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## Commitment

Every 'successful' relationship has the element of commitment.

This is the type of relationship which all of us consciously or not, have need of.

Advocates too in their relationship, could do well to occasionally reassess their own level of commitment.

- Commitment is all about entrusting, caring and binding oneself to another.
- Commitment is the invisible cord that brings people together and keeps them together in a relationship.
- **Making a commitment means making space in a busy life for another person—bringing stability and security to a relationship.**
- We make commitments based on faith, hope and trust. Making a commitment involves risk. It has an unconditional quality to it. We may even give up some of our freedom, individuality and control in our lives.
- Commitments are worth the effort and sometimes the sacrifice because when all is said and done, people are almost always better off because of them. If we keep them the way they were meant to be kept... with care as well as consistency... we are laying the foundation for the only kind of life fit for human beings. This is ultimately why commitment keeping is worth a try.

Lewis B Smeades

You will find  
As you look back upon your life  
That the moments when you really have lived  
Are the moments  
When you have done things  
In the spirit of love

Henry Drummond

## Bakery Role Opens Doors for Josh

When Josh finished Year 12 at the local high school, he and his family began looking at options for him to pursue in his local community. Josh lives with an obvious impairment. Not surprisingly then, the only options presented to him were segregated workshops or day options where he would spend most of his days with other people with similar disabilities. Building on his competencies did not seem to rank high on the agenda for the school or for the professionals who were paid to assist Josh to find suitable post-school career paths.

Fortunately for Josh, the sheltered workshop where he was placed asked him to leave after a couple of months due to behaviour they deemed as unacceptable. This prompted Josh's family and friends to think of alternative options for Josh without the help of paid professionals.

It did not take long before Josh found paid work at a Bakery not far from his home. This seemed like a great fit for Josh who has always had strengths in areas of hospitality and hosting, due to him and his family frequently entertaining friends and family at home.

Josh has been working at the Bakery twice a week for over two years now and his confidence and self esteem have developed greatly during this time.

Josh is a baker, and being in this role brings with it much more than a bakers hat (although, he does have a bakers hat too!). He has learnt how to be responsible - not just for himself, but for the team he works with. He knows that if he isn't responsible and reliable, it will impact on the whole team. This encourages Josh to keep going, even when he is feeling tired.

The job at the bakery has also developed his social skills in the wider community. Having a valued role as a baker opens new doors for Josh when meeting people and in conversations with them. When Josh tells people he is a baker, people instantly know what that means, and it assists in developing conversations. In this way Josh is viewed as an active contributor to the community rather than a passive receiver of services.

Josh's work role has also furthered his independence. The money Josh earns at the bakery allows him to enjoy and pursue his interests and passions when he isn't working. This has a huge impact on his self-esteem. Josh feels good about who he is and what he does. Like most of us, Josh wants to contribute and enjoys the feeling of satisfaction after a hard day's work.

One of the most positive outcomes of working at the bakery is that Josh is meeting people that he wouldn't have met otherwise in the local community. Rather than only spending time with family or other people with disabilities, Josh now spends a greater amount of time interacting with typical people in his community. This has a huge impact on Josh's competencies and understanding of social norms and expectations which are important skills all young people need to learn after leaving school. **Renee Butler**

**SRV alerts us to the potency of enabling people to be in valued roles and the many good things that can come from being in a valued role.**



### **Whose needs are being served: The benefits of bureaucratic Shielding. Fletcher Tame**

*Fletcher Tame has worked in community services for over twenty years; around half that time in management roles. His work in the disability sector began in 2010 and shortly after he attended an Optimal individual service design (OISD) course, facilitated by Michael Kendrick & CRU. Fletcher strives to find, make and improve ways of using systems to support people, instead of the other way around. Fletcher spoke of how, as a manager within a large human service, he applies the notion of bureaucratic shielding to his day to day work. Fletcher is a director on CRU's board.*

