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Introduction

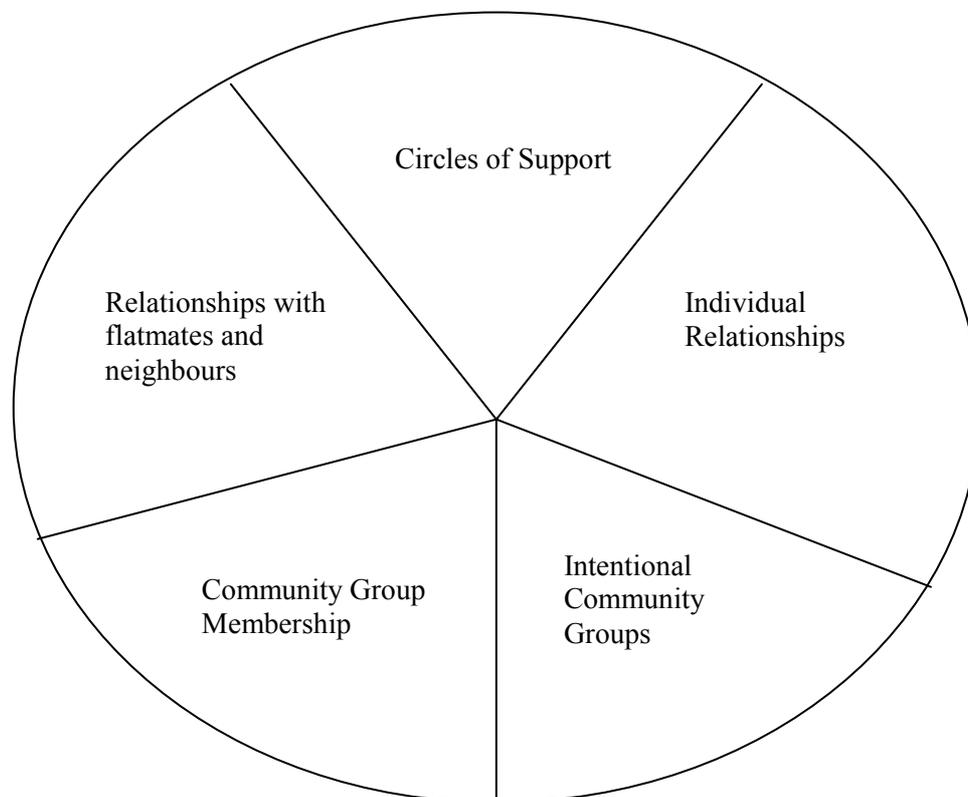
This booklet has been produced by Community Living Program (CLP) for release in Disability Action Week 2006. The stories were sourced from interviews with constituents and community members.

Community Living Program has worked with people with intellectual disabilities since 1987. The stories of people with intellectual disabilities are often ones of community exclusion. People may experience rejection, isolation, loneliness, boredom and a lack of fulfilling opportunities in their lives and in their communities. Because of this, people with intellectual disabilities are over-represented in many areas of social disadvantage, such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and the criminal justice system. They may have significant physical and mental health problems and be victims of exploitation, abuse and assault.

CLP believes that people with intellectual disabilities have a right to be included in the community and to feel valued and able to share their gifts. Relationships are central to community inclusion.

CLP aims to work alongside others to create a community who accept people with intellectual disabilities. This booklet is about the impact of positive relationships and positive community connections on people's individual lives. To assist us to understand the different ways people with intellectual disabilities can build relationships, CLP has developed the following relationship framework.

Relationship Framework



Community Group Membership

One of the ways to make relationships in the community is to join an existing community group. While joining community groups can often be very difficult for people with intellectual disabilities, we believe that many community members have the capacity and willingness to welcome people with intellectual disabilities into their groups. CLP workers support people to make initial connections with community groups.



Carolyn, Belinda, Teresa & Tracy

Shannon's and Harry's Story

Computers 4 Kids began in 1999 when the ANZ bank upgraded their computer systems and donated all their old machines to the Rotary Club. Rotary sent the donated computers on to what was then known as the 'Donations in Kind' project, which was operated by a group of volunteers who worked to refurbish the computers. However, the project ran into problems with licensing restrictions for the computer software. The group approached Microsoft about supporting their efforts to refurbish the computers with approved software and, in early 2004, Computers 4 Kids became a Microsoft Approved Refurbisher. In August 2004 they entered a partnership with Hendra Secondary College, which gave Computers 4 Kids a permanent venue from which to operate. The project is now producing in excess of five hundred quality refurbished computer systems annually. These computers are made available to disadvantaged students of all ages, both locally and overseas. The work is all done with volunteer labour and is made possible by donations from local businesses and the financial support of Nundah Rotary.

According to Computers 4 Kids:

"Harry, the father of the project, is our Project Coordinator, member of the Management Committee, and he is still a kid at heart. Three quarters through his Diploma in IT ... he has temporarily deferred his study to put the time needed into refurbishing the computers needed to fulfil the requests. As Project Coordinator, Computers 4 Kids is Harry's baby, and has been since 2000 when Harry joined the team and began his rise up through the ranks at Computers 4 Kids. Harry comes from a background of small business, and he currently runs a number of small businesses, including computer reselling and repairing."

