

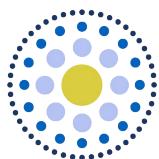


**Resourcing  
Inclusive  
Communities**  
An initiative of Family Advocacy



# DEVELOPING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Strategies for assisting a person with disability to connect with people around shared interests and experiences



## Resourcing Inclusive Communities

An initiative of Family Advocacy

ISBN: 978-0-646-97700-3

© 2017 Resourcing Inclusive Communities

# Foreword

This workbook is a collaboration between Resourcing Inclusive Communities, an initiative of Family Advocacy, and Ric Thompson of Great Ideas in Action. The authors wish to thank all the contributors, especially those who generously shared their stories to help others imagine the possibilities and take the necessary steps to assist someone to develop personal connections in their community.



# DEVELOPING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

# — why is it so important?

**Human connection with people we consider significant and who we share a commonality of experience and interest is vital to our survival, safety and the quality of our lives.** Isolation and loneliness are not only detrimental to our wellbeing, but are potentially dangerous for our security. It is the people who know us personally who are more likely to take the extra effort to check if we are ok, if we look anxious or upset, or haven't been seen in a while. It is less likely that a government, system or organisation can or will do this because the connection is often impersonal. Personal connection with others, about things that matter to each of us, also adds a richness and meaning to life that makes it worth living.

With this knowledge, it should be imperative that more action is taken to assist individuals to make community connections, especially those who may be vulnerable to isolation and marginalisation. People with disability are often socially isolated, and many need assistance to develop and maintain interpersonal connections. There is no magic formula for this, but there are strategies for creating opportunities that make it more likely to happen. This workbook aims to provide strategies to assist in helping an individual develop connections with people in the community. Establishing connections based on commonality is one of the most natural ways for all of us to develop relationships.





What

# are the barriers?

Many people have not been welcomed and have been hurt, rejected or ignored by people from the community. One reason for this is that many people have had limited experience of getting to know a person with disability. People in the community have often seen people with disability grouped together at a distance from their daily lives and don't know how to relate, connect and support people into sharing their everyday experiences. This can also reinforce the belief that this responsibility belongs to others or is the sole responsibility of paid workers. This assumption heightens the risk of isolated people being further distanced from people within our communities.

This distance is increased by the number of groups that are created specifically for people with disability that do not enable interaction with the community in general. This means that a person with disability is less likely to experience the variety and richness of personal pursuits with others that share the same interests. Instead there is often an unconscious belief that people with disability don't belong in regular and typical community events and places, and are better off with their 'own kind', meaning other people with disability. Community inclusion has sometimes been used to describe groupings that actually separate people from the places, experiences and people that most other people mix with and value. This workbook, however, is based on the idea that a person's 'own kind' relates rather to people who share a person's personal interests and passions, and that this is where commonality is likely to be found.



Practically everybody lives in a community, large or small, but the idea of community is more than just a physical place.

Community is a social place (having a sense of human connectedness) called upon by family, friends, neighbours, neighbourhood associations, clubs, civic groups, local enterprises, churches, ethnic organisations, temples, schools, local unions, local government and local media.

John McKnight, 1993.

# What is community?

Community can be about the sense of human connectedness that exists with and between people. It also encompasses social connection in all the variety of human creativity, imagination and purpose that draws people together. This means that people can belong to any number of communities that reflect their personal interests and allegiances.

Belonging to a community of interest can make people come alive. Eyes light up and faces glow when someone is experiencing something that really matters to him or her. Everybody should have a chance to find this and share it with other people who also have the same passion.

Community groups can offer a wealth of opportunities for people to learn from and encourage one another; share new information, skills and experiences; develop a sense of belonging; learn new roles and responsibilities to contribute to the group; get to know one another; explore new commonalities; and possibly develop friendships over time. Community involvement is beneficial for individuals, groups and the broader community.



# Community involvement offers an individual a chance to:

-  meet different people
-  actively participate
-  enhance their image with others
-  develop positive friendships
-  learn independence
-  make a contribution
-  be known more intimately
-  experience the privileges of citizenship
-  exercise his or her freedom
-  maximise personal enjoyment
-  find a purpose
-  expand mutually supportive networks
-  engage in many different experiences
-  experience more opportunities
-  meet higher expectations
-  develop a sense of self
-  be a valued member
-  develop a sense of belonging
-  assume roles and responsibilities
-  imitate positive role models
-  develop skills
-  gain self-confidence
-  feel safe with more people looking out for them
-  have a say

Can you add to these lists?

# Community involvement offers communities the chance to:

-  increase interdependence
-  understand people's real needs
-  learn from and value difference
-  increase the local economy
-  welcome all citizens
-  create more fun
-  grow better networks of support
-  develop people's skills
-  receive more contributions from more people
-  learn respect for others
-  become safer
-  build social capital
-  find creative solutions
-  make the community more accessible
-  support self-determination
-  improve the vitality of people's lives
-  improve health and wellbeing for all
-  widen friendship circles
-  deepen relationships
-  exercise responsible stewardship
-  strengthen civil society
-  develop a positive story
-  increase membership
-  offer everyone a voice

What do the two lists for the individual and the community have in common? What priorities differ? How universal do you think these needs and aspirations are? What importance would you place on each one?



