

Belonging

A PLACE TO BELONG NEWSLETTER NO 30

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THE END IS IN THE BEGINNING

Neil Barringham

The end of our work is in the beginning. How we begin our work strongly affects the end of our work.

Recently we have worked with a man who was employed in a workshop with other people with disabilities. He was earning just over \$2 per hour doing tasks he did not find appealing - folding letters, putting forms together and filling balloons with sand. This man told us he wanted to work but not at such a place.

We spoke with the agency coordinating the workshop about whether this man could be provided more typical employment on the open market. They indicated that they had assessed this man and determined that he is functioning at a level of 9% capacity. According to their service guidelines he therefore was not eligible for open employment.

A group of people then set about meeting with this man to search for more enriching employment. Firstly, they talked with him about his strengths and what he has to offer - his energy, his enthusiasm, his sociability and his love of helping out. They also discussed with him the kinds of work he might enjoy. Then a resume was designed and visits were made to local businesses looking for opportunities. Discussions were held with people at this man's church about odd jobs and car washing opportunities. Posters were put up around the local shopping centre offering assistance with walking dogs.

Soon enough a woman rang to find out about the dog walking opportunity. As part of a time-poor household, she and her husband were looking for someone to walk their large dogs five times a week. She met the man and enthusiasm was shown all around! A reasonable remuneration was arranged as well.

Now three months later this man is making a valued contribution to the family and their dogs. He loves to be outdoors each morning with the dogs, burning up energy and helping the family. They pay him a fair wage for the work he is doing and are pleased their dogs are exercised. They have grown to value this man and have visited his home and gone on outings with him.

If you begin with an intelligence or 'capacity' test you might end up with a low score and also end with a limited, confined and excluded role which is not life-giving for the person you are assisting. If you begin with capacities, contributions, creativity and imagination you will probably end up in a much better place!

In our work in the disability and mental health realms we therefore need to be ever careful and watchful of the tools we use, the language we use, the assessment approaches we use, the reference points we use as we begin our work.

As you can see, the end of our work is in the beginning!

EXCITING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

A Place To Belong has been granted funding to carry out some exciting developmental training. We have been funded to:

- coordinate four inclusion training days over the next 18 months
- coordinate four Building Better Communities training courses with *The Community Praxis Cooperative* over the next 18 months
- Develop an on-line conversation space for people who want to keep in touch about inclusion
- Coordinate another Recovery Training Day in 2011.

The funding for these activities has come from the Mental Health Branch of the Queensland Department of Communities.

We are looking for groups and organizations who want to host these events. If you are interested please contact us and we will be happy to discuss the possibilities with you.

MOVING FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

Finding hope is a key issue in mental health.

We are often in touch with people who have experienced deep hopelessness. People might communicate despair and lack of hope for the welfare of themselves or their friend or relative.

Recently we ran a workshop on moving from despair to hope. We began by hearing someone's story of their experience in working with despair and hope. Lynda Shevellar from the School of Social Work at The University of Queensland facilitated a workshop following this moving session to encourage people to think about their own experiences.

In our workshop we talked about the role of hope in our lives, and the difference between the idea of hope as something passive but unreal (eg *I hope I win the Lotto!*) with the idea of hope as something engaged and active and steeped in reality.

What became clear in our discussion is that hope is much more than just an ideal or a feeling. It sits alongside other important virtues we can hold in our lives, like compassion and courage. Hope is therefore a quality that we seek but it doesn't just magically happen to us. It is something we actively create every day in our reflections and our conversations.

During the discussion people pooled some of the ways they create hope in their own lives. An enormous list was generated, including:

- Asking friends for help
- Knowing your own limits
- Developing personal insight
- Seeking a connection with someone else
- Gathering family support
- Talking to someone who understands – 'have a coffee'
- Writing to get thoughts and feelings out
- Knowing that medication can be helpful
- Eating well and looking after one's health
- Stepping forward—taking just one step: big changes start with tiny steps

The group shared their insights and suggested that every time we think and talk we have a choice about whether to 'do' hope. And we recognized that thinking about things as a choice is perhaps, the most hopeful thought of all!

PEOPLE MEETING PEOPLE

Our work at *A Place To Belong* is about helping people meet people. For example, in 2010 we aided a woman to reconnect with her son and mother. We were also involved with three people in secure mental health wards in Brisbane. We have found volunteers willing to spend time with each of these people and go on outings away from their secure units. One of these people has been in a secure unit for three years and has no family or friendship contact with anyone outside the unit. Three volunteers are currently building tiny threads of contact with him going shopping, fishing, and on small trips away from the unit. Another one of these people from a secure unit is attending TAFE and we have found two people near his TAFE college who catch up with him when he is at TAFE. These are small and significant human connections.