"Shannon volunteers his time at a local community centre to assist with computer education. Recommended to us by the sponsors of that project he has become a star performer at C4K. He is always cheerful and eager to learn. He is also the biggest stirrer on the Hendra Campus and is responsible for the poor state of Harry and Debbie's blood pressure."

- www.computers4kids.com.au

Shannon has been working with Harry at Computers 4 Kids for approximately nine months. Shannon's CLP worker, Paul, heard about Harry through the Victory Community Centre, and thought that he and Shannon would get along well, due to a similar interest in computers and technology. Paul spoke to Harry, and took Shannon over to meet him. Paul went to the first few meetings and supported Shannon in his contact with Harry.

According to Paul, the relationship with Harry has been very beneficial for Shannon. *"It has provided him with a sense of belonging and achievement. It has also given him a chance to show his strengths and skills by doing something he is passionate about."*

The relationship has also given him a chance to contribute to his community by re-building computers for people who are less fortunate than himself. *“In the past he has gone to others and helped them fix their computers in his own private time,”* Paul says. *“Shannon’s work with Harry gives him a sense of pride and a purpose to his day.”* Shannon has formed positive relationships with Harry and some of the other people who work there. *“This means that he is less isolated and provides him with a sense of self-worth,”* Paul says. *“Ultimately this relationship has given Shannon the confidence to aspire to find goals in his life.”*

Harry and Shannon refurbish computers for kids who are disadvantaged, with computers going to local and overseas schools. Shannon says, *“I enjoy going to work with Harry and would go more days if it was possible. I wasn’t doing anything much before this relationship began. Harry is a nice guy, good to work with and someone with a good sense of humour who likes to joke around.”* Harry says, *“Shannon is a good guy, tells jokes and has lots of friends”.* They mostly have a working relationship, but they also sometimes see each other outside work hours as well.

Shannon goes to the centre from 10am to 1pm on Thursdays and from 8am to 1pm on Saturdays, sometimes staying till 4pm. On Thursdays he is working with a couple of other people, and on Saturdays there are often up to six others there. He is slowly forming relationships with these other people, one in particular. *“Shannon enjoys coming to work so much that he has ‘booked’ Thursday and Saturday up in his mind,”* Harry says. *“Shannon has helped us with getting new volunteers – he brings his friends along sometimes. The relationships with the other volunteers are what keep him coming back – he enjoys it for the connections and role models.”* It has been a great way for Shannon to expand his social networks and supports.

Harry has been running theory lessons for another volunteer, and recently Shannon has shown an interest in becoming involved too. Harry has noticed some significant changes in Shannon since he first started working. *“He has completely turned his attitude around and worked his issues out. Now he just wants to try and help everyone out,”* Harry says. Also, Harry thinks that Shannon has potential. *“I often give him small supervisory roles, for example, ‘You are in charge of ... today’.”*

Harry says, *“I have run this program for six years as a volunteer. The other volunteer workers I have had have been ordinary. Shannon turned up and I was surprised at how good he was with computers”.* According to Harry, *“Shannon is very good for self-taught. He just goes away and tries stuff till he gets it right. Once I have shown him something, it is there for life”.* Harry says that one of the best things about Shannon is that he has realised that work isn’t always fun. *“He is always keen to volunteer for the less interesting jobs, such as bringing in a new lot of computers.”*

Shannon says, *“Harry has had an impact on my life by teaching me about computers. He also provides support, guidance and is a role model for me. My long-term dream is to work in a computer shop and continue the working relationship with Harry”.* Harry has aspirations for Shannon in the future. Computers 4 Kids will soon sponsor a Work for the Dole scheme, initially for a period of six months, which will provide on-the-job training for up to ten people. Harry says, *“I would really like him to shine on the first round of the Work for the Dole activity. If there is a second round, I would like him to take a supervisory role”.*

Shannon is now happy to have contact with Harry without Paul's support, and talks about him often. Harry is also very happy with Shannon. *"Over the last few weeks he has been very good! He just got his Blue Card approved, so he should be very happy. If I had ten of him, that would be no problem at all!"*



Shannon and Harry

Individual Relationships

Individual Relationships are mutual, positive and respectful relationships that exist between constituents and community members and/or volunteers. Many individual relationships begin through the CLP volunteer program. The program matches constituents with volunteers in terms of their personalities, hobbies, interests, and skills. By 'community member', we mean people from a constituent's community who have developed a mutual and positive relationship with a CLP constituent and who support that person to participate and be included in their local community.



Katalin & Sarah

Susan's and Kerri's Story

Susan has known Kerri for two years. In that time, they have seen each other about once a month. Their relationship began through the CLP volunteer program after Susan had said to her worker that she wanted to meet more friends. The desire to meet more people also drew Kerri to CLP. *"I have no family in Brisbane," Kerri says, "and I wanted to do something meaningful and worthwhile to keep me busy on lonely days. I saw an advert in the paper for a meeting at CLP for people who thought they might be interested in volunteering. I went to the meeting and signed up with the volunteer coordinator".* Kerri was matched with Susan.

