

**next  
steps**  
digital version



St Luke's  
**Innovative  
Resources**

*Author: Andrew Shirres*

*Photographers: Mat Jones, Paula Markey & Andrew Shirres*

## Welcome to the Digital Version of

# *next* **steps**

St Luke's Innovative Resources is delighted to bring you the interactive, versatile, digital version of this conversation-building resource, first published as a hard copy card set packaged in a polypropylene box.

You can:

- swipe through the digital cards, one at a time
- swipe through a row of thumbnail images at the bottom of the screen
- bookmark/tag images
- write, scribble or draw on the digital cards—you may want to circle a relevant statement or scribble notes as a card is discussed



- add and drag notes anywhere on the images
- highlight, draw and write in multiple colours
- take a screen shot and access the image in your photo gallery
- send the image to the person you are working with so they have a copy
- print the image and mail it to the person so they have a hard copy
- save the image in your files as a record of your conversation.

## How can I use this digital tool remotely with groups or individuals?

If you are running groups or meetings using Skype, Zoom or other similar video conferencing tools, you can use our digital cards and tools in a number of different ways.

A good place to start is to give the group or person some time to get to know the cards:

- The facilitator can share their screen, and scroll through the images so everyone can see.
- Point out the different features of the card set including the types of images, the format of the words (if any), the suits (if relevant) and any other unique features.
- Show them some of the features such as the scribble and text tools.

## Deliberate Selection

- As you scroll through the cards, invite the person or group to pick cards that jump out at them for any reason. Perhaps it is the image that catches their attention. Perhaps it is a word or a question, or some other quality of the card. It may be a card they are curious about, or would find most helpful to focus on, or think is very important, or it may be a card that matches something they are thinking about or experiencing at the moment, or even a card that expresses something they have never thought about before.
- As the facilitator, you may wish to choose one or two cards to prompt an activity or discussion.



## Random Selection

An alternate way of getting activities started is to select images randomly, for example:

- Ask each person to close their eyes and randomly say, 'Stop!' as the facilitator swipes through the images.
- Or ask each person to choose a number between 1 and X (X being the number of cards in the set). This is the number of their randomly selected card.
- Or use the timer on your phone set to a chosen interval—5 seconds, 10 seconds, etc. Stop on the image that is on screen when the timer dings.

Many videoconferencing tools allow you to put people into groups using 'breakout' rooms. So you may want to invite two or more people to discuss what a particular card means to them, and then come back to the whole group.



## Some questions for reflection and conversation

Whether you use a deliberate or random selection method, you can then build the conversation by inviting each person to read or comment on their card, if they wish.

Facilitators can then ask individuals or groups questions like:

- What does this card mean to you?
- Have you thought about the topic on the card before?
- On a scale of 1-10 how important is this to you?
- Can you think of a time when this card was particularly relevant? What happened?
- When this is happening, what is the effect?
- When this is not happening, what is the effect?
- Do you know anyone who is really good at this?
- What do they do?
- What is one simple thing you could do today or tomorrow that would make a difference?
- How will you notice the effects? (Some people ask for feedback, and others prefer to notice carefully how it feels inside themselves and what the effect is on others.)

In the booklet written especially for the card set you have chosen, you will find a lot more information. It includes the purpose of this card set, its origins and practice base, things you should take into consideration before using the cards, and many creative ideas for using the cards. Please adapt the suggestions to the digital environment.

**Don't hesitate to call us for support  
in using this digital resource.**



St Luke's  
**Innovative**  
Resources

**P: (03) 5446 0500**  
**E: [info@innovativeresources.org](mailto:info@innovativeresources.org)**  
**w: [innovativeresources.org](http://innovativeresources.org)**



Published in 2017 by:



62 Collins Street Kangaroo Flat  
Victoria 3555 Australia  
p: + 61 3 5446 0500 f: +61 3 5447 2099  
e: [info@innovativeresources.org](mailto:info@innovativeresources.org)  
w: [innovativeresources.org](http://innovativeresources.org)

ABN: 97 397 067 466

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Editor: Karen Bedford

St Luke's Innovative Resources acknowledges the Jaara people of Dja Dja Wurrung country, the traditional custodians of the land upon which our premises are located and where our resources are developed and published. We pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future—for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and other First Nations peoples. We must remember that underneath this earth, upon which we so firmly stand, this is, was and always will be, the traditional land of First Nations peoples.

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*Introduction:*

# **The power and purpose behind Next Steps**

Every step we take follows another.

Every step we take precedes another.

The smallest shifts—doing some dishes, putting something away, stopping something, starting something, taking a shower—can all be significant events on a continuum of ‘next steps’, representing our unique pathways through life.

*Next Steps* is a resource that attempts to capture the power and purpose behind the simplest of immediate steps one can take on a longer journey. It contains 52 cards made up of 48 colour photographs and four timeframe cards.



