



**David Rallings,
presenting at
CRU's forum at
the convention
centre in
September 2013**

Some background to this Edition:

On 13th September 2013 Community Resource Unit held a one day forum and dinner at the Brisbane Convention Centre to celebrate its twenty fifth anniversary. We often talk as though Community Resource Unit (CRU) is the small group of people, employed in an office in Brisbane. That resource has been an important cog in the wheel and over the years has played an important role in stimulating change. However CRU is more than the staff and committee members – it doesn't stop there – our ambitious vision for change won't be achieved by that little group alone so CRU was celebrating twenty five years of many people working together for change. All the people who have shared their ideas, insights and learnings through presenting, writing, telling their story at a CRU event or sharing a conversation over a cup of tea have built and strengthened the work of CRU.

For twenty five years CRU has said loud and clear in many different ways, that *'a good life' is possible for all people who live with disability and that people who happen to have a disability deserve access to the same life as everyone else.* From this simple starting point there have been conversations and workshops; conferences and writings about what that means; what makes for a good life; what it looks like; why and how we should do that and what to be concerned about. We acknowledged that that work is not yet done... the lives of people with disability in this state (and other places too) are still too different to those of other Queenslanders for us to be complacent.

In the lead up to the celebrations, as we talked about how to mark this occasion, people agreed... *'at this time of change, we need to bring people together and to provide a space to meet that will strengthen us all. We need to be inspired, encouraged, reminded and connected. We need to get our hearts racing.'*

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Celebrating 25 years

We started the day with a presentation by Luke Farrelly and his mother Ann O'Brien. Luke is in grade nine at a local high school and he and Ann delivered a presentation on the wisdom, courage and hope gained and required when a family pursues an ordinary life for a person who lives with very significant disabilities and health challenges.

Craig Roveta and his mother Anne co-presented to share Craig's story. Anne focused on the importance of planning, process and inviting other people to be part of the journey with their family. Craig used art and poetry to describe, what he can now call, 'his wonderful life' and to share his thoughts on those things that challenge him and those things that set him free.

Having heard from Luke and Craig about their lives and something of what has helped and what has hindered in achieving what they have, our next presentations addressed the question of what we can do collectively, across the sector, to make this possible for more people to live ordinary and wonderful lives. What do we need to do to create real and lasting change so that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people?

Leigh Tabrett spoke of the importance of leadership and change; Michael Kendrick spoke about the importance of thoughtful, principled innovation and Anne Cross and Lorna Hallahan spoke about the importance of partnerships and linking our individual efforts into a movement for change.


In a session entitled "A real life; an ordinary life; a life like everyone else" we had some great illustrations of the change that is happening across the state as more people with disabilities are planning their own lives or planning with their family members; setting the vision of what's possible and then working out what they need to achieve that, including what part paid or formal service has in that life. David Rallings and Alison Crawford spoke during this session and twenty nine others sent photos and video clips to create an inspiring audio visual presentation. A small sample of the photos from this presentation are included in this edition of CRUCial times as a snapshot of some of the change that is happening as people are showing us what is possible.

The new DVD, 'Together in Partnership – Stories of individual and family governed organisations in Queensland' was launched that afternoon. It features organisations in which the authority and governance is held either by people with disability themselves, in conjunction with their supporters, or through their family members. This DVD is now available for sale from CRU.

See www.cru.org.au for more details.

Celebrations continued over dinner That evening and we took the opportunity to launch a colourful new logo based on the idea of a 'spark' – and with the tagline "Expanding Ideas: Creating Change".

The feedback we received from the couple of hundred people who were able to join us for the forum and dinner would indicate that we did achieve our intention of providing a space to meet that strengthened us all. People felt inspired, encouraged, reminded and connected. The presenters, by sharing their thoughts, ideas and their personal stories certainly helped to get our hearts racing.

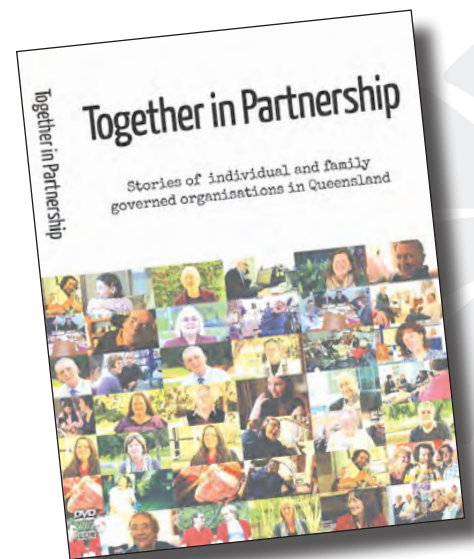


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The new look of CRU

The new look of CRU, including our colourful new logo, was launched at the evening celebrations. After 45 editions over 20 years CRUCial Times has also taken on a new look. This new layout is designed to be more readable - especially online. Rest assured, it is still our intent to continue to provide articles that are insightful, thought provoking and inspiring.

For the sake of accessibility, all articles will be available on our website in Word format.



DVD, 'Together in Partnership – Stories of individual and family governed organisations in Queensland'



Directors of CRU, past and present. Margaret Rodgers, Jane Sherwin, Lynda Shevellar and Anne Cross

Editorial

At the heart of the work of Community Resource Unit is the belief that change is critical and possible but that it doesn't just happen and this message was also at the heart of the presentations at the forum to mark the twenty fifth anniversary of CRU.

The opening papers by Luke Farrelly and Craig Roveta are personal stories of change; changes in initial directions and challenges to what was thought possible for both these men. They have both been influential in demonstrating that change is possible and leading others by example.

Leigh Tabrett told us that successful leaders know that the heart is the key change muscle and successful leaders find ways to reveal something of their own hearts, to give meaning to work and desired outcomes and to speak to values and aspirations, as a way of engaging the best energies.

Michael Kendrick spoke of the importance of beneficial innovation and seeing the world from a new perspective. He cautioned that innovation is not always positive and reminded us that we need leaders to understand and recognise the significance of innovations and to bring out the best in the people that can bring them into being. In leading us through what is required to build a movement for change, Lorna Hallahan asked 'what is the transformation we seek?' She challenged us to think about seeking more than funding mechanisms and serviced lives and to shift our focus to efforts that build a culture and community that is open, embracing and fun. Lorna reminds us of what our movement does well and what we need to be careful of as we work together for change. Following on from Lorna's thoughts on movements, Anne Cross pondered the lessons from our own movement in Queensland and how these lessons can help us prepare for the future.

It was heartening to be reminded that one of the strengths and the joys of the work that has been done in Queensland is that both 'quiet' and 'visible' leadership has been shown by various people in all sorts of roles in a wide range of settings on an array of issues. Many individuals and families have

crafted different possibilities and these in turn have inspired others.

It is these examples that mean we are able to say "I know it is possible" and this is very powerful.

We wanted our celebration in September to be more than just an enjoyable day of reminiscing about the past; we wanted to learn from our past in order to create a future that is relevant to a constantly growing, evolving movement for change.

We trust that this edition of CRUCIAL Times is also more than just a pleasant reminder or souvenir for those who were able to join us on the day but that it too says loud and clear that 'a good life' is possible for all people who live with disability and that people who happen to have a disability deserve access to the same life as everyone else.

Each speaker reinforced that change is personal – it involves the heart as well as the head. It is not the work of someone else; in another role or place; it is not the mysterious 'they' who should make things better. Authentic and lasting change takes thought, commitment, perseverance and people, like us, who are prepared to take a lead.

Margaret Rodgers



From the President

CRU's twenty fifth anniversary celebration was quite an event. On behalf of the Management Committee I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those who were involved in making the whole day and night such an inspiring and exciting event. To the people with disability, their families and friends who shared their stories and examples of what is possible – I sincerely thank you for your generosity and contribution. To all of you who came along – thanks for celebrating CRU's anniversary so well.

