Community Connectedness

A Priority When Supporting Individuals with Disability

Part 1: Literature Review and Guiding Principles
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CONTENTS

Introduction 1
    A. Community 2
    B. The Current Situation 4
    C. Trends within the Disability Sector 5
    D. Guiding Principles 7

Individual 7
    1. Consider the whole person, focusing on their gifts and assets 7
    2. Ensure the person’s own views and interests are being pursued even when they are hard to find or understand 8
    3. Focus on common interests when facilitating relationships 9
    4. Ensure there is time available for social relationships to develop 9
    5. Aim to positively develop the roles a person plays within society 10
    6. Search for leaders within the community and connect individuals to them 11
    7. Be prepared to let go when appropriate 11
    8. Consider the person as part of a family system 12
    9. Provide support with uncertainty and problem solving 13
    10. Aim for an extensive and varied social network 13
    11. Allow an appropriate level of risk taking 15
    12. Look for small increments of change rather than a breakthrough 16
    13. Be aware of the influence you can have 16
    14. Always assume there are ways of achieving community connectedness 17
    15. Continue to pursue community connectedness 18

Organisational 19
    1. Ensure person centred rather then service centred planning 19
    2. Work in partnership 19
    3. Ensure those working with people with disability are appropriately skilled 20
    4. Support community development activities 21

Some Final Points 21

References 23
Introduction

Community connectedness relates to a person’s sense of belonging within the community. It is closely linked to quality of life and general well-being. Community connectedness involves areas of life such as relationships and friendship networks, self-esteem and day-to-day support networks. The connections we have with our community enrich our lives. They are likely to provide us with a sense of belonging, a purpose, an identity, a support network and many opportunities to learn. We build our connections to community over a lifetime and we may belong to several communities, i.e., our local community, our work community, our school community or our church community.

Quality community connections do not always occur naturally, particularly for groups who are vulnerable or seen as being different in some way, such as people with disability. The reality for many people with disabilities is a life of disconnection to community. Even people who live amidst community can do so in isolation. Many people who experience or carry the label of disability experience rejection and this may occur over a lifetime. They may be physically disconnected from their families and community through institutionalisation. The connection of people with disabilities to their communities is likely to enrich their lives, however, it is also likely to enrich the community and the lives of its members. Therefore, community connectedness is an extremely important area for organisations providing support to people with disabilities to consider.

The role of a support worker in disability services is likely to involve enriching peoples lives through connecting them to their communities. One of the realities of Human Services in general is that we may unintentionally undermine people’s connectedness to communities. One example of this is by people assuming we are here to support a person and that is all they need. These can be the hidden consequences of the work that we do. Whatever we do in supporting a person will either enhance or hinder the likelihood of the person developing and maintaining connections to their community. Therefore, it is particularly important that we carefully consider all that we do to ensure we are enhancing the likelihood that people build and maintain their connections to community.

This paper outlines strategies that we may use to ensure we are working to support people to enhance their connections to community.
A. Community

Community connectedness is a complex phenomenon that can’t be defined easily\textsuperscript{6,7,10}. To date there has not been extensive discussion related to community connectedness\textsuperscript{11}. The literature related to inclusion and quality of life for people with disabilities is relevant, as it addresses aspects of community connectedness. To explore community connectedness, it is useful to consider community and the current situation within society in relation to community.

In the past ‘community’ referred to a group of people within a certain geographical location\textsuperscript{4,12}. Whilst there is no universally accepted definition of community it is clear that in modern society community is more than just a place\textsuperscript{1,3,4,12}. Communities are collective associations comprised of various groups of people that work together in a variety of ways\textsuperscript{1,4,6}. Nowadays people tend to belong to multiple communities\textsuperscript{1,3,4,12}. To conceptualise this it is useful to consider three forms of associations that create communities as described by McKnight\textsuperscript{6}:

i. **Formal**

These associations often have names and officers elected by members that hold certain positions.

*Examples:* sporting clubs, churches, charity groups

ii. **Informal**

Informal associations represent a gathering of people who solve problems, celebrate together or enjoy social contact. They usually do not have a name or officers bearing positions.

*Examples:* a gathering of neighbors, a cards group

iii. **Enterprise/Business**

Although less obvious, considerable associational activity occurs in locations that could be described as enterprises or businesses.

*Examples:* Restaurants, pubs, supermarkets, the hairdressers and hardware stores provide places where people gather for interactions as well as purchasing goods and services.
People benefit from being involved in these types of associations through gaining everyday exchanges of support, having socially valued roles and having opportunities to develop and maintain personally significant relationships. Currently people with disabilities are often isolated from these types of associations and are hence unable to gain such benefits.
B. The Current Situation

There has been a general trend of declining community with the rise of individualism and economic rationalism in Western society \(^4,13\). In addition, a large human services system has emerged and services have been used for support where in the past citizens would have turned to the community in order to solve problems \(^6\).

In recent years the decline in community has been acknowledged and the importance of strong communities to society has been recognised \(^13,14\). At an individual level, the psychological, social and physical health benefits of quality community connections are now clear \(^3,4,7,15,16\). People who are isolated and lack social support have been found to suffer mental distress, have increased risk of health issues such as heart disease and experience higher death rates \(^4,7,8,14-16\). Not addressing community connectedness for people with disabilities places them at risk of these health issues. Being connected to the community, more so than being involved in activities and recreation is very strongly linked with well being \(^4,7\).

Currently there is considerable discussion about the need for community building \(^14\). Rather than focusing on what worked in the past, it is a matter of inventing new ways of connecting that fit the way we have come to live \(^14\). In Western Australia organisations such as local councils and the Department for Community Development have commenced some initiatives that aim to build community at a broader level. The benefits of these will take considerable time to be realised. Such initiatives form an important base for pursuing community connectedness for people with disabilities.

There are many strategies that can be employed within the realm of community connectedness that will enhance the lives of people with disability within society as it currently operates. Therefore those supporting people with disabilities must act now rather than waiting for communities to be regenerated \(^6\).
C. Trends within the Disability Sector

Over the last few decades, both internationally and within Australia there has been a trend towards deinstitutionalisation. People with disabilities are now experiencing life within a community setting in the majority of cases. However location within the community does not equate with community connectedness. Many people with disabilities have remained isolated and lonely despite being located within the community. There has also been an increase in participation in activities within the community for some people with disabilities. Again, this does not automatically achieve community connectedness. The initial approach to including people with disabilities was to take them out in large groups. This method tended to invite rejection from the wider community and built a stereotype for how people with disabilities are involved in the community. Despite the fact that this no longer commonly occurs some communities have not changed their perception, making it challenging to move from participation to community connectedness.

Employment options for people with disabilities have also increased in more recent times. However, physical presence in the workplace does not always achieve connectedness. This may be due to factors such as coworkers lacking experience in working with people with disabilities and therefore being unsure of how to respond to the person. Whilst employment is not the only way of achieving community connectedness it is significant in that it provides individuals with one of the most valued roles in our society.

It is also important to note that having a number of people in ones life does not necessarily equate to a sense of belonging and inclusion. Many people with disabilities know a large number of people. These are often people they have met through the support services they receive. There may be few or no people who relate to the person by choice rather than in a paid capacity. Freely given relationships are extremely important in achieving community connectedness.

Facilitating community connectedness is a complex process for organisations. It is often a process that occurs informally and naturally within the family environment. In these situations the challenge for organisations providing support is to ensure that their involvement strengthens these connections rather than sending messages that suggest the
service system provides specialised input \(^{21}\). For example arranging a therapy appointment at a time when a person would normally have coffee with their neighbour sends a message that the therapy is of more benefit than maintaining contact with the neighbour.

Some individuals with disabilities and their families face significant barriers to making connections on their own behalf \(^{8,28}\). In these situations the role of service organisations is to work in ways that enable barriers to be removed or overcome rather than offering increased services in order to fill the gaps \(^{21}\). This area presents one of the greatest challenges to organisations \(^{19,21,30}\).

There are a number of other challenges faced by organisations when working within the area of community connectedness \(^{19,21}\). The professionalisation of the human service industry has resulted in quick fix solutions by professionals who come in and out of peoples lives without ever getting to know them \(^{19}\). Staff turnover creates significant issues in relation to a persons networks as it impacts on how well support people know a person and hence are able to support them to maintain and increase their connections \(^{19,21,22}\). Issues around the conflict between being a friend and being a support worker often arise \(^{19,21}\). Despite all these challenges, there are numerous examples of people with disabilities establishing genuine, interest based, freely given relationships that have a very positive impact on their lives \(^{19}\).

As a final point it is essential to consider that when people with disabilities are successfully connected to their communities there are numerous benefits to the community as a whole \(^{31-35}\). Communities that connect with people with disabilities are positive about differences between people \(^{30,32,34,36,37}\). They are therefore more likely to connect with other groups who have differences such as people from various cultural groups \(^{33}\). Such communities are inclusive, strong communities in general and provide significant benefits to society as a whole \(^{30,32,34,36,37}\). Even designing the physical environment to suit the needs of people with disabilities is of benefit to a range of people including those people with young children, older people and people carrying things. The efforts of organisations that support people with disabilities to connect to their communities are positive for the individuals involved as well as the broader community \(^{32,35}\). This makes it even more important for organisations to focus on community connectedness.
D. Guiding Principles

Based on an analysis of the current literature, there are a number of guiding principles that all organisations supporting people with disabilities can employ in order to facilitate community connectedness for those they support. Due to the fact that people with disabilities are not a homogenous group, these principles are broad and general. It is recognised that there may be more specific strategies that are appropriate to certain groups or individuals.

When exploring these principles it is useful to bear in mind that they ‘are often the same strategies that we use for our selves and other members of our families only that they are used more consciously, explicitly and deliberately’ (p 9). This is not to say that community connectedness will be achieved easily. As Webb states ‘Real relationships and authentic community participation do not happen by magic for those whose lives have been marked by stigma, marginalisation, segregated schooling, or whose range of relationships is limited to those who are paid to be present in their lives’ (pg 34).

The principles are listed in terms of those that apply when working with individuals and those that relate to the organisations supporting people with disabilities.

INDIVIDUAL

1. Consider the whole person, focusing on their gifts and assets

In the past there has been a focus on what disabilities and deficiencies a person has and how skills can be developed to overcome these. More recently the value of considering a person’s assets and gifts has been recognised. Identifying the capacities, skills or potential contributions of the person with disabilities and considering what policies, resources or activities could result in these assets being used, recognised and further developed provides opportunity for positive community connections that would not be possible through consideration of deficiencies and disabilities. Once a person’s talents are recognised other opportunities for community participation can arise, creating the potential to further community connection.
While the focus should remain on the abilities and contributions of an individual, it is also important to consider the barriers that may prevent a person from becoming involved. It is important to be realistic about a person’s limitations and to focus on creative strategies that allow barriers to be overcome. For example, when supporting a person who tends to be noisy, visiting the local shopping centre as opposed to the library may be a wise decision. Another example may be that in the case of an individual that looks physically different, it is useful to downplay the physical differences by ensuring they have attractive, fashionable clothing.

2. Ensure the person’s own views and interests are being pursued even when they are hard to find or understand.

When supporting a person to discover and pursue their interests, it is often natural to introduce them to the things you like doing, assuming they will get the same satisfaction that you experience. Each individual has interests that reflect their cultural beliefs, prior experiences in life, personality type and their assets and talents. Therefore they may be vastly different to those employed to support them or to other members of the family. A conscious effort must be made to ensure that the individual’s interests are being pursued rather than those of people who provide support.

Finding out what the interests of a person with a disability are can take considerable time. This is particularly the case for people who have difficulty communicating, carry labels of challenging behaviour or have little experience in pursuing their interests. People may need to experience a range of activities to find ones that interest them. They may also need to try things more than once.

In order to find out what interests a person, it is important to spend considerable time getting to know them. In particular, it is important to know how a person communicates. It may be that a form of communication other than verbal communication provides significant information. Reviewing a person’s history can often reveal certain interests. Families and friends of people with disabilities often have an intimate knowledge of an individual. This expertise should be utilised in determining the interests of a person with disabilities.
3. Focus on common interests when facilitating relationships

People tend to form friendships and connections based on common interests 4, 10, 36, 39, 45. Once people recognise their common interest, the apparent differences in ability, appearance or lifestyle becomes insignificant 4, 8. When people with disabilities are given opportunities to interact with people based on a common interest, it is more likely that they will form an ongoing connection or friendship with the people involved 4, 8, 39. Indeed it may take a combination of factors such as personality, goals and interests and this may be difficult to achieve 36. However when the right balance is achieved, the results can be remarkable 36.

4. Ensure there is time available for social relationships to develop

People with disabilities often have lives filled with routines based on where they live or on what support services they require. A person with a disability may require a range of therapy and medical services 28. They may live in a situation where routines are based around the needs of multiple people. This impacts on flexibility and spontaneity. This may leave little time for allowing the person to have experiences where social relationships may develop 8. Clearly there is a need for a balance between meeting the needs of a person with disabilities and allowing opportunities for social interaction 4, 8, 28. However the clear benefits associated with being socially connected mean that ensuring and pursuing opportunities for social relationships needs to be given ultimate priority within the lives of each individual 8.

