

CRUCIAL TIMES

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CRU's Mission Statement

- To challenge ideas and practices which limit the lives of people with disabilities.
- To inspire and encourage individuals and organisations to pursue better lives for people with disabilities.

Article references are available upon request – please contact the editor for details.

editorial

As humans, we tend to simplify problems in order to understand them, and we utilise simple solutions to try and solve them. Money has been seen as the simple solution to the complex problems of a chaotic human service system, of services that struggle to do well, and of families and individuals who struggle to participate on an uneven playing field.

Additional new money has been delivered to the Queensland disability sector, and it is yet to be seen whether money will deliver us from all our problems. More funding is welcomed, however the acute danger is that the lives of people with disabilities will be held together with bandaid solutions, and that Queensland will see more of the 'same old' responses: group homes and day centres, rather than responses that enable lives to be meaningful, joyful, fulfilled and with the shared richness of community participation and relationships.

For lives such as these, where people can participate in society as citizens, where services are in their rightful supportive place, the funds must be used to allow positive and enduring change at the level of individuals, families, communities, services and systems. While the sector has issues to address in the short term, we must not lose sight of what's needed for the long term.

How the funds are spent will send signals to the community sector about what government thinks is important. If the government is serious about enduring positive change, about system and service reform, then funds will be spent in ways that improve the capacity of people to have authority in their own lives, and of services to meet needs in responsive ways and to encourage social integration and valued participation in community life. We will see the funds spent in ways that are focused on the future, and mindful of the past. We will also see innovation used as a vehicle for social change.

The challenge is to get the old ideas out of our heads. All that is new is not necessarily good. And all that appears new is not necessarily new. Group homes, cluster housing, villages and day centres have been tried in a range of guises all over the world in the past. They have resulted in split communities: the haves (those with ordinary lives, opportunities for decent living, education, jobs, hobbies, the normal hubbub of community life) and the have-nots (vastly limited experiences of the real world, limited control over their own lives, protected from ordinary community risks, but exposed to the risks of models with congregation and segregation at their core). They did not contribute to communities of tolerance, acceptance, and diversity because those who brought diversity and required tolerance and acceptance were not present. It is also clear that investment in bricks and mortar produces limited dividends: a large amount of money gets tied up in fixed ways of responding to people's

editorial cont.

needs, thereby taking away from opportunities to use the money flexibly.

At times of injections of new money into the system, we are faced with three important concerns. Firstly, naming the issues accurately: understanding the current major concern primarily as a service viability issue is simplistic and short sighted. Blind faith in assessments, models, checklists, glossy documents, standardization, and seeing people as packages and services as market outlets are serious threats to true social justice and will not lead to positive reform.

Secondly we need to expand the range of responses to people's needs through both the structures and the processes whereby people get support to live decent lives. The last few years in Queensland have shown that when people receive new money, they have mostly had to purchase supports from an existing and narrow menu of service arrangements.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, we must invest in people. We must build capacity in service leaders and workers to better meet the needs of people with disabilities and families. We must build capacity in individuals and families to forge their own lives. We must provide ongoing assistance to allow them to do this.

This is an important time in our history. In years to come will we look back, and say 'what a wasted opportunity'? Or will we be relieved that we took this opportunity to move forward, to increase our expectations about what is possible through creating new knowledge, through innovation and through enabling people to do better?

Jane Sherwin

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A word from the President

The best use of money – can it sometimes get in the way?

In the recent State Budget there was a considerable injection of money into the disability sector. For many individuals these monies are certainly much needed. However, I need to emphasise here that receiving financial support is not often the panacea that will best serve to assist people with disabilities interact with life. We need to put money in perspective.

This is certainly not saying that paid support hasn't a role to play. On the contrary. Paid supports can provide one with the autonomy over one's life – the independence and where-with-all to be able to get on with life. But it is the experience of some people with disabilities that receiving monies, and thus paid support, can ultimately be a hindrance to people establishing freely given relationships.

We must support all individuals as they develop their capacity to live, learn, work and participate in all aspects of living in the community. This can only be achieved through a delicate balance of both paid and unpaid supports. Similarly, we must encourage the community to develop its capacity to welcome and support people who have not always had the same opportunities as others to participate in community life in meaningful, productive ways.

Often people simply need social or attitudinal barriers dismantled to enable them to make their way in the community. In both direct and indirect ways, supporting people to contribute and participate makes good economic sense, and produces communities that are vibrant and strong. This is not only the right thing to do, it also makes the most sense.

