

Families for Change

Promoting and defending the rights and interests of people with developmental disability.

ISSN 1833-7147

Spring 2008
Volume 3
Issue 7

family
ADVOCACY

Towards A Better Life: Re-framing Thoughts and Actions

The past 12 months have been busy and productive at Family Advocacy. We met with many families and workers from all over New South Wales, all of whom are endeavouring to find the right mix of supports. The workshops that were held during the year covered most of the milestones in a person's life: starting school, transitioning to high school, leaving school and finding work or meaningful leisure and on-going learning. Other sessions focussed on the development of circles of support and the true meaning of a home. All of the events run by Family Advocacy are underpinned by a theory that provides a comprehensive framework for how to help people with disability achieve a good life. How do we help people with disability to achieve their potential? How do we understand the experiences that have shaped their lives to date? What ideas can we draw on to go forward? This edition of *Families for Change* focuses on Social Role Valorisation (SRV) and how families can use it to improve the life of their family member with disability.

Human beings are complex creatures. We process information about our environment and the people in it, rapidly and continually and much of it is done unconsciously. Part of this process involves placing a value on various objects, ideas or people. We often give value to, or take value away, without thinking deeply about it.

This is the basis of SRV, a social science framework for understanding human relationships and the life experience of marginalised people, formulated by Dr Wolf Wolfensberger in the early 1980s. Wolfensberger, and his associates at the Syracuse University in New York, conceived the concept of SRV, based on the idea that, within any given society, some attributes and by association some people, are valued more highly than others.

The roles that people have are valued differently too.

We all have roles - work roles (teacher, office worker), relationship roles (mother, brother), civic roles (tax payer, voter) and leisure roles (football supporter, dancer). Most people gather many roles randomly over the course of their life, without the need for much consideration or effort.

Many of the roles people have are valued because they are associated with attributes such as wealth, competence, independence etc. But people with disability typically have fewer roles, or fewer roles that have positive value. People with disability might have the roles of patient, pension recipient or client - roles that our society doesn't value.

Valued roles open the door to new possibilities and opportunities.

People who have many roles and roles that are associated with wealth, competence, etc are likely to be more valued than a person with fewer roles that are linked to dependence and poverty. People without valued roles will find it harder to access those things that society calls the 'good things in life', things like a home, meaningful work, opportunities to meet people and form relationships, to have a positive reputation, to name but a few. Valued roles *open the door* to new possibilities and opportunities.

SRV is often perceived as an academic concept, but at its basis are ideas that we are all familiar with. In her article, *Acceptance and Belonging*, Jane Sherwin explores how to re-think the roles that a person with disability might have and how this can lead to greater acceptance in the community. John Armstrong provides a slightly more technical overview of how SRV might be used to bring about real change in the lives of people with disability in his article *What does Social Role Valorisation have to Teach Us About How Best to Support People With Disability?* Finally, Michael Kendrick describes the 'life making' potential of SRV and the positive impact it can have in a person's life in his article *SRV As A Resource for Seeking and Shaping The Good Life*.

Over the years there have been many theories that try to explain why some people in society are disadvantaged. These theories all have their strengths but, overtime, SRV has proved that when properly understood and applied, people do get access to the good things in life.



The Management, Committee and Staff of Family Advocacy wish you much happiness for the festive season and peace and empowerment in 2009!



Inside this issue:

Editorial:	1
Towards A Better Life: Reframing Thoughts and Actions	
Acceptance and Belonging: The Helpfulness of Being in Valued Roles	2
SRV As A Resource for Seeking and Shaping the Good Life	3
What Does Social Role Valorisation Have to Teach Us About How Best to Support People with Disability?	5

Acceptance and Belonging: The Helpfulness of Being in Valued Roles

Jane Sherwin

Jane Sherwin is a Queensland based consultant who has been involved in the lives of people with disability since the late 1970s. She is well regarded for her teaching and writing and has worked in government and community services in a range of management and direct service roles. Jane has been involved in social change efforts, particularly through her roles with Community Resource Unit Inc (CRU), including as Director of CRU until mid 2007. Jane is a Senior Social Role Valorisation (SRV) Trainer, having participated in the teaching, learning and application of SRV since the early 1990s. Jane finds SRV theory helpful in understanding how society and human services work, and in thinking about how to progress issues for people with disability. Jane is also a member of the Australian & New Zealand SRV Group.