Another relevant point to mention is that relationships take considerable time to develop. This means that a person may need to participate in an activity multiple times in order to be recognised by others and for social interactions to begin to occur 21, 43. For example it may be beneficial to visit a café at a certain time each week in order for the person to become known by staff and other regulars as opposed to visiting at different times, or visiting a new café each week. This can lead to meaningful experiences that contribute to a sense of connectedness rather than novel experiences that have no ongoing basis 21, 43.
In considering our own lives, it is obvious that a committed relationship may take years to develop\(^{46}\). In reality it is often about four years before a relationship is well developed and even then they require ongoing effort and changes to ensure they last. Therefore it is often necessary to persist and continue to pursue a particular activity beyond the timeframe that may have initially been proposed despite an apparent lack of success in terms of forming a connection or friendship.

5. **Aim to positively develop the roles a person plays within society**

An important aspect of feeling connected is related to having a variety of valued roles within life\(^8\). This includes formal roles such as an occupation, being a tenant or homeowner and for example, being the president of an association. There are also multiple informal roles people have such as being a consumer and therefore shopping and using a variety of services, being a neighbour and for example being the ‘organiser’ within a group of friends. If the role a person is in is perceived positively, then the individual is recognised as contributing to the group\(^{21}\). The individual is then identified by the role that they play rather than by the disability that they have\(^{21,47}\).

In order to develop positive roles there is an enormous advantage for people with disabilities to be involved in using generic services, supports and activities\(^{21,47}\). It is often the case that one thing leads to another in that once a person is seen as having a valued role, they are then able to develop other valued roles\(^{47}\). Segregated activities often serve only to further exclude or limit community inclusion as they do not provide a valued role but highlight a person’s disability within the wider community\(^{27}\). Therefore it is essential to focus on involving people in inclusive ventures rather than segregated activities when ever possible.

Another element that contributes to the development of valued roles is that of age appropriateness. If people pursue roles and interests that are appropriate for their age, and frequent settings that others in their own age group are likely to use they are likely to be perceived positively in the community\(^{41,47}\). This then provides greater access to opportunities to become connected and form relationships\(^{41}\).
6. Search for leaders within the community and connect individuals to them

In each community there is generally some leaders or community guides. These are people who know what things are happening, are motivated to strengthen the community, know a lot of people, have the ability to focus on a person’s assets and are persistent when presented with a challenge. They have the ability to bring a person into life as a citizen by introducing them to a web of associations. Efforts to connect a person to the community may be more successful if a community guide who is well known and respected already is involved.

Often the role of support workers is not only to provide appropriate support themselves but to link people to appropriate supports within the community. This can heighten the chance of a person becoming connected. For example an individual has expressed an interest in attending church. There are two churches that are active within the town. One church has a new minister who has initiated a range of activities within the community that involve a range of people from across the community. The other church has a very stable population that has done the same things for many years. The support worker may be wise to encourage the person they are supporting to join the church with the new leader who appears to have the characteristics of a community leader.

7. Be prepared to let go when appropriate

In order for a person to achieve community connectedness, they need to reduce their dependence on human services and increase their interdependence in community life. For this to be achieved, there is often a point where those who have supported a person to become involved in the community must step back. It is only at this point that the fullness of community hospitality is expressed and the excluded person becomes incorporated as a citizen.

It can also be appropriate for support services to step back in the initial stages of establishing community connections. The sense of ‘ownership’ by service staff can be a significant barrier to forming relationships and membership within the community. This does not mean that support is not needed, but more that subtle support where the focus remains on the individual with disabilities is what is appropriate. Also the benefits of a
community member rather than a support worker providing the appropriate support must be recognised.

The notions of ‘stepping back’ or ‘letting go’ are challenging given the fact that people with disabilities often do have vulnerabilities. It is necessary to ensure that there are safeguards in place when making a decision to step back or let go \(^4,21,49\). Often these safeguards do exist and it is a matter of recognising them \(^49\). A person having a variety of relationships in their lives can in fact be a safeguard in itself \(^1,4,15,46,50\). An acceptance that community life will not be perfect all of the time is necessary to allow those providing support to nurture rather than control relationships and connections \(^33,51\).

8. Consider the person as part of a family system

Community connectedness often has a base in how an individual is connected within their family \(^6,36,43,52\). The supportive actions of family can allow the person to experience the care, power and continuity that comes from being part of a community \(^1,6,27,28\).

When planning support services, considering the person with the disability as part of a family system is relevant for children \(^28,43\) and those who continue to live a home as adults \(^36,52\). The supports provided will naturally impact on family activities \(^28,43\). For example a family that has to ensure a child attends several therapy appointments a week may not be able to go to the park with their grandmother anymore. This impacts on the connectedness for the whole family. The effect of the support on the ability of the individual to enjoy the ‘ordinary’ aspects of life must be considered extremely carefully \(^28,43\). For example providing support to enable an individual to participate in an ordinary event such as shopping may of more benefit in terms of community connectedness than arranging support for the individual to go to the movies.

Consideration of family is equally relevant for those individuals who do not live with their families \(^43\). Support people can assist a person to stay in touch with their family members through methods such as phone calls, sending birthday cards, arranging visits and making plans for activities that involve family members \(^43\).
9. Provide support with uncertainty and problem solving

Many people with disabilities have had prior experiences in trying to establish social connections that have not been positive\textsuperscript{11, 21, 53}. This may result in them being uncertain and even afraid to try again. A crucial part of a support workers role is to build confidence and self esteem within the people they support\textsuperscript{11, 21}. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for success and ensuring the demands placed on a person are appropriate. This may simply involve supporting a person through those awkward social moments that can occur, especially in new situations.

Forming new connections and relationships within the community requires flexibility and change and often presents a range of issues that may need to be addressed\textsuperscript{8, 21}. Support people can assist the person with disabilities to solve problems that arise and hence facilitate community connectedness\textsuperscript{8, 21, 48}. Problem solving may range from working out a new routine to ensure a person is able to visit a friend when they are invited over to assisting a person to reciprocate appropriately within a relationship.

10. Aim for an extensive and varied social network

Community connectedness involves a variety of types of social networks\textsuperscript{1, 4, 46, 48, 50}. This is consistent with McKnight’s\textsuperscript{6} view of the various types of associations that make up community as discussed above. The Victorian Government Department of Human Services\textsuperscript{4} developed a model of social inclusion related to people with cognitive impairment where the individual is at the centre and a series of circles represent relationships ranging from intimate to community presence (see Figure 1). Generally the number of contacts a person has increases as the circles move outwards.
In terms of facilitating community connectedness, a number of issues are relevant in relation to this model. These include:

- Participation in the outer circles can be used as leverage to involvement in the more inner circles
- Difficulties can arise due to the fact that people with disabilities tend to have fewer relationships at each level, but have a disproportionately larger number of contacts in the outer circle. This can result in issues such as people with disabilities treating acquaintances as close friends. Increasing the number and types of relationships a person experiences reduces the likelihood that people with disability will rely too heavily on or over interpret particular relationships
- The more communities a person is involved in, the more robust their social networks are likely to be. This is likely to lead to a greater number of friendships and close relationships.

Figure 1. Model of Social Inclusion.
• Close relationships with other people with disabilities can provide people with the confidence to venture outwards into environments that may be less accepting of their disability. This then provides increased opportunity to develop closer relationships with people without disability.

• While the family, service providers and peers with disabilities are key elements of an individual’s social networks, extension of the network beyond this has significant potential in terms of enriching the lives of people with disabilities. Freely given relationships are a very important part of community connectedness.

It is useful to use this model when thinking about what types of connections a person already has and what other connections could be developed.

Although the size of a person’s network does not equate with quality, the larger the network, and the more varied, the more likely the individual is to experience different levels of support, reciprocity and intimacy that contribute to community connectedness.

11. Allow an appropriate level of risk taking

Developing relationships with people requires a certain level of risk taking. People have to reveal something of themselves and put themselves in unfamiliar situations in order to have opportunities to form friendships. Currently both families of people with disabilities and the service system for people with disabilities find it difficult to allow risks to be taken and hence may minimise opportunities for relationships to develop.

It is appropriate to aim for a balance between the potential opportunities and benefits of risk taking and the possible harms. Having a process where decision making regarding risk taking is clearly outlined, and hence the balance between risk taking and safety and protection for the individual, family, staff and general public is documented can allow organisations to achieve this balance.
12. **Look for small increments of change rather than a breakthrough**

When pursuing community connectedness, it is unlikely that an action or strategy will lead to a sudden breakthrough that establishes strong, lasting community connections \(^{21,54}\). Rather it is necessary to look for small increments of change that can be built upon to further community connectedness \(^{19,21,36}\). A ripple effect whereby one small thing leads to something slightly larger can often occur \(^{1,36}\).

13. **Be aware of the influence you can have**

The actions of support people within situations where community connectedness is being pursued are critical \(^{4,55,56}\). The support provided has the potential to ‘make or break’ situations in terms of making connections \(^{21,57}\). The influences that support people have impact on the person they are supporting, the people involved in the particular community in which connections are being pursued and the wider community \(^{4}\).

All the points discussed thus far relate to strategies support workers can adopt to promote community connectedness for the individuals they are supporting. There are many other areas where support workers can have an influence on the individuals they support. For example support workers have the potential to encourage and develop valued social habits in people with disabilities through modeling and support \(^{21}\). Demonstrating social behaviours such as making introductions can provide people with disabilities powerful skills in terms of connecting with their community. Also simple things like the way in which a person with a disability is dressed or groomed can have a significant influence on how they are perceived in the wider community \(^{45,48}\).

Support workers have a role in reinforcing and rewarding any actions within the community that support community connectedness for people with disabilities \(^{36,43}\). This could be simply praising those involved or having a private discussion with those involved about the benefits of their actions. Providing this type of support and feedback increases the likelihood that the actions will be repeated and expanded \(^{36,43}\).

Those supporting people with disabilities have a role in demonstrating to the general community appropriate ways of relating to and including people with differences \(^{4,45,48,54}\). For example considerations about how support people interact with people with disabilities
are important. A support person who is relaxed, confident and respectful when interacting with a person with disabilities provides a good role model to the wider community who may not be experienced in interacting with people with disabilities. 

Overall the attitude and actions of support workers has a major influence on the achievement of community connectedness. Believing in and striving for better lives for people with disabilities can in fact lead to positive changes for the individuals you support. As Kendrick states ‘… a measure of “sensible unreality” may be just what is needed when the actual reality is so deficient’ (p27).

14. **Always assume there are ways of achieving community connectedness**

Communities are all different in the ways in which they operate and how they connect with people with differences. Support workers need to gain information about the communities that they are attempting to connect people to in order to work in a way that increases the chance that the individual they are supporting will become connected. For example encouraging a family to take their children to the local park is a great idea but may fail in a community where people have become so concerned about safety that they no longer visit the park.

As mentioned previously it is wise to assist the person with disabilities to identify why one option may be better than another in terms of the likelihood of connections being made. However this is not to say that in a situation where a community does not seem conducive to connecting with a person with disabilities that no further attempts at making connections are pursued. It may be that providing some additional information or approaching the situation differently may be more successful. For example in a situation where a group leader does not seem keen for an individual with disabilities to be included in the group it may be that getting to know one of the other group members and then having this person introduce the individual to the group will have a greater chance of success. It is useful to always work from the assumption that everyone is willing to assist.

Just as each community is different, each individual with disabilities is unique. Each person will have different needs and a different level of experience in terms of community connectedness. Part of a support workers role is also to work out where an individual is at and use appropriate strategies to assist them to achieve community
connectedness. For example the strategies used when supporting a 40 year old man who has spent most of his life in institutions will be different to those used to support a teenage girl who has been brought up within a family environment and attended a mainstream school.

There may be situations where attempts at pursuing community connectedness appear to have been unsuccessful. It is important that support workers think about how things might be done differently rather than presuming that community connectedness is not possible. There may also be situations where the individual with disabilities appears disinterested in community connectedness. This is often a result of limited positive experience and hence reduced aspirations\(^9, 33\). Again it may be a case of providing different support to the individual rather than not pursuing community connectedness.

15. **Continue to pursue community connectedness**

Community connectedness is a complex area and there are no clear steps to achieving it\(^8, 21, 36\). The way it is achieved and the results will be vastly different for each person. Generally it is only when a person has had considerable experience at forming connections that the process becomes natural and relaxed\(^4, 15, 54\). Also it is only with increasing participation that barriers become less obvious and opportunities greater\(^9, 48\). This means it is almost inevitable that initial attempts at facilitating community connectedness may not be fulfilling. However the benefits to the individual of achieving it are enormous and justify continued attempts to pursue it\(^21, 54\). It is a matter of analysing experiences and learning from them and then reapplying that learning in other situations\(^46\).

Community connectedness is not an entity that is achieved at a certain point after which effort can stop\(^36, 54\). Continuing to be a part of the community and staying connected to community life and people is an ongoing process\(^12, 21, 36, 54\). Organisations need to maintain focus and effort to ensure lasting community connectedness\(^12, 21, 36, 54\).
1. Ensure person centred rather then service centred planning

Often organisations inadvertently develop systems and ways of operating that suit the organisation 4,32,36. When providing support to people with disabilities, plans are often made that suit the service and the way it is accustomed to operating rather than focusing on the person with the disability 32,60-62. People are often unconscious of this as the process is closely intertwined within the culture of organisations 32. To enable a person to become connected to their community, plans must focus on the person themselves 30. This may mean that services work very differently with different individuals rather than having a standard system for planning 36,61-63. Services may also need to rethink how regulations and paperwork requirements are discussed with the people they are supporting to ensure these do not become the focus 4.