We are then 'called', not to refer to ourselves by the labels that are used to categorize and therefore 'separate' people from their dreams, but to take a different approach. Such an approach declares and upholds the vision of *all* people to be included and to support the goal we strive to achieve: a community that is welcoming and supportive of all.

We must learn that just throwing money at something doesn't necessarily make it disappear or improve the situation; in fact it could make things worse. We must use money wisely. We must impose the necessary appropriate safeguards as rigorous filters. We must be wise about what is best for individuals, and do just that. We must never let money get in the way.

Mike Duggan

The importance of starting with the person rather than the money

Deb Rouget is the coordinator of Person by Person, a small family governed service in Melbourne that aims to assist adults who have a disability to pursue their aspirations and abilities in the community and develop meaningful relationships with other community members. Person by Person is an alternative to standardised, segregated, institutionalised responses to people's needs. Deb focuses on the creation and provision of innovative services by starting with the person.

With good intentions we have searched and invested a great deal of time, effort and money in systematic solutions that aim to assist people who have disabilities to live in the community. However we remain troubled and somewhat puzzled by the continuance of segregation, notwithstanding the many advantages now more commonly enjoyed by people who have a disability in community life.

It would be comforting to know that by simply investing additional money in our current service systems, that all things "good" would subsequently happen for people who have a disability. However even with a great deal of resources most of our current practices constantly fail to live up to the life-giving rhetoric used to describe them.

We have invested vast amounts of money in technology, paperwork, buildings, bureaucracy, planning tools, management systems, procedures, regulations and so on. Whilst there was great faith in the potential outcomes of such investments, the practical experience of what has happened in people's lives makes many of us wonder whether these investments should have been our priority. We have come to believe that people who have a disability need to fit a particular systematic response rather than ensuring that all efforts need to start with the person first. We are now grappling with what should be the real priorities for our investments and what would bring value to the way in which we serve people who have a disability.

We need to place faith in the reality that there are simply some things that money cannot purchase or produce. For example money does not purchase love, compassion, trust, understanding, humility or respect. It does not end loneliness, seek out relationships, or make a house a home. It can't on its own assist a person who has been isolated from their community to become intertwined in their local neighbourhood and develop friendships. It can't be "with" people in times of crisis, need or desperation. These things come from the hearts of people and their personal investment to find the humanness in each other or, as Michael Kendrick suggests; from being in "right relationship" with each other as human beings. To have the ability to listen, be "with", and search with a creative passion for how a person can be included rather than excluded is a gift one finds in people and community rather than in service systems. As Jack Kornfield states "Love and compassion are not the possession of any group or religious system. They are woven into our human spirit and our very cells. The only nourishment they require is our intimate and heartfelt attention".

Recently I was reminded of the gift that can occur when one pays intimate and heartfelt attention to another's life and when one searches with deep commitment, passion, creativity and endurance. Felicity lives in a small Melbourne community with her family. Following several years of segregation, Felicity and her family have been on a search to find places where she can belong, contribute and become more actively involved her local community. Felicity was successful in obtaining a job in a local supermarket: work which Felicity loves and which has become a place where she is well respected and known. However Felicity, her family and support worker knew there had to be more. So in the first instance they started with Felicity rather than a predetermined system or way of doing things or what it would cost. They took time to "imagine" what might be possible. They came up with an idea of Felicity setting up her own stall at a weekly community market. Although there was much thinking, work and some hesitation involved, all were willing to give it a go. It was a great success with Felicity doing what she loves best – meeting and talking with people. Quite amazingly other stallholders offered to help Felicity out when she needed it. But perhaps what is more significant was the "investment" in Felicity, her

family and their choice of supports. They employed a support person who was well connected to the community, who could be in "right relationship" with Felicity and her family, who could creatively help with imagining better, look to the local community for opportunities and support, use her own networks and believe that anything is possible.

So perhaps now the priority for our investments is to search and foster support for those who can be in "relationship" with each other and assist people who have a disability to become actively intertwined in their local communities. Rather than continuing to invest money in technology and systems that tend to group and segregate people we need to add value to our approaches and begin to invest more in people who can "think" and "imagine" better lifestyles. We need to invest in people who have the ability to discover each person's uniqueness with compassion, sound ethics and humanity and discover what quality actually means for each person.