# Reflection

**What different communities do you belong to?**

---

---

---

---

**What are the benefits for you and others within these connections?**

---

---

---

---

# 6 STEPS TOWARDS DEVELOPING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS



# This workbook will...

... walk you through a 6-step process to help you understand who a person is and what kind of communities and community experiences they are looking for. It will then help you determine the right support to facilitate a connection, and give strategies to strengthen and keep the connections growing.

It isn't a guarantee for instant success, but a strategy to keep you on track and make these connections more likely. Human connections are not often immediately established. It takes time and effort.

These 6 steps will help you be intentional about assisting someone to develop connections and take action towards this goal.



**Step 1:** Start with the person



**Step 2:** Discover community



**Step 3:** Identify the right community



**Step 4:** Connect with the right support



**Step 5:** Strengthen participation



**Step 6:** Sustain common-unity



# Step 1: Start with the person

**The following exercise invites you to recognise and celebrate a person's gifts, talents and contributions. Historically, people with a disability have been defined by what is missing or broken in their lives. In contrast, this exercise will focus on recognising a person's personal assets and the positive impact that these assets bring to the wider community.**



## **Gifts of the head –**

**Things I know something about and would like to share with others.**



## **Gifts of the heart –**

**Things I care deeply about and would like to share with others.**



## **Gifts of the hand –**

**Things or skills I know how to do and would like to share with others.**

**Take some time now to reflect and begin to fill in the Individual Capacity Inventory chart on the following page for yourself first, as a way of discovering all the things that you have to offer the world. Write down all you can think of, no matter how small or insignificant you think it is. This should help you practise before doing this exercise with or on behalf of someone else.**

# Individual Capacity Inventory



## Gifts of the head –

Things I know something about and would like to share with others, e.g., art, movies, mechanics.

---

---

---

---



## Gifts of the heart

Things I care deeply about and would like to share with others, e.g., protection of the environment, children, cars.

---

---

---

---



## Gifts of the hand –

Things or skills I know how to do and would like to share with others, e.g., carpentry, sport, organising.

---

---

---

---



# Things to think about

-  If someone doesn't communicate with words, what are the gifts their presence brings? For example – a bright smile, a warm greeting, a calm peacefulness or infectious energy.
-  If someone has a fascination with something that some might call an obsession, consider it a passion instead and how this interest could connect the person with others who have the same interest.

When you have completed the Head, Heart, Hand chart with or on behalf of someone else, circle the things that you know are really important to the person and should be developed in their life as clear expressions of who they are. It is these interests, passions or gifts that may well be the catalysts for finding personal connections around shared interests. This will be explained more in upcoming steps.

## Having trouble?

**Don't worry if you can't fill the chart in full or haven't noted something in every category. If there are just a few clear gifts noted, this may be enough to start with. You can also build up the chart by sharing it with other people who know the person and may see a different side of him or her and add to the chart. You may also decide that the person needs more experiences to determine what their interests and gifts are. This chart can be revisited and developed over time.**



# Dan has a passion for newspapers.



**He loves to gather and stack newspapers and roll them in the correct way. It was obvious to Dan's family that newspapers needed to be a central part of his life for it to make sense to him. They also realised that if they didn't channel Dan's interest in a positive way, he may be viewed negatively by his community, as he liked to collect delivered papers from the street.**

Dan's daily routine is to be ready and waiting for his paid assistant to arrive at his home, and together they make their first port of call to Dan's favourite newsagencies where all kinds of newspapers are purchased. Like anyone who needs to start the day with a good cup of coffee or a trip around the block with a dog, Dan starts his day with newspapers under his arm. They are an essential stabilising force within his everyday life.

Dan has a small van that was bought for a song and looks exactly like the newsagent's van. He uses this to keep his papers. He goes with his paid assistant to his various jobs which centre on taking mail to and from the post office and delivering supplements for the local newspaper. This is a significant help for local businesses.

Dan also repairs walkways and tidies up parks. He is expert with a shovel and can dig without tiring. He enjoys the strenuous work, and this gift has made him a valued member of the community. He is well known around town for his contributions, and has been recognised with an Australia Day Award nomination.



# Step 2: Discover community

Communities also have assets and, like people, should be seen for what they have to offer, not for what is considered negative or broken about them. The Community Mapping Tool on the next page may help you in your exploration, to see the communities within communities that offer an opportunity to become involved.



**People** – their gifts, talents, energy, enthusiasm, contributions, knowledge, skills, networks, influence, charisma.



**Formal systems** – government, schools, hospitals, public transport, community centres, local council, TAFE, libraries.