One of the strongest wishes that a parent can make for their sons and daughters, with or without disability, is that they are happy and fulfilled in what they do and who they are with. This is at the core of wanting acceptance. Without acceptance, the pain of rejection is felt strongly by the son or daughter with disability and by those who love them. Finding ways to protect against the likelihood of rejection and increase the possibilities of accepting relationships is important.

Feelings of acceptance come from being acknowledged as someone who is intrinsically worthwhile and/or having characteristics that are seen as worthwhile. This could be as big as being in a role that allows someone to contribute to society, or it could be as small (yet no less important) as being admired for one's way of being in the world. Belonging is such a fundamental human need, and being accepted brings a sense of belonging. The majority of people need and want to belong to all sorts of groups and places such as families, friends, neighbourhoods, workplaces, clubs and interest groups. Belonging and feelings of deep acceptance are like being 'home' in a relationship. There is a sense of comfort within the relationship, and a sense of being safe and secure.

Acts of acceptance and their cousin, acts of tolerance, towards people who are marginalised, bring out the better qualities in each of us. These acts come from private thoughts and personal actions, but the benefits are more public: they lead to caring and compassionate communities. They lay judgemental thoughts and behaviours to rest. They bring peace between people.

Having a life of meaning and rich ordinariness is a central goal of SRV, and being in valued roles is one way that helps achieve this. The application of SRV principles helps us to assist ordinary citizens enact acceptance and tolerance.

How might valued roles encourage acceptance in the community? There are five things for family members and people with disability to think about.

1. *Acceptance comes from a changed perception about people with disability.* The deeply embedded prejudices about people with disability come from stereotypes about people with disability. These stereotypes are the negative roles that people with disability have been weighed down with throughout

Being in valued roles that are related to interests or talents reinforces the similarity between people.

the ages. They include the stereotypes that people with disability are children forever, worthless, useless, can't learn, sick, and a drain on our society. Therefore, SRV helps us understand that we need to challenge the preconceived ideas that ordinary citizens have about people with disability. We can do that in two ways: firstly, don't reinforce the ideas by even unwittingly treating people as if they are children forever, worthless, useless, and so on. Secondly, we can do this by supporting people to be in valued roles that show people in a positive light.

Changing perceptions is called 'popping people out' by John McGough, an American man who has Down Syndrome. He says that when people see him and his Down Syndrome features, they expect him to be a certain way: like other people with that syndrome, to be placid, to like music and animals, to never grow up, to never have intimate relationships, and to be a burden on the family. However, when people discover that he is a loved family member, a member of his local church choir, a talented artist who has exhibited and sold paintings, a part

time worker at a local grocery shop, a best friend of someone who is also a musician, and a member of a band, John believes that they get 'popped out'. They expected one thing based on preconceived ideas and stereotypes; they discover another. This challenge and discovery is because John is in valued roles.

2. *Being in valued roles that are related to interests or talents reinforces the similarity between people, rather than emphasising what is different.* It follows then, that it is helpful to assist the person to find roles that are truly authentic for them and which build on the gifts they bring to the world.

3. *Think roles, not activities.* If ordinary citizens see people being 'occupied', 'programmed' or 'minded' in the community, then they are likely to assume that this is all that people with disability can cope with, and that they need a special worker to be with them to do those things. This squeezes out the possibility of an ordinary citizen seeing themselves as someone the person could be spending time with and doing things with. Also, activities that aren't part of a genuine role and that are there for the sake of filling time, are likely to be empty and meaningless.

4. *Use ways that are typical, ordinary and valued to meet the needs of your son or daughter, or yourself.* Truly valued roles only occur in ordinary life. These are the roles related to home, work, relationships, study, hobbies, civic duties, and being generally out and about. Reflect on questions that start with 'How does anybody else of a similar age, gender and culture ...?' This will give clues to more specific strategies that assist someone to be in a valued role. So depending on what the desirable future of the person might be, the question could be such as: 'How does anybody else of a similar age, gender and culture tend to find flatmates?'; 'How does anybody else of a similar age, gender and culture typically spend a meaningful day?';

‘What are the range of valued ways that anybody else of a similar age, gender and culture celebrates their 18th birthday?’.