Throughout Australia there are many examples of unique small grass roots efforts that are often governed by the people who use them, that have attempted to create supports that are highly relevant to people's needs. Such efforts have demonstrated instances where people have found some measure of progress and meaning in their lives within their local communities while keeping bureaucratic processes at a minimum. One example of such an effort is *Person by Person* in Melbourne, which is a small family governed service that strives to assist people to pursue their aspirations, abilities (and things yet to be discovered) in the community. Each person has influence over their funding and support to imagine and create a very personalised lifestyle and support arrangement from their own home. No two people do anything together, as quite naturally enough they do not share the same interests and desires. *Person by Person* has a fundamental belief in starting with the person first. It believes in the ability of people themselves to be innovative and recognise what is most important in their own lives. This is not something that money or systems alone can produce. Although *Person by Person* has had its challenges, people are moving closer to what they actually want and desire in life that to most people is quite ordinary.

Small grass roots efforts such as these have often gained encouragement from government departments to try innovative responses that occur simultaneously with a whole range of other traditional responses. Thus there has been no need to "wait" for the whole system to change to create small pockets of innovation. However what has been most important for those seeking innovation is to be clear on a range of guiding ethics and principles for

living one's own life as part of the community.

In some instances such grass roots efforts have been given new resources to create personalised lifestyle responses but it would also be possible to extricate current resources invested in segregated responses and get them close to people so that they can design their own personalised solutions and responses. In this sense new resources may not be required, but existing resources could be used differently to create solutions that assist people with disabilities to live typical lifestyles within and as part of their own communities.

In our search to do this we need to invest in people who have disabilities together with their allies, as often when their sense of what is needed and possible is recognised and harnessed as an active and decisive force, they can be very positive and innovative. This is not always forthcoming. It is often difficult to "imagine" something that is different as our imagination is often limited by past approaches and traditional ways of doing things. This means we need to set aside, even for a moment, what we currently know to give space to thinking about what life might look like if it were how we imagined. As Toni Packer suggests "The emergence and blossoming of understanding, love and intelligence has nothing to do with any tradition – no matter how ancient or impressive – it has nothing to do with time. It happens completely on its own when a human being questions, wonders, listens, and looks without getting stuck in fear".

Once we begin to question, wonder, look and listen to people who have a disability, their allies and community and to seek genuine alternatives with space and encouragement that is free from fear, then we can start to "imagine" what might be possible. Rather than saying "it's not possible" we need to open our hearts and minds to the liberating idea that anything may be possible if we put our minds to it and if we imagine better in a sense of "withness".

From what we know about human history and the wisdom of others we need to begin to recognise that investment also needs to be made in people. It is people who will "think" with compassion and innovation not money. It is people who need our heart felt attention and this is not often easily measured or priced. Even though resources are much needed it is not so much the money that is most important but what we do with it, and how we reach out to our fellow human beings.

Deb Rouget

in association with the people
and families from *Person by Person*

Strengthening the Capacities of Support Workers

Lesley Gissane works with Access Incorporated, supporting adults who have an intellectual disability who have had limited family and community experiences due to institutionalization. In this article Lesley addresses those qualities, in addition to money, that are needed to create good support.

There are many “big picture” issues facing people with disabilities – issues of access, funding and government policies. All are very important, but for most people the issue that impacts on them most directly is the quality of their support, and the quality of their support workers. The equation we generally accept is that more dollars equals more support hours equals more support workers equals better quality of life. However this equation is not always reliable.

Increased funding is only part of the solution to bringing about real change in people’s lives. There are numerous other factors that need to be addressed to truly increase the quality of supports for people. It is essential for a service to have a thorough understanding of its role, its limitations and its opportunities. The most important work to be done is determining an individual person’s needs and how a service might help to meet these. This is always done at the direction of the service user.

In addition to this, I believe that there is also work which is important for the service workers to do in order to bring their best selves into their support roles. For me, this comes down to three key areas: education, reflection and mentoring. Throughout my career, I have found that education and development opportunities that are offered in a values-based framework have given me an opportunity to reflect on my role in people’s lives through a greater consciousness about the deeply held values that drive human behaviour. It is necessary for services to create an organizational culture that encourages workers to have greater awareness of their own values and how this affects their work. Without diverting funds unnecessarily to administrative minutiae, it is important to devote some resources to recruiting, developing and maintaining high quality support workers.