**Associations** – interest groups, sporting clubs, art associations, political groups, cultural groups, faith communities.



**Physical space** – streets, parks, neighbourhoods, beaches, shopping plazas, galleries, museums, bushland, sports fields.



**Local economy** – business, banks, industry, agriculture, farmers markets, art fairs, shops, tourism, consumers, workers.



**Stories** – history, tradition, culture, heritage, significant events, local identities, festivals, community spirit and values.

Take a look at the Community Mapping Tool and see if you can fill each of the six community assets for your community. You can get others to help you, in order to generate more information.

# Community Mapping Tool



People

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Formal Systems  
i.e. Government

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Associations

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Physical Space

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Local Economy

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Stories

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

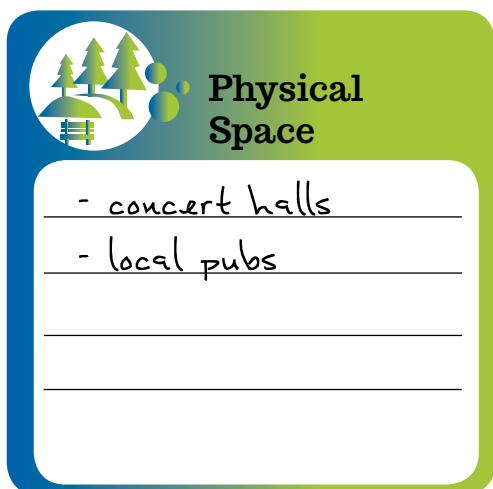
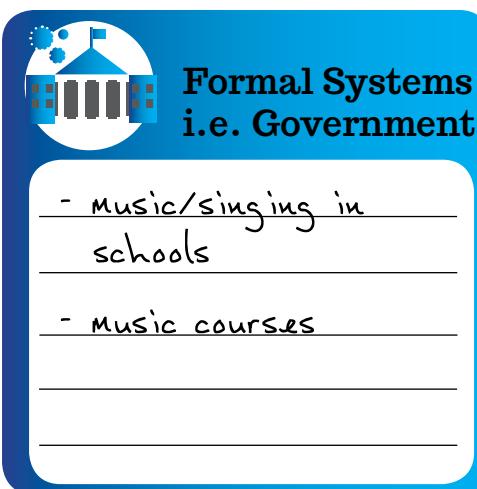


# You can ...

**... use the Community Mapping Tool to map your whole community. You may discover that the lists don't fit on this one chart!**

**If, however, you are focused on someone in particular, you can use the tool to discover the community opportunities around the person's genuine interests. For example, if someone has a desire to sing, consider all the places where singing occurs in the community. As a creative thinking exercise, push yourself to come up with 10 ideas for possible involvement. The Power of 10 will push you beyond traditional thinking and spark creative, out-of-the-box ideas that may not immediately come to mind.**