The key themes of the forum were: Getting a Good Life, inclusion, change, innovation, leadership and social movements. These were presented and discussed in such a way that I am confident many of us left the event filled with creativity and a new energy for creating positive change in the lives of people with a disability. If you were not able to attend, please enjoy reading some of what was presented in this edition of CRUcial Times. If you were there, you might, like me, have been looking forward to re-reading these presentations and catching those bits you missed and reliving the bits you loved.

This year we proudly celebrate twenty five years (and counting) of leadership, innovation, challenge, collaboration, partnerships and community living. For a community-managed organisation to reach such a milestone is quite an achievement.

CRU remains a unique part of the disability movement in Queensland thanks to its members and supporters. During our history there have been times when the numbers at events were low, when the vision got a little out of focus, when funding was threatened and when a compliance or legal requirement demanded more attention than might otherwise have been desirable. Despite these challenges, members and supporters have kept watch over the years to ensure CRU always came back to its purpose.

For twenty five years CRU's small teams of staff has worked in partnership with people around the state to inform, inspire and educate, to develop leaders and to confront ideas and practices that limit the lives of people with a disability. There have always been times of great promise and change and in 2013 we find ourselves there again.

CRU is a bit like a service station. You need to pull in every now and then and fill up before getting on your way again. Events like the forum are like filling up with Premium – not the regular unleaded. With this injection we may feel like we want to go faster, but the lasting impact is that the premium assists in working better and more effectively. The direction we take as we pull away from the service station is heavily influenced by what we took in and a clear pathway to community living opens up. We are carried along this path by solid foundations, and guided by the leadership of people with a disability, their families and allies, our networks and alliances.

Lorna Hallahan writes, "Our values are not aspirational." Here is to another twenty five years of putting our values into action.

Cheers,
Matt Stone



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Sharon Daley	Vice President
Mike Duggan	Secretary
Sherryn West	Treasurer
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The Getting of Wisdom, Courage and Hope

Ann O'Brien

Luke Farrelly is a well-travelled fourteen year old highschool student. Together with his mother, **Ann O'Brien**, they explored what it has taken to hold a vision of Luke's life; how they have safeguarded this vision, shared this vision and how, combined with the wisdom of experience, this vision has helped give the family clarity in enigmatic times. During the presentation, with the assistance of his father, Dan, and his teacher's aide, Darrel, Luke changed the slides using a switch connected to the computer.

The Getting of Wisdom, Courage and Hope

This is Luke's story. It is also about the getting of wisdom, courage and hope (for his parents). What you will hear about today are aspects of Luke's life that reflect what we believe have helped to shape his life and ours as a family. You might call them guiding principles or themes.

Luke and I put this presentation together using his Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD) book - this provides us with key words that allow us to work out what Luke wants to say. Luke communicates by answering yes or no to questions by lifting his hand or head for yes and keeping still for no. During this process Luke demonstrates great patience and tolerance as he strives to communicate with us. One of the teacher aides recently said to me how she admires a Luke's ability to show forgiveness for those of us who constantly ignore his potential, talk over him or not wait for the answer.

There is no doubt that Luke has much to offer to those who take the time to get to know him and listen to what he is telling them. As you listen to his story it is my hope that you will capture a glimpse of an inspirational young man who we and our family and friends are very proud to call son, brother, nephew, grandson and friend.

Luke is the eldest of 3 boys. He is almost 15, Isaac is 12 and Nathan is 10. Dan and I are very biased but we know we have 3 fabulous boys who constantly bring us joy, love and the usual frustrations, exhaustion and heartache that go with raising a family. As a family we aim to live an ordinary life and to pursue everyday activities. We plan holidays, go on weekend outings, attend sporting events and are involved with the schools our boys attend. We also spend days and weeks in hospital, many hours at appointments. We try to live a normal life ... whatever that means.

Luke has many professionals in his life: therapists, medical staff, teachers, teacher aides to name but a few and each play a role in his life. We appreciate their input and their expertise but at the same time we exercise our rights as parents and advocates when making big decisions. This has been something we have had to learn to do, and it hasn't always been easy. We are fortunate now to have a few professionals in our life who know us well and respect our opinion. There are of course times when we are not heard and we have to fight for what we believe is in his best interest.

We try to stay clear of the medical world and the world of disability because they tend to focus on what is wrong rather than right. Life does get really tough. Luke has extended periods of ill health, often with hospital admissions where Dan and I live between the hospital, home and work.



Life has taught us that this will eventually pass and we do the best we can at the time.

Courage

If I am to reflect on the place of courage in our lives, there are a number of significant decisions that we made that required us to take a risk. My husband and I, and our other boys, are called to be our sons ally; we are his voice; we hope we speak truthfully his hopes, desires, likes and dislikes. We hope also that we listen to what he wants his life to be like.

In 2007 we decided to approach our local state school about him enrolling into grade 5 fulltime. This decision was driven by Luke's desire to be with his peers in a stimulating noisy environment. He was already going to our local school to attend philosophy and he was telling us through his actions where he wanted to be - in a regular school, with his peers

It was not an easy decision. We knew many would not understand our desire for Luke to be part of our local school where his brothers attend, nor would they appreciate that he had much to offer to other children. We put ourselves on the line and then couldn't back down until we achieved what we had set out to do. I can remember driving a way from meetings fighting back tears while my husband was busy remembering every swear word he knew. After much discussion, disagreement and frustration approval was given and Luke began grade 5 in 2009.

Luke is now in grade 9 at our local high school.

He enjoys school especially music and socializing at lunchtime. He is not so fond of maths. How do we know this? He often goes to sleep!

Wonderful things are happening at school for Luke. There is a cohort of students who have recently come together with the assistance of a teacher and have formed a circle of friends. These are students who have formed a connection with Luke over the last 18 months and now want to be more involved in his life. This group of students met to discuss how they could contribute to Luke's day. Suggestions included: reading the newspaper in the morning to Luke, taking Luke to the admin block at the end of the day, taking him to and from class and to lunch.

The school population is made of students from many different countries. Luke's presence at school does not faze them as many come from cultures which have a very strong sense of community and an understanding that all people contribute in different ways. If you were to watch Luke in that environment you would gain very quickly an understanding of what it means to him to be there in amongst the noise and life of a high school

While planning for Luke's inclusion into our local state primary school we also decided to take 6 months to travel around Australia. My husband and I planned carefully and ensured that we had thought through what we would need to keep Luke safe, given he has, at times, significant health issues. We were aware of the risks we were taking but decided that the experience and the benefits would far outweigh any of the risks. The reality was that we would deal with whatever life threw at us at the time.

Our trip was a wonderful time together. We saw only some of what this beautiful country has to offer, but memories of those days keep us going when times are difficult. Luke experienced all we did, often on Dan's back as we climbed mountains and explored gorges.

The most important lesson learnt was about the importance of taking a risk and following your dreams. Had our son's health deteriorated or the trip been too exhausting we would have rethought our plans or if necessary come home. If we had, however, allowed those potential risks to overwhelm us, what wonderful experiences we would have missed out on.

Luke demonstrates courage most days of his life. Wanting to be out there... dealing with the injustices of others, living with illness and hospitalization on a regular basis.

A vision for Luke's life.

When we talk about a vision for Luke's life we think of the ordinary: schooling, friends and all that comes with it, and therefore it is vital then that we listen to Luke. His schooling was a good example of this; he was telling us through his behaviour that he wanted a mainstream education and we could not ignore this. It is vital that we consider what he loves to do, what his strengths are and in turn that we believe he has much to offer to those he meets.

Family life comes with challenges but when there is a member with a disability it is all the more challenging. Making family work when there is a child with a disability is a conscious choice. If we spend all our time wishing life was different than we end up missing the beauty and the joy of what we have. This certainly applies to our life with Luke. This is our son and he has much to offer, if we take the time to listen and learn.

The future....

