

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*

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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