





# DSP Connectors Training Resource

Disability Support Program



Opportunities & Social Development

## **Section 1: Introduction**

1.1: Purpose of this Document

1.2: Overview of the DSP Connector Role

## **Section 2: Practice Information**

2.1: Facilitating Introductions to DSP

2.2: Obtaining Consent

2.3: Note Taking

2.4: Analyzing Trends

2.5: Safety and Safeguards

2.6: Overview of Past and Future DSP Programs

2.7: Overview of Other Government and Community Referrals

## **Section 3: Tools and Resources**

3.1: Contacts and Supports

3.2: Helpful Tools

# Section 1: Introduction

In Nova Scotia, we are on a journey to implement international best practices that promote choice, full community inclusion, and human rights for people with disabilities. We are striving to enhance the way people connect with and contribute to their communities. We want Nova Scotia to be a place where people with disabilities can choose the life they want to live, in communities that are welcoming, inclusive, and supportive. A life where individuals can build authentic relationships, explore their interests, and achieve their full potential as valued citizens in their community.

Nova Scotia's Disability Support Program (DSP) has implemented a community-based framework for supporting individuals with disabilities to live their vision for a good life in community. DSP Connectors are a key position within this community-based framework.

## 1.1. Purpose of this Document

This document sets out the core elements of training that drive and support DSP Connectors. These elements are key to delivering and sustaining the Human Rights Remedy and rights of people with disabilities and their families. The following document is **a resource for you as a DSP Connector** to:

- Provide guidance on roles, responsibilities, strategies, and tools to guide the way you work
- Provide an overview of other government and community programs for appropriate referral pathways
- Provide awareness of key contacts and supports for your day-to-day work

This document can also be a key resource for Team Leads and other Regional Hub Staff to help support DSP Connectors.



It is important to note that this is not a step-by step procedure document nor an all-encompassing list of tasks, tools, and policies.

DSP Connectors should refer to corresponding DSP policies and consult with their Team Lead for more information.

## 1.2. Overview of the DSP Connector Role

DSP Connectors are a **critical part** of the Human Rights Remedy in Nova Scotia by removing barriers to obtaining information and accessing and navigating supports for individuals with disabilities.

DSP Connectors operate as the front door to DSP for new applicants and community members seeking supports and services. Individuals with disabilities are supported by DSP Connectors in understanding and navigating the steps to working with DSP or finding other supports and services that would be more appropriate given their unique needs. As the name implies, the purpose of DSP Connectors is to help individuals connect with who and what they need:

- **Support individuals with disabilities** and their networks to understand what DSP offers and how the Disability Support Program intersects with other government programs.
- **Connect people to DSP Local Area Coordinators**, and to other services and supports like income assistance, health, and housing, based on their situation and needs.

**The DSP Connector role works at the individual and family level** to listen and get to know people and their needs. They work with a person-centred approach and provide appropriate DSP referrals and/or other community-based referrals.

The DSP Connector also works at the community level to understand what services, supports, and programs exist in their community beyond DSP so they can identify and refer community members who could be served by another organization as well as DSP, or instead of DSP.

They also work in partnership with community leaders, organizations, and government and non-government service providers (e.g., continuing care, income assistance, 211, and many others).

#### Key Responsibilities of the DSP Connector Role



Provide individuals with exceptional service and linkages to supports and services



Referrals to additional DCS and external supports



Identify and collect foundational information



Identify trends and Patterns



Triage and intake of partner referrals



Uphold values and principles

## Section 2: Practice Information

The following section provides guidance on the foundational principles and practice information to support DSP Connectors in their day-to-day work alongside people with disabilities, families/support networks, and communities.

In the next few pages, you will find:

- Overview of Facilitating Introductions to DSP
  - Key Points for DSP Referrals
- Obtaining Consent
- Analyzing Trends
- Note Taking
- Safety and Safeguards
- Overview of Past and Future DSP Programs
- Overview of Other Government and Community Referrals



## 2.1. Facilitating Introductions to DSP

Connectors take time to listen to individuals and their natural support network to better understand the individual's strengths, aspirations, needs, relationships, and contributions so that they can make appropriate connections. DSP connectors will be available directly via email, phone, or in person.

Most interactions will occur over the phone, following the DSP Connection Form. It is important to follow the Connection Form to ensure you are collecting essential information while remaining flexible and conversational with the caller.

