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Community Resource Unit: A Decade of Investment in Values, Vision and Grassroots Development

Anne Cross and Margaret Ward

Anne Cross has worked at Community Resource Unit (CRU) since its inception in 1988. As Director, Anne has been involved in the lives of people with disabilities and their families, worked with service agencies, and been involved in teaching Social Role Valorisation and related topics and in numerous change projects in Queensland and throughout Australia. Anne's major interests lie in translating positive values and visions into practical ways that support people with disabilities to have better lives. Prior to her work with CRU, Anne worked in various government and non-government positions, with much of that work also being concerned with improving opportunities for people with disabilities.

Margaret Ward was founding President of CRU and presently holds the role of Secretary. She is also the parent of three children, one of whom has multiple disabilities. Margaret has previously been president of Queensland Parents of People with Disability (QPPD), a member of the Disability Advisory Council of Australia, and has served on numerous committees. In 1989 Margaret was awarded a Churchill Fellowship, which supported her to travel to Canada and the USA to meet with families involved in advocacy. Margaret worked for some years in a government position concerned with the provision of public housing to people with disabilities. She is presently a director of a family-based business, Verandah Papers.

Introduction

Community Resource Unit (CRU) commenced its work in 1988. Its adopted role was to support change that would enhance possibilities for people with disabilities and their families. This role was set in the context of the principles and objectives of the (then) newly introduced Commonwealth Disability Services Act. The role of CRU was then, and is now, somewhat different from the efforts

of others we have heard from at this conference. CRU has always seen itself as a catalyst creating the preconditions for authentic change that favours people with disabilities. It is a role of change agency rather than one of advocacy or 'hard core' service provision. During the last ten years CRU has worked to raise issues, heighten expectations, and pose many values questions.

It has also worked to support innovation and leadership, and to develop safeguards that will protect and enhance possibilities for people with disabilities. While not duplicating the role played by others, on many occasions CRU has worked with groups and organisations in the pursuit of specific changes.

CRU is an Incorporated Association run by a Committee of Management and has a membership of approximately 200 people. Its origins lie in an initiative taken by parents and professionals who wanted to make the most of opportunities and to challenge the status quo that was so limiting to the lives and potential of people with disabilities. During the past ten years the committee and staff of Community Resource Unit have worked hard to clarify the organisation's own values and to refine its own theory of change. While CRU's public work in education, training, and the provision of information is well known, much of CRU's work is in supporting and advising people who are themselves providing leadership, and in this role CRU is not always so visible. In direct and indirect ways CRU has had a part to play in many of the change and development efforts in Queensland over the past decade. This is the nature of grassroots development. While CRU is an organisation with specific change agency roles, it is hard to separate the results of its work from the work of many others. As many of the presentations in this conference have shown, it is the collective effort of people that so often produces the outcome. People with disabilities are most likely to get what they need when families, friends, advocates, professionals, service providers and government officials work supportively and collaboratively.

In this chapter, CRU shares something of its beginnings, mostly because we believe it stands as an example of people coming together to work systematically towards change. We also want to share CRU's theory of change, or what we think it takes to bring about authentic change, and some significant steps in CRU's journey and discoveries along the way.

CRU's Beginnings

In 1987, when CRU began its work, change was clearly in the air with exciting initiatives being taken by the Commonwealth Government. Chapter 2 by Don Grimes describes some of these initiatives including the establishment of the Office of Disability, the Disability Advisory Council of Australia, the Home and Community Care Program and the Disability Services Program. While other

states, to a greater and lesser degree, embraced these initiatives, Queensland proved to be a hard nut to crack.

Historically, Queensland had the lowest rate of welfare funding per capita, a lack of a community development approach to welfare issues, and the most decentralised population in Australia. There were four main service providers for Queenslanders with a disability: Endeavour Foundation, Queensland Spastic Welfare League, North Queensland Crippled Children's Society and the Uniting Church, with Endeavour receiving over 40% of the Commonwealth funding to Queensland. Little interest was shown in change strategies or innovation by either the Queensland government or the funded non-government organisations at this stage.

