



# Our Better Selves

APPRECIATING AND  
RE-IMAGINING  
OUR WORK TO  
CREATE CHANGE

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*Our Better Selves* is Anglicare Australia's 19th State of the Family report, first published November 2019.

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Anglicare Australia is a network of independent local, state, national and international organisations that are linked to the Anglican Church and are joined by values of service, innovation, leadership and the Christian faith that every individual has intrinsic value. With a combined expenditure of \$1.59 billion, a workforce close to 20,000 staff and 9,000 volunteers, the Anglicare Australia Network contributes to more than 50 service areas in the Australian community.

Anglicare Australia has as its Mission "to engage with all Australians to create communities of resilience, hope and justice". Our first strategic goal charges us with reaching this by "influencing social and economic policy across Australia... informed by research and the practical experience of the Anglicare Australia Network".

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# FOREWORD



Remarkable things happen when people are moved to act – whether that is in small ways or at the level of a community or society. It's how friendships begin. It's also how injustices are righted and seemingly intractable problems solved.

At the heart of every change is a person catching sight of a larger vision and taking steps towards making it a reality.

Australians have high levels of compassion towards people experiencing poverty, and a belief that no-one should experience poverty in our country. That's a strong foundation for bringing about the necessary structural changes required to make this so. Always, change begins with simple actions that uphold the inherent dignity of others by demonstrating 'you are seen' and 'we are here with you'.

This project digs deep into the work of Anglicare services - discovering the best in what we do, and how that can provide direction for broader change.

At Anglicare, hope is not about wishful thinking. It is trusting that God is at work in the world and that there is great transformative power in the humble ways of love, justice, compassion and mercy.

As you explore *Our Better Selves*, may it give you hope for the future and the creative possibilities in each of us.

**Rt Revd Dr Chris Jones**  
Chair  
Anglicare Australia



### **ABOUT THE ARTWORK**

The artwork featured on the front and back cover of this report are details of 'The Welcome Mat' by Annie Franklin. 'The Welcome Mat' is also featured throughout the pages of the report.

In the words of an unnamed refugee detained for seeking asylum "we are not asking for a red carpet, just a simple welcome mat....".

'The Welcome Mat' by Annie Franklin, 2005

Etching, screenprint, oil and mixed media on paper and board,  
180x300cm.

Photographed by Brenton Mcgeachie. Collection of Joc and Roll Brett.



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
WHAT IS OUR INQUIRY?	10
THE INQUIRY REPORTS	
THE RIPPLE EFFECT <b>NEIL BARRINGHAM WITH BELINDA HANGER,     IAN HODGESON AND JOHN MAHER</b>	20
BEING, BELONGING AND BECOMING <b>JUSTINE HANSEN</b>	30
FROM A HOUSE TO A HOME <b>DAMIEN CHALMERS</b>	40
IN HELPING OTHERS HEAL WE HEAL OURSELVES <b>HELEN FIELDER-GILL</b>	50
A HOME OF HOPE <b>SHARON WATSON AND JIEUN CHUN</b>	60
THE FUTURE WE DESIRE	70
BUILDING A VISION	78
BEING SOMETHING MORE <b>KASY CHAMBERS</b>	88
REFERENCES	93
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	95







# INTRODUCTION

*A vision is not just a picture of what could be;  
it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to be  
something more.*

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2001)

## THE PROJECT

*Our Better Selves* is a project with a big vision. It asks how, in the work of Anglicare Australia, we can help Australia become a society where everyone is seen as unique and valuable and where mutual care and compassion are central to our identity as a people. But the project does not limit itself to painting a picture of what could be. It calls on all of us, individually and collectively, to be something more - listening and drawing inspiration from one another, strengthening our connections and creating change.

We already know that people who provide care and support right across Australia bring respect, love and insight to their work with others. They show us how enriching it can be for everyone where that journey is a truly shared one. But in the wider society, this enrichment appears accidental. Looking after each other is seen as a business or a burden rather than the very thing that defines us.

One of the goals for *Our Better Selves* is to make a clear link between the everyday work of care and support with the creation of a truly compassionate and inclusive society. We want to show how the human services within the Anglicare Network can express the values and practices of such a society by putting the interests and the experiences of the most marginalised and silenced at its heart, and then learn how this can change the communities of which they are a part.

Five separate teams from across the Anglicare Australia Network were partners in the project: a mental health community centre in Brisbane; a post-release drug and alcohol service in Newcastle; a youth homelessness to housing scheme in Adelaide; a housing support service in Alice Springs; and a child and parent centre in Mandurah. They conducted inquiries into their services, exploring what works best for the people they serve, drawing further on the strengths of everyone involved, and building on the connections their work creates.

## WHY US

Anglicare Australia's Network members work with more than one in twenty Australians between them, and draw on \$1.6 billion of government funding and community support each year. The Network includes large multi-service agencies involved in aged care, family support, mental health and housing as well as small specialist disability employment, youth housing, and drug and alcohol services. Its reach – in terms of people, community partners, church parishes and other agencies – is extensive. Its national impact is profound. Anglicare Australia sees itself as 'matching local presence with national strength'. *Our Better Selves* is designed to help use that scale and unity to be more deliberate and prophetic.

## **Anglicare Australia's members share the belief that every person brings something unique and important to the world around them.**

Anglicare Australia's members have grown from their local Anglican churches and dioceses. They are an expression of their churches' mission and so share the belief that every person brings something unique and important to the world around them.

An Anglican understanding of Humanity is drawn from a theology based upon humankind being created in the image of God. 'That God includes humankind in God's self and God's work through God's incarnation as Jesus Christ' (Snowdon, 2016) is central to the Anglicare Network's values of inclusion, partnership and equality of all people.

Similarly, there is a strong humanist tradition of community service based on equity, justice and compassion that the Anglicare Network and its workforce draw on. Its political expression gave rise to the evolution of the welfare state (Cottam, 2018), from which the Anglicare Network's services have largely devolved. These values are now often expressed through a commitment to person centred care, linking equity to a complex understanding of wellbeing.

We also recognise that the best of this work taps into the spirit. Spirituality is a way of knowing that underpins a sense of wholeness in mind, body, and soul, at every stage of the life course, faith based or not. It offers a meaningful basis for authentic relationships between people as social citizens.

In short, there is a fundamental link between quality of care and a meaningful life. It perhaps explains why the Anglicare Australia Network members, with their history and purpose, and their deep compassion and commitment to justice, offer such rich ground for this inquiry.

### **WHY NOW**

Anglicare Australia's member organisations accept public funding in order to play an important role in caring for and supporting people throughout Australia. However, the social values that underpin the way they approach and deliver their services are frequently at odds with government funding requirements that define people as clients, consumers, or dependents, and a public rhetoric that frames the overall cost of social services as a burden.

Defining people as clients, consumers or dependents focuses on the individual and on need. Covertly, it strips away a sense of social purpose in delivering these services, and narrows the scope of who can connect to them and in what way. The dominance of policies such as welfare conditionality and the consumerisation of care frequently undermines the inclusive approach to wellbeing and care that we espouse. These policies and their effect are discussed in Chapter 2.

Framing welfare and its cost as a burden creates division and invites distrust. Recently, for example, Faye Whiffen, the president of a local community centre, argued that recipients should not quibble about extending income management to Central Queensland, because it 'is the taxpayer's money,' adding that 'welfare is supposed to be a hand up, it is not supposed to be a career choice' (ABC, Oct 2019). But when encouraging farmers to ask for drought relief, the Prime Minister was at pains to emphasise 'this isn't welfare'. It was just helping people experiencing hardship (SMH, Sept. 2019).

We need to challenge this rhetoric through compelling counter narratives that convey positive outcomes - the power and richness that comes from taking strengths-based, connected and generous paths. We can find those narratives by looking into the work we do.

### **WHY APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY (AI)**

Appreciative Inquiry is a process for engaging people in building the kinds of organisations and a world they want to live in. Working from peoples' strengths and positive experiences, AI co-creates a future based on collaboration and open dialogue.  
(Cooperrider, cited in [Appreciatingpeople.co.uk](http://Appreciatingpeople.co.uk), 2013)

We decided to use an Appreciative Inquiry approach for this project because it is grounded in many of the values, beliefs and practices we already share and that we wanted to explore further. Like so much of what goes on inside our services already, it is a process that builds on

people's strengths, imagination and hopes. It incorporates people from right across an organisation, community or group and asks them to tell their stories, and through conversation, discover, dream and design a shared future together. Ultimately, Appreciative Inquiry is intended to bring about deep, meaningful and sustainable change.

Mostly, when we think about bringing about change, whether at organisational, group or personal levels, we start by identifying a problem or weakness that won't go away. Appreciative Inquiry turns this on its head. It asks us to think about the best in what we do or have done in the past, inquire into what we know that works well and, through exploring past strengths and successes, open ourselves up to new possibilities for the future. According to Cooperrider (2017), 'when we fuse the word inquiry... with the word appreciation, we are talking about things like awe inspiration, veneration, delight, wonderment, humility and valuing' (p. 130). Appreciation draws our attention to what is life-giving and what excites our curiosity. Inquiry leads us into the unknown, to embrace mystery and imagine the possibilities for change.

### **APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PRINCIPLES**

Appreciative Inquiry is underpinned and guided by a set of seemingly simple but powerful ideas or principles (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999). It is premised on the idea that reality is constructed through social interaction and language and suggests that while our stories assist us in making sense of things, they represent just one of many ways of seeing the world. When we inquire we become part of the inquiry rather than being a neutral observer to it. What we ask and the words we use help to create the world we are inquiring into.

Appreciative Inquiry assumes that we begin to change a system as soon as we inquire into it. This gives the questions we ask a particular importance as they determine the direction we take and they hold the potential for the changes we make.

It also assumes that what we focus on grows, that whatever we give most attention to and the stories we repeatedly tell about ourselves are what we become. It follows that a focus on whatever is positive or life giving leads to positive actions and outcomes. And what's more, when we create positive images of the future, we are inspired to make decisions that lead us towards that future. In other words, we speak 'the future into existence' (Cooperrider, 2017, p.97).

### **THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY MODEL**

(Appreciating people, 2013, Cooperrider 2012, Hammond, 2013, Stratton-Berkessel, n.d.) Appreciative Inquiry follows a cyclic process (the 4 D cycle) that is constructed around a positive core, that is, the inherent strengths that already exist within an organisation. The four phases are Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny, noting there is some overlap between phases (see the diagram opposite).

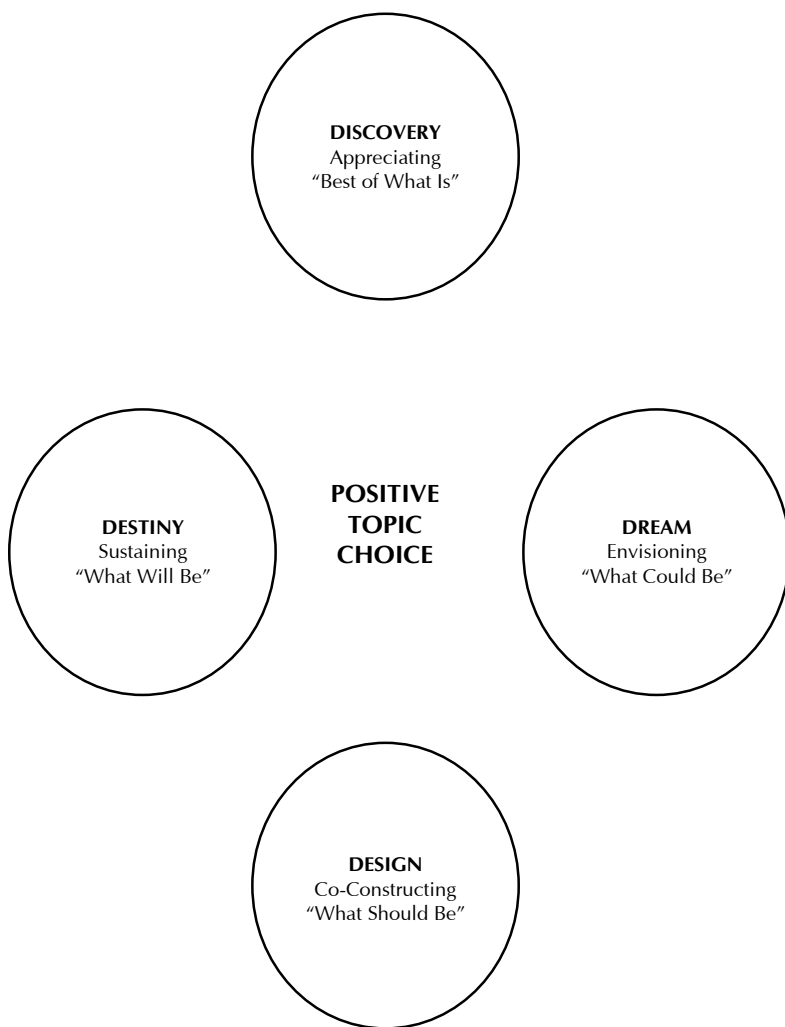


Diagram: Appreciative Inquiry's 4 D cycle (Ludema et.al., 2001)

The first step in an AI inquiry is choosing an affirmative topic that becomes the focus of the inquiry or intervention. This is likely to be based on what drives people, what they are curious about or want to know more about. The choice of topic takes careful consideration as it defines the nature and scope of the inquiry. It should be something that people really want to talk about and that will move them into thinking about a future that they desire. This is sometimes described as a fifth inquiry phase, known as Definition.

**Discovery** asks the question - What gives life? It is about appreciating the best of what is and identifying the group or organisation's strengths and past successes – 'the positive core'. This phase involves holding structured conversations with a wide range of participants based on well-crafted, positive questions related to the topic, looking for core factors that give life to an organisation or group.

**Dream** asks the question – What might be? It is about sharing stories and images to imagine possibilities of what a shared, desired future might be like- how it might look, sound and feel. New possibilities emerge from past strengths and successes or the organisation's positive core.

**Design** asks the question – What should be? It involves co-constructing the ideal organisation, by beginning to design projects, structures and other innovations that help move things towards the desired future. This phase starts by developing some provocative propositions that present clear and compelling pictures of how things will be when the full strength positive core has been realised. Provocative propositions are grounded in reality but stretch and challenge us to move beyond the status quo.

**Destiny** asks the question – How do we empower, learn and improvise? It builds on the dream and design phases and nurtures a collective sense of purpose. On a practical level, this phase involves generating actions, making arrangements and delivering the results that have been identified. It is also about sustaining an appreciative learning culture, committed to continued learning, exploration and innovation.

## THE REPORT

This report is organised along the lines of an Appreciative Inquiry.

In **Chapter 2** we introduce the inquiry by defining and describing the affirmative topic that underpins the whole project. We discuss the main concepts that inform it and examine the project's purpose and what we would hope to achieve from it.

In **Chapter 3** the five teams involved in Our Better Selves reflect on their Appreciative Inquiry experiences, share their key findings, and describe the next steps they hope to take. They link the best of what they do to the development of a culture that truly seeks out and celebrates the unique, important contribution and value of every person; and together help us to reimagine their services with that cultural transformation in mind.

In **Chapter 4** we draw out the compelling, overarching themes that have arisen from the five inquiries, imagining what could be within individual services and across the Anglicare Network as a whole.



In **Chapter 5** we present a set of provocations and possibilities into key priorities and possible actions for Anglicare Australia and its members to use its national strength and local presence in delivering social change.

In **Chapter 6** we celebrate what we have learnt from the project and depict new ways of being together as a community united by a collective purpose. We ask: Where to from here? What do we need to do now? What do we want to inquire into next?





# WHAT IS OUR INQUIRY?

Members of the Anglicare Network are a large part of the fabric of their communities. They provide care and support services right across Australia, working with and alongside people who live in hardship. But for many of us, Australia is not the fair and inclusive society we believe it ought to be. While our work in the network is built on shared values such as compassion, care and hope, it can be hard to see that what we do is making any real difference to the way Australian society at large regards people who are experiencing disadvantage, living in hardship, are ageing or are unwell. This was the impetus for *Our Better Selves*.

The Anglicare Network's rich resources and experiences offered a strong foundation from which to inquire. At a micro level, we wanted to discover the positive effects our services and relationships have on participants, staff and their communities. What gives them the power and energy to grow, to change, and to thrive? On a grander scale, we wanted to explore the role our services and programs might play in transforming our society into one that is fair and truly inclusive.

One of the first steps in an Appreciative Inquiry is settling on or defining affirmative topics. These may be seen as 'bold hunches about what gives life' (Cooperrider, 2012) to an organisation, that offer a way in to what we are most interested in or want to learn more about. For *Our Better Selves* our hunch started out as a question: What would it mean for society if we all put the interests and experiences of its most marginalised members at our heart?

