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Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability

**Submission from VALID Inc
(Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with
Disabilities Inc)**



CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	6
1. The Right to be Included.....	8
2. To be included, I need to be supported.....	8
3. Self advocacy support	9
4. Family support.....	11
5. Advocacy support	13
6. Disability services support	14
7. Community inclusion.....	16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. For most people with intellectual disability, being included means having friends, going to school, having a job, participating and being accepted and respected in the community. In this respect, they share the dreams and aspirations - along with the disappointments and frustrations - of people across the world.
2. Supporting inclusion requires supporters who are capable enough, and secure enough in themselves, to get the balance right between too much and too little support. Typically, support comes from:
 - Self Advocacy and peers
 - Families
 - Advocacy
 - Funded services
 - Community and generic services
3. Self Advocacy Support: VALID believes that the most effective strategy for ensuring people with intellectual disability are not excluded – and therefore are not discriminated against, not exploited, not abused, not disenfranchised and not left out - is to boost the resourcing of self advocacy and peer support initiatives.
4. Family Support: VALID believes families are the most effective and powerful source of support for the inclusion of people with intellectual disability. VALID also believes families need information, training and support to ensure they remain positively focused on the rights of their sons and daughters, and to assist them in planning for positive futures. We believe this is best addressed by equipping families with the skills, tools and values of person-centred thinking and planning.
5. Advocacy Support: VALID believes disability advocacy groups – at least, those which are genuinely led by and inclusive of people with disabilities and families - have a vitally important role to play in building more inclusive communities. For this to occur, advocacy groups need to be properly resourced and supported to proactively engage in the challenge of changing community attitudes, building the capacity of their members, demanding quality services and achieving the rights of citizenship.
6. Disability Services Support: VALID believes the most powerful driver of change and reform is the will of people with disabilities and their families. They must be supported to build their capacity to engage on equal terms with service providers and within the community. Their role in changing the service sector, and indeed in changing the community, must attract levels of investment from Government at least equivalent to the level of investment that goes into service reform. Organisations that respect and heed the will of the person with a disability, and which welcome and respect the contribution of families, must become the new model of service; in order for such services to evolve or emerge, however, people with disabilities and their families must be empowered to engage, to demand, to collaborate, and to work in effective partnership.

7. Community inclusion: VALID believes if we are to do more than pay lip service to the right of people with intellectual disability to be included in society as equal citizens, then service agencies will need to start recruiting and training people in the skills of making it happen. The pay-off for government, when inclusion truly occurs, is a dramatic reduction in the costs of the person to the specialist system, but this will only be achieved for people with intellectual disability if service providers and their staff are:
- Genuinely committed to ensuring their clients develop the capacity to survive and thrive without them, and;
 - Capable of cultivating and nurturing the kind of relationships with people in the community which encourage them to open their doors and welcome people with intellectual disability into their lives.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability

We understand the Terms of Reference to be :

- a) defining 'social inclusion' for Victorians with a disability
- b) identifying the nature and scale of relative inclusion (exclusion) and participation of Victorians with a disability in the economic, social and civil dimensions of society
- c) understanding the impact of Victorian government services and initiatives aimed at improving inclusion and participation
- d) identifying examples of good practice on inclusion and participation driven by local government and the community sector
- e) assessing how the Disability Act 2006 has impacted on the social inclusion of people with a disability with respect to Victorian government services
- f) recommending ways to increase social inclusion, including the roles and collaboration between local, state and federal governments, the community sector, individuals with a disability and their carers.

We appreciate the Committee's invitation for VALID to reflect in particular on:

- ways to increase social inclusion for people with a disability
- VALID's 'stand beside' approach to advocacy for people with a disability, and does this help them to be more socially included
- how the Disability Act 2006 has helped people with a disability to be socially included
- examples of ways that people with an intellectual disability have achieved social inclusion

VALID's Vision:

VALID is committed to the vision of an Australian nation in which people with a disability are empowered to exercise their rights, as human beings and as citizens, in accordance with the Victorian Charter on Human Rights and Responsibilities, the Disability Act 2006 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

VALID's Mission:

The mission of the VALID Advocacy Service is to protect and defend the human rights of people with an intellectual disability, and to champion their rights as citizens to:

Community Presence, Choice, Respect, Community Participation and Self Determination

VALID is funded by the State Government as an advocacy group for adults with intellectual disabilities and their families. VALID is managed by an independent Committee made up of people with disability, family members and concerned citizens. We are a leading state-wide agency funded to provide independent advocacy support to people with intellectual disabilities in Victoria.