The relationship developed slowly, at a pace that was comfortable for Susan. *"I met Susan the first time with Trina (Susan's worker). Susan was very shy and anxious and needed Trina's support. We had lunch together, and then made a time to meet up a month later."* Susan says, *"During the first meeting we went to Sizzlers for lunch. Kerri brought some photos of her cats".*

Kerri says, *"The next meeting was just the two of us. Initially, I had to work hard to gain Susan's confidence as we didn't have a trusting relationship at the time. However, since then it's been great to watch Susan's confidence grow – she now opens up and asks me questions".*

Susan has now broadened her social networks, and has become a part of Kerri's life. *"I introduced Susan to my husband, and she has been over to our house and met my dog and fish. I also showed her where I worked and Susan was able to pop in sometimes to say hello. I gradually let her a little bit into my world. My husband comes along with us on some of the outings, as him and Susan get along really well."* According to Susan, *"Kerri helps me to do well at work. She also comes in and buys plants from me sometimes".* Susan works in the nursery at Help Industries, in west Brisbane.

Kerri has met Susan's family as well, and really likes them. *"Sometimes when we go on outings, Susan invites her mum to come along too. I also invited the whole family to my wedding last year. They all had a great time – Susan was dancing on the dance-floor for the whole night!"* Kerri's family and friends welcomed Susan and her family as they see them as Kerri's friends. *"I was very excited about the wedding,"* Susan says. *"I also met some of Kerri and her husbands' family."*

Susan and Kerri go on outings together. Susan says, *"We often go to the movies and bowling and we have been out for dinner at Southbank. Kerri enjoys taking photos of us doing stuff together".* Kerri says, *"We go bowling, to the movies, to the markets and out for lunch. I always ask Susan what she wants to do, and involve her in the decision-making. We also often invite Susan's sister Carolyn to come along as well".*

It has turned out to be a very successful relationship. Susan says, *"Kerri makes me happy all the time. We've never had a fight and she is a lovely friend. I always look forward to seeing her".* Kerri says, *"Even from very early on, I felt like a friend as opposed to a volunteer. The whole family are really lovely people. I don't consider Susan to have a disability – I just see her as a lovely young lady who has become my friend".*



Kerri, Susan & Carolyn

Katalin's and Desleigh's Story

Katalin has known Desleigh for several years. Desleigh expressed an interest in joining the CLP volunteer program, and she was matched with Katalin.

As would be expected at the beginning of any new relationship, there were a few problems. *"At first,"* Desleigh says, *"it was challenging, as Katalin didn't trust me. She used to run away a lot, even if I turned my back for a second. However, it only took two or three visits for Katalin to feel fairly comfortable with me, and now she is fine"*.

Katalin said that the first things she noticed about Desleigh were that, *"She is very kind, kind-hearted, not mean, likes laughing and singing"*. Sometimes the two of them sing together – mostly songs from Katalin's favourite musical, 'The Sound of Music'. *"We play jokes on each other and tease each other – it is good fun"*. Desleigh says, *"We have water pistol fights and have a lot of fun together"*. Katalin says, *"The best thing about Desleigh is that she is good company, gets me out of my unit, and we have a good laugh and we tease each other. She also helps me when I am upset and she is someone I can talk to. She also gives me hugs all the time, which I like. There aren't many people in my life that give me hugs"*.

According to Desleigh, the best things about this friendship are *"... the fun times. Katalin is also brilliant therapy for me – she makes me laugh a lot and can see the humour in everything. She is great at cheering people up"*. Desleigh is also able to speak to Trina (Katalin's CLP worker) if she is worried about her. Katalin is happy about this, as she trusts both Desleigh and Trina. *"Desleigh encourages me when I am upset. She helps me to keep positive."* Desleigh says, *"Katalin always says to me that laughter is better than crying"*.

Katalin looks forward to her outings with Desleigh. *"We go to Shorncliffe or Redcliffe for fish and chips. We sometimes go to the movies, shopping and to Desleigh's house. Also, we went swimming at Sandgate once and went on the waterslide, it was lots of fun! One day we drove to Southbank after literacy class, and had dinner - fish and chips - and went on the Citycat. I wouldn't normally get to do stuff like that if Desleigh didn't take me."*

They talk on the phone often. Katalin says, *"It is good to have Desleigh to talk to and she is someone to have a laugh with. We tease each other on the phone"*. Desleigh says, *"Sometimes we just hang out at my house and watch DVDs, and Katalin plays with my pets"*. This is great for Katalin because, although she is a huge animal lover, she does not have any pets of her own.

Katalin says that one of the best things about her friendship with Desleigh is the chance to do things that she wouldn't otherwise get to do. *"Before meeting Desleigh, I had never been on a holiday. We went to Caloundra for two nights – we had a BBQ on the beach, sat on the balcony and went shopping."* They have talked about going on a holiday together again in the future, maybe back to the Sunshine Coast or down to the Gold Coast.