After much discussion, as an inquiry team we agreed on the following statement as an affirmative topic that reflects the richness and diversity of the society we want to create:

Australia is a society that truly values – and celebrates – people of all abilities, backgrounds and circumstances. Everyone is understood to have something unique and valuable to give the community and each other. All voices are heard, all people are listened to. What defines our society is how it cares for everyone when they need care and offers support when they need support.

Our fundamental purpose was to discover opportunities for the Network to drive change in Australia's political and social culture. To do this, we needed first to consider the broad context in which we operate, the ways our services and activities are structured and funded, and tensions in the public sphere that play out between what we believe in and what is expected of us.

### **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS**

The work explored through *Our Better Selves* echoes two of the Anglican Church's Marks of Mission - responding to human need by loving service and seeking to transform unjust structures of society. But we operate within specific parameters and, today, most of our care and support services are funded – in part or as a whole – by governments. Services are shaped or defined as corporate or private care industries or highly targeted, conditional welfare models and, as such, face the risk of being co-opted by the state.

**Too often the state misunderstands the needs of the people it serves and fails to work alongside them.**

English activist Hilary Cottam (2018) claims that, in Britain at least, the welfare state is no longer fit for purpose, with its original vision replaced by 'an obsession with service delivery' (p. 44), based on an 'assess me, refer me, manage me' (p. 197) style of logic. Too often the state misunderstands the needs of the people it serves and fails to work alongside them. Cottam has undertaken a radical rewriting of the contract

between the citizen and the state, advocating a more focused and collaborative approach, built on remaking the relationships between people, and a shared investment in developing the capabilities everyone needs if they are to flourish.

Her analysis rings true in Australia too, where two divergent trends in human services are making genuine partnership very hard to reach: welfare conditionality and the consumerisation of care.

## WELFARE CONDITIONALITY

Income support is perhaps the most highly ideological sphere of welfare in Australia. It can be clearly traced from the late 1990s with the introduction of the Work for the Dole scheme, 'which emphasised the elimination of the individual flaws of job seekers rather than measures to address the absence of sufficient jobs... and massive penalties for breaches of welfare requirements' (Mendes, 2017, p. 39). Since then, the focus on changing 'irresponsible behaviour' has intensified through the introduction of mutual obligations that, according to Mendes, reflect 'the 1834 amendment to the English Poor Laws Act concerning the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor' (p. 73). While aged pensioners currently escape its most intense opprobrium, anyone under pension age, who is unemployed either in the short or long term, faces a raft of punitive compliance tests and behavioural constraints if they are to receive support.

The spread of 'cashless welfare cards' signals to the community that recipients are poor decision makers, who require someone else to control how and where their welfare payments can be spent. It is often argued it is not their money, and the 'best form of welfare is a job.' Ironically, as Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot (2019) shows, the number of jobs available to people who most need support is decreasing at the same time as punitive compliance measures and behavioural controls have increased.

The view that welfare spending must be highly conditional has been used to make participation in support programs mandatory. The ParentsNext scheme, for example, sees parents of young children having their income withheld when private sector staff judge they have failed to engage appropriately in program activities. It is a long way from the program's initial proposition, that a caring society would provide support for young parents to grow the skills they will need to enter the workforce as soon as they are ready and able. More significantly, in its focus on participation obligations, according to Shepparton FamilyCare (2019), the scheme pays no heed to the parenting skills or attachment at the heart of family relationships. In this context, the depth and complexity of people's lives becomes invisible.

## THE CONSUMERISATION OF CARE

The nature of care industries is itself changing, being increasingly framed in terms of 'consumer choice' i.e. having the choice about how we are cared for. In general terms, we understand consumerism. As consumers we are all trained to choose the best value for money, and as business people we deliver what we are paid for as efficiently as possible. And so both community aged care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme pay for services based on individual, assessed entitlements. The principles behind consumer-directed care or individualised funding are not necessarily a bad thing. However, the rich connections and rewards implied by a relational approach to

care are extraneous to the economic relationship they have established. And in a context where the price and/or the supply of these services are heavily constrained by government, those seemingly extraneous benefits can easily fall out of reach. Underlying this is a deeper message that in today's world, it is everyone's responsibility, in the end, to look out for themselves.

### CHOOSING ANOTHER PATH

Anglicare Australia's member organisations accept public funding in order to play an important role in caring for and supporting people throughout Australia. It is important to remember there are many models of social care, philanthropy and co-production other than those described above. There is always scope for change both within and beyond the current models. To provide a richer and more hopeful context for our inquiry, we have distilled key ideas and principles from current thinking that take a more positive and inclusive view of policy and practice.

In a recent policy brief relating the social determinants of Indigenous health to the Closing the Gap strategy, the Southgate Institute for Health, Society & Equity, (2019) identified negative and positive determinants that reach beyond factors such as housing, employment conditions, education, social relationships, income, poverty and the distribution of power and resources. They nominate both positive and negative determinants, including the following two examples:

**experiences of racism** contribute to chronic stress, influence health behaviours such as smoking, and may reduce access to health care. ...[whereas] **connectedness to culture and caring for country are positive** determinants of Indigenous health. (p.1)

The paper went on to recommend new directions for policy makers that put greater emphasis on positive health factors through initiatives such as a partnership approach to policy, strengths-based approaches and community-controlled services such as those delivered through the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) model.

### FOUR FRAMEWORKS

Many of the frameworks and approaches we discovered that advocate a new direction for social policy and services originated in the United Kingdom, with some being adapted for Australian conditions. We have synthesised key concepts from four of these to see what our programs and services might look like through a lens of wellbeing, and how they can reach beyond the ideological boundaries and instrumental purposes that currently define them.



The first of these, the Foyer Federation's **Advantaged Thinking** focuses on the assets, talents, resources and abilities we all have as human beings to create a society in which everyone can thrive. It 'looks for the springboard of positive action that will bring about sustainable change'. It advocates 'a shift away from deficit, disadvantaged or problem-saturated thinking, ...towards advantaged thinking and acting' (Education First Youth Foyer, n.d.).

The new economics forum's **Five Ways to Wellbeing** (2011) offers a set of evidence-based public mental health messages that offer a positive and constructive guide to the design and delivery of human services. These messages apply to all of us rather than being limited to pathways for 'clients'. And, because they don't necessarily have instrumental ends, they can lead us on a journey with no fixed destination in mind.

Cottam (2018) bases her approach on a set of six principles for **21st Century Radical Help** that 'enable us to grow, flourish and take care of one another' (p. 195). The six principles are: having a positive vision for the future; developing everyone's capabilities; relationships; connecting to multiple forms of resources; creating possibilities; and being open to everyone.

Lankelly Chase (2019) identify qualities or 'core behaviours that systems have in common that help them to function better for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage'. They have called these **system behaviours** as they help answer the question of what healthy systems look like. They maintain that these behaviours are more likely to account for positive change than any specific methodology.

## KEY CONCEPTS

Drawing from these sources, we settled on six broad concepts to map the territory our inquiry is likely to cover, recognising that there will be gaps in our thinking and that some ideas are likely to flow between categories. The six concepts are: shared vision and purpose; capabilities; relationships; community; learning; and social citizenship and power.

### Shared vision and purpose

One of the key elements underpinning change is the development of a shared vision for the future. Cottam's (2018) vision for the future is 'good lives lived well' (p. 197). Such a vision she says 'sparks energy' and generates a common sense of purpose. Though Lankelly Chase (2019) do not articulate a particular vision, they argue that when people share a vision they come to appreciate the perspectives of others and look for common understanding and a sense of purpose. The goal of a shared vision for the future is also an important component of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 2012), with its assumption that positive change is most likely to be sustained when the best of the past is carried forward and there is the drive to envision a shared future.

The idea of spiritual wellbeing connects to the concept of a shared vision at a deep level. It is about finding a meaning and purpose in life and an authentic life for everyone. The trigger of taking notice as a way to wellbeing (Five Ways to Wellbeing, 2011) leads us there.

### **Capabilities**

The concept of capabilities focuses on someone's potential – what they can be and what they can do rather than the limitations they face or the problems they have. Lankelly Chase (2019) take the view that people are resourceful and bring strengths to whatever they do. For Cottam (2018), people's capabilities are determined by many factors both internal and external to them and they vary according to context. People are autonomous and capabilities cannot be given or done to you. They develop their capabilities themselves. According to Cottam, 'we need the help to help ourselves' (p.204), suggesting that when using a capabilities approach the way support is offered has to change. The EFY Foyer (n.d.) recognises that it is the right set of support and opportunities that enables their students to develop their talents and capacities for personal and social good.

Capabilities also draw attention to the whole person as a physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual being, which is reflected in the range of their capabilities.

### **Relationships**

The concept of relationships is deeply embedded in all four frameworks. Indeed, Cottam (2018) puts relationships above all other principles, stating that 'relationships – the simple bonds between us – are the foundation of good lives' (p. 205). Connecting with the people around you, building social relationships and spending time with friends and family is one of the Five Ways to Wellbeing (2011) and Lankelly Chase (2019) identify open and trusting relationships as one of the key behaviours that enable effective dialogue so that people feel safe to ask difficult questions, express disagreement and manage conflict.

If we recognise the fundamental importance of connecting to others for our wellbeing and the central place of compassion in our understanding of care, then relational care is about the two way power of a compassionate connection. It links directly to people being heard within such a relationship, and consequently in the shaping and delivery of the care and services themselves. It becomes about the whole person; about celebrating family and culture and heritage. It reminds us that we are not individual consumers or customers, we are a part of many communities. And these complex ingredients shape the kind of care and support that we need and want.

## Community

The concept of community flows naturally from relationships. It encapsulates a sense of belonging, and being part of something. It is about people viewing themselves 'as part of an interconnected whole' (Lankelly Chase, 2019) with the capacity to look outwards beyond themselves. It involves feeling linked to the wider community and working with others for a common purpose. Community is also about giving (Five Ways to Well Being, 2011) and making a positive contribution to the lives of others.

**The concept of community encapsulates a sense of belonging, and being part of something.**

For Cottam (2018), community is about being open to everyone and taking care of them. For the Anglicare network, how we care for each other is the heart of what we do. As providers of care and support services, the compassion that underlies it is fundamental to our work. It is no surprise then, to see a relational approach to care strongly present across the Anglicare network. The idea of being open to everyone is reflected in the ethos and practice of aged and disability care providers. But it is also tangibly present in all other programs and services, whether in mental health, out-of-home care, family support, alcohol and other drugs, homelessness services or financial wellbeing.

## Learning

The concept of learning is shared across all four frameworks. One of the Five Ways to Wellbeing is to keep learning as a way to maintain curiosity about the world and to build confidence. Cottam (2018) identifies learning as an essential capability, enabling growth through inquiry and meaningful work. Formal and informal learning that supports young people to achieve their aspirations is the core business for the Education First Youth (EFY) Foyer. In fact, for the Foyer Federation a focus on learning and work is the most effective route out of poverty and disadvantage. Lankelly Chase (2019) identify feedback and collective learning as a key component of participation arguing that they drive adaptation.

There is no shortage of evidence for the power of learning as a way to health and wellbeing and a positive future. Across the Anglicare network we can point to literacy classes at mental health community centres; the HIPPY program (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2019) for parents as first teachers; vocational education for graduating participants in drug and alcohol programs; two way learning about health, nutrition and child development in remote communities; and the formal linkage of secure housing for young people with education. But more exciting is the opportunity for people to learn through their design of and engagement with services themselves, and for that process to create the space for them to give and to teach.

### Power and social citizenship

Lankelly Chase and the Education First Youth (EFY) Foyer most strongly articulate the two related concepts of power and social citizenship. For Lankelly Chase (2019) there are three key behaviours associated with power: equality of voices is actively promoted; that decision-making is devolved; and that there is mutual accountability. The concept of social citizenship, though not new, has taken on new meaning over time. According to Biggs (2013), it ‘refers to the ways in which people access, maintain membership of and actively participate in society’ (p.2). Conceived in this way, social citizenship emphasises ‘the active agency of the person, as someone who has a hand in creating their own social circumstances and for whom participation and recognition are a precondition’ (p.2).

More than any of the others described here, these two concepts throw out a challenge. They require us to examine our practices and policies critically, asking whether we put people at the centre of our work and how their views are represented in our decision-making. For instance, the co-production of care and services comes out of people actively working with each other and sharing responsibility. Services such as time credit schemes and home support networks show us the power this kind of collaborative action can have in transforming the circumstances of the people involved. However, they sit outside the zones of prescribed, conditional welfare programs and consumer services that are the setting for so much of our members’ work.

### THINKING BEYOND FUNDING

There is then a rich set of principles and behaviours that dramatically enhance the wellbeing of participants and inform how we might imagine and organise ourselves into the future. They are powerful because they are relational, they can be enriching for everyone involved, and they can make a difference to the world inside and beyond the social service system of which they are a part.

Of course they come with a cost. As things stand, these kinds of approaches exist in tension with funding arrangements that define people as clients, or consumers or dependents and the cost overall as a burden.

The Anglicare Australia Network is a strong ‘family’ made up of people and services interested in and supportive of each other’s work. Looking at our delivery of services as part of a project that is transforming society is a potent idea. And building on the extraordinary insights people gain by working with each other, through hardship and vulnerability, would be a powerful act.

The teams that are part of *Our Better Selves* do not exist outside the frame of public funding, and the tension described above. But it is important, and liberating, to think outside that box. If we desire all Australians to see worth in each other and to celebrate what they can give each other, then drawing from the best of what we do across Anglicare Australia is a positive and affirming way to start.

In the next chapter, we follow the journeys of the five teams as their inquiries unfold. They relate some of the stories they have heard, share their discoveries and describe the next steps they hope to take.

**A Place to Belong** is a part of Anglicare Southern Queensland based in West End, Brisbane. It is small in numbers though far reaching in impact, building inclusion for people who experience mental health challenges. The Ripple Effect created space for deep listening to people's stories, what mattered, what made a difference and what it felt like to be included.

As community workers we often focus on the changes an individual can make to improve their own situation. We miss the real opportunity which lies in the strength of an open and welcoming community where all people have a place to belong and can thrive. Now the NDIS is challenging that work as its focus on the individual leaves little room for the community.

The Ripple Effect has touched on deep challenges about humanity, inclusion, belonging and what it takes to be a good society.

Karen Crouch  
CEO, Anglicare Southern Queensland



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Deborah [above and centre] and Kathy [left] have shared their stories of *A Place to Belong*. Belinda Hanger and John Maher [top], who co-authored this piece, are part of The Ripple Group.



# THE RIPPLE EFFECT

## A Place To Belong, Anglicare Southern Queensland

*A Place to Belong is a part of Anglicare Southern Queensland, based in Brisbane. It is a small organisation working to build inclusion for people who experience mental health challenges. We do this by encouraging and developing the capacity of the community to welcome and include others.*

*Our vision is to facilitate inclusive community through building networks of contact and friendship, so that people who have been marginalised can experience inclusion, acceptance, friendship and respect.*

By Neil Barringham with Belinda Hanger, Ian Hodgeson and John Maher

### **A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT**

He brings a free-floating transcendence – he takes us up into the happy world. He brings out the best in people and he brightens the room. He has a wide smile and a warm embrace. He's a team worker – he fills in where needed. He brings a generosity of spirit – he leads instinctively.

Who is this person who leads with joy and generosity? Who is this person who brings out the best in people?

The speaker is an organiser of a weekly community barbecue. He is describing one of the supporters of the barbecue – a man who lives with a significant intellectual disability and who in times gone by was seen as a 'community risk'. At one stage he

was even recommended for high-level contained care. However, with appropriate support this man has lived in his community for some years - contributing magnificently - and his community has been safe.

This man, who could be typecast as 'disabled' or 'vulnerable' by many, is actually enabling his community to be what it could be. In a community that is reactive, defensive, impersonal and disconnected he is bringing warmth, generosity, contribution and connection. He is enabling his community to be their 'Better Selves'.

This is one of many powerful stories community members told us as we took part in *Our Better Selves*.

### **BEGINNING OUR INQUIRY**

Beginning in May 2018 a group of interested participants (three service participants, two volunteers and a staff member) gathered to take part in an Appreciative Inquiry process. As a group we met regularly for the next few months – listening to stories, recording what we heard and then seeking to find the thematic elements that energised these stories.

We wanted to understand what the 'ripples' were, emanating from our work and to understand how 'ripples' went out into the community as individuals' capacities increased. We wanted to find principles and inspiration to deepen and further our own work, and to help strengthen Anglicare's national voice advocating for human service work.

The central inquiry question on which we settled was – *What is the ripple effect around here and what makes it happen?*

We unpacked this a little further by saying:

A Place to Belong helps people to find meaning and a different orbit in their lives. They secure their place in their locality – they have developed skills, knowledge and capacity. They have also begun having an effect on those around them – a ripple effect has developed! People activate local and social change.