### Key points for DSP referrals:

Within DSP, there are three main referral pathways for individuals. Most individuals will be connected to a Local Area Coordinator, but it is important to also identify when individuals should be connected to Intensive Planning and Support Coordinators, or Eligibility, Funding, and Assessment Coordinators.







## Local Area Coordinators

DSP Connectors will **encourage most people to connect with a Local Area Coordinator (LAC)** including people who are unsure about the supports they require.

### Who can work with an LAC?

- Anyone living in the local community that self-identifies as having a disability can access Local Area Coordination. Access to a Local Area Coordinator has no exclusion or eligibility criteria.
- An LAC can remain alongside the person through life and service transitions.
- An LAC works alongside up to 50 individuals within their community.

### What support do LACs provide?

- Access relevant, timely information in a variety of ways that are useful to them.
- Identify personal strengths, goals and needs.
- Find practical (non-service) ways of doing the things they want or need to do, where possible.
- Develop and use personal networks- family, friends and community. Building mutual support, friendships and reducing loneliness and isolation.
- Plan for the future and practice support to make it happen- building capacity, natural relationships and resilience.
- Connect with, be part of and contribute to local community life.
- Access, navigate, choose and control supports and services if required- right support, right time, right way.



## Individualized Planning and Support Coordinators

New applicants to DSP **will not be able to choose to work with an IPSC** without assignment through an IPSC Team Lead. This is because IPSCs have smaller caseloads to dedicate more time to individuals with more intensive planning and support needs.

### Who can work with an IPSC?

- Intensive Planning and Support Coordinators work with individuals with disabilities whose support needs are complex and require a coordinated approach across multiple services to live in community.
- Intensive Planning and Support Coordinator are alongside individuals to develop intensive transition and support plans.
- Intensive Planning and Support Coordinators works alongside up to 20-30 individuals.

### What support do IPSCs provide?

- Develop and work with personal networks- family, friends and community.
- Access relevant, timely information in a variety of ways that are useful to them.
- Be heard, in control and make choices.
- Identify their personal strengths, goals and needs.
- Utilize natural supports to do the things they want or need to do, wherever possible.
- Access, navigate, choose and control supports and services
- Plan for the future and support people to explore and evolve what works best for them in community.
- Connect with, be part of and contribute to community life.

- Identify options for supports and services and support them to help and access them.




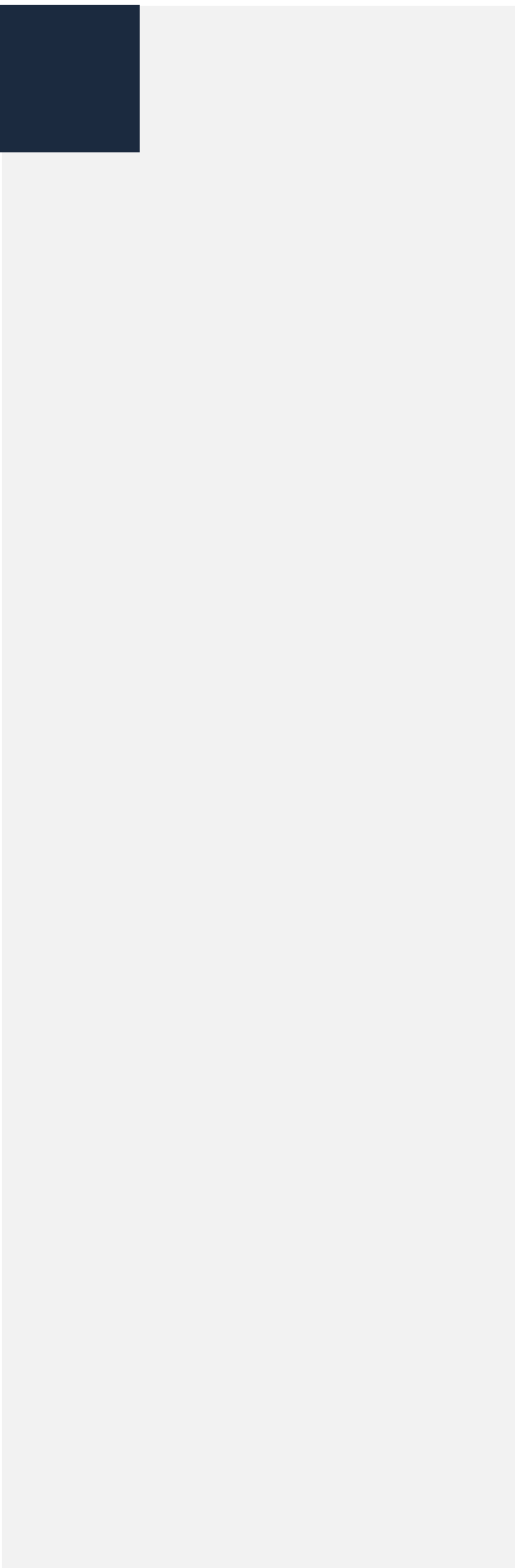
### **Eligibility, Funding, and Assessment Coordinators**

