

Belonging

A Place to Belong



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the Power of ONE

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. Sunday workshops for the start of 2018 are February 4th and March 25th. 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.

Person Centred Communities, This article is the first of three writings on rediscovering how we can support each other in an authentic human way.

Professionalism has its helpful contributions – but it also carries risks. One of these risks is that professionals can lose the ability to work alongside non-professionals in people's lives.

In the highly professionalised field of mental health it is a challenge to reflect and revision about the contributions of ordinary amateur citizens in our work.

We know from research into recovery and wellbeing that people often speak of the role of non-professional others – family, friends, companions and allies – who provide something that professionals don't.

It is important, therefore, that we keep in our minds the invitation for professional and specialist services and providers to work hand-in-hand with ordinary community members.

We have recently been reminded of the central role that ordinary individuals can have.

We began working with a man who was in a lock-up mental health ward some 10 years ago. He had no one visiting him. His chequered history meant that he wasn't a person with whom people wished to associate. Social workers were saying this man would likely never be discharged. He was asking us for some inclusive and human links. After some conversations, we found a man who fitted the kind of profile we thought was needed. We took him into meet the resident of the ward and they agreed to begin meeting weekly. The 'ally' - a semi-

retired businessman began to drive many miles across Brisbane each week to visit this man. As happens in these kinds of situations plenty of paperwork had to be carried out with the workers in the system to provide approval for visits and there was a degree of formality and monitoring of the visits at first.

The relationship between these two men began to develop and they looked forward to seeing each other. Staff in the institution began to warm up to the visits and recognition was made of the relationship. After some time the ally began to attend review meetings in the Mental Health Review Tribunal to support this man. Thus he was broadening his role from 'ally' to 'advocate'. His advocacy was gentle, slow-moving and relational. Things moved very slowly but eventually the Tribunal began to approve escorted leave for the man, with the ally as escort.

As time went by, the man demonstrated commitment to manage his mental health well, and leave was granted more regularly. During these outings no serious incidents occurred.

Now, ten years later, this man has been granted discharge from his incarceration. He is living well in community housing. He is responsible, self-aware and managing

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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. The first two Guiding Group dates for 2018 are February 15th and April 26th. Contact us if you would like to be added to the mailing list.

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 event is held at the Chermside-Kedron Uniting Church. See our website for details for 2018 and more information or contact us if you have questions.

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himself well thus far. His companion has continued loyally and added to his roles as 'ally' and 'advocate' and now is also an 'assistant' – helping this man re-learn how to use shops, public transport and manage living arrangements. Their relationship promises to continue and to be long-lasting - the ally reports getting a real buzz out of travelling alongside this man.

This story reminds of us the need for community members and professionals to reinforce each other's efforts. Even in highly controlled, highly monitored and risk-averse situations the presence of gentleness, humanity and a spirit of community can be potent and long-lasting.

Perhaps there are some pointers to guide our work in this area:

- Might workers in the 'community' mental health field re-think what 'community' means in their work – and affirm and recognise the centrality of ordinary people's involvements – no matter how tiny or sparse – in people's lives?
- Might workers realise that their inputs are just one small part of a person's life – that the richness (and risks) of community life contribute different and important dimensions to people's lives?
- Might agencies employ workers who are skilled and capable at working alongside community participants and family members of the people they assist?

- Might citizens and community members recognise the role of ordinary contributions they can make – and offer themselves to community organisations (such as *A Place to Belong!*) who would be glad to find potential contributions for them?
- Might workers remember that they generally come and go from people's lives as they follow their career paths – and that a long-lasting legacy they can leave is to support, cement, facilitate and introduce community links for the people they assist?

As we reflect on *the power of one* in our work and how low profile, covert, and slow-moving some of the best work is we are reminded of Wendell Berry's reflection that -

The real work of planet-saving will be small, humble, and humbling, and (insofar as it involves love) pleasing and rewarding. Its jobs will be too many to count, too many to report, too many to be publicly noticed or rewarded, too small to make anyone rich or famous.

The great obstacle may be not greed but the modern hankering after glamour. A lot of our smartest, most concerned people want to come up with a big solution to a big problem. I don't think that planet-saving, if we take it seriously, can furnish employment to many such people.

(Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community: Wendell Berry. Pantheon. New York. 1992.)

The NDIS

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is a major reform which is being introduced across Australia.

A Place to Belong is working as part of *Anglicare Southern Queensland* to prepare for the scheme's arrival in Brisbane in 2018.

A number of our staff have done Pre-planning training and are assisting people we assist to prepare for their NDIS assessments.

A number of our staff are being trained as

Relationship Managers and will carry out a role of supporting people with NDIS plans to access the helpful relationships they need.

And all of our staff and volunteers are being offered training in understanding the NDIS and how we can best work with the opportunities of this moment to assist people to get better lives.

If you would like to understand more about the NDIS please don't hesitate to contact either Neil, Jeffrey or Ted at the *A Place To Belong* office. You will also find a new link on our website that outlines the services we can provide.'



Reading & Writing Group

RAW is a community-based adult literacy program. Volunteers are welcome. You need no formal teaching background just a willingness to learn and support other learners.

Disability Support workers preparing for the NDIS will be interested in our new publication, 'Start With My Name: Supporting Community Literacy for Adults with Disabilities and Learning Barriers'. This resource affirms the importance of lifelong learning and highlights the right to learn for everybody. By sharing ideas emerging from our developmental practice model, and drawing inspiration from the personal stories of three adult learners, we hope this guide will support processes that enable learning in the community.

