

(ppt S1) Mutually Beneficial Direct Support Partnerships – Key to Satisfaction for a More Skilled & Longer Lasting Workforce

Catherine Fraser, field:

Thankyou Sue (Healy, session chair)

1. Project Background And Learning For Workforce Capacity

Over the past 12 months or so, *field* explored the direct support working relationship through an innovative learning model, recognising this relationship is a cornerstone for workforce capacity.

(ppt S 2) My co-presenters were instrumental in this exploration and I am delighted to present today with colleagues Ms Deb Mackenzie and Dr Peter Gibilisco from the *field* Learning Partnership Project.

I realise this presentation title is a bit of a mouthful, so we will break that down a little:

- I will briefly provide the background to this work,
- Peter will detail the major project finding of the project team - 'mutually beneficial partnerships', and
- Deb will share her firsthand experience of that learning experience from her perspective of a direct support worker.

As a general starting point, against backdrop of

- Recruitment and retention difficulties (remembering this was pre GFC)
- low social status,
- and concern for quality and consumer outcomes',

Field was interested in **'what works'** in direct support relationships.



Our inkling was it was something about *(ppt S 3)* ...SATISFACTION.

The **field Learning Partnership Project** provided a space and resources to explore productive real work relationships at the nexus of the service delivery system i.e. learning from and learning with people with disabilities and people providing direct support.

When I say 'nexus' what I mean is the point of 'transformation' of system policy and legislation to the personal experience of people with disability: Direct support workers and people with a disability are the embodiment of this nexus.

(2) (pt S 4) **WHAT WE WANTED TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT was:**

a) **Understanding what makes for a more sustainable and skilled workforce.**

- We know there is a reported and documented¹ difficulty in getting and keeping good staff....workers who hang in there and like their job.
- In today's context we are potentially the beneficiaries of the "GFC" – For our sector this is a great window of opportunity to recruit into the sector, BUT we need to RETAIN these recruits...the pressure is on for strategies and practices that do this!

However, we do know people stay in jobs they like....where there is 'satisfaction' .

b) **Learning opportunities that enable reflection and development of 'practice' in values and attitudes².**

- Again, there is reported need for on-going learning, development, and practice support for direct support workers, and a reported desire of people with disability to be more **actively engaged** (and recognized) in this process³:
- And, we were also very interested in the integration of values and attitudes into models and processes of learning.

c) **Partnership building through learning models which assist to re-align learning roles.**

- We were mindful of the implications for learning for work in a citizenship framework and with new directions in self-directed approaches.

And lastly,

d) **Fostering cooperative rather than adversarial, abstracted or 'forced' learning engagements and environments...a model supporting a culture of learning.**

- **Learning because it helps, not because you have to.**

¹ 'Learning and Development in the Victorian Disability Services Sector- DISTSS Strategic Development Project Summary', DISTSS Inc April 2007, and
DISTSS Strategic Development Data Report –Emerging Directions and Key Issues , DISTSS Inc. 2006

² Ibid

³ Ibid

(3) (ppt S 5) **So what then is THE INDUSTRY IMPERATIVE?**

To explore this ‘coalface’ relationship is to recognise that our industry is a human one – it defies rigidity and ‘one-size-fits-all’ rules. So when we reference this to NDS Conference theme - **WORKFORCE CAPACITY** - our understanding is enriched if we also learn from the perspectives of those who live it at the system ‘coalface’ in terms of:

- **SKILLS:** To understand the nature and variability of interpretations of successful relationships at the nexus point
- **SAFETY:** That OH&S not just about protection, but promoting and fostering environments of ‘wellness’
 - According to the WHO, physical & mental health and happiness is central to ‘safety’ – *more on that in a minute!*
- **SATISFACTION:** In reality this, I believe, is the measure of the success of linking workforce to client outcomes:

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Of critical relevance of the conference theme are the findings that (ppt S 6):

