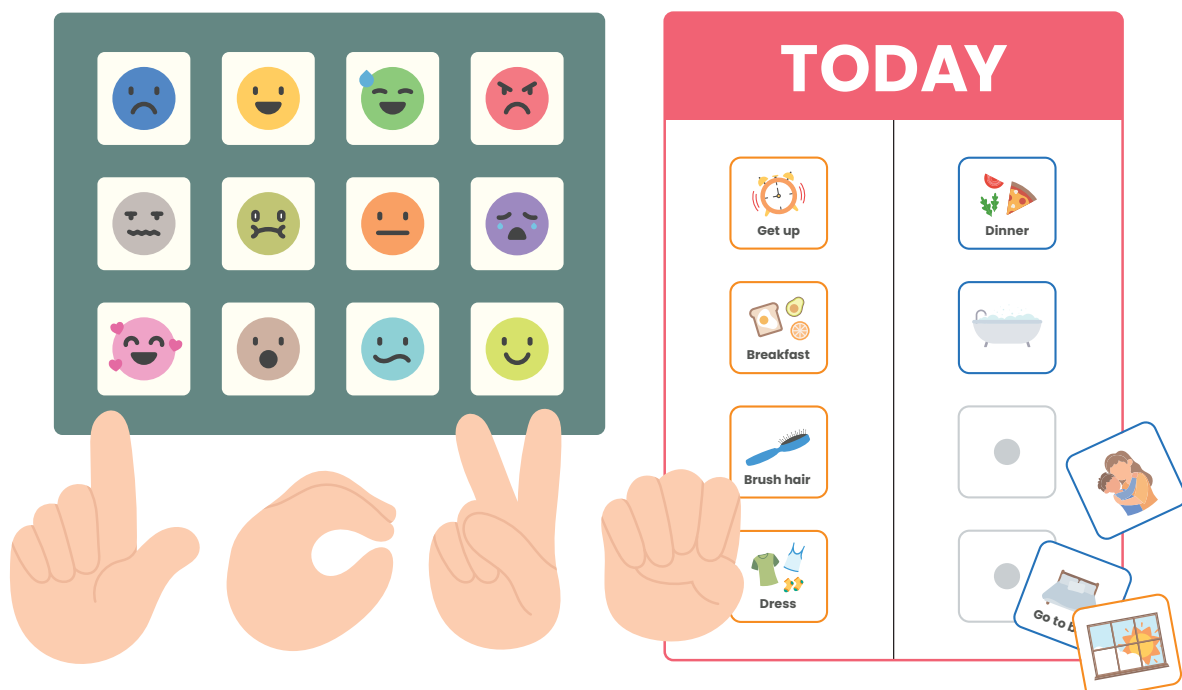
Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems are any method of communication that replaces or enhances spoken communication (Davis, 2020).

Types of AAC

- No technology – use of gestures, facial expressions and motor movements e.g. sign language.
- Low technology – utilises paper-based tools often with visuals and phrases to aid communication process e.g. Communication board, social stories.
- High technology – Speech generating devices.

Due to the nature of the Community Services Sector, the use of low tech AAC options were found to be the most accessible way to reach a diverse audience.

Having low tech AAC options available allows our services to be prepared for a client who may have communication difficulties.



Communication Board

Communication boards can help reduce communication challenges by offering clear, easily identifiable images and symbols for better understanding. They can be used to:

- Convey basic messages, such as “I need to use the bathroom”.
- Ask questions.
- Provide options.

These boards enable individuals to express their immediate needs and preferences more clearly. By allowing users to communicate effectively, communication boards can enhance independence, empowering people to make decisions and manage their own lives.

Ruah collaborated with Scope’s Communication and Inclusion Resource Centre to create a communication board and lanyard message cards for the Ruah Engagement Hub service. To develop customised communication resources visit: <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/business-solutions/communication-access>

These resources ensure the messaging is suitable for the unique nature of Ruah’s service. The purpose of the communication resources is to ensure that the Community Services Sector takes a proactive approach and is recognized as a service offering accessible options for everyone who walks through the door.

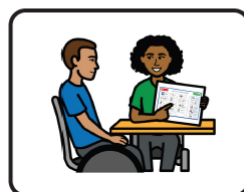
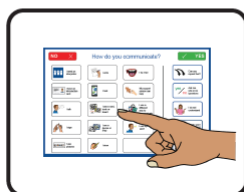
Ruah Communication Board



Instructions



1. Introduce yourself to the person.
 2. Ask "Would you like to use this communication board?"
 3. If you are unsure of their answer: Say "It will help me if you can show me how you say yes and no." Note their response.
- If no, Continue to talk directly to them.
 - If yes, Ask "Do you want to point?" or "Do you want me to point until I get to your message?"



