

Strategies for Community Connection

- ❖ **Be open** to listening, trusting and accepting others.
- ❖ **Break the cycle of isolation.** Look for ways to bring the person in everyday contact with a whole range of other people.
 - For example, consider
 - small businesses eg. local deli, newsagent, churches
 - public places eg. libraries, community centres
 - associations and clubs eg. hobby groups, sports clubs
- ❖ **Search and focus on the person's 'ticket' out of isolation.** Search for individual strengths and capabilities and focus on the person as a whole. Find that one special attribute that could help facilitate a meaningful connection.
- ❖ **Ask people.** Don't wait for that extraordinary person to come along – consider whether ordinary people hold the key to showing others hospitality and friendship.
- ❖ **Trust the wisdom of the community.** Brainstorming with others produces ideas that no single person could have gathered.
- ❖ **Strengthen and rekindle existing relationships.** Play a part in nurturing those relationships that already exist.
- ❖ **Use your imagination.** Believe in the vision that people who have been marginalised can be accepted!
- ❖ **Find and work with bridge builders.** Bridge builders are people who have a wide range of connections in the community. They can assist in introducing an individual to others.
- ❖ **Consider the importance of rhythms and routines.** It is often good to do things at the same time at the same place.
- ❖ **Recognise the importance of the simple and ordinary.** Celebrate small things that are actually quite significant, like meeting a neighbour.

- ❖ **Give people the space to sort out differences and work through issues.** Think about whether it is appropriate to ‘step in’ or whether the situation can be sorted through by itself.
- ❖ **Don’t look for an ironclad guarantee of success.** There may be no perfect solution so you have to trust the process.
- ❖ **Be willing to let go.** You cannot direct outcomes or maintain overzealous involvement. Be willing to let things take their course.
- ❖ **Know the bottom line.** Consider how money can be best spent to facilitate this work.
- ❖ **Focus on opportunities for relationships rather than on activities.** Some activities hold more opportunities for meeting and getting to know people than others.
- ❖ **Encourage everyone.** People can easily become reluctant or discouraged.
- ❖ **Keep your eyes open for opportunities.** It’s important to keep looking and to keep asking eg. read the local paper.
- ❖ **Know the community.** Find out what organizations exist, who belongs to them, where there is to go, and what there is to do. Find community leaders or people who know everybody and what’s going on.
- ❖ **Work with moments of openness.** Respond to opportunities for developing relationships with people who are more open. Times of change, cycles, crises, celebration or chance are times when people are open to the possibility of meaningful friendship.

From: Amado, A.N., Conklin, F. and Wells, J., 1990. *Friends: A Manual for Connecting Persons with Disabilities and Community Members*. St Paul, Minnesota: Human Services Research & Development Centre.

From: O’Connell, Mary (1998). *The Gift of Hospitality: Opening the Doors of Community Life to People with Disabilities*. Centre for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University and Department of Rehabilitation Services, Illinois.

From: Andrews, D., 1989. *Can you Hear the Heartbeat*. Hodder & Stoughton, London.