

Belonging Matters' Podcast

Transcript

Episode 10: More Roles More Community Life

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Welcome to Belonging Matters podcast series. Now available on Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Spotify, and www.belongingmatters.org. You can email Belonging Matters at info@belongingmatters.org. Episode Ten, "More Roles More Community Life." Jane Sherwin is one of two accredited teachers of Social Role Valorisation in Australia and New Zealand. She works as a consultant and her objective is to make social change through values based organisational improvement and transformation strategies, training, mentoring and supervision, evaluations and writing for various newsletters and journals This podcast is based on an article by Jane titled "Making the Most out of the NDIS" which appeared in Voice December 2013. The Journal of Down's Syndrome Australia.

Most people would agree that being excluded to the margins of typical community life brings little reward to the individual and depletes our society. This podcast draws on a theory called Social Role Valorisation, SRV for short, and illustrates that being in valued roles can be a path out of exclusion, and into a community lifestyle that others without a disability take for granted. SRV is a helpful thinking framework, because its central idea is that if someone with a disability wants a lifestyle that is meaningful, and brings participation and belonging and community life, then being in valued roles, will be a crucial path to that life. This podcast also proposes a different view from those who believe that money, choice and a plan are the answers to all the problems related to disability. Let's start at a place of possibility and explore how a better life is more likely if each person with a disability is supported to have valued roles. There are two points to explore about valued roles, and then we'll move on to three practical implications. The first point about roles is that valued roles stem from our hopes and aspirations for the future. All parents have dreams for their children before they are born. Each person typically has dreams about what they might like to do when they grow up, shaped by what they see their brothers and sisters do, and what they see in broader life. Often our dreams are played out in the many roles we take up in life, such as employee, student, volunteer, team member, neighbour, friend, and so on. This is true for people with disabilities too. However, there are many dynamics that get in the way of these dreams becoming real life. Working for a better life, a life of richness and meaning, a life of purpose, and a life that includes relationships with a range of people who aren't paid to be there, is likely to be a

richer, although more challenging, path. Another point about valued roles is that valued roles are more likely to happen with intentional effort. In planning for a life of richness and meaning the first step is to have a clear sense of what a positive future outside of services and program might look like. This requires a focus first and foremost on the potential, the gifts and the talents of the individual, being mindful of needs, but not focusing on deficits. Three ideas from SRV, which this podcast explores are, firstly, think valued roles when thinking about a typical and fulfilling life. Secondly, have roles in mind when naming your goals. And thirdly, plan to meet each role goal by identifying how the person can best learn the role and become socialised into the role. Let's look at the first key idea. Think valued roles. The good things in life for an adult typically include things like having a home, having a job, continuing to learn, having friends and family, opportunities to contribute, having a spiritual life, receiving respect and dignity, health and control over the things that matter to them.

Being in valued roles makes it more likely that those good things in life are possible. At home, the roles could be that of homemaker, neighbour, or hobbyist of some sort, and family member. At work, the roles could be an employee, a colleague, a taxpayer and social club member. Contribution and purpose could be through various volunteer roles or as an employee, parent or Good Neighbour. It is through roles that there is a sense of identity status, respect from others and self respect. There are also age appropriate roles. For example, a three year old might be in the role of the daughter, adored grandchild, cousin and 'Wiggles' lover. A 12 year old might be in the roles of

son, brother, student, football player, guitar player, iPad user, library member and 'washaupperer'. Also, if acceptance and belonging is important, then being in valued roles is an essential path, because it is through valued roles that people participate in community life and become known. A sign of belonging is when the person is missed for their contributions or for their personal qualities. Being in a role is very different from simply having activities. For example, when a young person leaves school, there can be 'make busy' activities done to fill in time, such as going on outings and doing life skills training, and crafts at a day service. One problem is that in five years time, the person might be stuck in those same activities with limited growth and opportunity. In contrast, for example, before a young person leaves school, the question should be asked, How does any other young person create a meaningful week once they leave school? The question gives rise to the roles of, for example, student, volunteer, employee, gym goer, library member, dog walker, and contributor to the home lifestyle, such as through cooking a regular evening meal. What this means is becoming clear about the vision for a positive future. It means identifying the sorts of roles that are likely to lead to an individual to have that future. Any specific needs should be met within the context of pursuing valued roles, and the good things in life. For example, the need to be skilful in personal care or to have manners should be met within the larger roles that those skills are necessary for, such as being an employee, or a student, or even a shopper. If using support services, one might need to consider if the staff have the necessary skills and wherewithal to actually assist someone into valued roles. This is very different from someone being