- If they will point, Place the board where they can reach it.
- If you will point, Point and say each message, working down each column. They will indicate 'yes' when you get to their message.
- The communication board and message cards are designed to work alongside each other. Topics on the communication board with a coloured border are linked to associated information on RUAH message cards.

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Not for replication.

NO

RUAH Communication board

YES



Housing and accommodation

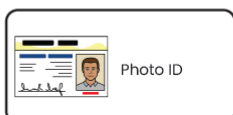


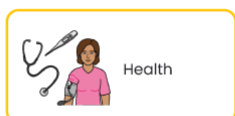
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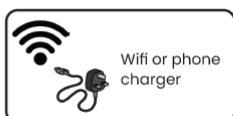
I need to talk to someone



What I want to say is not here



Health



Wifi or phone charger



Somewhere to rest



Can you repeat that?



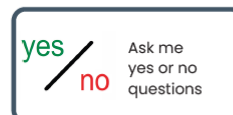
Emergency



Food and drink



Services that come here



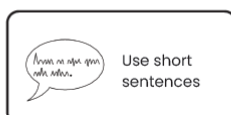
yes / no Ask me yes or no questions



Legal help



Shower or toilet



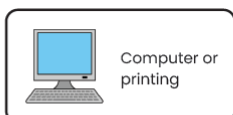
Use short sentences



I do not understand



Help with Centrelink



Computer or printing



Interpreter



I will spell it

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Not for replication.

Communication Passport

Communication Passports provide a practical approach to handing over important information about a person with communication needs.

A communication passport is developed with the person, their family and other supports. Most importantly, ensuring that the passport is person centred.

Its use is particularly helpful during periods of transitions such as introducing a new service or in a new environment. By allowing staff and others to best understand the persons preferences, how they communicate and how to best communicate with them, someone's message can be understood without adding further pressure or stress on them.

Tried and tested, this is a powerful tool to utilise when a person has multiple agencies and services involved as it promotes consistency of support. One of the many benefits is that it can reduce the times an individual needs to share information, thereby lowering expectation on someone that may not be in a position to be able to be heard.

Things you might like to include:

- How the person communicates: eg. Sounds, Gestures, Pictures, Communication device.
- How you can support the person with communication.
- Important people in their life: eg. Next of Kin, neighbour.
- A snapshot of likes and dislikes.
- Other important information to include: eg. hearing, eyesight or health conditions.
- Medical: eg. medical treatment, health professional contacts, Community Pharmacy contact

Art and activities

Art can be used to enhance the communication of individuals who are unable to communicate, or who struggle to express feelings, to get the words out and to be understood.

Some ideas for communication through art and activities:

- Vision Board Collage: Provide magazines, newspapers, and other materials for clients to create a vision board representing their goals, aspirations, and values. They can cut out images, words, and phrases that resonate with them and arrange them on a poster board or canvas.
- Life Map: Have clients create a visual representation of their life journey using drawing materials such as markers, coloured pencils, or paints. They can map out significant milestones, achievements, challenges, and future goals on a large sheet of paper or canvas.
- Future Self Portrait: Ask clients to create a self-portrait that represents their future self, embodying the values, qualities, and achievements they aspire to. This activity can help them visualize their goals and motivate them to work towards their desired future.



Example of a Vision Board Collage.

Visuals

Using visuals and images to assist communication is not a new concept although through this project it has become evident that they are underutilised in the Community Services Sector.

Visuals can help to provide structure and routine, improve understanding, avoiding frustration and offer opportunities to interact with others.

We all rely on visuals to support us in our everyday life e.g. calendars, diaries, and signs. Visuals promote inclusion, as they are helpful for everyone regardless of their communication ability.

Ways you might like to incorporate visuals:

Personalised Communication cards



Example of cards used for individual's who have communication challenges. These cards were developed to assist a client in expressing their needs while they were in hospital.



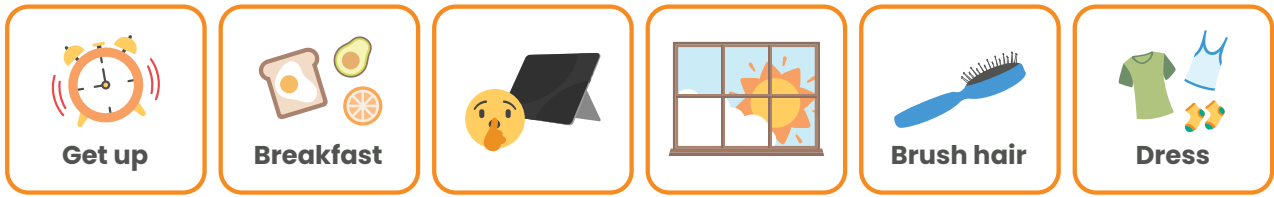
Emotion cards can assist individuals in acknowledging and identifying with emotions.

