

# Belonging Matters' Podcast

## Transcript

Episode 12: I Believe in Inclusion but Don't Want to Ask!

Deb Rouget

This podcast is an edited version taken from:

*Rouget, D. (2014). I Believe in Inclusion but Don't Want to Ask. In [Thinking About The Art of Asking](#). Issue 21, pp 23-29. Belonging Matters: Melbourne*

Welcome to Belonging Matters podcast series. Now available on Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Spotify, and [www.belongingmatters.org](http://www.belongingmatters.org). You can email Belonging Matters on [info@belongingmatters.org](mailto:info@belongingmatters.org). Episode Twelve, "I Believe in Inclusion but Don't Want to Ask!" Deb Rouget has been involved with people with a disability and their families for over 30 years. In 2003, Deb was integral in the development of Belonging Matters which sprung to life as a catalyst to prevent the exclusion of people with a disability from their communities and enable individuals to enjoy a fulfilling life that is well embedded in community, relationship and citizenship. Since that time she has been the CEO of Belonging Matters. Deb has also been keen to foster advances that leave people who have

a disability and their families with greater control over their lives. In this podcast Deb highlights the importance of knowing a person and other insights to ease the burden of asking.

*"You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of just embarrassing bravery. And I promise you something great will come of it."*  
(Benjamin Mee)

One of our biggest barriers to creating opportunities in our own life or the lives of others is our inability or fear to ask! We freeze! One of our greatest fears is rejection. So how can we muster some bravery so that something great will happen?

If we look inwardly and examine our own resistance, we begin to discover ways in which asking becomes more comfortable. The following provides some reflections and thoughts about moving beyond our resistance and fear!

We think people should read our mind. Shouldn't people just know what we need? Can't they read between the lines? Inclusion should be a given! After working in services for such a long time, I have come to realise that we, the service system, have become part of the problem. We have kept people with disabilities away from other people, in institutions, day programs and other forms of congregate care. Although barriers to inclusion certainly exist, community members are generally very receptive when asked and will assist if they can. But they can't read our minds – we need to ask!

Scared of being rejected. No-one wants to be rejected or refused. We're often scared to hear that the answer to our request might be "no". We want to avoid painful feelings. It can affect us deeply, as we fear that others don't believe in us or the person we care deeply about. But I have found myself

pondering many times that I already have a “no”. Perhaps if I ask, I may get a “yes”! Finding strategies to make asking comfortable is important. If we view it as a moment in time; as twenty seconds of courage that will pass, then we might free ourselves from the fear of asking. The person we have asked is not likely to amplify or ruminate over the enquiry anyhow! More than likely, within a few seconds, the person will have moved onto the next pressing thing in their life! They’re not trapped in the same rejection or let-down that we, the asker, chew over for hours, days or even weeks. The other person may even take it as a compliment that you asked them! But if your fear still restricts you, you will not discover the opportunity that abounds in a “yes”, or even a “maybe”.

We might view ourselves as a burden on others. We have a strong cultural view that we should be independent and self sufficient. That asking for help is a sign of weakness, or that we don't want to burden others. That we should pull up our socks and get on with things. However, most human beings are interdependent and depend on each other for support opportunities and contribution. We actually also derive much happiness from giving to others, as it gives us a purpose and fulfilment. Over the years, I have heard many comments like “I always wanted to assist, but I didn't know how.”, or “It gives me great satisfaction that I'm helping someone out.” Or “It's great to be involved in something that is meaningful and real.”, or “It's a pleasure.” Additionally, it's important to move beyond the notions of burden, as it has many implications for people with a disability about how they're viewed in society. The notion of burden often restricts people's opportunities and keeps them dependent on charity, pity and services.

Cameron is employed as a receptionist for the 'Jeremiah Business Group, and he's an integral part of the team. His colleagues depend on him to fulfil a crucial role in the business.