Finding a name for ourselves was easy. We quickly settled on *The Ripple Group* and we began by inviting participants from across our work to come and share their stories with us.

### **DISCOVERING WHAT GIVES LIFE TO OUR COMMUNITY**

In each Ripple Group meeting as we sat with a person's story we were impressed by the transitions and stages that people had moved through. In their stories they were very clear about their own pathways to greater empowerment and personal development but also towards local and community contribution. And in each story we began to notice the ripple effect.

### Donna's story

I have been fortunate to find *A Place to Belong* during my hard times of adjusting to living with a mental illness. It has been my saviour as I have been invited to tell my story to many people, linked to *A Place to Belong*. This has helped me to conceptualise how different my life is now. It makes me get in touch with a part of me who still wants to do something to contribute to the community.

[I took part in] a group of people with mental illness to write about how people live with the memories of acute care and what recovery looks like. This included an academic article to explain to nurses how we are still human beings and want to be treated as such. [The group] has enabled me to form friendships with people who are similar to me and have daily challenges with their mental health.

### Kathy's story

Kathy spoke about how she learnt to manage her arthritic condition by attending community dance classes.

I have rheumatoid arthritis and I would cry when I had to walk up and down stairs. Now I do NIA, a form of dance exercise that incorporates all kinds of activity such as dancing, boxing and Tai chi. I hate exercise and don't like the gym. NIA is fun - it's different every time. You don't need coordination, which is good as I have two left feet.

Kym, Kathy's support facilitator from *A Place to Belong* introduced Kathy to NIA because it doesn't put strain on the body. She has now been doing it for three to four years. It's helped with her rheumatoid arthritis as well as the fact that she lives on the top floor and is constantly going up and down the stairs.

Being involved in NIA has assisted Kathy's inclusion in her locality. The group often gets together at a local cafe and they Facebook each other.

I moved into the area and didn't know others. NIA helped me get confidence and meet people. It got me more physically strong and I met people. I got on Facebook and got to know a few others who were in the NIA group. I connected with these women through Facebook. They went to my place. I went to theirs for dinner.

Then this amazing thing happened – I did my first fun run. They forecast a storm [but] we didn't get the storm until half way through the run. We couldn't see a thing. Kym ran with me in the pelting rain. I have done more fun runs and fundraising walks. I raised \$800 for Legacy.

Kym has helped with other things too. She has helped me share my story a few times at workshops and training days. I am just coming into myself.

### **A volunteer's story**

A man who has lived with chronic mental illness learnt that walking assists him. For some years now he has walked miles across Brisbane to be part of various community events. He is now volunteering at A Place to Belong and has been part of an informal Circle of Support around a vulnerable man. He said, 'People have put me back together, after I've suffered schizophrenia. Now is a chance to give back to others. I needed the context of other healthy people to be able to do that - when we band together and work together.

There is something in the spirit of this place – it is empathetic. Things like kindness, sensitivity and intelligence, friendliness and empathy are a part of this place, so I fit well into it. I like the empathy, the energy [and the] kind and loving people around here. Anglicare lines up with many of my own values.

### **Deborah's story**

Deborah, a woman with a range of disabilities and challenges, who some years ago had been semi-homeless, is now on the casual payroll at the University of Queensland and she regularly contributes to different classes.

I used to live in institutions and hostels and I used to have to do things by the rules. I can do what I like now within reason. I like living in my own house. I can see the city and I have my own clothesline. I really like my TV. These days I watch movies on Netflix and YouTube on my computer. My support team and friends are helping me to learn the computer. It is difficult but I am better than I was. To help me manage my mental health and the hard times that I go through I have made a list of things that might help me. These include: ringing a friend, going for a swim, going for a walk, having a relaxing shower, listening to relaxing music, thinking why I feel this way and working through my feelings, putting on rollerblades, making rose hip tea and going to sleep.

I have bad days when I don't want to talk to anyone and I have good days. I know I do not get it right all the time but I try to be a good person.

A lecturer shared feedback from participants in a workshop where Deborah had told her story. One student commented, 'Hearing Deborah talk today gave me a special insight into the different ways that we'd be able to potentially assist my brother in the future, and how's best for me as his sister to support him without taking away important learning opportunities.'

Another said, '[It] definitely changed my perception of people who seem like they've had a bit of a complicated life. I think it's made me more accepting and considerate regarding mental health.' Deborah is educating future professionals. Now there's a ripple!

### SEARCHING BEYOND

While the Ripple Group met regularly to hear and understand stories, we also engaged with broader parts of the agency's work. We took the ripple effect concept to three of the quarterly Guiding Groups, which *A Place to Belong* sponsors, to consider significant issues it faces. By sharing what we were doing we invited others into the process and with them analysed what we were learning.

So we moved into the next phases of the inquiry process to discuss and share discoveries and begin to search beyond the best of what we do now. In seeking to identify and understand the key themes we found that people analysed their own stories. For example, one person told us 'It's not about science, tech or skills. It's about ethos. **People believed in me** here and I carry spirit with me now years later.' Another said, '**I feel more human here.**' And another, 'there's **something in the spirit** of this place –things like **kindness, sensitivity and intelligence, friendliness and empathy.**' And yet another, 'It's all about relationships.' And finally, 'A Place to Belong has invited me to **try things and take responsibility.** I've been given **opportunities** and treated as someone who can take responsibility. A Place to Belong really **respects and nurtures** people. People value being respected.'

Thus, we synthesised key themes from what people themselves named: respect, love, safety, time, opportunity, leadership and connection. It was these themes that led us into formulating provocations to compel us into a deeper future.

### IMAGINING NEW POSSIBILITIES

From the many stories we sat with, we developed 12 provocations to take back to our agency for consideration. The feedback we received from the Guiding Group was that there were too many lengthy and wordy provocations. We did more workshopping and reduced the 12 provocations to four that we settled with to guide our future work:

1. What would it take for us to inspire safety, growth and new vision for each other?
2. What would it take for us to be sustainable for the long term?
3. What would it take for us to assist people to be loved and connected via a rich mixture of natural and informal support along with funded supports?
4. What would it take for us to activate people towards skilful leadership contributions for positive social change?

From here the challenge became how to work with these compelling challenges in the design and destiny phases of the inquiry process.

## MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

So we took the provocations back to the Guiding Group and other agency teams. People were invited to express interest in contributing to any of the provocations they found attractive or compelling. Our aim was to go with where the energy was. This process is still rolling out at the time of writing.

So far, particular action points we want to deepen are to:

- accept people for their gifts
- listen to people's stories
- walk in relationship alongside people
- link people to others.

An immediate and powerful outcome thus far has been in identifying a further strategic area of *safeguarding our soul in challenging times*. The primary change in our current environment is the arrival of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and more than ever we are seeing that we need to understand our place and role so that our work is not twisted and contorted by the funding criteria of the new model.

Through this inquiry, people across our agency have been able to understand and articulate the essence, soul and spirit of our work (our ethos) – namely that we are into deeply person-centred, inclusive, community based, leadership development work in the mental health and disability fields. For us to fulfil the intent of our four provocations we need to know, articulate and hold firmly to our ethos in the NDIS environment.

**Our inquiry has synthesised the importance of what we do and reinvigorated our belief in who we are.**

Our inquiry has unearthed what is significant in our work. It has enabled us to better understand and articulate in a fresh way what we are doing well and what gives life to our community. It has synthesised the importance of what we do and reinvigorated our belief in who we are.

That said, with the fiscal demands of the NDIS confronting us, the challenge of the second proposition has been staring us in the face. And so, we are immersed in conversation, organising meetings and discussing plans, to strengthen the viability of this small and vulnerable agency.

Specifically, actions we have taken so far include:

- running a Team Leaders' meeting with facilitators to discuss how we can hold to our ethos in a new environment
- engaging a volunteer strategic planning consultant to help us rework our heart and ethos in this new environment
- taking the provocations to our annual Vision Day as a scaffold for planning for the coming year.



## REFLECTING ON OUR INQUIRY

Over the course of the inquiry the Ripple Group has experienced many things. Moving from stage to stage we often felt like we were walking into the fog – but we trusted the process and moved forward despite our insecurity and anxiety. Now we have come to this point, Ripple Group members have reflected on the value of the process for them.

Ian said, ‘the richness of what I get out of this is awesome. It’s a privilege to be part of it. It gives me something to reflect on afterwards – and how good things are happening through connections, contributions and creativity. It’s not the car we drive - it’s the people we meet’.

Donna said, ‘It’s educated me to the number of people involved here in different ways who are triggering a ripple effect. It’s really uplifting. I’m so grateful that a place like this is running.’

John said, ‘It has been an amazing and awesome experience. It has been transformative for me because I have been able to find my voice and contribute. For mostly all my life I have lived with the ideas that I am a waste of space, a good for nothing, unlikely, unlovable, person who cannot connect. Now I can shift these thoughts with the experience of attending regular meetings, where there was much discussion of meaningful, thoughtful ideas, and I was able to understand, formulate my own thinking and contribute in a manner which leaves me feeling good about myself and others. This is a major shift for me’.

Thus, one of the outcomes of the Ripple Group has been the development of leadership – our fourth proposition. These three individuals are service participants who have been at the heart of our inquiry. As an indicator of their leadership capacities, they co-presented a paper about the Ripple Group process at a recent Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Services conference in Brisbane – without any staff support from our agency.

## CONCLUSION

This inquiry has touched on some of the most profound and deep challenges of our civilisation: challenges about our humanity, and about inclusion, belonging and the good society. Its dramatic impact and poignancy resonate in people’s words, such as Donna when she says, ‘I feel more human here.’ She goes on to say, ‘I was feeling an alien in the community and treatment setting. What does it take to transcend that? A lot of people don’t want to talk to you if you have a mental health issue. Whatever the cause – there are still feelings of alienation. So our challenge is how do we work with that and improve things? How can we keep reaching out to that vision?’ And so, we return to the inquiry’s initial question: *What is the ripple effect around here and what makes it happen?*

More than anything, we have a positive story to tell about *A Place to Belong* and the people who come here. We see a richness coming through all the stories that is about respect, acceptance, trust, safety and opportunity, which somehow results in people's healing, inclusion and belonging. As another person said, 'there is trust in this place. It is touching. It is honouring. Everything is confidential, it is validating. I feel supported'.

And as we saw from the story that opened this account, capacity building not only affects individuals, it ripples across communities. At *A Place to Belong* the ripple effect has been felt in places such as community barbecues where people who were seen as 'risks' are now resourcing their communities to be their Better Selves. It has had the effect of educating people in a range of situations from dance groups to conferences and universities. And it continues to spread. Ultimately though, it is the deep truths emanating from people's stories that feed the flame of our resolve to move towards a future where we can realise the ethos of love, inclusion, social change and sustainability we have set out in our compelling provocations.



**Neil Barringham** is the manager of *A Place to Belong*. Neil first started learning about community inclusion when he and his wife Penny became more involved in their community and shared their home with a few people who were working through the recovery process. From this, Neil saw the power of ordinary, simple friendship connections and has been passionate about sharing this insight across the sector ever since.

**Ian Hodgeson** and **John Maher** are both participants in the *A Place to Belong* network and who have learnt from their mental health experience to the point that they were keen to volunteer to support this Appreciative inquiry process. **Belinda Hangar** is completing her Masters in social work and is a volunteer at *A Place to Belong*.

The **Child and Parent Centre** in Dudley Park, Western Australia is a hub of activity where parents come to spend time with their children, learn new parenting skills, meet other parents and seek social support. Our Better Selves allowed the CPC team to step back from day to day service provision, take time to listen to parents and volunteers, and reflect on their values and purpose.

The insights by the CPC team are based on the unique stories from the Dudley Park Centre but they resonate across our agency. They remind us to focus on creating spaces where families want to come with their children, to have fun, to be vulnerable, and just be themselves. They have further reinforced our commitment to listen to people's stories, better understand what that means for the way we deliver services, and foster a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Dr Shae Garwood  
Manager, Research, Advocacy &  
Prevention, Anglicare WA



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CPC helps to create happy, well-adjusted communities of creative, kind kids who are connected to their families and their communities



# A PLACE TO BE, A PLACE TO BELONG AND A PLACE TO BECOME

## Child and Parent Centre, Dudley Park, Anglicare WA

*The **Child and Parent Centre** (CPC) is based in the suburb of Dudley Park in Mandurah, Western Australia on the back oval of Dudley Park Primary School.*

*We walk alongside families, supporting them in the early years of parenting, and growing little people into big ones. We help to create happy, well-adjusted communities of creative, kind kids who are connected to their families and their communities. We work with families to strengthen their connections, link to other families and our team and support them to access people within their own community, as well as services and programs that will help them to thrive.*

By Justine Hansen

### **DECIDING WHAT OUR INQUIRY WAS ABOUT**

From the start of the project in May 2018, our team took the chance to see our Centre with a new set of eyes, looking from the outside in, seeing the strengths that are already there and becoming energised about what we do well. The whole journey has given us the opportunity to take a long, slow, collective breath in and out - helping us to clear our minds and push the reset button.

Being an ocean lover, for me the process was like diving through a big, powerful wave, touching the bottom and holding on while the water rolls over. There were times, not really knowing what was happening, it was like being in the swirl of sand and surf and turbulence, coming up and out the

other side and looking back at the shore through the wave breaking and getting a completely different view of the beach from the water. That is what this process feels like, with some magic thrown in (also like the feeling of being in the ocean).

### ASKING THE FIRST QUESTIONS

In our early conversations as a team we began thinking about our topic. We wanted to discover what helps us to create a place where we can sit alongside parents and their children, and design and deliver services with them as genuine and invested partners in the process. We wanted a model of service that was not coming from an expert perspective on parenting but a place where everyone developed a sense of ownership in it.

We wanted a place families wanted to come to, where they could be vulnerable and where they could just be, without having to try; a place for families and children to belong. It would be a place where it is safe to reflect on their relationships, especially with their children but also across their extended families.

Our team conversations began over lunchtimes in informal team gatherings and later, during formal team meetings. We brainstormed ideas and brought these back to team meetings, which staff, volunteers and students and our parents attended. Together, we generated the opening statement below for the inquiry, based on what we knew was at our Centre's heart, and what we aspire to for the future. At Dudley Park Child and Parent Centre:

We are a place that belongs to everyone and where everyone belongs. Families love to be here and they have fun here. We are open to everyone's ideas and energy, and understand that there are many pathways to thrive as a family. No one door is in or out.

We know that we are all in this together and that we walk side-by-side to learn and grow. We belong to a bigger community that respects everyone and cares for their wellbeing. Our Centre is a way of working together. It can pop up anywhere.

From this statement, we developed the guiding questions below that we used to stimulate conversations and stories with our families, volunteers and members of staff:

- Can you tell me about a place where you felt you belonged or where you felt at home?
- Can you think of a time when you felt the door was open for you to try something new?
- Tell me about a time you noticed someone who showed they care about another person's wellbeing either at the Centre or somewhere else.

## WHAT WE DISCOVERED

Over several months, conversations continued throughout the Centre - in team meetings, in playgroups, in the reception area of the CPC and in cars as we drove to events and activities. We slipped in conversations in all our meetings, sometimes on the agenda, sometimes not.

Throughout the process we had students who became part of the inquiry. Some would finish their placement and leave, though many did not want to leave and signed on as volunteers to continue working with the CPC team. We have noticed that the number of students who have become volunteers has increased during the AI process and wonder whether the change in our conversation has meant that people felt connected and passionate enough to want to continue to be a part of our team.

In trying to link the team up when they couldn't attend meetings, I would catch up with them individually to give them an update, hearing their input and keeping them up with the rest of the team. We used WhatsApp as our team communication tool to invite everyone into the discussions.

We also had a conversation about the Appreciative Inquiry process at the Local Area Committee (LAC) meeting. I also noticed that we began using the questioning process during our regular team meetings, asking for people to tell stories about things we wanted to learn more about. We now use this questioning process whenever we are trying to uncover something, find inspiration or a deeper understanding, or when we get stuck in our old ways of thinking and talking.

## SOME OF OUR STORIES

### The old man at the door

The first time Amber arrived at her new church an older man at the door just said 'I am so glad you came today' whilst shaking her hand as she came in with her family. As she proceeded to sit, she felt accepted with no expectation of having to give any more of herself. A space was provided for her to just be, while she and her children settled into the place. She noticed the pastor talking to a homeless man and how he made him a cup of tea and sat with him above other regulars in the congregation. This demonstrated to her who the church leaders prioritised and confirmed to her that she would return to the church. She also noticed that the kids were invited up to share their special talents, for example, singing, playing music or doing a hand stand. This created a space for the children to feel valued and accepted.