#### **Who can work with an EFAC?**

- Anyone may contact an EFAC to learn about DSP requirements and processes.
- Applicants work with EFACs for the initial eligibility process. If found eligible, then they work with EFACs for needs assessment and funding level processes.

#### **What support do EFACs provide?**

- EFACs use a person-directed approach, which means they consider each person as a unique individual, each family/support network as a unique family/support network, and each set of circumstances as a unique set of circumstances.
- EFACs share knowledge and act as point persons for all questions about DSP eligibility, regardless of whether a person is a current program participant.
- EFACs apply their expert knowledge about supportive decision-making to tailor information about program requirements and processes, to enable applicants' self-direction and agency.
- EFACs carry out initial eligibility evaluations, by reviewing diagnostic and functional medical documentation, collateral information, and financial information. EFACs collaborate with healthcare professionals as needed to clarify and understand each applicant's individual situation. Then, guided by policy and guidelines, an eligibility determination is made.

- 
- The EFAC conducts comprehensive, multidimensional needs assessments with individuals, including interviewing the applicant and their family or existing support network. Assessment results are then interpreted to identify the appropriate level within the Support Level Framework.
- 

## 2.2. Obtaining Consent

Once you have introduced yourself to the caller, have identified who you are speaking with and the reason for the call, it is essential that you obtain consent to capture personal information and register the person in CCM.

If you are speaking directly to the individual:

1. Ask for Consent: Directly ask for their permission in a straightforward manner: “Do I have your consent to get you registered in our online system?”
2. Clarify: Let them know how the information will be used. For example, “Information captured will only be used to help support you better and ensure that you are not asked to repeat these details multiple times.”
3. Encourage Questions: Invite them to ask questions or express any concerns. For example, “Do you have any questions about the information I will be gathering or how it will be used?”
4. Document Consent: If they agree, acknowledge their consent verbally and check the consent box within the Online Form in CCM.

If you are speaking to a service partner, family member, etc.:

1. Awareness of Request: Ask whether the applicant is aware of the call being made on their behalf.
2. Confirm: If the individual is present with the caller you can ask to speak with them to confirm they consent to the registration. If not, you can call the applicant to discuss the referral and obtain consent. Alternatively, this can be completed over email with the applicant if that is preferred.
3. Document Consent: If they agree, acknowledge their consent verbally and check the consent box within the Online Form in CCM.

## 2.3. Note taking

Contact notes are the foundation of person-centred support. They are an essential component of documenting interactions/contact (or attempted contact), accountabilities, actions, changes, connections with partners, outcomes, incidents and issues arising when supporting people with disabilities, families/support networks and service partners. DSP Connectors will use the online connection form within CCM to document notes.

### **DSP Connector contact notes....**

- ✓ Provide a record of the visit/interaction and are a memory aid
- ✓ State accurately what is happening/has happened, what you heard, what you saw, avoiding any vagueness wherever you can
- ✓ Highlight any issues that arise and any agreed actions for either party and timescales for responses/follow up
- ✓ Are an important reflective tool for 1:1 meeting with Team Leads
- ✓ Meet professional and legal requirements and provides a source of information for any investigations and inquiries

## **What Should Be Included**

It is a key expectation for DSP Connectors for contact notes to be up to date in a timely manner with relevant, accurate information. Individuals and their families/ support networks can review contact notes with the Support Staff at any time. Good contact notes also support more accurate, and efficient monitoring and evaluation.

