

Belonging

A PLACE TO BELONG NEWSLETTER NO 28

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Stories of Inclusion

Neil Barringham

Recently APTB presented some community inclusion awards to people and businesses we felt had been doing a good job of including and respecting people with disabilities. Here are the stories behind these awards.

Inclusive Employer Award

Businesses are often seen to primarily about covering the bottom line. It's refreshing to hear examples of businesses therefore which model other priorities as well as staying afloat.

A man was going through hard times - his wife was becoming unwell and needed support. He would receive phone calls at work and need to go home immediately to respond to his wife or care for their 2-year-old son. Eventually she needed hospitalization for some weeks and again this man needed to take more time to be at home to care for his son. His family and other friends rallied around to assist the family at this time of crisis. The man needed to keep his job to pay the rent and to keep food on the table.

One critical ingredient necessary to hold the family together was for him to keep his job - he needed a responsive and supportive employer who could allow flexibility and assurity of employment during this period when the man could not give his job all that was needed.

The employer did just this. ABC Printing at Milton provided support and flexibility for this man's employment. They understood that he needed to have extra time at home to hold his family together. When his wife returned home from hospital this man still had his job, they still had a home to live in, food on the table and the family was still together.

ABC Printing has a business to sustain. They expect their workers to work responsibly and loyally. It is great that ABC Printing is also

reciprocating by expressing loyalty to a worker who needed a hand. Their act of inclusion has saved our community the huge expense of supporting someone who was out of work and a family that could have been torn apart by serious life events.

Inclusive Professional Award

Grant Nelson works as a chaplain at The Park Centre for Mental Health. Many of us might feel anxious at the thought of visiting or working in a mental health facility. However, not only does Grant know many of the staff and residents at the Centre he also has deliberately chosen to particularly focus much of his energy and time on the secure section of the facility - where many people who have committed serious crimes or acts of violence are kept locked up. Grant is therefore working with some of the people we might be most fearful of!

Grant uses his musical skills to gather people together in the Secure Unit to sing and enjoy music together. Frequently the loud singing of the patients can be heard around the facility. Grant has found a way of bringing a taste of life and humanity to a group of people who may find it rare to be treated in this way.

Grant also involves himself in the care and treatment of residents - advocating to staff and doctors with ideas and trying to find ways to provide helpful connections for people.

As a professional Grant is bringing tiny threads of life and inclusion to some of the most excluded people in our society.

Inclusive Business Award

We all know that banks are increasing their profits. However it is great to hear about a bank that is responding well to people who won't help them much on their bottom line.

Suncorp in West End is a bank where some

disadvantaged people want to do their banking. For some people who don't have very much, keeping in touch with the little they have is very important. One local woman who has a range of disabilities and who can be very rude and abusive rings Suncorp first thing every morning to check on the status of her tiny account. She also comes in regularly to withdraw some money and to carry out transactions. She is loud and raucous and might be the kind of person that traders would think might offend customers. However the Suncorp staff treat this woman with respect. They know her name and they give her the time she needs. She has at times been offensive and intrusive but the staff have done the right thing by her. Once she even demanded to withdraw money when there was nothing in her account! She refused to leave. The staff did not abuse her back or mistreat her. They found a respectful way to deal with the situation.

Other people with disabilities have been seen to be treated with respect in Suncorp at West End as well. It is easy to give people with means respect and time. It is much harder to treat people who don't contribute to our profits with the human respect and gentleness that they require.

Inclusive Household Award

For many of us home is meant to be a place for privacy and retreat. The statistics show that we place such a priority on privacy at home that the

number of people per household in this country is continuing to decrease! It is therefore refreshing and challenging to hear of a household who want their home to be inclusive as well as a place for reflection and privacy.

A share household of young people in West End consists of people who need to be committed to their community as a condition of moving in! They welcome local people over on Friday afternoons for 'Hi Chai' where afternoon tea and chai are served and people who want a place to hang out and meet others can come. Some quite lonely people come to this time.

Further, this household welcomes a local woman who lives with a range of disabilities and who is quite lonely. She comes by for coffee and a chat and asks for assistance quite regularly. They give her their time when they can, they assist her when they can, but they have also learnt to say 'no' when that is best too, so they are able to put limits on their response. Recently, this woman has said she wants to live with other people as living by herself is too lonely for her. This household has agreed to have this woman stay with them one night a fortnight to practice cooking, cleaning and learning to live with others.

Thus by looking beyond our social drift of wanting primarily privacy in our homes this household of young people are helping people like this woman take a step towards their dreams of a more shared life, a more respected life, a more included life with others.