***‘A journey of a thousand miles  
begins with a single step.’ Lao Tzu***

The idea for *Next Steps* arose directly from my practice both as a mental health support worker and manager of mental health programs for St Luke’s Anglicare (now part of Anglicare Victoria, Australia). The people who accessed these services were doing their best to cope with what the extremes of life and their mental illness were throwing at them. At a time when they were struggling to come to grips with the intensity of their lived experience, often we, as workers, would encourage them to come up with some long-term goals to aim for. Sometimes these goals would be decided for them.

### *When big picture goals get in the way*

As well-intentioned as this practice may be, and as useful as having a goal or aspiration may be, it can lead both worker and client to expect big things to be achieved quickly, and yet they may find it hard to get things going. It's a bit like, 'Well, we both know what your goals are, let's just do it!' Pretty soon these big picture goals seem to get further and further away, 'progress' can feel slow or non-existent, and blame can set in for both client and worker.

On top of this, 'blank slate practice' can creep in. This revolves around the concept that someone is starting from an undetermined beginning—an assumption that can make any step towards the long-term goal seem monumental, or at the very least, hard to

achieve. Blank slate practice also encourages workers to think they are somehow responsible for that so-called first step and, quite possibly, that it might not happen without them being involved. Before you know it, both worker and client are blaming either themselves or each other for not making big changes or achieving 'outcomes'.

I started wondering what we could do that would support both the people we work with (clients of family services, youth or mental health programs) and ourselves as workers, to identify and celebrate the small, next steps that have been, or could be, taken towards long-term goals. What could we do to place the means for the conversation in the hands of the people we work with? What would be a

practical, simple and easy-to-use tool that captures the elements of change that are achievable or doable almost immediately?

And so *Next Steps* was born.

### *Simple steps can be life-changing*

A prototype set of simple photographic images was produced depicting tangible, everyday actions that almost anyone can take as part of their journey through life—small, practical and specific actions or steps such as setting an alarm, going for a walk, writing a list or preparing some food. Some of these activities are silent and individual, like reading a book or making a bed, some are loud as in playing music, and some involve other people such as doing a course, making a phone call or connecting with community.

While small and perhaps simple, these steps can still be profound and even life-changing.

The simple act of saying ‘no’ or ‘yes’ may be protective, decisive, liberating and even monumental in its repercussions for the person and those around them. Everyday actions like doing the dishes, taking a shower, going for a walk or doing some shopping can, at times, be out of reach (or at least very difficult) for any of us to achieve. Actions that may be inconsequential or even unconscious for some may be profound for others. What is easy for one person is difficult for another and what is easy for one person at one time may be difficult for that same person at another time.

Taking these steps can be pivotal in terms of what participating in ‘normal’ life can represent for someone. For example, being able to do what our world considers everyday activities can be ‘normalising’. It can help to put bigger, longer-term challenges into perspective. As well, big picture goals—like living independently,

having your children return home, getting a job, being in a safe relationship or getting a qualification—rarely happen overnight or without a range of smaller steps being taken first.

### *Trialling the prototypes*

Copies of the prototype collection of *Next Steps* images were produced and handed over to a range of enthusiastic workers to trial in practice. On top of this, *Next Steps* was trialled for more than two years as part of the strengths-based training workshops I deliver across Australia on behalf of Innovative Resources. Immediately, the cards found a place within practice. Workers from mental health and family services programs, and the people they worked with, found *Next Steps* helpful, not only in deciding on the actual steps they could take, but also in building conversations around goal-setting in general.

Putting this tool into the hands of clients quickly unearthed a surprising breadth of applications. While some people clearly identified with the immediacy of what might be achieved, others found ways to order the cards into categories such as what had already been achieved, what other people might identify as achievements or what might be considered as aspirations. They discovered that the cards could be prioritised, ordered or categorised according to a wide variety of contexts such as home or community, quiet or loud, work or recreation, inside or outside, alone or with others. Some people chose to interpret cards at their face value, for example, the image of the rubbish bins meant ‘Put the rubbish in a bin and place it outside for collection’. Others chose to interpret the same card metaphorically, for example, ‘Letting go of emotional clutter that can hold a person back’.

### *A tool built on strengths-based principles*

This acceptance of unique interpretations made *by* (and not *for*) people accessing services is important as it is entirely congruent with the strengths-based principles upon which *Next Steps* is built. The idea of developing a tool that places ‘personal agency’ for decision-making and actions within the hands of people accessing services is integral to this card set. *Next Steps* is not intended as a tool where workers might be encouraged to make decisions or predetermine actions for clients. It is intended as a tool that is based on assumptions anyone working from a strengths perspective would have, including:

- All people have strengths and capacities
- People can change and grow
- People are experts on their own situation.