We need to ask ourselves a number of questions about what we want Luke's life to become. What are we doing to plan for Luke's future? What does Luke want? What do we think would be good for him? We need to consider Luke moving out of home into his own place with support.

To help make all of this happen we also need to think about inviting family and friends to be a part of a circle of support. We need to have support of the village to raise our children. We need lots of heads and hearts together to dream what could be possible for Luke's life. We need to ensure that Luke will be safe by sharing what we know about him, with those who are prepared to be around for a long time. There will also be a wider support network to be there when times are tough due to ill health or hospitalisation. Luke's life will be so much richer by forming closer relationships with those who care about him.

If we look back on our life with Luke there were times of planning, living, reviewing, thriving and barely surviving. We look at his life in stages and never think too far ahead... It's too hard. We do think, and are aware that, there are times when we need to consciously plan and begin the process that will bring those plans to fruition.

What have we learnt?

Life is full of ups and downs and we need to appreciate and remember the easier times. We have learnt to respect the ebb and flow of life and to choose our battles.

We don't have or need all the answers now, we just need to keep asking the questions. We are still learning about Luke and about ourselves. Each person is unique and one size does not fit all.

We do not know if our son has a good life - that's for him to say... but we do strive to do what we think is in his best interest. We are listening and learning from Luke.



Craig Roveta is a local Brisbane artist and poet. Craig has exhibited his work in galleries from New York to Goombungee and many places in between. With his mother, **Anne Roveta**, they shared their story of Craig's life and their journey thus far. Anne focused on the main ideas and principles that inspired and sustained her, Craig and their family in their efforts to create the life Craig has now. Through his poetry and art work Craig described some of the difficulties and challenges of his journey as well as the positive aspects of what he describes now as his "wonderful life".



Millions of Moments of Living

Together Craig and I are reminiscing with you today about his life... about what it has taken for him to be living as he is now. There are many phases to this story, each of which could be a presentation on their own. However this morning we will present a brief overview of what Craig describes as "his wonderful life" – his life of "millions of moments of living" – and how this has evolved.

I will be talking mostly about planning and process. What I say will be interspersed with poems and other pieces Craig has written and paintings he has created to express his own thoughts about his life. Most of the poems and paintings are contained in this book called "Craig's Story".

We would all appreciate having a worthwhile, wonderful life, though such a life is not always readily attainable for any of us. For people in Craig's situation, to achieve such a life is very much more complex and difficult. To do so requires a great deal of planning and needs to incorporate many levels of safety.

Craig talks about the challenges he faces in life in these words and images.

FRAGMENTED

I am a damaged man
Negative thoughts imprison me
Reality fragmented by autism and dyspraxia
Messages cross with signals
taking over cutting me off
but
the body is the vehicle of the soul
and autism is not all of who I am
Do not get caught up in my exterior facade
Grab my words that reach out to you
See that I am not really that different from you.

At the time Craig's father, Barry, and I began to seriously ponder the question of how to achieve a worthwhile life for Craig in the long term, Craig was living at home with us. At that time Craig had a good life but we realized we needed to act immediately because without us none of the arrangements we had in place at that time would have continuity. We felt we needed to have the structures in place for Craig to live as independently as possible and to have support to enable him to fulfil some of his dreams. We soon realised that this was not going to be easy to achieve without our planning and advocacy.

The sort of life which appeared to be available for Craig offered at the best a mere existence. A bed in a house sharing with people with whom he had no common interests, activities (if fortunate) which did not reflect his interests and staff who did not necessarily share our vision of a respected and worthwhile life.

This is not the life we wanted for Craig. We felt strongly that anything less than the life we envisaged was not negotiable.

But we needed to think more concretely and practically about what we actually meant by a good or worthwhile life... for anyone. We came up with the following list:

- A feeling of safety
- Friends of our own
- A home of our own
- Ability to communicate our thoughts and feelings
- A feeling of self-respect
- Respect within the community

Most of us feel that we are able to work towards fulfilling these goals in our own lives, however for Craig, the right to pursue these outcomes could not be assumed. In order to pursue these goals for Craig we knew we needed the support of an organisation – but we were only prepared to work with one committed to upholding the values we regarded as mandatory.

There was no such organisation available to us at that time so River North Lifestyles came into existence for that purpose; and that in itself is another long story for the families involved in the development of that organisation. As Craig has said... not everybody is born free.

FREEDOM

Not everyone is born free
Free to grab their rights with both hands
Some need to fight...
Fight for basic freedom
Fight for the same rights everyone else takes as assumed
There are those impassioned to support us
They become freedom fighters
They may look ordinary
But they are extraordinary...
They never take no for an answer

Craig needed very strong advocates to negotiate on his behalf. These are the people he calls “freedom fighters”. A “freedom fighter” is a person who is committed to freeing people such as Craig, those who are trapped in their own body and who are frequently ignored as they try to advocate on their own behalf. Freedom fighters are people who tenaciously pursue the desired outcome, refusing to give up, refusing to become disillusioned when goals are not achieved. Freedom fighters come in many forms - family members, Circle members, the wider network of friendship. “Ordinary” people from all walks of life but as Craig says these people are in fact “extraordinary”.

Barry and I learned a lot during these years. We learned that the pursuit of a worthwhile life needs to be carefully planned. We learned that goals still need to be constantly revisited, reviewed and retuned even when they have been achieved. There is never a point when it is possible to say that there is no more to be done.

We thought at one stage that our goal of Craig being supported to live more independently in the community had been achieved. But we sadly learned, at great cost to Craig and to the whole family, that safety is not guaranteed by having a beautiful purpose built house in the community. Safety is dependent upon the people with whom we interact. Through this hard lesson we also learned that institutional behaviour exists outside institutional style buildings. The kind of institutional behaviour and attitudes that impact so negatively on vulnerable people can exist anywhere, even in a beautiful purpose built house in the community.

That experience is now in the past. Craig now lives in a home of his own with staff he chooses himself. Consistent vigilance has negated any possibility of an institutional attitude and behaviour developing amongst the people who work with Craig and helps to ensure a safe environment for him.

The people in Craig’s life are the key to his continued safety.

KEY TO HAPPINESS

I am so happy
Life is worth living
Why
because there are wonderful people in my life
People who understand me
People who are my friends
People who are there for me

Craig’s Circle has been in existence for 10 years. The members all know the goals that Craig and his family have in place for his good life. They visit Craig regularly and contribute immeasurably to the quality of his life. They celebrate achievements with him and support him through the tough times. They have given him a feeling of safety, proving that they can be relied upon in good times and in bad.

Craig’s informal network of friends and neighbours provide another level of safety. These people are not part of Craig’s formal Circle but are also very important in his life. They call to visit him, attend regular BBQ’s, dinners and parties. Recently when Craig was in hospital many of his network of friends called to visit him.

As I said earlier Craig now chooses his own staff. They are not “carers” nor “workers”. They are a team of Lifestyle Facilitators. They work with Craig, his family, Circle and wider network in mutual respect to support Craig to live the life he chooses. It can take a long time for new staff to be confident and competent to work with Craig but we find that the time invested in taking things slowly at the start has been valuable. People tend to stay for a long time in their roles and when they move on to their own professional careers, many have stayed in contact and become part of Craig’s wider network of friends and supporters.

IF I WERE A KING

If I were a king
I would be king of freedom
In my kingdom nobody would be
imprisoned
Everybody would be free
Free to do what they want
Free to be master of their own destiny
Nobody would be imprisoned
Imprisoned in a body
A body which will not respond

In this poem Craig alludes to the feeling of imprisonment within a body which will not allow the freedom of movement, including the freedom to speak effectively. A life deprived of successful communication equates to

a life of frustration. Without successful communication there is no easy platform to identify the person within.

Sadly as a society we tend to only acknowledge a person's intelligence if they communicate using the same format we ourselves use. We tend to speak loudly or slowly to anyone using other formats. How then can the intelligence of a person deprived of speech be acknowledged?