Webpage launch

Caroline Perry Workshop

Notes – a summary

What is happening around the network

- Wally gone from 70hrs/wk to 25??
- Chaplains mental health orientation went well
- Reviewing marketing and logo
- Reviewing mission statement
- RAW update

Office hours and office workers

Mention APTB advocacy policy + what can we do better? + complaints process

We are having vigorous open discussions with work colleagues to help safeguard some of our values and practices.

AN INSPIRING STORY: FINDING POSITIVE ROLES

As we have conversations with people around the disability sector we hear of sound work being done by people. Here is one such story.

In one regional centre in Queensland a support worker was working with a man who was isolated and who wanted to be better connected in his area. This man enjoys Rugby League and so he and the support worker began to think about where his place might be in local Rugby League circles.

The support worker knew the president from one of the local Rugby League clubs and approached him to discuss the man's passion. The president of the club was quite open to ideas of inclusion and agreed for her to bring the man along to the first grade training sessions. Before long he was attending the sessions and meeting the players. Initially the support worker was transporting him to training, but before long he became such a fixture there that the players would pick him up and take him

home before and after training. A role began to develop for him as he offered to be a water carrier for the team. He began to travel to other towns on weekends for the team games and worked during the games to carry water for the players, clearly carrying out a role that was important to the team.

As he became better known, the team discovered that he was an avid supporter of the Melbourne Storm football team. So they bought him a Melbourne Storm jersey. Later, wanting to show really how much they appreciated his contribution the club decided to shout him a trip to Melbourne to watch his favourite team.

Local businesses got on board, plane trips were booked and the man had a fabulous time visiting Melbourne with a support person and attending a Melbourne Storm game.

Inclusion can really happen ... and it all started through asking ... and with the belief that we all have a place!

*Ultimately, a sense of connectedness lies at the heart of resilience.
Ann Deveson*

Circles of Support: A Powerful Model for Inclusion

Marg Rodgers from Mamre led a community workshop sharing about her work with Circles of Support. Her role is to work with people with disabilities and their families towards more connected and supported lives. Marg starts with the person and their family connections, as flimsy as they might be. She asks others to be involved and Circles of Support are formed. Some people with disabilities have been supported to move out of their family home into a home of their own with predominantly freely-given contributions from community members. Marg says that money can't buy what is happening around the 13 people with whom she is involved.

Opportunities for Training and Meeting Others

Sunday Workshops

Every second month we sponsor a Sunday afternoon workshop, aiming to inspire and equip people to build community links. These will usually feature someone's story, afternoon tea, small groups and a short presentation. Dates for workshops are February 1, March 29, June 7, October 4 and November 22. Contact us if you want to be on the mailing list.

Guiding Group

A quarterly meeting for people who want to help shape the work of this network. Come and meet others who are holding a vision for better lives and better communities. The first Guiding Group meeting for this year will be held on Thursday, 5 March. Others are planned for June 18, August 27 and November 5.

Recovery Forum

We are planning to run this in early August. Contact us if you want more information.

Mental Health Orientation Day for Chaplains and Pastoral Care Workers

Helen Glover will be the guest speaker at this training opportunity which will be held on Wednesday, 15 July. Contact us if you want more information.

Women's Mental Health Support Group

This group is held every second Thursday night of the month starting on 12 February. Please contact Helen Prior on 3240 2111 and ask switch to page her.

Reading, Writing, Computer and Lifeskills Inclusion Group

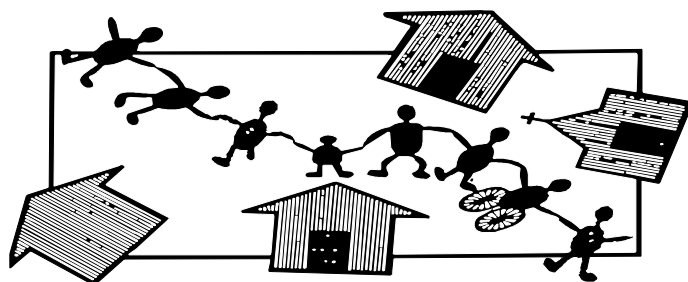
Mondays and Tuesdays from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm classes are held that facilitate learning to read, write, use computers as well as teaching various lifeskills. Their aim is to assist greater inclusion in the community. Classes resume on Monday 23 and Tuesday 24 February. Please contact Penny on 3217 2522 or Carmel on 0412 926 389 for more information.

Community Inclusion Art Group

This group meets on Wednesday morning from 9.30 am to 12 noon, starting on 21 January with drawing classes. Please contact Debbie on 0421 409 069 for more information.

DID YOU KNOW ...

... that *A Place To Belong* welcomes your feedback and complaints about our work?
... that at any time when participating in an *A Place To Belong* activity, a person may have a support person or advocate with them?



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