5. *Pay attention to image.* The messages that people send to the world about who they are come from a variety of sources such as how the person looks, who the person spends time with, their possessions, and where and what they spend their time

doing. This means helping people put ‘their best foot forward’. This also means paying attention to those things that are likely to lead to rejection by others, such as poor social habits or a down-at-heel appearance.

SRV does not offer any recipes for acceptance. What it does do is help us think about those things that are *likely* to

increase the possibility of acceptance and belonging. By paying attention to these things, it is likely to bring out the best in all of us: emphasising the characteristics of the person as a fellow human being with feelings, hopes, interests and gifts; assisting people to have access to better lifestyles; and bringing forth acts of acceptance in community members.

SRV As A Resource for Seeking and Shaping the Good Life

Michael J. Kendrick

Michael Kendrick is an independent, international consultant in human services and community work. He has worked in the disability, mental health and aged care fields for nearly thirty years and occupied a variety of roles including the Assistant Commissioner for Program Development with the Massachusetts government, the Director for the Institute for Leadership and Community Development and the Director of the Safeguards Project. He is an active public speaker and trainer as well as evaluator, consultant, and advisor to advocates, governments, agencies and community groups. He also writes extensively and many of his articles are available through Family Advocacy’s Inclusion Collection Library. He resides in Massachusetts.

The theory of Social Role Valorisation (SRV) is not one that families and most ordinary citizens will have come across, quite apart from seeing its usefulness and applying it. In fact, even a majority of professionals in the sector may have only heard about it and may themselves lack any meaningful comprehension of or competence with it. However, those that have had the good fortune to have been able to immerse themselves in it, typically find it to be hugely helpful to their efforts in regard to assisting people with disability to create and obtain a good life for themselves. In the interests of helping curious people gain the beginnings of an appreciation for what SRV can do to help with ‘life building’, a series of brief descriptions of the ways that SRV theory can help people make progress are offered. Each of these draws upon specific elements of the theory of SRV and illustrates how it can help impact on ‘life-making’ in practical ways. Nonetheless, what is offered here is a description of its potentially positive impacts, not a description of the theory itself.

The Importance Of Acquiring And Being Supported In Valued Social Roles

The world is full of experiences, opportunities and possibilities that, if they are properly tapped into, can mean that a person gets to enjoy life more richly and to fulfil their greater potential. However, if they cannot get to these experiences, then all of this will be lost. The means to get to these life giving experiences and opportunities are valued social roles. Roles are the vehicle through which a person gets to be part of community life and enjoy what

community life might offer. These roles can include, for example, friend, neighbour, club member, employee, sports fan, adventurer, athlete, relative, companion, travel mate and so on. These roles are usually not available, or in extremely short supply, in segregated settings for people who have disability. Consequently, a person who is segregated will never have the extent of life opportunities that one who is out and about in the larger community will have. Such roles can be consciously created for a given person even if they do not exist at present, as long as there are people who are supportive of this happening. The more one has a diversity of valued social roles, the more of life they can taste, embrace and reject depending upon whether these experiences are to their liking.

Being Granted Full Humanity And Personhood

One of the ways that people with disability get cheated out of a good life is that we act as if they do not deserve nor want *as full a life* as their non-disabled peers. Though we may be unaware of it, we extinguish countless life possibilities for people when we set our expectations for them too low because this conveys and confirms the message that ‘less than’ will have to do for them because, after all, they have a disability and the bottom line is that they should settle for less. This constitutes a profound and damaging mistake because it crushes a person’s life and possibilities. On the other hand, if one starts from the assumption that, irrespective of the person having disability, this person is as fully human.... in all ways..... as anyone alive

today, then we can properly appreciate all of the hope and possibility that comes when the fullest potential of all of life awaits to be tasted. It is important to not forget that being fully a person is a great gift, because it means that it is always possible to conceivably enjoy and appreciate any aspect of life providing that the appropriate support to do so is present. Taking up this view, that a person with disability is fully capable of enjoying any aspect of life that suits them, is much better than to take the opposite view that they should give up on life and settle for less. One road leads to a narrow diminished life and the other leads to the hope of a daily richness in living.

