

THE ENABLING GOOD LIVES NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GROUP (NEGL) RESPONSE TO DSS CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Context

The Enabling Good Lives National Leadership Group (NEGL) is the kaitiaki of the Enabling Good Lives approach. NEGL gathers perspectives from Regional Leadership Networks, allied national networks and disabled leaders. The NEGL affirms there is a consensus that “the system” (in this case DSS) must be transformed. The elements of this transformation have been previously described in detail.

These comments are provided in the context that DSS is committed to a comprehensive process of positive change based on Te Tiriti, UNCRPD and the EGL approach.

1. What would you be able to do, or what experiences would you be able to have, at different times in your life, if support were working well. And how do you know when it is working well?

A. In early life (childhood and youth)

Support working well means a child or young person can include:

- Participate fully in everyday life — play, learn, join in community activities, be included in early learning or school settings
- Build strong relationships — with whānau, peers, teachers, and community
- Develop identity and confidence — feeling valued, safe, and culturally grounded
- Have choices in how they learn and grow — supports adapt to the child, not the other way around

B. In adolescence and early adulthood

Support working well means a young adult can:

- Explore aspirations — education, training, work, creativity, relationships
- Access meaningful pathways — supported employment, apprenticeships, volunteering, community roles
- Build independence at their pace — managing daily life, transport, money, decisions
- Experience belonging — in cultural, social, and community spaces

C. In adulthood

Support working well means a person can:

- Live in a home of their choosing — with the right supports, not forced into a service-driven arrangement
- Do meaningful work or contribution — paid work, volunteering, caregiving, creative pursuits
- Direct their own supports — choosing who provides support, how, and when
- Participate in community life — clubs, marae, faith communities, sports, arts

D. In later life (older adulthood)

Support working well means a person can:

- Age in place — staying connected to home, whānau, culture
- Maintain dignity and autonomy — making decisions about health, support, and daily life
- Stay socially connected — avoiding isolation, maintaining meaningful relationships
- Continue contributing — mentoring, volunteering, sharing knowledge

2. How you know support is working well

A. The person's own experience shows it's working

- They say they feel heard, respected, and in control.
- They can make choices and those choices are honoured.
- They experience safety, belonging, and cultural alignment.
- Their life looks more like the life they want — not the life the system offers.

B. Whānau experience shows it's working

- Whānau feel included, valued, and supported.
- They see the person's confidence, wellbeing, and opportunities growing.
- They experience clear communication and partnership, not bureaucracy.

C. Practice indicators show it's working

- Person-directed planning is real, not a template exercise.
- Supports are flexible, responsive, and timely.
- Staff demonstrate respect, cultural competence, and safeguarding.
- The organisation monitors outcomes, not just compliance.

D. System indicators show it's working

- Funding is flexible and portable.
- Decision-making is closer to the person, not centralised.
- Processes are simple, relational, and mana-enhancing.
- Community connections are prioritised over service dependency.

E. Outcomes show it's working

You see tangible changes in the person's life:

- More **participation**
- More **relationships**
- More **choice and control**
- More **ordinary life opportunities**
- Less **stress, isolation, or crisis**
- Less **service-driven constraint**

2. What does flexibility look like for you? And, how might we better reflect this in the services we deliver?

A. Flexibility means I can shape supports around my life, not around service schedules

- I choose **when** support happens.
- I choose **who** provides it.
- I can change things easily when life changes.

B. Flexibility means I can pursue opportunities as they arise

- If something important comes up — a job interview, a whānau event, a cultural obligation — support can shift quickly.
- I'm not locked into rigid plans or rosters.

C. Flexibility means supports fit my identity, culture, and whānau rhythms

- My tikanga, routines, sensory needs, communication style, and whānau ways of doing things are respected.
- Supports adjust to *how I live*, not to a generic model.

D. Flexibility means I can grow, change direction, or try new things

- My goals aren't frozen.
- If I want to try work, study, volunteering, or a new living arrangement, support can pivot with me.

E. Flexibility means I don't have to fight the system to get small changes

- I don't need to justify every adjustment.
- I don't need to wait weeks for approval.
- The system trusts me.

In EGL terms: flexibility = self-direction + responsiveness + mana-enhancing practice.