Taking time to reflect on one’s role as well as individual responses to people’s needs is crucial. I found this quote by Richard Carlson relevant: “Reflection is one of the most underused yet powerful tools for success. It is a passive way to pinpoint solutions and strategies with the least amount of effort or wasted energy. It’s the opposite of ‘trying too hard,’ of forcing an answer. Reflection is more a matter of allowing an answer to unfold right before your eyes, often with little or no effort on your part. One of the benefits of reflection is that it enables us to get our egos out of the way. In a quiet state of mind we are able to see things clearly including our own contributions to problems, new ways of doing things, and the ways we get in our own way. Reflection allows us to sense our self-imposed limitations and some of the blind spots in our thinking.”

Opportunities for reflection allow workers to give consideration to their own internalised values, how their subconscious issues may get in the way of service and for developing the best individual responses for the person they are working with. Indeed, Wofensberger lists consciousness as one of the seven core themes of his theoretical work, stating that “consciousness is preferable to unconsciousness...negative feelings and dynamics should, and usually have to, be made conscious in order to be adaptively addressed.”

In addition to education and reflection I see an important place for mentoring. Many workers could improve and maintain a higher level of support and develop innovative strategies if they had the opportunity to learn from more experienced people. Within the professional counselling model, a percentage of a counsellor’s time is spent in supervision, ensuring that their own issues are not tied up in the therapeutic relationship and seeking advice about appropriate strategies. It is an important and potent mentoring strategy. Perhaps adapting this type of approach for disability workers may help avoid the high level of staff turnover that many service users have to live with. This in turn might allow for workers and clients to know each other over a longer period of time, encouraging support to go beyond basic needs, and to truly support a person to achieve higher order goals.

My view is that there is no standard set of qualities or responses that will work in a ‘one size fits all’ approach. It is unrealistic to think that a particular ‘shopping list’ of values will make for a good support worker. Each individual using a service deserves an individual and innovative response. If there is one universal element it is that it needs to be a collaborative approach, based on a thorough understanding of the service user’s goals and desires, and of the worker’s role in helping them be achieved. Money is certainly important in the equation, but to convert money into a better quality of life for people requires much, much more.

Lesley Gissane

“Are we too
obsessed with money?”

Minding the Dollars and Losing the Sense

Jim Ife is Haruhisa Handa Professor of Human Rights Education and Head of the Centre for Human Rights Education at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. His research, teaching interests and community activities have been community development and human rights. In this article, Jim examines the way in which the market, and economic activity in general, have been allowed to operate freely in a social and moral vacuum.

If we ask this question in relation to the society as a whole, many people would answer with a clear ‘yes’, and tell you that money doesn’t necessarily buy happiness and that other things are really more important. This is supported by research which suggests that, beyond the minimum level of income required to meet our basic needs and keep people out of poverty, there is little correlation between wealth and happiness. Yet despite this conventional wisdom, backed up by research, most people will continue to act as if money *is* of paramount importance. Despite knowing that it makes no sense, the power of the consumerist ideology is such that it carries us all along with it.

When it comes to community services, we seem to behave in the same way. While acknowledging that of course community life is about much more than money, and that money is only one dimension of community development, the reality of practice is that, all too often, money and economic imperatives seem to take over and dominate other agendas. The first reaction of a community worker, when faced with a need or an issue is commonly ‘where can I get a grant?’ Financial resources take up much of the discussion at management committee meetings, and proper financial accountability has become so dominant that people seem to forget that other forms of accountability (such as accountability to the community) might actually be more important. Managers and funding bodies seem to suggest that it is balancing the books and financial accountability that matter most, and if the books balance and the budget is in surplus they must be doing a good job (regardless of the quality or humanity of the service). Reduction or withdrawal of funding is often regarded as the end of civilisation as we know it. Community development programs can be taken over by a narrow agenda of community *economic* development, that sees the establishment of a strong economy as the beginning and the end of what community development is all about; based on the belief that if we can get the community economy right, the rest will follow.

This is a form of economic rationalism (perhaps more properly termed economic fundamentalism): a philosophy that many in community services choose to criticise, yet which in reality they seem destined to follow, with varying degrees of reluctance. Economic rationalism simply says the economy comes first, costs and benefits must be measured in dollar terms, and if the bottom line is right, then all will be well. In other words, once the economy is right, people should be left alone to get on with their lives, free to buy what they need and sell what they produce, leaving the rest to the invisible hand of the market rather than the interference of meddling governments and other busybodies. On even the slightest reflection, this is simplistic nonsense. It is easy to criticise economic rationalism, but one of the amazing things about contemporary politics is that we have been so persuaded of its virtues that we often suspend our better judgement and go along with it, even though its inequities and its contradictions are obvious.

