



Belonging

A PLACE TO BELONG NEWSLETTER NO 28

January 2010

A Place To Belong's 2009 Inclusion Awards

Recently *A Place To Belong* presented 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: ABC Printing at Milton

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

A man was going through hard times because a family member was becoming unwell and needed support. He would receive phone calls at work and need to go home immediately to respond to his family. Eventually hospitalization was needed for some weeks and this man needed to take more time to be at home to care for his family.

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 assurance 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 to this man. They understood that he needed to have extra time at home to hold his family together. When his family became stabilized this man still had his job, the family still had a home to live in and food was on the table.

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.

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Inclusive Professional Award: Grant Nelson

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. 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: Suncorp West End

We all know that banks have to maintain their bottom lines. However it is great to hear about a bank that is responding well at a local level to people who won't help the bank much on their profit.

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 'in-your-face' 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 the kind of person that traders would think might offend customers. However the West End 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 do not 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 Brisbane 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.

"You wait till last!"

Teresa Davies

I have been doing a student placement at *A Place To Belong* and I have spent regular time with a woman who experiences a number of disabilities. I provide some company whilst she goes about her daily life and in the process I learn from her about her experiences in the community. I have found that there are many people in the community who know her well and who are very friendly.

One day we were waiting for a bus to the city. Three men arrived after us and were also awaiting the bus. When the bus arrived, the three got to the door before us and one hopped on. The other two stood back and allowed us onto the bus. I got on first and I took the seat behind the driver. As I sat down I heard the driver shouting angrily "You wait till last! You wait till everyone else is on the bus!"

I turned to see what was happening and saw my companion had stopped and she was saying "I only wanted to sit with my friend. Sorry. I only wanted to sit with my friend." She allowed the other two men to pass her and then got on and sat beside me. Before the driver pulled away, she again apologized saying "I'm sorry, driver, I only wanted to sit with my friend."

Initially, when I heard the driver shouting, I looked to see what was wrong. When I saw that he was shouting at my companion I realised that she had done nothing more than follow me onto the bus. I could see that she was conciliatory towards the driver, even though she had done nothing wrong. I had no wish to upset her further by responding angrily to the driver myself.

It was really shocking to me that someone would act that way to another person. I started thinking that she probably has had many similar experiences in the past. The idea that she may be used to this unreasonable and discrimination behaviour I find very upsetting. I consoled myself with the fact that she has been very welcome within her local community in our other interactions. There seem to be a lot of people within shops, people she meets on the street and friends who live locally who receive her in a friendly and welcoming manner.

The meaning-making dimension of mental illness gives us the opportunity to ask different questions. Rather than asking "What's wrong and how do I fix it?" we can ask "What is it that sustains this person during this crisis" "What gives their life meaning *now*?" It reframes their life and experience in a way that can enable our conversation with them to become a deeply spiritual encounter and allow for the possibility of hope to surface. (There is always both meaning and hope present; it is just not always apparent.)

From *Spirituality and Mental Health Conference*

LIKE TO GIVE A HAND?

Critical to our work of inclusion is finding people who want to open doors into the community for isolated people. In 2009 people have assisted others by: driving a car while a man learnt how to use a street directory and guided him around; assisting a woman with learning needs to record her story; visiting an isolated man and going for walks together; assisting in the organization of our Recovery Training Day; assisting in our office; tutoring at the Reading and Writing Group.

If you would like to offer some spare time in 2010 please contact us. Tasks can often be fun and a great learning experience for all concerned.

DONATIONS AND FUNDING

Thanks to St. Hilda's school at Southport for putting on a Musical to raise funds for *A Place To Belong*. Students wrote, composed, choreographed, sang, acted and danced three original musicals on the theme of "belonging". Thanks to others individuals who donated funds to *A Place To Belong* in 2009 and to one person who left a bequest.

If you would like to support *A Place To Belong* please contact us or our administering organisation *Spiritus*. Your funds could be used for supporting vulnerable people in our community or for events such as our 2010 Inclusion Awards or the 2010 Recovery Training Day.

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 January 31, March 21, June 27, October 10 and November 28. 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 will be held on Thursday, 25 February. Others are planned for May 20, September 16 and November 4.

Reading, Writing, Computer and Life skills Group

Mondays and Tuesdays from 9.00 am to 2.00 pm classes are held that facilitate learning to read, write, use computers as well as teaching various life skills that aim to assist greater inclusion in the community. Classes resume on Monday 1 and Tuesday 2 February. Please contact Penny on 3217 2522 or Carmel on 0412 926 389 for more information.

Recovery Training Day: Saturday, 28 August

Many of us yearn for a fuller more enriched life for ourselves and for those we know who experience the struggle of working through mental health challenges. We are planning our fourth Recovery Day and hope that this will help us find ways forward in our diverse encounters with mental health issues. Please find enclosed a date claimer.

Mental Health Orientation Day for Chaplains and Pastoral Care Workers

Helen Glover will again be the guest speaker at this training opportunity which will be held on Wednesday, 21 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 Thursday 21 January. Juliette will be demonstrating how to make cheap cleaning products. Please contact Helen Prior on 3240 2111 and ask switch to page her.

Service User Assessment

Kathy Buckler has been employed as an external consultant to undertake this, which is part of our bi-annual feedback cycle, and will provide us with important feedback from service participants. Kathy will be reporting to our February Guiding Group meeting as well as submitting a written report.

Important Information

A Place To Belong welcomes advocates to be with people whenever we are working with others. We also realise that our work could often be done much better. We value your feedback to help us do better. Complaints can also be made if we have possibly done the wrong thing by someone.

2010 Office Hours and Admin Staff

Monday and Tuesday 9 - 3: Alex, Wednesday 8 - 1: Sannie, Thursday and Friday 9 - 3: Eleni.

A Place To Belong Website is being updated soon at www.aplacetobelong.org.au

A Place To Belong—A Spiritus Mental health Network

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