In listening to this story we discovered that:

- The **first contact** is critical for families to **feel comfortable** just in being in our space. This allows families to **feel safe** to come back.
- Allowing families to **just be** in the space without explanation, not having to tell their story immediately and avoiding any explanations from them or expectation of them helps them feel accepted.
- Using language like **‘welcome’** or ‘I am glad you have come to play here’ directed both towards children and their families helps newcomers feel supported.

### Washing the sink

It was a hot summer’s day and Lisa and Sharna (a mother and daughter) came in to discuss their student placement at the Child and Parent Centre. They were both completing a TAFE certificate in case management and needed to find a practical placement to gain practical skills.

As they sat down, Lisa mentioned that their mum/grandma, Julie, was parked out the front as neither of them drove. I said they should ask her to come inside in the cool, as it was a hot day. Julie joined us and we made her a cup of tea.

We gave Lisa and Sharna a tour of the CPC and when we came back into the kitchen, Julie was cleaning the sink. We thanked her and invited her back anytime! From that time on Julie has contributed in many ways to the CPC, laminating books, cooking food. The contribution from the whole of Lisa’s family has continued and Lisa mentioned it was the sink cleaning day that made her whole family feel they belonged and could contribute to the CPC.

In listening to this story we discovered that:

- **Everyone has something to contribute** and it is important to give people a safe space to **offer their help** and then for us to **welcome the offer**.
- Our genuine concern for a family member **built the relationship** with the whole family. It showed that everyone is **welcome**.
- The CPC is a place for our own families to be **connected as a part of the community**. We are a **place to give** and a **place to receive**. We are a place for everyone.

### My first day at the surf club

When Ruby walked into the local surf club for the first time as a 14 year old, she was really nervous. She knew nobody other than her family. She walked up to a group of girls who were getting ready for a club event together. They were helping each other write their numbers in zinc on their arms and legs as well as their club name and colours. She was welcomed into the circle and absorbed immediately into the group and one of the girls grabbed her and

said we need to get you numbered up. So for Ruby, the first ten minutes of her time in the club felt like an initiation time. There was something to do with others. She said she felt like she was part of the group immediately and had an identity within the team.

In listening to this story we discovered that:

- It is important to **feel a part of things quickly** – like an initiation into the group, something that draws the person into the place/group and gives them **a common bond**.

### Imagining what might be

There is a point in the process when the real story drops in, moving suddenly from a broad discussion into ‘Oh, there was this time when...’ and you are there in the magic of story and the discoveries that spring from it. In these moments, I observed a physical change in people. Eyes widen, they sit forward (the teller and the listeners), and other people join in. There is a increase in energy in the room and people put themselves out there to offer suggestion and themselves.

Over the past eighteen months, we have had moments of great clarity and ah-hah moments. We have had moments of frustration (often when we are caught up in our own heads about the direction of the process or the words needed to get the right questions). And then suddenly, in the midst of the confusion, magical things just leapt at you from a story and conversation to retell it. In one moment we were sharing a story about a young woman joining a surf club and somehow we now have a deeper understanding of what belonging might look like for people having a first contact at our Centre and ideas to try new and different things.

We knew we had uncovered some key themes from the stories: the importance of first contact and of being welcomed; feeling a part of things and having a common bond, feeling like you have something to contribute – giving and receiving; being connected to the community and, more than anything, the strength of positive relationships.

### DESIGNING THE FUTURE WE DESIRE

This is where the surf became a little rougher and cloudy with sand and swell, and was the part of the process we struggled with the most. We found securing time to get into deep discussion was difficult as the constant nature of our work invariably had priority. But we became more creative and innovative about where and when we talked.

After numerous conversations, we teased out a set of provocations around the three themes of being, becoming and belonging. Their purpose was to provoke and challenge us in thinking about what we might do to build on what we know is working. The most important of these describes the place we want the CPC to be in the future and the importance of relationships within it.

The CPC is a place where we value ABOVE ALL the relationships and connections between families from our community, our staff, our volunteers and students and our own families as a part of this community.

What would it take to have a place that values relationships above all else? How can we sustain this?

From this central proposition, we developed three more:

- **Being:** We are a place to be  
What if CPC was a place that families could come to just be, to be there with their kids, to have fun and to just be themselves - with no questions asked?
- **Becoming and reciprocity**  
What if everyone felt they had something to offer the CPC and felt safe to do so?
- **Belonging**  
What would it look like if everyone felt a sense of belonging to the CPC?  
How would that look and feel when you first walked in?  
What would it take to have a place that values relationships above all else?

## **DELIVERING OUR DESTINY**

A number of actions sprang immediately from our consideration of the provocations above and from the stories we had collected so far.

### **Being**

We have started just saying 'welcome' when families first arrive at the Centre and giving them time to settle into the space before asking them what they are here for or how we can help them. We focus on engaging, often through children, to make families feel welcome rather than collecting information about them straight away. We watch more and wait, allow more silences and then pick the time for further inquiry. We have explicitly chosen not to probe too much in the first contact. This has resulted in families becoming comfortable surprisingly quickly and being more prepared to share their stories openly and honestly.

### **Becoming**

We are looking at new ways to increase our families' involvement in the CPC, from simple things like inviting parents to help with everyday activities such as cutting fruit, cleaning toys or sorting resources, to greater involvement in running the Centre, for example, by supporting parents to sit on the LAC group and the operational team. We recognise everyone has something to contribute and how much we can learn from others, wherever they are from and whatever stories they share with us. In this way we can change the world, one story at a time.

## Belonging

Based on our discovery about the importance of feeling connected quickly, we make sure staff or other families always greet new families as they arrive. This may include simple things such as showing them where to put their bags, or what to do in an activity, so that newcomers quickly feel connected, comfortable and safe. We have also begun texting families after their first visit to the CPC, thanking them for coming and inviting them back again. This has been an easy and simple action for us to implement and has had a positive impact of families returning to the CPC.

We are also developing a welcome pack for new families as an introduction to our Centre. It will include stories from the staff, with pictures of us with our children and families, to allow new families to get to know us on a more personal level, rather than simply being seen as professionals waiting for clients.

We are displaying artwork from our families in the Centre and putting up photos from the kids who are regular participants in our programs.

## Changing our language and the way we think

We have all learnt the power and importance of the questions we ask and HOW we ask them.

I have noticed a change in our language in team meetings, as well as in daily conversations with our families and children. People reframe questions into the positive. They begin sentences with 'I wonder what would happen if...' , 'Tell me about that', 'Tell me more' or 'What happened next?' In team meetings I have taken to asking the team to 'Tell me about a time when...' . This keeps the process fresh in our minds and reminds us to do things differently.

**We have all learnt the power and importance of the questions we ask and how we ask them.**

In addition, staff members are more likely to spontaneously use open questioning in their work with families and also within the team. I also plan to put examples of this questioning on the white board in the office to remind our team to keep trying out this process until it becomes a normal part of interactions with families.

Overall, we now reflect a little more on each other's stories rather than trying to fill in the space with our own ideas and beliefs or interpretations. That moment becomes about handing over to the person talking and we have no choice but to listen more deeply.

## REFLECTING ON OUR INQUIRY

Appreciative inquiry does have a magical quality about it. It requires you to trust in it, in yourself and in others, and to have the ability to just be in the moment, to put aside previous patterns of thinking and ways of asking questions, taking time to sit and absorb. It may seem to go

round the outside of things ...but eventually brings you back into the centre with a deeper, richer understanding of each other. It has allowed us to access ideas, inspiration and motivation, like a spring that winds itself down into the depth of a story and then, with a powerful impact, it releases learning and energy.

We have learnt about the richness of telling and sharing stories and how this process connects people, and teaches, touches and engages them. Because of this, we now use storytelling more frequently, in group settings and in individual conversations with families, partners and team members and also in the community at large.

Our inquiry has given us the tools, practice and trust to try things differently beyond the formal AI process, through big and small interactions with families, within our team, with other partner organisations, funders and even within our own families. It has highlighted and reinforced the things that we already knew worked well. We have learnt things we had no idea about. We recognise there are still things to learn about ourselves as people and as workers, about our services and about our families.

The big thing is the seemingly spontaneous and organic change that happens in people - how they light up when telling their stories, how it gives them a chance for connection, for healing and for sharing something of themselves. How people lean in (both physically and emotionally) when they listen deeply to the stories or hearing what has happened for others, and then naturally become invested in the story and the ideas and the actions that leap out ... 'We could try that here you know'. And so the changes begin as people put their hands up to be involved.

What gives energy and life to our Centre is our people, and the relationships we have with one another. It is these relationships - between staff, students, volunteers and our families - that are the driving force behind the whole CPC. Together we know that by providing a place that is safe, welcoming and supportive for everyone who steps through the door - not just families with young children - we truly become a place for everyone.



**Justine Hansen** is the manager of *Dudley Park CPC*. Justine is a strong believer in community development, working alongside people to set up playgroups and co-planning programs and services with community as authentic partners. She has a degree in health promotion and has lived and worked in the Binjabr (Peel) Region for the past 30 years. Justine is committed to making her community a place for everyone to belong and thrive in - from her family to work, to friends and colleagues.

While providing immediate housing and support for young people in crisis is vital, our guiding goal at St John's Youth Services is to ensure each young person we work with has the skills, support and resources they need to leave homelessness behind them for good.

Our Better Selves has provided an opportunity for the **Next Step Outreach team** to listen and learn about what has worked for young people who have participated in the programs themselves. It has led us to think about building on those strengths so as to provide the best possible service to young people overall.

The inquiry showed how important young people sharing their stories and experiences with each other can be in helping us plan our next Next Steps.

Nicole Chaplin  
General Manager, St John's Youth Services



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The mural at SAY Kitchen [above] is by Mara Dreaming. It is based on the theme of Reconciliation.



# A HOUSE TO A HOME

## Next Step, St Johns Youth Services

*St Johns Youth Services (SJYS) has provided homelessness and support services to young people in the CBD and metropolitan areas of Adelaide for nearly 40 years. Its outreach support includes Next Step, which assists young people to move from the welfare sector into safe and affordable private rental properties.*

By Damien Chalmers

### A HOUSE TO A HOME

The SJYS Outreach team undertook an appreciative inquiry to discover what young people value from our service and want to see more of. We wanted to find the elements of great service young people had experienced and use these to help more young people have similar positive experiences. We knew we did great work with young people to secure long term, stable housing but we wanted to learn more about exactly what was working well and how we could push our support programs to do even better.

At *Next Step*, young people decide when they have graduated from our support. It is not determined by a set period of time and they will regularly let us know when they no longer need support. Sometimes, this is through indirect measures such as missing appointments or not returning phone calls. At other times, the message is passed on more overtly. This happened in a conversation a couple of years ago, where a young man commented that he felt he had 'completed', his support with SJYS.

He added, 'I feel like I've learned what I needed. I feel comfortable [in my home] and can do it for myself now - A house to a home.' This comment set us thinking about the notion of 'graduates' completing their support with us within our outreach program of young people. And it was the idea we started with.

We wanted to know more about what we were doing well that meant young people felt they had graduated from our program. More particularly, we wanted to discover what we were doing that supports our graduates to have the skills, knowledge and confidence to live independently and to be involved in their community, living healthily and interested in sharing their own experiences. Through discussion between our team and a small group of young people, we agreed on the topic for our inquiry.

Our graduates have the skills, knowledge and confidence to live independently. They are involved in their community, living healthily and interested in sharing their own experiences.

We expanded this into a guiding statement that was the basis for our conversations with young people. It was positive and forward-looking.

When young people graduate from our program, they are confident they have what it takes to live independently. They are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy. They live in independent accommodation, are actively involved in their local community and are employed and/or studying. They understand their personal finances and can manage their day-to-day living expenses. They seek ongoing and supportive relationships with workers and other people in the community and offer support to others. They are valued and respected within their community, which includes and supports them, and prioritises their well-being. Our young people decide when they have graduated from our support, it is not determined by a set period of time.

**At Next Step, our aim is not for young people to simply move out of our accommodation programs into their own houses. We aim for young people to make their own home**

*At Next Step*, our aim is not for young people to simply move out of our accommodation programs into their own houses. We aim for young people to make their own home. We work with young people to be confident in their independence and valued community members who seek support when they need it and also offer assistance to others.

## DISCOVERY

Over the next eighteen months, we held one-on-one interviews and group sessions with young people, outreach workers and community members. We asked them what made them feel or know they were graduating, how they knew they were part of their community, who helped them to live independently with tasks such as managing their finances, and what was happening in their lives to know they no longer needed support. We also asked property managers about the help they gave to a young tenant to look after their home. We asked ourselves what it looked like for a young person to have made a home and how we had contributed.

Over the course of our conversations, we discovered the same areas of strength kept occurring in their stories. The first area was about how important the relationship was between a young person and their support worker networks. The second was about the organisation's flexibility to respond to young people's needs. The third was about the importance of persistence.

Through stories like the three below we began to discover what was working well at *Next Step* and to have a clearer idea of what it is that gives us life.

### **'I could give this bloke a go'**

During an early focus group, a young man, Dan, recounted his story about when he decided to turn his life around and make change. An SJYS worker had been meeting regularly with him, while he was staying in the SJYS crisis accommodation service after overcrowding forced him out of his family home. Sometimes the meetings would go well. Sometimes Dan did not turn up at all.

SJYS offered Dan a number of opportunities. And he did take on a few of them. One was to start a hospitality course. He said he didn't really take it seriously but thought of it as something to occupy his time and maybe keep him out of trouble. Throughout everything, Dan felt a constant 'pull' to return to his family, whom he described as loving but not a good influence on his life.

On the outside, Dan was progressing really well. He had stable accommodation, linked to his ongoing traineeship. In the background, however, there was still the pull to be involved with his family and his friends. By his own admission, they were 'pulling him down' and after a night out drinking he found himself locked up. Dan spoke about how he felt he had two directions he could go. He could continue being involved in the same circles that would most likely lead him to being in prison, or he 'could give this bloke a go'. This was the SJYS worker who, he felt, was someone looking out for him, someone he could rely on.

Dan made the decision sitting in that cell that he would give the SJYS worker a real chance and start taking on board the advice and opportunities available. He said that without that relationship based on safety and trust and developed over time, it was unlikely he would have continued with his apprenticeship or become a chef. Most likely, he would have continued on the path to prison. Dan took on big changes in his life largely by taking himself out of family and social circles. He credits finding the strength to do so to his relationship with the SJYS worker who had stuck by him through the low times and encouraged him to stick at study, and later, his career.

It is often said relationships are the agent for change. Throughout many of our conversations, like the one above, it became apparent that the relationship between young people and their worker can influence monumental change.

### **An odd choice of pet and additional time**

The second story from a young woman, Amari, highlighted the importance of listening to young people's concerns and being prepared to make adjustments so their concerns are met.

I had some support to find a home but one sticking point I was told was due to my love for animals. The SJYS *Next Step* team was pretty good at knowing what it takes to get a property and what makes it difficult. Apparently, pets make things difficult. Landlords are not keen on animals in their properties because of the mess they might make. They are not keen on the regular cats and dogs let alone other animals such as mine. My pets were rats and I was told this was going to make things harder than normal, but I was really happy and a little surprised when my workers didn't stop until I had a place.

After quite a few knockbacks, I was successful in finding a place and was able to bring my rats with me. I was feeling pretty good about the outcome but then the reality set in for me. I would be moving into my own place and living on my own for the first time. I got a bit anxious as the date came closer and spoke to my worker about it. They agreed that, even though I had a place to move into, I could stay in youth110 for an extra week to work out all the details of the move and plan a bit for the first few weeks. This extra time with the support around me gave me the confidence to feel I could move into my own home and make it a success. I'm still in the same property, with my rats, but I feel if the service did not allow me the extra time to move in when I felt right about it, I may not have lasted there past the first week.

While it is unsurprising that needs differ from person to person, those seeking support can frequently experience very rigid assistance. We were faced with a young woman who was not quite confident in her ability to live independently and also brought along an extra, interesting barrier to housing which many agencies may not have been able to work with.

With some breathing room and a clear day-by-day plan to build her confidence, Amari eventually felt sure enough of her capabilities to move into her own home, make it a success and have her beloved pets with her. Listening to this young woman's nervousness and responding to her individual needs, we gave her the chance to develop a sense of belief in herself. Instead of a rushed transition, which likely would have led to a failed move, a carefully planned and gentle move occurred. The result was a success and Amari remains in her home to this day.

### **I kept working with Steven**

Our third theme arose from an SJYS outreach worker relating Steven's story. Steven was first supported through SJYS' crisis service and then through the *Next Step* outreach program to move into private rental with his brother.

I worked with Steven and his brother to find a place and after a lot of difficulty and a lot of support they were successful. While there were some issues to navigate along the way, everything finally went as planned.