Queensland signed the Home and Community Care (HACC) agreement with the Commonwealth, two years after most of the other Australian states. Because of this tardiness they lost out on significant starting-up funds and were well behind the other states in the establishment of community-based services. An estimated 2% of HACC funds was allocated to people with disabilities and their carers. There were arguments as to whether children were part of the target group, and the concept of assisting families was foreign to the thinking of the Queensland government. Funds provided by the Commonwealth to stimulate and initiate change were not taken up. In 1986, out of more than 200 Demonstration Projects funded across Australia, only a few were in Queensland and in 1987, half a million dollars in recurrent funds were returned to Canberra due to a lack of suitable submissions.

At that time the people who were excited about the new possibilities offered through Commonwealth initiatives, and who were agitating for change, were mostly young, idealistic workers, people with disabilities, or parents who were able to access information directly from the Commonwealth. The loss of opportunities in Queensland was becoming more and more apparent. At the same time, Commonwealth bureaucrats were desperately looking for a strategy to stimulate some action beyond that of the large service providers and a disinterested Queensland government.

This was a time to seize the day. With the blessing of Queensland Parents of the Disabled (QPD, later to become QPPD), a small group of parents, workers and people with disabilities who were outraged by such lost opportunities for Queenslanders, came together around a dining-room table to plan a Search Workshop. We all had our own dreams and plans but how were we to catalyse a shared vision across Queensland and across all areas of the disability field?

Over 100 service recipients, parents, service providers and government officials were invited to come together in a Brisbane Search Workshop for three days in October 1987. Joan Hailstone, then President of QPD, welcomed people with the following words:

“Let us now take off our hats and participate for this short time as individuals who are enthusiastic and willing to share a vision of the future and develop and nurture a supportive network for these visions. In this process we must think about all possible initiatives and alternatives.”

The Vision Statement was penned as:

Every person in Australia has the right to live a socially valued life in the community of their choice.

The issues were expansive and overwhelming. We talked about the role of government, community and personal action and, following the Workshop, we were all sent a copy of ‘the pink book’ (the workshop proceedings) which documented each of the commitments made and the names of all who attended. Two of the goals from the Search Workshop supported the eventual establishment of Community Resource Unit. QPD obtained funding and established CRU in 1988.

CRU’s First Efforts

CRU began as a project with Research and Development Funding from the Commonwealth government. In its first application for funding under the Disability Services Act, CRU stated that it would:

- Work collaboratively with organisations in the disability field;
- Be committed in its work to the values from which the Principles and Objectives of the DSA were derived;
- Ensure the centrality of people with disabilities and their families in its work; and
- Contribute to a collaborative partnership between people with disabilities, their families and service providers and attempt to build on that feature of the Search Workshop.

The funding was provided for a period of eighteen months. Given the context of the 1986 Disability Services Act, and the Queensland environment at that time, CRU created a small team in Brisbane and established a single position in Townsville. With these resources CRU began trying to bring about organisational and cultural change in the disability sector in Queensland – and initially aimed to achieve all of this in an eighteen month period!

In the first few months, CRU staff visited nineteen towns throughout Queensland. They spent time with almost every non-government funded service in Queensland talking with service providers and service recipients about the Disability Services Act and their plans to tackle transition processes. They discussed the ways in which CRU might be able to assist. In this way, over a period of just a few months CRU staff were able to get a ‘snapshot’ view of the disability sector in Queensland.

During this initial work, CRU noted that:

- Most organisations were trying to grapple with what the legislation would mean for them. There was considerable opposition to the Commonwealth legislation;
- There was limited understanding of the values from which the Principles and Objectives are derived;
- Many organisations were embracing new ideas without any clear understanding about what they were doing. Solutions were being determined without any consideration of processes especially in regard to service recipients and their families;
- Individual Program Plans were seen as a magic solution!
- While there was much more activity and innovation in the employment area than in other areas, there were few people with actual experience in the area;
- Almost no examples of innovation were found in the area of supported accommodation;
- Examples of networking and sharing information were very limited; and
- Most families and people with disabilities had almost no information about, or any exposure to, ideas about possible ways of supporting people with disabilities.