# Mapping Singing in the Community





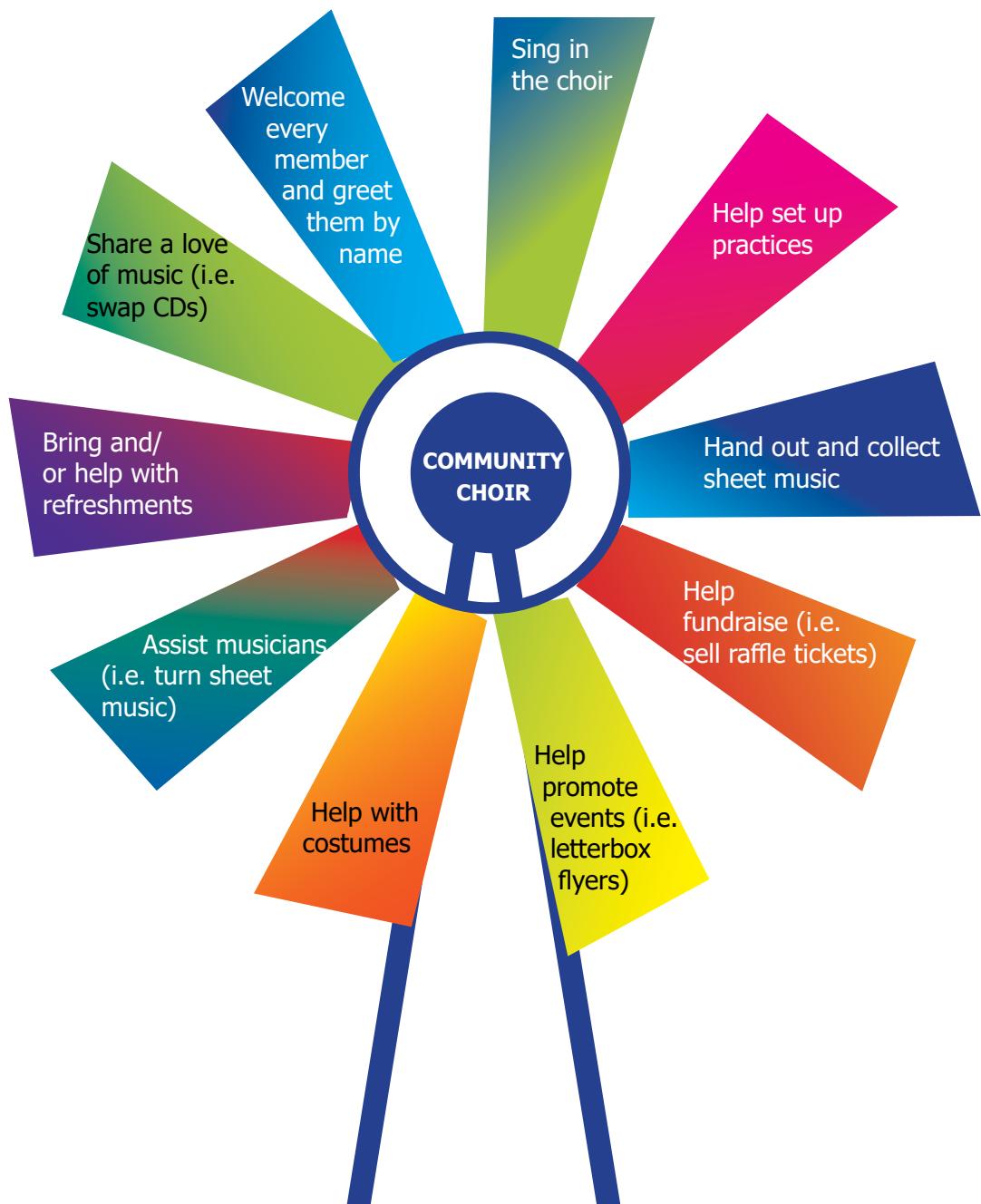
# The Power of 10

Dr Michael Hewitt-Gleeson describes the Power of 10 as '*the deliberate process of using the concept of the multiple of ten (x10) to take us beyond the boundaries of our traditional thinking.*' This is reflected in the diagram below. The centre point of the windmill represents our traditional thinking – i.e. how we readily perceive the world. The sails of the windmill signify the 10 new ideas generated that push us, both deliberately and consciously, to go beyond the boundaries and provoke our thinking further. Cognitive psychologist, George A. Miller discovered that our short-term memory shuts down after seven numbers or after five words or concepts. The Power of 10 forces our thinking out of shutdown mode and acts as a booster to increase our options by a hundred percent.



# Step 3: Identify the right community

Having mapped your community and discovered some possible places, people, associations or events that someone may have an interest in being involved with, you now need to investigate which of these offer the best opportunity for connection. Again, the Power of 10 can help here. You can take one possible opportunity and find 10 ways to be involved.





THAT'S IT!!  
I'M GOING  
TO GRANDMA'S

# Things to think about



You can seek help from community members with knowledge of a specific area of interest, such as singing or choirs. They may be able to help you think about different ways someone could become involved.



All of the 10 things listed to do in the community choir are roles that can be adopted to support the group or event. Roles enable people to have a responsibility that makes a contribution. This is a positive way to be recognised by others and develop skills. It doesn't matter if someone needs assistance to achieve these roles. In fact, paid support is best used to help someone fulfil a role that makes a positive difference.



Some opportunities, by their very nature, will offer a greater chance of connecting with people than others. While a person's love of singing can be enriched by attending concerts and events, it can be difficult to meet people and make friendships in such settings. People largely build friendships by becoming a regular and valued member of a group, where they can interact freely and get to know each other over time. It is important to be mindful that opportunities are created in a person's life that have the goal of facilitating personal connections.



Rick is a young  
man with a  
love of Harley  
Davidson  
motorbikes.



**There was never any doubt that Rick's community of shared interest was to be with other Harley Davidson enthusiasts. There was a local Harley Davidson motorbike chapter in Rick's community, but they didn't meet regularly enough to fulfil his interest to be heavily involved with everything about Harleys.**

Rick's supporters looked again at the Community Mapping Tool to seek out other opportunities. Under 'Local economy', a specialist Harley Davidson motorbike shop was identified. There they discovered that the members of the chapter met informally on Saturday mornings to swap stories and plan events.

Rick became a regular participant and made some good friends. Over time, Rick's community development worker knew that the best thing was to step back at the right time and enable the members of the chapter to step forward. This allowed them to play a greater role in supporting Rick's full participation. The club identified communication as a barrier to Rick being fully involved and purchased a communication aid to improve their interaction.