#### **Whose needs are being served: The benefits of bureaucratic shielding**

Humans have, for a long time, organised themselves and their resources into bureaucratic structures to get things done. Unfortunately these structures can easily become almost self-sustaining to the point where more effort is required from people to support the system rather than the other way around. It's the tail wagging the dog. In human services this can mean that priorities and "what's important" moves away from serving people to something else. This phenomena of 'process before people' is a potential vulnerability of all systems and is not restricted only to large service providers. "Formal" disability services and supports are almost entirely funded and delivered via bureaucracies (large and small). It follows then that even with the noblest of intentions, disability services delivered in this way are inevitably prone to deliver the darkness of 'the system' along with any light that comes with 'pure' support. As the old state-based bureaucracy is on the way out and a new federally administered bureaucracy is coming in, service providers are re-organising and restructuring themselves accordingly. While I can accept that this is probably required in order to improve what we have been doing to date, I am left wondering how do we do that without that impacting on the people we serve? I think bureaucratic shielding is a big part of the answer. I first heard of Bureaucratic Shielding at an Optimal Individual Service Design (OISD) course in 2010, run by CRU. The concept was something of an epiphany for me.

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I was new to the disability sector and confused as to why I needed to know about building codes, fire safety, CPR, food preparation - and why did everyone I work with put so much time and effort into stuff that didn't seem to have anything to do with people? The course helped me put my reality into a different context and reassure me that I wasn't the one missing the point of our work.

### **So what is Bureaucratic Shielding?**

To me, Bureaucratic Shielding is the actions a person can take to intentionally protect people from the destructive, de-humanising, incoherent or largely irrelevant aspects of organisations and systems.

This means working in a manner, and behaving in a way that promotes interpersonal focus and connection, over the impact of non-personal systemic and organisational factors on people. This applies to the people we serve, their families and supporters as well as paid staff. Examples of this include: • using plain English instead of jargon and technical language; • being transparent, available, approachable and not only relying on formal meetings to discuss issues; • creating space for teams to talk about how their support is/ isn't being effective, instead of focusing on organisational matters; • not overloading workers with a set of tasks, checklists and procedures so that they are so busy they don't have time speak to the person they are there to support; • not putting organisational needs and funding considerations ahead of people's human needs. For example, making people who have never met and may not even like each other, live in forced co-tenancies.

### **What action have you taken because of it?**

Because it is so easy for systems to focus on their own needs and not the needs of those they support, we need to be ever-vigilant; this is always a work in progress. That said, I'd like to highlight five actions that can help:

**1. Awareness** - Being aware of and reminding myself of the real reason this work is important. What I do must somehow lead to a person's life improving. It's not about getting my paperwork done. It's also about being aware of the context in which I work and the extent to which it impinges on what I do and am asked to do. Legislation, funding, service agreements, industrial matters and office politics are part of the program in many ways and can be very important for the organisation.

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As a manager they are my responsibility; they are not the responsibility of the people who use our service and we should not pretend they are.

**2. Pushing back** - A CEO I once worked with said "ask yourself what is the link between what I am doing now and benefit for people with disability. If you can't see one, then ask yourself if you should be doing it at all". Sometimes, you need to say 'no, I'm not going to do that'. I am not advocating being rude or pushy but rather being clear about what your purpose is and how your activities deliver on what your role has promised to deliver. So say no, where you need to.

**3. Absorbing** - Inevitably things will come to you that you cannot push back, so you absorb it. For example, you call the department on behalf of that family; you take the time to explain the funding to the person because the email was too complex; when Workplace Health and Safety want to train support staff in asbestos management - your senior management group gets the training because there are fewer of them; they are already in the office and they will pass the info on in a way that individual teams need, thus protecting their time and resources for people and their families.

**4. Co-create** - If it cannot be avoided, find ways to make the bureaucratic processes more relevant, helpful or accessible to the person you support. Recruiting staff can and should involve the person receiving support, or at least a family member. Rostering, how funding is used, what and how support is actually delivered are all things that can almost entirely be dictated by the person and their family, with some assistance from paid staff. It doesn't have to be the other way around.

### **5. Equipping** -

It is not uncommon to see the intent of protecting people being taken too far, resulting in a person who is perfectly capable of much being limited to very little. Bureaucracies are part of life and it can be helpful for people to learn how to deal with life rather always be shielded from it. Giving ideas, encouragement, information and your time to facilitate someone's learning about the system is essential in helping them to drive their own outcomes. You don't have to be qualified, or a genius, or super-knowledgeable about it all. You just need to commit and follow through in enabling a person's growth and independence when it comes to system-wrangling, making their own decisions and speaking for themselves.