Expressing Opinions or thoughts:

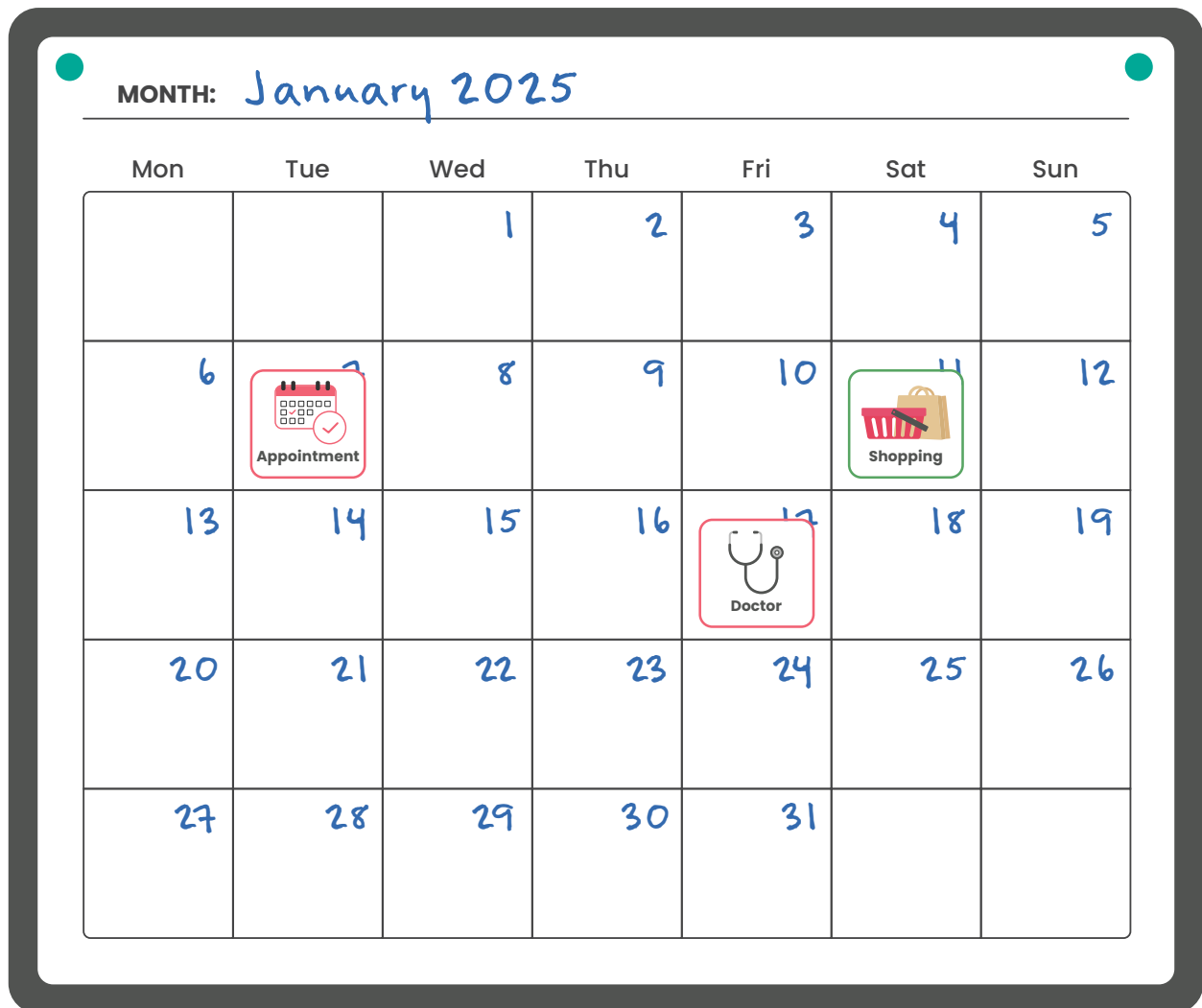


These Decision Making story cards were developed by Legal Aid WA in collaboration with Developmental Disability WA to support the participation of people with intellectual disability in conversations about decisions they need to make and decisions that need to be made that affect them. You can purchase a copy online.

My Morning Routine



My Night Routine



Supporting routines and creating a sense of independence through Calendars and visual schedules.

7 Environmental Communication Access

Environmental communication accessibility involves designing physical spaces, tools, and resources to enable individuals with communication challenges to engage effectively with their surroundings.

This includes ensuring that spaces, signage, technology, and communication aids are accessible to people with varying abilities, such as those who are nonverbal, have limited speech, or experience difficulties in understanding written or spoken language.