2. Work in partnership

People with disabilities frequently have a number of service agencies involved in their lives. When these agencies operate in isolation, issues such as community connectedness, which is relevant across all aspects of life, becomes difficult to effectively pursue 26. Placing social inclusion at the centre of disability services, rather than each service focusing on its particular specialty will contribute significantly to achieving community connectedness 1,4,30. Operating in collaboration allows sharing of resources including expertise, provides opportunity to learn from one another and allows for a shared vision between the individual with disabilities and those who provide support 36.
3. **Ensure those working with people with disability are appropriately skilled**

Those supporting people with disabilities can act as either facilitators or barriers in the process of individuals establishing and maintaining friendships and social networks. To ensure support people are facilitators of rather than barriers to community connectedness certain skills are required. For example support people often need to act as advocates, allowing a person to speak for them selves when they feel comfortable doing this and offering support when they encounter obstacles. Sophisticated skills are required and people benefit from training in this area.

Organisations supporting people with disability must ensure their workforce is appropriately skilled in area of community connectedness. There is a significant amount of evidence that demonstrates that improving staff practices has beneficial effects on participation in meaningful activity whereas increasing staff ratios has limited impact. Creating a culture of learning within the organisation and ensuring staff are provided with adequate opportunities to develop their skills is essential.

Volunteers who support people with disabilities can also benefit from training. So to can groups within the community, many of which may be willing to involve people with disability but are unsure of how to do so in a respectful way. If an organisation is planning to use volunteers, or introduce an individual to an association or group, prior and ongoing training of those involved may make the interactions and connections more successful.

People with disabilities often live with their families. Most families have a range of extended family members and friends. These people have enormous potential to facilitate community connectedness. However, in some cases these people are uncomfortable providing support or chose not to be involved as they feel inadequately equipped to meet the needs of their family member who has disabilities. If such people are supported to develop skills and increase their involvement, the individual with disabilities will benefit greatly. Connectedness within the family is the basis for connectedness within wider society and it is therefore essential to support development in this area.

The type and quality of training must be monitored to ensure it is indeed leading to support people using strategies that facilitate community connectedness.
has been found in some cases that training has resulted in increased activity levels rather than increased social engagement and that changes have not been sustained beyond the training period. The limitations of training, particularly in relation to attitudes and values must also be considered. Valuable skills are often gained as a result of life experiences and it can be difficult to replicate this through training.

4. Support community development activities

Strong, inclusive communities provide greater opportunities for people with disabilities to achieve community connectedness. As discussed previously, community strength has been declining in recent times. Therefore it is of benefit to organisations that support people with disabilities to be involved in activities that aim to develop the community in general. Involvement in generic community building activities by those considered to be from the disability sector sends a clear message that people with disability are an important part of mainstream society rather than a special group.

SOME FINAL POINTS

Collectively the points above illustrate that organisations supporting people with disabilities to connect with their communities need to give careful consideration to the way in which they operate. Successful community connectedness depends on appropriate support rather than the quantity of support.

McKnight lists key characteristics of people who are supporting people with disabilities into community life as follows:

- They focus on gifts and capacities of excluded people
- They are well connected in association life.
- The paths they walk into community life are based on relationships of trust rather than the authority of systems.
- They believe strongly that the community is filled with hospitality for strangers.
• They learn to leave the person they guide so that the community can surround them and become responsible for their lives.

These points provide a summary of the issues discussed above. Overall it is clear all those who support people with disabilities must see community connectedness as a priority.
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Community Connectedness

A Priority When Supporting Individuals with Disability

Part 2: Case Studies
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CONTENTS

E. Case Studies

1. Nulsen Haven 2
2. My Place WA 21
3. Lower Great Southern Community Living Association 45

Please note: In some cases names have been changed in order for confidentiality to be maintained.
E. Case Studies

Many organisations supporting people with disabilities within Western Australia have begun to focus on community connectedness in recent years. There are now some excellent examples of how community connectedness has been pursued and what has been achieved. Below are some case studies from three Western Australian organisations.
1. Nulsen Haven

*About Nulsen Haven*

Nulsen Haven provides a range of services to people with profound and severe intellectual and physical disabilities. Essentially the core business of the Association is the provision of accommodation services. This includes care, training and community support to the residents of the Association. Currently Nulsen Haven supports 76 individuals. The Association has over 250 staff, the majority of whom work in residential care. The organisation covers the southern metropolitan region of Perth.

In addition to residential services Nulsen Haven has a Scope (Social Integration Services) program that is an alternatives to employment service. The Scope program involves assessment of the needs and aspirations of individuals, planning and development of programs. Nulsen Haven also has a Program Development section. This section works to ensure each individuals needs are addressed with family, friends and professionals in order to promote their well being, independence and participation in their home and community. The Training and Development Department offers tailored packages to internal staff and staff from other organisations across the disability sector. Nulsen Haven also provides administration services to a number of individuals, families and charitable organisations.
Interest Becomes a Business Venture

Gillian is a 51 year old lady who lives in Gosnells. Gillian lived with her family until she was about 12 years of age. She then went into a hostel for many years. In 1992 she moved into her current home, a group home shared with four other people with disabilities. Gillian uses a wheelchair and communicates non verbally, mainly through her facial expressions. Gillian’s family is in Queensland. She has a sister, nephew and niece there. Her mother also lived there, but passed away about two years ago.

After moving into her current home, support staff worked with Gillian to discover things she was interested in. The House Coordinator thought that Gillian may be interested in arranging pressed flowers on greeting cards. A support worker was employed to come to Gillian’s house to do this with her. This went on for about six months but did not seem to work for Gillian. In hindsight it seemed that this might have been due to the support worker not really knowing Gillian that well. After this time, the House Coordinator and a support worker, Sue, used to make time each week to do craft with Gillian.

Gillian appeared to enjoy this time and was most interested in arranging pressed flowers. Patti, the Creative Development Officer at Nulsen Haven became aware of Gillian’s situation and applied for a grant for Gillian’s interest in this area to be extended. The grant application was successful and funding for the rent of a space for Gillian to do her flower work, some equipment and some hours for Sue to support Gillian one day a week were funded for a two year period.

After a short time the people running the florist asked if they could display the cards in their shop. The cards sold well and one day a lady came in and asked if Gillian had a business card as she was interested in selling the cards through her shop.

Sue and Gillian went looking for a location for Gillian to work from and found a back room in a florist shop. Gillian went to the shop each week and
worked on her flower arranging with the support of Sue. After a short time the people running the florist asked if they could display the cards in their shop. The cards sold well and one day a lady came in and asked if Gillian had a business card as she was interested in selling the cards through her shop. Gillian began to supply cards to this lady as well as the shop. Gillian continued her work from the shop until a point where the shop closed.

*From time to time different people in the group invite Gillian to their homes for morning tea.*

Gillian and Sue then needed to look for a new location. Gillian rented some space at Liddelow Homestead, the Community Craft Centre in Kenwick where she had been a member for six years. Gillian became known amongst other people working at the Centre. A group of ladies doing pottery asked Gillian to join them for morning tea. They always made sure Gillian and Sue knew that they were having their morning tea. They also invited Gillian to other events such as their Christmas Party. From time to time different people in the group invite Gillian to their homes for morning tea.

![A Hard Point at Which to Keep Going](image)

At one stage the Gosnells council made a decision to withdraw the staff member who used to coordinate things at Liddelow Homestead. A community committee replaced the staff member. It became apparent that one of the committee members was not fully supportive of Gillian being involved in Liddelow Homestead. Sue continued to support Gillian to go each week and ensured they helped with tasks such as cleaning. Sue remained positive in her interactions with the person concerned and now believes that the person has changed their view. The person is now friendlier and more open with Gillian and Sue.

Liddelow Homestead often has market stalls and festivals. Gillian participates in these. She sells her cards sometimes and helps wherever she can with the organisation.
Challenges

- Staff rosters had to be juggled in order for Sue to be able to consistently support Gillian with her card making. At times there was some resistance to this as some people believed the role Sue was playing could be done by anyone.

- Initially a few people held the vision that the flower arranging venture was possible and had high expectations of both Gillian and the project. Trying to communicate this to some others that weren’t involved in the project and hadn’t worked with Gillian in a creative sense was difficult. Fortunately Gillian had key supporters with some ‘pull’ and as a result rosters and other areas that required changing occurred more easily than they otherwise might have, allowing the project to proceed successfully.

- A very early challenge was for staff to understand the need for Gillian to be directly involved in as many aspects as possible with the project rather than others ‘doing’ things on her behalf. People like Sue and Patti clearly understood this and instilled this in others who worked with Gillian. This ensured that in the end there was ownership and integrity in the work.

- With the best will in the world, Gillian’s supporters wanted the flower arranging venture to be successful financially for Gillian. There was a view that the greater the output in a financial sense, the more ‘successful’ the project. Sue felt this pressure but maintained a focus on the value for Gillian (ie. the community connectedness). Interestingly and very satisfying this aspect is no longer an issue at all as people have recognised the value of the community connections Gillian has achieved.

- Gillian makes loud noises at times. This can result in disapproving looks or even comments from people in the community. Sue remains positive in her interactions with Gillian and will draw attention to something else about Gillian in order to minimise the impact of this behaviour.
Gillian and Sue have spent time taking the cards around to different shops. Gillian now provides a regular supply to gift shops in Kelmscott and Subiaco, a tourist shop in Kings Park and even a gift shop in Dunsborough. This eventuated when Sue was down south on holidays with a friend. They visited the shop and Sue’s friend commented that Gillian’s cards would really suit the shop. Sue talked with the shop owners and they were interested. When Sue returned to work she made arrangements for Gillian to get down to Dunsborough. Gillian went to the shop and showed them her cards and they agreed to sell them. Gillian sends supplies of her cards to them when needed but also makes visits down there as the shop owners like to see her in person.

As demand increased for Gillian’s cards Sue was unable to keep up the supply of pressed flowers. She asked her mother Maud to assist her and Maud now presses flowers for Gillian consistently. She even gained a permit to pick wildflowers to enable her to keep up the flower supply. Maud and Sue also liaised with a wildflower factory to see if they could gather flowers that drop onto the floor for pressing. The owner agreed to this and the also asked Gillian if she could make cards for all his clients each Christmas. These cards are sent all over the world to the people who buy Australian wildflowers from the factory. The ladies from the pottery group often return from their holidays with flower pressed for Gillian. The gardeners employed by Gosnells Council that come to Liddelow House plant pansies each season for Gillian to use for pressing.

The gardeners employed by Gosnells Council that come to Liddelow House plant pansies each season for Gillian to use for pressing.

Gillian (right) works on her flower cards with the support of Sue (left)
Working at her studio in Liddelow Homestead, Gillian Deague creates a range of delicate and attractive pressed flower items. Here she is pictured with her son Sue James.

**Flowers to Wish With — By Gillian Deague**

The colourful and exquisite pressed flower arrangements created by Gillian Deague have established her as a successful and recognised local artist. Her love of flowers is matched only by her creativity and dedication as she continues to pursue her craft at the Liddelow Homestead in Kenwick.

In 1997, Gillian won a grant from the University of Western Australia’s Arts with Disabilities Fund to continue her work. The Artists with Disabilities Fund was established in 1987 to recognise the rights and abilities of artists with disabilities, and to provide them with an opportunity to participate and be recognised for their contributions to the arts and craft community of WA.

With her grant, Gillian has been able to rent studio space at the Liddelow Homestead Arts and Crafts Club and employ a partner, Sue James, to assist her with her latest project “Flowers to Wish With”. According to Crafts Coordinator Patti Christiansen, working at the Homestead has been a creative and inspiring experience for Gillian.

“Here, Gillian is surrounded by potters, wood-turners, quilters and painters, among others. She has made many new friends,” said Patti.

There is plenty of room in the studio for Gillian’s tools of trade such as her modified scissors, a heat sealing machine and a stamping machine. Boxes of pressed flowers collected by Gillian, her partner Sue and many friends are spread out across the floor.

The beautiful cards and bookmarks created by Gillian are on sale at the adjacent Liddelow Gift Shop, Cooper Avenue, Kenwick (just past the Royal Street intersection on Albany Highway).

Gillian Deague and Maude Blackwood show it’s not all hard work as they share the fun of choosing flowers for Gillian’s next craft creation.

**CRAFTY CREATIONS FOR SALE**

ARANGE of creative and useful items made by residents is on sale. To purchase them, please contact Patti Christiansen on 9358 551. Not only will you receive attractive, individually created pieces, you will also be supporting the work of our residents.

**FLOWER CARDS**

made by Gillian Deague of Dillon Place, Gosnells.

- Large cards $3.00
- Medium cards $2.00
- Book marks $2.50
- Gift Tags $1.00

**CORK PLACE MATS**

created by David Hunt of Byrewood Place, Lynwood.

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**POTPOURRI AND LAVENDER BAGS**

made by Julie Crowe of Candington Way, Huntingdale.

- Potpourri Bags $1.50 (with gift tags $2.20)
- Lavender Bags $1.50 (with gift tags $2.20)

Choice of crochet or lace bags.

An article and advertisement for Gillian’s flower arranging work
Consistently talking about Gillian’s achievements and maintaining a high level of excitement about the project were essential strategies in maintaining the momentum of the project in the early stages. As a result the team of people that have and still support Gillian are key advocates for her development and some of her best fans!