We have become only too aware of the weaknesses of the market: markets may be good for encouraging growth and technological development, but they are not good at the equitable distribution of social goods and services. However we cannot simply assume that market processes are bad in themselves, and that ‘the market’ is somehow evil. Markets are a natural part of human activity, and have been so ever since the establishment of settled communities allowed for an increased division of labour. The problem with ‘the market’ as we now experience it is that markets are no longer contained within human communities, serving a useful social purpose and serving the needs of the community, but have developed a life of their own. It is not markets themselves that are the problem, but rather that the market has become removed from its community context.

This suggests one answer to the problem of the obsession with money. If markets, and economic activity, can be recaptured by the community, embedded in community processes, and used to meet community and social ends, then many of the problems we experience with market ideology, and neo-liberal economic orthodoxy, will disappear. It is in allowing the market, and economic activity in general, to operate freely in a social and moral vacuum that the problems have been created. To bring the economy back to the community is a big challenge for community development, given that the economy is now global, and this is one of the reasons why grappling with global issues, and the global/local connection, is

vital for community workers.

The dominance of 'money thinking' poses two potential dangers. One is the danger of allowing economic rationalist assumptions to dictate our practice, so that the economic side of human experience and interaction crowds out everything else that is important. The other danger is to go to the opposite extreme, and to reject any idea of the importance of money or economic development, seeing anything with a dollar sign as beneath one's dignity as a community worker. Neither approach is healthy or useful to the communities and groups with whom we work. There is a need to strike a balance; money is important, but it is not the only thing that matters, nor is it necessarily more important than other aspects of what we do. The dominance of economic frames of reference, and of market ideology, will make it very difficult to keep financial matters in perspective.

My own view of community development sees economic development as one of six dimensions of development, sitting alongside, but not dominating, social development, political development, cultural development, environmental development, and personal/spiritual development. Good community development will keep these in balance, and will not allow any one to take over at the expense of the others. Such a holistic way of thinking can put economic development back into perspective; seeing it as necessary for a strong community, but as being far from sufficient.

Monetary resources are important, but they are only one set of resources that are brought to community work. One way to maintain the balance is to think always of other 'resources' that can be brought to community development and community services. But in doing so, we should not be seduced by the instrumentalist language of 'human resources', 'people are our greatest resource', and so on; this suggests that humans only have value as something to be 'consumed' for some greater good (after all, this is what happens to resources), rather than having intrinsic value as ends in themselves. Rather, we need to think about, and celebrate, all the important things that people (rather than dollars) will bring to community life: enthusiasm, creativity, spirituality, magic, skills, love, wisdom, stories, imagination, knowledge, and their understandings and expressions of our common humanity. These tend to be things that money can't buy, and they are actually much more important than money.

As I indicated in the first paragraph, research suggests that, while people need a decent minimum income in order to meet their basic human needs, extending their income and wealth beyond this level does little to achieve extra happiness – it is other things that can make us happy, and we tend to lose sight of this simple truth. Perhaps the same is sometimes true in developing healthy, happy and fulfilling communities.

Jim Iffe

When economics & ethics meet

Dr Christopher Newell, AM, is a consultant ethicist in private practice and a senior lecturer in medical ethics, University of Tasmania. He is also a person with disability. Christopher believes that our current problems are perpetuated by the allocation of money solely within disability budgets. Such practices ensure that disability remains an area of "special needs" rather than the core concern of all government departments and society in general.

It was a question which revealed a side of me of which I am not proud: "It looks as if we are getting a lot more money in the Queensland disability sector, but what values should be used in spending it?" As a Tasmanian with disability, I must confess to a momentary feeling of envy and even greed. "Lucky sods" I thought in a weak moment, as I mentally added up things that I wanted: a new piece of equipment, new batteries, more personal care, even a replacement for a wheelchair which has probably sustained more disabilities in travelling with Qantas than its owner, and the list went on.

That momentary selfish response is how we are encouraged to act, as we compete with each other for crumbs of the cake. Yet, when we think beyond narrow self-interest and the dominant ethical mantra "autonomy rules, OK" then we start to realise why a set of overarching values are enormously important. Not just because no matter how much money we have, it will never be enough, but because the allocation of money solely within disability budgets helps to perpetuate our problems: disability as "other" rather than the

mainstream “us”; disability as “special needs” rather than a core concern of all government departments, and society in general.

