

# SRV in action

HONEST HOPE  
IN THE FACE OF  
VULNERABILITY

BEING ME

WHAT MIGHT SRV  
SAY ABOUT...  
'HELPFULNESS'

NOTHING SUCCEEDS  
LIKE THE APPEARANCE  
OF SUCCESS

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

*by Rebecca Murphy*

*Rebecca worked for 15 years in the area of community care and aged services before having two children. Her background and skills in advocating for clients helped to foster a firm belief in an inclusive and fulfilling life for Rohan, who lives with a disability. SRV training supported her awareness and values as well as developing her skills in how to aim for the typical and avoid the 'special'.*

*With limited access to services, and living in a regional area, Rebecca navigated many barriers and challenged people's perceptions to support Rohan's development. Rohan now attends mainstream school in Brisbane and loves the learning environment, and his friends.*

Born in beautiful regional Tasmania, Rohan was the adorable fourth member of the clan. With the realisation that Rohan's development was not progressing as that of his sisters or friends, we set out early on to ensure Rohan had every opportunity to reach his full potential and have a meaningful life.

Travis and I discussed our vision for Rohan and it was based more on what we didn't want for him.

And also our regular features:

- *Helpful Articles*
- *From the Inbox*
- *My Favourite SRV Concept*

# SRV in action

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## SRV in action

An initiative of **Values in Action Association Inc.** to assist people make the links between the theory of Social Role Valorisation and how it can be used in our work and our lives. We are assisted by our colleagues in other local groups as well as the Australian and New Zealand SRV Group.

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Throughout this periodical the following style formats are used:

*Italics* are used for both emphasis and for SRV concepts.

Direct speech is italicised and in inverted commas.

Quotes and unusual expressions are in 'single, inverted commas'.

References are available upon request.

VALUES IN ACTION ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND AND OUR GRATITUDE THAT WE SHARE THIS LAND TODAY, OUR SORROW FOR THE COSTS OF THAT SHARING, AND OUR HOPE THAT WE CAN MOVE TO A PLACE OF JUSTICE AND PARTNERSHIP TOGETHER.

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values in action association

# GUEST EDITORIAL

## HONEST HOPE IN THE FACE OF VULNERABILITY

by Mel Jackman

Values in Action has invited Mel Jackman to the role of Guest Editor for this edition. Mel has many roles, Chair of *Training and Evaluation for Change*, the SRV group in Adelaide, advocate, friend, student, and avid walker. Welcome Mel.

**The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it - Michelangelo**

One of two things happen quite reliably for devalued people. The first is that devalued people are affected by a lack of belief about their potential to grow and have full lives; they are surrounded by low expectations and negative assumptions.

The second is a more complex phenomenon. It is where belief about possibilities are held, but done so in the absence of understanding the context of devalued people's lives. Lives full of wounding experiences, limited resources, rejection, devaluation, isolation, and the list could go on. In short, belief in the possibilities, is embraced in the absence of addressing people's *heightened vulnerabilities* and *negative life experiences*. The outcome of this is often that people are set up to fail. We then find ourselves having travelled full circle: we have held positive beliefs without taking account of the supports people need, which leads to disappointments. Our response is to return to holding limited, negative beliefs about a person and their capacity to achieve an ordinary, good life.

What is needed is what Fran Peavey calls 'honest hope'. Honest hope is created not out of unrealistically high expectations nor built of too lowly expectations. It is an honest hope because it shines a light on our low expectations and pushes us to dream big.

SRV addresses this issue in the theme of *mindsets*. Wolfensberger reminds us of the importance of positive mindsets, which encapsulate beliefs, values and assumptions. And he says that it is vital to hold the belief that 'all people, no matter how impaired or oppressed, have the capacity for growth and change'. He further emphasises 'that this capacity is much greater than most people realise, than is evident from a person's current life conditions and functioning'.

We all need to be surrounded by our own (and others') belief to succeed. And for devalued people the simple act of believing can be incredibly powerful. Belief becomes a catalyst for opportunities that would otherwise have remained unseen. The simple act of believing is the tool that shines a light on pathways to bigger and better things in life. When people hold *negative mindsets*, devalued people are denied the opportunities, and resources, to achieve their life goals – those pathways forward remain in the shadows, unclear. Also, because of the countless bad things that have happened to devalued people, sometimes those life goals are not evident or even seen as important. Just getting through the day takes one's whole attention. However, something bigger and better is *always* possible.