This Submission is informed by our ongoing processes of consultation and engagement within our self advocacy and family networks, which includes:

- Regular monthly meetings of five regional and one central self advocacy groups, totalling an average of 350 people with disabilities
- Five Peer Support to Buy Support Groups throughout Victoria
- A program of information and skills building activities for people with disabilities and family members, involving several hundred participants monthly
- Three annual conferences involving app. 1500 people with disabilities, family members and supporters, including the Having a Say Conference - the largest conference for people with disabilities in the Southern Hemisphere
- Regular monthly meetings of the VALID-initiated Geelong Parent Network, which continues to provide input into VALID's policy-making processes
- State Agency representation of Inclusion Australia (formerly known as the National Council on Intellectual Disability), Australia's peak body representing people with intellectual disability and their families
- Australian representation of Inclusion International, the world's largest NGO representing people with intellectual disability and their families

**The UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with a Disability
Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community**

Parties to the present Convention recognize the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and shall take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community, including by ensuring that:

- a. Persons with disabilities have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement;
- b. Persons with disabilities have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community;
- c. Community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs.

1. THE RIGHT TO BE INCLUDED

EVERYONE WANTS TO BELONG

'We value being a part of families, neighbourhoods, a group of peers at school, a group of colleagues at work, clubs and sports teams, and having friends and neighbours who care and look out for us. Unfortunately all too often people with an intellectual disabilities are left out – hidden, excluded or kept separated from the rest of their communities...Community is fundamental to our sense of who we are. Communities are stronger when we are all included and when everyone can participate, contribute and be valued.'

Inclusion International's Global Report on Article 19 - The Right to Live and Be Included in the Community, entitled: 'Inclusive Communities = Stronger Communities.'

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) obliges governments and societies to:

- Enable people to make choices about how and where they live
- Provide support so that people who have a disability can live in the community
- Ensure that mainstream services and systems are available and accessible to people with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

People with intellectual disability tell us that living independently and being included in the community means:

- Being able to make decisions for themselves
- Choosing where and with whom they live
- Having their own dreams and aspirations
- Making their own plans
- Being respected and valued
- Being free

For most people with intellectual disability, being included means having friends, going to school, having a job, participating and being accepted and respected in the community. In this respect, they share the dreams and aspirations - along with the disappointments and frustrations - of people across the world.

To me, inclusion means:

- *Having friends with and without disabilities*
- *Being part of the work force and the real world*
- *People liking me because of who I am*
- *Being part of a team that values my abilities*
- *Being free to make my own mind up and have my own opinions*

Heather Forsyth, VALID Self Advocacy Leader

2. TO BE INCLUDED, I NEED TO BE SUPPORTED

For people with intellectual disability, the term 'independence' is probably better defined as 'inter-dependence'. They may need support and assistance not only with day to day tasks such as with shopping and managing finances but also with more significant supports such as assistance with communicating and eating. They may also need assistance to consider the options available to them, support to make decisions, and support to understand and defend their rights.

It is important to understand this distinction, because it has significant implications for the meaning of inclusion for people with intellectual disability. Without 'inter-dependent' support and assistance, many people with intellectual disability find it difficult to be included within the community. They often require support to be included within their own families, to make and maintain friendships and relationships, and even to be included in decisions regarding their own lives. Achieving true inclusion for people with intellectual disability, therefore, usually relies on getting the balance right – i.e. the balance between too little and too much support. Too little support can risk a person being exposed to rejection and failure; too much support can undermine a person's sense of autonomy and self esteem.