In particular, the long standing partnership between Sue and Gillian has contributed greatly to the success of the flower venture and the community connectedness that has resulted from this. The way that Sue advocates for Gillian has been very important as has Sue’s ability to ensure Gillian always has the lead role in doing anything related to the flower arranging venture.

Sue reported that having the support of Patti in the Creative Development role has been critical in terms of sorting out issues that have arisen. For example Sue was able to consult with Patti when faced with a discrimination issue. Patti was able to consider the situation objectively and offer suggestions.

The man who supplies Gillian the cards she uses retired from his business but still sells the cards from home. Gillian visits his house to get supplies of the cards when needed. The man always offers them a cuppa and is interested to know how Gillian’s business is going and what other things she has been doing.

The sale of Gillian’s cards generates some money. She uses this for her supplies and to go out to events such as concerts and plays. She also flew to Queensland once to see her mother and on another occasion paid for her mother to fly to Perth to have a holiday with her in Mandurah.

After the two years during which the grant funding was available, Nulsen Haven made a commitment to continue to fund the staff hours required to support Gillian to make her cards. Gillian funds the membership and rental fees for Liddelow House from the proceeds of her card sales. The grant was instrumental in getting the venture off the ground and convincing the necessary people that there was no way that things could stop once the grant money ran out.
An article printed in the West Australian newspaper about Gillian and her flower arranging venture.
Important Guiding Principles

2. Ensure the person’s own views and interests are being pursued even when they are hard to find or understand
Many different things were introduced to Gillian before it became apparent that she liked card making. It was important that those supporting Gillian took the time to discover what she really liked.

5. Aim to positively develop the roles a person plays within society
As a result of the card making venture Gillian is an artist and business person. Both of these roles are valued within the community and provide Gillian a positive image.

12. Look for small increments of change rather than a breakthrough
The journey from Gillian living a very isolated life within an institution to where she is now has been one of small changes over a considerable time period. However the contrast from the beginning to now is amazing.

14. Always assume there are ways of achieving community connectedness
Early attempts to expand Gillian’s interest in card making did not lead to community connectedness. Support people thought about how things could be done differently and tried again. This lead to community connectedness at a level many would have never thought possible or Gillian.
City Farm: A Surprising Success

Gary is a 47 year old man who lives in a house with one other person with a disability and a support person. He has lived in this situation for about 16 years. Gary communicates non verbally. He is a very social person and is almost always happy. For many years Gary worked for Work Power in a sheltered workshop situation. In 2002 the workshop closed.

A few years prior to this support workers were keen to assist Gary to become involved in meaningful activities. Gary has an Italian background where market gardening has been a family tradition for generations. Support workers thought that linking Gary to this in some way was an important part of his identity. Men of Trees were contacted and they mentioned that they ran City Farm in East Perth.

Gary made an initial visit to City Farm with the support of Gail. The people running City Farm and other workers there seemed receptive to Gary being involved. Gary continued to visit City Farm one day a week.

Gary quickly became a part of the general goings on at City Farm. He always joined the other workers for meals. He usually enters the tea room, grabs his cup and puts it down and someone will say “Oh you want a drink Gary” and will make him a cuppa. If there is a soccer game on at lunch time, Gary is always involved. Gary also participates in meetings that the workers have.

If there is a soccer game on at lunch time, Gary is always involved.

The main job Gary had initially at City Farm was to sterilise all the pots. He liked this process as it involved organising things and following the same routine.
Gary had been sterilising pots for about 12 months. One day a worker came and got some pots from the unsterilised area. Gary realised something was not right. Gail explained to the man that he should be using the sterilised pots stacked on the other side. The man said that the sterilising was all a waste of time and completely unnecessary. Gail said this was a huge shock as Gary felt he had been performing a valued role at the farm.

Gary and Gail consulted with Roseanne who is the manager at the farm. Roseanne suggested some other tasks that were of greater importance. Gary took some time to adjust to the new routine but is now happy doing a range of tasks including watering, picking vegetables and feeding the animals. The main thing is that he still has lots of interaction with the other workers.

The farm has recently gained some new funding, which means some improvements can be made around the place. This is good for Gary as it means the place keeps going and he continues to be a part of it.

City Farm have festivals throughout the year and Christmas Parties each year. Gary is always invited to these. He also takes part in the preparation for these events. Initially he felt uneasy going to these events. Now that he knows most of the people really well, he loves attending and hates leaving at the end of the night.

Gary is also involved in a range of other things that connect him with other communities. He goes to the Victoria Park Arts Centre each week and does some cleaning. During this time, people that use the centre drop in for various reasons. They always talk with Gary. Gary goes to the markets and garage sales associated with the Centre. He is becoming well know by people who use the centre, even those who are not usually there on days he is.

Gary goes with the maintenance man employed by Nulsen Haven to do the weekly maintenance round for all the houses associated with the organisation. He assists with the maintenance and chats to all the people at each house.
Challenges

• Gary has a very friendly nature. He loves interacting with people. Sometimes people find him too upfront when they meet him. Also Gary is so keen to talk to people that he is distracted from what he is doing if other people come past and does not always recognise that they may need to be doing something else. For this reason Gary’s cleaning job at Victoria Park Arts Centre had to be arranged on a day when there are not that many other people there. People do come and go on the day Gary is there, allowing him to get to know them and become know enough to be a part of the centre. Gary needs support to identify the appropriate behaviours for each situation. It is challenging to find a balance between allowing Gary to be friendly and assisting him to interact in a way that facilitates his connections with people.

• Gary is a very active man who likes to be busy. He likes to do things in a routine way that is consistent each time. If things have to be changed for some reason, or done differently on a particular occasion, Gary finds this very difficult to cope with.

Gary goes to the local shops not far from his house and is well known by various people down there.

Gary also assists with transporting gear from Claremont to the Nulsen Haven Op Shop in Victoria Park. He knows all the ladies who work in the shop and they always have time to chat with him. Gary goes to the local shops not far from his house and is well known by various people down there.
Keys to Success

Ironically the keys to success for Gary are very similar to the challenges. Gail reports that Gary’s happy, social nature facilitates his connections with the community. He does require support in this area, but it certainly is a positive feature related to community connectedness.

Gail also feels that consistency is a big factor. This relates both to the fact that the same people have been supporting Gary for some time and also that Gary likes to do things on a regular basis, allowing time for connections to be developed.

Important Guiding Principles

4. Ensure there is time for social relationships to develop

Whilst Gary usually has something that need to be done support people recognise the importance of social interaction and ensure there is a balance between getting a job done and allowing time for socialising.

7. Be prepared to let go when appropriate

Gary does need support to form connections with people. However he is also well liked by many people. Therefore support staff focus on assisting him when required but also stepping back when he is able to manage independently.

9. Provide support with uncertainty and problem solving

Gary is uncertain about things that are new. If he is given support in the initial stages of doing something unfamiliar he will give it a go and can then discover whether it is something that he likes.
Ina is an Aboriginal woman from the Halls Creek area who is in her 30’s. She uses a wheelchair and communicates non verbally. Ina lived in an institution in Perth area from the age of four years. She had minimal experience of her culture whilst she was growing up. She lived in one particular hostel for many years before moving into a home with four other people that is supported by Nulsen Haven.

Whilst at the previous hostel Ina had some contact with her father. The staff at this hostel wrote a Christmas Card to Ina’s father to inform him that Ina would be moving to a new home. At this point Ina’s father was making his way down from up north in order to attend a lifestyle meeting that had been planned for Ina. Unfortunately Ina’s father passed away before the meeting and before he received the card. When relatives were clearing up his belongings they found the card and opened it. One woman who was a sister to Ina read the card. She had never known of Ina’s existence. She contacted the hostel who put them in touch with Ina’s new home. One of her daughters, Ina’s niece, was coming to Perth to attend appointments for her son who has disabilities. She met with Ina on her visit. Ina continues to have contact when family members visit Perth.

Julie felt that if Ina had a greater knowledge of her culture, that the links she has with her family would be strengthened and that this may also enhance her identity and sense of belonging.

Julie came to know Ina through being a support worker. Julie felt that if Ina had a greater knowledge of her culture, that the links she has with her family would be strengthened and that this may also enhance her identity and sense of belonging. She assisted Ina to look for opportunities to be involved in things that would allow her to get to know her culture. Julie heard of a Bridging Communities and Culture grant. She thought that if Ina was involved in cultural awareness training through schools she would learn about her
culture and have contact with a range of people in the community, providing the opportunity for connections to be made. Julie remembered that when Ina had tried out a walking group in the hills she had met Kuta, an Aboriginal man who worked for CALM. Ina had met Kuta due to the fact that she had gone with the men’s walking group because the track the ladies took was not suitable for her wheelchair. Julie and Ina approached Kuta to see if he would be interested in participating in the cultural awareness training if the grant application was successful. Kuta agreed and said that his daughter Delvene would also assist. Julie completed the grant application with support from Patti the Creative Development Officer. The application was successful.

A Hard Point at Which to Keep Going

When Julie mentioned her ideas to other people they were skeptical as they felt that because Ina could not communicate verbally, she would not be able to be involved in cultural awareness training. Despite this Julie persisted as she knew that Ina could be involved and that it would give her opportunities to learn about her culture and make connections in the community.

Julie had not done any grant applications in the past and found it challenging to get all the information required, express her ideas clearly and meet the deadlines. With the support of Patti she met the challenge and got the application in. The fact that it was funded demonstrates Julie was able to meet the standards required and that it was worth the effort!
Challenges

- Julie said they did experience some issues with physical access into some of the schools. With some rearranging of venues and assistance from other people, these were easily overcome. Fortunately, because Ina and Julie had visited the schools to deliver the letters they were able to work out ways around these issues prior to the day of the workshops.

- Continuity has been a big challenge in this situation. The workshops had a limited time span and it has been difficult to have follow on outcomes on an ongoing basis. Julie’s role changed so that she was no longer working with Ina and is therefore not around to continue to identify opportunities for Ina. Patti, the Creative Development Officer, has the role of looking for opportunities in the community for workshops to take place, making the project dependant on one person and opportunities. Therefore some of the opportunities to build Ina’s cultural awareness further and to pursue the connections she made during the workshops have not been maximised.

Ina and Julie set to work and designed a letterhead and wrote letters offering the free Cultural Awareness workshops to schools. They decided to visit schools with the letters rather than post them as Julie felt this would be a better experience for Ina. Ina and Julie visited schools to see which ones were interested in hosting the workshops. There were six schools that expressed an interest. Ina and Julie then took confirmation letters to each of the schools and met some of the staff. Kuta, Delvene and Ina then ran the workshops at each school. The workshops involved Delvene and Kuta talking about Aboriginal culture. The children would then be involved in an activity. Ina would assist the children in various ways including holding the string for weaving activities. Ina also played musical instruments during the singing component of the workshops.
Various things happened as a result of Ina’s involvement in the workshops. Ina has had ongoing contact with Delvene. Delvene ran a Women’s Business meeting from Ina’s house. She also did a Women’s Business workshop at the Victoria Park markets and asked Ina to assist her. People were so interested in this that it was hard for Delvene and Ina to get away.

The West Australian newspaper printed an article and photo about the workshops. A nephew of Ina’s saw this and contacted Nulsen Haven. He had become aware that he had an Aunty he had never met and had been trying to find her for about six years. Ina now has ongoing contact with her nephew and his family.

The Swan Aboriginal School, one of the schools that hosted the workshop, invited Ina back to their school to have morning tea with the children. They were very interested in finding out more about Ina’s life.

Ina also has connections in her local community. For example the fresh produce store in Maddington a lady stopped Ina and Julie one day when they were shopping and said she had lived in Halls Creek and thought she knew Ina’s mother. Julie explained that this was not possible, as Ina’s mother had passed away before the time the lady had been there. They continued to talk and realised that it was Ina’s sister the lady knew. The lady now always comes to talk with Ina when she is shopping there.
Keys to Success

Julie reported that the willingness of people within the schools to give the workshops a go gave Ina the opportunity to participate in the workshops and experience the many positive spin offs from them.

Another important part of the process was that Kuta had already met Ina prior to doing the workshops with her. He was able to ensure Ina was very involved in the workshops. The fact that he was comfortable interacting with Ina provided a positive image to the school students and staff.

An article printed in the West Australian newspaper
Important Guiding Principles

5. Aim to positively develop the roles a person plays within society
Being involved in the workshops allowed Ina to take on the role of being an educator. The schools that the workshops were run at recognised this and respected Ina for her role. It also gave Ina an interesting topic of conversation in many situations outside of the workshops, particularly following the media coverage.

6. Search for leaders within the community and connect individuals to them
When Julie was developing the idea about doing the workshops she thought about who would be a good person to work with Ina. She had recognised from the time that she had spent with Kuta that he was a respected person within his community and was interested in trying new things. Therefore she felt he could provide opportunities for Ina to make connections in the process of doing the workshops. Indeed Kuta’s own daughter now has an ongoing connection with Ina.

8. Consider the person as part of a family system
Developing Ina’s knowledge of her culture recognises her background and family links. Being involved in the cultural awareness training lead Ina to meet family members she did not know. This demonstrates the importance of being involved in things related to a person’s family system.
2. My Place WA

About My Place

My Place assists individuals and family members who are in need of accommodation support. Support is provided in a number of ways including assessing accommodation needs, developing budgets, finding suitable community accommodation and recruiting and training suitable carers. My Place also provides support in the areas of recreation, employment, education, transport, grant management and service coordination. My Place provides services to people across the metropolitan area and in Bunbury.
Ronella’s story demonstrates how the way a situation is set up can lead to increased potential for community connectedness. Ronella has only been in her current circumstances for a two month period.

