

Unisson Excels in Person-Centred Active Support (PCAS) Results

Summary of results from the longitudinal study *Living the Good Life: Embedding Active Support and Practice Leadership*, a collaboration between researchers from the Living with Disability Research Centre at La Trobe University and participating Disability Service Providers.

This is Unisson’s sixth year of participation in the study, with observations spanning from the end of 2018 to the beginning of 2019. The report was published in August 2019. This year’s study included 461 service users from 134 sites, managed by 13 disability service providers from five different States. Groups were matched as closely as possible on age, gender and adaptive behaviour. As in previous years, information was collected about client outcomes, front-line staff practices, front-line practice leadership and organisational structures and processes using surveys, observational methods and interviews.

During observations, researchers coded participants’ engagement at 1-minute intervals according to their activity and behaviour and the contact or assistance received from staff. PCAS quality was scored using the Active Support Measure (ASM), rating 15 items that assess the quality of staff support.

Quality of support from front-line staff

The strongest predictor of good quality Person-Centred Active Support is motivated, well trained front-line staff providing consistent, individually tailored support¹.

Unisson’s report-card comments: *“The overall level of resident engagement remains above the benchmark for engagement reported by Mansell and Beadle-Brown, 2012. No [Unisson] resident received weak Active Support... Examples of good Active Support practices were observed, particularly where staff effectively applied graded assistance and choice and control. Unisson residents spent less time disengaged and demonstrating self-stimulatory behaviour than the whole sample average...Engagement in household or work activity involving gas or electrical equipment remained high at twice the average for the whole sample.”¹*

Results

Results	Group Average Overall Score (Participating organisations)	UNISSON DISABILITY		
		Overall score	High Support Needs ²	Low Support Needs ²
Engagement in meaningful activity (% time)	62%	70%	64%	75%
Benchmark for engagement³	N/A	N/A	(52%)	(75%)
Engagement (minutes per hour)	37 minutes	42 minutes		
People engaged less than 5% of the time	2%	0%	0%	0%
People engaged more than 50% of the time	67%	79%	67%	88%
Social activity <i>Interacting with others – talking to, showing, sharing information, listening and paying attention to someone speaking or interacting with them</i>	15%	16%	16%	16%
Non-social activity (NSA) <i>Tasks or activities that promote a person’s quality of life.</i>	49%	57%	51%	61%
Disengagement	38%	30%	36%	25%
Assistance from staff (minutes per hour)	3 minutes	6 minutes		
Active Support Measure (ASM score)	62%	75%	69%	79%
Weak Active Support (ASM score below 33%)	8%	0%	0%	0%
Good Active Support (ASM score above 66%)	47%	75%	67%	81%

Front-line Practice Leadership

An important predictor of good Person-Centred Active Support is strong Practice Leadership, supporting front-line staff. A Practice Leader's role is to evangelise PCAS best practice, provide mentoring and practical supports, uphold standards and pursue continual improvement¹.

Unisson's report-card comments: "The strength of front-line leadership at Unisson was rated among the best in the whole sample. Unisson showed consistent improvement... and there was also reduced variability across services. On all domains, each service was rated mixed, good or excellent. In the domain of staff coaching, every service was rated good or excellent."¹

Front-line Practice Leadership Scores

1= very weak, 2 = weak, 3 = mixed, 4 = good, 5 = excellent

	GROUP AVERAGE (Participating organisations)		UNISSON DISABILITY	
	Average score	Services rated Good/Excellent	Average score	Services rated Good/Excellent
Manager Focus	3.25	36%	3.67	57%
Allocating Staff	3.21	27%	3.33	43%
Coaching Staff	2.98	27%	4.17	100%
Supervision	2.97	23%	3.50	57%
Team Meetings	3.44	37%	3.67	57%
Overall Score	3.17	12%	3.67	29%

Best Practices for Good Quality Person-Centred Active Support

The study recommends the following best practices for good quality Person-Centred Active Support⁴

BEST PRACTICE	HOW UNISSON MEETS THIS BEST PRACTICE
Staff are trained in Person-Centred Active Support (PCAS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> La Trobe University foundation PCAS training Unisson's industry-leading Art of Human Connection (AoHC) training Front-line staff complete extensive online and practical PCAS/PCAS practice leadership training
Senior Leaders have a shared understanding of PCAS and recognise and value high quality practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Senior Leaders have completed PCAS training Senior Leaders have many years of experience in the disability sector, collaborating with other stakeholders and advocating for improved standards in PCAS Outcomes of PCAS research and practice are discussed among the Senior Leaders with a shared understanding that how we support people is the main focus of our work.
Strong Practice Leadership of front-line staff through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular coaching Observation and feedback Discussion of PCAS in team meetings Individual supervision Shift planning Support to maintain focus on the quality of life of the people they support as core to everything they do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes and procedures are in place, based on the La Trobe University PCAS study recommendations, to improve and embed strong practice leadership. Over the past 6 years, Unisson's practice leadership scores have shown continuous improvement. A leadership training and mentoring program has been introduced to support Team Leaders and Managers in Client Services. We've created a new Service Engagement Team to improve rostering and free up time for Team Leaders to spend training and coaching their teams. At a whole organisational level, Unisson's culture, values, organisational structure, people and practices are all aligned to support front-line staff to do their best work.

Practice Leaders are close to every-day practice and their tasks are not split across different positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We invested in an analysis of role clarity to resolve overlaps and ensure staff can focus on their core activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff having confidence in the management of the organisation 	<p>Our 2019 Employee Feedback Survey results scored</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% for individuals' alignment with Unisson values 90% for individuals' alignment with Unisson's strategic goals 88% for individuals' overall satisfaction rating 75% for individuals' satisfaction with support and leadership from individual manager
Services with a staff culture of supporting wellbeing	Unisson's complementary Wellbeing...being U Program provides physical and mental wellbeing support services to all Unisson employees to ensure they bring their best selves to the work we do with colleagues and the people we support. It complements an inclusive and welcoming organisational culture that provides ongoing training, opportunities for career progression, reward and recognition and supports employees to be their authentic selves.
Services supporting no more than six people under one roof	Unisson's shared supported independent living homes have 3 to 4 people living under one roof. Our specialist disability accommodation cluster models have units of 1 to 2 people per dwelling.
Services supporting people with relatively homogenous support needs but who do not all have challenging behaviour	Unisson uses a person-centred approach when supporting people to decide where to live and who they want to live with.

¹Living the Good Life: Embedding Active Support and Practice Leadership Study Report for Unisson Disability. Christine Bigby, Julie Beadle-Brown, Teresa Iacono & Jane Bowden-Dodd. La Trobe University, Tizard University of Kent, Living with Disability research centre. August 2019

²Higher support needs group (Severe Intellectual Disability - Adaptive Behaviour Score less than 151 = 12 participants), Lower support needs group (Mild Intellectual Disability - Adaptive Behaviour Score more than 151 = 16 participants)

³Benchmark figures for good quality engagement (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012)

⁴Flynn et al., 2018; Bigby et al., 2019a; Bould et al., 2019; Bigby et al., 2019