Katalin has also met Desleigh's family. *"We went to Desleigh's mum and dad's after fish and chips. I was shy and nervous but they were nice and said it was all right. I went shopping once with Desleigh and her mum."* Katalin sees Desleigh's parents sometimes and has also met her sister. This helps Katalin get used to meeting new people and broaden her social networks. According to Desleigh, *"My parents adore Katalin. They often invite us both for a home-cooked lunch. They have really embraced her"*.

Katalin thinks that it has worked so well between her and Desleigh because, *"Desleigh understands people with disabilities. Also, she doesn't tell me to shut up or not to laugh. Other people tell me how I should behave, but Desleigh likes me the way that I am!"*

Desleigh has also got a great deal out of the friendship. *"I think we were meant to be together. I feel like Katalin has helped me more than I've helped her. I think this friendship was just meant to happen."*

Katalin calls Desleigh both her volunteer worker and her friend. *"Desleigh says that I am a good friend to her. It makes me feel happy that I make Desleigh happy. Desleigh is a lovely and kind girl and I love her very much. I want us to stay friends forever!"* Desleigh says, *"I would like to maintain this friendship, and to see more of Katalin. We have fun and have so many laughs. I think we have a special bond. Katalin is very special to me and I often tell her that I love her a lot"*.



Katalin's picture

Joe's, JoAnn's and Dave's Story

Joe has an intellectual and psychiatric disability and he has been a constituent of CLP for over 10 years. He lives with a lot of limitations, and needs significant support to participate and be included in the community. His relationship with Dave and JoAnn has helped him be a part of his local community. They have been marvellous supporters of Joe and truly value his caring and fun personality. They say that they learn something new from Joe every time they see him.

JoAnn and Dave met Joe over five years ago when they were both working at Foresters ANA Mutual Society. Joe was doing his art work there, his 'faces' (like the one on the cover of this booklet). JoAnn and Dave were working at Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative (NCEC), based at the Foresters ANA office, and they were also heavily involved in the Nundah community. *"Joe used to come by the co-op and we got talking. He then began to drop in especially to see us. Dave then put Joe on to help him out with a building job with the NCEC, which he got paid for."* Joe later worked for the NCEC feeding the chooks and washing cars.

"The relationship developed little by little but has got much closer over the years," JoAnn says. According to JoAnn, the best thing about Joe is his sense of humour. *"He just laughs out loud at everything,"* she says. He also regularly makes funny comments. Dave tells the story of how they took Joe on an outing one day to do lawn work. They walked there and carried the tools. Joe said *"Next time we're calling a damn cab!"* The three of them share a sense of fun and humour.

Joe says he sees Dave and JoAnn as his other Mum and Dad. When JoAnn and Dave began the Shared Meal group, they especially wanted Joe to attend. The difficulty was that Joe needed support while he was at Shared Meal, and also help to get home. CLP workers could make sure he got there, so JoAnn and Dave were quite happy to support him at Shared Meal as well as drive him home after it was finished. He now looks forward to 'The FEAST', and to seeing his friends.

JoAnn and Dave spend a fair bit of time with Joe. *"He watches TV with us and often brings his own movies,"* JoAnn says. *"They invite me over to their house. We have also been to the movies. We went to see The Mummy Returns,"* Joe says. *"They also took me to the airport to watch the planes."*

According to JoAnn, one of the best outings they've ever been on was when they took Joe to Nudgee beach. *"He hadn't been to the beach for a really long time. He really liked walking in the mud, as the tide was out, and really enjoyed himself and laughed a lot. After they left he asked, 'Can we walk on water again soon?' There were also people who were walking horses on the beach. Joe gets quite nervous around big animals, but he still went up and patted one of the horses and he was very excited. 'That's the first time I've ever patted a horse!' he said."*

"Joe keeps us in line and out of trouble," JoAnn says. *"It makes us feel good to know that we are doing something for someone else,"* Dave adds. *"JoAnn and Dave are lovely people. They are my best friends,"* Joe says.



Joe, JoAnn and Dave

Relationships With Flatmates and Neighbours

Relationships with neighbours, flatmates and visitors are important to people with intellectual disabilities, as they often find living alone a negative experience and are prone to loneliness, isolation, boredom and feelings of rejection. When people are isolated, they can develop significant physical and mental problems and are more likely to be vulnerable to exploitation. People's home-space relationships can be enhanced to improve their quality of life and to encourage shared home activities with flatmates, neighbours, and friends.

Friends and Neighbours

We all come together
In all sorts of weather,
Friends and Neighbours
United as one.

It is special to me
The things that I see,
Within my neighbourhood
We are a friendly community.

There's Eileen who lives above
And Paolo too,
There's Elisha and her husband
And me, that makes a few.

Next door there's Greg, Jack,
Winston and Carel,
Who are mighty fine
And friendly as well.

On the other side
Carmel, Andrew, Eric and Shaun,
Have a lot of fun
Playing games on their lawn.

We share our concerns
With one another
And we are there
For each other

They are all wonderful people
My neighbours and friends
And I am lucky to be a part
of such a caring community.

By Sarah Healy.