Checklist

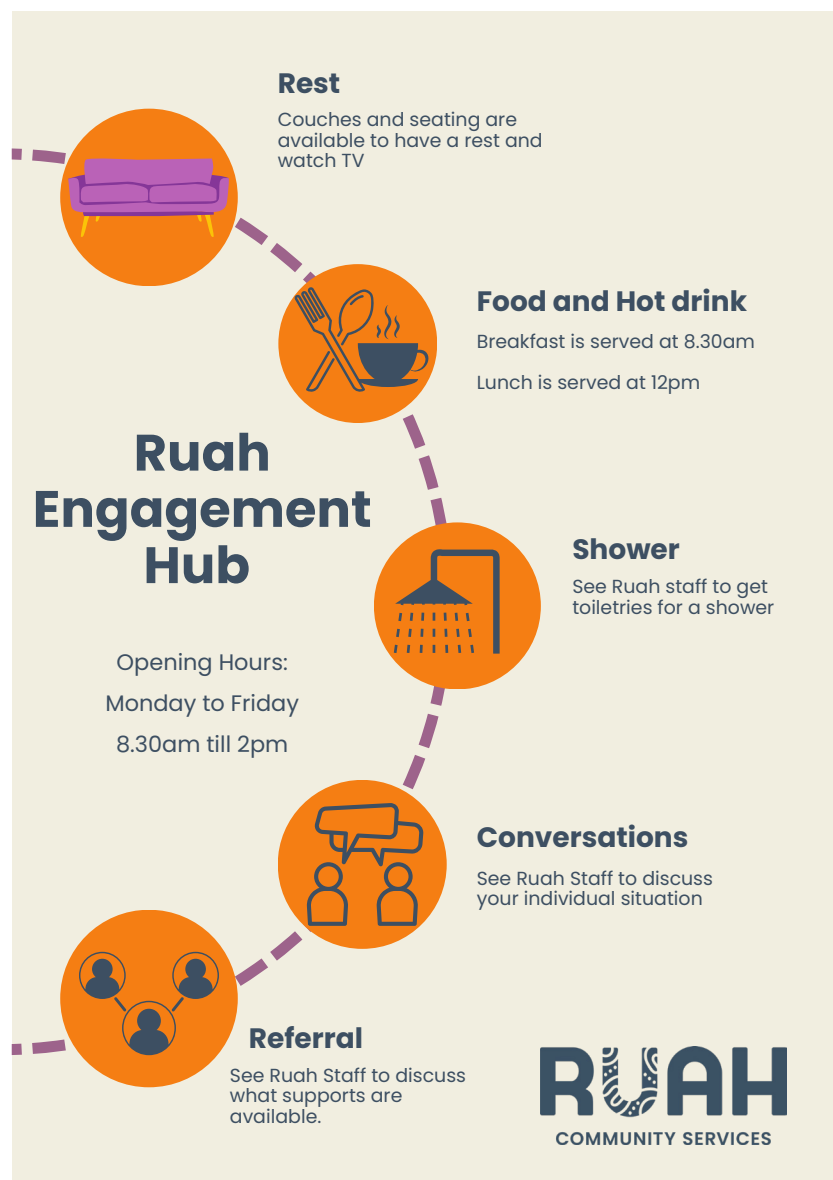
- ☐ Signage and documents are in plain or Easy English avoiding jargon and acronyms.
- ☐ Service expectations and client responsibilities are available in an accessible and clear way.
- ☐ Using symbols and visuals to enhance understanding, ensuring they are universally recognized and consistent throughout your service.
- ☐ Font size is 14pt or larger for all documents.
- ☐ Use of Plain font such as Arial, Calibri, Poppins and avoiding italics and bold lettering.
- ☐ Signage is visible from entrances or key points in the service.
- ☐ Create spaces with reduced background noise and adjustable lighting to have discussions.
- ☐ Clear and accessible ways for people to provide feedback.
- ☐ Staff are aware of communication needs and have completed relevant education.
- ☐ Staff are confident in adapting their communication styles.
- ☐ Ensure alternative communication tools are available, such as Easy Read information or a Communication Board.

The Ruah Engagement Hub is an example of the work done through the project to improve Environmental Communication Accessibility. While not all spaces can be perfectly accessible, we can make changes in the right direction. Below are a few examples of the changes implemented to improve accessibility at the Ruah Engagement Hub.

Poster outlining the services offered to clients by the Ruah Engagement Hub

The Ruah Engagement Hub service provides a safe space for adults over 20 years old who are experiencing homelessness to rest, refresh and access specialist support services.

Drop-in between 8.30am and 2.00pm Monday to Friday.