Supporting inclusion requires supporters who are capable enough, and secure enough in themselves, to get the balance right between too much and too little support. Typically, support comes from:

- **Self Advocacy and peers**
- **Families**
- **Advocacy**
- **Funded services**
- **Community and generic services**

3. SELF ADVOCACY AND PEER SUPPORT

The desire to be included - in family, in community and in society - is a fundamental human need, but it is also a fundamental human choice. We may choose to be included, or - depending on how we are feeling - we may equally choose solitude. People with intellectual disability tell us that they want to be included, but more fundamentally they tell us they want the right to choose when, where and with whom they associate. In other words, they want the right to be included but not at the expense of their right of self-determination.

Currently in Victoria, people with intellectual disability:

- Rarely get to choose who they live with: DHS Vacancy Coordination panels make that determination for many, and as a result many people are forced to live with strangers.
- Are often forced to associate with people they neither know nor like, and are required to occupy their days in segregated settings
- Become 'community tourists', being driven around in groups and visiting shopping centres in order to get their artificial dose of 'community inclusion'

In many cases, we see the person's right to be included in the community being paid cynical lip service - usually due to the lack of adequate staffing and resources - and their more fundamental right to self determination being ignored. While other Victorians have the right to lead their own lives, we see the lives of many people with intellectual disability being led by others - often well-meaning and well-intentioned, but also often without due regard for their right to choose.

It is important to understand this issue, because we risk exposing people to failure and rejection when we simply place them in the community and expect them to 'be included'.

For people to truly enjoy the benefits of relationships and opportunities within the community, they need to be continually exercising choice and control over the level and nature of their involvement.

In our experience, people need to feel confident and secure before they will successfully connect with others; people who don't have their choices understood or respected, and people who have others controlling their lives, are often so lacking in confidence and self esteem that connecting with others becomes almost impossible. How can we expect people to move easily within the community, to be accepted and included, when they have often been conditioned not to accept themselves and are not even included in the most basic plans and decisions that affect them?

For many people with intellectual disability, their ability to be included will remain unexplored and undeveloped unless support is provided to build their capacity, particularly their confidence and their self esteem. Such capacity is best developed through the kind of peer mentoring and positive role modelling that is available through independent self advocacy groups and peer support networks.

Self advocacy and peer support groups serve two functions that are critical to community inclusion. They act as 'resource bases' from which people with disability can gain confidence and build the skills necessary to influence decisions, stand up for their rights and interact positively with others in the community. They also act as 'launching pads' from which people with disability can collectively influence community attitudes, break down barriers and 'launch' themselves with confidence into community activities and relationships.

In VALID's view, despite the emphasis given to community inclusion and self determination in the Disability Act and the State Plan, there has been far too little recognition of the important role to be played by self advocacy groups in empowering and enabling people with disability to take their place within the community.

Currently the Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU) is funded by DHS to provide advice and support to independent self advocacy groups starting up in the community, but without actual resourcing to seed and sustain 'free-standing' groups, they simply do not survive or thrive.

VALID supports a wide range of self advocacy group meetings, in which people regularly talk about their experiences. They tell us:

'Sometimes I don't get included when my two friends at work are talking, I feel left out.'

'I couldn't go to my brother's funeral. Mum thought I'd make too much noise.'

'I recently found out that a childhood friend of mine passed away, we were really close. It wasn't until this happened that my staff discovered we'd only been living a few streets away from each other... I feel like I've lost all that time together where we could have spent with each other.'

'Agency reliability is difficult at times...I've booked support hours to use for my ISP and due to unforeseen things happening, staff cancel shifts. Which means I can't do my shopping or do basic things around my house... It's extremely frustrating!'

'People stare at me, it makes me feel uncomfortable.'

'When I go to the shops to buy something the shop keeper talks to my staff, not me. I'm the one paying.'

'My parents told me I couldn't vote because of my disability but someone else told me I had to because I'm an Australian citizen...'

VALID is funded through DHS to establish and support self advocacy and peer support groups. In addition, VALID's Keys To Success program, also funded by DHS, provides training to people in their rights as human beings, citizens and consumers, and builds their capacity to participate in the community, to lead their own planning - and ultimately to lead their own lives.