### **DSP Connector contact notes should include/or be...**

- ✓ Purpose of visit/contact
- ✓ What was discussed/issues raised/skills identified/actions, desired outcomes, responsibilities/actions
- ✓ Concise and clear – bullet points are acceptable
- ✓ Objective, factual, relevant and professional
- ✓ A log of attempted contacts (e.g., left a message to call back)
- ✓ Email communications
- ✓ Any need for escalation (e.g. safeguarding) and why
- ✓ Summarized with the individual at the end of the visit

## **What Shouldn't Be Included**

When thinking about capturing relevant and accurate information in contact notes, it can be useful to think about what should not be included.

Remember that any contact notes may be read by other people – Team Leads, colleagues, external professionals and, most importantly, people and families that DSP staff are working with. Wherever possible, Connectors should agree on the content and accuracy of notes with the person and their support network.

### **DSP Connector contact notes should not include/or be...**

- X Personal opinions, judgments or assumptions
- X Too much detail – should provide an overview while not oversharing personal information
- X Any surprises to the individual if they were to read them
- X Subjective descriptions
- X Unnecessary information (e.g. the weather, the color of someone's shirt)
- X Vagueness



## 2.4. Analyzing Trends

Reviewing what is happening within the introduction to DSP process will be important to ensure Connectors are properly supported, and practices evolve in a timely way. Do you notice:

- Trends in calls to DSP
- Average wait times for connections to DSP supports or other community supports increasing or decreasing?
- What qualitative information are you learning about changes in circumstances leading to reassessment?

Bring your observations to your Team Lead during your meetings. Team Leads have access to the data needed to analyse and act on these observations. Data provides information to help investigate, understand, and respond to trends, so DSP may continually improve support to Connectors and, in turn, Connectors may better support people, families, and sector partners.

## 2.5. Safety and Safeguards

DSP Connectors, alongside other professionals, have a legal obligation to ensure all people are protected and safe within the communities in which they live. Connectors are alongside people through a range of life's opportunities and challenges. This means that Connectors may sometimes find themselves in situations where a risk is present to an individual's safety.

Wherever possible, Connectors are guided by the concept of the **Dignity of Risk**- that life experiences carry the risk of failure and that we must support people with disabilities in experiencing a spectrum of success and failures. This means that Connectors enable individuals to manage their own risk whenever possible.

However, Connectors also have the **duty to report** when they identify a potential risk or safeguarding situation that may cause harm to an individual. Connectors need to **follow the applicable laws and policies to respond appropriately to safeguarding situations**.

## 2.6. Overview of Past and Future DSP Programs

DSP Connectors are responsible for maintaining an understanding of the supports and services available within their region, including any updates, changes, or new offerings. This will involve proactively researching and staying informed about community resources, benefits, and service enhancements to ensure that you can provide relevant and timely assistance.

### Ways to stay informed include:

1. Attending Community Meetings and Events: Participate in local meetings and events to stay informed about new resources and updates.
2. Utilize Online Resource Directories: Regularly check and review online directories and databases that list community resources and support services. Additionally, review updates from municipal and provincial websites, including policy changes and new programs.
3. Maintain Relationships with Service Providers: Build and maintain relationships with key contacts at local service providers and community organizations to receive first-hand information about changes and new services.

### Past DSP Programs

As the first point of contact for individuals seeking support, DSP Connectors receive a variety of requests and questions. Connectors need knowledge and awareness of existing (pre-Remedy) DSP programs, as well as what DSP options look like with Individualized Funding.

Below is a list of existing DSP programs that new DSP participants will not be joining but that will continue to operate for existing participants as DSP transitions into the future state of Individualized Funding.

#### Flex Individualized Funding Program (FLEX)

Flex provides individualized funding to participants living at home with their families or who live independently with support from their families or personal support networks. This funding is used to:

1. purchase supports specific to a participant's disability-related needs and goals;
2. promote the participant's independence, self-reliance, and social inclusion; and
3. Offer an alternative to, prevent or delay a participant's placement in a DSP funded residential support option.

#### Alternative Family Support (AFS)

The AFS Program provides an approved, private family home, where support is provided for up to two persons who are not related to the AFS provider. Participants may receive varying levels of support with activities of daily living, and routine home and community activities.

#### Independent Living Support (ILS)

ILS provides funding for ILS Service Providers to deliver a range of support hours to ILS participants that is based on the assessed needs and life circumstances of the participants, who are semi-independent and require minimum support to live on their own in a rented or their own home.

