

Belonging



No 35 | Jan 2016

Letting the Light Shine

Neil
Barringham



Sunday Workshops

We sponsor occasional Sunday afternoon conversations about mental health and inclusion. These usually feature a story, afternoon tea and a workshop presentation and discussion. The first 2016 Sunday workshop will be on 7th Feb. Tentative dates for other workshops are 10th Apr., 17th July and 9th Oct. Contact us if you would like to be added to the mailing list.

Learning Circle

We facilitate regular learning circles for people who would like to discuss, read and consider how to assist inclusion for isolated people. Contact us for details.

Many of us learn to do OK at life by 'letting our light shine'. We learn quickly that we are happier – and others respect us – if we do the things we like to do and are best at.

If we are musical we play an instrument or get into a choir or a band; if we are sporty we get into a club or team; if we are extroverted we organise to be with people and don't get a job managing an isolated lighthouse. Jessica Watson, the Dalai Lama, Jimmy Carter and Bob Dylan are all examples of people who have accomplished amazing things – they have found their 'niche' where they are at their best and their light has shone.

We also learn that we will struggle – and others won't see the best side of us – if we place ourselves in contexts where our spirit is crushed or limited - we are not at our best and our light flickers and struggles.

Might it help us to take this thinking to our inclusion efforts in the mental health and disability realms? Why are people with disabilities and vulnerabilities so often relegated into situations where anything but their best will show? Why do we surround people with systems and strategies that are primarily about monitoring, controlling, managing and restricting – rather than strategies which also invite and elicit the light within?

Here are three local and current examples of people who have in the past been

limited and diminished and then have been supported to be more in touch with their inner 'self' – and their light is beginning to shine for theirs' and others' benefits.

We know a man who once was ejected from hostel to hostel around Brisbane. Living in confined situations, surrounded by vulnerable people and being controlled and dominated by over-worked and under-trained staff he reacted violently again and again. Eventually he ended up in a locked ward under 24 hour surveillance with reinforced windows and doors – and even here he continued to do great damage to his surroundings. He was seen as a threat and as a risk and as dangerous. Now – 8 years later – he is living happily in a unit in Brisbane, he is liked and greeted by others and a recent DVD clip of him shows him dancing to his favourite music in a crowd. Here he is at his best – people around this man know he is at his best when his passion for certain kinds of music is expressed. We don't know of any violent outbursts that have occurred for some years and if he becomes frustrated the people around him can see the signs and know how to respond supportively to avert a crisis.

continued on page 2



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. Meetings are held on Thursday evenings at 69 Thomas Street, West End. Tentative dates for 2016 are 17th March, 9th June, 8th September and 17th November. Contact us if you would like to be added to the mailing list.



Reading, Writing, Computer & Life Skills Program

Mondays (Mt Gravatt) and Tuesdays (West End) from 9.30 am to 1.00 pm sessions 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, Christine or Amanda on 3217 2522 for more information.

Letting the Light Shine Neil Barringham continued

We know a woman who once roamed the streets of Brisbane. Seen as a disturbed and disturbing person she bounced from service to service, housing service to housing service. After some years of slow gradual gathering of people around her, building a culture of respect and love for her, listening to her, her ability to engage positively with others began to show more and more. A public speaking ability began to manifest – she spoke confidently in front of audiences, she got people laughing and audiences listened to her! Her story became a powerful tool for educating people about the significance of belonging and inclusion and she began to be invited to speak to professional audiences. Recently a trainer was having difficulty connecting with an audience. The workshop looked like it might become a flop! When it came time for this woman to share her story the session was quickly reinvigorated and the training was back on track. People in her suburb who might be tempted to see her as a ‘problem person’ are often reminded that she is a gifted speaker and comedian and that she is being paid to travel to many places to train professionals. This puts her in a different light for others.