The VALID groups – which come together for monthly regional network meetings and the annual VALID Having a Say Conference - are providing a highly important opportunity for people to talk through their issues and concerns, to learn about their rights - e.g. recent meetings were all about their right to vote and other meetings have talked about their right to complain - as well as to tackle community prejudices and barriers. Most importantly, they support people to be included on their own terms – with choice and control, and with self confidence and self esteem.

VALID believes that the most effective strategy for ensuring people with intellectual disability are not excluded – and therefore are not discriminated against, not exploited, not abused, not disenfranchised and not left out - is to boost the resourcing of self advocacy and peer support initiatives.

4. FAMILY SUPPORT

For people with intellectual disabilities, like everyone else, being 'included' is fundamentally about relationships - with families, friends and community. Families play a critical role in supporting people to be included, but families themselves need support to avoid feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Because many families have negative experiences of systemic resistance and social stigma, they often need support to remain positively focused and ambitious for their sons and daughters.

If parents don't imagine it's possible for their son or daughter to be included - in the community, in their neighbourhood, in their local school or even within their own family – it's almost guaranteed not to happen.

Parents frequently tell VALID they want to support their sons and daughters to be included, but without adequate support they often have to pursue segregated, congregated and even institutional options.

Parents also tell us that, as much as they might wish for their sons and daughters to be included in the community, their experiences of discrimination, bullying, exploitation and abuse often causes them to err on the side of exclusion, in order to 'keep them safe'. The fact that segregated settings have proved to be equally conducive to abuse, and often more so than the community, simply adds to their burden of anxiety and fear.

Parents' trust in the capacity of services to get the inclusion balance right - especially the balance between dignity of risk and duty of care - is easily undermined by examples of staff exercising poor judgement and of services failing in their responsibilities. Again, given the choice between inclusion and security – and that is exactly how it is often perceived – most parents will understandably opt for the latter.

Despite the Disability Act's recognition of the important role of families, too little effort has been given to supporting them.

Families need support not just to meet the physical demands of caring for someone with a severe disability, but also support to assist them in dealing with the emotional stresses and strains of the parenting role. In particular, they often need support in balancing their own natural parental concern for safety and security with their other natural parental concerns for the independence, growth, self sufficiency and happiness of their sons and daughters.

In VALID's experience, the best strategy for providing such support is to ensure parents have opportunities not only to talk with each other, but to learn and grow in their ability to support the growth and development of their son or daughter, particularly as they enter adulthood.

Parents need support to remain positively focused and ambitious, and at the same time they often need information and training that enables them to plan and negotiate their way effectively. Without such support families are often left to become disillusioned and overwhelmed, and their expectations of their child's future therefore become correspondingly low. Parents therefore often become easy prey for the cynics and naysayers, who seem to thrive on spreading negativity and bitterness amongst people who are already struggling to imagine a better future. In such circles, inclusion gets a bad rap. It's often denigrated as being idealistic and unrealistic; the tragedy is, as long as parents are prevented from having hopeful expectations, and are not supported to pursue the possibilities, the situation will remain hopeless.

Conscious of the vital role of families in supporting people with intellectual disability to be included, VALID has developed a range of programs designed to inform, support and empower families. The main program, Families as Planning Partners, is funded by DHS and has enabled us to run courses across the State over the past three years. Another organisation, Belonging Matters, has also been supported to work with families in a similar way. Through our programs, parents are brought together to share their experiences and feelings, to learn about the system and what is available, to understand and become skilled in the new person-centred approaches to planning, to effectively support their sons and daughters to make their own decisions and choices, and to become their planning partners.

VALID believes families are the most effective and powerful source of support for the inclusion of people with intellectual disability. VALID also believes families need information, training and support to ensure they remain positively focused on the rights of their sons and daughters, and to assist them in planning for positive futures. We believe this is best addressed by equipping families with the skills, tools and values of person-centred thinking and planning.

