

Building community connections through valued roles

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My son Rhys is fifteen and is a member of the local gym, which is frequented by many people in his community. Having a valued role, such as gym member, in a valued setting is an important way to enhance image, develop skills and make connections with other people. Rhys' self-esteem is improving and his happiness increasing, as he focuses on a preoccupation of other boys his age - developing some muscles. As well as helping Rhys to feel good about himself, regular exercise also has obvious physical benefits. The gym is an age appropriate setting for Rhys to attend and has the potential for a number of good role models for him to emulate. Generally, regular gym goers are health conscious, disciplined and committed people.

Rhys also enjoys learning how to use the gym equipment and thus he is developing a variety of new skills, including how to share community spaces with other people. He is also learning what membership of a group means – the responsibilities and privileges – as well as getting a sense of the social community that can exist around a space such as a gym. This community may offer social opportunities that he could possibly become involved with in the future.

By choosing to exercise with others in the same place and at the same time, the opportunity to make connections is another important potential outcome of Rhys' gym attendance. Over time, Rhys will become better known and will be able to have interactions with a number of different people at the gym. People already greet Rhys when he is in town because he is recognised from the gym.

I hope that Rhys will continue to be supported to attend the gym and, ideally, I would like this to be facilitated by a young man who has similar interests to Rhys and who enjoys the gym environment. It will be more enjoyable if they have things in common but it can also be more effective for the facilitation of other connections. A young man supporting Rhys to attend the gym is likely to be better able to facilitate Rhys getting to know other young guys of similar interests. By creating the opportunity for connections, conversations may develop and other shared interests may be explored and recognised. Over time, these many superficial connections offer the possibility of yielding deeper relationships and could perhaps become friendships. The first step is to become known and Rhys – the gym member of the popular local gym – is taking the first steps to being recognised and welcomed.