It didn't take long for the chapter to discover the intensity and passion that Rick had for Harley Davidson motorbikes and they shared his passion. Rick became so valued to the group that the chapter negotiated with the Harley Davidson head office in Chicago, USA, to seek approval for him to become a full member of his local chapter. HOGS stands for Harley Owners Group. Rick didn't own a Harley. The club strongly advocated for Rick to have his membership approved by way of recommending a new membership classification – 'significant other'. The Club's membership lobbied Chicago. Chicago agreed. Rick's application was incorporated within the application of one of the club's leading and respected members, as his identified significant other. Rick experienced serious health issues, along with significant daily challenges, because of the nature of his disability, but this didn't matter to his mates. Rick was not defined by his disability but as a valued fellow member of the HOGS, who collectively share their passion for everything Harley.



# Step 4: Identify the right support

**This next step asks you to identify who in the community is going to be a key person to help make possible the community connection you're hoping for.**

**Look out for people who:** are well known, are connected to lots of people, lead others, bring people together, have influence, care, do what they say they will do, welcome others, are respected and valued by the community, collect information and share it, and mentor others.



These people can be asked to make an introduction, extend an invitation, facilitate a welcome or help you map out the possibilities. They are likely to be excited by the prospect of a new member joining the group and make an effort to work with you to make it happen. Just as important as identifying the key helpers is identifying the people who aren't interested, are negative and may even work against your hopes and dreams. These people will not lend their support, so don't waste time and effort trying to get them on board. Invest energy into the right people who can open doors, be supportive and invite others into the person's life. It is always useful to keep looking out for good people, even if you don't need their help straightaway. Make note of a person's name, where you met and what made you notice them. You never know when you might need their assistance in the future.

## Be 'ask prepared'!

Identifying the right support is just the beginning. The next step involves approaching people to become involved. This means asking people to offer assistance and is more likely to be successful if you are 'ask prepared'. To be 'ask prepared', you need to have a clear plan of approach which is guided by seven key questions – the 7 Rules of Asking.

# The 7 Rules of Asking

- 1. Why are you asking?**
- 2. What are you asking for?**
- 3. Who should you ask?**
- 4. Who should do the asking?**
- 5. When are you asking?**
- 6. How and where should the asking take place?**
- 7. How can you prepare for the unexpected?**



## 1. Why are you asking?

Think about why you are seeking what you are asking for. What would it mean for the person you are assisting, if the opportunity you are asking for opened up for him or her? When you consider how important it is for this person to follow a dream, fulfil a passion, or get out and about and meet new people, you may get more confidence to be bold and ask. If you think about the consequences if you don't ask, this may motivate you also. Lost opportunities mean a life that is not as rich and meaningful as it could possibly be.



## 2. What are you asking for?

It is vital that you are absolutely clear about what you are asking for. A vague, indirect or confused request is not likely to receive a direct or positive answer. People rarely say yes to something they don't understand and can't connect with. Make sure you ask for something that is relevant and easily achievable. For example, asking a group leader to help someone attend a meeting to see if they want to join is an acceptable and expected request. Asking somebody if they would spend time with someone and be their friend is too open ended and out of the ordinary. The person being asked may be immediately concerned that they can't meet such a need and could become reluctant to be involved. The question may trigger concerns such as 'how much time am I expected to spend with the person?' and 'what happens if we have nothing in common or don't get on?'. The wrong ask can be a barrier of your own making to establishing positive connections for people. Keep your requests typical, relevant and doable. Write a short script and practise beforehand. Remember you can always follow up with another request once the first is achieved. These small steps may be more successful than overloading someone with a number of requests and ideas when you have only just met them.

## 3. Who are you asking?

Many people will be delighted that you asked them for help, because it recognises their expertise and valued experience around a particular topic or event. This in itself may be enough to motivate people to want to help you succeed with your request.

You don't always have to ask the person in charge of a group or event about joining. You may identify someone else more appropriate to ask. If you already know somebody in the group, then it may make sense to ask them first. For example, if John likes fishing and you know Dave is a member of the local fishing club, you can ask Dave if he will take John next time he goes fishing with the club. If this works out, Dave may make a commitment to take John every time the club meets. If not, you can ask Dave who the best person at the club is to either help John themselves or enlist the help of others, so as to encourage John to become a regular member. The thing with asking is that you can persist. Keep asking until you find the right person to ask. If someone doesn't give a clear answer and doesn't take action for you, then find someone else to ask.



## 4. Who does the asking?

This may not have to be you. If you are a parent or family member of the person you are hoping to assist, and you feel too close to the situation or you have run out of energy at this time, then perhaps another person can do the asking for you. You may also identify a highly regarded person or someone already known to the person you want to ask who may be better placed to make a request. Whoever does the asking needs to be well briefed on what they are asking for and why, so they can be ask prepared.

## 5. When do you ask?

Always ask when a person has time to hear and consider a request. Don't ask if they are running to another appointment, are busy in that moment or are not feeling well. If you know the person and are aware that things are difficult in their own life at that time, then ask at a better time. It is best to be respectful, if you want your request to be respectfully considered, so always ask if the time is convenient before you proceed. If needed, give people time to consider what you have asked and get back to you. Be sure to contact them again, if they don't reply in due time.