But devalued people are more vulnerable to having bad things happen to them. So belief and positive mindsets need to be paired with safeguards and thoughtful support. Embracing belief blindly and charging forward to the ordinary good life can be harmful. A support worker, in exasperation at my unwavering belief in the possibilities, once said to me, 'yes, I can see across the river to what you are talking about but I cannot see a way across'. A brilliant metaphor for the journey forward. The way across may seem deep and treacherous but there is a way across. The way is just not paved yet. It never is for any of us, just like in any journey we will face barriers, setbacks and moments of uncertainty. But belief and honest hope can be used as beacons to keep us on track as we pave a way across the river. We can ask ourselves 'Are we being too cautious, too reckless? Are our assumptions negative and our expectations too low?' We can ask ourselves honest questions so we get honest answers. Without that belief we will be blind to the possibilities (or stepping stones across the river) because we will be looking the wrong way!

Knowing where we want to go, and believing it is possible, gives us the opportunity to place those stepping stones down for the devalued people who rely on our belief that better is *always* possible.

# UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

Continued from the front cover

by Rebecca Murphy

We had known people deeply affected by having lived in institutional care and group homes and the lasting implications of that. I had also worked for over fifteen years in aged care and community care.

The other major influence was having attended an accredited Social Role Valorisation course with Jane Sherwin some years earlier. It made a huge impact on me at the time. The theory has been useful in navigating life for Rohan; it has underpinned a lot of our decisions around trying to ensure he is included and has an ordinary life like other boys his age.

Our experiences with early intervention therapies exposed us to the potential limitations and challenges Rohan may face throughout his life. He was denied access to some services because he was 'multiply impaired'. Having been given various labels, people did not see his potential or worth. We worked extremely hard to search for supports from outside our local area including interstate, in developing a home based program.

We moved to Queensland for work and schooling options for both our children. We believed that this would give Rohan greater opportunities for an education. After attending an amazing Early Childhood Development Program, we were strongly advised by staff, family, and friends, that special education was the only sensible option.

We enrolled Rohan into a special education school for Prep but realised straight away that it was not the right placement. They did not share our vision for Rohan, so we started home schooling. Our extended family members were not very supportive of this; they believed special education was the best place for him and that he would be looked after there. But we didn't want Rohan looked after, we wanted him to have an education. Rohan may have not been speaking but we knew and had a deep belief that he was intelligent and had so much potential.

After another extensive search we found a

mainstream school with a special education unit. We thought this would be a good balance between the specialist supports he needed and giving him access to a mainstream environment. The following year was our clan's hardest and tested our defences. Rohan was extremely vulnerable and was not yet able to verbally express himself.

We became aware that Rohan was being segregated and isolated from other students most of the time and not attending mainstream class. A lot of his time was being spent watching videos. He was becoming extremely unsettled, showing signs of emotional and physical distress. The school had assessed Rohan as being at a curriculum level below that of kindergarten. After many discussions, meetings and heartaches, we withdrew Rohan and started home schooling again.

Around this time Rohan started seeing an amazing speech therapist. She was opening up his access to communication through facilitated communication. Rohan had a breakthrough moment ... he could spell and had something to say!

Over the coming months we discovered that he was very good at maths and had great comprehension skills and had been able to read for some time. Rohan now attends a mainstream school, attends five days a week and is seen as a capable student. He achieves good grades at peer level (grade three), and does grade six spelling lists. The shift for Rohan has been enormous. In his own words, *'I feel valued at school because I have friends who like me. I am seen as capable and made to work hard which I don't like but it's good for me'*.

Last year Rohan wrote a story about himself that was put into the school newsletter for Disability Action Week; it is titled *Being Me*.

Rohan's story, *Being Me*, appears on the following page.

# BEING ME

by Rohan Murphy

EDITOR: We are thankful that Rebecca and Rohan have generously contributed their stories.

Rohan wrote this story on an iPad via an app called Notability using facilitated communication. Rebecca supported Rohan at the wrist to enable him to point to the letters with his finger.

Rohan uses facilitated communication at school using touch screen computers, and his iPad or a communication board to do his work. He is supported by his teachers and teacher aides. The teachers now assess him as now working at peer level.

The text below is presented as it was written by Rohan at the time, after only ten months of access to communication options. Both Rebecca and Rohan feel it gives more validity to the text to not edit.