For Direct Support Workers	For People with Disability
<p>“In general, having a job is better for health than having no job. But <u>the social organization of work, management styles and social relationships in the workplace all matter for health.</u>” <i>Richard Wilkinson and Michael Marmot, Social Determinants Of Health: The Solid Facts, WHO, 2nd edition 2003</i></p> <p>Pointedly this is from the nursing sector and I was unable to find research like this into the disability support workforce, however in nursing,</p> <p>“We find that nurses who report overall dissatisfaction with their jobs have a 65% higher probability of intending to quit than those reporting to be satisfied. However, <u>dissatisfaction with promotion and training opportunities are found to have a stronger impact than workload or pay.</u>”... and thus 65% more likely to quit – its not just about the money.</p> <p><i>Michael A. Shields and Melanie Ward, Improving nurse retention in the National Health Service in England: the impact of job satisfaction on intentions to quit, Journal of Health Economics Volume 20, Issue 5, © 2001 Elsevier Science</i></p>	<p>“<u>Being excluded from the life of society and treated as less than equal leads to worse health and greater risks of premature death.</u>” <i>Richard Wilkinson and Michael Marmot, Social determinants of health: the solid facts, WHO. 2nd edition 2003</i></p> <p>This is about as stark a statement as you can get! The converse of this – inclusive practices – are where we focussed our attention.</p> <p>And from DHS in Victoria, The Outcomes Standards for Disability Services in Victoria describe what is important for people with a disability as citizens of Victoria. These <u>standards prompt us to consider the influence and impact that we have upon the political, social, cultural, economic and physical wellbeing of people with a disability.</u>”</p> <p><i>The Quality Framework, Disability Service – DHS Victoria 2007</i></p>

So where we arrive at is developing (ppt S 7 + sound bite R.S.- Satisfaction riff)



*mutually beneficial direct support partnerships
as a **key to satisfaction** for a more skilled &
longer lasting workforce*

4. Briefly, the Process background to the field Learning Partnership Project is that:



- (ppt S 8) In early 2008 **field** (then DISTSS) began circulating the ideas and concept for this project to a group of 'critical thinkers' in the sector (including people with disability)
 - This enabled us to clarify the project vision and potential models
- In May 2008 we engaged Mary Burgess from Service Quality Australia to develop an action learning program with these concept and ideas.

(S 9)

From the Learning Partnership Pilot Project - Course Outline, MARY
Had 3 exploration goals:

1. The nature of relationships that 'work' between a person with a disability and a support worker
2. The range of ways the role of support worker is thought about and experienced by people using support workers and support workers themselves
3. How the role of support worker evolves and develops between each client and their support team over time.

One public outcome is a website developed by the project participants. Deb will elaborate on this later.

So, in summary what we at field have learned from all this is:

- That strong respectful and caring direct support relationships DO matter at and industry level, and

- There are things we can be doing to explore and support these partnerships, BUT IMPORTANTLY, those directly involved in the relationship are critical to this action.

Appropriately, on that note, I'd like to handover to Dr Peter Gibilisco.

Dr Peter Gibilisco (field Learning Partnership Project participant):

The Learning Partnership Project (LPP) highlights the potential of Mutually Beneficial Partnerships in the disability work environment. For example, it is capable of drawing much needed attention to its primary objectives which is to support support workers. As part of this it hopes to promote public recognition of Mutually Beneficial Partnerships that are performed between them and the people they support. The LPP avoids using the term disabilities in ways that promote a stereotype and instead refers to the people being supported in the Mutually Beneficial Partnerships as people with different abilities to highlight the fact that such people with disabilities are also those who have much to give in their service to society.

Today there is a workforce shortage in the disability sector. It is my belief that this shortage has not been sufficiently explored. The disability sector suffers from a formal theoretical approach which is biased in its top-down approach. Instead we should look at the work carried out in this sector from a "bottom up approach". The shortage will very soon reach a crisis point if it hasn't been reached already and the problem needs to be looked at, and cured, from a pragmatic standpoint, rather than policies being captive to a remote theoretical overview. The Learning Partnerships Project has highlighted to me that the potential benefits from such Mutually Beneficial Partnerships can be substantial. Mutually Beneficial Partnerships allow the group to focus on the actions which can be provided by a positive synergy. The flow-on will be to all those in society who are indirectly and directly related to disability. For example, there is an unlimited possibility for the transference of abilities, which will create a new potential for social inclusion of people with different abilities and support workers in a globally dynamic, merit-based society.