Poster outlining the services offered to Clients at Safe Night Space

Safe Night Space is a safe and culturally secure overnight shelter for women experiencing homelessness, family and domestic violence and other vulnerabilities who have no other safe place to go. It operates from 7pm to 7am, seven days a week, 365 days per year.

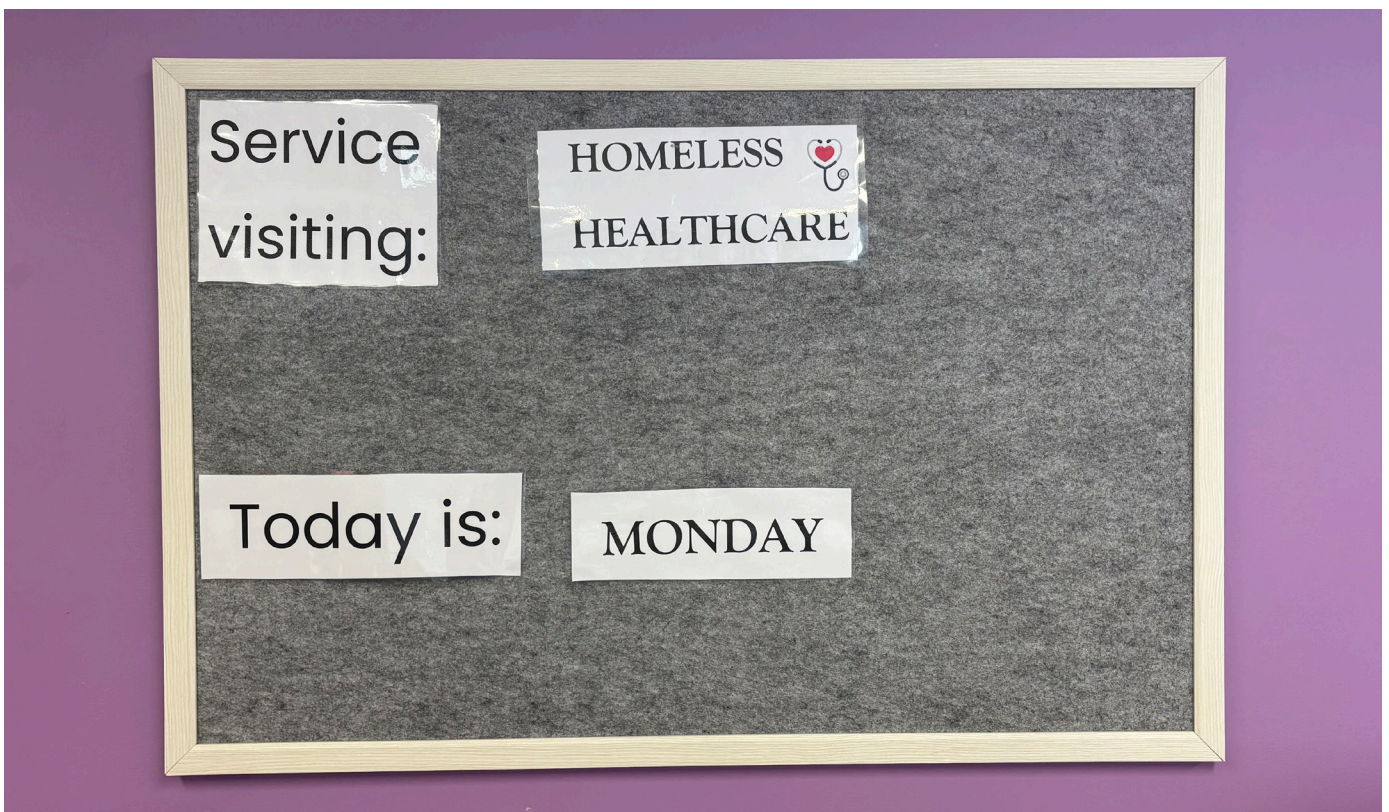


These posters are printed in A1 size and displayed at the front entrance of the Ruah Engagement Hub service. It is one of the first things a client will see when they enter the service, it allows the service to clearly outline what it can offer.