Sarah's and Eileen's Story

Sarah and Eileen have been neighbours for three years. Prior to this, Sarah had been living in a block of units where she was very unhappy. People were not very friendly, in some cases quite nasty, and she felt very lonely. Community Living Program was purchasing a unit, as part of CLP's Village Housing Program, and workers were talking with Sarah about living in it. While they were investigating who the neighbours were and whether they were friendly, they met Eileen. CLP purchased the unit, and Sarah subsequently moved in near Eileen.

What began as a relationship between neighbours has grown into a lovely friendship. According to Sarah's CLP worker, Carmen, this relationship has been very beneficial for Sarah. *"She feels a lot safer because she knows people around her that she can turn to if she needs help"*.

Sarah says, *"We became friends when I first moved in. When my dad and I were looking at the unit, she came and checked us out to make sure we were ok. When she heard I was moving in, she said, 'That's good'"*.

Eileen looks out for Sarah. She has met some of Sarah's family and her worker from CLP. If anyone strange comes round, she checks who they are. *"I pop in a few times,"* Eileen says. Sarah says, *"She wants to make sure that I am safe. I feel very safe in my unit now because of Eileen"*.

Sarah says, *"Eileen is a lovely person who has been incredibly good to me while I've been here. We get along very well and she spoils me rotten!"* In this relationship it is the simple things that mean a lot to Sarah. Eileen gives Sarah gifts. *"She has given me flowers, ferns, tomatoes, a parsley bush, shrubs and a dolphin necklace."* Eileen says, *"I often give Sarah magazines"*. The two of them often just spend time chatting, in the garden or in Sarah's unit, and they have been for a few walks together. Eileen sends Sarah cards at Christmas and when she is unwell.

Since moving in, Sarah has managed to develop relationships with some of her other neighbours as well. *"I feel very safe with all the networks around me,"* Sarah says. According to Carmen, *"Sarah's neighbours are friendly and say hello. They are all familiar to Sarah"*. Also, the neighbours often send Sarah gifts and get well tokens. *"This shows Sarah that her neighbours care about her,"* Carmen says.

Since their relationship has begun, Sarah says, *"I have felt safer and happier. I would like this friendship to stay the same in the future because Eileen is my special friend"*. Eileen says, *"I am really happy that Sarah is part of the units. She is a sweetie"*.

Intentional Community Groups

New community groups are intentional groupings, mixed groupings of people with and without an intellectual disability who come together for a common purpose or goal. The groups focus on full inclusion of members who have an intellectual disability. Community Living Program runs or supports a number of support groups who help build networks and connections and combat isolation and loneliness. These groups encourage constituents to contribute their thoughts and ideas, as full members of the group.

Shared Meal

Shared Meal was set up by a group of local people, and takes place one evening a fortnight at CLP. It brings together constituents, workers, volunteers, parents and significant others, in fact, anyone involved with CLP. Everyone who attends must bring a plate of food to share and must observe some basic rules. The aim is to promote a safe, inclusive space for casual conversation where people can meet and get to know other people. (Due to the popularity of the event, it was impossible to interview everyone for this booklet, so the story of Shared Meal is based on interviews with community and constituent members.)

Talking About Bullying (TAB)

Talking About Bullying is another CLP supported group. The group formed after a number of constituents disclosed to their workers that they had been bullied at school. Therefore, when the group first began, it was called Talking About Schools. However, the name was changed when people began to share their experiences of being bullied after school and in other situations. The group regularly gives presentations to schools, workplaces and universities. The group's aim is to educate the community about the effects of bullying and to promote the message that it is unacceptable. The group meets at CLP once a fortnight and is facilitated by a CLP worker.

Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative

Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative began a few years ago to address the difficulties that CLP constituents have finding employment. It was started by a third-year social work student on placement with CLP, and has grown from there. It now incorporates the Catering and Maintenance Divisions. The Catering division consists of the Espresso Train Café, which is both a coffee shop and a catering service. The Maintenance Division is responsible for maintaining several council parks on Brisbane's northside and the street gardens of Nundah village.

The Story of Shared Meal

Shared Meal began in April 2004 when CLP workers, community members and constituents met to discuss some social activities that could take place on a regular basis. Steve is one of the constituents who has been attending Shared Meal since the beginning. *“After some discussion at this meeting, we decided to have a meal together on a regular basis,”* he says. Dave is a local community member who was involved in the initial Shared Meal. *“I was talking to Steve early on and we thought it would be good if we had some form of relaxed get together at CLP. The idea for Shared Meal came up. At first it was difficult because we always struggled with the venue. We had the Shared Meals in the winter inside the big meeting room at CLP. However, this was always too cramped. We also had one at the Shed but there were issues with the lack of cooking facilities.”* Shared Meal now takes place in the courtyard behind CLP, and the group has just purchased some outdoor heaters for the winter months (with their own finances).

JoAnn and Dave are local community members who have been involved with Shared Meal since it began. *“The idea for Shared Meal was suggested, and we agreed to give it a whirl. We brought food and encouraged everyone else to do the same,”* Dave says. Gay is a volunteer with CLP, who has been attending Shared Meal since the beginning. *“Shared Meal originated from JoAnn and Dave and some other people talking about the idea at CLP.”* Shared Meal started out relatively small. *“It started as a handful of people who came together for a meal once a fortnight. We have grown from there and we now generally have about two dozen turn up each fortnight,”* Steve says.