As well, *Next Steps* is intended to be used in ways that accord with other core strengths-

based principles such as doing whatever is possible to create conditions where people can be their own agents of change; they can control and direct the decisions they make and the processes of change they engage in.

Practice that arises from a strengths-based, solution-focused approach is often built around considering what might be happening if a preferred ‘picture of the future’ was in place. It recognises that this preferred future may not be connected to the problems people are facing and, instead, considers what might be happening if the problem did not exist or did not have the same influence.



### *Non-problem talk*

This involves noticing or reflecting on what might be different (or what people might be doing) if the problem did not have so much power. *Next Steps* can be used in this way too. The simple actions depicted on the cards can represent things people can do, or may want to consider doing, that are not part of the challenges they are dealing with. *Next Steps* can be a kind of ‘visual non-problem talk’ resource!

Once trialling of the prototypes was completed and the decision was made to go ahead, the photography for the actual set could begin. The brief for the photographers was simple: Take pictures of a range of everyday actions and keep them as real and tangible as possible. The intention was not to create glorious or artistic photography, but to epitomise the actions as directly as possible, taking the shortest route between the world represented

in an image and the experience of the person viewing it.

### *Finding a link to everyone’s unique world*

It is also true that one person’s experience of a landscape, kitchen, shower or supermarket will always differ from another’s. While the photographs were taken primarily in rural and regional Australia, we hope that the objects or environments depicted will be recognisable across the world and that the user will be able to find a link between the world of the cards and their own. For example, not every city council’s rubbish bin is the same; for some there may be no such thing as a city council or a green plastic bin on wheels, but we hope the card with the rubbish bins will prompt anyone to consider whether disposing of rubbish or tossing something out might be their next step, whatever their environment or culture.

In addition, *Next Steps* certainly does not depict every possible next step that someone might take. While careful editing and review went into finding 48 of the simplest, most immediate steps a person could contemplate taking sooner rather than later, only the person using the resource can decide what their most important next step is—and they may not find it depicted here! Perhaps in not finding it, a conversation can take place where greater clarity or momentum is gained towards the person's own desired next step.

***Next Steps is intended to be used in ways that accord with other core strengths-based principles such as doing whatever is possible to create conditions where people can be their own agents of change...***

As well as identifying next steps, we hope that this card set will open the door for wider conversations about where a person's life may be heading—and perhaps even about life's purpose overall. The images lend themselves well to reflection on what has been achieved and dreams about what might be possible, as much as they do to reflection on what is to come within minutes, hours or days ahead.



# Who is Next Steps for?

The initial aim was to design a resource that could be used by anyone who works in human service support roles—such as counsellors, social workers, educators, family service workers, mental health workers—to help create client-centred, client-owned conditions for change.

However, given the immediacy of the images it is possible for anyone—whether or not they are receiving services—to lay the cards out and consider the relevance of the images to where they may be heading in life.

While the photographs were all taken in Australia, mostly in rural or regional settings, they represent activities that are familiar to most people, wherever they may live. While



the scene may differ from home to home and certainly from culture to culture, most people can relate to sharing a meal, taking a walk, connecting with a friend, throwing something out, organising something, fixing something, drawing something. We hope people will use the cards as prompts for envisaging their own version of their next steps.

*Next Steps* is most suited to an age range from youth to adult, including the aged. The images have little or no text, ensuring that literacy and numeracy considerations are unlikely to be a factor. And because they consist of simple images that can be interpreted literally, these cards may be accessible to those with mild cognitive impairment.

# What should I consider before getting started?

It is important to consider the potential impact of any tool you use—especially if there are visual elements involved. Pictures, particularly photographs, can be very powerful and even a seemingly innocuous image can cause unexpected emotions and memories to surface.

## *Taking care*

Before using card sets published by Innovative Resources, please consider the following:

- *Your own reaction to the cards.* Do they work for you?
- *Your knowledge of the cards.* How well do you know the cards? Are there any cards you might want to leave out?
- *Your knowledge of the people who will be using the cards.* Do you think the cards will sit comfortably with the culture and background of the person or group? Do you know of any trauma present that may make a specific card or cards particularly potent? For example, the card of the person petting the cat may be particularly evocative if the person is currently experiencing the loss or illness of a pet.
- *The safety of the setting.* Have you created a 'safe space' for open conversation? Is the timing right? If the activity is going to take place in a group, is it likely that there will be respect in the group? Have guidelines for respect and safety (such as listening and confidentiality) been established? What if the cards elicit strong emotions? How will you ensure that the person is supported

appropriately, and that their privacy and dignity are respected? How will you make sure that everyone gets an equal turn to speak, and that a person can 'pass' if they wish to?

