Guide to writing a great support worker letter

A great support worker letter is a key part of the access request process. It's your opportunity to demonstrate how the person meets the legislative entry criteria, it's an opportunity for you to share your perspective on the person's impairments, it's a summary of the application and ties up all the evidence with a big bow.

If you can write a great support worker letter, you'll give the access assessor a really good understanding of your client's application, which makes their job easier and should increase your chances of getting a speedy and positive outcome for your client.

Before thinking about writing a support worker letter, make sure you have a really solid understanding of the access process. Our How to apply webpage explains the streamlined access for psychosocial disability and collects together a number of other useful resources.

We also have a template support worker letter that you might find useful as a starting point.

What's the purpose of writing a support worker letter?

Fundamentally, the purpose of writing a support worker letter is to clearly demonstrate to the assessor that your client meets the criteria for accessing the NDIS. If you can hold this in the front of your mind when writing your letter, it'll hold you in good stead.

We can break this down further into three things you should make sure you do in your letter:

- Summarise the application – it's a cover letter
- Help the assessor navigate the evidence
- Give your own evidence.

We'll look at each of these in turn.

Summarise the person's application

Your support worker letter ties together all the different parts of the application and might well be the first thing the access assessor reads, so you need to introduce the client, and briefly state their case against the access criteria.

This means stating that:

- the person has a disability that's likely to be permanent (and point to the evidence for this)
- they have substantially reduced functional capacity in one or more domain (ditto).

Overall, your goal here is to make it easy for the access assessor to understand how the person meets the criteria, and to introduce them to the difference pieces of evidence that they'll find as they work through the access request.

If you do this well, you'll make the access assessor's job easier, and get them focusing on what you want them to see.

Help the assessor navigate the application

Sometimes an application might include a number of different pieces of supporting evidence. Assessors are busy and it's a complicated job – so the easier you can make it for them, the better. Orient them, draw their attention to the particularly relevant bits of evidence and help the assessor sift through the information.

This might mean including a bullet point list of what's enclosed with your letter – it's always possible for paperwork to go missing, so this is a handy checklist for them.

If you have long reports, point out the most important bits – give page numbers.

Ideally, only include evidence in your access request that addresses the eligibility criteria. However, sometimes you might need to include evidence that in parts could be misleading or conflicting. Part of helping the assessor navigate the application is to clarify any points of confusion!

For instance – the person's psychiatrist might state that the person is 'managing well'. You could put this in context and say that they are doing well in the context of the struggles that they have in life, and because of the support that they receive (including what happens when the support is not provided). Or you might want to remove or black out some parts of the evidence as it relates to sensitive trauma history not relevant to the application – and if you do this, you must explain why.

Bringing this all together, you might write something like the following:

I believe that my client, Rob Jones, meets the requirements to access the NDIS.

Rob was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 2002. His condition is likely to be permanent and Rob will require NDIS support for the rest of his life. The enclosed Evidence of Psychosocial Disability Form shows this. Part A was completed by Rob's psychiatrist, Dr Smith, who has been treating Rob since 2010. Dr Smith has also provided a comprehensive report (pages 23 and 24 are most relevant) and a list of treatments Rob has tried over the years. I have also included a hospitalisation summary and a letter from Rob's local mental health nurse.

As Rob's support worker, I completed part B of the Evidence of Disability Form myself. The LSP-16 functional assessment section (along with my later description) shows that he has substantially reduced capacity in the areas of self-management and social interaction. I will provide further detail of my own observations of Rob's challenges against these domains later in this letter. I have also included a letter from Rob's mother which gives you an idea of his day-to-day life.

You can see that we've introduced Rob, stated that he meets the access criteria and what evidence you have for this, listed the different pieces of evidence made available to orient the assessor, and pointed the assessor to key parts of the evidence.

(Note: this is an example only and everyone's application will look different – make sure you are confident in gathering evidence and preparing applications.)

Give your own evidence

The support worker letter is also a great opportunity for you to provide your own evidence.

Support workers have a unique relationship with the person and might have more insight into their daily life and functioning than their doctors. You can give really valuable information!