Communication is vital. In this biographical note he prepared for his recent book Craig writes about the different channels he uses to communicate

I am a man who can speak through many different forums
but rarely my mouth.
I can paint and type and sing and I share this with you all
from my heart and soul to yours.
They say I have Autism but I say I am Craig and I am an artist.

Being able to touch type has given Craig freedom to use his words and thoughts in a format which is recognizable to other people. Communicating in this way has enabled Craig to be acknowledged as an eloquent and intelligent man. His singing and art have also enabled people to see the creative man behind the facade of autism.

THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS

AUTISM is...
Hues of autumn brown
Flashes of angry red
and
hopeless, cowardly yellow.

AUTISM is
Seeing the world through a different lens
It is travelling in a car with a muddy windscreen
The vehicle often breaks down
The driver cannot see clearly to reach his
destination
but
This vehicle is unique
It is mine. And it is how I am travelling

ART has been one of Craig's main vehicles of expression, particularly prior to his discovering the freedom of expression which Facilitated Communication (through typing) offers him. The recognition and subsequent respect which Craig's first solo exhibition gave him caused Craig to comment that it was "Victory over Madness" - it gave him a new identity, the identity of an "artist" and not solely the identity of "autistic".

Craig has had nearly 30 successful exhibitions of his art work since 2001 including a very successful solo exhibition in Toowoomba last year. His work has been shown and sold through the Graceville Gallery and at the Rosalie Gallery in Brisbane. Craig was invited by the Brisbane City Council to exhibit his work alongside Pro and David Hart and Judy Pickering. His work was also included in the SoHo Digital Art exhibition in New York.

Craig's work was presented at the Asperger National Conference in 2012 by Occupational Therapist, Moira Boyle. One of his paintings has been used on the cover of a book published by the Occupational Therapy faculty of University of Queensland, Working with parents of a newly diagnosed child with spectrum disorder, by Deb Keen and Sylvia Rodger, and his poem Fragmented is on the flysheet.

His paintings and poems are also contained in the American publication, The Heart of Autism by Debra Hosseini.

This review from the Courier Mail followed one of Craig's exhibitions at the Graceville Gallery.

"Using acrylics, Roveta immerses himself in the beauty of nature and colour rather than focusing on the negative aspects of life. He has always had a passionate interest in colour which he uses for relaxation and self-expression as he finds words difficult. "

THIS WONDERFUL LIFE

I can quietly reflect
to see how lucky I am
friends are changing my world
Opening up my life
I can now build up dreams
millions of moments of living.

Many of those original goals we shared with Craig for his life have been achieved. He is safe in his own home, he has the respect of those around him and a feeling of self-respect. He can communicate his thoughts and feelings. He is free. But we have learned over the years that life is never static. It is constantly changing.

Maintaining this worthwhile life needs constant review and vigilance. It is always a work in progress, never a work completed. But Craig lives with a strong sense of hope and, like him, we believe that, with the commitment of the people around him, Craig's "wonderful life" - his life of "a million moments of living" - will continue.

Craig would like to conclude this presentation with these words, the final statement from his book:

"Being me makes a difference in the world in which I now feel a part of in a good way."



Leigh Tabrett has worked in education and the arts as a teacher, university administrator, senior public servant and policy advisor to both state and commonwealth governments. Leigh drew on her experience in education and the arts, particularly her contribution to the comprehensive review and renewal of Arts Queensland, to explore the links between leadership and change within organisations and the processes that can assist leaders through change processes.

Leading Change

As living organisms, we are constantly changing – have a look at your primary school photos and you will see what I mean, even if the mirror doesn't remind you every day! We are also part of multiple sets of complex living systems which are also changing every instant – the dynamic physical world, our partnerships, families, friendships and social groups and networks, our workplaces – the list is endless.

Perhaps it's no surprise that we seek stability in the face of this truth, and indeed we may fear and resist change – especially change which we don't initiate ourselves, but which arrives unexpectedly or which challenges our sense of comfort. Remember the cows in the movie *Babe*? Their response to Babe's attempts to change his role was "The way things are, is the way things are". We can be very like those cows when the stability of our known world is challenged.

Yet at one level we know that life-altering changes can arrive in the blink of an eye – we can fall in love, be hit by a cyclone, lose a loved one, become responsible for the care of an injured child or partner, or have our employer taken-over, change direction, or fail. **We consciously prepare ourselves for much of our lives but when it comes to being "fit for change", how ready are we? And how can we achieve both the stability we need to feel and function well, and the capability for change and growth we need?**

For leaders of teams and organisations, there are very well established and tested "recipes" for taking a work-group or a whole organisation on a change journey. I love John Kotter's little fable "My Iceberg is Melting" (1) and have used it as a set of principles for effecting big organisational changes in my work. His eight steps for organisational change (*with my comments in italics*) are:

1. Create a sense of urgency

Why do we need to change, and why now?

2. Form a coalition of change leaders

Teams are better at problem solving than individuals!

3. Develop the vision

Where do we want to get to?

4. Communicate the vision to everyone - internal and external stakeholders

This keeps you honest and focussed!

5. Get everyone working on the change

Find ways in which everyone from board members to volunteers and clerical staff can be involved in carrying forward the new agenda.

6. Focus on an early win and celebrate it together

The power of positive feedback confirms the value of the change agenda.



7. Never let up – keep pushing the change vision into all the working parts of the organisation.

Once the first rush of change is over, the desire for comfort re-emerges. But if you want to be "fit for change", you have to exercise your change muscles continuously!

8. Embed change in the culture of the organisation

Depending on your circumstances, you may in fact want to pay attention to this from the beginning. For example, if your agenda is about shifting from a regulatory to a client service orientation, this will be part of the vision, and you will need to start on it up front.

That all sounds pretty clear, doesn't it? So why, when so much thought, research and attention has been paid to the challenge of achieving change in organisations, does leadership matter? And what is the actual task of a leader of change? Here are some observations built on my own experience and reading: I have no-one else to blame for them.

Successful leaders help people to manage their own change.

For me, it was a HUGE lesson to discover that, if you want to change a relationship or pattern of interactions, you need to know and act on this fundamental truth: *you can't change another person, but you can change how you interact with them.*

I will illustrate this with a personal story. When my daughter was about four years old, she developed what I can only describe as a "sock fetish".

We would be rushing to get ready for school and kindy, with bags for ballet, sport, school, swimming, homework, my work, laptop, dry-cleaning – the whole routine – and she would suddenly sit down on the floor and throw a small tantrum because her socks “had lumps in them”. I would lose it, we would yell at each other, and I would end up at work needing a half-hour sit down and a strong coffee to regain my equilibrium. I dread to think what her first half hour at school was like!

At about that time, I chose to go to a one-day course on dealing with difficult people in the workplace, where I heard those magic words: “You can’t change someone else, but you can change how you interact with them”. The next time we had a sock tantrum, instead of behaving like a child myself, I sat down on the floor with my daughter, and gave her a big cuddle, and said things like: “Oh darling, you are quite right. Modern socks are a complete disaster. Sit here quietly with blue bunny for a moment and I will find some better ones!” I think we only had two more sock tantrums, and of course, I realised that it wasn’t about socks, but her anxiety about the rush to get ready and go to school – readily, and only, addressed by some proper attention.

The good lesson from this is that, as a leader of change, one thing you can really affect is how you interact with people. You can create an environment in which people can express their fears and anxieties safely, where attention is paid to those concerns and what lies beneath them, and where there is some clarity (if not certainty) about the parameters of the change agenda and what it means for them. Calling on learnings from neuroscience, you can stimulate people to engage and deepen their own thinking and problem-solving capacities (2), you can give them metaphors and stories which help them find new pathways for thinking and acting, and you can praise and reinforce successful change.

Successful leaders live the vision.