Almost two years later, Steven made contact with us, asking for help to find a new place as his current property was being sold and their lease not being renewed. While it wasn't our usual practice, I assisted him in finding a new property. A further twelve months passed and Steven made contact again, this time asking for help to find a new housemate. Steven's brother was leaving the country and Steven needed another person to share costs so he could afford his rent. In the past, Steven had relied heavily on his brother as English was not their first language. Without his brother to fall back on, Steven didn't know where to begin so he turned to us at SJYS again and we found a housemate for him.

Because we are an agency where young people don't have set support periods and can return at any time, by coming back to us Steven avoided a whole range of negative outcomes such as breaking his lease and returning to homelessness. Normally, I might help young people find one house, maybe I'd pop back in to help address some tenancy issues but I kept working with Steven over the years, each time preventing him from returning into the homelessness system.

For this young man, the worker's persistence and continued support over several years resulted in him living independently outside the 'welfare' system and enabled him to continue moving forward in his life.

### Giving back

Listening to young people, especially in group settings, gave workers an injection of energy. Their sense of positivity was obvious and, as they became more comfortable with each other, their sense of safety. This led to some almost trying to 'out do' each other in their honesty and openness.

One group built such a safe space for each other while sharing their stories that quite an amazing display of trust occurred. As we were nearing the end of the session, one young man wanted to share one more personal experience. He began with, 'because of what you have shared today, I want to share with you all one thing I rarely show anybody'. He talked of his childhood, growing up in a war torn country and being taken away to become a child soldier. He rolled up his shirt and showed the scarring that had been inflicted upon him. For him, this was a display of trust in this diverse group, all with a common theme of trauma in their lives. Because of the trust other people had shown him, he wanted to show his trust in return.

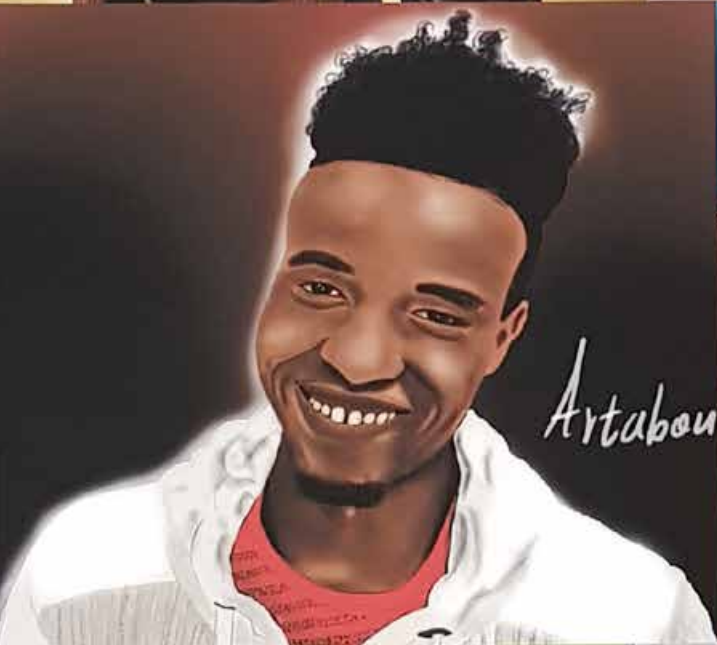
Following this session, participants told the team they had found the whole experience moving, but what the young man had done would be memorable for them. All went on to say they felt this was an experience that as many young people possible should be invited to have. They made it clear they wanted to be involved in other forums where their stories could be shared and heard.

### DREAM

With a remarkable amount of content, the Next Step team shifted into the Dream phase of the inquiry. We discovered that four key themes stood out in the stories that were always associated with positive experiences for young people. These themes were: *relationships; flexibility; persistence; and giving back.*

We began to imagine a series of creative possibilities around them and developed four provocative questions:

- What if everybody had somebody in their life to push them forward, explore possibilities and opportunities?
- What if support agencies and their staff worked responsively and had greater freedom over what they could do?
- What if workers kept their doors open, no matter what?
- What if young people had a powerful platform to give back and instigate change?



## DESIGN

A small group of young people became involved in designing responses to the four provocations. They particularly wanted to prioritise opportunities for young people and build on the flexibility and persistence of service delivery.

We were keen to start implementing young people's suggestions and use the energy and momentum we had unearthed during group sessions. We began work on providing extended opportunities for young people outside regular service delivery, creating a strong, effective platform for young people to have their voices heard, and making an open door for all.

### Extending opportunities and support for graduates

For several years we have facilitated groups and activities for young people in our services. These have been a means for workers to break down barriers in the 'worker client' relationship, and to have fun, informal experiences focused on building positive relationships. This year, these opportunities will be available to our graduates at the annual SJYS Reconciliation Camp with young people who have moved on from SJYS invited to attend.

SJYS will look for other opportunities for graduates to be involved as well as openings for SJYS to check in on past participants and extend an offer of support when it is needed. This will help us to remain flexible and keep doors open to young people after they have graduated. It will allow us to stick with young people who may be hitting bumps in their journey of independence and will promote an ongoing relationship between workers and young people.

### Having a voice

A further priority for the group was the formation of a youth led consultation advisory group, a group of young people who would be available to give advice and opinions on service delivery and to be involved with staff development sessions, conference panels and lived experience forums. Their wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm they bring will no doubt improve the way we work with young people experiencing homelessness and, we hope, will bring positive change more broadly across the human services sector.

### An open door

SJYS has always attempted to respond flexibly to the needs of young people coming through our doors. By highlighting the power of an organisation that can be a constant in their lives and a place they could return to, young people prompted some great conversation about how this could be done. Could the outreach team operate as a 24 hour service or provide an 'on-call' service to respond to young people outside regular office hours? The importance young people gave to this idea suggests it should be given serious consideration.



Another key consideration for us is the promotion of our programs so that graduates are aware the organisation's doors will be open to them. With 'Keeping My Place' aimed at early intervention and homelessness prevention, young people agreed this program would be perfect to develop further.

## DESTINY

The outreach programs at SJYS have always provided needs based services for young people who experience homelessness. They will continue to evolve as they respond to young people. Through this inquiry we have heard what young people hold valuable and have made some initial steps to implement their ideas.

For the future, the *Next Step* team aims to be a place where young people gain opportunities to achieve their long-term goals and where they are exposed to experiences they may never have considered. We want our graduates to have a strong voice and advocate for change to allow more young people equitable access to opportunity. We want our young people to know that they can count on us to care for them.

This appreciative inquiry has been a growth opportunity for us as individual workers, as a team and as an organisation. The early stages were confusing for many of us and looks of uncertainty were not uncommon when outlining the process. But over the past 18 months, the *Next Step* team has pulled together to discover that young people's contributions are not limited to their stories. They teach us what is truly valuable. Their involvement in guiding service delivery has resulted in positive outcomes – more flexibility, workers' persistence in offering support and, above all, the pursuit of positive and trustful relationships that can offer both opportunity and hope for the future.



**Damien Chalmers** is the manager of outreach at St John's Youth Services, including *Next Step*. He's also the lucky owner of 1,000 cherry trees. Damien has worked with young people for fourteen years, finding them opportunities to reintegrate with the wider community. Watching young people move from crisis accommodation into their own homes, lay the foundation for returning to study, complete degrees and become successful in their first (or second or third) jobs is Damien and his team's greatest rewards.

The **Recovery Point** program in Newcastle, NSW, is a client driven Drug and Alcohol program that provides ongoing and person directed programs that assists people to stay drug free, post-release.

These personal stories of recovery, at the heart of this inquiry, demonstrate the value of taking the time to ask questions, and listen. Those who have been through the justice system experience a multitude of barriers to re-integration with little or no support, and where opportunities that most of us take for granted can be invisible. These reflections have shone a light on the way we work towards enabling, partnering and providing opportunities for our people to achieve their potential.

Most importantly, the team has used the inquiry to identify a new level of initiatives that would build on people's capabilities, support them more strongly, and strengthen their positive presence in the community.

Marette Gale  
Associate Director, Samaritans  
Foundation



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Josh, Amy, Robert, Rachel and Shane were all a part of *Recovery Point's* inquiry. Rob [above] has shared his journey and the work of Recovery Point with Newcastle radio.

# IN HELPING OTHERS, WE HEAL OURSELVES

## Recovery Point, The Samaritans Foundation

*For some time now, Recovery Point has been moving closer to being a client driven service – a service where those attending provide more than just feedback. As clients become clean they take on specific roles according to their individual skills. Some have moved into mentoring, co-facilitation of groups and then paid employment through trainee positions. When we relocated to larger premises that were old and tacky, the clients rebuilt the sections that did not need the skills of a qualified builder. They painted the offices, helped with the move, and with setting up the office. From the beginning we established a culture of being a part of the service rather than just attending.*

By Helen Fielder-Gill

### WHAT OUR INQUIRY IS ABOUT

*Don't tell me why we can't do something. Tell me how we are going to make it happen.*  
(Cec Shevels, former CEO of Samaritans)

Many people exiting prison or dealing with drug and/or alcohol problems experience social isolation, are judged and excluded for their struggle, and are deprived of opportunities to speak up in the community. People in recovery have important experiences to share, and lived wisdom about coping with addiction that can provide help to others. Samaritans, *Recovery Point*, wanted to provide an opportunity for people using our service to share their experiences of recovery, and to suggest ways in which the general community could best support those battling with addiction.

At the heart of our inquiry were six people who volunteered to talk about their own journeys, to take part in exploring the ways *Recovery Point* could move into the future, and to share their hopes and dreams of acceptance into the wider community. It was a collaborative process with a group of staff, client participants and volunteers meeting regularly to work our way through what the inquiry looked like for us at each of its stages.

We decided that we wanted to know the effect our program has on the people we support and the wider community, the difference we make to the lives of those we support, and the things we get right now that can help us to do things even better in the future. We came up with eight questions to help participants tell their stories.

### **Inquiry questions**

- Could you share some of the challenges you have faced in your life?
- What prompted you to make changes to deal with the challenges you have faced?
- What steps have you undertaken to gain more control in your life?
- How have others positively influenced you to make these changes?
- What advice would you have for others that we have contact with, who may have experienced some of the challenges you have faced?
- Have you had any experiences where you feel you've helped others in their recovery journey?
- If you had an opportunity to have a greater say in our community to break down the stigma about people facing challenges such as addiction or crime, what would you want to say?
- Based on your involvement with 'Recovery Point', do you have any advice for us about what we should focus on moving forward?

### **DISCOVERY**

After we had conducted the interviews with the six volunteers, we decided to make an audio recording of those taking part, so that it was not just words on a page, but real people with lived experience telling their stories and sharing their expertise in recovery. You can listen to what they had to say by following the links in the online version of this publication.

### **Amy's story**

Amy had many years of drug use and the challenge of raising her two boys on her own. The boys were her greatest inspiration to get clean. She revealed how difficult it was to get to a place where she knew she had to get clean. Amy now works for Samaritans *Recovery Point* as an Aboriginal Trainee Support Worker. She talked about the benefits of helping others as a client, and now as an employee of Samaritans. Helping others 'gives me the strength to keep helping them,' she said. 'Having people come in and say OMG how does she look like that?' gives her the drive to keep going. She wants people in the community to see how hard those trying for recovery are working, and how hard it is to be in addiction. 'It is so much easier to live a normal life'.

### Rachel's story

When Rachel came to the Samaritans, Family and Community Services had removed her children due to domestic violence and drug use. She came with an attitude that said I am better than Samaritans I don't have a problem. But each time she arrived she was greeted by staff who took her in with open arms. In thirteen months, she turned her life around and was completely drug free, and she is now an inspiration to everyone who knows her. In the opening of her interview Rachel touches on some of the things that brought her to this place. She says what inspires her is 'People who are soberer than me, like Amy'. Rachel is now a mentor to those who are at the beginning of their recovery. She says, 'Sometimes it feels like you are going to drown.... you won't! If you keep swimming you will get there.'

Her children are back in her care. Her story, her enthusiasm to help others and her input made this report possible.'

### Rob's story

Rob has had a lifetime of gaol due to the consequences of his drug use. He has had a lifetime of self-medication to block the voices in his head. He came to our service directly from prison through our supported accommodation program. Rob's story is representative of the trauma experienced by most of those who come to our program. He says that what helps his recovery is 'coming around the corner at Recovery Point and having someone smile at me'. He also speaks about how he helps others by making people laugh. He talks about the stigma of being in addiction and says, 'don't condemn us just pray for us'.

### Shane's story

Shane has a history of drug use going back to age eight. He grew up thinking that drug use was a normal way of life. Shane is now a volunteer mentor in our service and is co facilitating Smart Groups. He has been a part of the program for the past 18 months. 'I just needed a bit of a push and I had all the tools... It's like a family here at Recovery Point.' He has moved from being a client into a volunteer role, giving back. 'I like to be a good influence now I know what the word means. I think just smiling is a good influence – just being happy.' Shane's nickname is Shiny, as his smiles shine. He is well known in the drug community and he knows that, just by example, he has changed the lives of others.

### Sean's story

Sean came to Samaritans from prison through the Friendship House program in 2014. He is a volunteer with Samaritans Recovery Point and has just finished his Cert 4 in Community Services. He established and is running our music program, as well as working with clients as a mentor and support worker. He played multiple roles in the Appreciative Inquiry process and agreed to tell his story and talk about his journey in recovery.

He says, 'Getting clean is a struggle on its own. It takes a lot of years to iron out what is clean... I'm in a good place now; it's taken me 34 years to get here.' He is very clear about the major role that helping others in recovery has played in maintaining his own recovery. As with all of those who interviewed, he sees helping others as key.

### Josh's story

'I grew up in a family of addicts. We were constantly moving, and my Mum was involved in selling. I lost both of my parents to drugs, and if I'd kept going when I got out of prison, I would have gone the same way.' A very quiet person, Josh will quietly come along aside others who are struggling with their addiction and encourage them to continue to attend meetings and stay on the road to recovery. Josh has not used since leaving prison eight months ago. He has done all the *Recovery Point* programs and is now doing Engineering at TAFE, and has just finished a test and tag course.

### DREAM

From the six stories, we identified several major themes that highlight *Recovery Point's* strengths and successes.

### The power of peers as mentors and supporters

The power of having people around who have been through recovery and who can anticipate challenges ahead was seen as extremely important to several participants. According to Sean, '**Seeing others change** has inspired my change.' Another person said, 'People who I've seen go **beyond addiction** have been the greatest supports', and yet another, 'Seeing people who have become well has been important to my recovery.'

Peer workers understand the **complexity of recovery** and the many and varied challenges it entails. They come to know when someone is ready to **accept help**, and to understand the length of time to recovery, which for some was years. As Amy stated, 'If you give them the right advice at the right time, it might stick and **they might take it**.' They also pointed out that people **support others** in their own ways, for example, Rob said he contributes by 'Making others laugh!'

### A place to go and a place to learn

Everyone spoke about the reasons they kept coming back to *Recovery Point* - the atmosphere, smiles, the **respect**, the importance of **being accepted** at all stages of the recovery process and the acknowledgement of the hard road travelled. For Shane, 'It's like a family - a second home - **a new start**.'

For many, it was **a place to go without being judged**. They overwhelmingly recognised the importance of having people around who are not on drugs, staff who can give wise and often painful advice and who are prepared to have difficult conversations.

They also valued the regular and varied activities and learning opportunities for participants. Keeping everyone involved with a wide range of activities helps to **re-focus**, and learn to **build relationships** and **new skills** to enter the workforce. At Recovery Point programs such as SMART / ICE SMART / Headstrong/ Certificate II Courses with TAFE/ cooking/ Friday outings / Music / Art classes are always running.

### Realising something had to change and persevering

Stories about commencing recovery were similar. For many, an internal recognition that **something had to change** prompted their journey to recovery. They wanted to change the way they were living and to live 'a normal life'. One said, 'I went to jail, but when I got out, I wanted to make a change. I didn't want to end up at the same place as my parents.' Rob said, 'There had been a lot of violence in my life. I had to start getting **people back in my life who loved me, and I loved them.**'

Everyone mentioned the importance of **perseverance**. Rachel, who had her children removed (they have now been returned), described the journey 'sometimes it feels like you are going to drown.... You won't. If you keep swimming you will get there'. Amy's advice was to 'Keep coming back! Don't stop fighting for what you really want'. The advice to **keep coming back** and **never give up** was strong in most people's stories.

### Helping others

#### Participants talked about how, as well as receiving help, they found strength in helping others.

While it was evident that recovery is a very individual journey, which relies on receiving guidance, support and understanding, participants talked about how, as well as receiving help, they found strength in **helping others**. For example, Amy is now on a traineeship, and is determined to pursue her goal of full time work in the sector. She said, 'I now have lots of experiences where I am helping others ... becoming a volunteer has moved the focus away from myself. I have started studying and I'm now doing adult stuff... I have helped tell others not to use, and warn them of ending up in the same place as me.'