Carolyn is a CLP constituent and a long-term member of Shared Meal. She has been attending since the second meeting and makes an effort to go each fortnight if she can. Michael is a constituent of CLP and also a long-term member of Shared Meal. *“I have been going to Shared Meal for a year or two.”* He attends regularly each fortnight. Jean is a volunteer with CLP. *“I have been going for two years, since the beginning. I initially became involved when I received a brochure in the mail from CLP about it.”* Jean wasn't actually involved in the initial process of starting Shared Meal, but has been a regular participant ever since. Kelee is a long-term member, and she first heard about Shared Meal through another constituent. *“Carolyn told me about it and invited me along.”*

Tony is a relatively new member of Shared Meal. *“I have been going to Shared Meal for about six months.”* Although he's new to the group, Tony attends Shared Meal regularly and enjoys it. *“It is a good way to get together, a social thing on Thursday nights. It's a good end to the week.”*

According to Gay, Shared Meal has been a process of trial and error. *“Initially, the time of the meeting was different to what it is now. It used to be the first and third Thursdays of each month. We trialed this until Christmas 2004. However, it was too confusing for everyone involved.”* The organisers decided that a less confusing time would have to be found. *“We trialed having it every pension week which seemed to work well.”* That was successful, and is still in place. JoAnn says, *“Shared Meal gets people together”*. It makes it possible for people to come together by providing a regular meeting time and safe space.

Dave adds, *“Shared Meal is about building community and providing an opportunity to catch up. A lot of us are short of time and find it hard to see people”*.

Carolyn enjoys going to Shared Meal. *“I enjoy everyone’s company, making different dishes, meeting new people and making new friends”*. Before Shared Meal began, Carolyn didn’t know many of the volunteers and community members who attended, so she has enjoyed meeting all of them. According to Tony, the best things about Shared Meal are *“the good food and good company. It is a good way to meet up with people around the community and see what’s happening”*. Another constituent, Kelee, says, *“The best things about Shared Meal are meeting people, taking food and having a chat. I enjoy helping out with the dishes, setting the table and collecting the money”*. According to Jean, *“The best thing about Shared Meal is getting to know people, especially constituents and workers. I have made a lot of friends. I didn’t know many people in the neighbourhood when I first attended, and now I have made friends with many of the other volunteers”*. Michael enjoys Shared Meal and says, *“Shared Meal gets me out of the house and it’s one night I don’t have to cook. My main goal for the night is getting out of the house, having a bit of fun and talking to people. It is better than being at home and not talking to anyone”*. Dave says, *“People seem to enjoy Shared Meal. Everyone has their black moments but they still make the effort to get there, and they never leave having had a bad time. Everyone looks forward to the next Shared Meal”*.

JoAnn and Dave have watched people develop their social skills. *“They have also developed more friendships and are now doing stuff as a group rather than as an individual. Many of the constituents have developed their cooking skills since attending Shared Meal, and have come to learn what constitutes a balanced meal.”* According to Gay, *“The first few Meals were all about getting to know each other and meeting new people. Volunteers don’t usually get much time to spend together, apart from attending things like Shared Meal. It is all about belonging and empowerment. There is a large focus on sharing and taking turns. It helps promote friendships and educates people about cleanliness and hygiene – which is something a lot of people haven’t had the opportunity to learn until they came to Shared Meal”*.

“We encourage everyone to help out,” Gay says. *“We share it equally – men have to help one night and women the next. I usually make a bit of a fuss if it’s a person’s birthday – letting them have the night off from helping out.”*

Shared Meal has themes. The person whose birthday is closest to the next Shared Meal usually chooses the theme. *“We have a great time,”* JoAnn says. *“Some of the constituents don’t get birthday cakes usually, but at Shared Meal they get a cake and a calendar with everyone else’s birthdays on it.”* Gay came up with the idea of the calendars. *“We started acknowledging birthdays fairly early on,”* she says. *“At first we would just sing Happy Birthday and give them a cake, but I wanted to do something more. I saw some calendars on special and that gave me an idea. Now, if the constituents turn up on the night that is closest to their birthday, I do up a calendar for them to take home with everyone else’s birthdays on it.”*

According to Gay, themes have been very popular, and there have been some great nights. *“Michael and another person chose a roast night and everyone had to come dressed in 70s gear! Also, we have had a Bastille night, an Americana night, a Melbourne Cup night and an Aussie night, among many others.”*

Carolyn says, *“On my birthday last year I chose to have a movie night. We watched ‘Ice Age 1’”*. Tony thinks, *“The best theme so far has been the pizza and movie night. One day I’d like to have a ‘pig on a spit’ theme”*. Kelee also has a favourite theme. *“I liked the Aussie night.”* Jean says, *“I would like Shared Meal to keep going, and have some new themes. My favourite theme so far has probably been the French night”*. Michael says that over the years, Shared Meal has had many themes, including a movie night, a games night, a trivia night and a Chinese theme. *“We sometimes have movie nights where we put it up on the wall,”* Stephen says. Someone is usually able to get hold of a projector and they use the bare white wall outside CLP. Michael says, *“My favourite theme so far has been the movie nights. We got to sit back and eat pizza and watch movies. We’ve seen ‘Ice Age’, ‘Madagascar’ and ‘Shrek 1 and 2’”*.