admitted to a group home, or expecting a service to find activities and outings to fill time. So we've been thinking about the first idea, think valued roles. The second area to be intentional about is to have roles in mind when naming goals. Potential roles of interest to the person are an important aspect of defining their goals rather than having goals simply for the sake of completing a plan. The sorts of goal areas include the following four areas - firstly, building skills, for example, building coordination skills so that the person can be a soccer player. Another sort of goal area is around developing a new role. For someone who loves to play the drums for example, the role could be drummer in the school band. The third goal area is expanding or strengthening a current role. So for example, a person who has moved into their own home and is a neighbour could be encouraged to be a good neighbour through offering to bring in the mail or water the neighbours plants. And fourthly, a role goal could be moving out of negative roles. For example, if someone has learned to act like the maternal child, they could move out of this negative role by learning age appropriate skills for a valued role. These four goal areas illustrate how using role goals, that is, looking for valued roles or strengthening valued roles, or decreasing negative roles, will be helpful in experiencing a rich and meaningful life.

The third area that requires high attention is planning to meet each role goal by identifying how the person can do two things; Firstly, best learn the role and secondly become socialised into the role. The following examples show that socialisation into a role occurs through the role communicators. Role communicators include the people in the social environment,

the activities that are done, and those things in the physical environment. All of those role communicators convey messages about what the roles expect in terms of behaviour and responsibility. For example, the role of student is shaped by the presence of a teacher and other students. Being surrounded by desks and chairs also send strong messages of where to sit and what to do. Another example, a fishermen will be valued in the role if they are actually spending time fishing, preferably with other fishing lovers at a local fishing spot with all of the appropriate fishing gear. We also need to be alert that roles can be strengthened in terms of their role communicators and value. For example, in a real workplace, there are more likely to be role communicators that convey high expectations of productivity and adult behaviour. The role of employee is less valued at a sheltered workshop than at a real workplace, where there are other employees who have valued status and are paid. Another example is that in a real house sharing arrangement, there are role communicators that convey a message that this truly is the person's home. This is where a person is expected to look after themselves and the house, answer the front door and be thoughtful to housemates. The role of tenant and housemaid is less valued in a group home than in a typical house sharing arrangement. In a typical house sharing arrangement, the housemates are there not on the basis of impairment. When planning for a valued role, each of the role communicators become a decision point. Decisions about each of the following needs to be made. One role communicator decision point, and often the first decision point, is where the most valued place is likely to be for the role. For example, a cleaner in a respectable hotel has more status, and

therefore more likely to receive more respect than a cleaner of the local path toilets. A second decision point is about who the person spends time with. The question is what is the most valued grouping likely to be. If we think 'typical', then the most valued grouping for the role of student guitar player is with other students who are learning guitar on the basis of that interest, rather than being grouped because they happen to have a learning difficulty as well. One of the reasons that this is so important is because it is the other students who could also become role models. A third decision point is to do with the tasks or the activities of the role, what are the most valued activities likely to be for that role? This decision point gets us to identify the activities that are the tasks and the responsibilities of the role. For example, the role of tenant and homemaker would include paying the rent and cooking, shopping and cleaning. The fourth decision point is to do with appearance, what appearance is consistent with the role. For example, a childcare worker would wear neat casual clothing that allows them to bend, sit on the floor and lift children comfortably. And finally, the question for a role communicator is what timing is consistent for the valued role. For example, going to church would typically happen on a holy day at a real church, not at a time that is simply convenient for the minister to visit a facility.

It is important to have all these decision points in place before or as early as possible when someone enters a new role. There also needs to be a fit between each of the role communicators. If there isn't a fit between all of these decision points, then it is more likely that the person won't become socialised into the role and others may perceive them as incompetent and or

different to others who hold the same role. If all of these decision points are attended to well, then it is more likely that the person will learn the role in a way that is likely to lead to others, perceiving and treating them to be truly in that role, and to the person learning the requirements of the role. This also means that the person is more likely to have a better chance at having a positive future as a contributing member of their community. Finally, if there is dismay and frustration at the experience of exclusion, if there is a desire to have an everyday, typical life like others without impairments, then a helpful thinking and practical framework is essential. Social Role Valorisation and its central idea of valued roles is a constructive and practical approach that has much to offer.

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