We know a man who has been diagnosed in the ‘dual diagnosis’ category. Until recently he was regularly transported to a disability ‘day centre’ in a monitored area with people he didn’t choose to be with. Frustrated, he lashed out at home and at himself. In only two short years, he has been removed from the day centre, the little amount of funding he has is being used to introduce him to more ordinary and typical community settings, he is embarking on ‘life-tasting’ (trying different opportunities and experiences) and a small and growing network of respectful people are gathering around him. As part of this process his supporters are seeing that he is at his best when he is hosting people in his home and when he is visiting others in their homes. Here is a clear way forward for assisting this man to ‘let his light shine’.

What are some ways we can support an inclusive process by finding and supporting people to tap into their authentic selves, to discover energies and capacities which might have been buried for a long time and to let their light shine?

- Let’s look, observe and listen as we companion a person into community life.
- Let’s do more ‘life-tasting’ – opening up opportunities for people to be in different and positive settings so we can see what goes well and what doesn’t.
- Let’s fly a few kites – not just one – some will fly and some won’t.
- Let’s support opportunities when they arise – gather people around to help make these opportunities real and possible.
- Let’s minimize the situations where people are not at their best – or if possible remove them from such situations.
- Let’s find and gather people who will build a culture of respect and honour around the person – people who can see strengths, who can hold positive hopes and who can search for opportunities.
- Let’s look for when a person is ‘in the flow’ – for those activities or times or pursuits when a person is absorbed in what brings them pleasure. These are moments to treasure and support.
- Let’s remember that in this work context is critical – we need to not just develop and change individuals – we might also need to shape a person’s context so it is more enriching and life-giving – so it invites their light to shine.
- Let’s support people to have a home which is as they want it to be. People are more likely to let their light shine if they have safe and secure housing and a sense that this is their ‘home’.

These principles remind us of the wonderful uniqueness of our (potentially) life-giving work. They remind us that we can create situations which bring life and which are contexts for healing and beauty. Like a dawn breaking our work can see movement from anonymity to intimacy; from fear to courage; from awkwardness and jaggedness to rhythms of grace. Perhaps this is the greatest gift we can offer in our work?



Wellbeing Day

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 pleased to be able to tell you that another Wellbeing Day will be held on Saturday 7th May at St Aidan's School, Corinda. See the back page for more information.

Mental Health Orientation Day for Chaplains & Pastoral Care Workers

A day filled with seminars, resources and information about mental health for people engaging in pastoral care. The 2016 date is Wednesday July 20th and will be at the Chermide-Kedron Uniting Church again. Contact us or see our web page for more information.

A Year of Writing

This past year has seen a number of writing publications emerging from our work. It is great to see a range of people recording what they are learning from the work and disseminating it for a broader audience. Some examples are given below.

- Andrew Wilcox completed a university placement with A Place to Belong in which he asked the question – what makes this organisation tick? He interviewed people from around the network and has produced a publication entitled *a place to belong: a reflection*. Contact us if you would like a pdf version of this production.
- Jeff Johnson wrote a chapter about mental health and inclusive learning for the Anglicare Australia *Who is being left behind? State of the Family Report - 2015*. Contact our office for a copy of this chapter.
- Amanda Toivanen and Damian le Goullon have produced a training guide for people who wish to support others in their community based learning goals – *Start with my Name – Supporting community literacy for adults with disabilities and learning barriers*. This resource will be available soon. Training workshops will be held in 2016 for people who want to learn about assisting others in community with their learning (10:30am-12pm on February 1 & 2; March 22; June 20; and September 13). Contact Amanda or Damian at our office if interested.
- Rozella Publishing published a number of books and stories in 2016. These were the work of adult learners in the Reading and Writing Group Program. Two of these are on our website or you can contact Damian at our office for more information.
- Lynda Shevellar and Neil Barringham published an article about boundaries and community inclusion work in Australian Social Work. Lynda Shevellar & Neil Barringham (2015): *Working in Complexity: Ethics and Boundaries in Community Work and Mental Health*, Australian Social Work, DOI:10.1080/0312407X.