The synergistic outcomes that can flow from this form of flexible support can be demonstrated through my own (unpaid) work output. Synergy is a term that is popular in most Human Resource Management departments, and simply defined it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, i.e., $1+1=3$ or in my case the synergistic partnership created by the Mutually Beneficial Partnership between me, the person with my specific abilities and my support worker, allows me to flourish in my role as a disability activist – come independent researcher.

For example, the synergy that is provided to me through the intervention of flexible disability support, provides me with the means to achieve many of my goals in life. This synergistic provision through personal care provides me with a more cohesive and flexible human approach, which is needed to manage the complexities of infinitely varied human behaviours and provides for a sustainable future in relation to my own desires and plans and the same is true for many others as well who have abilities different from mine. This is done through assistance that helps me attain my full human potential when and where my bodily abilities are lacking. For example, my progressive illness creates a deterioration of motor skills, which leaves all my physical attributes severely

disabled. However, I am still able to perform research and write articles at a significant rate beyond that of many paid workers in the disability sector. Basically my performance is created through the synergy gained mainly through the work of my support worker.....

That is, synergy explains the transformation in people with such different abilities and support workers, where the mutual benefits that occur provide for a more proficient and humanly thoughtful disability sector, and thereby providing the prospect of a more inclusive society. Synergy becomes a fundamentally conscious event, which motivates, transforms and unifies all of life with a concerted and organised combination of such people of different abilities with support workers - this then in my view is the path to unify and enhance the disability sector.

Synergy for people with different abilities and support workers is about life chances and the creation of opportunities.... .Therefore, the essence of synergy is to value DIFFERENCE... by pragmatically creating order from disorder.....

By initiating a top down approach there is also the support worker who sometimes languishes at the grass route needs of the disability sector. The disability sector should also look favourably at enhancing their talents and encourage a future within the disability sector by establishing a feasible bottom up approach.