For participants who have become mentors and coaches to others, there were benefits as well. For example, Amy and Rachel mentioned a growth in their **skills, confidence** and sense of **control over their lives** as they moved from client to volunteer and worker. When we all met to listen to the final version of the recorded interviews, the six participants realised that they had made something significant, and something that **could help others** – whether through addiction recovery or just through life itself. They could hear themselves **providing inspiration**, with comments such as, 'I sound so professional. I feel so proud of myself that I could say these things so clearly.' And 'Did I say that? I make so much sense.'

### Three provocations

After listening closely to people's stories, and discussing the themes we had discovered, the group came up with three provocations, to challenge us to think about the future in the most positive way possible.

- What would it take to have a client move through the system to eventually be the CEO of Samaritans and/or a member of the board?
- What if we lived in a world that moved away from discrimination, and into believing in redemption?
- What would it look like if someone whose life had always been an enormous struggle put down the pain and moved forward to a 'normal' life?

### Poking the provocations

Our vision, or dream, is drawn from those who have walked the journey of recovery. Some are still on the journey and are now helping others through their recovery.

## **Our vision, or dream, is drawn from those who have walked the journey of recovery.**

The discussion turned to what it is that we do well, and then to designing what we CAN do better.

The group wanted to look at how the service could move further towards being a client driven service, and how clients' input had an impact on those attending the service and their recovery.

Participants also wanted to look at the wider implications of how this would influence the way they were viewed within the wider community. They discussed how changing the way people viewed them might take away stigma and allow more people to reach out for help.

In the discussions, the six participants' backgrounds were initially important, as each person established where they were coming from. This all fell away with the realisation that they all wanted the same thing – a 'normal' life. Each expressed a desire to find a way to move through the world but, most importantly, a way to help others and to give back.

Their stories are heartbreaking – every one of them – but their courage and determination to move forward comes through. They have taken the opportunity to think about their roles in *Recovery Point* and out in the community – how they have used the sadness, shame and hopelessness in their lives to help others; how by helping others they realise that they too are starting to heal. Moving on from that, they talked about expanding the program to give others the opportunity to give back, continuing the cycle of healing.



## DESIGN

Dreams can become reality once a plan is put in place and action is taken.

### Weekends

Many people spoke about the need for services and assistance on the weekends. When the group looked for ways to meet the identified needs with minimal resources, we came across a program at the University of Newcastle run by Professor Fiona Kay-Lamkin, who is working on a range of apps to fill in gaps in the mental health system. These Apps provide people with access to tools that help with anxiety, depression and substance abuse. They are easy to use, and have been shown to be as effective as one-on-one counselling.

We have organised a meeting with Fiona Kay-Lamkin regarding their possible usefulness for clients on the weekends and at night. She is very keen to show us what we can do with them.

### Intentional Peer Support

We want to focus on the benefits of helping each other and grow the number of peer mentors in the service. We also want to increase the number of traineeships, and build networks of trainee opportunities within the organisation, and across the sector.

With this in mind, we are looking at training in Intentional Peer Support for those involved in mentoring. We are initially looking for funding to run a program alongside *Recovery Point* that supports the people involved in the Intentional Peer Support program.

### The centrality of client voices

After the experience of doing the interviews and listening to the results, the participants all wanted to use their voices to share who they are and what they have to say in the world. The group agreed that the recordings should be used as an educational tool for groups and on social media. We also want to work towards Peer Workers being represented on boards, in management committees and on government consultative committees.

### Education and employment pathways

We want to develop new and creative ways in which those exiting corrections, and those who have alcohol and other drug and mental health issues, can find education and employment pathways and reduce the stigma of employing staff who have had a custodial sentence. We will provide peer workers with the same training and professional development as permanent staff.

## Community education

We will use the recordings to develop and provide education and training to staff in Health, NDIS, government and Not for Profit sectors, looking to quell fears of working with people who have had very difficult and trauma filled childhoods, and helping them to become more aware of many ways in which to work with people who are in different stages of recovery.

## DESTINY

This inquiry drew out new and transformative information for Recovery Point and, most importantly, the process itself was an example of the benefits of client driven outcomes. The powerful dynamic of helping others and being helped by peer workers was a sentiment expressed by everyone, which echoes the evidence of the power of Peer Worker Model (Gagne, et al. 2018). As Mead et al. (2001) point out:

When people find affiliation with others they feel are ‘like’ them, they feel connection. This connection, or affiliation, is a deep, holistic understanding based on mutual experience where people are able to ‘be’ with each other without the constraints of traditional (expert/patient) relationships.

Throughout the inquiry, the group identified many new possibilities for growth. It has highlighted to participants how much they have learned in relation to coping and resilience, and the importance their voices have in our community.

At *Recovery Point* we will continue to build on the work of the past 25 years, and to influence model future service delivery models, that is, to deliver services informed by the narratives of personal recovery. We will use the successes we have discovered through this inquiry to move forward together with trust, respect, acceptance, perseverance and mutual support.



**Helen Fielder-Gill** coordinates Post Release and alcohol and other drug Services for the Samaritans Foundation. Helen has worked with Post Release Service in Samaritans for the past 15 years. She has a passion for providing people with opportunities and pathways to creating change in their lives. She would say that these program are only here because of the amazing staff and clients who are always participating in their reintegration and recovery.

In this story we observe the power of new approaches to thinking and questioning to transform **Alice Springs Housing Support Services**, a Transitional Housing Service working mostly with Aboriginal adults and families.

When staff learnt to ask questions differently using their Appreciative Inquiry skills, both tenants and colleagues were energised.

When the intake process stopped focussing on problems alone and asked firstly 'tell us about a time when things were going really well?' tenants were buoyed with hope. They began to create the future they wanted and to share knowledge with other tenants. When staff applied similar processes at weekly staff meetings, they were energised and more hopeful for their tenants' future. Team meetings became positive opportunities to innovate and celebrate and learn.

Dave Pugh  
CEO, Anglicare NT



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Anglicare NT's *Alice Springs Housing Support Service* has worked with Pamela, William, and Dawn [above].

# A HOME OF HOPE

## Alice Springs Housing Support Services, Anglicare NT

*In Alice Springs, Anglicare NT has a long history of providing support to people experiencing homelessness. Its services have evolved and expanded to provide a comprehensive response to homelessness.*

*A strengths-based case management model of support is provided, incorporating a holistic approach in working with all family members to identify needs and supports.*

By Sharon Watson and Jieun Chun

### WHAT OUR INQUIRY IS ABOUT

Accommodation is a key factor in people beginning to develop a sense of security and safety. However, the opportunity for long term growth and change must incorporate the areas of wellbeing and connection, for the individual and within the community.

In participating in *Our Better Selves* we wanted to explore two key areas:

- What does it mean to feel 'at home', and the broad definition of home?
- When do things go well for clients, and what or who have contributed to these moments?

From this starting point we were aiming to identify what we already do well and to explore how we can do more of what works well for the Alice Springs community.

## HOW IT TOOK SHAPE

As a team of case workers who support clients experiencing housing stress, we thought it was important for us to approach the inquiry together, drawing on the positive relationships we already have with our clients to engage in respectful and meaningful conversations.

Following the initial development of guiding questions to use in our conversations, we soon found the interactions between staff and clients were too formal and too broad. We were conducting interviews as opposed to conversations, and we were hearing many, varied answers rather than good quality stories. With this challenge in mind, the team worked on strategies and skills to engage in conversations with clients where we were capturing key details about specific moments, drawing out the finer details to help paint a picture in our minds about what it was that people were sharing with us.

**It was about us as a team learning how to really listen, converse and capture these key moments.**

What was exciting here is that we discovered we were already having these positive engagements with clients during our day-to-day interactions. But it was more than that. It was about us as a team learning how to really listen, converse and capture these key moments. We learnt here that it was about quality over quantity, with this reflection process strengthening our inquiry and opportunities for gathering stories.

Interestingly, although we were talking about ‘when things went well’, stories most often started with a reflection on when things weren’t going so well. Then, the depth of the stories evolved and the people talked about how things got better, what helped them, other significant people and places that were a part of this, and how this helped them grow within themselves.

Our conversations occurred in various environments including homes, local parks and during car trips to promote a sense of security and comfort. Extending on our conversations with clients, as a team we engaged in our own inquiry process, sharing stories about our work with clients and within the community that were meaningful and significant for us, also reflecting on the finer details of what contributed to these key moments for us, and why they were significant. A common theme emerged here for staff about the significance of seeing clients succeed and feeling proud of themselves, emphasising the privilege of being a part of these special moments with them. In addition, the laughter and humour between staff and clients were a highlight for everyone.

Over the course of the inquiry, we developed our themes and our vision of how we wanted to serve the community, allowing for changes to occur as we continued to make discoveries. Together, we developed a guiding statement and a name for our inquiry - A Home of Hope.

Home is a place of safety and comfort where people feel a sense of belonging. Everybody deserves a place to call home. The Housing Support Service is a place of safety and comfort where people can tell their stories with dignity and respect. We work together to help people connect to their family, culture, home and communities. The housing support service offers people new beginnings; where the past does not define the future. It creates the space to explore options and pathways; to generate hope and create positive changes; and to grow strengths, autonomy and connections.

### DISCOVERY THROUGH STORIES

Our inquiry incorporated a wide variety of conversations with clients, both current and past, with all staff playing a key role in engaging in these conversations. Our team also talked with each other as a part of the process. Some examples of the stories are shared in this report.

#### Nicholas's story

Nicholas has been struggling with addiction and has been in and out of prison. When he was offered a move into transitional housing, he was very happy and excited as he felt it was an opportunity for him to get back on track. Nicholas reflected on a moment when he was at one of his lowest points, sharing what was important to him and the good things he felt were happening for him during these times.

I had made a bad choice, but my case worker just sat with me and listened, there was no judgement, even at my worst he was still giving me genuine care, he never gave up on helping me.

Anglicare staff could see that addiction is my struggle but supported [me in] this and allowed me to grow and try to be as honest as possible. I know I probably could've been kicked out, but staff saw things deeper than this and I feel like they are really giving me a chance.

From Nicholas's story, we discovered that generating feelings of **hope** comes from **persistence**, **affirmative comments** and genuine **care** from workers and significant others in a person's life. We also discovered that everyone in the community can **help another person** to feel a sense of hope. Showing genuine care, using words of **encouragement** and **allowing time and space** for a person all contribute to creating a sense of hope. When someone is hopeful, the **ability to dream** and believe is possible. Through listening and **sharing positive stories**, we were sharing positive energies, not just within the team but also within the wider community.

#### Peter's story

Peter was living in transitional housing that was for adults only and that was not set up for children. Child-care arrangements with his ex-partner changed and the children were going to be spending more time with him. Peter was very happy that he could spend more time with his

children, but he was also aware that it was against Anglicare's policy to have children living in transitional housing. Peter was comfortable to discuss his worries with his case worker, who supported him to raise the issue with the management team.

From Peter's story we discovered the importance of taking the opportunity to reflect on and **review our rules**, why they were in place and how they were potentially limiting his connections with his children. By being **willing to listen** and to change our rules, we **promoted connections** between a father and his children within their home, without causing further disruption to their lives. For Peter, this made a big difference. He said:

I was so grateful that Anglicare helped me to have a better relationship with my children and my ex-partner. Alice Springs is where I want to be as I have family and sporting connections within the community.

### DREAM

From listening to people's stories, we could see what we are doing well, and we felt a renewed sense of pride in recognising the strengths within our team. Generating strong conversations and ideas provided us with excitement about how we can develop the service further. We became increasingly aware of the positive effect our conversations and discoveries were having in our work for both individuals and the community.

The stories offered us a rich source of inspiration and food for thought. After much discussion we organised these into four key themes.

- Home - Identifying what home really means to everyone.
- Connections - Family, culture and community, being a part of something.
- Hope - Being proud of yourself, having a dream, positive reinforcement, encouragement
- Working together - Providing genuine care and learning from each other, with persistence.

From the four themes, we developed four provocations, the 'what if' questions, that provoked and took us the dream stage of our inquiry. This is where the brainstorming began. Starting from imagining the future we most desired, we identified what we could do both here and now, and in the near future to make a difference, remembering the little things and the positive long-term effects that are possible.

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'Connections - People coming together' by Dawn Pearce,  
2019 Acrylic on canvas, 16x12 cm





## Home

In our first provocation we asked: *What would it look like where everyone's home was safe for them, and where they are the boss of what goes on in their home?*

We wanted to capture various ways that people choose to live, who they allow within their home and what happens within this space. A lot of people talked about what they wanted to do in their home. Some people wanted to shut the door and lock the world out, others want their family and friends in their home. Above all they wanted to be able to control what happens. As one person said, 'We don't need permission to do what we choose at home.'

This provocation created real challenges for us, particularly around supporting people to live autonomously, while at the same time meeting the rules and expectations of the public housing system. But it was also an opportunity for us to become greater advocates for our clients and to add to their voices on what works and what doesn't work for them, particularly when supporting clients living in public housing.

Within our transitional housing service, there was another opportunity for us to implement change to better meet the client's needs and preferences. As Peter's story showed, even though there was a 'no children' rule in place, we decided to review our policy based on what is important for clients, giving them an opportunity to increase their autonomy. Similarly, we are in the process of reviewing other policies regarding visitors and pets within the home to further support people's preferences, and so strengthen their well-being.

## Connections

In our second provocation we asked: *What would it look like if people share their knowledge and experiences with others to support community connections and growth?*

The theme of connections occurred frequently and in many different ways throughout people's stories. People talked about what is important to them and how they want to be able to pass this on to others within their community. For example, in reflecting on a connection she had when she was nineteen, Julia, a sixty-three year old woman, shared her excitement and passion. She said that at that time, wherever she went in the community, she felt that everyone welcomed her and looked after one another. Even though her family wasn't around her, others taught her the right way to go and she felt the need to pass this onto others. She said, 'I didn't have experience in teaching, but I was given an opportunity to work as a teacher. I could teach children to read and write, I taught them what I have, and they taught me what they have.'

**When someone's eyes light up and a big smile appears, it's hard not to become excited, share in their moment and embrace their strengths.**

As a team, this was an exciting area to dream about because, although we thought we understood the importance of connections, the deep significance of these connections to people's sense of their own wellbeing was stunning. When someone's eyes light up and a big smile appears, it's hard not to become excited, share in their moment and embrace their strengths.

### **Hope**

In our third provocation we asked: *What would it look like if we were always proud of ourselves and dreaming bigger and better?*

In many stories we discovered moments where people felt proud, and where they reflected on times that had a positive impact on them. We found that these conversations generated high levels of energy, which led to conversations about achieving more of this within our lives now. Jacob reflected on how happy he felt about working for a local supermarket company. He said:

When I am working, I like to go to town early so that I can spend time walking around in my uniform. I show off in my work uniform because I feel proud, and I want to show others that they can get a job too.

Lisa had recently been released from a women's prison and was feeling unsure about where things were going for her. She had a history of alcohol use that affected her wellbeing, and following her release was worried about how to keep herself away from excess drinking, using this as an opportunity to move forward. Without any supports in place, she said it was the words of one particular person that helped guide her in the right direction and believe that she could do this:

She said to me, don't give up, and she sat with me and we prayed together. I never forget what she said to me, it helped me so much. We are still friends now after a long time, and I will never forget what she said.

### **Working together**

In our fourth and final provocation we asked: *What would it look like if everyone genuinely cared for each other, no matter who we are or where we come from?*

We had many conversations where people talked about what is important to them, and passing on this learning, knowledge and experiences to others within the community. Through these conversations we learnt that this can happen in many ways and contexts and between many different people.



Lizzie shared her story as a family member of a client with significant mental illness who required lots of care and support for her children and herself. Lizzie reflected on her experience and how she felt about extended family members being given the opportunity to contribute and work together. She said, 'we had one case worker who worked with our whole family, bringing us together to understand and support the needs of my sister. This was very important to me as it helped create stronger relationships within my family and better outcomes for my sister.'

One of our staff members, Robyn, shared her exciting moment when working with two of her clients who were experiencing an ongoing state of crisis. One day she identified an opportunity where the clients were talking about engaging in change, and she felt that they were ready to do something themselves:

I got excited about the opportunity to discuss my client's relationship and identify what they really wanted. It was not my plan, it was their plan. They were ready to make a change. I allowed it to happen in their time.

## DESIGN AND DESTINY

This has been a team project from the beginning and although this, our first inquiry, has come to an end, there are many ideas, thoughts and actions that we have or will implement to create the strongest possible service to the Alice Springs community. The reflection process for our team created an opportunity to explore the things that are really going well within the service to our clients. From this, we recognised our capacity to strengthen our service and practices. The recognition that everyone has strengths and capacities within themselves is the most important starting point, and it is up to the community to utilise skills and abilities to empower others to feel capable and in control of their destiny. To be successful at this, as individuals and as a community we need to be more innovative and explore new possibilities, whilst also ensuring we keep doing what works well.