What started as an ask over 10 years ago by his support worker Denise not only provided acute, crucial and valued role for Cameron, but also Cameron makes a valuable and needed contribution to the business. The business definitely views Cameron as an asset, not a burden, or someone they took pity on. Service domination. As the disability service sector grows, and every need of a person with a disability is taken care of, either by the base paid supports, or in disability specific programs or accommodation, the community can be pushed out of its role. The assumption is that people with disability need professional assistance and as an untrained citizen, I have nothing to give or offer. Others may assume everything is taken care of. So they don't need to offer or include. It's important that we continue to ask, invite, and commend community members for their efforts. Supporting people well in the community and moving beyond special groups and living arrangements is vital if people are to get to know each other, and except diversity. Interestingly, families and service providers are often reluctant to accept an offer from a community member. This often stems from a long history of involvement with professional services and special programs that reinforce service dependence, or a belief that no one would want to spend time with a person with a disability unless they're paid, or the person doesn't have the necessary expertise or even that the community member is deviant for wanting to spend time with a person with a disability. Brenda, a parent, often shares the story of the day her daughter's housemate, Maxine offered to live with Kim. Brenda was a bit stung by the offer, and also couldn't really believe what she was hearing. Here was this gorgeous young woman, an ex worker now friend, saying that she and her partner would really love to live with Kim. Brenda couldn't respond at the time because she was too emotional. Or maybe she thought she was miss hearing things. Maxine had to mention the offer a few times

before they really got to discuss the idea and the mutual benefits that would be involved for all, not just Kim. Many years later, Kim still shared her home with Maxine, her husband Simon and two gorgeous children. Not to mention the chooks and the bees in amongst the organic veggie patch and truly wonderful community that sustained the mall. Sadly, Kim passed away a few years ago, but her legacy and leadership will be always remembered. First things first. After nearly 30 years of assisting people with disability to become active and contributing members of their community, I know how vital it is to identify and build on people's interests, strengths and gifts. It's much easier to ask when you know what a person's strengths are, and what they really enjoy, or what skills and gifts they can contribute. These are the necessary foundation for a person's connection with the community. In regard to supporting people who have been labelled as having challenging behaviours, engaging their interests, strengths and passions has shown to be vital. People will be at their best when they do something they love.

Being able to transfer the person's interest into a role that makes sense to others is also useful. For example, Brodie is a great young man. At a recent family retreat, he clearly articulated his passion for music, the heavy metal type. He said he would like to become a DJ. So the role of DJ became the starting point for connection and asking for Brody. It was very clear. Abundant networks. There are a number of ways to research and explore an interest in the community other than disability specific groups. Google and the internet are a dream. Local newspapers, council guides, and those types of resources can also be useful. However, I find it much easier to ask when I have a connection with people. It may be utilising my networks or the networks of my networks, local business

people, neighbours, friends, people I meet at a party and so on. Being well connected in the community is extremely beneficial. Research by McCormick Salganik and Zheng, in 2008, indicated that each person has a network size of approximately 611 people. Thus, by asking only one person in your network about a particular interest, you have 611 other people that you can connect with. Being part of a church, Rotary Club, business group, or other type of association can bring an abundance of people from all walks of life, with all sorts of interests, who are right for asking, and also have multiple connections. Asking is about being connected. People love to talk about their passions, interests or business. For example, when trying to connect Brodie to his passion of becoming a DJ, it just so happened that I was at a 30th birthday party. As I watched the DJ, I observed a few things. He was obviously passionate about music and being a DJ. He was also great with young people on the dance floor. In the break, I approached him and started a very natural conversation, asking him all sorts of questions about his DJ business and passion. For example, How long have you been a DJ? What type of gigs do you do? Do you enjoy it? What types of things do you find difficult about your business? I was trying to find the gaps or roles that someone could feel, and so on. Then came the ask. I said you know a lot about being a DJ. And I know a young man who has just left school who would love to become a DJ. I'm wondering if you would mind having a conversation with him and sharing what you know. Sure thing, said the DJ, not a problem. He gave me his card to contact him. When we connect with people about their talents, passions, and business, they're more than happy to discuss and share.

Actually, they're delighted. The flow of conversation, even multiple conversations, can build the context for discovery and comfort in the art of asking. Cultivating connections also needs to be done with integrity and trust. You need to follow through and support people well. Amanda Palmer is an American performer. In her TED Talk, she gives a powerful example of the art of asking. She began as a street performer asking for money and in return, she would give people a flower. She goes on to describe how she battled to raise money for her music via traditional methods such as record companies and sales, she began to give her music away for free. Eventually, she raised over a million dollars. Simply through the art of asking. The media kept asking, "How did you make people pay for the music?" She said, "The real answer is I didn't make them. I asked them. And through the very art of asking, I connected with them." And when you connect with people they want to help. Trust in the generosity of people. Near the end of the 30th birthday party, the DJ came over to me and made a very generous offer. He asked if Brodie would like to hang out with a group of DJ mates who meet every second Friday night. People can be far more generous than we ever give them credit for. Sharing his love for music was certainly not a chore. He was going to be able to share his passion and expertise with another DJ lover. Notice that I did not try and connect with the DJ about disability, but on Brodie's love for music and being interested in being a DJ. Brodie has recently made a connection with the DJ and has been invited to his DJ group who apparently like a bit of heavy metal music. One parent I recently spoke to said that she was reluctant to ask because she didn't want people to feel obliged to say yes or guilty if they

