



Belonging

A PLACE TO BELONG NEWSLETTER NO 31

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MAKING INCLUSION REALITY

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At *A Place To Belong* we work with some people who have little or no family support, who have no regular employment, no formal qualifications and often are treated by others as low status citizens. Some people we work with are locked away in mental health facilities, some are excluded because of their eccentricities, and many are struggling to engage with their mental health recovery process.

What does community inclusion mean here? How can we work with communities to see some beginning steps towards meaningful participation and enriching relationships?

Over the years we have found some practices which help to energise and focus us to work positively towards inclusion:

It helps to reflect on our own experience of (un) belonging as we work with someone else on their belonging.

This practice humanises inclusion and takes our work beyond the disability and mental health realms. By remembering our own process of inclusion or exclusion we can then work with people in our common humanity towards a better life. The quest to belong is a common human struggle!

We can assist people to move out to community - or we can bring community to people!

In mental health some people don't want to engage in the big overwhelming or frightening world out there - but there is probably still a yearning to belong! Our task is to respond to the person's desire to belong. We work with a woman whose mental and emotional health means that when she moves out into community contexts she cannot handle relationships well and ends up pushing other people away. She catches buses across town to attend meetings and activities but sabotages all her own efforts to belong by the way she reacts to people. We observed this and

discussed her yearning for friendship with her. We decided with her that the best way forward was to bring someone to her - someone with patience who could talk quietly and one-on-one with her. We found someone who fitted the bill and each week these two people meet, talk and share. This woman now feels a little more connected. Assisting her to move out into community was not helpful - but bringing community to her was!

We can work on two fronts - helping individuals to develop and helping their context to develop as well!

Inclusion is not just about shaping the person so they fit in with the environment around them. Often in our fragmented and individualistic neighbourhoods we need to provide some support for communities to change and be more inclusive. So inclusion works hand-in-hand with community development. Over the past few months we have been privileged to offer two Building Better Communities courses in Brisbane to assist localities to become more engaged and responsive. We are looking forward to offering two more such courses in 2012 and we are currently looking for host communities.

This work involves belief and action, science and art, structure and imagination!

We cannot manufacture belonging - but we can support, unearth and discover it! We are not talking about just a technical process here. This work is about hopes and dreams; technique and wise practice; imagination and application. If we don't believe that inclusion can happen all the technique in the world will not get us started. On the other hand enthusiasm and imagination are not enough without planned and conscious work.

These four practices inform and energise our work at *A Place To Belong*. We often unpack and describe these in our one day

Inclusion training days. We were very honoured to share these days with Peer Support Workers in Brisbane, Sunshine Coast and Hervey Bay and with Lighthouse Resources and Footprints in Brisbane in 2011.

A DAY WITH MICHAEL KENDRICK

In November 2011 participants of *A Place to Belong* enjoyed a refreshing day of discussions with Michael Kendrick, a global leader and advocate in the disability field. Michael talked informally with us about engaging with people to get a good life. He then spent time with some of the agency work teams. At the end of the day Michael left us the following challenges.

- A strength of our work is that we are focusing on working with people's vulnerabilities – this is the beginning of getting a good life.
- A strength of our work is that we are focussing on personal connections.
- A strength of our work is that we are not bureaucratic or formalised meaning that we can be quite flexible.
- *A Place To Belong* is not just a service, he added, it is an initiative that is significant because it is safeguarding people, values based and counter-cultural.

However, he also encouraged us to:

- Keep the ball moving forward – to keep being developmental – avoid doing “business as usual.” It is good to keep being “pattern disturbers” who are doing more than “putting out fires.”
- Focus on “the big stuff” and don't just be busy doing minor things – give attention to major issues in people's lives (e.g., employment, finding good friends, safety) rather than just the minor things (e.g., washing up, tidiness).

THE POWER AND VALUE OF BEING A NON-PROFESSIONAL

It is interesting that at the 2011 Australia and New Zealand Mental Health Services Conference in Adelaide a key note speaker, Alain Topor, spoke of the importance of acknowledgement of common humanity in mental health.

