

# NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE THE APPEARANCE OF SUCCESS

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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*

## PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE – SeQual

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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!**