Don't get me wrong, I am not saying that we shouldn't have dedicated budgets for the disability sector. I applaud governments which have designated Ministers for disability issues. We need policies driven by such Ministers, in order to lead our lives as part of vital communities, rather than as a special needs grouping - an economic burden on the State. There is no better illustration of this than considering the sorts of values that we need to sustain and nurture us in a civil society – one where our economic policies embrace disability as “us” rather than “other”.

It is only within this context that disability needs can be met, because they then become hardly exceptional or special needs. They are just part of what it is to be part of a vital community – one which evaluates itself against the benchmark of embracing those of us who live with disabilities and all the “others” we exclude from our moral community.

Rushworth Kidder identifies eight universal values necessary to create the moral conditions for a sustainable 21st century:

love, truthfulness,
fairness, freedom,
unity, tolerance,
responsibility,
& respect for life.

Here I take a set of values from across mainstream cultures, rather than suggesting an entirely different set of values for those of us with disability, as sometimes occurs. Most importantly, these are values which can only be learnt and lived out in interrelationship.

The value of “love” immediately challenges us to recognise that we need to move beyond the belief that a service culture is the solution for those of us with disability. Yes, we do need appropriate services, but these should be a means to an end: for example the ability to sustain various human relationships, including those where we are loved and are able to offer love ourselves. All of the values require a rethinking of the dominant

individualistic ethos and the Thatcherite notion that there is no society just individual economic actors. Yet, none are values which by themselves can immediately have an outcome attached by the Minister. Imagine for example having a “love quotient” outcome target to be experienced by people with disabilities in the community, and putting it out to competitive tendering! Yet, of course, love and selfless relationships are what makes the world go round. Values, by themselves, mean nothing. We need policy goals that embrace such values and recognise that it is our actions, and *how* we spend our money, which reveal our true values. Such policy goals must inevitably not just embrace the rights of people with disabilities, but recognise that disability issues transcend every government, business and social sector.

In implementing the values essential for a civil society, we need to ask some awkward questions. For example, can we have benchmarks which dream of persons with severe multiple disabilities becoming a Premier of this State or a professor seen as being expert on disability or someone living in loving relationship in the community? In other words, in so many ways, being all that we can be? The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provides an important but oft neglected litmus test regarding our social and economic norms and policy. An important way of delivering this is the integration of the resourced and supported voices of people with disabilities to advise governments at the highest level about how such values can and should be delivered, evaluated, and translated into allocated resources. This is a difficult process; it is essentially about community development, reclaiming the lives and stories of people with disabilities and their families as part of a vital and sustaining community.

Perhaps most importantly this will entail recognising that it is our system of economics, based upon narrow imperatives, which helps to create disability. It is only when we have rethought our approach to economics, so that it fosters and sustains communities, as opposed to individual-versus-individual, that we will be addressing the fundamental ethical problem of how we as a society are to spend our money.

Christopher Newell

Are the dollars all we need?

Why Funding Can Sometimes Get in the Way

Neil Barringham endeavours to support a spirit of neighbourliness in his locality. Some of his best learning has been through being with and working with local people who live with a range of vulnerabilities and challenges. Neil is a community worker. He currently works at A Place to Belong, facilitating community connections in mental health. He also works with The Community Praxis Cooperative. Neil reflects on what it takes, aside from money, to build community.

In 1992 when I moved to the area in which I now live I started to become involved with local people. As I did I noticed a couple of things about community work and government funding. Firstly, I couldn't help but see that some of the best things that were happening in the area had a high degree of energy, participation and ownership yet were unfunded. I can still remember more than twenty people gathering in a lounge room on Sunday afternoons to discuss how we could support each other in our responses to people in the area who were experiencing isolation.

Secondly, at about the same time I received a small government grant to do some community development work. I had made up a grant submission with all the right lingo and got the funds. But alas, it was my submission, my goals, my plans. I used community development language without genuine community development processes. The level of participation in the vision and planning was too low to use the funds as best we could. I learnt from these experiences that we need much more than funding to build community. As a matter of fact funding can sometimes get in the way.