- *Plan B.* Sometimes an activity simply doesn't work, and knowing when to adjust the activity on the fly or abandon it altogether and go to Plan B, is a very useful skill.

While care is crucial, stepping out of our comfort zones and trying something different can be very effective. I invite you to experiment and see what works best for you and the people you work with.



***Pictures, particularly photographs, can be very powerful and even a seemingly innocuous image can cause unexpected emotions and memories to surface.***

# Deliberate selection or random choice?

While there are endless creative activities for using cards (see the next section for some ideas you may want to try), they all fall into two broad methods of distribution—deliberate selection or random choice.

## *Deliberate selection*

This method involves spreading the cards out on a table or other surface and inviting participants to look them over and make a selection based on a question or other prompt. It might be as simple as, ‘Pick a card you are drawn to for some reason.’ Some activities may involve picking more than one card—or even a series of cards.

The cards can also be displayed on a wall or window. Spreading the cards out on the floor

can also be very effective. People get a bird’s eye view of the cards, and they can walk around them or follow a line (or meandering path) of cards as they look over them. Activities that involve significant movement can open up different pathways to learning, particularly for those who favour a kinesthetic learning style. (Here’s a quick idea: once people have chosen a series of cards that represent their next steps, they could then arrange them in order along a path.)



### *Random choice*

Activities using random choice often bring a great sense of play into the room! This includes activities such as shuffling and dealing, placing the cards face down on a surface, playing games that involve hiding and finding cards, lucky dips, placing random cards on chairs, selecting a card with eyes closed, and so on. Let your imagination come into play!

It is amazing how meaningful random choices can be for people. Time and again they see synchronicity and significance in ‘their’ cards. Often an element of whimsy, playfulness and serendipity enters the conversation—many people enjoy playing games and great learning can happen when people relax and have fun in this way.



***It is amazing how meaningful random choices can be for people.***



# What are the images and what questions could accompany them?



There are 52 full-colour cards in the set. They are made up of 48 original photographs of everyday objects or activities, and four timeframe cards representing 'Now', 'Today', 'Tomorrow' and 'This week' (these can be easily recognised by their white borders.)

The scenes or objects depicted in the photographs can readily be taken at face value—for example, 'Do the washing up', 'Take a shower', 'Go for a walk', 'Read a book'. The original idea of the resource was to depict very accessible images of simple, practical, everyday next steps a person may want to

take within a short period of time. This is particularly important when we find ourselves in the midst of life's challenges. When unwell, highly stressed or confused, deciphering a metaphor or symbol can be difficult or even impossible. In addition, a big picture goal may seem overwhelming and out of reach, while a simple, tangible next step can be pivotal in gaining forward momentum.

As people choose steps many will want to elaborate on their choices, perhaps giving reasons or wider context, or reflecting on the

meaning that a particular card might hold for them. It is entirely possible that a person will interpret the cards in a unique way; perhaps far removed from the expectations we might have had when deciding to include a particular image in the set, or the interpretation of the practitioner.

Sometimes the practitioner simply needs to listen and acknowledge. Hopefully, a relationship exists where the practitioner can ask questions so that they can learn more about, or better support, the client in taking the steps they have chosen. Some of these questions could invite the client to reflect on the past or the present, or they may invite the client to wonder about what the future might hold.

For that reason we offer some examples of simple questions that may prompt further

***The original conception of the resource was to depict very accessible images of simple, practical, everyday next steps a person may want to take within a short period of time.***

conversation or help to provide clarity for both client and practitioner. They are not necessarily the right or the best questions to ask, nor are they a recipe for how to use the cards. They are not prioritised and they certainly don't capture the extent to which questioning can be used with *Next Steps*. We hope these sample questions will prompt ideas for topics and questions, knowing that the wisdom existing in the room where *Next Steps* is used will lead to the best questions being asked. So please feel free to use or discard the following questions as best serves the situation.

## Thumbnail images and sample questions



- Is there a baby or young child in your life?
- Who are you closest to in your family?
- What memories do you have of family?



- Is there anything you would like advice about at the moment?
- How could you get that advice?
- What advice would someone you admire give you right now?



- What does faith, religion or spirituality mean to you?
- What values or beliefs are most important to you?
- What lights your way?



- Who could you reach out to?
- Who cares about you and who do you care about?
- What makes a good friend?

next



- Is there someone you would like to visit?
- Who would you like to invite over?
- What would you like to welcome into your life?

- Have you ever played a musical instrument?
- Would you like to learn a musical instrument?
- What is your favourite musical instrument?

- What is one thing you would be proud of having started or finished today?
- What is the first thing you could do to get started?
- Who or what would make starting or finishing easier?

- Would you like to plant something?
- Do you enjoy seeing things grow?
- Do you have a favourite garden?