Ronella is a 15 year old Aboriginal girl who has cerebral palsy. She is in a wheelchair and requires assistance for activities of daily living such as eating and showering. Ronella communicates non verbally. She appears to have good comprehension of verbal language. Until Ronella was about 13 she lived with her mother and siblings. She also spent time with her grandparents. Ronella was then taken into the care of the Department for Community Development. She was placed in temporary accommodation at a hostel designed for temporary emergency accommodation. For a variety of reasons Ronella stayed in this placement for a period of about 18 months.

My Place were contacted and asked whether they could support Ronella to find a more suitable living arrangement. Mary went and met Ronella and spent some time with her. Staff at the hostel informed Mary that when Ronella had initially come to stay she had needed extremely high care. She would constantly rock and scream. This had settled somewhat but still occurred from time to time. Mary also started to attend meetings such as those organised by the Department for Community Development. These meetings provided information about Ronella’s past and even allowed Mary to meet some of Ronella’s relatives, including her grandparents.

Mary began to get a sense of Ronella’s likes and dislikes. One thing that seemed to come through repeatedly was that Ronella loved being outside. This was the only way she would settle if she became upset.

Mary met with a few people who had expressed an interest in supporting someone in Ronella’s situation. For one reason or another Mary did not feel any of these options would suit Ronella. One of Mary’s colleagues mentioned that a person they knew who did some support
work may be interested in supporting someone on a live in basis.

*Mary thought this lifestyle would suit Ronella and that Matt and Kristine’s positive attitudes would allow Ronella to feel connected and that she belonged.*

Mary followed this up and met with Matt, a support worker with My Place and his partner Kristine. Matt and Kristine were very keen on a live in support arrangement and had a variety of experience in supporting people with disabilities. They also lived on a small property on the outskirts of the metropolitan area and have a menagerie of animals. Their lives were generally full of different people coming and going and of doing things outside. Mary thought this lifestyle would suit Ronella and that Matt and Kristine’s positive attitudes would allow Ronella to feel connected and that she belonged.

Kristine and Matt were introduced to Ronella and began to spend short amounts of time with her at school and at the hostel. After a short time Ronella began to recognise them and became excited and happy when they would arrive. Kristine and Matt began to spend more time with Ronella. Eventually they started taking Ronella to their place for visits, at which time it was noted that she happily recognised where she was going and was always calm and relaxed during these visits. The visits became more frequent and extended to overnight stays. By this time Kristine and Matt were fully committed to supporting Ronella on a long term basis.

With the support of Occupational Therapists and funding from Disability Services, the bathroom at Kristine and Matt’s was modified to suit Ronella’s needs and other equipment was put into the house. Kristine and Matt renovated the room that was to become Ronella’s bedroom. They included doors with lead lighting that would be interesting for Ronella to look at and would allow her access from her room straight onto the verandah where she could sit and watch the animals. They furnished the room as is appropriate for a 15 year old.

During the planning process it became apparent that Ronella was content at the school she had been attending since being in the hostel. The school staff were keen for Ronella to continue to attend the school and felt
that their program suited Ronella’s needs. Changes in Ronella’s school were discussed and it was decided that considering the significant change to her living arrangement it would be in her best interest to continue where she was to allow some continuity in her life. The staff at the school also said that after a considerable settling in period, Ronella was now making significant gains with her learning. Despite the fact that Kristine and Matt lived 40 minutes drive from the school, they could see the benefits of Ronella remaining there and made a commitment that they would transport her to and from the school when she moved to their place. In time consideration will be given to transferring Ronella to a local school.

The transition was paced to ensure Ronella’s comfort and the carer’s confidence. The result of this is that they have formed a relaxed and trusting relationship with one another.

By the end of this Ronella was ready to move in permanently.

Kristine and Matt are planning to make a path that will go right through and around the property so that Ronella can see what is happening outdoors.

From this time Ronella has been fully involved in life with Kristine and Matt. She always interacts with the constant visitors that Kristine and Matt have. She seems to love the activity that is always occurring, such as house renovations and the activities of the animals. Kristine and Matt are planning to make a path that will go right through and around the property so that Ronella can see what is happening outdoors.

Kristine and Matt have a large extended family and Ronella is well known by all of them, allowing for much stimulation to assist her overall quality of life. Ronella is also known at the places where Kristine and Matt shop and do business.
Challenges

- There are several agencies involved in supporting Ronella and this has presented several challenges. There have been a number of staff changes making continuity difficult. Each organisation has particular ways of working which have sometimes conflicted with each other. Even arranging a meeting to discuss particular issues has been challenging!
- The situation that led to Ronella no longer being able to live with her family was very complex. This has meant that Ronella’s contact with her family has been very minimal to date. This will be an ongoing challenge but obviously one that must be tackled in order for Ronella to have a sense of belonging and connection.
- The fact that Ronella is living with non Aboriginal people is also an ongoing challenge. It means that not only factor such as age appropriacy, but also cultural appropriacy need to be considered whenever a decision is made.

Kristine and Matt are very positive and comfortable in their interactions with Ronella, providing a great role model for those who may not be experienced at interacting with people with disabilities.

Kristine and Matt are very positive and comfortable in their interactions with Ronella, providing a great role model for those who may not be experienced at interacting with people with disabilities. Kristine and Matt always assume Ronella can understand everything that is said and spend time explaining what is happening, particularly if it is something unusual or new. Kristine has also spent time with Ronella buying clothes that she likes and that are appropriate for a 15 year old girl. This adds to the positive image Ronella now has in the community.

Kristine has also advocated for Ronella in relation to the equipment she requires and some medical issues. Many hours have been spent talking through things and working on plans to ensure Ronella has the equipment and treatment that best suits her needs and allows her
to be comfortable. Each issue that is raised is considered carefully prior to it being pursued. For example Ronella had previously been scheduled for surgery which Kristine advocated to have postponed as it would have coincided with Ronella’s move and therefore created undue stress.

In the initial stages of planning for life outside the hostel for Ronella, it became obvious that Ronella would need an appropriate form of transport to be able to be involved in community life. Mary worked with Kristine and Matt and arranged for a modified van with hoist that allows Ronella to be transported safely in her wheelchair. Matt and Kristine modified their garage to ensure the van could be stored securely.

The fact that Ronella can make choices at this level provides a strong basis for her to be able to make choices in terms of activities and friendships she pursues in the community.

Kristine and Matt have worked hard to give Ronella more control and choices in her life. They have started with simple things like food choices. Kristine and Matt were told that Ronella was very slow at eating and that she needed all her food to be of a smooth, thick consistency. They began giving Ronella a choice of two different things and gauging from her facial expression which one she preferred. They noticed that Ronella would eat quicker and not spill her food when they gave her what she chose. Now Ronella gets a wide variety of choices of food each meal and manages food of different textures well. The fact that Ronella can make choices at this level provides a strong basis for her to be able to make choices in terms of activities and friendships she pursues in the community.

When investigating options for Ronella, Mary was very conscious that Ronella was already 15 years old and that at the time she turned 18 years, the funding support she receives from the Department for Community Development would cease. Mary realised that if this meant a change in Ronella’s circumstances would occur, all the community connectedness Ronella is able to build in the next three years might well be lost. Meetings have occurred with Disability Services Commission to ensure a commitment to
Ronella’s eligibility for funding from the age of 18 years. She will also be eligible for Post School Options funding to pursue her interests after she leaves school.

Now that Ronella is settled and content at Matt and Kristine’s they are beginning to explore options for Ronella to connect with the community. Contact with Ronella’s family is naturally a priority. Kristine noticed that amongst the things Ronella had whilst at the hostel was a plaster art piece that Ronella’s sister had made for her. Kristine made sure that this was kept and talks about it with Ronella. There is a large group meeting planned by the Department for Community Development in the near future. Mary and Kristine plan to discuss the issue of connections with Ronella’s family, particularly her siblings, mother and grandparents whom she was with prior to going to the hostel.

Kristine has also begun to think about options within the local community that will provide Ronella the opportunity to interact with people her own age. These will be explored and trialed as time goes by, providing further opportunities for Ronella to become well connected.

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**Keys to Success**

In Ronella’s situation there have been a number of organisations involved and several staff within each organisation. While this has been challenging in some ways, the fact that they have all been motivated to achieve what is necessary for Ronella has been a key to the success of the situation.

Though Ronella’s move to her new home has only recently become final, it is anticipated that it will be very stable and long term. The careful planning and extensive consideration regarding aspects of the arrangement that would be likely to make it successful have been vital in getting to this point.

As already mentioned, Kristine and Matt’s positive attitude towards supporting Ronella and the way in which Kristine advocates for Ronella have been very important. Kristine and Matt were familiar with the disability support system prior to supporting Ronella. This has assisted them not to become overwhelmed by all the services and supports involved in this situation.
Important Guiding Principles

2. Ensure the person’s own views and interests are being pursued even when they are hard to find or understand
Kristine and Matt have spent a lot of time getting to know how Ronella communicates. They are still in the very early stages of ensuring she is able to express her own views and interests, for example, in situations such as making choices about what she eats. They will build on this to ensure that Ronella is able to express herself in relation to a wide range of areas within her life.

12. Look for small increments of change rather than a breakthrough
In Ronella’s situation things have moved very slowly for a number of different reasons. Rather than focusing on achieving community connectedness as a breakthrough, those supporting Ronella have focused on setting her situation up so that it is conducive to her becoming connected more extensively as time goes by.
An Opportunity to be a Sister and Aunty

Terri is 27 years of age and has been living away from her family since she was 9 years of age. Her family is from Newman, although her sister now lives in Perth. My Place began supporting Terri in September 2002.

Prior to this Terri lived in a variety of group living arrangements. Most recently Terri was supported by another organisation to live in her own home in Melville. Terri was described as having intellectual disability and behavioural issues. Terri had rotating support staff while at home. Her family had noticed that she often got into difficult situations at the times when no staff were present and they were very concerned about this. Terri is very friendly but often not aware of the dangers of, for example, inviting strangers into her home. She is influenced by what she sees on television in terms of relationships. Support staff often introduced Terri to their friends and family and included her in social occasions. Terri loved this but would become extremely angry and confused when a staff member left and these events did not continue.

A clear priority was that Terri needed to build a network of her own friends.

In the initial stages of supporting Terri, Craig spent considerable time talking with Terri and her family about their goals and aspirations. Craig ensured there was a focus on Terri’s gifts and talents. They mapped out what communities Terri was involved in or would like to be involved in. They also constructed a map of her circle of friends. A clear priority was that Terri needed to build a network of her own friends. Terri’s family also wanted her to have a better connection with them and for her to be involved in the everyday events of life such as finances, domestic tasks and work. Due to Terri’s mother
having diabetes, her family was keen for Terri to exercise and have a good diet to prevent or delay the onset of diabetes.

Terri receives funding support from Disability Services Commission. In the past Terri had not been involved in any of the discussions around finances. Whilst Terri’s sister administers the funding, Terri is now involved in discussions about what funds are available and how they are spent. Terri does not like to be informed that she cannot do something, but will accept it if it is explained to her that it is not within her budget or that she would have to give up other things in order to have what she wants.

**Considerable time was spent with support staff initially to ensure they supported Terri with consistency and in a way that would enable her goals to be achieved, particularly that of having her own network of freely given relationships.**

After initially supporting Terri in Melville, where she was living at the time My Place became involved, Terri moved to a house in Dianella, a neighbouring suburb to Morley where her sister lives with her two children and partner. While in Melville, Craig established a team of support people who work with Terri on a 24 hour basis. Considerable time was spent with support staff initially to ensure they supported Terri with consistency and in a way that would enable her goals to be achieved, particularly that of having her own network of freely given relationships.

The team had agreed upon ways in which they would assist Terri to make connections and maintain them. For example if Terri met someone whilst she was out the support person would talk to her about an appropriate way to pursue a connection with that person, such as waiting until she had seen them a couple of times and then inviting them for a coffee. These strategies were necessary as Terri is very open and friendly with everyone, but not aware of the risks of this at certain times, or the fact that relationships needed to be built gradually and mutually.

In some instances the support team identified that Terri needed additional support to what they could provide in relation to specific issues. In these cases
they would look at ways that Terri could be given more support. For example Terri has attended Secca for input around sexuality.

Terri was not used to taking responsibility for the general duties around the home and everyday things like shopping. When this was discussed initially Terri was not happy about having to participate in these tasks. The reason for doing these things was explained to Terri. A routine was developed in that Terri focuses on things like cleaning the house, washing and shopping on particular days of the week. Terri does not like doing these things but will do them knowing that then she can do other things once these tasks are completed.

Through planning and discussions with Terri and her family a clear long term goal of Terri having her own network of freely given relationships emerged as a priority.

Terri’s past relationship with supports has resulted in her preferring their company to other freely given relationships. Terri continues to test the boundaries with her supports and will often seek out their company despite having her own friends around her.

Terri’s supports need to be vigilant and focused to ensure their presence does not impede Terri’s progress and development in this area.

