

CHANGING OUR WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

When Jeff Strully was visiting Queensland from Colorado in the 90's, he told a very powerful story from his own life situation as a parent. The example given here, about two other women in their early twenties, is told in the same way:

I have two daughters:

Daughter 1

My elder daughter has a very active life. She is continuing her education at TAFE doing computer studies and working part time at our local supermarket. She has made many friends through her work and studies and is planning to go away for the next long weekend to Noosa. She is already asking me for additional money to do the Eumundi Markets over!

Two of her friends stayed over the other night to plan the trip away. You see, she is the one with the car, so her company is much in demand. There were lots of laughter, phone calls and the internet doing overtime trying to find a cheap place to stay. I suppose she will be asking me to look after her cat while she is away again too.

She is really into the latest clothes and her hair colour seems to change on a regular basis. Her favourite band is Savage Garden and she and a couple of her friends are saving to go to their next concert. She lies in her room and turns up the volume much loader than I like and sends me away if I complain!

I am very proud of my daughter. She is involved in so many things. She was asked to be part of a panel to give a lecture at the University last week and she is becoming quite an ambassador for the political group she is involved with to get a fair deal for people with disabilities.

She also keeps contact with her grandmother who is getting on now. She goes once a week with one of her friends and takes a casserole or a take away so that Nan doesn't have to cook for guests.

Daughter 2

My youngest daughter has a significant disability. She is unable to walk and is confined to a wheelchair. She cannot communicate verbally and is not completely toilet trained.

She lives with us.

Her main needs are to get better control of her bodily functions and to get a better communications strategy so that people know what she wants.

She gets some support hours during the day, which means she can get out and about a bit and we can have a break.

A friend of ours gave her a stuffed toy cat for her birthday because she would never be able to look after a real one herself. She has it sitting on her bed.

When nursery rhymes are played she gets all excited making noises to the music. She really likes bright and noisy things.

Her clothes are pretty much all the same - very functional, no ironing, with lots of Velcro so they are easy to get her in and out of. Because she can't do her own hair, it's kept really short and straight so it's easier to manage.

She mainly goes where we go and does what we do, but we tend to stay home quite a lot.

She sees her grandmother when we visit her

The point of these two stories of young adults is that they are in fact the same person. How people are treated can depend on how they are seen and what roles and expectations are put on them.

When valued adult roles are pursued, adults with disabilities begin to get a real life.