He spoke of the importance of human warmth, of “friend-like” relationships. Of professionals giving something extra – *a coffee, a joke, a conversation – often the unexpected, small everyday actions, genuine interest and involvement.*

Topor spoke of his research in mental health – that helping professionals are experienced as helpful when they go above or beyond professional roles in small ways that are not directly related to the person's psychiatric condition. He considers the possibility that helping professionals that “go beyond” – suspending briefly the formal constraints of the professional role – to demonstrate the willingness to be genuinely helpful.

Topor was clear that he wasn't advocating rule breaking – he reported that we are all breaking the rules sometimes anyway – we should be honest about it, make the invisible visible.

It is interesting that this discussion is leading us to name humanity as important! And ordinariness! And the giving of time! And mutuality!

Sounds like we are advocating a world of love and kindness and generosity!

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Martha is a student who has recently done a student placement with *A Place To Belong*. She had previously had training and experience in the professional clinical mental health field. During her placement with us she had time and space to get alongside some vulnerable people who were working through their own unique recovery experiences. She says of her placement:

"To describe my unique and rich journey and placement experience at *A Place To Belong* in a half page of paper is just too hard!

It was very challenging for me to hear people's stories in the first place because I came from hospital mental health system and a different language and cultural background. However, I was free and even supported to explore things that I was interested or struggling with. In the middle of the placement, I came to realise that I had encountered *A Place To Belong* for a reason, which was to fulfil my desire: finding my gifts and making good use of

them. Towards the end of my placement, I finally discovered something that I really enjoy and want to commit in my life, which is BEING with people and GROWING together. This can be more difficult but also more interesting and useful than DOING things for people or telling them what to do.

I love *A Place To Belong's* equality, values, bonding and flexibility. I really think *A Place To Belong* is like heaven on earth, where love is overflowing because everyone is equally valued, concerned, respected and supported by one another, and hence recovery and healing take place. In this heaven, I learnt to value and embrace both my struggles and strengths which have considerably helped me, thereby helping me to support others.

How amazing a small organisation can do so much to help disempowered individuals become empowered and help the incomplete community become complete! How lucky I am to journey with *A Place To Belong!*"

The ability to recognise the humanity of those with whom we work, value them and recognise the importance of their lives forms the essential bedrock upon which supportive, hope-inspiring relationships are based. (Repper, J., & Perkins R. (2006). Social Inclusion and Recovery: A Model for Mental Health Practice. London: Bailliere Tindall.)

JOINING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT INCLUSION

A Place To Belong launched an on-line conversation space about inclusion in 2011. Here you will find resources about inclusion, space to share your learning and experiences, opportunity to interact with others and raise questions. Why don't you check out this space?

Go to www.aplacetobelong.org.au and open *Inclusion Forum*.

Our thanks to the Department of Communities (Mental Health Branch) for funding to commence this space.

SERVICE USER ASSESSMENT

Late in 2011 *A Place To Belong* engaged Jane Sherwin and Lynda Shevellar as consultants to meet with participants to gain their reflections on the contribution of this work to their lives. Jane and Lynda will be sharing their reflections to constituents of *A Place To Belong* at our first Guiding Group meeting on Thursday, March 1, 2012. This assessment is an important aspect of our feedback process to help us improve our work

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 2012 workshops are February 5, March 25, June 3, September 23, and November 18. **In 2012 the workshops will be held at "The Parish Centre" cnr High and Jephson Streets, Toowong.** 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. Dates for 2012 meetings are March 1, June 14, September 13, and November 1.

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 sixth 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

Dave Andrews will be the keynote speaker at this training opportunity which will be held in July. Contact us or see our webpage if you want more information.

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.

Corporatisation, Compliance and Community

A Place to Belong will be facilitating a conversation for a day about this significant topic in 2012. **Contact us or check our website to hear details.**

Important Policies and Processes

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. Please contact us for information about our policies in these important areas.

2012 Office Hours and Admin Staff

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 9 am to 3 pm: Carlos
Thursday 9 am to 2 pm: Sannie

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