



## **Authentic Citizenship and Asset Based Community Development – The way forward for people with disabilities**

### **City of Playford Submission to the Australian Productivity Commission Inquiry into Long Term Disability Care and Support**

Government and their organisations must lead the way in creating genuine partnerships with community to drive positive change in disability care and support. To achieve this people with a disability must have their rights as authentic citizens realised and be recognised and valued for their strengths and abilities and the assets they can bring to a partnership.

Authentic citizenship for people with a disability means being seen as people first and foremost and not being defined by their disability. It means real choices and genuine opportunities to participate and contribute to the community socially, politically and economically.

To achieve this access and inclusion for people with a disability must be built into all policy and planning and embedded across organisations to become everyone's responsibility. Strategic planning processes need to ensure that when new services, facilities and developments are being planned they are encompassing of access for all and maximising people's independence. It also needs to be the responsibility of the area developing the facility, or planning a new service to actively seek advice and consult with people with a disability rather than only considering their needs when a complaint has been made.

There also needs to be a fundamental shift in how services are currently provided 'to' and 'for' people with a disability to one in which services are delivered 'with' them. There needs to be a genuine commitment to processes in which services and planning are consumer driven with a focus on maximising strengths and, starting from a position that looks at the abilities of people and builds from there. There needs to be more emphasis on choice, control and independence with individuals as active participants rather than passive recipients. Using a model that combines a genuine commitment to Authentic Citizenship for people with a disability with service and planning based on Asset Based Community Development is a way of working to achieve this.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is development that is community driven rather than driven by external agencies. It identifies and mobilises local talents, skills and assets to uncover and utilise the strengths within communities as a means for sustainable development and to create positive and meaningful change from within. It focuses on abilities not disabilities, assets not deficits, builds projects around strengths not issues and recognises that communities have untapped resources rather than just unmet needs .

ABCD works because it strengthens communities by focussing on the positives and investing in its own assets, and:

- Is strengths based
- People working together
- Promotes positive thinking
- Builds shared understanding
- Aligns actions around shared goals
- Builds partnerships

'Every single person has capacities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given' (John McKnight, [www.bankofideas.com.au](http://www.bankofideas.com.au) ).

Fundamental to achieving this is:

- Empowering people with a disability and giving them a voice in deciding how resources will be used and services delivered
- Building a Government framework to achieve increased levels of independence and increased engagement through an ABCD approach to all policy development. All Government policies for people with a disability should be reviewed to build a focus on a strengths based approach as an inherent basis for action.
- Redefining the notion of assets to view not only infrastructure and finances, but the value and importance of the vast resource of people and the human capital that each person brings to the table
- Developing a system in which the measure of success is not driven primarily by the economic bottom line but that measures success by:
  - the benefit to the people
  - benefit to building the organisation's capacity
  - community based outcomes i.e. policy change, change in attitudes, more people engaged

This shift in focus from a predominately economic lens to a more person centred asset based community development approach empowers people, encouraging and enabling them to become less dependent on services and supports. The result of which is improved budget utilisation as resources previously directed to care and support are legitimately reduced and redirected into positive and proactive whole of community development.

- Providing community leadership development , and decentralised leadership
- Taking a less top down approach to decision making and creating genuine community conversations in which decisions are made through a collaborative process inclusive of all people and partners affected by the decision.
- Recognising that all partners around the table are equal and must include people with a lived experience of disability, a creative space that is real and the most real experience is the lived experience
- Development of services and projects in which the community is a genuine partner through the whole process from the idea to the realisation, evaluating along the way and asking what happened, what did we learn, now what?
- The process for genuine Community Conversations involving all partners at all stages is:
  - Converse
  - Engage
  - Collaborate
  - Master Vision

(Born,Paul. 2010. [www.seekingcommunity.ca](http://www.seekingcommunity.ca) )

Some easy to implement yet practical examples of how the ABCD model can be used to improve disability care and support include:

- Develop projects/programs and opportunities that enhance skills, build on existing strengths, develop positive social and community connection and acknowledge and increase resilience
  - Peers trained as 'buddies' to assist people to attain specific goals, overcome particular barriers, develop social connections and freindships
  - Encouraging circles of support based on common interests and goals
  - Improve access to the economic domain through education, employment, training and property ownership
  - Enable people with a disability to use their assets to give back to the community rather than be seen only as the recipients of support/welfare

- Encourage people to discover their own inner strengths and assets and how to maximise them
  - Build on existing skills to improve confidence
  - Consumer driven community education programs utilising lived experience
- Development of Community Reference Groups of people with a diverse range of lived experiences of disability for inclusion in all levels of government services planning and policy development
- Improving access to Transport by creating Community Passenger Networks for people who are transport disadvantaged. These could involve such initiatives as:
  - Agencies pooling vehicles and making them available to the network in down times
  - Cab sharing among people with a disability who have Access Cab vouchers where someone assists to coordinate small groups of like minded people going shopping or socialising etc at the same time. This will not only assist with transport but also development of informal networks and friendships. Enabling people with a disability to be less reliant on workers to provide transport and take them shopping for example but rather to maximise and utilise their independence and skills to go shopping in a group.
  - Volunteers using their own cars to provide transport to medical appointments etc. Volunteers would be matched to their 'clients' with a disability based on shared interests, locality and other attributes likely to encourage a genuine bond.
- Promote and adequately support and resource innovative ABCD models of practice which encourage people to strengthen their own resources and networks with projects such as
  - Friendly Visitor Buddies Program – There are many people with a disability in the community who are independent and do not need to be in a formalised program or service but want to access community activities such as football or movies and just need a friend or buddy to provide a small amount of support to do it.
  - Goal oriented mentoring programs designed for specific target groups i.e. people with Autism, people with mental illness, young people at risk of offending - where people with a lived experience help develop skills around self management and resilience in others. Importantly mentors and 'clients' need to be matched appropriately in terms of age, likes etc.
  - Short course programs to increase opportunities for independence - starting from a point that positively identifies existing skills and builds from there. Encouraging participants to discover or rediscover their own inner strengths and connect with the community working in partnership with agencies and employers.

Community conversations with people with a disability will no doubt reveal many other opportunities to improve service provision using this model.

The Productivity Commission enquiry into Long Term Disability Care and Support provides an opportunity to make significant changes to improve the lives of people with a disability. A genuine commitment to Authentic Citizenship and working from a model of Asset Based Community Development is a positive way towards achieving this.

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10/11/10

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[www.seekingcommunity.ca](http://www.seekingcommunity.ca)