Contact APTB for class times and more information.

Illustration by Portia Graf.



Finding Home in Caring Communities

Damian Le Goullon

A Place to Belong is a service with a vision that encourages communities to 'walk with' people who have been isolated, estranged or alienated by social attitudes to mental illness and disability. We aim to activate community support and care rather than rendering people invisible through the segregated support of institutions. The idea of situated care is central to our approach. Care should be recognised not only as a behaviour but an attitude of 'being with one another'.

Situated care describes the supportive environment that can be created when we are connected with one another and open to each other's realities. In this piece, we explore the notion of home as a site of situated care. We draw on the experiences of three people, George, Kathy and Anna who are supported by 'A Place to Belong' and discuss what home means to them.

A Place to Belong encourages and supports community relationships. George describes a place not fit to be called home.

"The property had no windows and no running water and the pesticides in the tank also affected my health. When my daughter came to visit, she was eaten alive by mosquitos." When personal problems arise, rather than refer them to other services, we suggest that people activate their personal networks to find the care they need. I invited George to find a place in which he could care for his family.

Home can extend beyond the door if we receive welcome from a community that cares about our situation. Anna identifies with her neighbourhood "A respectful, nurturing environment is important to me, as it is good to be acknowledged within the community. I like it when you go for a walk for a coffee and you bump into people who know you." Surely a community that cares is a home for us all.

From the National Anglicare State of the Family Report. Copies of Damian's article are available from our office or the full report can be found at <http://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/state-of-the-family-report>

How can we respond empathically to people's experiences?

Amanda Toivanen

The notion of 'responsibility' can be overwhelming. We can feel burdened by the weight of it, bound to expectations of it, guilty if we feel we're shirking from it or avoiding it. We speak of carrying it. Of living up to it. Fulfilling it. Meeting it. Failing to meet it. What a challenging concept – it's no wonder we occasionally find ourselves lost in attempts to navigate it with grace and wisdom. When it comes to dealing with others, despite the best of intentions,

we may end up feeling responsibility for others rather than responsibility to them.

So what's the difference?

When we feel responsible for others, we seek to protect, rescue, control, carry other people's feelings and we don't listen. We end up feeling exhausted, anxious, fearful and liable because our concerns are about

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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.

2018 Office Hours and Admin Staff

9 am - 2 pm, Mon. - Wed.
& Fri.: Angelica
Thurs.: Sannie

How can we respond empathically to people's experiences?

Amanda Toivanen

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solutions, finding answers, being seen as or putting things 'right'. We ruminate over details and worry about performance. We may even end up in the role of manipulator or perceived persecutor in the belief that others should live up to our expectations.

When we feel responsible to others, we are better equipped to show empathy and encouragement. We are more ready to share, gently challenge, be sensitive towards others and listen deeply to them. We tend to feel more relaxed, aware and comfortable within ourselves. Our concerns are about genuinely relating, person to person. We can offer authentic presence and validation in the belief that the other person has 'what it takes' to navigate their experiences. We can guide the process without controlling it. We expect the other person to be responsible for themselves and their actions. We can trust and let go.

What if we thought of 'responsibility' as 'response-ability' - or our ability to respond with compassion and understanding? What if we listened to others with something more than just the intent to reply? What if we intentionally sought to hone our 'response-ability' by listening empathically? Marshall Rosenberg (2003) describes empathy as 'a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing'. In situations we face in supporting and guiding others through difficult times, empathy cannot be prepared beforehand. It requires a level of presence, attention and 'response-ability' that is not easy to maintain.

Instead of offering empathy, we are often quick to give advice, reassurance or explanations of our own position or feelings rather than focussing our full attention on the other person's message. People feel validated when we allow them enough time and space to express themselves fully and feel understood. Believing we have to 'fix' situations and 'make others feel better' prevents us from being fully present. Rosenberg (2003) highlights some common behaviours that prevent us from being present enough to connect empathically with others. The following are examples we are all likely to be familiar with:

Advising: 'I think you should.....' 'Why didn't you...?'

One-upping: 'That's nothing; wait 'til I tell you what happened to me...'

Educating: 'Well this could be a positive experience if you just...'

Consoling/reassuring: 'You might be upset now, but you'll feel better soon'

Story-telling: 'That reminds me of the time when I...'

Shutting down: 'Cheer up, don't feel so bad'

Sympathising: 'Oh, you poor thing, I feel so sad for you'

Interrogating: 'When did this begin?' 'Why did you do that?'

Explaining: 'I would have called but...'

Correcting: 'Wait a minute - that's not how it happened'

Della Marshall (in Boyle, 2006) offers a gentle reminder to never underestimate the power of being present with another person and genuinely listening to them. She further notes that it is a validating experience when someone listens carefully to us, adding that for many, it is a rare experience to be really heard. Rosenberg (2003) notes that our ability to offer empathic presence can allow us to share vulnerability, to diffuse conflict, to hear the word 'no' without taking it as a rejection, to revive a struggling conversation and even be able to hear the feelings and needs expressed through silence. Empathy enables the privilege of bearing witness to people transcending emotional pain when they have sufficient contact with someone who is able to respond empathically with understanding and compassion. Our ability to respond in such a way is worth cultivating, nurturing and encouraging.

(Boyle, S., Hull, G., Mather, J., Smith, L. & Farley, W. (2006). *Direct Practice in Social Work*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Rosenberg, M.B. (2003) *Non-Violent Communication. A Language of Life. (2nd edition)*. Encinitas: Puddle Dancer Press.)