How services can better reflect flexibility (EGL → service design)

EGL gives very concrete guidance on how services should behave if they want to embody flexibility. These are the system-level behaviours that answer your second question.

A. Shift from fixed service models to person-led design

- Replace “this is how our service works” with “how do you want this to work for you”.
- Allow individualised arrangements rather than standardised packages.

B. Build responsiveness into operations

- Quick adjustments to hours, staffing, location, or type of support.
- Minimal bureaucracy for changes.
- Decision-making delegated close to the person.

C. Use portable, flexible funding

- Funding follows the person, not the provider.
- People can mix and match supports from different places.
- Providers design around outcomes, not contracts.

D. Prioritise relationships over processes

- Staff have time to listen, adapt, and respond.
- Whanaungatanga is treated as core practice, not “nice to have”.
- Plans evolve through conversation, not paperwork.

E. Support people to direct their own lives

- Provide information in accessible ways.
- Offer real choice of workers, times, and methods.
- Honour cultural preferences and whānau involvement.

F. Remove structural rigidity

- No unnecessary rules about minimum hours, fixed rosters, or “approved activities”.
- Policies allow exceptions and adaptation.
- Compliance never overrides wellbeing or ordinary life outcomes.

G. Measure flexibility through outcomes, not service inputs

Ask:

- Is the person doing what matters to them?
- Are they able to change direction easily?
- Are supports enhancing mana and autonomy?
- Are whānau experiencing partnership rather than resistance?

3. Thinking about the services that DSS provides to carers and whānau, what is missing, or what else could we provide that could support you and your whānau?

“What is missing, or what else could DSS provide to support carers and whānau?”

EGL gives a very specific lens: **carers and whānau should be supported in ways that strengthen mana, relationships, choice, cultural identity, and ordinary life outcomes.** When you apply that lens, the gaps become obvious — and so do the opportunities.

1. What carers and whānau say is missing

A. Support that is genuinely flexible and easy to change

Carers often say:

- “I need support that adapts when life changes.”
- “I shouldn’t have to fight the system for small adjustments.”

EGL implication: DSS should offer responsive, low-bureaucracy adjustments to hours, workers, funding use, and support types.

B. Support that strengthens whānau capability, not just fills service gaps

Carers want:

- access to an independent ally (Connector, Kaituhono)
- coaching, mentoring, practical guidance
- help navigating systems
- access to peer support networks
- support to build confidence and skills

EGL implication: Provide whānau capability-building, not just respite or tasks.

C. Support that honours culture, identity, and whānau ways of doing things

Carers often feel services:

- don’t understand tikanga or whānau rhythms
- don’t adapt to cultural preferences
- don’t support whānau-led decision-making

EGL implication: DSS should offer culturally grounded, mana-enhancing support, including Māori, Pacific, and other cultural frameworks.

D. Support that reduces stress, not adds to it

Carers frequently report:

- administrative burden
- unclear communication
- inconsistent workers
- crisis-driven responses

EGL implication: Provide simple processes, clear communication, and stable, relationship-based support.

E. Support that recognises carers as partners, not service extensions

Carers want:

- to be listened to
- to be included in planning
- to have their wellbeing valued

EGL implication: Shift from “carers as unpaid labour” to carers as partners in self-determined lives.

2. What else DSS could provide (EGL-aligned service improvements)

A. Whānau-directed support options

- Whānau choose workers, schedules, and support types.
- Funding can be used in ways that fit whānau life.
- Whānau can mix formal and informal supports.

B. Relationship-based practice (connectors for whānau, not just individuals)

EGL emphasises relationships as the engine of good lives. DSS could provide:

- whānau connectors
- peer mentors
- community navigators
- cultural guides

C. Practical, everyday support that reflects real life

Carers sometimes need help with:

- transport
- household routines
- community participation
- transitions (school → work, home → independent living)

EGL says supports should be **ordinary, practical, and life-shaping**, not just “service tasks”.

D. Support for carer wellbeing

What’s missing:

- emotional support
- respite that actually works
- counselling
- stress-reduction tools
- whānau retreats or cultural healing spaces

EGL emphasises **mana, wellbeing, and whānau flourishing** — DSS could expand here.

E. Clear, simple, accessible information

Carers often say:

- “I don’t know what I’m entitled to.”
- “I don’t know who to talk to.”
- “Everything is too complicated.”

