**Self-Determination Project – Executive Summary**

**Purpose of the Project**

Over the years we have seen that involvement with get2gether has had a big and positive impact on the lives of our members. Through some initial reflection we felt that the development of self-determination was key to this, and were interested in how our work contributes to it. We decided to carry out some research to explore the idea of self-determination and to capture what we do well and so that we can do more of it.

**Method**

In order to carry out this project we had conversations with both internal stakeholders and external projects as well as reviewing the policy and academic literature around self-determination and disability. We also partnered with Thistle Foundation to adapt and facilitate one of their Lifestyle Management courses for our members to see how we could continue to open up more opportunities for adults with disabilities.

**Findings – Self-Determination**

Self-determination can be simply defined as:

*Making things happen in order to improve or maintain your quality of life.*

Our analysis found this idea to be qualitatively different to the ideas of independence, choice and control that are widely used.

Academic research has demonstrated that adults with disabilities or learning disabilities have far fewer opportunities to naturally develop the component skills of self-determination such as choice making, problem solving, self-management etc., and are less self-determined as a result. It has also found that people are more likely to be perceived and treated as an adult once they start displaying the behaviours associated with self-determination.

Our research highlighted a number of key ideas that supported the natural development of self-determination, as well as a number of key barriers.

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| **What helps?** | **What gets in the way?** |
| * Opportunities and experiences that teach you about yourself * Access to information * Expectation * Opportunities to learn through trial and error * Valuing your input * Believing in the power of your input | * Over-protection that gets in the way of learning from difficult life situations, taking risks and making mistakes. * Low expectation and the desire to protect an individual from failure. * High levels of support. Having others involved automatically dilutes your voice, but also people’s natural instinct to be helpful can get in the way of learning. |

**Findings – Our Approach**

The research conversations highlighted many ways in which get2gether’s approach is distinct to other organisations. Analysis has highlighted some key areas that can be specifically linked to how our approach creates opportunities for members to become more self-determined.

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| **Theme** | **What we do** | **How this links to self-determination** |
| Expanding opportunities | We offer **real opportunities** to our members through events, leadership roles and paid employment | * opportunities to get to know yourself – likes, dislikes, strengths etc. * opportunities for real choice * learn skills such as problem solving * increase expectation of what is possible |
| Raising expectations | We **encourage** our members and **step back** as much as possible | * real opportunities to develop skills through trial and error * we don’t inadvertently get in the way * opportunities for real choice * increase society’s expectation of what is possible * creates opportunities for goal-oriented behaviour |
| Relationship with our members | We **work with the individual** rather than their families and we are **guided by normal adult moral and social standards** rather than heightened, risk averse anxieties. | * individual feels and sees their voice has value and power – self-advocacy * being treated as an adult allows greater opportunity to develop skills such as self-management |
| Risk positive | We **recognise risk as a normal and important part of life** and encourage our members to take life-enhancing risks | * opportunities to get to know your true strengths and limitations which allows you to know what support you might need – self-awareness * we don’t inadvertently get in the way |
| We are supportive | We provide **access to information** and are **encouraging and helpful** when our members **ask** for support. | * real informed choice * we can be part of the plan, the individual is in control, but can ask for the support they need * we don’t inadvertently get in the way |

**Going Forward**

For further information or to view our project outputs please email clare@get2gether.org.uk