Families tell us the Families as Planning Partners Course:

- *Gave me skills to tackle future negotiations.*
- *Enable me to know what to include in my planning process.*
- *Should be able to implement what I learnt to develop a plan to improve my son's life and those that support him.*
- *Help others to achieve the outcomes with my son.*
- *Reinforced my resolve.*
- *How to approach others to get what you want.*
- *Excellent sharing of personal experiences*
- *Reinforced my knowledge of system and what I need to do to make my sons the best they can be.*
- *I thought the course has provided me with a lot of information about resources and places to get help for my children with disabilities.*
- *Excellent- lot of things I heard for the first time after 17 years "caring". Also being new to Geelong, good to hear local names of orgs. Many thanks.*
- *Learnt a lot of new things and have learnt things about myself and how to behave in different situations.*
- *Learned good strategies- build confidence. Very informative, looking forward to more sessions. Speaker is very informative, given lots of useful information.*
- *Excellent presentation for families new to the industry. Introduction to Disability Services and the journey.*
- *Each class is even more informative each time we came and leaves you with a lot to think about.*
- *We have received a lot of very important information and ideas for my children that have disabilities to help with their future.*
- *Think course could be condensed however times allows for networking etc which is valuable.*
- *This really helped me think about what info provided and to who I provided it to. Not all info relevant to some.*

5. ADVOCACY SUPPORT

Many people with intellectual disability require support to help them deal with issues ranging from everyday dilemmas to major life-changing challenges. Many will rely on, and receive, the advocacy support of families, friends and neighbours. Many will also require the independent and more specialised support of an independent advocate. Whether they receive it or not, however, usually depends on either their own capacity to ask for it, or on the willingness of those around them to seek it. The capacity of most advocacy organisations to proactively seek out people in need of support is virtually non-existent.

Because of the limited supply of independent advocacy, individual advocacy, including VALID's, has tended to become focused on reacting to situations of crisis or high need, and has become less available to people who need advocacy support in their day-to-day lives. Such advocacy was once the charter of Citizen Advocacy groups, and it is very regrettable that Government support for agencies that recruit citizens from the community to stand alongside people with intellectual disability over the long term has all but disappeared. Instead, individual advocacy has mostly become, like VALID's, a form of crisis-driven, short-term support.

Such advocacy is critically important, but without the long-term, low-level form of advocacy support, many issues that might have been easily resolved at an early stage tend to escalate and become major issues demanding our crisis advocacy response.

VALID is funded for two advocacy units to support adults with intellectual disability eligible for DHS disability services across the State. Our annual funded target is 200 new cases. This does not account for the many other long term older and ongoing cases (i.e. beyond three months), nor does it account for the often very intensive cases which tend to come to VALID. Regrettably, the need to meet the demand has led VALID's individual advocacy service to be focused not so much on supporting people to proactively pursue their right to community inclusion, but on reactively defending them against various abuses and violations of their rights, primarily within disability funded services and less commonly within either their families or the community.

We believe advocacy should be more than simply reacting to and complaining about the problems; it should also be about contributing to the building and championing of an inclusive society. That's the significance and importance of VALID's self advocacy and family support strategies, for they allow us to remain proactive and optimistic, even though our individual advocacy seems to be constantly giving us cause for pessimism.

VALID believes disability advocacy groups – at least, those which are genuinely led by and inclusive of people with disabilities and families - have a vitally important role to play in building more inclusive communities. For this to occur, advocacy groups need to be properly resourced and supported to proactively engage in the challenge of changing community attitudes, building the capacity of their members, demanding quality services and achieving the rights of citizenship.

6. DISABILITY SERVICES SUPPORT

In Victoria, we are fortunate to have many service provider agencies that have been at the forefront of advocating for the inclusion of people with intellectual disability. Despite their best efforts, however, their own capacity to follow through and deliver inclusive outcomes has generally been limited by:

- The legacy of their own historical models
- The concern for their own viability
- The lack of adequate funding to allow more personalised support
- The failure to overcome financial disincentives
- The lack of technical know-how
- The failure to 'get the balance right'

Victoria's disability services are not alone in facing these challenges. Inclusion International's Global Report, examining the state of disability services across the world, observed: *'Many of the services and support models that governments and communities fund to support people with intellectual disabilities are remnants of institutional, protectionist delivery systems and continue to segregate and isolate people.'*

As noted earlier, the most 'inclusive' outcomes that many services manage to deliver are various forms of 'community tourism'. It's the Clayton's version of inclusion: people with disability might get to visit the community but they never get to belong.