DSS could provide:

- plain-language guides
- culturally tailored information
- one-stop navigation
- proactive communication

F. Support that adapts across the lifespan

EGL is explicit: needs change, so supports must change. DSS could strengthen:

- transition planning
- future planning
- ageing-in-place supports
- whānau succession planning

4. How can we improve the way information flows both ways so it works better for you – both when you're seeking advice or support, and when you want to give feedback or make a complaint?

EGL treats information flow as **a relationship**, not a transaction. So the question becomes: *How do we create communication systems that are mana-enhancing, simple, responsive, and genuinely two-way?*

1. What good information flow looks like for people, carers, and whānau

A. Information is easy to find, easy to understand, and culturally aligned

People shouldn't have to decode jargon or hunt through multiple websites. EGL says information should be:

- plain language
- available in multiple formats (video, audio, visual, written)
- culturally grounded (tikanga-aligned, Pacific-aligned, accessible formats)
- available in the person's preferred communication style

B. People get answers quickly, without being bounced around

EGL emphasises responsiveness. Good information flow means:

- one clear point of contact
- timely responses
- no "service maze"
- no repeating your story to multiple people

C. People feel safe giving feedback or making complaints

EGL is explicit: mana must be protected. That means:

- feedback processes that don't feel risky
- complaints pathways that are simple and non-punitive
- options to give feedback anonymously
- culturally safe ways to raise concerns (kanohi-ki-te-kanohi, whānau-supported, community-based)

D. People can shape services with their insights

Information flow isn't just about receiving — it's about **influence**. EGL says people should be able to:

- co-design improvements
- share lived-experience insights
- see their feedback lead to real change
- be part of ongoing dialogue, not one-off surveys

3. What DSS could do to improve two-way information flow (EGL-aligned service behaviours)

A. Create simple, unified communication channels

Instead of multiple disconnected pathways, DSS could offer:

- one central “front door”
- clear navigation support
- a single number or email that actually works
- connectors or navigators who help people find the right information

B. Provide information in multiple formats and languages

EGL emphasises accessibility and cultural grounding. DSS could strengthen:

- video explainers
- visual guides
- Easy Read versions
- Māori and Pacific language resources
- community-based information sessions

C. Make feedback and complaints processes mana-enhancing

This is a major gap in current systems. EGL would suggest:

- feedback options that don’t require confrontation
- whānau-supported complaint pathways
- culturally safe facilitators
- clear timelines and updates
- transparency about what happens next

D. Close the loop — show people how their feedback changed things

People often say: “I give feedback but nothing happens.” EGL requires **visible responsiveness**. DSS could:

- publish “you said, we did” updates
- share improvements back to whānau and carers
- involve lived-experience groups in reviewing changes

E. Strengthen relational communication, not just transactional communication

EGL is relationship-based. DSS could:

- prioritise kanohi-ki-te-kanohi where possible
- build ongoing relationships with whānau
- use connectors to maintain communication
- reduce reliance on formal letters or bureaucratic emails

F. Make information flow proactive, not reactive

Instead of waiting for people to ask, DSS could:

- send updates about changes
- provide reminders about supports
- share opportunities, events, and resources
- check in with whānau periodically

Summary

This document, prepared by the Enabling Good Lives National Leadership Group (NEGL), sets out a clear vision for transforming DSS supports so they follow the EGL approach. **The Enabling Good Lives National Leadership Group (NEGL) is the kaitiaki of the Enabling Good Lives approach.** It frames success as people living ordinary, culturally grounded lives with choice, control and strong relationships across childhood, adulthood and older age.

Good support is described in practical terms across the lifespan: children included in learning and play, young people accessing meaningful pathways, adults living in homes of their choosing and older people ageing in place with dignity. Indicators of success are person-reported outcomes (feeling heard, respected and in control), whānau wellbeing, practice that is genuinely person-directed, flexible and culturally competent, and system features like portable funding and decision-making close to the person.

This paper recommends system changes to deliver flexibility and reduce burden: shift to person-led design, portable funding, relationship-based practice (connectors, peer mentors), whānau capability building, and simpler, culturally aligned information and complaints pathways. **“EGL treats information flow as a relationship, not a transaction.”** These reforms aim to make communication two-way, mana enhancing, and proactive so feedback leads to visible change.