Volunteers and allies are essential to our work. As well as offering companionship to people loyal volunteers attend *A Place To Belong*'s Reading, Writing and Lifeskills program on Mondays and Tuesdays to tutor or spend time with people who are working on their learning goals.

If you want to make a difference in your world in 2011 please consider volunteering with *A Place To Belong*! Contact us if you are interested.

2010 RECOVERY DAY - 28th AUGUST



A Place To Belong's Recovery Day in August 2010 was attended by 127 people. Two keynote speakers – both with a lived experience of mental illness – presented on the day.

Five workshops were also conducted around the theme of recovery in mental health.



Participants from areas as far away as Toowoomba, Warwick, Benarkin, Hervey Bay, Sunshine and Gold Coasts attended.

Some comments from people were: *Long live survival, empowerment and recovery; We own our own recovery; See me as a person, see my abilities, I'm not my illness; and People matter.*



2010 INCLUSION AWARDS

At *A Place To Belong*'s Recovery Day in August Steve Heap presented the 2010 Community Inclusion Awards.

David Stothart received an Inclusive Person Award for 2010. David has spent many years offering friendship and companionship to people in his own time. He has done this quietly and loyally in such a way that he has opened up opportunities for ongoing relationships with people who are very excluded in our society.

Glenys Marsh, Anna Clark, and Lorraine Murphy received Inclusive Professional Awards for 2010. Glenys, Anna and Lorraine have worked cumulatively at The Park Centre for Mental Health (and Wolston Park Hospital before that) for 82 years!! They serve on the switchboard and in the mail room at The Park. *They are a steady, calm voice on the end of the phone, and a peace in the chaos* says Grant Nelson. *They are some of the best listeners we have at The Park, and I believe some of the best counsellors.*

They are a non-judgemental and understanding ear and a calming, assured voice on the other end of the phone.

Elisher Page also received an Inclusive Professional Award for 2010. Elisher works for "Connect2Group." Connect2Group is a not-for-profit organisation providing whole-of-life (work, home and play) community connectedness and development of people with disabilities. Many of the individuals she works with face multiple challenges in their return to work. Elisher is characterised by her ability to believe in people and to be able to see their strengths and abilities. In her work, Elisher has demonstrated an unflinching belief that people who have, and are experiencing Mental Health challenges, have a right to find employment that they enjoy and work that is meaningful for them.

Opportunities for Training and Meeting Others

Sunday Workshops

Every second month we sponsor a Sunday afternoon workshop, aiming to inspire and equip people to respond to mental health needs in their communities. These will usually feature someone's story, afternoon tea and a presentation. Dates for workshops are February 6, March 27, June 5, October 2 and November 20. We have a new venue for these workshops. In 2011 they will be held at "The Parish Centre" corner High and Jephson Streets, Toowong. Contact us if you want to be on the mailing list.

Reading, Writing, Computer and Life skills 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 life skills that aim to assist greater inclusion in the community. Please contact Damian on 3217 2522 for more information.

Recovery Day: A Saturday in 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 fifth Recovery Day and hope that this will help us find ways forward in our diverse encounters with mental health issues. Contact us or see our webpage for details and a brochure closer to the time.

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 in July. Contact us or see our webpage if you want more information.

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. Dates for upcoming meetings are March 3 and June 16.

Important Policies and Processes

A Place To Belong welcomes advocates to be with people whenever we work with them. We also realise that our work could often be done 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. Please contact us for information about our policies in these important areas.

Building Better Communities Courses

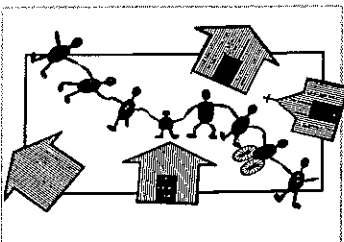
A Place To Belong will be working in partnership with the Community Praxis Cooperative to offer *Building Better Communities* courses in or near Brisbane. These courses will inspire and upskill people to build more inclusive, safe and open communities. Look at our web page or phone the office if you would like to find out more.

2011 Office Hours and Admin Staff

Monday and Tuesday 9 am to 3 pm: Gaby

Wednesday 9 am to 2 pm: Sannie

Thursday and Friday 9 am to 3 pm: Carlos



A Place To Belong—A Spiritus Mental Health Network

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