Nothing shapes an organisation’s culture and behaviour more than the behaviour of the person at the top. If you want to build an organisation which values the contributions of all its staff, for example, then you will need to demonstrate this in your own behaviour. If you want to reduce the sense of hierarchy, and get everyone to share responsibility for the success of the organisation, you will need to be willing to clear meeting rooms, make coffee, collate and staple, and empty bins - whatever the so-called “low level” chores are. This has other benefits: you will be amazed at how much you can learn about your own organisation while you are stuffing envelopes or stacking the dishwasher with team members!

Successful leaders know that the heart is the key change muscle.

One of the hardest things to do is to get people to part with their hard-earned cash for a project or a cause. Yet annually, Australians give huge sums of money to a range of causes and projects designed to make life better for others, including people in remote countries which they may never visit, and whose citizens they may never meet. What triggers this behaviour? It is the heart – the recognition of our common humanity, the possibility that it could be us, gratitude for our own good fortune, the desire to make a difference. These are powerful motivators of human action, and successful leaders find ways to reveal something of their own hearts, to give meaning to work and desired outcomes and to speak to values and aspirations, as a way of engaging the best energies of their staff.

This takes both a willingness to be yourself and the courage to engage. The pay-offs are big. By focussing on values and aspirations, you are creating the building blocks for stability and survival: systems which share values and communicate effectively are able to withstand a battering from external change. Think about then Premier Anna Bligh’s speech during the floods in 2011.

Successful leaders focus on strengths

We are highly tuned to judge and assess, and much of our education system is focussed on the development of what are called “critical thinking” skills. Applied to people – to clients and staff (and to family and friends, for that matter) these highly developed skills can derail us from precisely the outcomes we are seeking to achieve.

We know that the more attention we give something the more it prospers - because the relevant pathways in the brain are being strengthened. This is how we learn and it is why it so difficult to change a habit. The more you focus on giving up chocolate, the more you are likely to crave it! If we “pay attention to the problem or the negative qualities of a situation or person, that is what will become hardwired”. (3)

What does this mean for how we manage our relationships with people? If what we focus on is failure we are hard-wiring failure and we risk invoking a whole raft of emotions – fear, pessimism, self-defensiveness - that turn off the capacity to learn. This is not an argument for not paying attention to performance: that is always a key part of a leader’s role. But it is an argument for using your “critical thinking” skills differently: for reinforcing strengths and encouraging people to act from those strengths – their achievements will amaze you.

Of course, not all of us lead teams or organisations but we are nearly all called upon to lead, sometimes. We may need to help our family deal with an unexpected challenge; sometimes, we need to get someone on the other side of a counter or at the end of a phone, to change their response or thinking. These life tasks can require some of our best leadership skills. It is our capacity to be aware of how we are interacting with people, to engage their hearts and minds, and to speak to their strengths which will help us to inspire others to “dream more, learn more, do more and become more”(4) – to be successful leaders.

For further interesting reading on this topic, Leigh has recommended the following:

1. John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber *My Iceberg is Melting* Macmillan 2006
2. David Rock *Quiet Leadership – Six Steps to Transforming Performance at Work* Collins 2007
3. David Rock and Lynda Page *Coaching with the Brain in Mind* John Wiley and Sons 2009, p 181
4. John Quincy Adams – Adams was not held to be a great American president, but he was a great orator, and he was right about this!



Innovation as a Possible Element of Agency or Service Transformation

Michael Kendrick

Dr Michael Kendrick is well known internationally for his work on leadership, advocacy, safeguards and the promotion of community living for people with a disability. He lives in the United States but works regularly in Australia. In his presentation Michael discussed the need for innovative thinking and action in achieving good lives for people with disability. Michael cautioned against innovation for its own sake and the highlighted the importance of the values underlying innovation.

Innovation as a Possible Element of Agency or Service Transformation

“Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things.”
Theodore Levitt

Much of what is considered innovative may simply be new to people. Even though the supposed innovation may have been invented possibly decades or centuries earlier, it may seem quite novel and possibly beneficial to those who have not encountered it before.

The distinction between inventions and the adoption of these is quite useful. In order for innovations to be created it may only take a tiny number of people. However, for innovations to flourish and spread into widespread use, it normally will involve very large numbers of people engaged in some manner of innovation adoption.

“Doing the same thing over and over, yet expecting different results is the definition of crazy.” Unknown

Innovation as a term is often used only in its positive sense as being a “good thing”. Yet many innovations can be horrific in terms of human consequences, yet still be unprecedented inventions. The Holocaust, the atom bomb, global warming and the widespread psychotropic drugging of people with disabilities are all, at some level “inventions”, yet these bona fide innovations are highly morally and existentially problematic. Obviously, we would all prefer that the innovations that are authentically beneficial to people would be those that are widely adopted.

Community services for people with disabilities were pioneered with the hope that they would be an alternative to old style custodial institutions; however some of them have quite unexpectedly perpetuated new forms of custodial existences. This perverse outcome had not been foreseen by their original pioneers and proponents; but it stands as a lesson for other “would be” inventors and innovation enthusiasts that we should be careful with innovations, as they may have aspects to them that are negative despite all of our hopes and good intentions. This is not an argument to not innovate, but rather to do so with fewer illusions that innovations will always be beneficial in practice.

“All existing things are really one. We regard those that are beautiful and rare as valuable, and those that are ugly as foul and rotten. The foul and rotten may come to be transformed into what is rare and valuable, and the rare and valuable into what is foul and rotten.” Zhuangzi

The present day agencies and community services have gradually revealed a wide range of their long-term shortcomings, at least from the point of view



of those who rely on them. These include segregation, poor social inclusion outcomes for people, disempowerment, failure to engage needs effectively, mistreatment of and harm to people, the flourishing of vested interest and so on.

Leadership is needed to begin to understand why these shortcomings have developed as they did and what might be done that could effectively counter these emergent unhelpful features.

Such reformist leadership would need to either innovate beneficial alternatives (if they do not already exist) or more widely urge and foster the proper adoption of practices that are more reliably beneficial than the status quo. If we are going to be innovative, we have to apply ourselves to be innovative – someone has to do the work.

“Transformation means literally going beyond your form.”
Wayne Dwyer

In initiating a mindful approach to invention, innovations and their considered adoption, it is important to make safeguarding such work a conscious part of what agencies routinely do. Should agencies be unable to do this, then it may be necessary to abandon conventionally configured community service agencies as being the cornerstone of community services and pioneer another means that is more consistent with the aims and hopes of service users.

If we take current community agencies as a basis for transformation and innovation, the types of investments made would be many in number; but taken together, could be suitable for both supporting needed innovations and their adoption.

The following are some briefly stated elements of an overall investment strategy to progress the innovation and agency transformation agenda. On a broader agency planning level, the agenda could include:

- Setting enduring agency goals and priorities that include: beneficial invention, innovation adoption, innovation safeguarding and innovation evolution as crucial.
- Creating concrete agency priorities and targets relative to innovation overall.
- Exposing people to potentially worthwhile innovations so that they can begin to appreciate their value.
- Linking internal innovators or potential adopters to the supportive networks of external innovators and adopters.
- Searching externally for examples of potentially relevant innovations, and the experience gained in their adoption, for useful lessons to guide internal adoption and practice.
- Making a routine practice of the intentional and repeated convening of both internal and external innovators, early adopters and potential allies as catalysts for needed changes.

On a practical level, an agency could invest in innovation by:

- Attracting, challenging and authorizing innovative people to undertake the various facets of the overall challenges involved in embedding potentially useful innovations.
- Exposure of potential innovators and innovation adopters to innovative thinking, persons and practices.
- Create intentional small scale safe “spaces” or “zones” within or near to services or systems where the unconventional can be experimented with and experience can be gained with new ways of operating.
- Protecting and cultivating innovative or experimental initiatives until they are mature and effective enough to be credible in their performance.
- Creating and developing the political, ideological and technical constituencies that would defend and promote needed innovations – whilst ensuring that the fiscal and human resources needed to succeed with innovations are present in sufficient amounts.

