Self-Organising Teams

# Interchange WA

Hi, my name’s Justin O’Meara Smith, and I’m the CEO of Interchange Western Australia. We pride ourselves on being an individualised service provider, and what that means is that we support people in their own home and then in their own community. We help them to be active in their community. We help them to gain employment, or self-employment. We help them to have a home of their own, whether that’s a home that they live in, or a home that they share with others.

For many years, staff have been standing outside my door as a service leader, asking the question, “Can the person do this? Can the person do that?” and it was my position to make a decision. In the new world, what I think is irrelevant. I don’t know the person, so how can I help them live a good life? So the benefits of self-organising teams for Interchange is that people live their life their way through a staff member who’s trained and guided to make decisions that are aligned to what we believe as an organisation, and to what the person is looking for.

It started for us working through what our values meant – empowerment, belonging, individuality, respect – and knowing that those values aren’t just values that we have for the people we support, but for all people, and importantly recognising that staff are people, too. The benefits of our change is that people with disability truly are in control. Yes, they have a supporter working with them, but that supporter’s job is to listen to them and help them to overcome the barrier of their disability. It means that the person that we support truly is in control. Those are the things that help the people we support to live a good life: A life of choice that they make for themselves, not consequences for choices made by others.

We’ve got amazing staff, and for years they’ve been making great choices about how they support a person. The great benefit now is that we’re further investing in their development in how to make those choices. Staff want to make the right decisions, and they want people to live a good life, and now, through self-organising, we give them that authority.

An organisation like ours has seen a significant improvement in our return, or in our surplus, because that process is highly efficient. We have made a good saving. Our savings are reinvested to help people with disability to live a good life. The work that I do is because I want to make a difference, and now I can see, through my teams and the people and families that we support that we are making a difference.

The recommendation I have for any organisation embarking on self-organising teams is to start today. It works because you involve people. It works because you trust people. It works because you do it. Think about who you are, what you stand for, and what you seek to achieve, and then surround yourself with amazing people and bring it to life.

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