Terri has a job delivering local newspapers one day a week. A support person goes with her and delivers papers on one side of the street and Terri does the other. Terri has met some of the people in the houses she delivers to and will have a chat with them if they are around when she drops their paper off.
Terri also works with Interwork in Stirling doing cleaning one day a week. A support worker assists her to the bus stop and then meets her when she comes back on the bus. Whilst at work she is supported by Interwork. Terri earns a small income from her two jobs. She is given considerable flexibility in terms of what this money is spent on. This reinforces to her the benefits of working. Terri is currently saving to go on a holiday.

Terri attends TAFE to do a literacy and numeracy course. Again, support staff do not go with her to these sessions but appropriate support is available during the course. She goes swimming, plays indoor cricket and attends a weekly dance/drama session. Support people attend these sessions and assist Terri with what is appropriate when meeting people. Terri has several people that she has made connections with through these events.

Terri goes for a walk in the mornings and evenings each day. She often sees people that she recognises and will say hello or stop for a chat. Support staff also assist her to make healthy meals and choose appropriate times to have treats. Since Terri has been doing this she has lost 20kg. This has had a positive impact on her self esteem and the image she presents within the community.

Terri’s sister will drop in and take Terri shopping every now and then. Terri’s sister also drops her children with Terri half a day a week.

Terri has developed a good relationship with her sister. When Terri lived in Melville her sister would visit every now and then and would stay for a short time and then go home. Now that they live close to each other they often go to each other’s places for a quick catch up. Terri’s sister will drop in and take Terri shopping every now and then. Terri’s sister also drops her children with Terri half a day a week. Initially Terri
was very nervous about this. Over time she has got to know the children and really enjoys the time. This has assisted Terri’s sister to see Terri as capable and supportive family member. Terri’s sister will now ring her at other times when she needs someone to look after the children.

**Challenges**

- Terri has been surrounded by a team of friendly, stable and committed supports. The improvement in her quality of life can be directly attributed to their efforts. Her supports have gained their rewards by seeing Terri’s progress and have remained focused during the difficult time! Keeping a team of dedicated supports around Terri who can offer consistent support to her has not been easy and will continue to be an issue as supports move on.

- It is important that Terri has an ongoing connection with her family, especially her parents who live in Newman. Terri looks forward to spending time with them especially when she can holiday with them in Newman without support. As Terri is removed from her home environment, supports and routines during this time she has the potential to impress her family with her newly developed skills. Terri’s support team continues to work with Terri and her family as they prepare for their Christmas holiday together this year.
Keys to Success

Craig identified that the fact that Terri’s support team has been very stable has had a positive influence on community connectedness. There are occasions where relief staff have been required. To ensure consistency for Terri the support team has a file that contains information about Terri and how things work. This includes the goals and aspirations that have been identified, the communities Terri is involved in and her circle of friends. The strategies used by the support staff to assist Terri to connect with people are detailed.

To ensure a continued focus on the goals for Terri, Craig and the support staff that work with Terri have met frequently whilst establishing Terri in her new home and circumstances. Initially the meetings occurred about once a week and Terri would go to her sister’s house for this time. Now the meetings occur about every two months and Terri comes along. Because Terri is involved in the planning and decision making, she is very reasonable about changes that are made or requests that might be declined.

In order for Terri’s relationship with her sister to become an appropriate ‘sister’ relationship Craig has worked closely with Terri’s sister to ensure that Terri’s sister addresses ‘work’ type issues with him rather than Terri or her support staff. This means that issues are addressed but that they do not confuse the relationship that the sisters are building. Terri’s sister will ring Craig and discuss any concerns she has about the way in which Terri’s support situation is working and Craig will act on these as soon as is possible to reinforce that Terri’s sister does not need to discuss these things with Terri or the support staff.

Terri’s family in Newman phone her regularly to catch up with her. They tend to visit Perth about every 3-4 months and will spend time with Terri on these occasions. There is a plan for Terri to visit Newman next Christmas. Two years ago Terri visited for Christmas and things were very difficult. Craig has discussed this with Terri and her family and it appears that Terri felt that whilst she was visiting her parents she was on
holidays and therefore they should do everything for her. Because of this history, the support team will begin to plan carefully for the next visit. As with other things they will discuss what the appropriate behaviours are in these sorts of situations and feel that Terri will be able to change her behaviour appropriately to some extent. Craig will also discuss the situation with Terri’s parents so that they can also make some changes to increase the likelihood that the visit will go well.

Terri has met people through TAFE, indoor cricket and swimming that she can now contact to go out with.

Terri loves going to the movies and out to dinner. She does this as often as is possible within her budget. Support staff assist Terri to identify friends she can arrange these things with. The aim is that Terri no longer goes with just a support person. Terri has met people through TAFE, indoor cricket and swimming that she can now contact to go out with. She was also involved in a Theatresports course and has ongoing connections with people from this. When they go out, the support person aims to remove themselves slightly from the situation but maintains a presence to assist Terri if required. For example at the movies if Terri has gone with a friend the support person sits in the same theatre but away from Terri and her friend. It is envisaged that as Terri’s relationships with people develop, there may be some times that she will go out with friends without support workers being there.

In the past Terri has used the phone extensively to the point where she had large bills each month. As this was not sustainable in terms of her budget and also was impacting on her ability to form lasting connections with people, a plan was put in place with Terri’s consent to improve this situation.

Terri has occasions where she becomes very angry and upset about something quite suddenly. She will yell at anyone who tries to talk with her and do things like throw breakable items. She will also talk about her family in a negative way and say that she will do dramatic things to them or herself. Terri’s support team and Craig discussed this issue and came up with a plan for dealing with these incidents. The staff now focus on assisting Terri to identify
what has made her angry. They offer her options of things she might like to do, for example go for a walk or go to a room by herself for some quiet time. They also stop the usual routine until the issue is dealt with. Sometimes it will take until the next day for Terri to identify why she is angry. Once she does this, the situation can be discussed with her and she returns to her usual routine. Since this strategy has been in place, the incidents have reduced dramatically to a point where they no longer impede the process of Terri achieving connections with people.

In conversations with people Terri tends to talk about what she has been doing or thinks. Her support team have been assisting her to recognise cues from what someone else says that can lead her to ask a question of them. They have also discussed with her how to continue a conversation topic that someone else initiates. Terri is beginning to use these strategies in conversations and it appears to be impacting positively on her ability to form ongoing connections with people.

The support team continues to focus on community connectedness for Terri. For example, they use the information file as a planning tool as well. It is reviewed as required during the year and then fully at least once a year. When a full review occurs, things like Terri’s circle of friends are examined closely. If there are additional people in Terri’s life these are added. If there are people Terri had not been keeping up with, the reasons for this are discussed and strategies for reconnecting are established if appropriate. For example one of Terri’s friends moved down south. Terri can’t phone them as she has an STD block on her phone. Support staff now assist Terri to write to this friend on a regular basis.
**Important Guiding Principles**

3. **Focus on common interests when facilitating relationships**
   Terri has been encouraged to pursue her interests in a variety of ways. Through this she has met other people who have the same interest and has been able to form connections with them. Focusing on common interests has reduced the focus on Terri’s disability and provides a positive image within the community.

9. **Provide support with problem solving and uncertainty**
   When supporting Terri, the support team assist her to work out what is the best thing to do in a certain situation in relation to forming connections with people. They go through the decision making process with Terri so that she can make sense of it, and eventually apply it with less assistance. This has been a critical process in terms of Terri establishing her own friendships.

13. **Be aware of the influence you can have**
   Those supporting Terri have developed an awareness of their influence on Terri establishing her own network of friends. They are very careful about adopting strategies that will assist Terri in this process rather than setting up the situation in a way in which they are viewed as Terri’s friend.

15. **Continue to pursue community connectedness**
   Whilst Terri now has a good network of friends, it is important that strategies are put in place to ensure these friends are maintained if appropriate and other new relationships are developed. The support team do things like review Terri’s circle of friends once a year and discuss who she might have lost contact with, whether it is worth reestablishing contact and areas where she may need to make some new contacts.
Finally an End to Shared Accommodation

Julie is a 66 year old lady who has a mild intellectual disability. She has been living in her own home in Maylands for about 18 months. Julie has an interesting history, some of which My Place are just beginning to assist Julie to piece together. The following information is what is known thus far.

As a young child Julie lived with her mother and four siblings. Her parents had separated and her father lived in a country town. He remarried and did not have contact with the children or his previous wife. Julie’s mother became terminally ill with cancer and Gwen, the eldest child cared for the children as well as working full time in order for the family to have an income. At this time Gwen was 15, Julie 13, Malcolm 10, Esme 8 and John 4. Both Julie and John had intellectual disabilities. After some months Julie’s mother died. Julie’s father visited Perth for the funeral and made the decision to place all the children in care. The maternal grandparents were approached but could only care for Gwen who was already working and relatively independent. Gwen remained with the grandparents until she married at 17. Malcolm and John went to Nathaniel Harper Homes. Malcolm had had polio as a child and had a recurrence at 21 years and passed away. Julie and Esme went to The Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Leederville and lived in the houses for homeless women run by the Sisters. Except for those that lived in the same place, the siblings did not have contact with each other. From what Julie remembers her father did not come to visit her but she would sometimes catch the bus and visit him. He remarried a third time after his second marriage broke down. He passed away several years ago.

Julie sits beside one of her patchwork projects that she does during the winter months.
At The Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Julie lived with other women who were homeless in some way. Some of these were women from circumstances that had left them without a home. Some were women visiting from country areas and needed short term assistance with accommodation. At first Julie was in the larger of the two houses run by The Sisters of the Good Shepherd in St Leonard’s Ave where there were lots of transient women. She later moved to the smaller of the two houses and lived with up to eight other women who tended to be there for longer periods. At some stage Esme married and moved out of the metropolitan area.

Julie said she went to school at some stage but couldn’t cope and that the Sisters taught her to read and write instead. It is unclear whether she actually stopped attending school. Julie remembers working in a large laundry run by The Sisters of the Good Shepherd for some years. The laundry had contracts with places like hotels to do all their laundry. Julie does not think she was paid for this work. The laundry eventually closed and Julie says she then did ‘nothing’. She did used to go into the city on the bus frequently and would sometimes take the bus to other places to have a look around. Food was delivered to the convent in bulk amounts and the women there at the time would go on a cooking roster to cook for the whole group. Julie remembers not liking the things certain people cooked but having to eat them anyway as there was no other options. Julie also remembers other residents taking her things and that she was eventually allowed to have a lock on her bedroom door so that she could keep a few things safe. The things Julie wanted to protect were items such as a plate, bowl and cutlery. There were many aspects of the shared lifestyle that Julie did not like.

After Julie had been with The Sisters of the Good Shepherd for many years Mavis, a lady in her 70’s from Maylands contacted Julie and informed her that she knew her brother John. It turned out that John lived in the same block of flats as Mavis. Mavis had experience working as an advocate. She initially used to ‘look out for’ John on an informal basis and later became a formal advocate for him through Citizen Advocacy. Mavis then began trying to track down John’s sisters. She found Gwen living in Scarborough with her husband and that
Esme was in the South West with the man whom she had married. Mavis facilitated contact between all the siblings over time. Julie keeps in touch with Esme through sending cards. She also sends cards to Gwen and sees her occasionally. She sees John on a fairly regular basis.

*It was suggested to Mavis that she become Julie’s advocate and Mavis responded by saying “But why, she is my friend”.*

Once Mavis met Julie she began to support her with various different issues and would have her over to her house for meals and coffee. It was suggested to Mavis that she become Julie’s advocate and Mavis responded by saying “But why, she is my friend”. Their relationship has remained as such and provides Julie with support and the experience of a freely given relationship.

At some stage Julie began to receive the Disability Support Pension. She paid board and lodgings to The Sisters of the Good Shepherd from this. There was also a point at which Julie became registered with Disability Services Commission. It is thought that this occurred a the time when The Sister’s of the Good Shepherd were going through a process of closing down due to the church wanting to sell the properties where Julie had lived. Options were found for the other residents but there was not an obvious option for Julie. One of the Sister’s got in touch with the Disability Services Commission Local Area Coordinator and asked them for assistance. The Local Area Coordinator contacted My Place and asked them for assistance. My Place submitted an application for Accommodation Support Funding through Disability Services Commission that was successful in gaining some funds to support Julie. My Place staff spent time with Julie finding out what she wanted in terms of a future living situation. By this time Julie had spent over 50 years with The Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

Julie was very clear that she had had enough of a shared living situation. She was also clear that she wanted to live in Maylands so that she was close to Mavis and could also have contact with John. She wanted a place that was close to the railway line and bus routes to allow her to get around on public transport. Julie felt confident she could be independent
in many areas of her life such as domestic tasks and cooking meals. She felt she needed support with financial matters and things like shopping which she had very limited experience in doing.

Julie was successful in gaining a private lease on a house in Maylands. She is very positive about her new living situation saying that she can now do what she wants to do and loves pottering around the house. Julie has support 15 - 20 hours a week for things such as banking, paying bills, paying her rent, dealing with any issues with her lease and shopping. The support worker also assists Julie to keep in touch with people she knows and to be involved in some things that allow her to meet new people.

The transport arrangement meant that she instantly knew some of the congregation and these people have introduced her to most of the other people who attend the church.

Julie was interested in continuing to attend church. Her support worker arranged for the Father at the local church to visit Julie so she could meet him. The Father was aware of a couple that lived very close to Julie who attended the church. He arranged that these people would pick Julie up each week for church and drop her back home again. This system works well for Julie. The transport arrangement meant that she instantly knew some of the
congregation and these people have introduced her to most of the other people who attend the church.