Therefore, we have reproduced Rohan's story as he presented it. The experience of assistive technologies and facilitated conversation are both enabling in that they make communication via language possible and have restrictive elements of technological/human mediated communication. So, in the spirit of bridging this divide, we prefer to avoid technical expectations such as grammar and spelling.

*I was just an ordinary boy born into an ordinary family but that all changed when i turned 9months. I was given a diagnosis of 18q deletion syndrome and it has changed my life completely. I want to be ordinary and normal but that just isn't how it is panning out. Why does a diagnosis transform someones life? It is just a term for a medical abnormality but not a state of being.*

*I am a normal boy who likes roller coasters and swimming and playing with my sister. Not a thing that people stare at or tease. I want people to know i am intelligent and clever but my body has trouble being in control. I cant feed myself or dress without help but i know things most other 8 year olds dont. I want to be like other kids and go*

*to school and play soccer. Go to the football with dad. What does it take to make people see me for who i am.*

*I have been very lucky to have been given parents who see me how i am. They see my intelligence and abilities and know i can be someone great. I can be a valuable member of society and be a worthy citizen.*

*i am very sweet and gentle but my body is out of control and moves a lot. I cant stop it from swaying or hitting my head. I don't like it but i cant stop it. I try very hard at school and work to be in control but my brain gets in the way. I love my school friends. They see past my body movements and see me. I love my teachers who know i can do the work.*

*Please see me for who i am not my diagnosis. Its not a significant part of me just a barrier to where i want to go.*

Rohan's mother, Rebecca:

It certainly made people aware of Rohan's insights and depth of understanding. We are now focussing on developing his grammar skills!

When I asked him recently about what helped him in his life he replied:

*I love that you don't accept the limitations people put on me. I love how you include me in everything like going shopping karate music lessons and gymnastics. All that helped me be an individual that is loved. I think about how people don't always accept me but having a family who loves me gives me confidence I am a good person.*

*I wish others could have the life I do. I know I am in a good school a good family a good country. I hope to be a lawyer and represent people with a disability so they can have a good life too. I also want a good looking wife and a red Ferrari. Yes I deserve them.*

*Quotes on being yourself make it clear that the struggle to determine your own identity and live the life that is most real in your heart is an age-old fight. But just as others have risen to the challenge, you too can learn how to be yourself, standing tall and proud – Kye*

# WHAT MIGHT SRV SAY ABOUT ... HELPFULNESS?

*Kane Morgan began supporting people with disabilities as a volunteer while still at school back in the 1970s. Since then he has held a variety of roles serving young people, people with disabilities and the elderly. He is passionate about SRV and its potential to transform people's lives and the communities in which they live. Kane is a member of the Australian SRV Group and a keen SRV student.*

When people are exposed to Social Role Valorisation (SRV) they discover what is really happening for people who are devalued. Furthermore, SRV equips them with practical strategies that can dramatically change people's lives. However, they often lament that SRV is not more widely adopted and begin to imagine a world of *harmonious helpfulness*. Harmonious helpfulness is a way of thinking about a 'social contract' that unites us all.

SRV can create a restless dissatisfaction with how things are and ignite a drive to make them otherwise. Unfortunately, devaluation is widespread. For many it is ever present. Many are so disempowered by the downward spiral of devaluation that they are unable to escape without the helpfulness of others.

So where will this helpfulness come from and what motivates people to be helpful? Alternatively, what motivates people to be unhelpful, even harmful, yet think they are being helpful?

*One of our primary purposes in this life is to help others. If you are unable to help someone, then please, do not hurt them! -*  
Attributions include David Kreger and the Dalai Lama.

Helpfulness can be defined as providing useful assistance. However, helpfulness is not simply kindness with good intentions. What someone believes unconsciously peeks out through their actions. So, if they have unhelpful beliefs (like a person is a menace) then their actions will be unhelpful, even if their intention is to be helpful.

SRV teaches us that we are often unaware or unconscious of what we believe. It is said that our ways of looking at the world, our mindsets, are often negative. If we aren't clear about those attitudes and beliefs, our assistance may be useless or even harmful. So, it is critical that

we strive for consciousness to make sure that our assistance is truly useful.

SRV, with its *if this then that* approach, lays a plan for useful assistance and true helpfulness. True helpfulness is grounded in the appreciation that devaluation is a root cause of people's suffering.