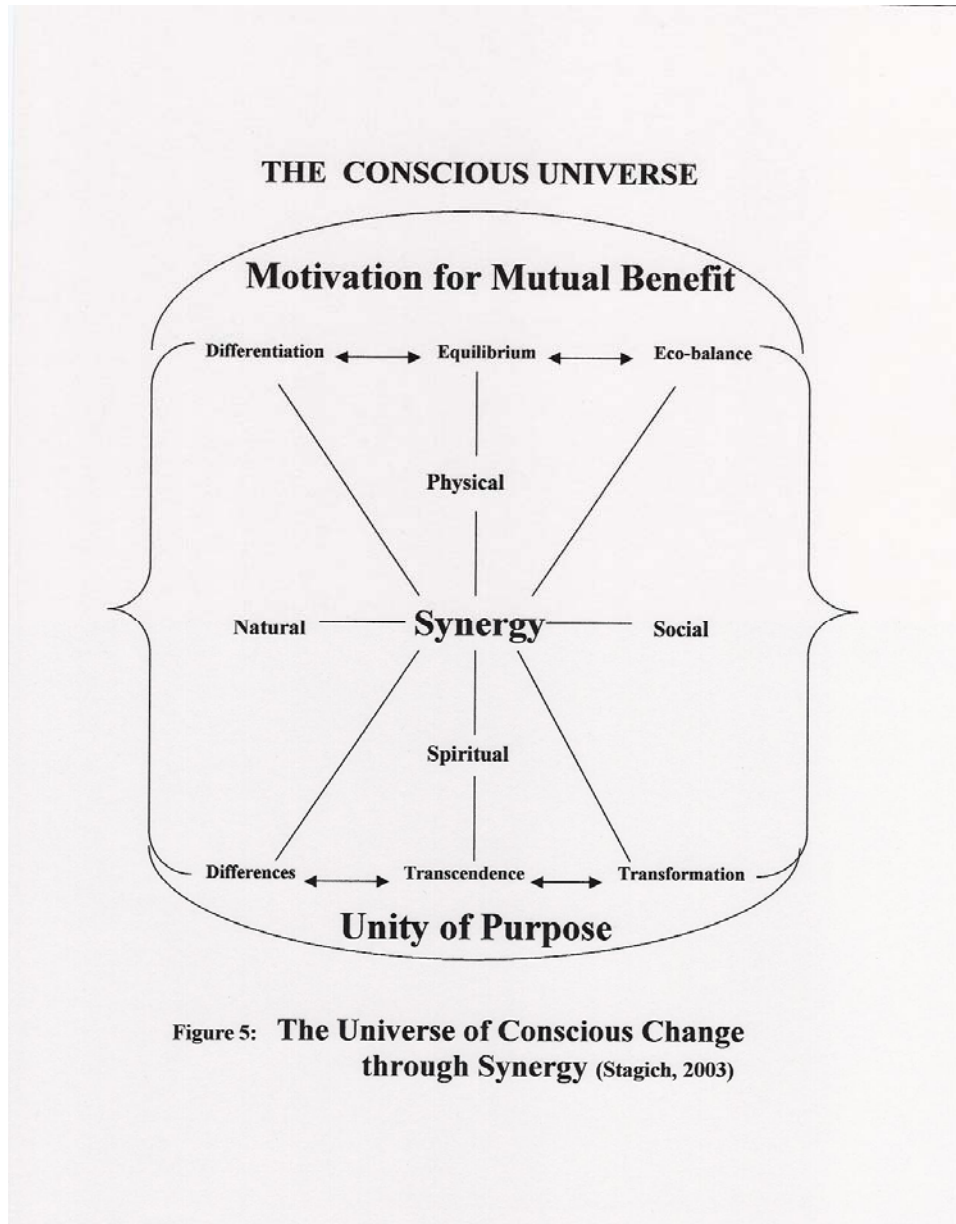
The disability sector seems to have many workers - some are below average in the quality of service provided but there are also many good workers who offer great support. However, the sector has a small population of workers and the plain truth is that it needs to be increased if it is to be flexible, effective and efficient. The possibility of recruitment from a more practical grass roots level should be left open, but this may well provoke the elitist viewpoint that will want to suggest that such workers need more education before they can be considered effective support workers and good enough for employment within the Disability Services department. However, each individual support worker should be judged on his or her merits.

The promotion of this option would provide a win – win relationship for people with disabilities and their support workers.

For example, Disability services could offer their work-force the inducement of monthly support worker awards. This would also help DHS get a handle on the quality of work and workers and assess the skills that are of greatest use in the sector.

By adding this kind of reward system to the workforce strategy, it will boost the morale of support workers, and help them to see their work in a wider cross-sector context. The sector needs to find ways to support its best workers and to encourage those who don't know how to offer what is truly needed. This would be

one indirect but specific way in which the flexible support goals stated in the State Disability Plan could be achieved.



Source: Timothy Stagich Ph.D, Transformative Leadership and High Synergy Motivation, 2003.

Thus, the essence of synergy is to value DIFFERENCE...

Website: <http://notjustwork.info/>
 Email: dr.peter.gibilisco@bigpond.com

Deb Mackenzie (field Learning Partnership Project participant):

Thank you Peter.....

I am a direct support worker and support people who live independently in their homes and last year I participated in the LPP. I'd like to share some of the key learning's from my point of view concerning the project process.....
FIRSTLY.....

NEXT SLIDE (1)..... PARTICIPANTS

- The group was made up of 10 people from different social and work backgrounds, not necessarily working together and most of us did not know each other until the commencement of the LPP.
- We were given a basic outline of the project, being left open ended for the group to work through with not knowing where the discussions were to take us.

NEXT SLIDE (2) OPPORTUNITY

The opportunity through the group learning process.... Engaged us to work together for mutually beneficial outcomes....