Julie sees Mavis at least once a week. They go to each other’s houses for coffee and meals or sometimes go out and do things together. Julie also has a couple that she knows from the street where she used to live. She goes to visit them and they come to see her on a regular basis. For special occasions such as Christmas Julie always celebrates with this couple or with Mavis and John. Julie is invited back to the convent for functions held by The Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Sometimes she goes to these and sometimes she chooses not to.

Julie loves going to the movies and does this on a regular basis with her support person. Megan and the support person have spoken to Julie about things such as Senior Citizens gatherings and Julie has said she is not interested in this sort of thing. Julie does patchwork in the winter months and loves quiz and puzzle books. She has certain shops that she really enjoys such as Crazy Clarks and will spend time in there having a good browse.

Julie’s support person assisted her to see a local Doctor regarding some medical issues. Julie now knows the Doctor and identifies when she needs to go. Julie has also begun to see a dentist and visits as required.

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**A Hard Point at Which to Keep Going**

When those supporting Julie first got to know her she appeared to have limited interests and networks. People had many ideas about what Julie may enjoy but she did not really seem receptive to them. It was difficult to maintain focus and enthusiasm on pursuing community connectedness when Julie was not responding.

Over time, those supporting Julie got to know her better. They discovered what some of her interests had been in the past and began to build on these. They also worked out ways of presenting their ideas that were more suited to how Julie likes to approach new things. As Julie has had more time to get to know those who support her, she has become more open and responsive making it easier to maintain a focus on pursuing community connectedness.
Keys to Success

Megan says that one of the keys to assisting Julie to achieve the changes in life was to focus on small increments of change rather than expecting to achieve huge breakthroughs. This meant that Julie was able to make the changes at her own pace and with the support that she needed.

Megan also reported that community connectedness has been achieved by ensuring Julie’s old connections have continued and extending connections based on her interests. For example Julie’s long term interest in church has lead her to meet a new group of people. Julie’s support worker plays on ongoing role in terms of assisting Julie to maintain her connections.

Getting the right support worker for Julie has been very important. Julie takes a while to get used to people and is quite particular about who she does and doesn’t like. Julie has developed a trusting relationship with her support worker. The support worker is able to encourage Julie to do things in a positive way.

Julie knows and chats to most of her neighbours. One had a baby recently and Julie was very excited about this. Her support worker assisted her to buy a gift for the baby and then Julie visited the family and gave them the gift.

Mavis feels they have a great reciprocal friendship that will be long lasting.

Mavis recalls a time when Julie was still in the convent where she began to think that she could not maintain her friendship with Julie. This was due to the fact that Julie did not seem to respond to the warmth and friendship she was offering. Mavis says that this has changed with Julie moving into her own house. Julie is now happy to share a joke, initiates conversation with people she gets to know and enjoys affection such as hugs. She seems to have a permanent smile on her face and always makes positive comments about how good it is to have her own place. Mavis feels they have a great reciprocal friendship that will be long lasting.

After moving into her own house, Julie had a birthday. To celebrate Julie’s new life and also her birthday her
support worker and Megan assisted Julie to invite several people over. It was the first time Gwen had visited Julie in her own home. Some of the Sisters from the convent came as well as the neighbours she got to know whilst living in St Leonard’s Ave. Mavis was of course there as was John. Julie was proud of her house and people seemed impressed that Julie was coping so well.

**Challenges**

It has been challenging to find and keep energetic and insightful supports for Julie. For example it is important that support people are able to see an opportunity to connect Julie to her community and follow up effectively for her. It is also important that they are able to nurture opportunities such that they are sustainable and can assist Julie to work out ways to do this herself. Not all people have the ability to do these things effectively. Fortunately Julie’s current support person has excellent skills in these areas.

**Important Guiding Principles**

1. **Consider the whole person, focusing on their gifts and assets**
Megan reported that those supporting Julie focus on her gifts and assets and that this has been positive in terms of connecting Julie with the community.

12. **Look for small increments of change rather than a breakthrough**
Due to factors such as Julie being used to a particular way of life for many, many years and her age, it has been important to take things slowly so that Julie adjusts to the changes. It also allows Julie to make decisions about what she does and doesn’t want to do. Such decision making was not really a big feature of her life until recently.
3. Lower Great Southern Community Living Association

Lower Great Southern Community Living Association (LGSCLA) was formed in 1991. The office is based in Albany and support is provided to people living in the Lower Great Southern Region. The Association provides individualised support within a range of programs including Accommodation Support, Alternatives to Employment, Post School Options and Intensive Family Support.

The LGSCLA currently supports 42 people who have a range of disabilities and support needs. Approximately 120 people are employed by LGSCLA to work as support workers. 16 of these are co-residents with people with disabilities. Others work with individuals at specific times and may form part of a support team that is managed by a coordinator. The Association also has an executive officer, three coordinators and three administrative staff.

LGSCLA also has a “My Life, My Community’ program that provides assistance to the community to adapt their generic programs to make them more accessible to people with disabilities. The program also offers a variety of educational and recreational activities. A Community Development worker coordinates this program.
Trevor is a 40 year old man described as having a mild intellectual disability. He lived with his mother until he was in his early 30’s. At this point his mother passed away. Trevor moved in with his brother and family for a brief time. He then lived in a group home situation. This did not suit Trevor as he found the lifestyle changes enormous and he was still trying to cope with having lost his mother, which resulted in many uncharacteristic behaviours. Trevor moved out of the group home to live with a family friend. This did not work out and Trevor then moved to a co resident situation. The co resident was not planning to stay in Albany long term and therefore another option for Trevor needed to be found. It was at this point that LGSCLA began to support Trevor. They were keen to assist Trevor to establish an option that would be appropriate long term. They were conscious that Trevor had many friends and connections through the time he had lived with his mother. These obviously needed to be maintained in their freely given state and supports offered needed to complement them.

It became evident that Trevor’s preference was to live in his own house. To do this he needed support particularly in the evenings, mornings and overnight with tasks such as preparing meals, cleaning the house, budgeting and personal care. During the day he was used to being fairly independent if things had been discussed with him in the mornings. There were a few areas of his day time activities that he needed support.

Trevor knew many people in the immediate area of his mother’s house and wanted to maintain his links with them. He liked to walk into town regularly and therefore wanted a house within easy walking distance of town.

LGSCLA began to look at what the options were for Trevor. Over many
years the Association had built up a strong relationship with the Great Southern Community Housing Association (GSCHA). This has enabled secure and affordable housing to be accessed for people with disabilities within the community. GSCHA were approached and were able to support Trevor to rent his own house. The house is located between the town centre and where his mother’s house was, making both locations within easy walking distance.

For Trevor renting his own house is an essential factor that contributes to his well being and sense of belonging in the community. It provides him with the role of being a responsible tenant, a role that is similar to many of his friends and neighbours. Trevor also values being able to invite his many friends over and entertain them in his own home.

*It provides him with the role of being a responsible tenant, a role that is similar to many of his friends and neighbours.*

A coordinator and support workers assist Trevor to maintain his home. Support workers assist him mainly in the evenings and mornings with things like meal preparation, cleaning his house, personal care, health issues, shopping and planning for the day. They also talk with him about inviting people over and how to ‘entertain’ whilst they are there. Support workers talk with Trevor about who he has been visiting to ensure that he maintains connections with people. Trevor does receive regular dinner invites and also stays overnight at some of the friends he knew through his mother on occasions.

Trevor delivers a paper to a business in Albany and looks out for someone to have a chat with.

Trevor does a paper round twice a week. He is able to do this independently as he knows the areas he goes to very well. The paper run has expanded rapidly since he has been delivering the papers. He knows most of the people he delivers to and always has a chat with them if they are at the front of the house or business as he goes by. He seems to
attract customers and the run continues to expand. For example he participated in an arts program and now delivers a paper to the arts centre.

Trevor also cleans windows for local people and businesses. Whilst doing this he will often chat to people who go past. Trevor is great at promoting what he does and through this often gains new customers. A support worker assists him with this venture, particularly with things such as the exchange of money and arranging future appointments. Trevor’s cleaning round is continually expanding based on people finding out that he does this and positive reports from his current customers.

Trevor has an informal relationship with a number of local businesses. He visits these establishments and does a few jobs for each business. Whilst there, he is always invited for a coffee or bite to eat and a chat with some of the staff. He has been doing this for years and it offers him the companionship and social interaction that he loves.

*He likes the fact that a range of people do the courses and he gets to meet new people on a regular basis. He is proud that he is involved in a course that people without disabilities also do.*

Trevor goes to TAFE and does literacy and numeracy courses. He has been doing this for some years now. He likes the fact that a range of people do the courses and he gets to meet new people on a regular basis. He is proud that he is involved in a course that people without disabilities also do.

A support worker assists him during the time he is doing the courses. The support worker assists him with the course content as well as with making connections with others doing the course. Trevor is able to identify which people he would like to get to know and he and the support worker discuss strategies around doing this.
Prior to LGSCLA supporting Trevor he had been in a series of situations that did not last for long. LGSCLA were conscious that they did not want this trend to continue for Trevor. Looking at what had happened in the previous situations and trying to establish a situation that was likely to be long term was difficult.

When Trevor’s situation was analysed, it appeared that the grief he was experiencing due to his mother passing away was having a huge impact. Trevor had been displaying behaviours that were very uncharacteristic of how he had behaved when he had lived with his mother. He was doing things that would annoy or even endanger those he was living with. He was doing things in the community such as stealing things that were bringing a great deal of negative attention. He was also doing some of the things he had always done such as be out wandering around during the very early hours of the morning that had been accepted by his mother but was not acceptable to those he now lived with. With these types of things occurring, sustainability was going to be difficult no matter what type of situation Trevor was in.

LGSCLA thought the best option was to assist Trevor with his dream to have his own place but also to bring in support that would begin to work through some of the issues that were apparent. Support was provided to Trevor as well as those working with him. Trevor also did gain considerable stability from having his own house. This meant that efforts to focus on some of the issues that were apparent was more successful. The road has not always been smooth but things are now sustainable and many issues are managed prior to situations escalating beyond repair.
Keys to Success

Things that have been particularly important in relation to Trevor’s community connectedness have been maintaining his existing connections in their freely given state. LGSCLA play an active role in doing this by communicating with Trevor’s friends and inviting them to contact support staff if any issues are apparent. For example there was a group of friends that Trevor would visit very late at night. The friends were not happy about this and at one stage one of them contacted LGSCLA to express their annoyance and to ask what LGSCLA were doing about the situation. LGSCLA were not aware of the late night visits and talked about what was going on with a number of Trevor’s friends. Now the friends contact support workers when Trevor turns up at an inappropriate time allowing Trevor to be given consistent feedback about what is and isn’t appropriate. This is very important in terms of Trevor maintaining his friendships in the community. Support workers also provide Trevor with assistance in getting ready to go to things with friends to ensure the time he spends with his friends is likely to be successful and therefore continue on a regular basis.

LGSCLA has used the support of many outside agencies when issues have arisen. For example they have consulted with Psychologists in Albany and from Disability Services Commission to provide input for Trevor and support workers. This has been very important in terms of making the situation sustainable.

The team approach to supporting Trevor has been crucial in terms of providing consistency to Trevor and support to the support workers. The coordinator meets with the support workers on a regular basis to discuss any issues. Trevor attends these meeting if he chooses to. This means that issues are addressed when they first arise rather than when they have become very complex and difficult to resolve.

Getting Trevor involved in things that he enjoys and achieves at has been very important. This has allowed him to have positive interactions with people in the community. For example he attended a film making course and was given a video of the movie they made at the course. He was able to show this to his friends when they visited or when he visited their places.
Assisting Trevor to deal with the grief and life changes associated with his mother dying has been very challenging and impacts on most areas of his life.

Working out why Trevor sometimes behaves in uncharacteristic ways and how to deal with instances of these behaviours has been a big challenge. Trevor misses his mother a lot and still has difficulty accepting things such as the fact that she was taken to hospital in Perth and then he never saw her again. Thinking about his mother or other stresses/pressures in his life seem to result in changes in Trevor’s behaviour. Trevor has been given support to help him identify what is upsetting him and to let others know how he is feeling. He has built relationships with people such as the coordinator and the Local Area Coordinator at Disability Services Commission and will now go to them to discuss things that are upsetting him. He will also ask support workers to take him to the cemetery to visit his mother’s grave. These strategies don’t always work and Trevor needs to be reminded about using them but they have changed things over time.

Trevor has been given support in other areas of his life such as in relation to his diabetes and an appropriate diet. Despite the fact that the education has been extensive and ongoing for some time, Trevor still chooses to eat foods that are outside the diet guidelines on occasions. It has been a challenge for support staff to accept that Trevor makes his own choices despite all their good intentions.

Trevor is a very good pool player. He has a pool table set up in his shed. He invites people over for a game on a regular basis. The people he invites over are friends that he knew through his mother, people he has met at TAFE, people he has met through his paper round and people who have supported him at one time or another.

For many different reasons there has been a large turnover of support staff that have worked with Trevor. During the time they have been working with Trevor they have built a relationship with him and he has often got to know
their family and some of their friends. Even when the support workers have left their positions they have maintained contact with Trevor in the majority of cases. These people invite Trevor for meals, drop in to see him for a cuppa or game of pool and invite him to special events they may be hosting. Trevor reciprocates by dropping into their places and inviting them round to his place.