### Shared Services

Shared services are a combination of supports and funding from DSP and the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care (SLTC) for individuals with disabilities under the age of 65 whose primary needs are physical and whose licensed nursing needs can be met in the community. The purpose of shared services are to support Nova Scotians with disabilities under the age of 65 to live the life they choose in their communities, to move away from facility living arrangements, and to support community integration and inclusion.

### **New DSP Programs**

With the implementation of the Remedy and Individualized Funding (IF), DSP moved away from a menu of different programs to a person-centered, person-directed approach. With IF, individuals build a plan tailored to their needs, goals, and vision of a good life in community.

### Individualized Funding

IF is a personalized approach to planning and funding, giving DSP participants choice and control over their supports and services. IF allows participants to choose how their support is provided, who provides it, and what services they receive. This funding follows the individual and not the service/program. Additionally, funding amounts are determined by direct reference to the individual's specific disability needs and their support plan. Funding spend is governed by an Allowable Usage Framework. The following are the IF spending guidelines:

- ✓ Daily Living Support Staff - Costs associated with supports/services that assist in activities of daily living or are instrumental activities of daily living, for the individual to employ their support worker
- ✓ Community Life - Reasonable costs intended to promote and support the participants well-being, social citizenship, life skill, and family wellness (e.g., day programs, recreation activities)

- ✓ Continuing Education - Costs associated with employment and continuing education for the participant or the staff they have hired, to support them to access paid employment, training, volunteering, and educational programs.
- ✓ Administration - Costs associated with the management and administration of Individualized Funding (e.g bookkeeping and tax preparation services). Only applicable to those self-managing their funding.
- ✓ Medical Supports - Costs associated with medical supports, such as nursing support for injections. Only applicable to individuals with specific funding for medical supports.
- ✓ Other - Other reasonable disability-related supports and services. This category should only be used to report on a purchase made prior to approval by the EFAC and does not fit into another category.

#### Home Sharing (previously Alternative Family Support)

Home sharing is an arrangement in which a person with a disability chooses to share a home with another member of their community who is paid to provide support and/or care (support provider). Either party could be the primary homeowner or tenant.

## 2.7. Overview of Other Government and Community Referrals

DSP Connectors must have an understanding and knowledge of what services, supports, and programs exist in their community beyond DSP to appropriately identify and refer community members who may be best served by different organizations. Below is a list of a few services, supports, and programs that DSP Connectors should have strong awareness of:

### 211 Nova Scotia

*Contact Information:* call 2-1-1; text 211676

*Who they serve:* Everyone

211 Nova Scotia is a free and confidential 24/7 connection to programs and services. Through information and referrals, they help connect Nova Scotians to local community groups, non-profit and government organizations. It can be accessed via phone call, text, email, and a live online chat. Additionally, 211's online database of social services and programs in Nova Scotia may also be beneficial for DSP Connectors to use when trying to find certain supports.



### Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA)

*Contact Information:* 1-877-424-1177 (8:30 AM – 4:30 PM)

*Who they serve:* Individuals aged 19+

The ESIA program helps individuals when they are not able to support themselves or their family. Depending on their situation, they may get money for their basic needs, help with other special needs or support with employment. Income Assistance (IA) can help with basic needs (e.g., food, rent, utilities) and special needs (e.g., pharmacare, emergency dental care). If an individual is on IA, Employment Support Services can help them with information opportunities and services to build the skills and experience they need for work. ESIA serves adults aged 19+ and in certain situations those aged 16-18.



### Continuing Care

*Contact Information:* 1-800-225-7225 (8:30 AM – 4:30 PM)

*Who they serve:* Individuals needing ongoing care

Continuing Care Services are provided to eligible people who need care outside of the hospital in their home and community. Care can be provided on a long or short-term basis. Continuing Care Programs and Services include Home and Community Services Care, Supports for Caregivers, Equipment, Long-Term Care, Protecting Vulnerable Adults, Community Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy, and more. NS Health Care Coordinators provide assessments and case management to determine the type and level of care needed and authorize services.



### Autism Nova Scotia

*Contact Information:* 1-877-544-4495

*Who they serve:* Individuals on the autism spectrum and their families

Autism Nova Scotia is a community—based organization that serves Autistics/individuals on the autism spectrum and their families through leadership, advocacy, education, training, and programming across the lifespan. They deliver its various programs and services from offices and Autism Resource Centres across the province. To varying degrees, they have staff and resources located in Halifax, Annapolis Valley, Cape Breton Region, Cumberland County, Pictou County, South Shore, South West, Strait Area, and Truro.