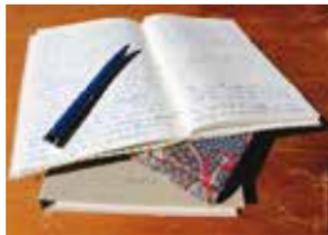
steps



- Do you take medication?
- Is everything working for you or is it time for a review?
- How do you feel about medication?



- Do you have a pet?
- Have you had a pet before?
- What do you like most about animals?



- Do you like to write or keep a journal?
- If you decided to do some writing, what would you write about?
- Would you share it with anyone?



- What music do you like listening to?
- How does listening to music affect you?
- Is there any music you would like to listen to more often?



- Do you like going to the library?
- How could going to the library be useful?
- Do you have a memory of a visit to a library?

- If you were going to clean up, where would you start?
- What is the first thing you would like to throw away?
- What difference would getting rid of rubbish make to you?

- When and where do you usually shop for food?
- What food do you have in the house right now?
- What does your typical shopping trolley carry?

- Are there any sports you like to play or watch?
- Would you like to be a little more active?
- Is there a sport you could try?

steps



- Is there somewhere you would like to go for a break?
- Is there a trip or adventure you would like to go on?
- Do you need to pack a bag and if so, what will be in it?



- How do you get around?
- If you had to rely on public transport tomorrow, would you know how the local system works?
- What is your 'dream destination'?



- Would you like to get a haircut?
- Is the way your hair looks important to you?
- Who cuts your hair?



- Where are your local parks?
- What time of day, or season, do you like being outside most?
- Do you have a favourite tree, bench, path or fountain in a park?



- Have art or craft ever been part of your life?
- What arts or crafts do you like most?
- Are there any arts or crafts you would like to try?

- Is there a health appointment you need to make?
- How could you best prepare?
- Would you prefer to go alone or have support?

- Do you have a car or any other machinery that needs repair?
- How much vehicle maintenance can you do by yourself?
- How important is having a worry-free vehicle to you?

- What walks can you go on near where you live?
- Do you prefer to walk alone or with someone else?
- When is it the best time of day for a walk?

steps



- Is there someone you would like to give a gift to?
- What would the gift be?
- What gift would you most like to receive?



- Do you ever keep the curtains or blinds closed during the day?
- What does opening the curtains or blinds mean for you?
- Could your place use a little more light or air?



- How often do you have a shower?
- What's the best thing about having a shower?
- Do you like singing in the shower?



- What is worth saying 'yes' to?
- What is the best question I, or someone else, could ask you?
- Which person or service would you most like to hear say 'yes'?



- Who is the first person you could call or text today?
- Who would you most like to hear from?
- How do you stay in touch with people?

- Are you drinking enough water?
- How do you stay hydrated?
- How do you stay cool?

- Do your clothes need hanging up or organising?
- Do you have enough suitable clothes?
- Are there any other parts of your life you would like to organise?

- What games do you like playing?
- Do you have a favourite memory of playing games?
- Is there a game you would like to play again or learn?

steps



- Where and when is the market closest to you?
- If you had a market stall what would you sell?
- How could you connect more with your community?
- Do you have access to a computer?
- What is the best use of a computer for you?
- What is the right amount of screen time for you?
- How does dishwashing happen at your place?
- How do you get started with cleaning up?
- Is having a clean kitchen a priority for you?
- When is the best time for a hot drink?
- Do you do anything else at the same time?
- Can you describe your favourite hot drink or mug?



- What tools do you have at your place?
- Is there something you could build or repair?
- Do you like working with your hands?

- Are you sleeping well?
- What helps you to get a good night's rest?
- When do you make the bed?

- Is there anything you would like to learn or study?
- What do you need to get started?
- Is there anything you could teach others?

- How easy is it to keep up with the cleaning at home?
- Do you have cleaning routines?
- Who does what at your place?

steps



- Are you reading a book at the moment?
- Do you find reading enjoyable?
- Do you have a favourite book?



- Is today a good day to do the laundry?
- How does your laundry usually happen?
- Do you need some help?



- Do you set an alarm at home and what for?
- What happens when the alarm goes off?
- If you got up earlier, how would you use that extra time?



- Is there something in your life you would like to say 'no' to?
- What have you said 'no' to in the past?
- Can you speak up or say 'no' when you need to?