Proactively Pursuing Life Possibilities; Not Over-Fixating On The Person’s Impairments

When we focus on what people are not, or on what they cannot do, it blinds us to who they are and, even more importantly, who they might yet be. Most impairments that people live with can be offset to a large degree by good supports that take care of the things that the person cannot do for themselves. So, while people may be constrained to some extent by their disability, it is important to not become overly focused on this, as it will make it hard to concentrate on what could be possible in life for the person, particularly if the person gets the support they need. By focusing on a person’s gifts, assets, potentials, capacity to enjoy life and their many passions and interests, it is only a matter of time and diligence before some kind of lifestyle will begin to emerge for the person. On the other hand, by constantly using the presence of disability as an

excuse for not having or expecting a good life, we will talk ourself and others into a self defeating hopelessness. This is why it must become a habit with us to **not** give undue energy to the ways that disability creates limits for a person and instead shift our focus and energy towards what is still possible in the person's life and what we can do about realising that potential. By doing so, life and its many enjoyments become closer rather than farther away.

Seeing And Meeting The Person's Needs In Typical Ways

A great danger exists when we make the mistake of believing that people with disability cannot get their needs met in largely the same way that other people do. This is because it leads to us setting people with disability aside from others in so called 'special' places and programs, as if these are the only way that they will get what they need in life. More often than not, they will get much less. Further, they will be harmed if they are denied the chance to get the 'real thing'. Why we must look to using the same resources as people without disability, is that these actually do meet the needs of countless ordinary people. It is true that people with disability may require some support to take advantage of these, but this should not be a reason not to take advantage of them. For instance, we do not need special clothing stores for people with disability when we have perfectly good shops already. The same could be said about 'regular' gyms, choirs, sports leagues, knitting groups, churches, airlines, homes, jobs and all manner of other 'regular' solutions to our needs and that of millions of others. This is because they can actually meet our needs and so, therefore, it is crucial that people with disability get to take full advantage of these. Undoubtedly some of these regular and normal ways of meeting one's needs will lead us to some people who are less accepting and welcoming of people with disability, but these kinds of people can change in time as they relax and come to be more comfortable with the newcomer who happens to have disability.

Sharing Life With All People

There is a theory that claims that people with disability could only be comfortable and secure if they lived out there lives 'with their own kind'. This overlooks the fact that most people with lifelong disability actually grow up and live quite comfortably within families in which they are the only person with disability. They most certainly can and do enjoy their lives and relationships not only with family, but also with all manner of people that they like and feel comfortable with. So, the real issue in whether people can get along with others is not disability, but rather compatibility.

People with disability are people like everyone else and so will quite naturally feel comfortable with and enjoy people that they find likeable and good company.

The more we emphasise this, the more we will begin to realise that it is the qualities of people that matter in congenial relationships, not whether they have or do not have disability. Whether these relationships occur in work, leisure, home or community groups may not matter as long as the time spent with people is pleasant and supportive. In fact, there are all sorts of instances where people with disability do not get along with other people with disability. This is not because

When we concentrate upon the gifts of people, we enable these to be noticed and to find expression in everyday life.

of their disability at all, but rather their lack of compatibility. So, when we focus on this, we will see that congenial and friendly people of all kinds are actually 'their own kind' if they end up getting along well. Since there is obviously a wealth of lovely people in this world, it is important to be sure that people with disability get all the chances possible to meet people whose company they enjoy.

Belonging To Groups That Share One's Interests And Passions

People with disability can usually have and enjoy any life interest that others also are attracted to. Similarly, when people share in a common passion or interest, they naturally gravitate to groups that are engaged in that interest. In the process, they not only get to share a passion, they also form bonds of friendship and comradeship stemming from the things they love and place considerable personal importance on. In this way, they find a place of belonging amongst others and the ability to say that they are a member and one of many. This helps form identity, can often provide status and typically, leads to various valued social roles within the group - and possibly in relation to others who are not part of the group. Further, others will also get to know and appreciate them and this will provide for all manner of relationship ties, including many lasting friends. It is true that facilitating such opportunities has its challenges, particularly in regard to groups that are wary of newcomers and slow to welcome them, but these are natural enough inhibitions that may be overcome with time and dedicated facilitation.