An exciting element of this inquiry is that it continues to strengthen and develop over time. From the beginning, people's wellbeing and connections were an important part of our practice. This was a key influence in our inquiry as we set about discovering what this looks and feels like for people within our community. The language that we speak is the starting point in the creation of strong and respectful relationships, further promoting opportunities to engage and share, particularly stories that can be used as a basis for identifying how we are going to engage in our work together. The strength of providing genuine care leads to the development of honest and respectful relationships where all involved can learn and grow together, and generates a sense of hope.

We have the opportunity to do this every day with the people we meet and spend time with and we are continuing with the development of this inquiry. Ongoing reflective processes help us to broaden our ideas and learning, and we look to use innovative ideas and opportunities within our team and the community as they arise.

Sharing celebrations together and making a big deal about them have emerged as strengths. It emphasises how valuable it is to feel proud of ourselves, among staff, clients and other community members. Most importantly, it is the person's voice that is critical in identifying their unique needs, hopes and dreams, and in helping us to work together to strengthen autonomy and connections.

This inquiry explored the common themes of home, connections, hope and working together. All four themes are both broad and specific to each individual and their circumstances. They are also closely connected to each other and it is hard to achieve one without another. For individuals and the community, they are vital to our overall wellbeing, particularly when things get tough and we need to draw on our strengths to help get us through.



**Sharon Watson** is a team leader of *Housing Support Services* at Anglicare NT Alice Springs. She has lived in Central Australia for over 14 years and worked with Anglicare NT for five. Sharon describes Alice Springs as a special little place to live, work and learn, where she can engage in diverse and meaningful work, with strong outcomes for all involved. Sharon is in her third year of a Social Work degree with Charles Darwin University.



**Jieun Chun** is a team leader of *Housing Support Services* at Anglicare NT Alice Springs. Following a successful career in journalism in Korea, Jieun moved to Australia and completed a Master of Social Work at Flinders University in 2010 as the first step in pursuing her great interest in helping and working with others and making a difference to people's life. Since then Jieun has worked in child protection and in housing and homelessness with Anglicare NT.





# THE FUTURE WE DESIRE

In an Appreciative Inquiry our future is constructed from our present thinking and images (Cooperrider, 2012). In Chapter 3, the five inquiry teams told 'life-giving' stories about what they did and with whom they worked at a particular period of time. In some ways, their reports were alike and in others distinct. Some of the realities revealed in their stories may change and others will remain constant.

Through the five reports, we have discovered many compelling ideas and images that form a consolidated positive core for *Our Better Selves*, from which to imagine what might be in the future we desire. We have organised these ideas into six interconnected themes. Some of these were important across all five inquiries. Others were more strongly depicted in some inquiries than in others and this is evident in the examples described in the themes below. Together they gave us the 'building blocks' (Cooperrider, 2012) upon which to base the imaginings and plans detailed in the remainder of this report.

## TIME AND SPACE

The first theme is about giving people time and space. It covers how we first meet people seeking our services and programs - welcoming and listening to them with open hearts and minds. For participants it was also about being in a place that was physically and emotionally safe, somewhere they could feel comfortable and 'at home'.

At *Dudley Park CPC* we learnt how important it was for people to just be there with their kids, in the space without explanation. Families became comfortable ‘surprisingly quickly’ and, in their own time they began to open up, making the space their own and tapping into available services. At *Recovery Point*, Rachel was already attending before she thought she had anything to gain or to learn, and she was made welcome and supported to turn her life around in her own time.

People value having someone listen to them without judging them. At *Alice Springs HSS*, Nicholas said, ‘my caseworker just sat with me and listened. There was no judgement.’ And when we take the time to listen we begin to look at people in new ways - who they are, what interests them, what their past lives were like and what dreams they have for the future. They stop simply being someone with a problem to be solved and become someone with a positive story to tell and a future ahead of them. For the young people at *Next Step*, the power of listening to each other as they shared their stories and the trust that came with it was profound. They were so energised by the experience that they volunteered to be involved in similar forums as a way of giving back to other young people.

Another aspect of time and space was the capacity to be flexible. This was particularly apparent at *Next Step* where they have the flexibility to respond to needs as they arise, because they are funded independently through St Johns Youth Services. This meant, for example, they could find an extra week in supported housing for Amira when she needed it. The *Alice Springs HSS* team found a way to change the rules to allow Peter’s children to visit and stay over in transitional housing because they could see what a difference it would make to him and his family. They are now reviewing other rules such as the ban on pets.

## STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

The second theme is about the power of positive relationships, accepting and being accepted, giving and receiving help. Many people

**Many people spoke about the importance of trust, persistence, encouragement and support between workers and clients, and with peers, family and friends.**

spoke about the importance of trust, persistence, encouragement and support between workers and clients, and with peers, family and friends. *Dudley Park CPC* identified positive relationships as their key strength, valuing ABOVE ALL the relationships and connections between the families, staff, volunteers and students as part of their community. At *A Place to Belong*, Kathy shared the exhilaration of doing her first fun run in the pelting rain

with Kym, her support facilitator. Kathy described the experience as ‘amazing’.



Generally, people come to a service because they need help, or perhaps because they are alone. It's important to keep in mind that not everybody's journey will be entirely successful or transformational. Sometimes the best that can happen is that people stick by one another, they walk alongside each other. As Amy stated, 'If you give them the right advice at the right time, it might stick and they might take it.' Others pointed out that they helped people in their own ways, for example, Rob said he gave support by 'making others laugh.'

For workers it was often about never giving up on a client. At *Next Step*, Dan made a shift from a life shaped by alcohol and violence to a traineeship as a chef with a place to call home. He made the decision to leave his past behind and 'give this bloke a go', acknowledging that the longstanding relationship he had with his support worker was essential to him in making that choice. For *Next Step* it is vital that everybody has somebody in their life to push them forward, and to help them explore possibilities and opportunities.

### COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND GIVING BACK

The third theme is about being connected to your community. Maintaining strong bonds with families, culture and community was a constant theme across all five inquiries, whether it was in linking people to others, being a part of something, having a sense of belonging, sharing knowledge and experiences, working or doing something together, or making a contribution and giving back.

The *Alice Springs HSS* team described how their understanding of connection deepened after listening to Julia's story. She talked about her experiences of being in her community as a young woman and her feeling of being welcomed and looked after. This led to her commitment to work with children. The HSS team shared her passion and excitement, saying, 'although we thought we understood the importance of connections, the deep significance of these connections to people's sense of their own wellbeing was stunning.'

Staff at *Dudley Park CPC* saw themselves as a part of their wider community, and while not at work 24 hours a day, they often met informally with families for a chat, under the trees, in the car park or at the shops. At *A Place to Belong* one man enriched his community's life through his involvement in the community barbecue, with the barbecue co-ordinator commenting, 'he brings out the best in people and he brightens the room.'

It meant a lot to people that they could contribute, giving back and helping to shape the services they use. The stories were full of people becoming involved in all sorts of ways - cleaning up, helping out at events, telling their stories in public forums or mentoring others.

Community involvement reached beyond the services as well. At *A Place to Belong*, Deborah's story was about teaching medical students in the wider community about health, inclusion and survival. The impact of her story on her audience was profound and Deborah has an ongoing involvement with the university.

It was important for some participants to make a formal contribution to the service. At *Recovery Point*, support from peers, such as Amy, played a vital role helping others in recovery. Its effect was inspirational, as Sean commented, 'seeing others change has inspired my change.'

## LEARNING AND GROWTH

The fourth theme is about learning and growth, for individuals and for services. On one level it is about learning skills and capabilities, at another it is about developing the confidence and resilience to make good choices and big decisions, being proud of yourself and feeling hope for the future. For services it is about learning to look at people and situations in new ways, being flexible, putting your 'expert hat' aside and taking opportunities to learn from others through two-way learning.

Training and formal learning were particularly important at *Recovery Point*, which participants described as a place to learn. They appreciated the opportunities to learn new skills to help them enter the workforce as well as learning to build healthy relationships. For people like Amy this has been a pathway to success.

Sometimes, learning was less formal. For Amira at *Next Step* it was about boosting her confidence so that she could live independently. At *Alice Springs HSS*, providing encouragement and allowing people time was critical to their growth and their ability to dream. This sense of hope was reflected in Jacob's story showing his pride in his work uniform as an example to others.

People often said they learnt from the example of others. In the end though, the big choices they talked about they made themselves. At *Recovery Point*, Sean made the call on the future life he wanted. It was about choosing to get clean. His journey involved turning up again and again, seeking and getting support from peers, workers and friends.

## VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

The fifth theme is twofold, combining voice and leadership. It is about affirming the stories we have to tell and the skills and confidence we have to tell them. And it is about reaching out beyond our immediate communities towards the society at large, through providing multiple platforms for people working in partnership to instigate change and create a world that moves away from discrimination.

One of the most powerful aspects of the appreciative inquiry process for everyone involved in *Our Better Selves* was the simple act of storytelling, because it was through their stories that people first had their voices heard. The *Recovery Point* participants were proud of their interviews. They were pleased with what they said, and how they came across. They felt more confident in themselves, knowing they had something important to tell others.

The young people at *Next Step* were keen to be a part of any future opportunities to share their take on what makes a difference. They wanted to continue their involvement even though they had graduated from the program as a way to have their voices heard in a public forum.

Many examples of leadership emerged from the stories. For some, such as Peter in Alice Springs, it was simply about being in control of what happens in your own home. For others, such as Shane or Amy at *Recovery Point* it was having a good influence over others.

The co-design and co-production integral to some inquiries also provided examples of leadership. Members of the Ripple Group spoke about the affirmation they felt from being a part of the inquiry. The leading role they played in their inquiry culminated in their presentation at the Mental Health Services conference, which they saw as enabling 'more people ... to understand and articulate the essence and soul and spirit of our work.' Clients, volunteers and workers co-designed all stages of *Recovery Point's* inquiry - from its initial set up, interview questions and recording to the formulation of provocations and discussion of directions and aspirations for the future.

Participants at *Recovery Point* and *A Place to Belong* expressed a strong desire to break down the stigma associated with people living with addiction or who experience mental health challenges. They saw a client-led approach as a way of changing the way people viewed them and as a way of encouraging more people to reach out for help.

### **BUILDING ON STRENGTHS**

The sixth theme is about the Appreciative Inquiry process itself and, more generally, the power and benefits of strengths based approaches

**What was striking and somewhat unexpected was the power of the process itself.**

to our work. What was striking and somewhat unexpected about all the inquiries was the power of the process itself, for staff and participants alike. The impact was gradual, as the implications of focusing on the positive, operating on the principle that what you focus on grows and that by asking the first question you begin to create change, began to take effect.

For instance, the *Dudley Park CPC* team described the importance of framing questions in a positive way and of listening deeply. And at *Next Step*, the opportunity for the young people to share stories created strong bonds of trust. It has also led them to offer to contribute more and to ask to be a part of future forums. The *Alice Springs HSS* team noticed the effect that focusing on the positive made to the way they saw their work – noticing strengths and successes where in the past they may have noticed struggles and problems. As a result, they made changes to their intake process and now start conversations by asking people to ‘tell us about a time in your life when things went really well.’

Strengths or assets based approaches push us beyond deficit thinking to focus on a future that is positive and hopeful, based on our past successes. For many, these approaches are well established. They have, for instance, been at the very core of *A Place to Belong* from its inception. Through these appreciative inquiries, *Our Better Selves* has offered our five teams a concrete and accessible approach that has been inspirational.

### REFLECTING ON THE THEMES

The six themes emerging from the inquiries highlight the strengths and successes at the core of each of the services and paint a picture of what really matters to them. The themes flow from one to another as a loose continuum, moving from the personal to the interpersonal and social spheres.

Many of the themes may seem self-evident to people working in the field. They also connect closely to several aspects of the current thinking discussed in Chapter 2. In some instances, there is an almost direct correlation, confirming the centrality of strong relationships, community and cultural connections, learning and growth across many approaches. There is also a clear connection between voice and leadership and power and social citizenship, noting that the ideas of mutual accountability, personal agency and active participation in society in current thinking, all suggest possible directions to build upon.

They are not identical though. The first theme – time and space – stresses the importance of a welcoming environment and an ambience of openness and safety. It draws attention to meeting people without expectation, looking at the whole person and listening to their life stories. The concept of capabilities extends the idea of openness to others by focusing on the individual and their potential, what they can be and what they can do. On reflection, this is a strongly held position in services such as *Recovery Point*, *Next Step* and *A Place to Belong*, but may need to be expressed more explicitly.

The two remaining areas for consideration – building on strengths and having a shared vision – are not points of difference. They simply underline the power and potential of asset or strength-based approaches and the critical role that having a shared vision and purpose plays in generating the energy and enthusiasm to move forward together. Both are integral to the Appreciative Inquiry process.

### WHAT COULD BE

The six themes provide the building blocks for imagining and co-constructing what Anglicare Australia, as a network of collaborative and inclusive services, could be:

- We provide a welcoming space for people, which is open and accepting. We are patient and allow people to simply be and to connect. We listen to them and are interested in their stories and their strengths. We start as we mean to continue.
- Services across the Anglicare Network are flexible and responsive. We seek to answer the needs and the ambitions of the people we serve. Sometimes it is just to walk beside them. We know how important that can be. Sometimes it's to support people when they make a big decision. And sometimes it is to give them a push. It depends on the people involved and the relationships that have grown up between them.
- What participants give and what they do is vital to how our services operate. We put a very high value on the contribution people make to their communities, to others at our services, and to society as a whole. It is this reciprocity that gives life to our work together.
- We are learning organisations. We look for opportunities for everyone to learn life and work skills that can open the doors they want to go through. Our goal is to learn about everyone's capabilities and find ways to support them when they need it. Essentially though, learning is interpersonal and reciprocal. I learn about you - your culture, your knowledge and your journey. You learn about me - my culture, my knowledge and my journey. We learn from each other.
- We offer a platform for the people with whom we work to speak for themselves - to tell us their stories and to share them more widely. We also provide avenues for people to help shape the programs they are a part of, and the directions of our services overall. They can provide support for others, or work to make change. Their expertise is essential to the work we choose to do. Their voice and leadership is a gift.
- Our role is to engage with people through connecting to their strengths and capabilities. We promote a positive shared image of the future and ask each other how we can get there.

In the next chapter, we use six provocations derived from the themes above to stimulate and challenge our thinking, moving from what 'could be' to what 'should be' and finally to 'what will be'.





# BUILDING A VISION

The fundamental purpose of *Our Better Selves* was to discover opportunities for the Anglicare Australia Network to drive change in Australia's political and social culture: to learn from the successes and strengths within our services that point the way to a society that truly values and pays heed to people of all abilities, backgrounds and circumstances.

For a considerable time, numerous programs within the Network have developed a range of successful and collaborative practices, offering the hope of change and improved wellbeing for individuals and building on community strengths. They were the inspiration for *Our Better Selves*. Through this report we are seeking to bring such practices to the forefront based on the inquiries into the five Anglicare programs. They give grounded examples of the changes we desire and a sense of the life and energy that comes with looking to the future with positivity and hope. They also imply possibilities for change on a larger scale.

In this chapter we offer six provocations to lead us to new priorities for the Network, our members and the people we serve. We have done this by joining the discoveries generated through the inquiries with the broader frameworks offered by Cottam (2018), Lankelly Chase (2019), Five Ways to Wellbeing (2011) and Advantaged Thinking (n/d). We consider power and social citizenship in how we connect with people. And we take an approach that is purposefully positive and strong.

## PROVOCATIONS FOR ANGLICARE AUSTRALIA

1. We make the time and space for people to connect.
2. We learn and grow – as individuals, as teams, and as a network.
3. We collaborate. Our programs are based on strong relationships and a shared purpose.
4. Everyone's voice is strong inside our organisations and in the world.
5. Our partnerships make us sustainable, creative and strong.
6. We build on strengths with our people, our communities and our network.

### 1. WE MAKE THE TIME AND SPACE FOR PEOPLE TO CONNECT

Making time and space for everyone stands out in the five *Our Better Selves* inquiries. But, given the many constraints our services face, this can be a big ask on resources and time. It is also a first step.

Our services create open, welcoming spaces. They work with the people they serve and listen to their stories. They aim to connect authentically to people, and learn from them. The people who use our services play important roles in shaping them and in making others welcome.

Making time and space is about connecting with the people around you. It means being there for others and offering them the support they need. However, in Australia today, connecting to many of our human services is more about barriers. It requires registering, identifying a need or a problem, qualifying or being assessed. There is a presumption that these services cost a very precious form of money that can only be spent reluctantly and must be most rigorously accounted for.

To create a truly welcoming place and then making the space and time for anyone who shows up requires a substantial voluntary commitment, an imaginative philanthropic contribution or a transformation in the way public funding is configured and envisioned. Hughes (2019) describes the richness and respect that comes from being able to connect, relate and express yourself authentically. But, he argues, this requires time and that people need to listen, and to understand.