## 6. How and where should the asking take place?

Does a request need to be in person, over the phone or in writing? Is it an informal ask or does it need an appointment? If in person, where should you meet? Consider a location convenient and comfortable for the person being asked. This sort of consideration paves the way to an open and considerate response to your request. A person-to-person meeting is preferable, given the importance of what you are asking about and because you are trying to build up a network of personal contacts around an individual. An in-person appointment builds connection that a phone call and letter may not. Its face-to-face format also needs to be given more attention by the person being asked, who can more easily overlook a letter or not return a call.

## 7. How can you prepare for the unexpected?

Not everything will go well or come easily. There may be some roadblocks and even rejections. It is good to be prepared and think through what could go wrong. At worst, someone can simply never respond to your request or say no. It is then time to consider if your request was clear or if you need to ask someone else. You may decide that there was no welcome there and go back to the Community Mapping Tool to find another place or group in the community that may be a better option. If someone says, 'I'll think about it,' ask them when you can get back to them. Knowing you could get a 'no' and thinking through some strategies may help you manage the situation if it happens. This may help with your resilience and your confidence to keep making requests to all kinds of people.

### Having trouble?

**If at any time things don't work out well, check your 7 Rules of Asking. Do you need to make some changes to any one of the rules or maybe a combination of them to get things right? Check your why, who, what, where, when and how before trying again. Like most things you will get better with practice.**



# The 7 Rules of Asking worksheet

Answer the questions to get **ask prepared** for taking a specific action for an individual to be actively involved in a community of shared interest.

**1. Why are you asking?**

---

---

**2. What are you asking for?**

---

---

**3. Who should you ask?**

---

---

**4. Who should do the asking?**

---

---

**5. When are you asking?**

---

---

**6. How and where should the asking take place?**

---

---

**7. How can you prepare for the unexpected?**

---

---

# Reflection

**What do you think the biggest barriers are for you in asking others to assist someone to be involved in community experiences?**

---

---

---

**What new thinking or strategies can you adopt to help you resolve these issues?**

---

---

---

---



Di had some  
knock-backs...



**... when she tried to enable her young daughter, Rhiannon, to be involved in after school sports.**

**Di knew, however, that this was really important for Rhiannon's physical, social and cognitive development. She was also aware that most kids do fun stuff after school, and that Rhiannon shouldn't miss out on these everyday opportunities because she has an intellectual disability.**

Di had a couple of friends wanting to help and do the investigating and asking with her. This helped her get up the courage to persist with asking. They tried the local pool, but for many reasons it didn't work out. So they tried again with the local gym classes that had courses for children. The new manager was welcoming and saw no reason why Rhiannon couldn't join. Di was present at classes to assist Rhiannon if needed, but it soon became clear that she could easily follow what the other kids were doing and line up and have her turn after she had seen what they were doing. Di didn't have to stay for classes because the other children were good role models for Rhiannon to imitate, which helped her keep up with the class.



# Prepare the person

**Sometimes we can become so focused or worried about the setting that we are assisting someone to join that we forget to help prepare the person as much as possible to feel comfortable and put their best foot forward in a new environment. It is essential to prepare a person as much as possible, without causing undue anxiety. In fact, good preparation may reduce anxiety.**

Here are some ways you can prepare a person to feel comfortable and start well within a new community experience.

-  Talk about the community group or event well beforehand, so they know what to expect.
-  Explain the routine or schedule of the meeting.
-  Think through how the person will need to be supported. For example, will there need to be adaptations or strategies to assist with communication, mobility or any other support, including modifying equipment that other people use to participate?
-  Assist the person to be well dressed, groomed and dressed appropriately to make a good impression.
-  Discuss who will be there and how many people will attend.

-  Visit the site beforehand so the person is familiar with the physical environment.
-  Introduce the person to a few key people beforehand to assist with the first meeting.
-  Practice any key phrases or behaviours that would ease their introduction into the group – for example, how to say hello and introduce themselves. This all depends on the setting.
-  Observe the person carefully at the event and notice when they look confused or uncertain and need support to help them stay in the flow of proceedings.
-  Discuss or explain what happened at the event to help the person understand, accept and adopt the group's rituals.
-  Prepare the person for what is happening at the next meeting.

Over time the person may not need as much preparation to be at ease within the group, but they may still need support to understand what is happening at any given time. This is especially important if new ideas, skills or experiences are explored by the group. Ideally, it would be best if people within the group could help prepare the person for such occasions. In fact, careful and clear explanation may assist other members who need the revision also. You may need to assist other people to recognise when this sort of support is needed.