While many of Victoria's specialist services are struggling to shed their historical legacies, and while many are highly dedicated to meeting the challenge, VALID believes there will continue to be little progress unless Government decides to provide effective leadership. In areas where the State Government has shown leadership, we have seen the kinds of major transformations that can occur. Its role in supporting the establishment of the NDIS, for instance, is an historic achievement; the closure of Sandhurst is also a major initiative that demonstrates what can be achieved when Government has a clear policy commitment and the resolve to follow through.

In a similar way, the impact of the Disability Act 2006 has been very helpful in raising expectations of a stronger and more inclusive community, but sadly, Government has largely failed to back its words with genuine actions. Nowhere is this more obvious than in its failure to drive service reform and assure quality standards. Its abandonment of the Disability Standards in favour of the Human Services standards, in our view, marked the end of what we considered to be a genuine effort to address the quality of disability services in Victoria.

After several years of consultation and hard collaborative work within the sector, which led to the Disability Standards being overwhelmingly embraced, VALID was beginning to see service organisations actively following through on their commitment to delivering outcomes across the 16 Life Areas, several of which were linked to participation in the community and to self determination. This was backed up by strong leadership from within Disability Services Division, working in partnership with the peak bodies to ensure maximum take-up. This kind of leadership was making a difference, in our view, and services reported to us they also felt it was helping to lead towards more inclusive outcomes for clients.

However, VALID believes the current State Government has failed to provide the kind of strong and effective leadership that is necessary to drive services and systems to make community inclusion a realistic choice for people with intellectual disability. On the contrary, its abandonment of Disability Services Division's various consultative mechanisms, including the Quality Framework Reference Group - together with the overnight axing of the Disability Standards and the 'restructuring' of DHS which led to the demise of Disability Services Division - have effectively stalled the journey.

Our complaints and concerns have largely been ignored and instead we are told disability services will soon all be the concern of NDIA. However, we have seen nothing in the NDIA work to date that suggests they will fare any better in the area of service reform; they may do more, but not necessarily any better. So far what we have seen is money being invested in the service sector to undertake reform initiatives, but it is apparent to us that services will not change simply because Government wants them to; they will only change when their accreditation is dependent on it and when their clients, consumers and users demand it of them.

VALID believes the most powerful driver of change and reform is the will of people with disabilities and their families. They must be supported to build their capacity to engage on equal terms with service providers and within the community. Their role in changing the service sector, and indeed in changing the community, must attract levels of investment from Government at least equivalent to the level of investment that goes into service reform. Organisations that respect and heed the will of the person with a disability, and which welcome and respect the contribution of families, must become the new model of service; in order for such services to evolve or emerge, however, people with disabilities and their families must be empowered to engage, to demand, to collaborate, and to work in effective partnership.

7. COMMUNITY INCLUSION

'For people with intellectual disabilities, while some specific accommodations are necessary and may improve access to the community, there is no service or support that will enable full inclusion. It is not sufficient to provide a child with an intellectual disability with physical access to a classroom nor is it sufficient to give them a teacher's assistant. Real inclusion requires a reorganization of the classroom, curriculum and teaching strategies. Similarly, real inclusion in the community requires the transformation of communities; education systems, labour market, political systems, transportation systems, etc. ... In order to live "independently" people with intellectual disabilities need support and need to have relationships with their families and others who enable them to live and be included in the community.'

Inclusion International's Global Report on Article 19 - The Right to Live and Be Included in the Community, entitled: 'Inclusive Communities = Stronger Communities.'

VALID's commitment to community inclusion is often accused of being *ideologically driven*. We argue, however, that it is driven by a concern for the need of all humans to feel connected and to belong, and a concern for the way people feel when they are rejected and left out.