Contributing To Life

Life need not only be about what others may do or not do. It can also be about discovering within yourself ways that you can give back to life and to the people and communities with whom you live. When we concentrate upon the gifts of people, we enable these to be noticed and to find expression in everyday life. All people have qualities and capacities that can add value and enrichment to the lives of others. When these gifts of people with disability are overlooked or remain undernourished and underdeveloped, we will be the poorer for it. So, it is important that we focus on people with disability and the contributions that they both want to and can make to life.

Having A Unique Life, Well Suited To The Person

It is a paradox that we are all so similar as human beings and yet, at the same time, we are all distinctly unique people. People with disability are every bit as unique and diverse and when their uniqueness is fostered and allowed its natural expression, then it becomes possible for a person to seek out and embrace a life and lifestyle that most optimally suits them as a person. Of course, the better the fit of one's lifestyle to one's personality and preferences, the happier most people will be. It is important to most people to be the designers and decision-makers of their own lives and to be able to pursue the directions in life that most closely align with one's ultimate purposes in life. It is no different if you have disability and the satisfactions are exactly the same when you can be your own person.

Not Allowing Vulnerabilities To Be The Reason To Deny A Person A Good Life

It is true that many people with disability may live with vulnerabilities that are more intense and worrisome than others might face. It would also be irresponsible to neglect these vulnerabilities. Fortunately, it is also possible to constructively offset such vulnerabilities with intentional safeguards that are well matched to the precise concerns that are present. Should this happen, then most of normal life can and should go on for the person much as it does for others. However, if such vulnerabilities are ignored, supported poorly or are overly emphasised, there is a risk that the healthy, satisfying and vibrant lifestyles that can be lived, even if one lives with serious vulnerabilities, will be threatened. Vulnerability is not a reason to not pursue a full life, as the enjoyment of life is the same in its essence whether you have or do not have vulnerabilities to contend with.

SRV Theory As A Guide To Assembling A Good Life

SRV theory is not a panacea, nor was it ever said to be. Life will be a challenge whether one has disability or not. However, if one is poorly advised on what it takes to make a

good life, then it is possible to miss many of the real opportunities that exist to do this. So, the best way to see the role of SRV, is as a body of advice about how people with disability can obtain fulfilling lives and address their diverse and unique potentials

as human beings. In this, SRV theory has much to offer, as can be seen in the results it can lead to if employed properly. In this way, SRV theory is wise counsel.

What Does Social Role Valorisation Have to Teach Us About How Best to Support People with Disability?

John Armstrong

Having been introduced to Social Role Valorisation (SRV) in the early 80s, John went on to train and receive recognition as a Senior SRV Trainer with Dr Wolfensberger and the Training Institute in Syracuse New York. Since 1991, he has worked as a self-employed consultant across Australia and New Zealand, conducting training, consultancy and evaluation and has worked closely with many family members in problem solving and developing strategies for a better life for people with disability.

John has a long involvement in Citizen Advocacy and is the inaugural chair of Citizen Advocacy Australia – a national fund raising body for Citizen Advocacy programs. His background is in education, with specific emphasis on education to Aboriginal people and people with hearing impairment, intellectual disability and autism.

Sometimes the focus on people's impairments obscures the realisation that they are also devalued by their society and community. *Devaluation* brings social repercussions to people's situations that can be more impactful and pervasive than the intrinsic impairments that occupy much of our attention.

This article introduces the reader to the implications of social devaluation and proposes a set of strategic responses, utilising substantial empirical evidence taken from the fields of education, psychology and social science, especially role theory.