Trevor often arranges things with friends that occur without support workers being present. For example friends offered Trevor a lift to the state football match that was played in Denmark recently. Support workers assisted Trevor to ensure he had what he needed for the day and was ready on time. Trevor went to the match with his friends and enjoyed telling everyone about his experience when he got back.

Trevor has a large party to celebrate his birthday each year. He invites about 90 people to his place for a BBQ. A support worker helps him with all the preparation. He loves these occasions. It is always surprising for the people who support Trevor to see just how many people he knows.

Some of Trevor’s friends have moved to Perth. Support workers assist Trevor to make visits up to Perth to maintain his contact with these people. Trevor also does things like attends the Perth Royal Show whilst up in Perth.

Trevor loves having a coffee and chat. The extensive networks he has in Albany mean that he can do this on a regular basis.
Important Guiding Principles

7. Be prepared to let go when appropriate
This principle applied in Trevor’s case right from the initial stages. Trevor had a lot of informal support in his life and LGSCLA worked in a way that ensured this was maintained rather than taking ownership of Trevor’s support needs. Trevor also makes choices about what he does in life which may not always be the best for his health or be in line with education he has been given. There are instances where support workers have had to accept they have done all they can and allow Trevor the independence to make his own decisions.

10. Aim for an extensive and varied social network
Trevor is a very social person who loves to get to know people. Supporting Trevor to have an extensive and varied network has lead to him having a variety of relationships ranging from close friendships to acquaintances.

15. Continue to pursue community connectedness
When LGSCLA got to know Trevor, it appeared that he had a good level of community connectedness. However, Trevor had been supported by his mother to establish and maintain this network. LGSCLA has put in place strategies to make sure that Trevor maintains and expands his networks and thus remains connected to the community.
Jude is described as having a severe to profound intellectual disability. She requires a high level of assistance with all aspects of her daily living. Jude has limited verbal communication. She is only able to communicate non verbally with people she knows well. Jude gets around by walking but this takes considerable effort and she generally only goes short distances. She is very unstable on uneven surfaces. Jude also has epilepsy that requires careful treatment and monitoring.

Jude lived with her parents on a farm north of Mt Barker until she was 36. At this time her parent’s health was deteriorating and they were getting older. They felt it was time to plan for their daughter’s future. They were put in contact with LGSCLA and discussions about Jude’s future began. Jude’s parents were very clear that they did not want Jude to live in a residential or group home setting. Jude had lived at home all her life and they were keen for her to move into a homely environment. They also wanted the support she received to be tailored to suit her individual needs. Jude’s parents also felt that she would have more options for her future if she lived in Albany, which is a bigger place.

Jude initially shared a house with another woman with intellectual disability. Support people were present on a 24 hour basis, with a number of people working different shifts. The changes in staff and living with another person with disabilities did not suit Jude and after about 18 months it was obvious that a change was needed.

LGSCLA felt that the co-resident model of support where Jude would live within someone’s house would meet her needs best. They began to look for appropriate support people and discovered a couple with a young child. This option was successful and Jude has
been living with the family for over 11 years now. Within the first year of supporting Jude, the family had twins and Jude has seen these children grow up.

**With three children in the house there is plenty of activity and Jude loves being in amongst this.**

Jude has become a valued member of the family of her co-residents. With three children in the house there is plenty of activity and Jude loves being in amongst this. She does things like goes and watches the children play sport. She has become known by other people who attend the events regularly and always has someone to sit with and chat to. She also attends special events the children are involved in such as dance performances at the town hall and street festivals.

**This model of support promotes Jude in a positive light and shows that she is a person of value.**

There are also the day to day things such as seeing the children play with their friends after school and visiting or having the neighbours visit the house. Life is not highly structured within the family environment and Jude enjoys this. She also accesses generic services for things such as dental treatment, medical issues and haircuts. Many people are surprised by the living arrangement that Jude has and will ask questions on initial contact. This model of support promotes Jude in a positive light and shows that she is a person of value.

A Hard Point at Which to Keep Going

Jude thoroughly enjoys watching others, particularly children, doing things. Most often she does not want to participate in what is happening but is very content to sit and watch. The funding provided to LGSCLA to support Jude is allocated for specific things. There is one component that is to support Jude to participate in activities. As Jude enjoys watching and informal activities it has been difficult to find things that Jude actually wants to do.
There was one member of the group who invited Jude to her house for a cuppa on a regular basis. This has continued despite the fact that the group no longer meets.

Jude used to go to the Salvation Army Home League Ladies Group on a regular basis. Unfortunately this group recently disbanded. Whilst the other members of the group were much older than Jude, she liked this group and was well respected by the other members. She was always invited to functions they held such as Christmas parties and last year the group even invited Jude’s mother along as well. There was one member of the group who invited Jude to her house for a cuppa on a regular basis. This has continued despite the fact that the group no longer meets.

Jude also goes to the Lions Community Care group during the day a couple of times a week. This group goes on bus trips, goes out to lunch and does a range of activities. Jude has been doing this for about nine years now. She is well known by the staff that coordinate the group and they are able to meet her needs. Therefore she does not have a support worker with her during these times. In this way she is just like all the other people who attend and this is important to her.

Jude does a number of other things in the community that have lead to other connections being made. For example she goes to the town library and with assistance from a support worker has learnt the process for choosing a magazine and checking it out. The staff know Jude and always make time to have a chat with her. Jude enjoys using public transport. With the assistance of a support worker she gets on a bus and goes for a ride to look at something different every now and then. The bus drivers know Jude and greet her using her name and ask about what she has been up to.

Jude continues to have regular contact with her family and the people she knew whilst living with them. She goes back to her old home on the farm every second weekend and for about six weeks of more extended visits throughout the year. Friends and family who live in Mt Barker often report to Jude’s parents that they have seen Jude out and about in Albany. This gives Jude’s parents a great
deal of pleasure as they can see their
daughter is well respected and viewed
positively within the community.

The sister of the co-resident family
has Jude come and stay with her on the
weekends that she does not go to the
farm. Jude enjoys this and because of the
family connection feels even more a part
of the family with whom she lives.

Challenges

• Jude has been living in the same situation for a long time now. It is a challenge for
  LGSCLA not to become complacent. Whilst things seem to tick along nicely, there is
  an ongoing need for regular reviews to ensure Jude’s needs are still being met and that
  she is being supported appropriately.

• For the co resident family it is an ongoing challenge to balance Jude’s needs with the
  needs of the rest of the family. To maintain the natural home like support, the co
  resident family need to have significant involvement with Jude but of course they
  can’t do everything. At times support workers come in to provide additional support.
  Whilst this is necessary it takes away from the home like environment and can be an
  invasion of the family’s privacy. It also means the family have to structure their lives
  around the start and finish times of the support workers, which again reduces the
  ‘naturalness’ of the situation.

• Jude requires a high level of support with personal care. This has been challenging for
  the co resident family to maintain, particularly given their own children are growing
  up and becoming more independent in this area all the time.
Keys to Success

Jude’s parents made the decision to seek alternative arrangements for Jude at a point where they were still coping but recognised that they would not be able to forever. This meant that family relationships were strong and their outlook positive. This was important in the planning process.

The attitude of the co-resident family towards Jude has always been positive. This has been crucial in terms of the arrangement being maintained and also how Jude is viewed by the wider community.

The co-resident family have a lot of support from their extended family. This has ensured that the situation is sustainable long term.

Despite Jude being described as having severe to profound disabilities there has been a strong focus on her accessing generic services within the community. This has meant that she has become well known in her local area and is viewed as having the same needs as the general population.

Jude also has a lot of contact with people through the co resident family and the support workers who work with her. This has created connections for Jude that may not have otherwise been possible.

Jude’s parents are very supportive, flexible and caring. They consider not only Jude’s needs but also those of the co resident family.
Important Guiding Principles

8. Consider the person as part of a family system
In Jude’s case, her parents had been caring for her for many years with minimal support. When it came time for Jude’s situation to change it was very important to listen to the views and aspirations of her family as they obviously knew her very well. It was also important to consider the whole family as the new arrangements needed to be conducive to them maintaining the links they had with each other.

11. Allow an appropriate level of risk taking
When establishing the co-resident model of support for Jude, there were several potential risks involved. Jude may have not liked the move out of the family environment. The co-resident family may have not coped with the change in their lifestyle, particularly given they had a young child, and later were to have twins as well. These risks were considered and with the right support in place, it was determined that the gains outweighed the risks and the situation proceeded successfully.

13. Be aware of the influence you can have
As already mentioned, the co-resident family has a very positive attitude towards Jude. This influences others that come in contact with Jude and has allowed her to become well connected to the community.
Woodwork, Thai Cooking and Belly Dancing are Options for Everybody

Rather than being an example of community connectedness for an individual, this example outlines a community project that facilitates community connectedness for a number of people with disabilities.

Through his work with LGSCLA My Life My Community program Adrian has met many people with disabilities. He has come to know them and has looked for opportunities to allow them to expand their interests through things that are happening in the community. Adrian recently became aware that there were a number of people interested in doing short courses through TAFE. Adrian approached TAFE and discussed the inclusion of people with disabilities and how LGSCLA could support this. TAFE were keen to try this and an important partnership between TAFE and LGSCLA evolved.

Adrian applied for and was successful in gaining funds from the Department of Training to support a trial of people with disabilities attending generic TAFE courses.

Adrian found out what areas of interest people with disability had and what courses TAFE could run. The courses were advertised through the usual TAFE process and promoted through established disability networks in the community. For example Adrian put a brief advertisement in the ‘My Life My Community’ newsletter, which is widely read by many people with disabilities in Albany. Many people saw this and because they knew Adrian from other things he had coordinated dropped in and asked for details or rang him up. Adrian reported that this type of advertising was necessary as many people with disabilities did not have the literacy skills required to get the information from the TAFE advertising.

There was a great amount of interest from people with disability. To run the courses TAFE required a minimum number of people in each class. Unfortunately not all the courses
advertised were able to run due to there
not being enough numbers.

TAFE in partnership with LGSCLA
are currently supporting three courses to
allow for the participation of people with
disabilities. The courses are Hobby
Woodwork, Thai Cooking and Belly
Dancing. Prior to the courses
commencing the course content was
reviewed in order to ensure it was
appropriate for people with disabilities.
The teaching and delivery methods were
also discussed and various strategies
included such as using visual material
and involving lots of repetition. Three
subsidised places were offered on each
course.

Keys to Success

Advertising the courses through
disability networks and in an appropriate
format was important in terms of people
with disabilities being aware of the
courses. Also the fact that many people
with disabilities know Adrian from other
things he has coordinated meant that
they felt comfortable contacting him and
finding out more about the courses. It
was also important that people discussed
the courses with people they knew and
were given the encouragement that gave
them the confidence to sign up.

A teacher’s assistant was employed
for each course to ensure that people’s
needs were met. Each participant’s
individual needs were discussed prior to
the courses commencing. This enabled
appropriate supports to be arranged and
for any concerns to be addressed.
Because of this the courses started off
smoothly and the people with disabilities
were viewed positively within the group
who attended the courses.

TAFE in Albany have formed an
important partnership with LGSCLA
that allows people with disabilities to
attend generic short courses at TAFE
A Hard Point at Which to Keep Going

TAFE required a minimum number of people to run each course. Some of the courses advertised did not end up running due to a lack of numbers. But by the time the decision was made for the courses not to run, people with disabilities had signed up, teacher’s assistants had been recruited and the needs of each individual with disability considered. It was very disappointing and frustrating when the courses did not end up going ahead. Naturally those that signed up for courses that did not run may not be so enthusiastic next time an opportunity arises.

Challenges

The grant received from the Department of Training has supported the initial run of courses to take place. Now it is a matter of looking at ways to make the project self sustaining. The way that TAFE in Albany operates means that these types of courses are always full fee paying courses. The expense of the courses is usually beyond the means of people with disabilities to fund themselves. Adrian has had discussions with TAFE about continuing to include people with disabilities and they are keen to try. They have offered to use students from relevant courses as the teacher’s assistants. Adrian plans to approach service clubs, local businesses and organisations such as the Lotteries Commission to see if they will agree to fund a number of subsidised places each year.

TAFE in Albany is located a reasonable distance from the centre of town. At the times the courses have run, there is little or no public transport available. This meant that to enable the people with disabilities to attend the courses there had to be transport available within their existing support systems.
Depending on what time of the day the courses run, they involve morning or afternoon tea breaks. During these times people have an opportunity to interact informally. The teacher’s assistant assists the participants to interact with one another if necessary. Some people knew each other prior to doing the course. In these cases the courses have helped them strengthen their links with each other. It is hoped that the participants with disabilities may be able to maintain some of the connections they are making outside of the course.

Due to the success of these courses, others are now being planned for the future. Adrian gathers information about what interests people have and negotiates with TAFE regarding appropriate courses being offered.

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**Important Guiding Principles**

1. **Ensure person centred rather than service centred planning**

   The approach taken by LGSCLA in arranging the TAFE courses was unique both to their own organisation as well as TAFE. By using different strategies the organisations were able to focus on the people they were supporting.

2. **Work in partnership**

   LGSCLA and TAFE had to work in close partnership for the courses to be a success. This was possible because both organisations were focused on supporting people with disabilities to do generic rather than segregated courses, allowing opportunities for connections to be made. It was an advantage that because of Albany being a small community Adrian knew the key people to contact at TAFE and they also knew him. This made forming the partnership easier at the beginning.