## Youth Outreach Program

*Contact Information:* see government webpage

*Who they serve:* Youth aged 12 to 24

The Youth Outreach Program is a community-based program designed to improve the immediate and long-term social, educational/vocational, economic and health outcomes for vulnerable youth. Youth Outreach has three program streams: General, Sexual Violence Prevention, and Youth in Care. Some service providers deliver more than one stream. Service provider program may include: drop-in for youth to hang out with peers in a safer space to connect and get support, emergency response to help address significant risks and immediate crisis, outreach to meet youth where they are and where they feel most safe, support to navigate and interpret systems and services, and more. The program's webpage details program locations and contact information across the Central, Northeastern, and Western regions.

## NSPHA Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency (NSPHA)

*Contact Information:* see contact us webpage for district office phone numbers

*Who they serve:* Low-income Nova Scotians

NSPHA is responsible for the management and delivery of government-owned public housing for Nova Scotians. NSPHA helps low-income individuals and families find a home that's right for them, in a community that offers the services, supports and opportunities they need. The agency has 4 district offices (Cape Breton Island, Metropolitan, Northern, and Western District) which are responsible for administering applications and placements, collecting rent, resolving tenant issues, and maintaining and repairing properties.



### CPP Disability (CPPD) Benefits

*Contact Information:* 1-800-277-9914

*Who they serve:* Persons with disabilities under 65

CPPD benefits provide partial income replacement to eligible CPP contributors who are under age 65 with a severe and prolonged disability. There are 2 CPPD benefits: the disability pension and the post-retirement disability benefit. The disability pension is provided to individuals who meet the eligibility requirements and are not yet receiving a retirement pension, and the post-retirement disability benefit is provided to individuals who are found to be disabled after the start of their retirement pension. Children of CPPD beneficiaries are also eligible for a flat-rate monthly benefit up to the age of 18, or up to age 25 if attending school full-time.

There are 2 eligibility criteria for the CPPD program. First, applicants must have made contributions to the program in 4 of the last 6 years, with minimum levels of earnings in each of these years, or 3 of the last 6 years for those with 25 or more years of contributions. Second, they must demonstrate that their physical or mental disability prevents them from working regularly at any job that is substantially gainful, and that it is long-term and of indefinite duration or is likely to result in death.

## Section 3: Tools and Resources

The following section provides additional tools and resources relevant to DSP Connector responsibilities.

In the next few pages, you will find:

- Contacts and Supports
- Helpful Tools



### 3.1. Contacts and Supports

**Comprehensive Orientation:** A comprehensive onboarding and training for all new Connectors, including a supportive approach to building strong knowledge of and partnerships with people with disabilities, their families, local communities and local government and non-government service partners.

**Supervision:** Each DSP Connector will be reporting directly to a EFAC Team Lead.

**Regular Team and Regional Meetings:** Regular team and regional meetings and workshops provide an opportunity for reflective practice, shared learning and problem solving, exploring current issues and trends and for learning about new programs and services.

## 3.2. Helpful Tools

DSP Connectors have a diverse array of tools within their professional toolkit, to meet the unique needs of the individuals and communities they are working alongside.

The following are some of the key tools that are a part of a DSP Connector practice:

### 1. Online Connection Form

The DSP connection form can be found on CCM and is to be used by DSP Connectors to ensure all information provided by callers is captured in one place. This form can be used to help Connectors ensure they are gathering the right information.

### 2. DSP Individualized Funding Policy

DSP Connectors can utilize the DSP individualized Funding (IF) Policy to guide their discussion should individuals have specific questions regarding the process, eligibility, and other information related to IF.

### 3. Email Lists

Signing up for email lists from community resources, such as the Community Health Team's monthly email, can be beneficial for DSP Connectors to receive timely information about new local programming and events.

### 4. Helping Trees

Helping Trees are infographic documents that assist service providers and inform residents of the many helping resources available in a specific area or region. DSP Connectors may find the Dartmouth and Halifax Peninsula Trees helpful to learn about the array of services and supports available in these areas.

**Commented [TJ1]:** <https://novascotia.sharepoint.com/sites/DSPServiceDelivery> Team SharePoint Site that will host resource documents