Devaluation is the name given to the negative judgment *made by others* about the relative worth of another person or class of people. The capacity for devaluation has been present across all time and historic periods. The nature and direction of devaluation in a culture is significantly influenced by the prevailing social values that indicate, or even dictate, what qualities people in that culture must have to become valuable or desirable (beauty, wealth, competence, youthfulness, independence etc). The opposites of such qualities are regarded negatively (ugliness, age, illness, incompetence, dependence etc) and thus anyone *seen* to embody those negative qualities becomes devalued, at least to some extent. People seen to contravene *important* social values or *many* social values will likely be more severely devalued, and especially so if there are no apparent positive qualities observed, like some valued history, skill or association to others.

Thus when considering a particular group of people, it will be important to know in what ways that group is likely to be judged negatively or be otherwise vulnerable. In addition, it is important to realise what *pre-existing* ideas may exist in a culture about a group of people that act as an additional

...the more roles a person has, and the more valued are those roles, the more chance a person has of experiencing the 'good things in life

risk for them. People with an intellectual disability have long had a mixture of positive, but particularly negative images and ideas held about them. Some negative *expectations* are that people will be slow, will display inappropriate emotions, have clumsy movements and childish interests, be easily distracted, tend to be gullible, as well as stare and gape, dress oddly and with poor grooming and communicate with little or indistinct speech.

Some of the assumed *roles* fitting people with an intellectual disability might include: eternal child, village idiot, sex offender (especially against children), arsonist, clumsy clod.

When looking at these two lists (one being the *expectations* about people and the other

the actual *roles* ascribed to people) one begins to realise how much risk people with a disability face, if they are presented to society in even the slightest way that conforms to any of this and the need to ensure that families or a support service or worker does not unwittingly reinforce an already existing negative stereotype or vulnerability surrounding that group.

Valued people very typically respond in negative ways to devalued people. Low status invites and 'legitimises'* bad treatment. The bad treatment has many universal features and is so detrimental that Wolfensberger¹ uses the metaphor of "wounds" to describe them. For instance, it is very common for devalued people to become rejected because of their low status. This rejection produces behavioural responses that include casting devalued people into negative roles and locating them into environments that convey negative images. The rejection is compounded by locating people away from others where freely given relationships are replaced by paid ones. Authorities take control of every aspect of their life including moving people around arbitrarily so that they lose contact and continuity with family, friends and even possessions. The experience of having so little expected of you leads to trifling investments in meaningless activities to the point of "life wasting." Yet people persistently wait for something beneficial to happen to them. Historically the bad treatment has resulted in people being neglected and maltreated to the point that one's very life is in peril.

If one has received *many* wounds and from an *early age*, the impact can be devastating and even life defining. That is, one may become known through one's poverty or by one's negative role(s) and abandonment from familiar community. Individuals with these experiences are likely to respond with sadness or rage and can see life only through their own experiences. The tremendous sense of insecurity and distrust is compounded by problematic testing of relationships and pre-occupation with past relationships or fantasising about relationships that may have never existed. People are prone to become irrational and impulsive and some of these problems (like talking about oneself all the time or insatiably seeking contact), can lead to even further devaluation and rejection from others.

A sensitive analysis of the wounds of people will bring to light a more adaptive response to people's circumstances than most of the typical assessments and checklists that are commonly given. Clearly, our first response is to become keenly aware of the potential for devaluation even from ourselves and the precarious social position of people with disability who face relentless exposure to wounding events. We must use our best judgment and only accept actions that prevent, reverse and compensate for the disadvantaged position people are in.

What is an antidote to devaluation? What could be so powerful as to both alter the perception of the observer and ensure people get a good life?

The strongest indication of a person's status is via their social role(s). Thus if one wants to increase the value of a person in the eyes of others – and improve their resultant treatment – one would have to change the value of the role or change their role to one of greater value. This concept has been called Social Role Valorisation, or SRV. Indeed, the aim of this strategy is to enable a person to experience the “good things in life”² that others enjoy; a home, security, to be appreciated, to be able to work or contribute to others, to have a positive reputation, a chance to grow and develop, to have a range of roles and relationships, to belong, and many other aspects that most people agree are the things we most appreciate in a good life.