Consistent signage with universally accepted visuals



Board used to tell clients the day and what service is visiting

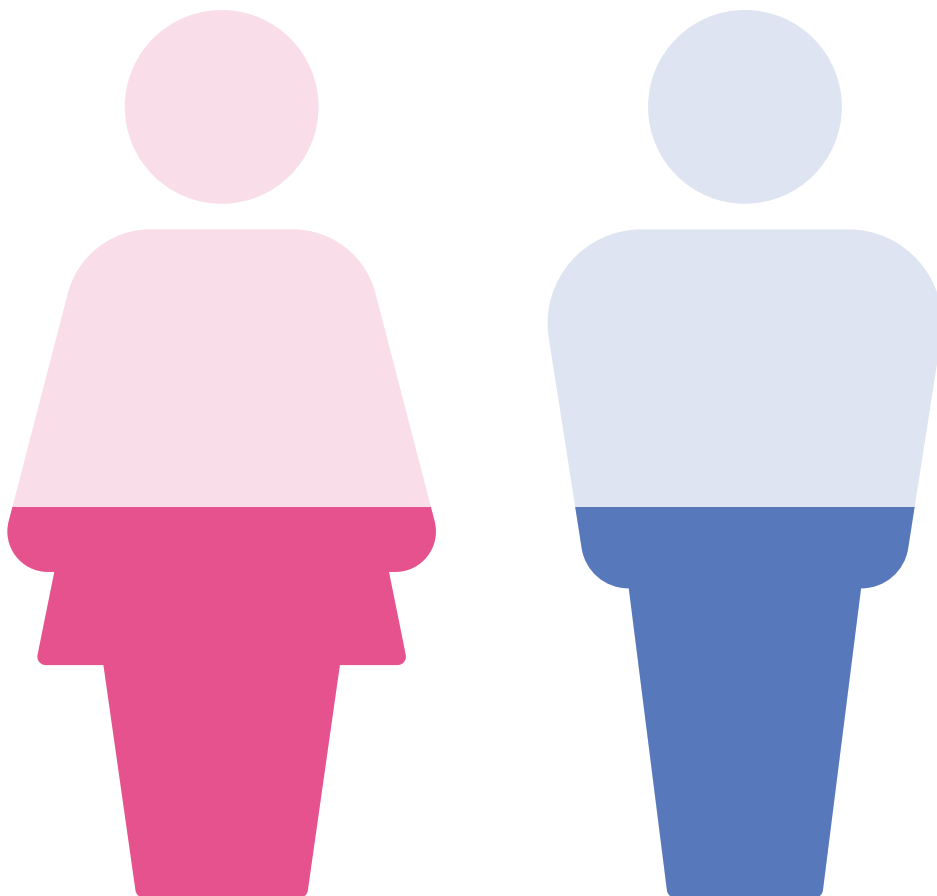


8 Accessible Information

Literacy is a person's ability to read and write. It is also how well they can access written text in digital and print formats.

In Australia, approximately 44% of adults have literacy levels ranging from 1 to 2 (Level 1 corresponds to pre-primary to year 6, and Level 2 spans year 7 to year 10) (ABS, 2013).

The effect of literacy on people's lives is profound. It influences how they interact with each other and how they approach education, work and government. Low literacy can make it hard to access community services and information. Providing information in Plain English and Easy Read improves the accessibility of written material for everyone.



Approximately 44% of adults have literacy levels ranging from 1 to 2.

What is Plain English and Easy Read?

Plain English

Plain English is a direct style of writing which is easy and quick to understand. Its goal is to make sure the audience can understand the information the first time they read or hear it.

- Short sentences, one idea per sentence.
- Simple, everyday words, avoid jargon.
- Explains hard words.
- Images to support each point on left hand side. Images to be universally understood.
- Use of white space.
- Text size 14pt or above.
- No more than 20 pages.
- Readability Age: As low as possible.

Easy Read

Easy Read is an accessible and alternative form of communication. It has a distinct format that is simple to read.

- Short sentences.
- Simple everyday words, avoid jargon.
- Headings are easy to understand.
- Use of white space.
- Clear sections of text.
- Readability Age: 12–14 years.

Developed in collaboration with Developmental Disability WA (DDWA) and their Lived Experience Advisory Council, Ruah has their 4 main client facing documents available in Easy Read Format. These are Consent Form, Rights and Responsibilities, Permission to Share and Feedback Form.



4

What is on the Consent Form?



The consent form asks

- do you want to use a Ruah service?
- can Ruah keep information about you?



If you sign the consent form it means you say yes to these things



I will use a Ruah service

If your organisation or service would like to create an Easy Read document Developmental Disability WA offer a free template that can be accessed via:



<https://ddwa.org.au/resources/how-to-make-easy-read-materials/>

Several Organisations provide translation of documents to Plain English and Easy Read for a cost. Some include:

- Scope
- Easy Read Australia
- Inclusion Australia

There are many more features you may like to include for a document to be Easy Read or Plain English. If you would like to know more, please visit:



https://centreforinclusivedesign.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Easy-English-vs-Plain-English_accessible.pdf

Organisations and individuals can check their accessibility of written materials and websites by using online readability and web accessibility checkers. It is always best practice to get your documents tested by individuals with lived experience to ensure your document is fit for purpose and easy to understand.

