

From the President

While Manager of a small family-support service, I worked within a leadership team committed to making a positive change in the lives of people with a disability. It didn't take us long to realise that creating change was not going to be easy, instant, or at times, even likely. We also learnt very quickly that we needed to know what we thought positive change would look like, have some ideas on how to achieve it, and be able to communicate our change strategy to others. Of course, we didn't have all those ideas and strategies clear in our minds at all - but we knew that people's lives could be better – so work for change we did.

We concentrated on what we learnt from Social Role Valorisation theory to help us. We encouraged the families we were working with and our staff to do the same. Once we started to focus more deeply on valued roles, image and competence - things did change. The way we thought about people changed. The way we spoke about people changed. The ways in which we engaged with people changed. The service changed. Over a period of some five years, we came to understand much better that our job was to be of *service* - not provide a *service*.

The initial changes we made might have seemed superficial at first. Many were related to the way we described our work and the people we worked for and with. The team stopped talking about “taking” and “doing to” people and started to describe their role as ‘being alongside’ a person. From this new position of alongside, our viewpoint began to change. It became easier and more natural to guide staff meetings into deeper and more thoughtful conversations on issues such as friendship, social connections, participation, contribution, life purpose and meaning. I understood this to be because we were journeying with people. We started to see that we were all in this together- the person with a disability, their family and supporters, the service and the wider community.

As we endeavoured to move from just being a *service* to being of *service*, we saw new roles for staff emerge – those of facilitator, developer, networker and connector. Not minder, body-guard or gate-keeper. The change for the people we served was seen in the valued social roles they acquired: Neighbour, Host, Hostess, Employee, Commuter, Volunteer, Artist and many more.

I feel extremely privileged to have experienced and witnessed such positive changes in people's lives during that time. I learnt from this experience that change depends on what I do. What we do. Change isn't something we must wait for. It is something we can all contribute to. It is intentional and requires a great deal more thought, creativity and strategy than I ever realised.

CRU is about change but we don't seek change for change's sake. We seek change because people with disability deserve to live lives of purpose and value just like any other citizen. We therefore seek authentic change – the sort of change which would allow people with disability to belong to and participate in community life. Our current strategies include leadership development activities (with a particular focus on family leadership); promotion of person-centred responses including investment in service workers and allies, and information dissemination through our publications, website and resource collection, among others. In this ‘change’ edition of CRUcial Times I hope the information, stories, articles, theories and examples of change are inspiring and motivating.