

Understanding and Planning Support Assessment and Planning Approach

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Australian Supported Parenting Consortium

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on behalf of the
Australian Supported Parenting Consortium.*



The University of Sydney



Stronger Families and
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Healthy Start. A National Strategy for Children of Parents with Learning Difficulties

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Report Summary

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The *Understanding and Planning Support Assessment and Planning Approach* (referred to from here on as the UPS) is an innovative assessment tool developed to assist practitioners and parents with intellectual disabilities work collaboratively to understand and plan support. The UPS was developed by Dr Margaret Spencer as a doctoral candidate and as part of a research initiative undertaken by the University of Sydney and NSW Family Services, with the assistance of an Australian Research Council Strategic Partnership Industry Research and Training Grant. As part of this initial research study, the UPS was trialled by 20 mainstream family support workers in New South Wales and found to have utility and beneficial consequences in their casework with parents with intellectual disabilities (Spencer, 2007).

The aim of this study was to evaluate what training practitioners, from different professional disciplines and with varying knowledge and skills in working with parents with intellectual disabilities, require to successfully use the UPS.

Two groups of practitioners were recruited. The first group (Sample 1) were experienced practitioners from around Australia who had been involved in *Healthy Start* (www.healthystart.net.au) since its inception four years previously in 2005. The second group (Sample 2) were students in a graduate on-line unit of study, 'Parenting with Developmental Disability', the majority of whom were sponsored to undertake this study as part of the 2008-2009 *Healthy Start* capacity building strategy. Sample 1, received the UPS materials and an UPS User's Guide that provided step by step instructions on how to implement the UPS process. Sample 2, participated in an on-line training module over two weeks, received the UPS materials and an UPS User's Guide, and in addition, were able to discuss their experience using the UPS via the dedicated on-line discussion forum as well as to seek assistance via the telephone or email. Following training, all participants were given five weeks to use the UPS with at least one parent with intellectual disabilities.

Participants were asked to complete pre and post questionnaires. In addition participants were asked to fill out a reflection sheet for each session in which they implemented the UPS to send these back at the end of the implementation phase. A record was kept of phone calls received from Sample 2 participants as well as a printout of all emails and discussion forum postings. Data from pre and post questionnaires was analysed using SPSS (Version 17.0) and on-line discussion transcripts, notes from phone conversation and email contact were analysed for common themes.

The findings demonstrate that the UPS can, with the User's Guide, stand alone and be implemented without a formal training component. Additional materials as presented in the on-line training component for Sample 1 were helpful and could be included in a complete package with the UPS permitting the purchaser and intending user to utilise the Guide and Training components as appropriate to their level of experience. There was also support for face to face workshops which is perhaps not surprising in the human services sector where such training approaches are widely utilised. An alternative suggestion, to develop and then incorporate a DVD which demonstrates the UPS and its processes, perhaps in role play format and with parents with intellectual disabilities, could be a cost-effective mechanism to support both experienced and 'naive' practitioners in familiarising themselves with this new resource. These recommendations will be carried forward with NSW Family Services in publication and production of the UPS in the near future.