The visits throughout Queensland also enabled CRU to establish and renew links with families and individual people with disabilities. The sponsorship of QPD and its network throughout the State was a great bonus with many of the more experienced parents taking CRU under their wing and into their confidence. These relationships have remained both precious and essential to the work of CRU. We also began to establish links with service providers and some of those links continue to this day. As a result of our discussions with service providers, several contracts with agencies were signed for substantial values-based training, provision of information about various models of service, consultancy relating to transition plans, support to managers, and independent consultation with service recipients. Thus began CRU's work in supporting service reform and development.

After nine months, CRU was in contact with 28 organisations. At that time an internal review noted the informal support role that CRU was fulfilling and recommended that this role be formally recognised as it was anticipated there would be increasing demands on CRU with service workers and families making contact – needing and wanting to talk.

During this period CRU also started conducting public workshops. They included topics such as 'home', 'work', and 'why values are important' and the

principles underpinning the Disability Services Act. CRU hosted various speakers and trainers from interstate and overseas.

Most significantly, 1989 saw the introduction of Social Role Valorisation (SRV) training in Queensland. A small network of people interested in SRV had formed after attending workshops conducted by Dr. Wolfensberger in Melbourne. With their support CRU arranged for Michael Kendrick to conduct the first public SRV and PASSING courses in Queensland. In October 1989, over 400 people attended either an introductory SRV event, or Theory and PASSING events in Brisbane and Townsville. These events started CRU's public association with the national and international SRV movement. Using SRV as a major strategy for raising questions about values, much of the groundwork was laid for other strategies that would engage those values in practical ways which could benefit people with disabilities. Consistent with CRU's beliefs that families and people with disabilities must be included in training and other events, the events were attended by people with disabilities, families, and workers from across the field. During the years, CRU has found SRV to be a very effective tool in engaging people in the debate about social devaluation and its expressions in services and in the experiences of people with disabilities.

CRU's role in supporting the development of new services also commenced during this time. Knowing that values dissemination, alone, was not potent enough to bring about change, CRU realised that some of the ideas about people living and working in the community had to be tested. To this end, in addition to providing information and advice to groups, CRU took a leading role in the development of an individual supported employment service in Brisbane (the first in Queensland), and the development of an individualised supported accommodation service in Townsville.

The last major activity undertaken by CRU in the initial Research & Development contract was to organise a conference called 'Celebrate Change' in March 1990. Like so many events in the last ten years, that conference was to be an inspiration to many of the participants. A parent recently told me that it marked the start of her quest to find community living alternatives for her daughter.

A Decision to Continue: Reviewing and Renewing CRU

In late 1989 and early 1990, CRU had to consider its future. Should it continue? What should the focus of its efforts be? We reviewed many of our implicit and explicit assumptions and concluded that some of these had been inadequate, or simply wrong. We also reviewed priorities and strategies. We decided that CRU should continue, with some re-orientation of strategies.

Significantly for the direction of CRU, the committee and staff decided that if a movement for positive change was to be strengthened, then major emphasis had to be placed on the development of individuals and the engagement of individuals in a commitment to a valued life for people with disabilities. An emphasis on leadership development was critical so that the circumstances and opportunities could be maximised in favour of vulnerable people. Other reflections led us to an emphasis on safeguards, especially the development of independent advocacy. Consistent with its original role, CRU reaffirmed the importance of continuing to work for the development of new services and to support the redevelopment of existing services.

While working co-operatively with government and service providers, CRU also reaffirmed its determination to position itself and have its key alliances with families, people with disabilities, and those working for positive change.

CRU adopted a new set of goals:

- The development and maintenance of a network of people committed to improving the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families, through the provision of information, support, training, and leadership development;
- The improvement in existing services, through support and guidance, so that they better meet the needs of their service recipients; and
- The development of new services which demonstrate how things can be done to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Encouraged by the Commonwealth government to consider an application for recurrent funding as a Section 10 Information Service, and realising that it had capacity to generate some income from its own work, CRU applied for recurrent funding for about half of its operating budget as an Information Service. This recurrent funding was to support its broad role in providing information, support, training, and guidance to people involved in change efforts within the field. This was granted in August 1990.