I raised the common lament earlier of why SRV is not more widely adopted. We could also ask why helpfulness is not more widely adopted. Could the adoption of both enable a *harmonious helpfulness* that would be very useful indeed to vigorously oppose devaluation?

Earlier I spoke about us not being aware of our negative beliefs. SRV calls this *unconscious negative mindsets*. And these perpetuate harm. Similarly, might there be unconscious positive mindsets that await awakening and, if engaged, could create helpfulness? Moving people from blissful ignorance to restless dissatisfaction and then into harmonious helpfulness? This could be the 'mindset reset' that would create an ongoing motivation for people to be truly helpful.

SRV can create a restless dissatisfaction with how things are and ignite a drive to make them otherwise. But the 'mindset reset' only comes when people's values are engaged and they feel a motivation to be helpful. We know that SRV is not a religion or values system. Importantly though, it certainly can give people pause to ask themselves what they are going to do with their new found knowledge given that it has exposed the ongoing suffering of others.

SRV can expose devaluation and its impact on people's lives and give practical strategies to combat devaluation. It can be a guide to do good and to be truly useful. Most importantly, though, it can bring about a 'mindset reset' whereby people are left motivated to bring about change in a way that is most helpful. A harmonious helpfulness that unites us all.

## FROM THE

# INBOX



2016/05/22 hrogers@goodfutures.org.au

Subject: SRV-only for individuals?

Hi Jane

I have been told that SRV is suitable for use only with individuals. I work in a service model that groups people. Can SRV be used in services like day services, group homes, nursing homes and special schools?

Thanks for any insights,

Hanna

2016/05/24 Jane Sherwin sherwinconsulting@gmail.com

Subject: SRV-only for individuals?

Hi Hanna,

Thanks for this query. When trying to help people get good lives through valued roles, it is certainly easier to work with individuals so that you can craft roles with the person that are very authentic to their identity. Even so, quite a few SRV ideas are helpful when working with either individuals or groups. These include understanding how devaluation happens in our society, the importance of mindsets that influence our actions, and ways that build bridges between people with a valued status and those with a devalued status.

One of the strengths of SRV is that it gives ideas about how to work towards the best we can do in a particular situation. If you are working with groups, then SRV helps us ask ourselves questions to move towards the ideal. What I would like to do in this email is focus on questions that are about maintaining or building the skills of individuals within the group, and look at image issues in the next email.

SRV suggests that we think about groups in two ways in order to maintain or develop skills. Is the size of the group as good as it can be? And is the composition (the make-up of the group) as good as it can be?

With regard to size, the size of the group should be a good match for the task that is being done. For example, a card game would typically have two to six people playing, but not ten. Ideally, the size of the group also allows for each group member to feel like they are not lost in the crowd, that they feel known and secure. Additionally, the size of the group should enable each

individual to receive support that is at the appropriate level of challenge and stimulation. Also, a group that is too big makes it unlikely that anyone who is not a member of that group, like an ordinary citizen, would interact with group members. From the perspective of the person supporting the group, the size should allow them to provide neither too much nor too little support.

With regard to the make-up of the group, ideally each group member should have the opportunity to learn from good role models. This generally means that those who are less capable would be in the minority. From the perspective of the person who is supporting the group, it is more difficult to provide good support when the needs of the group members are too diverse, such as having a very broad range of capabilities or ages. The inclination in that situation is to either exclude 'problematic' people or to lower expectations to that of the least capable person. The latter is clearly problematic for the more capable group members.

As you might have heard, SRV is a very big theory and the above are just some of the many ideas in it. I look forward to writing next time about how people are likely to be perceived depending on who they are rubbing shoulders with.

Hope that's helpful - SRV is so informative when improving the ways we offer services.

Thanks again and warm wishes.

Jane

*Jane Sherwin is an Accredited Teacher of SRV (Senior Trainer) based in Brisbane, Australia*

*Reader: Stay tuned for part 2 of Jane's response about Image and Perception Issues (in the next edition).*

# NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE THE APPEARANCE OF SUCCESS

*by Katie Weston - Inclusion Works worked to build a better Townsville community through the inclusion of people with a disability. One of the theories that underpinned their work is Social Role Valorisation (SRV). SRV is a high order empirical social science theory. It reminds us that many people are not well regarded in society, that this can most likely be improved through people getting positive valued social roles, by developing the skills to be in valued roles, and having an image so that people are deeply respected.*

These two stories are specifically related to image. They give a sense of its impact on how the people we work alongside gain social acceptance and social inclusion.