# Step 5: Strengthen participation

**Simply being present in a community does not bring about the same benefits that being actively involved in a community can bring. Being present passively is not likely to lead to meaningful community engagements. For example, many people with disability are brought to shopping centres, cinemas and other public places, most often in groups with other people with disability. This is often labelled as community participation, but the individual or group is simply passing through anonymously with limited interaction with other people from the community. Of course, lots of people from the community go to shopping centres and see a movie but would not consider this a meaningful connection to community. Yet, for many people with disability this is the sum total of their community experience. No wonder many people are unfulfilled, frustrated and lonely.**

**For people to experience real belonging, we need to be strategic and deepen connections to community through crafting valued social roles for each person based on their genuine interests. The table on the next page demonstrates how any pastime can be strengthened from merely being present towards actively participating and ultimately making a contribution. This does not assume that a person will not need support to achieve these things, but rather that any support should be facilitated in such a way as to make such things achievable.**

		Being present	Actively participating	Making a contribution
Football game	Sit in the stands at games as a spectator	Sit with loyal fans and join the cheer squad	Join the supporters club and attend regular meetings to support the team	
Shopping	Be taken to a store and have someone purchase items for you	Select items from the store for yourself and present them for purchase	Shop regularly at a local store and become known as a valued customer and greet staff by name and be greeted by name	
Invitation to a barbecue	Sit eating food with everyone else	Make conversation or have someone assist you communicate with others	Make, prepare or purchase some food to bring, with or without assistance	
Local park	Sit or walk through the park	Join the early morning tai chi group that meets in the park	Join a volunteer group that meets to look after the park	
Art	Go to art classes	Join the local artist cooperative.	Volunteer at the local gallery	

Each of these categories is a role a person can fulfil, but the stronger roles centre on making a contribution. If you take the first example, the football game, the first role of spectator is largely passive, the second role of cheer squad member at games is more active, but becoming a fan club member who attends meetings is by far the most valued role. Active members are valued, as they contribute to the success of the team or event. Regular attendance with the same group also offers greater opportunity for friendships to develop, as they generally take time to do so. With roles comes responsibility which enhances a person's image with others and enables them to learn new skills. Roles can keep multiplying. What if the football fan club member took on some roles at the fan club meetings? Could the person be supported to help take the attendance register, set the room up for the meeting, or serve refreshments? Contributions like these will cement a person's belonging to the group, help develop skills around meaningful tasks and be received appreciatively by everyone attending.



Jos has an affinity with small children.



## **Even though Jos was a non-reader with a significant intellectual disability, she passed many of the subjects and achieved her first aid certificate.**

Looking to life after school, Jos thought she would like to work with children in some way. Her family listed all the places that young children gathered in the community: playgroup, childcare, Sunday school etc. The place with the best fit for Jos was a crèche run by volunteers at the local leisure centre. The coordinator knew Jos as she had gone to school with her daughter, so that was a good beginning.

Jos's mum approached the volunteer coordinator about Jos joining the crèche team. As Jos had studied child care, had her first aid certificate and was a keen local woman, they agreed. Her family offered paid support for Jos to learn the role, but it wasn't necessary as the crèche volunteer role fit her so well, she quickly understood what was required.

Jos is now known as the Baby Whisperer due to her skills in rocking cranky babies off to sleep. As a crèche volunteer, Jos earns credit points at the gym, which she uses to provide swimming lessons for a friend's children and have private swim coaching for herself.



# The Power of 10

If you are stuck thinking of a role for someone then use the Power of 10 strategy. Start with one of the person's personal interests and brainstorm, with others if possible, 10 roles that connect to that interest. Push to think of 10 because it is the last roles that may be some of the most creative.





# Role communicators



**It is important to help people look the role and act the role. Be mindful of role communicators that help the person and others to recognise his or her role.**

**Role** – Football club member

**People** – Is the person in the presence of the right people around the role, i.e. connected to other football club fans?

**Places** – Are they in the right places these people meet, i.e. club meetings and social gatherings?

**Actions** – Are they engaged in actions that reflect the role, i.e. assisted to make a contribution to support the team?

**When** – Are they engaging in these actions at the right time when other people in the role are also engaged in them? For example – at games, training sessions, social events, club meetings? Are they also meeting regularly enough with other people around this shared interest? A quarterly or monthly meeting may be not enough contact with others to build friendships and so a group that meets weekly may be a better option.

**Appearance** – Are they wearing the appropriate clothing, uniform or branding for the role, i.e. club shirt, scarf, beanie or cap, depending on the season?

**Language** – Do they know the jargon, rules or unique meanings and languages associated with the role, i.e. the team song, game rules, players' names and positions?

All of the above can be facilitated or taught. Who better than another football fan to help someone understand the rules of the game. It is alright if someone can't fill all aspects of the role around action or language, but the place, people and when is really important. If you are not showing up when everyone else does, you won't meet people and belong to a community of shared interests.