Use a readability checker:



<https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>



<https://app.readable.com/text/>

Use a Web Accessibility checker:



<https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/>

9 Staff Training

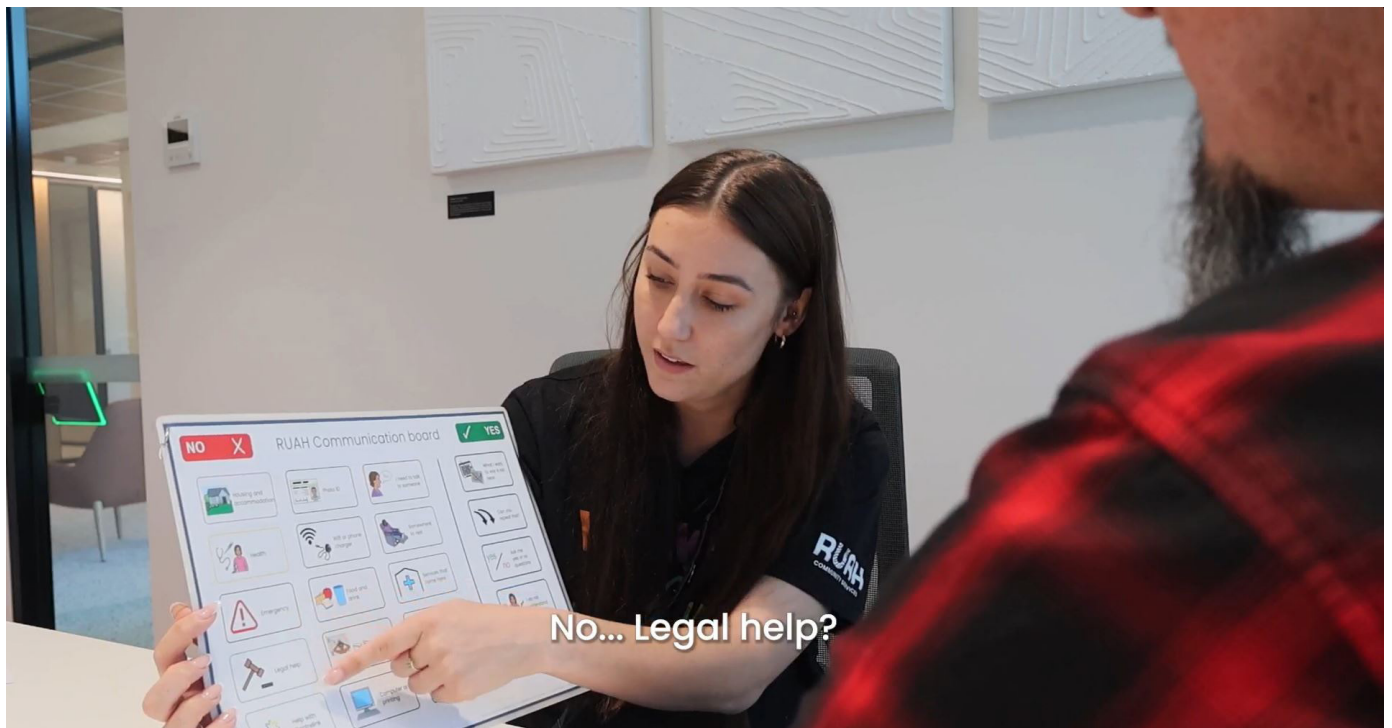
Ruah Experience in Staff Capacity Building

The Access and Inclusion Project has introduced staff training along with various resources to enhance staff confidence and understanding.

Ruah has partnered with Scope to provide communication access training. All staff will be refreshed with the new content, and it is part of the mandatory onboarding training for new staff.

Additionally, Ruah has created in-house training videos on using Plain English and Easy Read forms to support informed consent.

The Access and Inclusion Project Team has also collaborated with Scope to deliver a training video on how to use the newly developed communication board and lanyard.



Training video screenshot showcasing how to use the newly introduced communication tools and Easy Read client forms.

Communication tips for staff

The project has placed importance on building capacity of our staff to deliver clear and meaningful communication with clients. Below are some of the key tips that are integral to facilitating effective communication.

- Have patience and learn to be comfortable with silence.
- Allow increased time for interactions.
- Ask one question at a time and allow time for a response.
- Do not ask too many questions.
- Do not interrupt.
- Speak in short sentences.
- Use a space that has reduced background noise or distractions.
- Provide opportunities for participation.
- Model asking for clarification and questions.
- Teach back method- ask the individual to explain in their own words what they understand from the topic and repeat it back to you.
- Use phrases such as “Did I explain that clearly?”.
- Be and look interested.
- Always admit if you have not understood.
- Repeating what the person says back to them may help let them know that they have been heard and understood.
- Learn to be comfortable with different methods of communication.
- Ask if they require an interpreter.
- Ask if they have trouble with remembering lots of information.
- Am I able to provide written information for them to take away?
- There are many ways to communicate, and all are valid.