The following two scenarios illustrate a positive and negative experience encountered by a young man by the name of William.

William is deeply passionate about the military. His dream is to one day join the defence forces. His extensive knowledge in the area meant that he has highly valued competencies to offer a community of people who would share his passion.

William also finds confidence and pride in wearing an old uniform his dad gave him from his time of service in the military. William's parents explained that he had at times encountered criticism by some community members for wearing a (old) uniform when out in public.

William's opinion of this was different from that of his parents', stating, *'there is no sign saying I can't, so why not?'*

Great question.

## **William's Employment and Work Experience**

William was offered the opportunity to participate in a work experience program with one of the Townsville military bases.

Within the defence force, there is no choice; William, like all members of the defence forces, needed to comply with the dress code. In the face of the powerful known social dynamics of the military, William didn't argue but complied with the dress requirements so as to not miss out on the opportunity to connect with a community he is so deeply passionate about.

William's gifts, talents and competencies were acknowledged, encouraged, supported and rewarded by his newly discovered community. Its members were able to see William for who he was, and the value he added to the community. Further opportunities to connect with its members were extended to William through the copious positive feedback he received. William was also encouraged and supported to grow

and develop his passion further and through being eagerly 'invited in' to various departments and social settings. In addition to this, a specific comment was made by a high ranking member of this community commending William on his presentation.

## **William's Social Club Membership**

The second community William connected with was on a more informal, social basis.

Prior to William being introduced to its members, the community development worker observed the 'social norms' of the group, that is, the physical setting, who attends, how it is perceived by the wider community and what its members generally wear (image) relevant to the activity. In addition to this, the community development worker observed the skills set (competency) required for an individual new to the group to be positively perceived and fully included.

William already had a high level of competency to add value to this community, however, he wanted to wear the old military uniform. A few helpful suggestions were offered to William and his family regarding alternative attire that he may like to wear. The suggestion was that William could wear something other than the old military uniform for a while, until people got to know him. In doing so, the group members would then be more likely to accept him. William could develop his competency further and develop deeper connections with its members.

In the beginning William decided to wear the uniform. As a result, he did not have the same positive experience that he had encountered within the first community. Rather, he was somewhat shunned by its members. Some members found the attire offensive, others found it odd, and thus were hesitant to even attempt to make a genuine connection with William. This caused considerable distress for William. Not only did it delay his immersion into the group and ultimately threaten his acceptance, it further contributed to his lack of confidence in putting himself out there.

Fortunately, William had made a genuine connection with one of the community's more influential members

*The image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy –  
Ezra Pound*

# NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE THE APPEARANCE OF SUCCESS

*cont. from previous page*

through some constructive networking facilitated by the community development worker. After some significant work (adjustments to his attire, others speaking up), William eventually gained the respect of the rest of the members and has become embedded within this community as a valued contributing member.

Being rejected by a group is a huge issue for many of us. For someone like William, who already has some things working against him, the consequence of presenting a known negatively perceived image (inappropriate attire for the occasion) evidently enhanced the likelihood that he would be rejected.

William's initial question, *'there is no sign saying I can't, so why not?'*, raised a good point.

From this, we invite you to consider the following five questions.

Should something be done about society's attitudes?

If so, who should do that, and how long are we (or William) prepared to wait for this change?

William has vulnerabilities and he is already carrying some level of rejection and devaluation in the eyes of others. The cost for William doing something to prove a point, such as dressing in a way that the wider community perceives as unusual, is clearly high. Is it reasonable or ethical to expect William to wear this cost?

How do we address this issue?

What is the consequence of not responding to this issue immediately?

## WE EXPECT THE COMMUNITY TO BE WELCOMING

### PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE - SeQual

*by Kellie Baigent*

***SeQual stands for seeking quality. Established in 1999, SeQual assists people with multiple disabilities who have individualised or private funding, in pursuing community and relational roles. Kellie is the inaugural and current manager of SeQual Association Inc.***

#### **We expect the community to be welcoming.**

We expect the people we support with multiple disabilities to be able to be part of regular, everyday life. We expect that they will feel the joy of relationships and connections. Are we always successful in assisting them to do so? No, the journey is hard, however, our expectations remain high.