It is a simple enough concept, but it is not so simple to achieve. The inclusion of people with intellectual disability, in particular, cannot be achieved simply by physically locating them in the community and expecting them to be accepted and included. We should not under-estimate the capacity of the Australian community to be tolerant and embracing of difference, but nor should we over-estimate it.

For most of us, inclusive relationships and connections are made naturally through our interactions within the community, but people with intellectual disability often need support to clear and pave the way, to nurture relationships, to seek out and pursue opportunities, to build connections and to maintain them.

In the past, advocates often argued that people would no longer require special education and specialist supports, because the all-embracing community would provide all the support needed. This led to the equating, in some people's minds, of segregation with specialisation, and this in turn led to the simplistic view that in an inclusive community there would be no need for specialisation. In a perverse way, this was often cited as the reason for decreasing the levels of training required of disability support workers, and not the desire to cut costs.

Experience tells us, though, that the support needed to assist people with intellectual disability to be successfully included - in both the mainstream classroom and the general community - often needs to be highly specialised and highly skilled.

Support workers need to be skilled in:

- Linking people into opportunities that are relevant and sustainable
- Identifying and recruiting mainstream and community leaders capable of championing the person's cause and influencing others to come behind them
- Negotiating the obstacles and overcoming the barriers
- Building the capacity of the person and their informal networks, such as families, to build and maintain connections
- Judge when to support and when not to support
- Judge when to appropriately withdraw – if ever

Supporting inclusion for people with intellectual disability requires a level of expertise that is rarely understood and not commonly appreciated. It has been frequently argued to us that disability services are an impediment to inclusion and their extinction will automatically lead to inclusive outcomes. We say they are an absolutely vital resource that needs to be developed and supported to transform themselves from mere historic *vestiges* to positive, community inclusion support agencies, in the interest not just of people with disability, but in the interest of all community members. We agree that the community can be a magnificent repository of good will and support, but our experience is that community leaders don't come looking for people with intellectual disability to include - it's up to the specialist agencies to knock on doors and create the opportunities. Once this is done, however, our experience is that community leaders very quickly turn into strong allies and champions of people with disabilities, and the possibilities become boundless.

An example of this is the recent Leadership Training program conducted by Leaders for Geelong and VALID, which has helped forge alliances with Committee for Geelong, GMHBA and Bendigo Bank. The course involved local community leaders engaging in discussions about leadership alongside people with disabilities, and sharing their knowledge to successfully plan a major community event.

Unfortunately, the equating of specialisation with segregation has allowed a dumbing-down of the role, and has been cynically used as an excuse for de-valuing the need for a professional disability services workforce. E.g. Over the past twenty years, the specialist techniques of positive role modelling, developmental programming, task analysis and support fading, which are powerful tools for empowering people to achieve independence – i.e. to no longer require specialist support – have become virtually unheard of in most disability support organisations. Yet, unless we actually want people to be forever dependent on costly supports, these are exactly the kinds of skills and tools that workers need to build the capacity of people with disability, their families and their communities. How can we expect workers to implement something as complex and elusive as 'community inclusion' when they get virtually no skills training and even less of the kind of values-based training that might provide the context for understanding their role?

VALID believes if we are to do more than pay lip service to the right of people with intellectual disability to be included in society as equal citizens, then service agencies will need to start recruiting and training people in the skills of making it happen. The pay-off for government, when inclusion truly occurs, is a dramatic reduction in the costs of the person to the specialist system, but this will only be achieved for people with intellectual disability if service providers and their staff are:

- **Genuinely committed to ensuring their clients develop the capacity to survive and thrive without them, and;**
- **Capable of cultivating and nurturing the kind of relationships with people in the community which encourage them to open their doors and welcome people with intellectual disability into their lives.**

What does inclusion in the community mean to you?

'I feel good when I can get into the city by train.'

'It's my right to be included in my community.'

'Library – I borrow books.'

'It makes me feel myself!'

'Be happy and smile.'

'Proud to be in the community.'

New Horizons Self Advocacy Group