Shared Meal has had an impact on the lives of all those who attend, both constituents and community members. According to Kelee, *“Shared Meal has made a difference in my life by getting me out of the unit, and I have met a few new people”*. JoAnn agrees: *“Since the start of Shared Meal, Dave and I have watched Kelee become more socially involved. Now she will go and talk to people and has made some new friends. We also let her collect the money which she really enjoys”*. Gay says that she has got a great deal out of Shared Meal. *“I have generally been in a supervisory role. It is another thing that I can help out with. I have made some friends and I look forward to it each fortnight.”* Carolyn says that Shared Meal has encouraged her to make new dishes. She gets a great deal of pleasure out of other people enjoying her food, and takes a great deal of pride in making it.

JoAnn and Dave said that in the future, *“We would like to see more wholesome food”*. Gay would like Shared Meal to keep going because, *“It provides a safe environment for the constituent and is somewhere that they feel like they belong”*. Dave agrees. *“Shared Meal has enabled people to make contacts, and other ideas for different activities have come up. This enables the constituents to link with each other.”* Overall, Shared Meal has proved to be a very positive experience for all involved.

A favourite recipe of Carolyn’s - Bacon and Onion Fettucine

Ingredients:

250g Fettucine
3 Cups hot tap water
1 tbsp butter
1 onion – finely chopped
1 clove garlic – crushed
3 rashers of bacon, rind removed and bacon chopped
¼ cup cream
1 tbsp parmesan cheese
2 tbsp finely chopped parsley
½ tsp finely ground black pepper
¼ tsp salt
1 tbsp extra parmesan cheese

Method:

Place fettucine and water into a four-litre dish. Cover and cook on HIGH for 8-10 minutes. Leave to stand covered for 2 minutes. Drain. Place butter in a two-litre casserole dish and cook on HIGH for 30 seconds. Add onion, garlic and bacon and cook on HIGH for 5 minutes. Add cream, parmesan cheese, parsley, drained fettucine and seasonings and mix well. Cook on HIGH for 2 minutes. Served sprinkled with extra parmesan cheese. Serves 4.

The Story of the Talking About Bullying Group

The Talking About Bullying (TAB) group is a group of constituents and community members who work together to educate the community about the effects of bullying on people with intellectual disabilities. The project has been operating for nearly 10 years while membership has changed over this time, there are two current members who have been involved since the beginning.

The members of TAB have benefited in numerous ways from being a part of the project. Speaking out about their experiences, in a group context with others who have similar stories, has allowed members to move beyond self-blame and towards healing. Their presentations transform the issue from an individual problem to a social one, and opens up dialogue in a broader context. The group has received a lot of positive feedback from the diverse audiences who have seen their presentation. This inspires them and validates their efforts to combat bullying. They experience firsthand the positive impact their work has on the community.

Being proactive through getting out and sharing stories, information and strategies for change with others is the central reason TAB works so well, and this is what gives TAB members most satisfaction. They are also very proud of the anti-bullying resources they have developed to get their message out into the community. TAB works well because it has a mixed membership (people with and without disabilities), it is proactive and change orientated, and it has been a forum where people have been able to explore the pain of past experiences and move towards healing and understanding.

For the past year and a half, a community member, Neville, has been involved with the group. Opening the group up to the involvement of community members has been positive, in that it has:

- further validated the group's courage and purpose through another's interest and commitment,
- educated community members about the group's strengths, experiences and challenges, and
- demonstrated the reciprocal, beneficial relationships that can develop within groups with a mix of people with and without a disability.

Ian and Paul have been in Talking About Bullying since it first began in 1997. Michael has been attending for a couple of years. *"I got invited to come to the meeting and check it out and to share my story."* Paul says, *"TAB started in 1997 when some of the constituents told their workers that they were getting bullied at school"*. Michael explains, *"The group changed its name from TAS to TAB when we realised that bullying wasn't just in schools; it was on buses and trains and other places as well."* Neville adds, *"As they've matured and got older, the type and location of the bullying has changed"*.

TAB members decided to compile their stories in a booklet, which was written and published in 2005. *"It was a good way to express the group members' feelings at the time,"* Neville said.

An important event for the group was their presentation at the Asia Pacific Wataboshi Music Festival in 2003. Ian said, *“We did a play of one of the other founding members’ story to a small audience”*. According to Paul, *“It was great going out to tell our stories to different people, and we came back with lots of positive feedback”*. The group also regularly present at schools. *“We have presented at my old school about four times now. I organise the presentations and we always do really well,”* Teresa says.

The group has been presented with awards, and they have had an article in a newspaper. They were presented with a Disability Access Award – Award for Excellence in 2000, and an award from the Queensland Government - Certificate of Appreciation in the International Year of the Volunteer, 2001.