In fact, the more roles a person has, and the more valued are those roles, the more chance a person has of experiencing the “good things in life”. (Wolfensberger, W., 1996)

Negative ideas are not the only stereotypes held about people with disability – there are positive ones as well. For example, society also holds impressions of people as being trusting, innocent, open and spontaneous, telling things as they see it, finding joy in simple things, bringing gentleness from others, and roles like compassionate consoler, honest and forthright speaker, the moral conscience of others, ice-breaker at gatherings. Is it

We must use our best judgment and only accept actions that prevent, reverse and compensate for the disadvantaged position people are in.

possible to think about ways that these positive impressions could be enhanced and built upon? How might that be done?

Messages and roles, to and about people, are communicated via the same “channels” (Wolfensberger, W., 1998) That is, they are communicated via:

- the physical setting people are in;
- the social contexts (the people one is placed with);
- the activities and other uses of time;
- the appearance of people;
- the language used to and about people; and
- a range of other image sources (staff appearance, names of a service, logos, and funding sources).

Each of these occurs in daily life – but they also function within human service contexts to signal to people about how they (and others) should behave. In fact you could use these six channels to assess what kind of message and role expectations any support service is presently giving people. As a rule of thumb, the service will usually be beneficial if these channels combine in ways that match valued cultural practices. The more a support service diverges from valued cultural practices, the more likely that negative expectations and impressions will be conveyed about people using the service, especially if they are already suspected of being devalued.

Thus a powerful component of an effective service is to approximate, as much as

possible, how similar needs of people would be met in the valued parts of the culture. In other words to educate as the culture does, to receive health care, work, friends, a home as other valued people do. We often talk about using ‘generic services’ where ever we can, because they are also used by ordinary people and are therefore usually typical of valued cultural practices. Generic arrangements also tend to be safer than segregated environments. As such, they significantly enhance the status and role of devalued people who use them and dramatically increase the chances that they will be seen more favourably even to the extent of having contact, interactions and relationships with valued people. The more distant a service response is from how the rest of the culture operates, the less likely people with disability will be seen as like other people and this perception potentially freezes them out of ordinary contact with their community.

These perspectives allow us to examine our own thinking. We talk about needing ‘*person centeredness*’, ‘*flexible*’ and ‘*individualised*’ services, amongst many other buzz words that abound in the disability sector. But what do we really get? Are we just going along with the way things have always been done, failing to really see the true impact of actions?

How do we change the lives of people with disability? Where do we start? Organisational consultant and author, Stephen Covey, writes “Before one starts, one should have the end in mind.”³ What kind of life might an individual have if they received the right supports? The answer is almost always – an ordinary life. Seeking an *optimistically realistic* outlook about a person's future allows us to consider:

- what supports are needed;
- *where* might they come from;
- can they be offered in unpaid/*informal* ways;
- can we utilise services that *valued people use*;
- can they be used *when* they are typically used by others;
- what *skills* and *images* are needed by someone in these settings;
- what *roles* are we trying to develop with a person?

Not everything will be possible immediately, but having a vision of what

* Nothing truly legitimises bad treatment. But because humans judge situations largely through what they perceive, low status, when applied to people, acts as a legitimising force, excusing and virtually inviting people to behave poorly and to do so without censure from their own conscience or by the conscience of others.

* It's not wrong that staff and family needs get met by service arrangements. It becomes a moral problem though, when the needs of the service recipient are sacrificed so that only the needs of others are met.

life could be like provides a powerful – even essential requirement – for creating a better life. For one thing, a vision allows us to examine our immediate goals and priorities and assess to what extent they contribute to the future life we imagined possible. If our present priorities contribute to a better future – then our initiative may be said to be ‘relevant’ to that person’s future. If it doesn’t contribute it will not be just irrelevant but may even be life wasting perhaps because it is meeting the needs of others, like staff or family members*.


It will be important to also know the current roles of the people with disability. A role inventory can be done; listing all the daily roles the individual has, including those that are less frequent, any special interest roles and roles within their house/neighbourhood. Typically, the role inventories of devalued people are smaller and contain more negative roles compared with valued counterparts. Yet once known, this inventory becomes the building blocks for ‘valorising’ the person’s roles, meaning that we pursue new possibilities: to build new positive roles, or upgrade existing roles, or make a negative role less negative, or a combination of these. The roles that are built create the life we imagined possible, and will transform the persons standing, opportunities and reputation in the eyes of others.