You should expand on their areas of functional difficulties – You have completed the LSP-16 as part of the *Evidence of psychosocial disability form*, but this only provides limited detail. Expand on this, explain your relationship with the person, and give the additional insights into the person's impairments that you have observed, including examples.

It's also a good idea to detail the support that they are already receiving – and what their life might look like if this disappeared.

For example, you might write something like the following. In practice you'd be likely to write more and give more detail, but you'll get the idea:

I have been working with Rob for three years in my role as a Support Facilitator for the Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program (CPSP). I have helped Rob with various daily living activities, including attending doctors' appointments, taking him to the shops, linking him with other community and health supports, and crisis management.

Rob lives alone in a granny flat in his mother's backyard. His mother is his primary carer – she visits Rob every day and makes sure Rob takes his medication, cleans the house, prepares meals for him and manages his money. Without this support, Rob often doesn't eat or keep the house clean. He has mismanaged his medication in the past when his mother was not supporting him.

Rob is fearful of others, takes a long time to feel comfortable with new people, and for this reason, rarely leaves the house without support. For example, we encouraged Rob to attend a small group cooking class, but he became agitated and upset at other participants and withdrew from the group.

You can see that this details the worker's relationship with Rob and his life, and describes some of the struggles he has with self-management and social interaction.

Tips for writing

Some people are very confident in their writing skills; for others writing can be a struggle. There are a number of things that you can do to both make the task easier and to produce a better outcome.

We've broken this down into three key areas:

- Start by making a plan
- Focus on being clear
- Get someone to read it for you.

Start by making a plan

No matter what kind of writing you're doing, it's hard to just start at the beginning of a blank page and write to the end.

Begin by writing notes on everything you want to say – do a big brain dump. If you struggle with writing, talk it out and then translate it to paper.

When you're so familiar with a person, it's easy to forget what someone else doesn't know. Take the time to reflect on the detail you can provide about the person's life.

This is a great time to go back to the resources you have available – our template letter, this article, your notes, the pieces of evidence you've gathered, the access criteria – to make sure you've got everything covered.

Once you have your notes down, start grouping your ideas together, and then think about a logical flow for these ideas.

Once you've arranged a structure, start building your ideas and notes into paragraphs, beginning with a topic sentence for each paragraph that summarises what the paragraph will say (stick to one idea per paragraph!)

Make use of subheadings – for example, you could have subheadings for each piece of evidence and briefly describe what the assessor should be looking for and how it adds to the access request. You could also use subheadings for the different functional capacity domains that a person struggles with, or for formal and informal supports.

Don't forget to give yourself time to do a draft and review it later. In practice, you'll probably write a draft that you'll take to the person's GP or other clinician along with the Evidence of psychosocial disability form, and then review and add to your letter when you have the evidence from the doctor.

Focus on being clear – not formal or fancy!

Unless you're a really confident writer, don't worry about trying to make it sound 'formal' and 'letter-like'. Just write what you think, and don't beat around the bush. Writing a 'perfect' letter is not as important as getting your point clearly across.

Being clear means ensuring that the assessor doesn't make assumptions. Firstly, it's hard for them to do this – because they don't know the person. Secondly, it's not appropriate because it's their job to make decisions based on the evidence in front of them. So – be clear, detailed, logical and precise.

This comes back to planning – if you're clear in your head about what you want to say, you've got a much better chance of writing a good letter. On the other hand, if you haven't got square in your mind what you want to say, your chances of communicating clearly are zero.

In practice, there's a few hints that will help you write clearly:

- Use simple words, choosing everyday language and avoiding medical jargon
- Use short sentences
- Use bullets and subheadings to help arrange your content.

Get someone to read it for you

Finally, even if you're super confident, get someone you can trust to proofread at the end. With the best will in the world, we all tend to see what we think we've written, rather than what's there.

A good proofreader will not only fix any stray commas, but far more importantly, will point out anything that's confusing or not clear enough.

Additional resources

Transition Support Project website

- Straightforward access case study - Marree Pouri
- Complex access case study - Karen Smolls
- Streamlined access checklist
- Evidence of psychosocial disability form
- GP cover letter template
- Support worker letter template

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