“We are probably one of the only groups in this area that go to schools and workplaces and actually present,” Paul says. *“Yes,”* agreed, Neville. *“Most other groups like this one only offer support. They don’t actually try to raise awareness of bullying and change the situation.”* TAB, as far as the members know, is the only self-advocacy group for people with intellectual disabilities in Queensland.



Toni, Neville, Paul, Richard, Ian & Michael

Not only has the group attempted to raise awareness of bullying within the community, it has also had a positive impact on its members. Ian says that TAB has given him *“a more positive outlook on life, and I also know how to react to the bully’s way of thinking now. I am more able to stand up for myself”*. Paul says, *“I have also learnt to stand up for myself in many situations”*. Michael says, *“By talking about it and not keeping it inside it doesn’t affect you as much”*. Teresa says, *“TAB means a lot to me. I enjoy doing presentations and we need more people to get the message that bullying is not acceptable”*. Neville says, *“TAB is a safe environment where no-one is critical and everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences”*.

The future goal of the group, according to Ian, is *“to do more presentations”*. *“We would also like to expand our presence, and get our voice heard in more areas,”* Neville says. Paul suggests that, *“We might also like to do some more presentations on the Northside as well as the Southside”*. This is a long-term goal for the group and comes down to resources and money. However, they know they are doing a great job of raising awareness of bullying, and they have many on-going projects that will give them plenty of exposure in the community.

How to stop bullying

- B** Be brave
- U** Understand each other
- L** Listen
- L** Learn to tell someone you trust
- Y** You deserve respect



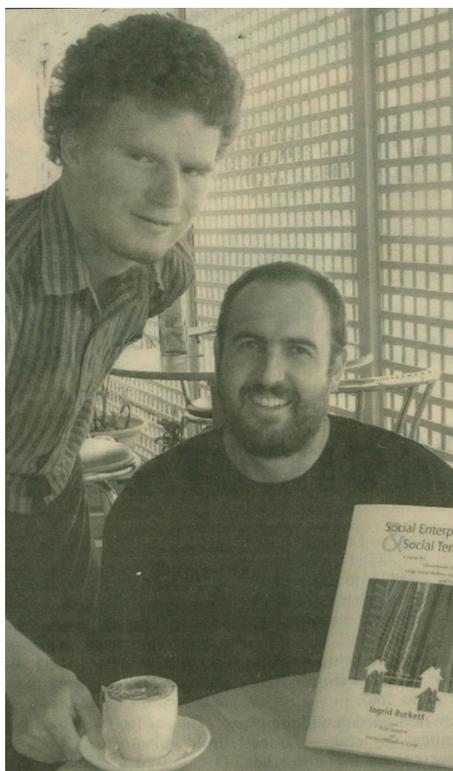
John's and Dave's Story

In the past, CLP constituents have experienced high levels of unemployment, resulting in feelings of boredom and loss of social roles, in spite of numerous referrals to various employment agencies. When people have managed to get jobs through agencies, the jobs have lasted only a very short time, and people have been laid off or sacked. In 2000, CLP workers met to discuss the issue, and out of that discussion came the idea to form the Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative. The aim of the Co-op is to be a job club for people with disabilities.

Initially, the Co-op had no capital, no government funding or support, no equipment and no jobs, and had to get by on its own efforts. Co-op members began mowing back yards with a borrowed mower, with a social work student as the coordinator. It has since flourished into four business areas – Espresso Train Cafe, Catering, Parks Maintenance and Nundah Village.

Dave started with the Co-op when he was a social work student on placement at Community Living Program, and he subsequently took on the role of coordinator. The Co-op owes much of its success to Dave.

John has known Dave for about two years. He works with him at the Co-op on Mondays and Tuesdays. John says, *“I originally got my job with Dave because I bought two fridges from him. I was short of money, so he gave me the job to pay the money off, and then he kept me on afterwards”*. Dave said he initially gave John one shift to see if it would work out and then kept him on. According to Dave, *“The best thing about John is his honesty. Also, it's very rare that he won't take ownership of something that he has done”*.



John & Dave

Having a job two days a week has made a big difference to John's life. *"It gives me stuff to do during the week and it gives me some money."* Dave says that John has also made a big difference to his life. *"He has pushed me to the professional edge and forced me to challenge my perceptions on appropriate forms of intervention. I have come to realise the importance of dialogue."*

John says, *"The best thing about Dave is that he talks to me rather than just letting me go. Other jobs I've had have just let me go because they think I can't do my job properly. With Dave, he will come and talk to me and I still have a job at the end of the day"*. Dave has discovered, since working with John, that, *"If you confront him in an appropriate manner about what he has done wrong, he will respond to it and respect what you have to say. John responds to people being honest with him"*.

Dave says that the relationship is reciprocal. *"John likes the fact that this job is not a hand-out – it gives him some power over his own life."* It is also not just the personal relationship with Dave that is important. *"John sees the cafe itself as a place of safety where he can hang out with his friends."*

John says, *"I want to work for Dave until I find other things to do with my life"*. Dave says, *"John has given a lot and he obviously has a lot of courage to challenge his self-doubt and believe that he is worthwhile"*. The biggest learning for Dave in his relationship with John has been, *"realising how similar you actually are to the people you are working with"*.