10 Communication Guide Role

Concept

The Communication Guide role is a newly developed position aimed at enhancing communication between Ruah staff and clients. This role serves as an integral link, helping to improve understanding and interaction between both parties. The primary responsibility of a Communication Guide is to work directly with both clients and staff on the ground, providing them with strategies and tools to facilitate effective communication.

1. Facilitating Communication:

The Communication Guide works closely with both clients and staff to identify any gaps, challenges, or barriers in communication. They observe how both groups interact and pinpoint areas for improvement.

2. Developing Strategies:

Based on their observations, the Communication Guide creates tailored communication strategies to address specific issues, whether it's language barriers, alternative communication methods or misunderstandings.

3. Providing Tools:

The guide equips both clients and staff with practical tools to help them communicate more clearly and effectively.

4. Training and Support:

The Communication Guide may also provide staff with guidance and support to understand communication challenges.

5. On-the-Ground Support:

The Communication Guide works directly in the environment where communication issues occur. This means they observe real-time interactions and provide immediate support, adjustments, or advice.

11 Case Study Example

Grace is a bilingual teenager from the CaLD community. She has been diagnosed with unspecified Non-Organic Psychosis (F29), Moderate Intellectual Disability (F71), Dyskinetic Cerebral Palsy, and Sensorineural Hearing Loss, for which she uses hearing aids. Following her first episode of psychosis in 2021, she was voluntarily admitted to Perth Children Hospital. Grace is accessing Support Coordination and Peer Recovery Support with the Ruah Early Psychosis Youth Centre.

Grace's Key Worker engaged the Communication Guide initially as she was experiencing difficulties with social cues and in social situations.

The Communication Guide attended a visit alongside Ruah Community Services staff to Grace's home and noted the below presentation:

- Verbal speech unclear at times.
- Inconsistent responses to questions.
- Limited use of non-verbal communication.

Upon the initial visit, the Communication Guide provided strategies to the Ruah staff working with Grace to improve engagement. These were:

- Minimise distractions.
- Allow for extra time for processing and responding to questions.
- Model and normalise asking for clarification.
- Check in regularly with client to ensure they have been clear and have understood her correctly.

The use of drawing and storytelling to explore Grace's thoughts and values have been used during support sessions. It led to a deeper understanding of what she is experiencing. The use of these tools has assisted in facilitating trust and a positive rapport between Grace and the Ruah staff.

Grace has expressed she wishes to grow independence within her life and have friendships outside of her family. She is currently not interacting socially with anyone outside of school and her immediate family. The Communication Guide's role is to assist in exploring these goals and providing education on friendships in a way that is accessible for her. The Communication Guide and Grace's Key Worker did this by using different visual activities, art and easy read information.

The Access and Inclusion Project Officer then attended ongoing visits with Grace to provide communication guidance and trial different mediums of communication alongside her Key Worker and peer recovery worker.

Feedback from Ruah Support Coordinator on the Impact of the Communication Guide role to client and staff support:

“Ruah Communication Guide’s positive approach and resource suggestions demonstrate their dedication to meeting clients’ needs. Their ability to collaborate with other professionals ensures comprehensive support, making them an invaluable asset to our team.

The Communication Guide’s support has significantly enhanced client care by providing consistent, personalized assistance tailored to the client’s unique needs. By using tools such as storytelling through drawing and collaborative planning, this role has helped our young client develop clear communication with their workers, ensuring she is heard and supported in achieving her objectives.

For example, using drawings to tell stories has allowed us to understand our client values, what distresses her, and what brings her joy. **This clarity in communication has minimized misunderstandings, which were a major barrier for this client** before their involvement. Additionally, the suggestion of resources like the Friendship Project has provided the client with tangible steps to understand the complexities of friendships, which are integral to building her capacity to engage within the community.

This has also **boosted the client’s confidence, improving her engagement with workers and overall participation in our program.**

The Communication Guide's approach has also upskilled me by demonstrating effective communication strategies and personalized support techniques. Through collaborative work, the Communication Guide has provided insights into our client's progress and challenges, equipping colleagues and I with a deeper understanding of the client's needs and preferences.

This includes recognising the importance of addressing the client's insecurities and comfort, such as suggesting support at a local library to minimize distractions from home surroundings, and providing holistic support that encompasses physical, emotional, and practical aspects. Furthermore, **by modelling collaborative planning, the Communication Guide has provided practical methods to enhance my own support practices**, ensuring a more cohesive and effective approach with clients who have communication barriers."

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