With these more focussed directions, and recognising education as a major factor in the development of individuals, CRU continued its emphasis in education and training. Education and training has never been an end in itself, and CRU has always tried to link it to grassroots and cultural change within the field. SRV and PASSING continued to be core training events, with several being conducted each year in Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns, Rockhampton, and Maryborough. Values in Action Association has now taken over sponsorship of such events in Brisbane while in Rockhampton, the Community Training Network has hosted SRV, PASSING and other related events.

CRU continued to conduct other events and host international visitors. During one month in 1992, there were over 700 registrants in workshops conducted by Michael Kendrick in Rockhampton, Cairns, Townsville and

Brisbane. In most years there have been 1,500 or more registrants in CRU workshops. Apart from providing extensive exposure to important ideas and issues, and challenging us to think critically, these workshops have brought CRU into contact with many people with disabilities, parents and workers who were trying to improve the conditions for Queenslanders with disabilities.

CRU's first advertised leadership event occurred in 1991, with Michael Kendrick. This event, 'Strengthening and Renewing our Commitment to Change', took us into areas of moral leadership, the nature of change agency, leadership development, and renewal.

In 1992, CRU had committed resources to investigating the 'needs' of leaders. A key recommendation of that research was the development of a year-long leadership development program. Initially proposed to run in both Brisbane and Cairns, funding was not forthcoming, so CRU decided to proceed with the program in Brisbane, subsidising it from its own funds. Subsequently, year long programs were run in Brisbane during 1993 and 1994. Twenty-eight people with disabilities, parents and service workers participated in residential weekends, fortnightly evening sessions and project work. Input was provided by a number of local, interstate and international people.

In 1995, having negotiated with the Department of Family Services to include leadership development as part of our service agreement, CRU extended the program to regional Queensland, offering a program to participants from the Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Gympie regions. In that year a 'Care of the Leaders' retreat with Liz Keene was offered in North Queensland. Once again, CRU consulted with various people across the state, and given the limited funds available, the limited time many people had to commit to such programs, and the strong support for leadership development, CRU arranged a number of short leadership events each year. These are now being run in various locations throughout Queensland.

Committed to innovation and the demonstration of what is possible, CRU continued to work with agencies on service reform projects and the development of innovative projects. New service development included accommodation, family support, employment and leisure and recreation projects. CRU also commenced evaluations of agencies, focussing on the question: 'Does this service do any good for the people it serves?'

Consistent with CRU's whole-of-field approach, we also engaged in a number of change efforts which were directed at raising questions and laying groundwork so that certain issues could be advanced. These included the role played by CRU in convening the first Inclusive Education conferences in Queensland in 1992. This pivotal conference and its follow-up heightened the push for the education of children with disabilities in regular schools. Over 200 people attended each conference held in Brisbane and Townsville. In the same year,

along with Queensland Advocacy Inc., we worked to host the first national Advocacy Conference in Brisbane.

Since the early nineties CRU has also undertaken some projects in the mental health area, supporting the development of non-clinical community services for people with psychiatric disability. These have included educational events, undertaking two major studies with people with psychiatric disabilities around the question of what it would take to have a valued life, and the development of employment supports. CRU also auspiced the Queensland Consumer Mental Health Advisory Group for two years and took an active role in the development of an accommodation support service for people with psychiatric disabilities.

Another Major Change: Further Development of Statewide Strategies

In 1993, the CRU committee made a decision to close its Townsville office. When CRU began it had been the intention of the committee that a locally-based management committee should be developed to support, protect, and oversee the work of CRU in North Queensland. For some time a group of people met to form a steering committee. This was a group of local people who were involved in the disability field but who, apart from their interest in the disability field, did not especially share the same vision or even the same level of interest in change. Another factor was that there were many things which needed to be done in North Queensland with too few people and organisations able to undertake them. The formation of a committee proved to be too hard and was not given sufficient priority by any of us at the time, and because the early years of CRU brought much benefit to the northern region, the original idea was not pursued.

