Individual Support Plans (ISPs) play a significant role in ensuring that the value-based disability-related goals of international and provincial legislation—promoting human rights and improving quality of life (QOL) outcomes—are brought to fruition. The ISP is a living document that, through person-centered planning practices, guides the day-to-day supports provided to persons labelled with an intellectual and/or development disability (PLWID/D). The quality and standards of care that are received by an individual can be linked to the effectiveness and efficiency of an individual’s ISP. Literature has demonstrated that ISPs are most effective when an individual’s identified needs and wants are aligned with clearly defined goals, when matched support strategies are used to meet those goals, and when measurement tools to monitor and evaluate individual and team progress toward those goals are in place. Further, ISPs are more likely to demonstrate improved QOL outcomes when the goals capture and promote the following QOL domains: self-determination, personal development, interpersonal relationships, social inclusion, rights, and physical, emotional, and material well-being.

Unfortunately, research has demonstrated that the ISP and accompanying processes are often inadequate in meeting the intended purposes of guiding day-to-day supports and practices and improving QOL outcomes. This project aimed to promote the achievement of improved QOL outcomes for PLWID/D supported by Community Living Haldimand through a collaborative examination of their current ISP framework and processes. The goal was to provide recommendations for a new ISP framework shaped by current research on effective and efficient ISPs, and authentically founded in the expressed concerns and recommendations of those who currently are responsible for developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of the organization’s ISP.

In a document analysis,9 completed ISPs were examined to determine the presence or absence of the components of an effective ISP and the number and types of QOL domains. A Nominal Group Technique (NGT) and participation from Coordinators and Supervisors assisted in capturing culturally sensitive language surrounding QOL and the ISP process. This involved asking participants to provide written responses to questions about how they would define QOL and the 8 QOL domains (noted above), as well as what it means for someone to have a good QOL. The NGT was followed by a focus group that discussed the processes related to the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ISPs. The final phase involved a questionnaire that was distributed to 180 Direct Support Workers (DSWs). DSWs were asked to rank order their preference for the descriptions and definitions developed through the NGT process and rate their agreement with the description of concerns and recommendations related to the ISP process as identified by Coordinators and Supervisors.

Recommendations for a new ISP framework included the use of culturally sensitive language and support and training for identified areas of concern (e.g., training on identifying needs and wants and defining goals). A description of the methods used in this study may assist other organizations in the evaluation and improvement of their ISP process.