As I reflect a few years later on about funding and community work some points come to mind:

- It is true that it is government's role to fund and resource community building efforts. I affirm Alan Walker's warning that "it is unlikely that an increasing amount of care will be provided by the community without economic and social policies to care for the community." I don't want to get

caught up in an ideological naiveté that idealises the informal sector and consequently asks too much of it. We don't want to hide behind euphemisms of 'building the caring capacity of the community' and replace 'throwing money' at social problems by 'throwing volunteers' at them!

- Don't hold your breath waiting for government to support your efforts before you start them. Do what you believe in, no matter how tiny. Even in small ways, gather people together around important issues of concern, and lobby government for the funds to support these issues.
- Hold the hope for a useful relationship with government because it can happen. One of my roles is doing community building work in mental health with "A Place to Belong". After trying elsewhere in government for funds and getting nowhere we tried Disability Services Queensland. We were one of the fortunate few who were successful. Our Community Resource Officer from DSQ has become a genuine resource person for us – helping and supporting us to do what we believe in. He is a superb example of what a brokering person can do between small non-government agencies and government departments.

Now that I am receiving recurrent government funding for some of my work I find that we need to work hard to keep community processes strong in our work. The following are some examples of how we go about that:

- We employ workers who believe in community and who will support processes of participation and ownership of community participants, rather than pushing their own credentials as workers.
- We work at honouring the unpaid contributions of people who get involved in the complexities of others' lives.
- We involve people in planning across our work, ensuring that paid workers don't squeeze out others in planning groups.
- We work to develop a range of leadership opportunities and roles, building partnerships with whomever we can – paid or unpaid – to contribute to the work.
- We stay close to people's stories, our own and those of others. Stories of community, isolation, friendship, connection and disconnection and struggle help us appreciate the common human struggle to belong and to contribute.
- We work hard at not making our office the main centre of activity. We expect workers to meet people on their own turf.
- In meetings and activities we attempt to de-role: professionals sit in a circle with family members, carers, advocates and people who access services. We try to learn from each other and with each other.

Another part of my role with "A Place to Belong" is to employ support workers. Funding from government has been critically important to respond adequately to the situations in which we are involved. A key consideration for me as a support coordinator is how can I use funds to nurture rather than squash community supports and networks? I feel this question strongly because I have seen people in my locality actually withdraw from support services because they find the workers too intrusive and disturbing of household and neighbourhood routines and energies. I have also seen arrangements and plans that have been made between community participants overturned and superseded by support workers and service providers without thought or apology.

To coordinate service supports that work to strengthen community links rather than sabotage them, I work with the following principles:

- We do our best to affirm the roles of unpaid allies and advocates in a person's life, trying not to squeeze them out. We receive advice and ideas from them, ensure that the workers know who they are and involve them in establishing our role with the person.
- I often employ workers who live in the same locality as the person being supported so that the worker's shops are the person's shops, the same worker's community is the person's community, and the possibility of increasing networks is deepened.
- I affirm the different roles that each support worker plays in connecting the person to others. For example one worker does well at mediating between a person and local shopkeepers; another does well at bringing new people into her life; another is skilled at welcoming her into her own share household where she meets other people.

I see value in, and a place for, both community participant and service provider roles. My belief is that community building does not do away with the need for services: rather services can actively promote and support community building. This involves mutual accountability and recognition of the different skills, capacities, resources and roles that people bring to a situation. The key is in developing respectful partnerships: service providers and local community members working with rather than over or across each other. When the pressure is on, and I can't see a way through the problems and complexities, it is gratifying to see a range of people – paid and unpaid - gather together and offer time, resources and skills. It is then that I sigh and say to myself, "community is good".

Neil Barringham

'It will be a life Jim, but not as we know it'

The power and place of innovation in services.

Positive change is more likely when there are opportunities for innovation. In this article, Ann Greer explores key elements for true innovation. Ann draws on her experiences as a parent in North Queensland, and as a worker and advocate for people with significant disabilities.

Innovation is a way of focussing on a problem or an issue and looking for the most up-to-date, potent and meaningful strategy to respond. The image generated by concepts of innovation are typified by words like 'excitement' and 'newness' - although it is also true that innovation may be the application of an old idea in a new and exciting way. Innovation in any field cannot exist in a vacuum and it needs other key elements to be 'in place' before it can flourish.

Creativity

Creativity in responding to the life needs of people has not been particularly evident in our culture for a long time. Creativity can only flourish when human beings have time to think, talk and devote significant amounts of energy to experimentation. It requires us to be excited about what we are doing and it requires a community of *other* creative thinkers to act as catalysts and sounding boards for new and interesting ideas. Creativity can only flourish when the community provides a supportive environment – one that is forgiving and prepared to go forward in partnership, offering and welcoming constructive criticism not negative comment.