The CRU office in Townsville had provided a vehicle to get training events and information into north Queensland. Between 1989 to 1993, 360 registrants participated in SRV theory and PASSING events in Townsville or Cairns. Six hundred registrants attended other public events conducted by CRU staff, Michael Kendrick, Bruce Uditsky and others. CRU also became significantly involved in the development of a number of small services in Townsville. This proved to be resource intensive and much was learned about what it takes to develop quality services through this work.

There were also many other issues in the region that needed attention – the struggles around Cootharinga nursing home, the inquiry into Ward 10B abuses at Townsville Hospital, the building of another facility, and the plan of Intellectual Disability Services to build a villa complex in Townsville. All of these things required action and a response. Being local residents, respected and knowledgeable, the Townsville staff of CRU were not only drawn into these

issues, but were also often expected to make the running on these issues. There were also very high expectations that many of these issues, which had been years in the making, could be quickly turned around. The CRU staff were being pulled in many directions and without the advantages of a local committee, the staff were left exposed to competing expectations. In addition, it was both perceived and true that Townsville was getting access to a greater share of resources than the remainder of north Queensland. From Brisbane, the capacity to manage these competing demands and complexities was not sufficient to either support our staff well or to negotiate with the many constituents of CRU.

Meanwhile the Commonwealth State Disability Agreement had been signed and the responsibilities for many services handed to the Queensland government. CRU's major funding relationship was now with the State Government, and a new set of expectations needed attention. In spite of the positive expectations of the new Disability Services Legislation in Queensland, confusions surrounding the new funding relationships dominated the service landscape. The push to continue the reform agenda was significantly weakened by these very practical and technical issues that surrounded the new funding arrangements. The State Government had to create new infrastructures to deal with its new responsibilities and the disability field had to deal with a new and inexperienced bureaucracy. Positive change that would benefit people with disabilities took a back seat to the bureaucratic and technical change that heralded the Queensland Disability Service Act. While the legislation contains much of the same provisions as the Commonwealth legislation, the imperative for the legislation at the state level was vastly different from the positive values that had driven the agenda of the Commonwealth legislation more than a decade earlier.

In this new environment, CRU had to negotiate new roles and expectations with the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. High expectations were held about what could be done by CRU and there were many questions asked about the distribution of resources across the State, such as why there was an office in Townsville and not elsewhere. Only a few State Government officers had an understanding of the history and role of CRU. Weighing all these issues, and consistent with CRU's sense of what was important and what was achievable, CRU sought the approval of the Department to close its Townsville office and concentrate on the development of statewide strategies that could be managed from a centralised base. While this has resulted in a loss of available resources to Townsville itself, it has enabled CRU to continue its statewide work, offering its services to a much broader constituency and strengthening its statewide influence.

At this point CRU had undergone another period of reflection, review and planning. The changing context, especially at a government and policy level, and our own experiences, led us to conclude that it was critical that we use our

financial, human and strategic resources to strengthen the grassroots movement for change.

This had resulted in further development of our goals, reaffirming our commitment to the development of individuals and leadership, the development of innovative projects and service reform, but with a particular emphasis on work that would be strategic to advancing the overall mission of CRU.

The Last Few Years

The restructuring of CRU after the closure of the Townsville office allowed us to employ an information and resource consultant for the first time. This has given us the resources to regularly publish our newsletter *CRUcial Times*, to catalogue and maintain the CRU library so that it is accessible to people across the State, and to take training programs to many locations throughout Queensland more systematically.

As well as being a source of information and inspiration, *CRUcial Times* has provided an important vehicle for families, service providers and people with disabilities to write about their dreams, their hopes and their efforts in creating greater possibilities for people with disabilities. Each edition of the publication is now distributed to over 1700 readers who include people with disabilities, families and agencies.

Our education and development program and leadership development programs have continued to be conducted across the State, with events held in each region every year. This has been especially valuable where it has been done collaboratively with local individuals or groups such as Values in Action Association in Brisbane and the Community Training Network in Central Queensland.

CRU's change agency roles have involved us in various projects in recent years. Along with many other people CRU has made a contribution to the ongoing efforts to close institutions for people with intellectual disabilities in Queensland. Recognising the lack of support for families who had a family member in Challinor Centre, CRU undertook a project to provide information and support to families so that they would be in a better position to influence the community living arrangements provided for their family member. This project was significant in bringing many families into the debate, campaigning for institutional alternatives. CRU also has played a role in supporting the development of independent advocacy in Queensland through its role in the statewide Advocacy Development Project.