# Jacob was asked to speak at a conference.



**This at first surprised his mum Linda, because it was she who usually was asked to speak at events.**

Linda realised that Jacob couldn't decide if he was interested in doing this or not, without some experience of public speaking. So Jacob opted to enrol in a Toastmaster's group, a community-based public speaking forum, and find out if he wanted to pursue this. Jacob enjoyed the group, especially the company of his fellow Toastmasters. Jacob uses a communication device to speak, has spoken at a number of conferences and is keen to keep developing his craft.



# Step 6: Sustain common-unity

**Connection and relationship with other people is something that all of us must work on, if we are to keep these areas flourishing in our lives. A person with disability will likely need help to sustain personal connections and develop them over time. It is important not to help establish a connection for someone and then just walk away. It is necessary to check from time to time that the connection remains meaningful.**

## Things to think about

-  If possible, help a person to learn and address people by name who are also in the group. Use photos if needed, to talk about the other people so they can acknowledge others.
-  Loyalty and commitment is valued by any group, so keep up regular attendance and membership.
-  If people within the group step forward to find ways to involve a person naturally, then step back and allow people the space to extend their support to a new member. Be sure to encourage people who do this, as this may elicit a desire to further build on this progress and find new ways to actively involve the person even more.

- Find someone in the group who can buddy (if it is a child) or mentor the person within the group. This does not mean they provide all the support; they simply look out for the person and help keep them in the flow of the group experience.
- Let others take over your role of establishing connections and exit the group when you are no longer needed.
- If the person needs to have a paid assistant attend with them, then this role should also be focused on facilitating connections for the person within the group – for example, by helping them join the conversation or sharing information about their life and interests if they are unable to speak for themselves.
- Remember to check with the person and the group from time to time that all is going well. Just because someone is attending doesn't mean they are actively involved. The group may benefit from respectful suggestions as to how to involve someone further and strengthen their participation.
- Remember that community groups change over time, and some grow and others eventually fold. Don't persevere if the group becomes dysfunctional or unpleasant to be involved with. Find a new bunch of people that generate a more positive atmosphere.
- Be aware if someone loses interest in a group or community pursuit. Everyone can grow tired of something familiar, and want to try something new.

## Having trouble?

**Is the person you are assisting on the sidelines, being ignored or away from the action? If so, is it because the group needs more guidance in how to engage them with what everyone else is doing? Is the person excluding themselves and drifting away from the group experience? If so, why? For example, is it happening when the conversation is becoming complicated or a new skill is being taught? You may need to think up some strategies for how to help them stay connected with the more challenging shared experiences.**



Jack enjoys  
soccer ...



**... and joined a community team with other neighbourhood kids.**

**When you're small, all the players can be a little distracted at times, as it's all about the fun rather than the ball.**

As you get older, the game becomes faster and, for this reason, Jack struggled sometimes to keep up with the other kids. His family noticed that he withdrew from training sessions at times and looked to see if there was a pattern as to when this occurred. It became clear that Jack found it difficult when a new skill was being taught because the explanation and demonstration was fast and technical. It was important to detect and address this issue, or Jack's withdrawal may have been interpreted as disinterest and he may not have continued in the team.

Instead the family took action because Jack had some paid support and they had engaged a young man to be his sports coach. The team coach, Jack's sports coach and Jack worked out a solution where Jack could practise the new skill being taught with his sports coach one on one, and then demonstrate the new skill to the team at the next training session. Jack was able to shine and remain part of the team.

Jack's sports coach also accompanied Jack to a soccer clinic in the school holidays. It was offered by a highly professional training team. Jack's sports coach remained in the background and stepped up when Jack needed help to understand a new skill. With the right support, Jack progressed through the programme with everyone else and had a good time.



# Notes

# Notes

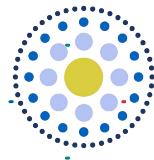


# Notes

# Family Advocacy

Est. 1991

Family Advocacy is an independent and impartial advocacy organisation that works with families across NSW to promote and defend the rights and interests of people who have a developmental disability\*. Our aim is to achieve positive social roles for people with disability through the development of advocacy by families and by strengthening the knowledge, role and influence of the family.



## Resourcing Inclusive Communities

An initiative of Family Advocacy

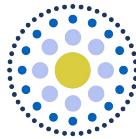
Resourcing Inclusive Communities is an initiative of Family Advocacy that works to assist people with disability to live valued lives in community. Our work provides support to people with disability, families, allies and the broader community through an international knowledge base, well developed tools and resources, tailored training and mentoring that enable people with disability to be fully included alongside everyday Australians.

\*Developmental disability includes but is not limited to: autism, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and multiple disability.

This workbook has been funded by Ageing, Disability and Home care. Department of Family and Community Services NSW.

# DEVELOPING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Strategies for assisting a person with disability to connect with people around shared interests and experiences



**Resourcing  
Inclusive  
Communities**

An initiative of Family Advocacy

Contact us for more information:

**Email** [info@ric.org.au](mailto:info@ric.org.au)  
**Phone** 1800 774 764  
**Website** [www.ric.org.au](http://www.ric.org.au)