

## BELONGING IN THE COMMUNITY

“Humans are social beings and need to interact with one another and feel that they belong. To a person like myself, whose illness had as its main component a feeling of complete isolation and estrangement from the rest of the world, this feeling of belonging is priceless.”

Jean Watson

“Finding a sense of place may be equated with survival or it may mean something much more significant and life giving.”

Jo Holloway

Finding a sense of belonging

*is a sense of knowing who you are and where you fit.*

*means having meaningful relationships.*

*is not the same as being “in the community” - presence does not necessarily lead to participation.*

*means having a chance to contribute.*

*takes time and effort.*

*cannot be packages.*

“People need a sense of belonging. We all need to be recognized as having a place, a respected place. There is no worse fate than to be rejected from society.” Clive Hamilton

These factors all imply changes in the service system, in society, and in how we relate with those who are seen to be different.

## INCLUSION . . .

*is about learning to live WITH one another.*

*means inviting those who have been left out (in a any way) to come in.*

*thrives on diversity and celebrates difference.*

*means welcoming everyone.*

*means living in the form of housing that one chooses.*

*means being able to have acquaintances, friends and intimates among a wide range of people.*

*means having the opportunity to participate in worship, recreation, social activities, political activities and shopping.*

*is about having the opportunity to work regular employment situations.*

*means receiving education in the institutions of one's choice.*

"Without acceptance of imperfection we cannot be whole." Erik Leipoldt

## HOW CAN OUR COMMUNITY FOSTER INCLUSION

*by being hospitable - being willing to open up, to listen, to trust, to see beyond the label to the person and to accept that person as another human being.*

*by directing efforts towards maximising the contact between people with mental illness and potential friends and supporters.*

*by looking for those who may be 'hidden' - isolated in our communities.*

*by fostering, supporting and strengthening natural networks, especially during a crisis.*

*by avoiding establishing specialized mental health services that aim to meet all the needs of clients.*

*by being inclusive ourselves:*

*"You learn to read  
by reading!  
You learn to write  
By writing!  
You learn to think  
by thinking!  
You learn to include  
By including!"*

( Forest and Pearpoint, *Inclusion News*, 1996:1)

"When the community cuts itself off from people who have disabilities, it also denies part of what it is to be human. A community that has no place for those who cannot speak, or walk or do higher mathematics is finally impoverishing itself. It becomes intolerant to differences, thus narrowing the path we all must travel. And it makes itself an impotent place, a place that doesn't help each of us live through disappointment, and failure, and sickness, and sorrow, and death —experiences that cannot be isolated because they come to everyone."

Mary O'Connell 1988