Safeguarding an appreciation for innovation is also important to ensure the upholding of a culture in which innovation is valued. The following are some examples of how this could be achieved:

- Ensuring that leaders are in place to understand the significance of innovations and how to locate, enlist and bring out the best in the people that can bring them into being.
- The development of strategies that link innovators to the people and needs that bona fide innovations may ultimately benefit.
- Education of the uninformed or currently undiscerning of the potential value of innovations so that they are more likely to be supportive.
- Add momentum, evidence and support to an ongoing innovation agenda by consciously capitalising on the emerging benefits produced by recent innovations.
- Begin to develop an appetite amongst supporters for innovations that have more potency and benefit (thus “significance”) in order to distinguish comparatively trivial from more profound innovations.
- Critically evaluate how beneficial innovations have been increased in scale for larger numbers in other jurisdictions.

The preceding strategies, taken as a whole, would go a long way towards animating the recognition and adoption of beneficial innovations. Nonetheless, more would be needed if the intent was to safeguard innovations from perverse unintended effects or aspects of proposed or already adopted innovations. In particular it would be important to:

- Investigate any perverse effects seen in similar innovations that had been adopted elsewhere and assess whether these developments might emerge in one’s own proposed innovations.

- In such investigations note any safeguards in practice that have successfully served as effective counterweights to perverse unintended outcomes emerging.
- Continue to critically examine one’s own innovation adoption so as to evaluate where these innovations may be vulnerable and begin to adopt or craft targeted intentional safeguards that might reliably offset undesirable outcomes emerging.
- Be attentive to small declines in the mindfulness of implementation as innovations are more routinely put in place. These could grow into unexpected perversities if not caught early enough and corrected.

It is important to recognize that even currently fruitful innovations may still have the potential for further evolution, refinement and strengthening. There may exist scope for examining such innovations with an interest in whether any qualitative improvements might be feasible.

Imagination is a very powerful engine and is like a muscle that needs to be used.

Discontent can often be the seed of an eventual rethinking and redesign of an innovation that is developmental and evolutionary in nature. For instance, the valued added benefits that can come from service users being supported to optimize the benefits they gained from their resources was overlooked in many early attempts to implement individual funding arrangements. This has subsequently led to their inclusion in a menu of potentially useful supports that other people can draw upon. In other words, innovations can often evolve into better innovations.

A lot of this begins with the capacity to imagine differently – to see the world from a new perspective. Imagination is a very powerful engine and is like a muscle that needs to be used. We are going to have to be imaginative in order to try and see something from a totally different angle.

“Innovation – any new idea – by definition will not be accepted at first. It takes repeated attempts, endless demonstrations and monotonous rehearsals before innovation can be accepted and internalized by an organization. This requires courageous patience.
Warren Bennis



Beyond serviced lives: leading in community building. Lorna Hallahan

Dr Lorna Hallahan is a senior lecturer in the School of Social and Policy Studies at Flinders University, Adelaide. Lorna, who was involved in the early days of Queensland Advocacy Inc, remains actively involved in the disability sector, most recently on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Advisory Group. In her presentation Lorna explored three fundamental elements of a social movement and concluded with her vision for how the disability movement in Australia can transform our communities by doing what we do best.

Beyond serviced lives: leading in community building.

Hallmarks of a social movement

The conventional wisdom about social movements is that they need to have two core features in order to be effective. A commitment to transformational values and a politically strategic environment and capacity. Some scholars would add that social movement actors also need the capacity to live the future in the present. To live as though what they think matters for most, if not all, people, is happening in their lives now. So gay and lesbian activists are out in a world that does not yet grant equal marital rights and presents opportunities for daily humiliation. Environmental activists live off the grid. You get the picture.

I want to look at these three elements in my considerations of where the opportunities might lie for taking us beyond serviced lives.

But first, a bit of a health check on our movement.

We can easily trick ourselves into some seriously negative thinking about our fellow citizens or conversely that nirvana awaits us when we wake. We can get mighty moralistic about it, about the choices we make, the stories we tell and the ways we conduct ourselves with others. We can become grandiose about our capacity to effect change, or, we go the other way, alternating with what Sharon Welch calls 'cultured despair'. Finally, we can become overwhelmed by the politics of envy.

I do not want you to think that I am taking some sort of standing back, judging stance here. These are my weaknesses as much as anyone's. But I am sure that leaving these things unacknowledged will not be healthy for our movement or within our individual lives. We need to aim for truth, an account that is not self-serving and attempts for emotional honesty.

Transformational values and generosity of spirit

This in part addresses the idea that we must be the change we wish to see in the world. If we think that what matters in our lives is a profound generosity of spirit... we have to be the most open-hearted people in town and being open means we have to pay attention to when we are closed. Smuggerly is the enemy of generosity of heart, humility is its engine.

This brings me to transformational values. Speaking of transformational values reminds us that our values have work to do... they are not merely aspirational and therefore tying goal with process is essential. Our work has to build affiliation, not simply desire it (which we must do as well).

Now I'm not suggesting that being nice is going make everyone like us and let



us, and our family members, into the decent parts of community life. My point is that everybody is a somebody and there are no nobodies. We are in substantial agreement about this, especially in the big picture, but at times I think we allow ourselves to slip into conventional values, especially when envy and status anxiety are driving us – and there are some very tempting shots to be had.

Speaking of transformational values reminds us that our values have work to do... Our work has to build affiliation, not simply desire it

A comment on being politically strategic

Movements also need to be politically strategic and to be able to operate within the environments that open both opportunities for action and close them off. This means we have to be smart, really smart!

In some ways it could put us in tension with our values – being politically strategic requires that some in our movement are required to work in ways that build influence and not always affiliation. I think you can do both, but competitiveness is the modus operandi in policy influence work and advocacy and we may need to use those with a competitive edge to advance progressive ideas and policies. People will need to display their gifts that are not shared by all.

What do people really think?

It's really hard to find out what we as individuals think about an issue, especially if it puts us in a light that might be seen as undesirable. Social scientists call this 'the social desirability bias': the tendency to give an answer that pleases. We tend to either deny our bigotry or overplay our charitable behaviour or intellectual achievements.

This is a problem for those of us who think that changing the minds and the actions of our fellow citizens is an important aspect of our collective efforts to build a more embracing society. How often are we tempted to quote those generalisations that feed into 'us and them' thinking, involving the recitation of the horror stories, encounters with the ignorant or hostile, struggles and slights?

Neediness and public image

What I would really like to know, and can muster only diverse evidence for, is whether in all the campaigning and politicking about the NDIS we produced, in the minds of our fellow Australians, a view that people with disability and their families are primarily needy and most of all require services to get through the day and to get through their lives. The disabled citizen as the perpetual welfare recipient.

This matters because we need to accept that our advocacy as always has both positive and negative impacts. We managed to address serious under-funding; the insidious impact of rationing that leaves us competing with each other to be the most desperate on the waiting list; and the rigidity of service models that constrain creativity and choice. But we did it by telling a story about being needy and neglected in recognition of our rights. Perhaps we orchestrated some cultural change or at least gave high note to a cultural code that has always sat there. In just a small way I know that members of the wider public think that the problems of 'folk like me' will be solved now. I know this because people tell me.

Is this the transformation we seek? For some, perhaps those committed to more conventional values, I think that this will be enough. They will be pleased that services might be easier to get and to run and end up better suited to the person. They will be delighted that a political window opened and they flew through it. They will be pleased that we got up and I share that delight. Please note that I am not critiquing the NDIS here, I am critiquing our movement. I know, however, from the birth and the growing to maturity of the Community Resource Unit and its sister organisations in this state and country, that these are too instrumental a set of goals. They meet essential needs but are not enough to bring about transformation into a society we seek. That is, one that is open, embracing, fun and dedicated to exploring when it's important to be a 'me' (about rights recognition and service appropriateness) and important to be a 'we' (about community acceptance and embrace).