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### Why is this concept important for leaders in the future?

It is important to point out that most leaders are not in management roles, so we must not leave this only to that group. Australia's new national funding scheme promotes choice and control within a market driven by participants. Customer service is the framework de jour. This is a major shift in how services are provided when in reality, a lot of people have never been seriously asked before what they want or how they want it done; or aren't listened to respectfully when they do express their wishes. There is a conundrum for service providers as they adapt their models to fit the new scheme and navigate this period of change whilst meeting the timely hopes and aspirations of those they serve. They need to be clear on their purpose and priorities because what people really need is time and respectful, abiding commitment, not Policy Direction to get them through this.

The ongoing corporatisation of community services has highlighted the dual tensions of "Money vs Mission". These things are essentially incompatible and have always been, but this combination is now "the way things are". This is why more than ever, we need to be able to identify and deliver what is important to people and their families and do that in a financially sustainable way. We need to find ways to meet the needs of individuals without commodifying them in the process. Being very clear about the purpose of your work, your role in it and what success looks like - as measured by the people you serve - is critical. Being aware of how quickly systems and bureaucratic requirements can become all-consuming and the importance of keeping focus on what matters to people will guide us all in what is to be shielded and what is to be embraced. So when it comes to Bureaucratic Shielding, what one person can do is stay aware; push back; absorb, create and equip because a better life is unlikely to be achieved through asbestos management training.

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To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.

Nelson Mandela

quotespedia.info





## The Struggle for a "Real" Life

Whenever I have a discussion with any individual or group about what a typical ordinary real life looks like, we very quickly agree on the broad outlines; the way we live our lives, our families, our intimate relationships, children, close friends, pets, acquaintances, homes, jobs, education, recreation, worship, celebrations, a sense of citizenship, belonging, community, contributing, mutuality, reciprocity, joy, sadness, struggle, connections to our past, belief in, and hope for, the future, learning and growth. The details may be different in degree or kind but we easily identify in the lives of others (and they in ours), the essential elements of a real life.

Something seems to change, however, when we discuss, aspire to, try to organize or support, a typical ordinary life for or with people with a disability. The intent is usually good and honorable but somehow, the homes, friends, schools and jobs for people with a disability do not look quite like the home we would want to live in, the friends we would want to be with, the schools we would want our children to attend, or the jobs we would want to go to each day. When any of the elements (either individually or collectively) of our typical lives are used as a measuring stick, people with disabilities seem, for the most part, to be leading very "atypical" and "unreal" lives. Why is this so?

There are probably many, often interconnected reasons, but some are fundamental. Firstly there is the assumption made by people in society overall, in families, communities, and human services in particular, that people with disabilities are not like the rest of us, so will not learn, grow, and develop in the same way, and thus not achieve a "real" life. An acquaintance of mine, who has cerebral palsy recalls with great clarity her early school days when she was the only person in her class who was not asked what she was going to do, or be when she grew up! Assumptions such as these are usually the starting point for a life which is lived on a parallel set of "tracks" whereby the person can see the "real" world, experienced some parts of it (eg be part of a real family, but never really belong to that world in the typical ordinary way that non-disabled people do).

Another barrier to a "real" life is the assumption that the service system can somehow replace or supplant natural, freely given relationships, which are the very glue, the stuff of our own lives.

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I sometimes ask people to imagine what it would feel like, and how one might respond if a human service worker was to knock on your door, introduce him/herself as the local area case manager, and offer to help prepare a plan for your life! This is not to suggest that some of the things that human services have to offer are not needed or important.

What is an issue though, is the assumption that human services are relevant in such domains as relationships, or having some control over one's life, building individual, family or community capacity. There is mounting evidence that precisely the opposite is more likely to be true.

Relatedly, the roles played by both the servers and those served often create a mutually reinforcing and mutually dependency making a situation whereby the person with a disability learns not to become too competent lest he/she loses the support of a person she/he may need, and possibly like or love very much. The worker, on the other hand, learns that need to be objective and professional, not to become too personally involved, to speak to and about the person he/she serves in ways which make it quite clear who is in charge, who is the boss. The community learns from this how it should treat a person with a disability. The person with a disability learns, and is reinforced for playing the "client" role, how to behave, and where he/she belongs in the world. Of course the roles played by server and served are not always so blatant or obvious.