CRU continues its service development role. It has been involved in the development of new agencies and the ongoing development of existing agencies. This has included considerable consulting, problem-solving, and review and

evaluation work. Our role in service reform has also continued with support to the redevelopment of a number of more congregated service settings.

The uncertain and regressive policies and practices of the past few years and the dominance of market welfare approaches has been the backdrop for our work in this period. Keeping reform processes going is extraordinarily difficult. There have been many attempts to discredit the importance of positive visions and values, and indeed many people have been wearied by the constancy of the battles and the issues. Many have wondered whether expectations have been too high and unrealistic. The needs of the system for 'tidy' solutions, and chronic underfunding, has meant innovation and person-by-person solutions are not supported in practice by the bureaucracy.

Summarising CRU's Work

During the past decade, CRU has tried to be a catalyst for change and has worked systematically to improve the likelihood of authentic change for people with disabilities. CRU 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. Elements of CRU's change theory have included:

- The importance of positive visions and values;
- The exposure of harmful and negative expectations and values;
- A coherent set of positive ideas about people with disabilities and their families;
- The importance of individuals who are committed to changing what happens to people with disabilities;
- The importance of leadership;
- The centrality of people with disabilities and their families;
- The building of networks and a positive movement for change;
- Practical implementation of positive ideas in service and community responses;
- The importance of innovation;
- An emphasis on safeguards; and
- An emphasis on long-term, substantive change.

Our strategies are reflected in our major programs over the past decade, the most significant programs being:

- Over 15,000 registrants have attended the training events organised by CRU throughout the State;
- *CRUCial Times* is produced three times a year and is distributed to over 1700 people and organisations; and
- CRU has worked with more than 200 groups and agencies throughout the state.

CRU has played a role in several change projects throughout that time and has played a significant role in leadership development and in building alliances between people with disabilities, families, service providers and advocates.

In Conclusion

There is no question that much has changed in Queensland during the past decade. CRU has had a part to play in this, and we are grateful for the opportunities and the support we have had in making a contribution. While CRU stands as an example of people deciding to 'seize the day', the results of its efforts cannot be easily disentangled from the results of the efforts of many others. Ten years ago, Queensland was struggling to make use of potential opportunities that existed because of policy and legislative changes by the Commonwealth government. What a joy it is that there is now such a ground swell for change; there is no shortage of ideas or possibilities.

Even though neither CRU nor many others would be satisfied with what has been achieved, progress has been made in many areas. Expectations are different. Many people with disabilities enjoy opportunities which would not have been possible or even contemplated a decade or two ago.

However, it is also true that most people with disabilities do not get the supports they need to live their lives as valued citizens of Queensland. Some people still reside in institutions, while others enjoy their own homes and live with family and friends. Some have nothing meaningful to do, while others work and participate in the life of their communities. Some people rely totally on paid staff, while others have relationships with a wide variety of people. Some children are welcomed into schools in their local communities, while others are excluded from the opportunities of going to school with their peers. People with disabilities have always struggled to have their humanity recognised and the struggle is far from over.

The question for CRU continues to be the relevance of its work to the struggle for practical and tangible advances in the circumstances of the lives of people with disabilities. What is clear to CRU is that it is important to invest in positive change. If change is to advantage people with disabilities, then it is crucial to elevate the interests of people with disabilities. It is also clear that it usually takes the merging and blending of the efforts of many people to make even the smallest advances.

In many respects, the nurturing of the 'movement' for change has been one of CRU's most significant contributions. Through the provision of information, its education and development programs, and its support and guidance roles, CRU has deliberately worked to support and nurture families and those people committed to advancing the interests of people with disabilities. Further progress

will not be made if we cannot continue to focus our efforts, make the sacrifices that are needed and work together systematically. Sound ideas, committed people, strategic leadership, analysis, and reflection will always be needed. In this sense the roles that CRU has played will continue to be crucial if we are to continue the struggle to improve circumstances and opportunities for people with disabilities.