In 2001, SeQual was fortunate to be funded to provide recreational supports to a group of people with significant disabilities living in a long-stay institution, the Halwyn Centre, Red Hill, Brisbane. At the time we were a tiny brand new service, committed to providing an innovative, flexible and individualised service. But how would we do this? The pressure was on to create a 'lovely day service in the 'burbs', but surely

there had to be a better way. Thankfully we found guidance in SRV thinking.

In the early days we grappled with how to maximise the support that our funding provided (just three hours of support per person, per week). We tried group models of support, similar to a day service model, and thought we could do it successfully. We were wrong. However, the first time we supported a middle aged man to go for coffee at a local coffee shop we knew we were on a winner. We saw the community respond and we knew that individualised support, helping individuals to build relationships and connections, was critical. We could see even in those early days that the way these marginalised people were grouped was going to be vital to encouraging interactions with and from the

*It is an absolute human certainty that no one can know his own beauty or perceive a sense of his own worth until it has been reflected back to him in the mirror of another loving, caring human being – John Joseph Powell*

## PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE – SeQual

*cont. from previous page*

broader community.

Paying attention to grouping has meant that we provide predominantly one-on-one support, allowing for genuine individualisation. We are often asked why we avoid grouping in our work with people. The answer has two simple parts. If we want people who have significant disabilities to have the best chance to make genuine connections, we would be foolish to assume it will happen in a group setting. Very few community members will walk up to a group of people with disabilities and make conversation. However, they just might walk up to a person with a disability and their worker. We have seen it work. Furthermore, individualisation of our support means that we are genuinely pursuing the unique interests of each person.

Indeed, focusing on the very specific and idiosyncratic likes and dislikes of each individual is often the starting point for planning what to aim for alongside that person. One of the advantages of being a small service is that all members of the team truly know each and every person we serve. We regularly share ideas with one another at team meetings when trying to think about what avenues to pursue, using interests as a starting point. Our goal is to ensure that the person is spending time in pursuits that excite and energise them. We constantly remind our staff to aim high when thinking about what is possible. In practical terms this means that what we strive for is what would be typical or ordinary for anyone else of that age, gender and cultural background.

One way of achieving the typical or ordinary is to aim for membership in mainstream groups rather than disability-specific groups. The people who we support benefit from spending time with age peers and develop social competencies through imitating those people. From this, genuine friendships are more likely to blossom. For example, attending a mainstream train-riding social group led to an ongoing friendship between two men. Although the friendship was kick-started through their shared interest in riding on trains, they soon realised that they had a lot more in common. They share a wicked sense of humour, as well as complimenting each other's personalities – one loves to tell stories and the other is a fantastic listener. The two now meet up regularly and take part in a variety of activities that both enjoy.

Our ultimate goal is for people to occupy valued roles in society, in their community. The previous example

is a perfect illustration of how not grouping people with disabilities impacts on the acquisition of valued roles. Attending the mainstream group opened the door to roles like friend, social group member and so on. Alternatively, we might have aimed for a disability specific option for exploring an interest in trains. In that case the role that the person would have filled would have most likely been limited to train rider. There would have been limited opportunity for valued roles in such a situation. Again, without the expectation that the people we support can actively participate in their community in typical ways it would not be possible to attain those things that make for a good life, like genuine friendships.

Hugely important to our success is hiring the right people and investing in their training. During recruitment we don't necessarily aim for the person that has the most experience or relevant training. Rather, we are always on the look-out for people that have a good values match with the organisation. We then follow this up with regular training through both formal SRV events and in-house training/mentoring.

Often it is the small things that are quite easy to change, especially when thinking about image-related matters. We make a concerted effort to ensure that the people we're supporting are wearing appropriate clothing for their age and gender. This means wearing clothes that suit the activity or event that they'll be attending; stylish haircuts that express the individual; minimal use of clothing protectors and so on. Likewise, we pay attention to our own image and how that projects onto the people we're supporting. Our accessible cars are deliberately unbranded and our staff wear no identifying uniforms or badges. We regularly get mistaken for a friend or family member rather than a support worker. Again, this aids in the obtaining of valued roles because it helps to avoid that person being seen as a client or service user, and more likely to be seen as an ordinary member of the community.