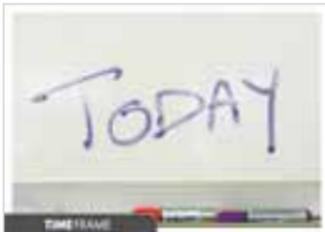
- Is there anyone you would like to send a card or letter to?
- Is there anyone you would like to receive a card or letter from?
- How do you show your appreciation to others?
- Is there something you could set a date for today?
- How do you keep track of your schedule?
- What event, appointment or meeting would you most like to see listed on your calendar?
- What is at the top of your 'to do' list at the moment?
- How do you prioritise the things you want to do?
- Do you find making lists helpful?
- Who prepares the meals at your place?
- What is your favourite meal to share with others?
- Are there any changes you would like to make regarding food?

steps

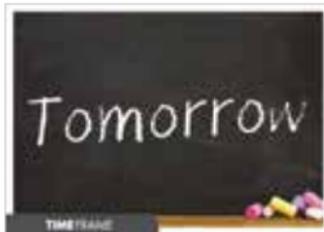
## Timeframe cards



- What simple step could you take right now?
- How would it help?
- Do you need anything to take that step?



- What is one positive thing you could do today?
- By the end of today, what is one step you would like to have taken?
- What could you do to make a start on something today?



- What is one useful step you could take tomorrow?
- When will you do it, how long will it take, and do you need anything to do it?
- Is there something you can do today to prepare for tomorrow's step?



- What steps do you want to take this week?
- Is there someone who can support you in achieving them?
- How will you acknowledge the effort you have made?



# What are some other ideas for using Next Steps?



We hope the sample questions in the previous section will spark ideas about the kinds of conversations and activities that *Next Steps* lends itself to, whether used with groups or individuals, in single or multiple sessions.

In this section, you will find more ideas to help you decide how you will use this resource.

## *Selecting cards according to themes*

You may want to use the whole set of cards or you may want to make selections according to such themes as:

- Independent living
- In my community
- At home
- Staying well
- The status quo.

In addition, you can invite people to select cards that represent the past, the present or the future, for example:

- Things I have done
- Things I am doing
- Things I could do.



Or you can invite people to arrange cards according to whether the activities are:

- inside or outside
- solo or with others
- most or least favourite
- regular or occasional.

On the other hand, you may choose to simply spread the cards out and leave them as visual prompts for any conversation that may spontaneously follow.

### *An opening question*

Getting started could be as simple as spreading the cards out and asking a question such as, 'Is there a next step you could take today?'

This can work with a team as well as with an individual. This simple opening question can readily lead to others, for example:

- How would you be feeling if you took the next step or steps?

- Who could join you in this?
- Who could help?
- What does this step say about the strengths you possess?
- Using the timeframe cards, can you identify the best time to take this next step?
- Do you need any equipment to take this step, for example, do you need a pen or some tools?
- How can you best get ready to take this step?

The conversation can be extended even further using ideas such as those below.



### *Exploring future pictures and goal setting*

Even the simplest of next steps can be aspirations and as such they can represent great hope. The ‘miracle question,’ which derives directly from solution-focused practice, is a useful questioning technique for imagining what could be:

- Imagine you woke up tomorrow and a miracle had taken place while you were sleeping and your best hopes were realised. Can you see a card that represents the next steps you would be taking?
- What would be the first thing you would do? This could be anything from simply going for a walk, sourcing some information, packing a bag or getting on a bus. Considering future pictures like this is a great way of helping a future picture go from being hypothetical or abstract to concrete or real.



*Next Steps* can be used to break a long-term goal down into achievable bite-sized chunks. For example, a person who is seeking employment may choose the cards that represent sourcing information, making a list, having a haircut, doing a course or going to a library as important steps towards getting that job.

### *Exploring strengths*

Any positive change a person wishes to make will be made possible by drawing upon the strengths and resources that exist within and around them. Using questions such as the following, *Next Steps* can help focus attention on the strengths a person might hold, aspire to, or draw upon:

- What strengths will help your next step happen?
- What gives you confidence that you will be successful in taking that step?
- Who or what can you draw upon to help bring about a change?
- Do you know anyone who does this step well? Is there anything you can copy from what they do?
- Even if you think you don't have these particular strengths fully at your fingertips

right now, just imagine that you do. Imagine or make believe that you have those strengths and capacities in spades! What would be the first action you would take?

### *Recognising exceptions*

Congruent with the premise upon which *Next Steps* is built is the understanding that life consists of a series of steps. Human service workers find their paths intersecting with people accessing services, even if briefly. The steps that a person takes during that time of intersection may have happened anyway, and the worker may play a role simply in supporting someone along the way. Fundamental to this understanding is that there can be many steps a person might have taken that could tell a different story to the one being told in a worker's presence or in the



context of the work. In this way, using *Next Steps* could be an enlightening experience for a worker who might ask someone:

- What steps have you taken before?
- How did you do it?
- What can we learn from that time?
- What was in place then that could be there again?
- Do you wish to do that again?