- When the group first started discussion we seemed to focus on negative aspects and experiences. This was done without much awareness – then we realised we needed to consciously focus on the positive experiences and aspect in order to move forward.
- However, the initial 'negative' start did serve to bond the group together and to this enabled us to move onto more productive discussion.
- THE NEXT QUESTION THE GROUP ASKED.... HOW?
 - The group decided we needed to do some work between sessions
 1. Thinking about what has worked within our working relationships to bring back and share with the group.
 2. Network via Email – what ever was shared via email was shared with all participants and at this stage it was decided what ever was discussed was kept within the group and not shared with others.
 3. The facilitator (Mary Burgess) emailed to all participants the notes from each session to enable reflection between meetings.

As the group is made up of a diverse group (which was good), everybody had different attributes to contribute.

This was good, as everybody had strengths and weakness, which enabled the group to bond and support each other.

Respecting the boundaries of confidentiality decided on by the group was important to the exploration of experience.

Each member brought a story of a positive nature pertaining to their experiences and shared it with the group.

The group grasped this with enthusiasm which broadened discussions.

- THE NEXT QUESTION THE GROUP ASKED – WHERE FROM HERE??

At the commencement of the sessions it was suggested we could present the outcomes at a forum or conference, or perhaps invite a small group of people. The choice was left with us to consider.

By reflecting on the stories and experiences that each member shared as a group it created an empowered environment and reduced the sense of isolation which can often be experience in our roles.

So, we toiled with how we present this to the sector.

We wanted it to benefit support workers and people with disabilities because we felt empowered with this.

To attend Conferences/forums are a great opportunity for networking and sharing information, however support workers for various reasons don't have many opportunities to reap these benefits.

So, it was suggested by a member of the group..... Why not establish a website.

THIS IS WHERE THE IDEA TO CREATE A WEBSITE CAME ABOUT.....

Participants made available a narrative for the initial postings on the website.....

ALL THESE IDEAS WERE MADE POSSIBLE BY A PROCESS FOSTERING.....

NEXT SLIDE (3)
RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPECT

- This was characterised by the relationships formed by building trust and openness which empowered the group.
- Working together we identified courteous and mutually beneficial ideas.

And the relationships which formed allowed the group to respect differing opinions and provided the capacity to bond in a working relationship.

From my prospective this was a unique learning environment.

I achieved so much from the group.

It gave me the opportunity to share and listen to others experiences, which lowered the sense of isolation of our daily working environment, remembering the group was made of people who lived independently or supported people within a one on one working environment.

NEXT SLIDE (4)
SUPPORT WORKERS BENEFITS

The next slide outlines the benefits we gained through the project, it was clear that the group could offer these benefits more broadly to other support workers and people with disability through the website resource.

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NEXT SLIDE (5)
LEARNING AND NETWORKING

In summary, these are the following attributes

- The participants of the Learning Partnership Project shared their knowledge and experience with the group.
- We were able to explore how theory and policy works in our experiences of practice....a pragmatic learning and networking tool
- Finally, reaching an understanding that **MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIPS** are a source of ongoing learning and growth for many..... for example:
 1. PWD
 2. SW
 3. Service providers
 4. Families and carers
 5. The general community.

It's a source others can contribute to.....
OR network by leaving a comment on a story to progress discussion.....,
OR it could even be an inspiration to people who may be able to relate too and
add support to their own situation

NEXT SLIDE (6)

OUTCOME

- The development of the 'NOT JUST WORK' website
- The flow-on to everybody in the community.....

NEXT SLIDE (7)

THE FUTURE

- The developing of a pragmatic form of networking within the disability sector
- A resource that is practical and flexible

The response towards the website has been positive. I have got notification from a Tafe teacher that the website is being looked at with interest in a teaching role within Certificate IV in Disability Work.

NEXT SLIDE (8)

WEBSITE ADDRESS – <http://notjustwork.info/>

- We invite people to visit the website and contribute to discussion and debate, as this will enrich the resource.