A Conversation about Learning and Health

Damian Le Goullon

Recently I talked to a friend (Ian) about our experiences of education. We both agreed that we did not feel that online learning was a rich experience for us. I discussed the work of the Reading and Writing Group (RAW) at A Place to Belong. RAW defines literacy as community orientation. We agreed that it is possible to become self-literate but it is more encouraging to learn together.

For many people their first experience of community is school. Ian told me that for him school had many rich experiences of feeling connected:

When I think of school I remember it fondly, being fortunate to have good friends right through out school. The majority of my happiest memories were always the moments I shared with my friends outside the class room and some good experiences. I was lucky enough to have good relationships with my teachers as well.

I think my greatest connections were formed for me on the playground and playing sports, and then as I got older, they were formed in study groups and doing partnered assignments. I believe it was part of my personality to form friendships and to feel part of a group.

continued on the back page



Interested in Volunteering?

Our work is strengthened by people's volunteer contributions. There are four primary ways that people can engage with us - as an ally for someone in the community, as a learning partner in the Reading and Writing Group program, assisting with organizing an event (such as Wellbeing Day) or admin support in the office. Feel free to contact us if you would like to consider any of these options.

Important Policies & 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.

2016 Office Hours and Admin Staff

9 am - 3 pm
Mon. - Wed. & Fri.: Carlos
Thurs.: Sannie

A Conversation about Learning and Health

Damian Le Goullon

continued from page 3

It is with others that have common interests that I learned from.

Education can conversely be considered to be a very solitary time of our lives. We both reflected on the dangers of education as personal achievement.

When I entered into my senior years, I had taken on the decision to want to achieve the highest grades that I could. This resulted in me being serious about my studies at home. Although I had time with friends, I also isolated myself to try

hard at getting better marks. Looking back I can identify some of this type of thinking as anxiety.

As we get older and try to find words to describe our mental health sometimes a career-driven and professional approach may shut us out of community learning?

As a support worker, I began to reshape my mental health understanding. The professional language seemed to focus on the illness. In community, there was a greater emphasis on listening to experiences and not symptoms.

At the reading and writing group we have volunteers who do not claim to be experts in mental health. Instead we share our uncertainty and create moments to remember.

Wellbeing Day 2016

We are excited to let you know that Wellbeing Day will be held this year on Saturday, 7th May at St Aidan's School in Corinda!

Wellbeing Day is relevant for anyone interested in learning about wellbeing and growing through mental health challenges. It will be beneficial to people living with these challenges, their families and those who stand alongside them, as well as workers in the mental health sector. The atmosphere is an inclusive, safe, and connected space, with a broad variety of information and strategies inspiring hope and possibility. Wellbeing Day allows people from different organisations and backgrounds to share their stories or work and to meet and hear about the lives and work of others.

This year there will be three keynote speakers. Helen Glover is a local presenter with her own mental health story. Helen is an international organisational consultant in Mental Health and has joined us each year since the event began. This year Helen has developed resources aimed at stretching both group and individual practice in our lives and work.

Steve Parish, wildlife photographer, in a recorded interview with Andrew Blythe will share how nature has been a key wellness strategy in his life. Andrew Blythe is a writer and storyteller who will dialogue with Steve Parish and talk about telling your own story.

In addition we will have 14 workshops. Topics include: assisting people experiencing psychosis, self-care strategies, stories from carers, approaches for planning with people, understanding indigenous wellbeing through guided yarns, an example of a holistic and inclusive care facility, updates on what is happening in the mental health sector, NDIS updates, innovations with employment and connections in community and corporations.

We have a Facebook page for Wellbeing Day along with the option to register early for the event online! Go to <http://www.facebook.com/aplacetobelongbrisbane/>. Check out our webpage (www.aplacetobelong.org.au) and Facebook pages for updates. If you would like to be on our email mailing list, please contact Carlos on 07 3217 2522. We look forward to seeing you there!

A Place To Belong | An Anglicare Mental Health Network | Ph: 07 3217 2522
neil@aplacetobelong.org.au | PO Box 5873, West End Qld 4101 | Fax: 07 3217 2274
www.aplacetobelong.org.au | <http://facebook.com/aplacetobelongbrisbane>