The notion of building services and plans upon strong relationships is widespread. Many care providers use a 'person-centred' focus of health, disability support and home care for the aged as a pathway to such a relational approach, linking it to their values or ethos. But tying resources to individual tasks and activities works against developing the close connections needed to learn about people, their families and their lives.

Many of the Anglican services have grown from the belief that love and compassion start by accepting people as they are; remembering that we are all made in God's image. On the one hand, it means having someone to walk alongside you. On the other, it means supporting



people when they make key decisions in their lives, and face their greatest challenges. It means looking out for opportunities for them, staying active and hopeful. Ultimately, it is a relationship of trust that acknowledges working through unconditional relationships, believing in second chances for all and respecting the uniqueness of every person and every person's spirituality.

### **Action points**

- We put people and the time and space they need at the centre of our practice frameworks and programs.
- We give priority to developing authentic relationships through learning about the person, their backgrounds, their hopes and ambitions.
- We make it clear that we welcome everyone through the presentation of our programs and the places where we are based.
- We work flexibly, adapting to people's needs, and reshaping programs and activities as opportunities emerge.

## **2. WE LEARN AND GROW – AS INDIVIDUALS, AS TEAMS, AND AS A NETWORK**

We learn from and with each other, as individuals and as teams. What we learn is reflected in the activities and programs we design and create. As individuals we grow resilience, confidence and authority in our own lives. As teams we grow our knowledge, our capacity and our impact. As organisations our governance is underpinned by our learning from people at all levels of our service.

People want to learn so as to reach their full potential, grow confidence and choose their own paths. We always look for the chance to help people find the training and employment that works for them. In our network the most important teachers are often people with lived experience, and so we provide appropriate scaffolding for them to volunteer, and to become mentors and peer workers.

One of the strengths people can express is a willingness to learn. Another is to share their knowledge. That is why two-way learning is so important. A well-established practice in Aboriginal communities, it underpins the collaboration and development of relationships that lead to mutual understanding and to change. Two-way learning can inform all progress towards a resilient and inclusive society and should be fundamental to the ways we work with each other.

The capacity to grow is integral to our work. People want to leave hardship behind and lead full, authentic and flourishing lives. Knowing you can change and grow helps you to focus on the future. While individuals tell us that the key moments of change and growth starts with themselves, often they are inspired by what is around them. We have pride in having a dream and an ambition for ourselves and for our colleagues.

In our organisations, learning from everyone about what has worked well for them and what helps us to realise our goals, keeps us accountable and becomes integral to our cultures as well as practices. As a network of organisations, we seek to learn from each other and share our experience and understanding. We create positive momentum by learning about what is working for us now and being open to change.

### Action points

- People pursue their dreams and ambitions through the development of their skills and capacities, including through formal training and pathways to employment.
- We integrate mentor, trainee and peer worker programs into our services.
- We initiate shared learning approaches to team development, such as two-way learning, reflecting the relationships at the heart of our work.
- We create a program of secondments across the network, and establish shared spaces and communities of practice.

### 3. WE COLLABORATE. OUR PROGRAMS ARE BASED ON STRONG RELATIONSHIPS AND A SHARED PURPOSE

**It is through our relationships and by paying attention to each other that we learn what we need to do now and what to aim for next.**

It is through our relationships and by paying attention to each other that we learn what we need to do now and what to aim for next. We are creative in how we seek leadership and inspiration from each other, especially from those for whom the services are intended. We are flexible. The design and the delivery of our programs and services are not fixed.

We value the strength of positive relationships between the people at the heart of our services, their families and communities, staff and volunteers. It is through these connections that people feel a part of something. They can contribute, share, and help others. It is their strengths that we all respond to, and it is this active belonging that brings life to our organisations.

These relationships underwrite our capacity to work creatively together. Tenancy plans or family barbecues may be fairly simple collaborations but they work best where they have a good partnership at their heart. The more complex the circumstances or the history of those involved, the more important the quality and durability of those relationships become.

Positive relationships develop as people learn to better understand and trust each other. They need something more open ended than to make transaction with each other. While consumer directed care, for

example, has the potential to focus on the needs and wellbeing of the consumer, the relationship is not necessarily an essential part of the equation, nor is the appetite for risk or innovation. We reach beyond a consumer focus to find and pursue a shared purpose.

We commission and design services through conversation and agreement making with the people who use them. It is a process that can involve some uncertainty. But we are flexible. We can change or adapt our rules, processes and timelines, and respond to people and their situations as needed. When we focus on the development of a shared purpose and the dignity of risk, more is possible and there is more at stake.

Above all, it is the co-production of services and the co-design of the way we work that is most powerful here, as we draw upon the assets that mentors, workers and community partners bring.

#### **Action points**

- We create and conduct programs in collaboration with people who share their lived experience.
- We work together as teams that depend on the vital contributions of staff and participants alike, and involve everybody in reviewing what we have done and what we plan to do.
- We use our expertise across the Network to build co-production and place-based innovation wherever possible.
- We support a culture that values reciprocity and working together for social change.

#### **4. EVERYONE'S VOICE IS STRONG INSIDE OUR ORGANISATIONS AND IN THE WORLD**

We seek and hear the voices of the people – staff, participants and volunteers – who are a part of our programs and use our services, throughout our organisations. We offer opportunities for people to advocate for themselves and for their friends. We also respect the right of everyone to retire or withdraw from public view.

Our voice together is strong. We draw on the stories and the insights of the people we work with, and we act together across the network to ensure we are all heard. We support people and communities making a contribution to public understanding and debate, and advocate on their behalf.

People need to know they will be listened to. That begins with giving people time and space to connect, and creating the opportunity for them to share their stories. But having a voice also means having a presence and an impact. It is about social citizenship, as reflected in the expression 'Nothing about us without us'. That is why it is important for people to have a voice both within our organisations and in the wider world.

People want to contribute meaningfully to make a difference. They use our services as platforms from which they can challenge and inspire their communities, and share insights and understanding. As a network of services, our advocacy and leadership are most powerful when we include the voices of people who face discrimination and exclusion, and who seek change.

### **Action points**

- We put the voices of the people at the centre of a project at the forefront of any advocacy, evaluation or development.
- We make building the capacity for people to negotiate and represent themselves and their communities a key component of our work.
- We promote people's voices and stories to the broader society well as their own communities and networks.
- As a network of service providers, we are never afraid to speak out for the people and communities we work with, nor hide the implications of the changes that they seek.

## **5. OUR PARTNERSHIPS MAKE US SUSTAINABLE, CREATIVE AND STRONG**

We are proud of the ethos and values of the Anglicare Australia network, our deep connection to the Anglican Church and our compassion for all people whatever their circumstances. We celebrate the strengths and qualities of the people we work with, and the high quality of that work. We affirm and reinforce our belief that the goals we set shape our understanding of what is possible. And we work in partnership with volunteers, communities, organisations and funding bodies that share our positive vision and our goals.

Through five appreciative inquiries into relatively small and distinctive services, Our Better Selves has made discoveries at the service level. It is through this day-to-day work with people and communities that we can see how the change we work towards is possible. Yet much of that work is created in partnership, and strong partnerships are building blocks of more substantial change.

Our most obvious partners are funding bodies. The processes of making funding agreements or tendering for programs, particularly government programs, are often rushed, constrained or opaque. As organisations and as community collaborations, we are experts in co-design and co-production. Our partnerships with funding bodies will be built on that understanding, and in the expectation that they will look to us and to the people we work with for leadership. That applies to publicly funded welfare and social services as well as philanthropic and social investments.

We work in partnership with many other network and community organisations across Australia and are open to learning from them. There is a wealth of expertise in approaches such as advantaged thinking and inclusive design that we draw from when planning and implementing initiatives. The growing power of the First Nations peoples in Australia, despite entrenched resistance, is an inspiration.

## **We use our strength as a network to seek out fresh opportunities to drive change.**

We use our strength as a network, the resources of our communities, and our connection to other entities that share our values to seek out fresh opportunities to drive change. Looking to the future, we need to work creatively with existing partners and to forge new partnerships so that we strengthen the viability of agencies that work beyond the constraints of government funding.

### **Action points**

- We seek leadership and direction from within, and through connections to people's cultures and communities.
- We draw on our relationship with the Church and church communities to amplify our purpose to create a compassionate and inclusive society.
- We join broad based alliances to create conversations and advocate for social change.
- We build robust relationships with independent and public funding bodies and seek new partnerships to sustain and extend innovative and creative work.

## **6. WE BUILD ON STRENGTHS WITH OUR PEOPLE, OUR COMMUNITIES AND OUR NETWORK**

Our Better Selves showed us the power of the work that we are involved in across the network and the ambitions we can have for it. It is not the inquiry per se that has the biggest impact but the process of inquiring, and the way of thinking and seeing that came with it. Seeking to discover 'the best of what is' in who we are and what we do is a very powerful habit to develop. The energy that comes from using these discoveries is the starting point for more imaginative plans and builds hope for the future.

The dialogue about what we are creating and learning is strong. We are now investing in sharing that knowledge more comprehensively with people in every corner of the Anglicare Australia Network; including service users, community partners and front line staff. We can have a bigger impact on the broader Australian society and build effective partnerships with funding bodies and public figures if we can all tell a stronger story about how we work.

Our key message is that through working together and understanding our purpose, we can create the change we believe in. Through its communities and connections, the Anglicare Australia Network can join with others to embrace a narrative that everybody counts in an Australia that is increasingly inclusive, compassionate and vital.

### Action points

- We build our work upon the best of what we do at a service level, as organisations and through national projects.
- We invest in shared impact measurement, evaluation and research as a national network.
- We investigate opportunities to extend strength-based practices across the Network.
- We understand that real strength lies within communities. We work with them to ensure their ongoing strength and sustainability.

In the final chapter we reflect on what we have learnt from and about *Our Better Selves*. We imagine how we might work in co-creating our future together. We ask:

- Where to from here?
- What do we need to do now?
- What do we want to inquire into next?









# BEING SOMETHING MORE

*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*

African proverb

This chapter is an open invitation, an encouragement, to members. This final chapter covers the Destiny phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process. It signals the end of one cycle and the beginning of another.

These individual inquiries and the sharing of their story are here to demonstrate just how we can give life to our collective mission. It is hoped that they will inspire the Network members to undertake their own inquiries. It is hoped that we will continue as a collective to learn from each other.

This report takes us from Discovery to Destiny using the AI approach. The point of this approach is that it is never finished – there is always more to discover, dream and learn. In chapter one we begin with a look at the environment, particularly the funding environment in which we find ourselves. The consumerisation of care and the assumption of scarcity and subsequent rationing work together to atomise services – to pick our response to people apart into the smallest possible transactions. This project developed to look beyond this – to becoming, and being, and sustaining something *more*.

When we talk about “more” it can mean to be in addition to; on top of other things; a luxury even. What this project and its inquiries uncover is that for the Anglicare Australia Network to be true to itself, its collective mission and values; for us to truly offer care and relationship, this “more” is not an added extra it is the essential fabric of our better selves.

## JOURNEYING TOGETHER

So where to from here? For the services and teams that undertook the inquiries in this report there are different answers – after all they all started down their paths as they set their inquiry and dreams. The analogy of a path is really very apt here - we can see from the inquiries that truly the journey has been the important part. Sometimes the destination has been unexpected, even unknown for some of that journey. However the destination has been reached by Design in each of those projects, and they have all made it together – no one has fallen by the wayside or been left behind.

It is also the case that everyone's journey will be different – it is the collective dreaming that forms the destination and this will be different each time. But dreaming it together makes it a wanted and real destination – one to which each traveller is committed. And one which in turn enriches the lives and the communities of those involved.

As we move from Discovery to Dreaming to Designing and onto Destiny in these reports we can see that one size does not fit all, that off the shelf solutions that promise quick fixes are not good enough.

## A COLLECTIVE SENSE OF PURPOSE

The journeys that are detailed in these inquiries takes us deep into why we exist, into the link we have with our foundations and the hope we have for ourselves and those around us, and indeed for a better society. For us not to work in the ways detailed here is for us to abandon our values, our history and our collective mission. The way in which these inquiries have been held authentically demonstrates our stated belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. The six provocations developed from the inquiries for the whole Anglicare Australia Network are actually our values in aspirational action.

## OUTSIDE THE ENVELOPE

This is a report about how to care, how to be in relationship with each other and how to deliver services despite government contracts and rules. In doing this it also allows us to catch a glimpse of that wider societal change that these conversations and projects enable. Just like the ongoing circle of the AI process that change builds and develops as the people involved become empowered, in many cases in these reports into active citizens in their own communities.

So much of what we discover does not sit well with the increasingly transactional nature of government contracts. However it also shows that if we are true to our mission and foundational beliefs we can truly produce better, longer lasting outcomes. We have produced this report of *Our Better Selves* for Anglicare Australia Networks members, yet it may also be interesting to policy makers and system designers if they are truly interested in outcomes beyond the activities along the way.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As we look to start a new process of inquiry, both collectively and at organisation, team and service level the provocations developed in chapter five are designed to do just that – to poke and provoke us into action, to give us ideas of where to start if we want to dream of more – of being better versions of ourselves and our services. The practical examples suggested below are invitations. Invitations to jump in, to start a new journey with these, or to develop your own. The ideas below are some jumping off points for celebrating what we've learned and committing to sustaining the impetus. They come from the individual inquiries, they cover all areas of organisations but they are by no means conclusive. Just like the multiple journeys there will be multiple strategies along the way.

This report *celebrates what we've learned*; that the strengths we most want to build on are our relationships and our partnerships, our belief and our trust in each other over time. This is the principle that underpins everything we do, as organisations and in how we connect person to person. The report also acknowledges that we mustn't leave it to chance - we need to actively and consciously sustain an appreciative learning culture. We can:

- Organise opportunities for teams involved in *Our Better Selves* to share their work across the network.
- Examine the welcome people receive when they first engage with you – remember to look at the both human and the environmental factors.
- Review the way we first connect with people through services and programs to build strengths based, positive engagement.
- Share examples of successful relational approaches across the Network. e.g. Anglicare SQ's 'Rel8'.
- Develop a guide for members on ways to use this report to help build an 'appreciative eye' into our systems, procedures and ways of working.
- Set up a community of practice to support further Appreciative Inquiries.
- Create communities of practice that look at a particular provocation or action point, such as creating the space and support for mentors and peer workers.

This report shows the importance of *empowering, learning and improvising*. In order to do these things the efficiency of some of our systems may need to be broken down, we need to stop running in order to ensure that there is space to listen to what people are able to tell us. The importance of reciprocity, of recognising and valuing that everyone has something to offer rang loud throughout many of the stories. This is the first step towards co-designing the destination.

The contribution that the people in these stories make to their various communities is manifold. From welcoming others at a BBQ to making people laugh, training professionals or presenting conference papers, this positive contribution is all the greater once we see it in place of the 'burden' narrative of government contracts. Empowering people to tell their story and learning from it shows servant leadership at its best, and makes that glimpse of a better society a firmer vista. And so we:

- Actively seek and value the voice of community, service users and staff, for example by paying people to share their stories in public forums and contribute to co-design of services.
- Create a program of secondments for staff, volunteer and community members across the network, based on expertise in identified areas, such as developing mentors and peer workers.
- Invest in listening and in conversation. Stories have been the key of these inquiries and learning.
- Invest in small scale projects and activities, such as recreational and cultural events, to initiate innovation and change.

Perhaps most existentially this report shows us why *nurturing a sense of common purpose* is so important if we are to become and remain true to our better selves. It is not just about working for the greater good it is about working together and being on the journey together.

What we focus on grows. It is tempting to pay attention to what the funding contracts push us to measure. But when we create positive images of the future, we are inspired to make decisions that lead us towards that future, not only the contracted activity.

It is a key challenge to ensure the viability of services so they are free to work beyond the constraints of government funding. Day to day busyness and reporting requirements drive us there. However this report shows us our better selves, our better services. In deciding to accept the provocations we remain true to our common purpose, and:

- Fine tune existing communities of practice and special interest group to share information on successful practices and areas of strength.
- Design place-based programs in partnership with local community leaders.
- Audit all programs to ensure ongoing community involvement in design, implementation and evaluation.

## CONCLUSION

This can be, and we hope it is a continual process. It is a good time for us as a collaborative network to create momentum for the change that we need to see. It is important that we not only nurture the findings of this report into individual agencies, but that as a Network we commit to this way of working too – that way we can truly become something more; become *Our Better Selves*.

This report has covered the process and inquiries from Discovery to Destiny. This chapter encourages and invites you to start your own – what will you discover?

### **Kasy Chambers**

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**Roland Manderson**

Project leader

*Our Better Selves*