So now, the question for our movement is how to honour the reforms, those who worked hard for them and continue to such that we do not appear churlish and irrelevant; and at the same time that we shift our focus back to the cultural and community building aspects of our work. How do we give a high note to that part of our self and collective understanding that says we are not needy but contributing and indeed leaders? I will return to this question soon.

Is there a problem in being supplicant?

This question leads us to the heart of what we need to do in order to live the future in the present.

Being supplicant is not necessarily a negative thing so long as we position it within a very different understanding of our desired relationships. It is OK to

ask for help...we all do it, some of us have to do it more than others. It is when it is seen as the grounds for condescension or for getting fixed up that it is potentially humiliating. The nature of the relationship in which help is sought is the issue, not the help-seeking itself and this is where our transformational values come into play, and where notions of affiliation come into play. We need to lead a community wide conversation about dignity, not just contribution, but about the dignity of response as well as the dignity of request. This is what we know best.

We need to lead a community wide conversation about dignity, not just contribution, but about the dignity of response as well as the dignity of request.

At heart, living a small life in which one is respected and sought out, named and celebrated, is OK. This automatically expands life and feeds hope. Living a small life in which one must further diminish one's expectations, in which one is dealt with and swept away is not OK. This automatically shrinks life and starves hope. We need to deepen our thinking about dependency and mutuality, about dignity and belonging and about solidarity and identity. All these conversations are alive in our movement but not strong.

And that is where our leadership comes into play. Not leadership inside our movement but leadership by our movement. By raising the value of dignity we are, by our actions, living our future in the present.

Leaders in affiliation building

I was involved in the development of the South Australian Strategic Plan (SASP) in which many people from all over the state and from many different communities came up with this:

- Our Communities are vibrant places to live, work, play and visit
- Everyone has a place to call home
- Strong families help build communities
- We are safe in our homes,

- community and at work
- We are connected to our communities and give everyone a fair go

This is our ground. It is affiliation as essential for all human flourishing. As we know about it, in deep and important ways, it is no longer us saying that we need serviced lives but lives with our neighbours (in the biggest sense).

We know what it takes; we do not have to rely on professional community developers to do it (although they would help); we can rely on our own internal conversations to bring vision and purpose; and our experience to bring skills.

This is way beyond being supplicant, while it honours our need for help and our capacity to care. It is way beyond having some impressive heroes while it recognises that their efforts are important to break new ground. It is way beyond thinking that our movement need only focus on the political moment and the redistribution of resources while recognising that a commitment to justice must come with dollars. It is way beyond thinking only about our internal leadership and debates, while welcoming a new generation with sharp ideas, fabulous skills and resources and a challenging gaze. It is the way we must live every day. So it is the leadership work of us all... paying careful attention to those things that can distort that I mentioned at the outset.

I will conclude on the words of Eleanor Roosevelt:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.



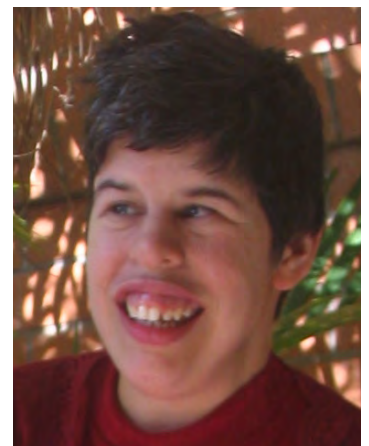
A good life, an ordinary life, a life like everyone else

David Rallings has built an impressive resume over the last 20 years. In his presentation (with his sister-in-law Anne) David discussed his various careers. He reflected on what he has learned from work and his colleagues as well as talking about his favourite jobs and why he moved on from others. He also discussed his current, and much-loved, job of 11 years – groundskeeper at the local golf course.



David appreciates that like everyone else, work opens up opportunities – whether it be paying his own rent, saving for holidays, or the satisfaction of a job well done. Having a job has given David the dignity of being an equal in his community and to choose the life that he wants live.

In a presentation with her mother Marlene, **Alison Crawford** reflected on the change of thinking that moved her and her family away from fitting into existing services and helped them to focus on what a good life looks like for Alison. The support she receives from her family, support circle, housemate, support workers, neighbours and friends, lets Alison focus on what is important to her to make her vision a reality.



Alison is passionate about her community, working and volunteering within a few minutes of the unit she moved in to three years ago. Alison chose three simple words to conclude her presentation. “I am happy”.

The collage of images to the right is collected from the final presentation of the day entitled “A Good Life, an Ordinary Life, a Life like Everyone Else”.

Queensland is in the middle of significant change around what support for people with disability looks like and its potential uses. More and more people are planning their own lives, or planning with their family members, setting the vision of what’s possible, taking charge and then working out what part a paid or formal service has in that life. People are moving into their own homes; getting jobs; following their passions and contributing to their communities.

In response to the often asked questions, ‘but what is happening in Queensland?’, ‘can it happen here or is that only possible in Canada or America?’ we want to assure you that these are all photos of local people. These images are just a glimpse in to the richness of the lives of the people who have shared their photos and a small representation of the number of people with disability who are living ordinary lives in the community, not perfect, but just like everyone else.

This powerful example of a movement of change is being created thanks to the courage and leadership of many people with disabilities, their families, friends and organisations across the state.





Shifting from Problems to Possibilities. Working Together for Change. Anne Cross

Anne Cross was the founding director of the Community Resource Unit in 1988 and is currently Chief Executive Officer of Uniting Care Queensland. She has more than thirty years' experience in the health and community services sector and has extensive experience in developing capacity in non-government community organisations. Drawing lessons from our own experience in the disability sector locally, Anne outlined some of the essential ingredients for taking individual efforts into a movement for change.

Shifting from Problems to Possibilities. Working Together for Change.

My task here is to reflect on our own history in the Disability sector in Queensland and in particular CRU's history to draw out the lessons that might be important to guide change efforts into the future. At last year's "Search Celebration Dinner", celebrating twenty five years since the Search Conference, I reflected on the place of that gathering had on the history of the modern disability movement in Queensland.

I used the word 'movement' deliberately. The Search Conference marked the tentative beginnings of the coming together of people who at that point in time didn't know that they might be potential allies. They came together to test their individual and shared convictions and the boundaries of what might be different if people worked together on projects, ideas and strategies, rather than soldier on in our own particular 'patches'. In this paper I would like to discuss what we can learn from this movement and how these lessons are invaluable for what lies ahead.

So what can we learn about our own history that might be pertinent to our change efforts in the future? One thing that is important is that we have learned that change is possible.

To reflect on this you need to recall or imagine what it might mean to not know any children with disabilities who had been included in regular school; to not know any people with intellectual disabilities or significant physical disabilities who had a job outside of a sheltered workshop, to not know people with disabilities who have degrees and professional lives. To not know any people with disabilities who lived outside of the family home, a 10 bed residential, a nursing home or an institution. To not know people with disabilities who were able to participate in community groups, sporting groups, arts groups other than in activity therapy centres or other specialist disability services. To not see people with disabilities out and about in the community, at the shops unless they were with their families or in large disability group outings. I could go on.

And whilst there have always been individuals and families that found a way to do things differently, I think it is fair to say that the predominant and also dominant set of circumstances that faced people with disabilities and families was against any of these ordinary things actually happening. We might reflect that this is still the case for many if not most people with disabilities, but we do actually know it is possible for change to occur and that there are many pockets of progress and some systemic progress that has been made. This is a great lesson to learn!



Consistent with the theme of engaging the heart and 'imagining better' I think we have also learned that it is possible to inspire ourselves and others to want something different and to see possibilities.