In the end all those small things put together can mean the difference between a good life or an ordinary life. A life that has value or one that is devalued. A life that is rich in the joy of unpaid relationships versus the alternative. Our experiences using SRV as a framework have been hugely valuable and we will continue to make it part of our practice framework for coming years.

**NEWS!** The next International SRV Conference will be held in May/June 2018 in Winnipeg, Canada.

**Start thinking about your presentation!**

**Start saving!**

# MY FAVOURITE SRV CONCEPT - UNCONSCIOUSNESS

*Katie Lewis works as a primary school teacher in Murwillumbah, NSW. She is a member of the Australian SRV Group and a long-term member of Values in Action Assoc. Katie has worked in a small disability service, which based its efforts on SRV in providing highly individualised, community supports to people with disabilities. This article is based on sessions that Katie presented at a recent SRV retreat and a Saturday morning study group.*

## **We see what we see, and we believe it to be real.**

This is the basis for SRV's teaching on unconsciousness. The corollary seems to be that if we understand unconsciousness, we can more deliberately consider what we believe and thus, how we relate to and assist people experiencing marginalisation.

What we don't often consider is that what we see isn't necessarily the same as what is right in front of us. We like to think we are rational. Not so apparently. Our brains are filled with deep-rooted patterns and personal experiences that can lead us to be very irrational. The notion of unconsciousness tells us two surprising and perhaps uncomfortable things. Firstly, that our thoughts and actions are largely determined by our unconscious mind. Secondly, this happens automatically - it is outside of our control.

Unconscious bias can be useful; much of it is influenced by the age-old need to make quick judgements for our safety. However, these biases that we are unaware of and which are in effect, speedy judgments of people and circumstances, can also be misleading. For example, it is common for us to rate the athletic ability of African American men higher than that of others. We also tend to associate professional roles more strongly to men than we do to women.

We feed our unconsciousness by avoiding thinking about unpleasant things and by sugar-coating reality. We change TV channels at horror stories; an employee is 'let go', not 'fired'; the military says it causes 'collateral damage', not that it 'kills civilians'. We all like to think that we don't exhibit behaviours that are sexist, racist, or ageist. We would be horrified to think we might act in ways that devalue people who are marginalised. However, each of us is more biased than we think we are, even the most open-minded person. We constantly receive messages about being fair and accepting - the possibility that we aren't confronts our view of ourselves, our very identity.

Unconscious biases play an astonishingly significant role in the decisions we make. They affect our feelings and therefore our behaviours. This then helps form our experiences which in turn form our mindsets and

assumptions, thus reinforcing how we perceive things. This process has both conscious and unconscious elements. However, most of the time the individual is unaware that their behaviour is influenced by their unconsciousness. We are drawn to information that matches our mindsets. We're more likely to be friends with people who agree with our own beliefs. This confirms what we already think and we unconsciously ignore or reject anything that threatens our beliefs and values. This is known as *confirmation bias*.

Devaluation of entire collectivities over generations can be explained by large scale, systemic unconsciousness. So much of devaluation in human services is unconscious. It continues to happen regardless of high morals that most people and services claim. These include 'mercy', 'equality', justice', and 'choice'. Human services will often work to sugar-coat wounding actions. This includes using misleading language, such as 'professional practice', 'good medicine' and 'only doing my job'.

The negative impacts of wounding are pushed into unconsciousness as people justify their actions with in-group/out-group bias (assigning greater value to their own group members than to the others). We can see this in the dreadful conditions at Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, based on a supposed need to defend against the 'other', in this case, terrorists. Similarly, there is much history of the use of electric prods and medication being used on people with intellectual disability for supposed behaviour control. The members of the in-group found this easier than addressing the conditions that created and maintained people's devalued and neglected lives.

If we don't understand devaluation, and how it is formed and maintained, we will struggle to deal with it well. We need to become conscious about the realities of unconsciousness. We need to see how unconsciousness feeds into the formation of devaluation. By doing so we become better prepared to use SRV to shift devaluation and see people get the good things of life.

*Don't build roadblocks out of assumptions - Lorii Myers*

*Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in - Isaac Asimov*

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## SRV DEFINITION

*The pursuit of the good things of life for a party (ie person, group, or class) by the application of empirical knowledge to the shaping of the current or potential social roles – primarily by means of enhancement of the parties' competencies & image – so that these roles are, as much as possible, positively valued in the eyes of the perceivers.*