It won’t happen overnight, but neither will it happen if we fail to act.

SRV has some helpful strategies that guide real change in our expectations of what is possible for people with disability and their families. It can be an awesome force for really changing lives.

References

1. Wolfensberger, W.1998. *A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services* (3rd Ed.). Syracuse NY: Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency (Syracuse University) (Obtain from CRU: clu@clu.org.au)
2. Wolfensberger, W., Thomas, S. & Caruso, G. (1996). *Some of the Universal “Good Things of life” Which the Implementation of Social Role Valorization Can be Expected to Make More Accessible to Devalued People. The International Social Role Valorization Journal* 2 (2) 12-14.
3. Covey, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Business Library, Victoria Australia, 1989.

The Odyssey... 

a journey of enrichment and possibility

October 2007
Sydney NSW 2000, Australia

**The Odyssey Conference DVD
is available for purchase!**

It features presentations made by International and Australian speakers at the Odyssey Conference held in October 2007.

Be inspired and informed!
\$15.00 for families, \$25.00 for professionals /organisations
(plus postage and handling)

Call Family Advocacy on 02 9869 0866
(1800 620 588 for non Metropolitan NSW callers)
or email: familyadvocacy@family-advocacy.com

family
A D V O C A C Y

family
A D V O C A C Y

If undeliverable, return to:
The Institute for Family Advocacy
and Leadership Development
PO Box 502
Epping NSW 1710
Tel: (02) 9869 0866
Freecall: 1800 620 588
Fax: (02) 9869 0722
Email:
familyadvocacy@family-advocacy.com

We're on the web!
www.family-advocacy.com

Family

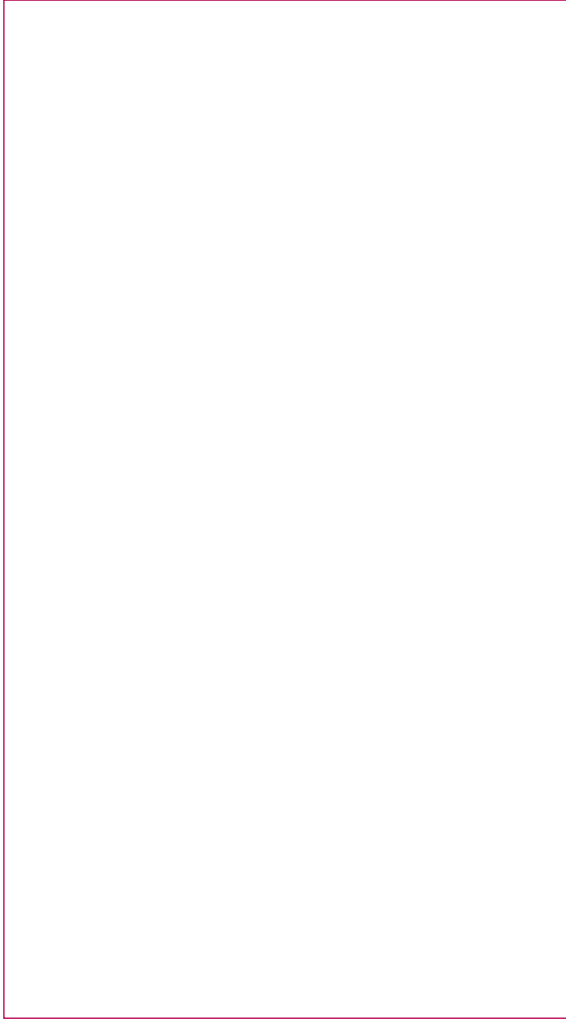
Groups which actively and powerfully shape society and within which there are unique individuals who share challenges, changes, struggles, failures, and successes... and sometimes dreams.

Advocacy

Standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged - and speaking out on their behalf in a way that represents the best interests of that person.

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

PRINT POST
PP 255003/03072



Please advise us of any change of address etc:

Name: _____
Address: _____

Postcode: _____
Tel: _____
Fax: _____
Email: _____

Please dispose of plastic wrapper thoughtfully