Indeed, the roles are sometimes masked in the language of typicality (friend, co-worker, house-mate) which conceals their true nature to some extent. It is partly deceit but, more often that not it is merely self-deceiving. Usually, people in the community know only too well, the nature of the relationship.

Often the language of "rights" and "choices" is used to convey the impression that person with a disability is leading a "real" life. Under this guise some people have been left unsupported in the community, or merely dumped. Others have been exposed to crime, drug and alcohol addiction and ultimately, to prison or death. More often though, it is the case that the purported rights and choices are merely a mirage.

Most people with disabilities have little choice about where they live, with whom they live, what they do by way of work or in their leisure time.

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The manager of a supported employment project I visited recently, was asked if workers were able to resign from their job. He said it was possible "probably for one day" but that they would quickly be sent back to work by staff in the group home. They had to go somewhere during the day because they could not stay at home!

Such is the power and seductiveness of the "typical" and the "ordinary" that there is a great temptation work workers, services, parents and advocates to try to re-create it out of its natural context. Such is the need for "typicality", like the need to belong, for love, to be needed, that many people with disabilities will play their part in the charade in the hope that somehow, this is the "real" world. The reality is that people who are already extremely vulnerable and wounded, may simply have another wound to add to their load. It may be the straw that breaks the cam's back.

There are no short cuts to a "typical, ordinary real" life. Our lives are the sum of all the typical experiences we have had, how we have integrated and adapted to these, what we have learned along the way. A "real" life cannot be invented or commanded into being; it cannot be the product of an individual service plan.

This is not to say that what is typical and valued in our society is not a useful or worthwhile frame of reference. Indeed, the problem for many generations of people with disabilities has been that the framework for "reform" has not been what is typical and valued. Rather, it has been a history of flawed reform, usually trying to improve previously flawed "reforms" many of which had their origins in institutions and institutional practices.

However, let us not pretend, under the banner of creating typical, valued lives for people with disabilities in the community, that it is easy, can be conveyed a by fine words and promises or by some fancy new program.

The struggle for a "real" life must be real.

Peter Millier

### Advocate/Protégé Contact—how much?

A question sometimes asked by advocates is how much contact should they have with their protégé. The answer is that there is no set amount of time. As in any relationship, whether with family or friends, contact varies depending on what is going on at the time.

The difference with advocate/protégé relationships is that when the protégé needs the support of the advocate, the advocate does their best to be there for their protégé. It is possible for an advocate to do a few things and then step back for a short while. Contact isn't necessarily maintained weekly. You may visit your protégé or it may not always be possible to make a commitment to be with someone on a frequent, regular basis for the long-term and, in order for the relationship to endure over time, we must be creative about how our relationship is developed and sustained.

It is important to understand that no two advocacy relationships are the same. You may know an advocate who has very regular personal contact, where advocate and protégé are very much involved on a social level. You may also know of an advocate whose personal contact is less frequent, where the advocate acts as a guide, mentor, or assistant to the protégé to work through difficulties and issues which may confront them, such as providing practical assistance to a person who is looking for work or who is wanting to move into a flat or house.

It goes without saying that your relationships are what Citizen Advocacy is all about, but we know that, like in all relationships, there are always going to be highs and lows, good times and bad times, that's what makes it all worthwhile. "It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can."

If people could really see  
the value of giving  
they would offer  
a part of every meal.

Buddha



## The Strengths, Limitations and challenges of Citizen Advocacy

Citizen Advocacy was developed in recognition of the fact that people with disability require protection and advocacy.

### Potential Strengths of a Citizen Advocacy Programme

- Citizen Advocacy is separate from direct services and from 'casework' or 'paid protective service worker' approach.
- Citizen Advocacy offers reasonable probabilities for continuity of protection and advocacy, due to back up of voluntary citizen advocates by paid staff.
- Built in conflict of interest are as low as any organized helping form can make them.
- There is a highly individualised range of advocacy options to meet both the practical and emotional needs.
- Most needs can be met through informal relationships. The options exist for citizen advocates to assume formal roles (e.g. guardianship) when needed.
- There is a reasonable chance that necessary long term relationships can exist either formally or informally.
- The cost of Citizen Advocacy is low, especially in comparison to other approaches