Collaboration

The best schemes are often the ones where communities work together to come up with an idea or a strategy that is owned and developed by that community. Collaboration works in a world of trust

and openness where the excitement of working together and the melting pot of ideas provides the spark required to move forward. Collaboration usually means that the key stakeholders are able to work together free of conflicts of interest and without competition for money, power or status. When there is strong collaboration on any project, the project is automatically elevated in status in the community – the fact that a number of people gave the idea their attention raises its interest value to others.

Focus

Innovation in any field usually infers that the field has been focussing on a particular idea or project, devoting a significant amount of time, energy and money to developing the concept. It is very hard to be innovative if there is no attention paid to the problem! Indeed it is even harder to remain focussed if the problem is not identified as a problem by the field.

Excitement

Innovation breeds excitement – or does excitement breed innovation? It really doesn't matter which comes first. Excitement generates energy and real change will not occur without large doses of both.

Money

Although we are all tempted to believe it, money is never the single answer to the needs of a community. We have all seen examples of people, service providers and governments who have ploughed thousands or millions of dollars into houses, services or projects which do not meet the initial identified need. Money is, nonetheless, an essential element in the package. All experimentation is exactly that, and in a climate of experimentation when mistakes occur, it will be necessary to respond quickly and efficiently. In truly innovative environments, it is never seen as luxurious to budget sufficient funds in order to respond at these times.

It is doubtful that true innovation in our responses to people with disabilities is on the agenda in 2003. There are many reasons why this is so. All stakeholders – people with disabilities, their families, service providers and funders – are consumed with the competition for and lack of funds, to the detriment of innovative ideas. Forging new ways of doing requires new ways of thinking and it is clear that many services are 'stuck' in old ways. The economic and intellectual climate in the disability community appears to encourage services and families to maintain these old ways of doing. We have a long history of resistance to anything that hints of change. Some service providers and families

(perhaps rightfully) believe that change brings loss and have fought to maintain the status quo.

Innovation has been squashed as governments and funding bodies have grown increasingly enamoured of 'quick fix' solutions to the needs of people with disabilities – particularly those who are labelled as challenging in their behaviour.

Within government and in funding bodies, there has been an appropriation of the word 'innovation' and it is now used to describe services in which people with challenging behaviour are congregated in housing units on one 'campus' or 'placed' in nursing homes during the day in order to receive support during daylight hours. These are not innovative responses but the acts of desperation that human beings perpetrate on each other in the absence of vision, creativity and funds.

Having said this, there have been individuals within bureaucracies, government ministers and members, services providers and families in Queensland who have responded to the challenge and struggled over many years to support and maintain quality services to people with disabilities. These services support the pursuit of an individually forged life for people with disabilities. Many families have made personal and economic sacrifices in their own lives because they have recognised the power inherent in providing a truly individualised and tailored support to their son or daughter. Our current climate does not support these people with disabilities, their families and services, many of which are run by small, active hands-on committees.

It is obvious that those who remember the 'golden years' of the mid 80s when the Federal Disability Services Act was first introduced, have a role in ensuring that stakeholders in the disability community understand that there has been a time in living memory when governments, funding bodies and the community believed and worked together to encourage innovative responses to the life needs of people with disabilities, regardless of the degree of disability experienced.

In order for this to occur again, we must plunge the depths to find the creativity, collaborative strength, focus, money and excitement that we know exists in our community in order to make innovation in services to people with disabilities a reality.

May the force be with us!

Ann Greer

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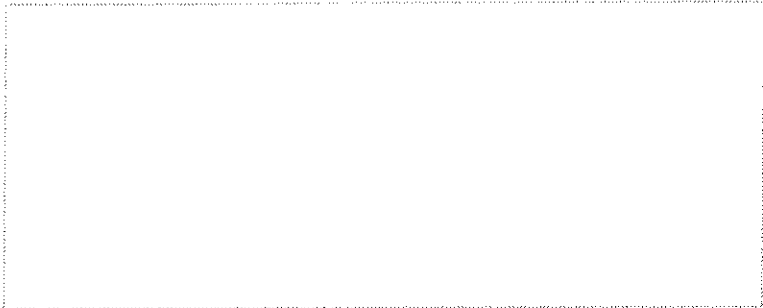
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