Back at the time of Search and the beginning of CRU, the notion that we could have a vision was novel, uplifting and filled us with hope. We soon learned that 'vision' needed to be articulated and nurtured. We looked elsewhere and especially overseas to find practical expressions of a vision that saw people with disabilities living valued lives in the community. We selectively brought in people who could inspire and help us flesh out the vision. Many people in Queensland have been touched by the stories brought to us by Nicola Schaeffer, Bruce Uditsky, Jeff Strully, Darcy Elkes, John O'Brien, and Michael Kendrick to name just a few of our overseas inspirers.

We also set about acknowledging what was happening in our own backyard and deliberately set out to support and nurture our own examples of positive change. Some of these have withered on the vine but many individuals and families have crafted different possibilities and these in turn have inspired others.

The sheer joy of moving from believing something is possible to knowing it is possible is liberating and challenging. Being able to say “I know it is possible” is very powerful.

At a previous conference, which coincided with CRU’s ten years, it was noted that CRU had adopted a theory of change, which emphasised a change of heart as well as changes to the structures that limit and oppress people with disabilities.

So, one of the things we have learned over the past twenty five years is the importance of a positive vision and values and the constant work of articulating, aligning and staying true to a coherent set of positive ideas that truly benefit people with disabilities and their families. This surely will continue to be an important ingredient in the nurturing of any movement for change going forward.

I think people of like mind need to find each other; the last twenty five years have taught us that they can find each other, gather and organise if this is facilitated.

One of the reasons social movements wither is that people who might share concerns might simply not know each other. So whilst the role of ‘facilitating social connection’ of likeminded individuals might not make it into a funding agreement with government, it seems to me that this is a crucial element of nurturing change. People of like mind and heart need to be able to have relationships with each other which are not defined by rules and procedures (alone) but by a sharing of a common outlook on society and within this context, on the place of people with disabilities and their families in our communities.

So I think we have learned that the building of networks and a positive movement for change is critical and there is nothing I know about change and social movements that would suggest it won’t continue to be important going forward.

Along the way, we have learned that a movement is a mixture of organization and spontaneity. Whilst there is usually one or more organizations (such as CRU) that give identity, leadership and coordination to the movement, the boundaries of the movement are never coterminous with the organizations.

I would reflect that we have benefited in Queensland from not only having a vision of what might be possible, but also from having strong beliefs about how one might actually go about bringing about change. All social movements possess ‘norms’, theories and ideas about ‘how’ things should happen. Throughout the past twenty five years, we too have had our theories about this.

I think it is important to note that all movements need a powerful set of ideas that guide what is expected. Wolf Wolfensberger’s ideas and strategies provided such a theory for a community service system to replace the institutions. His principles of ‘Normalization’ together with concepts such as ‘Least Restrictive Alternative’ were influential for all levels of government. These ideas evolved into Social Role Valorisation. This theory has provided a powerful set of organising ideas for most people involved in grappling with the deep change that is actually needed if possibilities are to be achieved and sustained.

Such ideas help strengthen people’s commitment to a movement. Not everyone will study and think through the philosophy (and science) that justifies the movement and its values, but enough people need to do that to ensure that the ‘party line’ is actually justifiable.

Indeed if you look to the wider disability movement in Australia at present, all the excitement about the NDIS and Disability Care Australia, makes me ponder what the central powerful ideas are in that reform. Will funding, some level of universal access, needs assessment, consumer control and the market place deliver what people with disabilities and their families want? Are these ideas powerful enough to deliver on a vision of people with disabilities living valued lives in the community? Perhaps the need for a disability movement might not quite be over.

My next lesson from the past twenty five years is that we would not have achieved much if there were not people who provided leadership at crucial times around important issues.

All movements need individuals who will exercise leadership. Change simply won’t happen if there are not people who recognise problems and help with defining a different possibility and in turn work at actually creating that reality.

I think there are two key aspects of this that stand out for me from the past twenty five years. The first is the importance of recognising and actively investing in the leadership of people with disabilities and families. And the second is that leaders might also be in all sorts of roles within agencies, within government and from outside the disability sector. One of the strengths and the joys of the work that has been done in Queensland is that both ‘quiet’ and ‘visible’ leadership has been shown by various people in all sorts of roles in a wide range of settings on an array of issues.

Change simply won’t happen if there are not people who recognise problems and help with defining a different possibility and in turn work at actually creating that reality.

Another point of reflection is that it was really in CRU's very first year that we realised that whilst there were many people (and especially families) who wanted change, there was a need to invest in leadership development to support people to have the confidence and the skills to make a contribution to bringing about change.

This investment in leadership is one of the core themes of CRU's work over the years... and crucial to sustaining an ongoing movement for positive change.

Because social movements are not eternal; they grow, they achieve success or failures, they dissolve and most cease to exist. It is true, I think, that social movements are more likely to evolve in times that are 'friendly' to social movements emerging. I think it is fair to say that the 1980's and 1990's provided considerable potential for the emergence of a modern disability movement in Queensland.

In the 1980's there was the production of various and deeply disturbing reports about institutional care across Australia for people with intellectual disability. This followed various reports in the 1970's, in some states, that highlighted the lack of assistance for people with disabilities. The work of shifting from an institutional model derived from the medical model to a social training model was groundbreaking; but faced opposition on many fronts.

It was in this context that the idea of a community conference using Search methodology emerged. A conference hosted by a parent advocacy group that brought together people from across the spectrum to explore a vision for people with disabilities in Queensland – now THAT was bold idea. So we used our networks and Queensland Parents of the Disabled (QPD – now Queensland Parents of People with Disability – QPPD) took to the Commonwealth Government this brilliant idea and offered to organise and host the Search Conference....a grassroots initiative in the state where nothing was happening. That was appealing! The funding was found very quickly and the rest, as you'd say, is history.

So the context allowed and even enabled Queensland to join what was much wider national and international movement for community living for people with disabilities. But of course it would not have happened without people deciding it should happen and people deciding to work together in what was then unusual alliances to turn ideas into real possibilities.

Movements need to respond to the particular circumstances and challenges of the time.

Whilst one might also need to create the circumstances that facilitate change, they need to be in response to the challenges of the time. Movements need to continuously and periodically be 'kick started' to engage new people and leaders and to emerge the next iteration of actions. Movements need to check their relevance to practical issues of the day as well their alignment with the desired vision. Different leaders are often needed at different times. The alternative is the cessation of activism and actions for change.

We have also learned that change is complex and that learning to 'work together' has been a crucial lesson.

We have learned that whilst the well quoted Margaret Mead saying that "Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world, for, indeed, that's all who ever have" is true... much change requires an alignment of people from different parts of the 'system'. I think it is true that we have learned over the past twenty five years that people with disabilities and their families can't make it happen on their own. Service providers can't make it happen on their

own and government certainly can't make it happen on its own - and we still often forget to include the business community and the general community... which is interesting given we spend an awful lot of time talking about community participation! We simply have done very little to invest in changing the culture of communities – to invite people 'ordinary people' into finding the solutions.

What our history has taught us is that allies are crucial in all parts of the system. It is too easy in our sector to be very insular; to not actually look across system divides for allies.

Movements need to continuously and periodically be 'kick started' to engage new people and leaders and to emerge the next iteration of actions.

Both the Search Conference and CRU have taught us about the importance of shifting from problems to possibilities; they have taught us about the importance of vision and the power of bringing together different voices and different experiences. We learned that it was okay to invite and expect people to step up to the plate, to show leadership and be involved. And of course we learned about the importance of alliances and coalitions and that allies are not always immediately obvious.

And I think the last lesson is about vigilance.

We have learned much about safeguards around individuals and even organisations over the past twenty five years, but it remains necessary to be vigilant about the movement itself. The lessons I have drawn out today – shared vision, nurturing inspiration, investing in leadership, working together, opening up alliances, deepening theory and understanding of bringing out change, are ongoing perennial matters of concern. A central consideration is relevance to context. Identifying the big questions that deserve our attention is a critical safeguard in and of itself.