### *Prioritising*

Given that change involves a series of steps, *Next Steps* can be used as a means for prioritising actions. For example, if several cards have been chosen, we might ask people to arrange them in a row or column according to questions such as the following:

- Which is the most important step to take right now?
- Which one would someone important to you choose?
- Which one would come next?
- Which one needs to happen now or today?
- Are there any you will do tomorrow or next week?
- Which steps do you think are the easiest/most important/most significant/least favourite (and so on)
- Is there one you would like some help with?

## Scaling

In addition to prioritising, *Next Steps* can be used for measuring and evaluating progress or change by pairing cards with a simple numerical scale, commonly 1—10 or 1—5. For example, a person may be invited to measure how far along the pathway towards their preferred future they see themselves. The rubbish bins could represent a cleaning up goal, the tools bench could represent a building or repair task, the book could represent something they are reading or studying. The conversation can then be explored further by asking such questions as:

- You have chosen 4 to describe where you are at right now with a particular step. What steps helped you to get where you are now? (This helps us to value and appreciate exceptions and learning experiences, as well as the effort we put in along the way.)
- What strengths did you use to get as high as a 4?
- What steps and strengths are you are using to keep yourself from slipping back to a 3?
- What is one step you might take to get to a 5?
- Were you ever at 0 or 1? What steps did you take to move forward?

As well as simple numerical scales, visual metaphors can be very useful tools for scaling. A picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes, and sometimes a simple drawing of a ladder, a pathway, a thermometer and so on, can be very useful ways of depicting how a next step is going. (See *The Scaling Kit* and *PaperWorks* published by Innovative Resources for simple line drawings that can be used to accompany *Next Steps*.)

### *Self-care planning*

Whether in the home or in the workplace, looking after oneself is a goal that many people share. But like all goals, being ok or well is rarely the result of a single action; we all take multiple steps to care for ourselves and others. Using the *Next Steps* cards we can consider questions such as:

- What steps are you taking right now to stay ok or to improve your wellbeing?
- What is one step you could take that might involve someone else (sharing a meal, visiting someone, going to a market)?
- What steps do you take alone to look after yourself (reading a book, having a cup of tea or coffee, working in the garden)?
- Does a balance of steps serve you best (for example, a mix of inside and outside, still and active, loud and quiet)?

### *Storytelling, creative writing, journalling and art therapy*

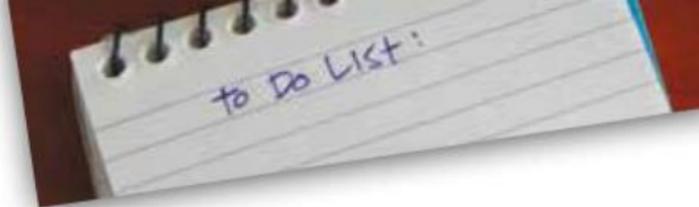
Visual images can be very effective prompts for storytelling, creative writing, journalling and art. Whether truth or fiction, stories give people the opportunity to express feelings, values and culture. As well as releasing the sheer joy of creativity, storytelling, writing and making art can play an important role in processing experiences and connecting with others. To receive and value people's stories is integral to social justice and respect. Here are some ideas for activities in groups (such as in the classroom) as well as in one's personal writing, journalling or art practice:

- Choose one card and tell/write a story using the image as a prompt. What is your most memorable experience of this activity or object? (It could be your best, worst, or funniest experience.)
- Place the cards face down and randomly choose 3 – 6 cards. Or shuffle and deal the cards. Can you tell or write a story using all of these cards? (Remember, it can be true or embellished with a healthy dose of creative imagination!)
- A variation is to leave the ending open and randomly choose another card that will give you clues to the ending of the story.
- Can you represent the story in a painting or drawing?
- Choose a card. Can you tell/write a story, or create a picture about what happens when this activity or step seems to disappear (or diminish) from our own individual life, or the life of our family, community, workplace, or world?
- What actions could you take to make more room for this activity personally and in your community in general?
- Choose a card. Write a poem, create a collage, painting or drawing inspired by the card.
- Choose a series of cards that represent activities you would like to do more often, or goals you have. Write about these cards in your journal. Create illustrations, doodles and collages about them. You could choose a different card each day, or you could record how you are going with a particular goal or step over time.
- Find inspiring quotes to go with the cards you have chosen.

### *Aged care*

Being with the aged can be a rich and rewarding experience. Wisdom can accompany age as can the negative stereotypes so often used to describe people as they grow older. Planning a future is just as much a part of getting older as reflecting on the past. Simple visual tools like *Next Steps* have a role to play in both respects and any of the activities above can be rich activities for older people.

A reality too, though, is that dementia and accompanying memory loss too often affect the experience of the elderly. Being able to navigate the steps to be taken to live in dignity and with respect can involve assessment and support. *Next Steps* can play a role in not only identifying the steps needed for daily living (showering, cleaning, eating, drinking) but also those that affirm identity and individuality (writing, reading, learning, playing or listening



to music, spending time with family or community). In this way, *Next Steps* can be used in aged care to help identify if support is needed for the practical steps of daily life as well as those activities that nurture the soul alongside the body.

