

From the board: Investing in Support Workers

My first role as a support worker was in 2008 supporting adults to develop their skills and participate in their community through a day service. One of my key roles was facilitating song writing workshops, which lead to supporting people to have their voices heard by banks and politicians, but also by family and friends. I took my direction from the service and the people fitted into our programs, with some ability to help shape the programs.

Between 2011 and 2014, I worked for several other organisations in similar roles, and during this time I started to think more about what good support looks like – both for me and the people I was working with. In 2014, I began studying inclusion and this gave me an understanding of how disability has been perceived throughout history, and how this impacts on the present day. It was here that I was introduced to the theory of Social Role Valorisation (SRV) which would influence my understanding of support considerably.

In 2015, while completing my studies, I began supporting a man who manages his own supports with the help of his parents. This experience brought home how intentional one must be to ensure that support is working towards inclusion and the development of the person. I began to really think about the language that I was using as a support worker and I recognised afresh how my role could influence the life of the person that I was supporting. By developing a greater understanding of how the person felt, I could work alongside the person to break down the barriers that exist between society and its perception of disability.

In 2016, I began working part time as a development worker with a small, family governed organisation. In this role, I take my direction from each person and their family and it is an ongoing conversation about how to assist people to direct their support. This has again changed and increased significantly my understanding of what good support looks like.

This role as a development worker has helped me to see the role of support worker with fresh eyes. Looking back over the last nine years, I see clearly now that my role as a support worker was also to support people to develop and that has been a two-way street. As we learn and grow together, the relationship of support offers growth to both of us as people and not just the one.

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