*Limitations of a Citizen Advocacy Programme*  
See page 16

## Built in limitations of a Citizen Advocacy Programme

- Since the time available to recruit Citizen Advocates is limited, Citizen Advocacy will probably never be able to meet all of the advocacy and protection needs of people with disability
- Citizen Advocacy Office should not control or direct established advocate-protégé relationships any more than would be expected in our society for other freely given relationships.
- Citizen Advocacy cannot replace other forms of advocacy. For example, systems (or class) advocacy is focussed on changing larger systems forces which impact on the quality of life for people with disability as a group. Systems advocacy focuses on patterns of problems (eg. Exclusion of a class of children with disability from public education), while Citizen Advocacy focuses on individual peoples changing needs over time.
- Sometimes opposition to Citizen Advocacy Programmes increases as advocates become more affective and successful in representing protégé's interests.
- Experience has shown Boards and staff face many internal and external pressures to move away from the basic values and principles of Citizen Advocacy in favour of other principles and strategies. When followed these lead to short term rewards but result in long term loss of many potential strengths of Citizen Advocacy.

*Challenges for Board members of Citizen Advocacy*  
See page 17

### Challenges for Board members of Citizen Advocacy.

- People with disability have many unmet needs. Citizen Advocacy is one form of advocacy but cannot respond to all needs of all people. Citizen Advocacy needs to be done well to be effective and the challenge to do it well is to constantly strive to adhere to the fundamental principles of the concept.
- Most of the compromises made with the essential principles of Citizen Advocacy result from a failure on the part of Board of Management and staff to believe that citizens can vigorously advocate for people with disability.
- One of the greatest challenges facing the implementers of Citizen Advocacy is to keep faith with the principles that many competent citizens in the community will voluntarily and freely chose to accept the personal involvement and sacrifice involved in Citizen Advocacy.

### The 5 principles of Citizen Advocacy

- **Citizen Advocate Independence**  
Citizen advocates are unpaid and give their time freely to be an independent volunteer to an individual.
- **Citizen Advocacy Program Independence**  
Citizen advocacy programs must be independent from direct services in funding, administration and location
- **Clarity of Citizen Advocacy Staff Role and Function**  
Citizen advocacy staff should focus on creating and supporting citizen advocacy relationships, and to building and maintaining the citizen advocacy program. Staff must not do advocacy.
- **Balanced Orientation to Protégé needs**  
Citizen advocacy programs should recruit Protégé's of varying ages, living circumstances, advocacy needs and personal characteristics
- **Positive Interpretation of People with Disabilities**  
Citizen advocacy programs should aim to be model agencies in the interpretation and representation of people with disabilities.

### Office resources of interest

#### BOOKS

- From behind the Piano – The building of Judith Snow's Unique Circle of Friends
- Observing, Recording, and Addressing personal Physical Appearance by means of the Appear Tool
- Suppression Stories
- A guideline on protecting the health and lives of patients in Hospitals – especially if the patient is a member of a societally devalued class
- Oliver Twist has asked for me – The politics and practice of getting justice for people with disabilities
- Duty of Care – Who's responsible?
- Social Role Valorization – Advanced issues in SRV Theory
- A brief Introduction to SRV – WW
- Public Policy Private Lives
- Talking about A series of Community Conversations
- The Homes West Experience – steps to independent living for adults with a disability
- One person at a time – How one agency changed from Group to Individualised services
- The Forgotten Generation
- The Inclusion Papers – Strategies to make inclusion work
- Christmas in Purgatory
- On being the change we want to see – Volume 3
- Standing by me – stories of Citizen Advocacy

#### DVD's

Living a good life  
Circles of Support  
A history of human services, Universal Lessons, and Future implications  
Advocacy for People with Disability

Please note: The Sunshine Coast Citizen Advocacy policies are available to anyone who would like to view them – Staff members are available to read the policy's to you if you need the assistance.

Sunshine Coast Citizen Advocacy

**Sunshine Coast Citizen  
Advocacy**

Is funded by the Department  
of Social Services

The program operates in  
and around Maroochydore,  
Nambour, Caloundra,  
Mooloolaba, Buderim,  
Coolum, Noosa and the  
Hinterland areas.

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