### *Creating recovery plans*

Recovery plans are used extensively within health and disability settings. Circumstances can be as diverse as recovery from mental illness, brain and spinal injury, heart attack, stroke and other trauma. Recovery plans often involve identifying steps towards independent living, living safely or living with supports. Mostly, it is professionals who make formal or informal assessments of what is required to enable this to occur.

*Next Steps* can help to place the assessment in the hands of the person being assessed. A strengths-based assumption is that people are the experts in their situation and know what is happening for them better than anyone else. It follows then, that people accessing services could use a tool like *Next Steps* to inspire conversations with workers about:

- steps they have taken
- what they can already do
- constraints or ‘what is getting in the way’
- who could help
- what step would be most helpful or achievable for them
- how they will notice differences
- how they will celebrate achievements.

### *Professional development and training*

*Next Steps* can be a powerful tool for:

- building empathy
- hearing people’s stories of daily life
- knowing about the challenges people sometimes face
- understanding how recovery might happen
- identifying steps towards independence
- assessing progress and change
- learning how best to support someone in their recovery.

For these reasons *Next Steps* is a tool that human service educators, managers and supervisors may find particularly useful for teams and individuals working in mental health support, youth and family services, counselling, aged care, emergency and trauma recovery.

## **About the author:** **Andrew Shirres**

Andrew has a Bachelor's Degree and a Post Graduate Diploma in Fine Arts, a Bachelor of Social Work, a Diploma of Management and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. He is a highly experienced facilitator of 'strengths-based practice', delivering workshops across many community and social service sectors throughout Australia and beyond. Through his training and group facilitation work Andrew has developed a myriad of skills and experiences to share with new and seasoned practitioners. Andrew's commitment and dedication to reflective practice have earned him great respect while working extensively in both mental health service delivery and management for more than ten years. He is a facilitator of 'strengths approach' learning and skills development for individuals, teams and organisations. Andrew is the practice development coach at St Luke's Innovative Resources.



# **About the publisher:** **St Luke's Innovative Resources**

Innovative Resources is part of Anglicare Victoria, one of Australia's leading community service organisations providing child, youth, family and community services throughout Victoria and New South Wales.

Innovative Resources publishes card sets, stickers, books and picture books, as well as digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, stories and goals. Our resources are for all ages and bring colour and creativity to therapeutic and educational settings all over the world. They are used by counsellors, psychologists, teachers, trainers, social workers, managers, mentors, parents, teams,

supervisors ... and anyone who works with people to create positive change.

Innovative Resources also offers highly-engaging training in 'strengths-based' approaches to working with people where change arises out of a focus on strengths and 'power-with'. We also offer 'tools' workshops on ways of using resources to invigorate human service work. Our workshops respect different learning styles and the power of images and storytelling to connect with children and adults alike.

[www.innovativeresources.org](http://www.innovativeresources.org)

# Acknowledgements

The creation of any resource is always a team effort. This one is no different. I would like to acknowledge everyone who contributed to *Next Steps*: Firstly, Karen Bedford for her patience, support, editing skills, written contributions and practice wisdom; Mat Jones for his artistic wizardry in both design of the card set and taking photographs; Paula Markey who was responsible for the bulk of the images and who was terrific to work with; Kerry Wise for both her support and her photograph of Sheetal Menezes and Kiann Puthussery for the 'mother and child' image; Sheetal and Kiann for their willing involvement; Sandra Goode, Katie Varallo, Delwyn Hopkins, Hannah Gordon and all patient workshop participants for trialling the prototypes and providing such helpful feedback.

Cheers everyone,  
*Andrew Shirres*



## *Mental Health Support or Information (in Australia)*

### **Beyondblue**

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Depression and anxiety information and support service.

1300 22 4636

[www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport)

### **Lifeline**

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

13 11 14

Access to crisis support, suicide prevention  
and mental health support services.

### **mindhealthconnect**

[www.mindhealthconnect.org.au](http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au)

Access to mental health care services, online  
programs and resources.

# *next* **steps**

*digital version*

Ever felt stuck and wondered what the next step might be? Beginning with one or two simple, practical steps is often the best way to gather momentum. Perhaps our task today is simply to get out of bed or open the curtains or have a shower? Perhaps it is to call a friend or make an appointment or go for a walk?

Using full-colour photographs of everyday objects and activities, these cards present an accessible way for anyone to identify one or more achievable steps they can take this afternoon, tomorrow or next week. These cards are invaluable in settings such as mental health, family services, counselling, emergency and trauma recovery.



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