said no. If we connect with people on interest, people rarely see it as an obligation. For example two people who connect on football will not see it as an obligation to go to a footy game together. Asking takes vigilance and persistence. Asking is not a nine to five job, especially if you want to be a DJ, the community's awash with opportunity 24 hours per day, but we need to be attentive and keep our eyes peeled for asking opportunities. I was recently at a lawn bowling club. I sat quietly and observed the possible roles a person could have at a bowling club other than being a baller. The roles included a green keeper, bartender, cleaner, scorer, social organiser, kitchen hand, waiter, committee member, window washer, event organiser, hall hirer, barbecuer, fundraiser and so on. All in all, I identified 34 roles that a person could possibly have at the bowling club. With so many roles available to be filled, I'm sure this sports club would welcome and respond favourably to an ask. So what if you give a no. Sales literature indicates that it takes many no's to get a yes. It also suggests that you should not take a no personally and need to desensitise yourself to the word no. Often there are reasons behind a no response. And it's not actually complete rejection. I have found that through conversation, you can often discover why a person might say no. Like most of us people are busy, and they simply may not have time or they may not have an opportunity at the precise time you asked. Sometimes people have issues that are overwhelming in their life, and they just can't contemplate a yes at that time. They may also have had a bad experience in the past when people have not been supported well. Or, in addition, those we asked may not feel confident or feel they have the

skills to assist a person with a disability because they assume they need to be an expert.

Once you can identify the reason you may be able to counteract the no by offering support, asking again in the future or reassuring people of this skill. I often use a no response to get another lead or contact that may be able to assist in this regard. Asking the person if they know someone or somewhere else that might have an opportunity gives you a lead and, and softens the no. Multiple asks. Some sometimes we need to make multiple tasks. Research led by Daniel Newark, a doctoral candidate at Stanford University, shows that we actually over estimate the chance that our requests for assistance will be declined, particularly if we have been turned down before. New work suggests we should be asking for assistance more often from a wider set of people than we do. The research suggests that maybe we are less likely to ask for assistance from people who are in fact the most likely to help or say yes. He also found that people who said no the first time are more likely to say yes the second time, thus we need to ask again. Ones' job is never over with the first ask, even if we get a yes. We still need to make multiple asks to enrich a person's life. Some years ago, I was assisting a young woman with a disability to pursue her passion in music. She had an amazing voice. So I asked the singing teacher if she would provide singing lessons. Then I asked the singing teacher if she knew of a choir. Then I asked the director of the choir if she could join. Then I asked a member of the choir if she could pick up this young woman on her way to choir when I couldn't make it. Then I asked the choir if they could sing at her 21st birthday. Then I

asked if she could perform with choir at gigs. Then I asked if she could go on tours with the choir. Eventually the choir just began to offer and include this young woman in everything. Multiple asks gives us leads and deeper connections. In regard to Brodie I also noticed that at the end of the night, the DJ had a massive job to pick up his equipment and put it in his van. Aha, another possible role for Brodie. Another possible Ask.

An ask is not just one way. The notion of exchange or giving and receiving is vital. Whatever you're asking for generally needs to be useful to the other person, or is an exchange that gives benefit in some way. For example, a person fulfils a role that contributes or is useful to a business, club or Association, or the person gives something in return. Some exchanges arise naturally, and they're based on an unspoken reciprocity. For example, a couple of my neighbours recently cut down two large trees in my backyard, they wouldn't take money because our exchange comes through natural reciprocity. For example, watering gardens, feeding pets, checking mailboxes, mowing lawns, taking bins out, and invitations for drinks and nibbles on a Sunday evening. When Amanda Palmer was busking an exchange was made. She entertained people for a donation. She also gave every person a flower in return for their donation. Then later, she gave her recorded music away on the internet. She found that the more she gave, the more people would give in return. Therefore, when we assist people with a disability, we need to assist them to be part of the exchange. And ask is not just one way asking someone else to ask. So what if you still can't master and ask? Not all is lost. You could ask someone else to do the asking. Some people are great at asking, they're

absolutely built for it. Others might find information for you so it can soften the ask. As we can learn from Scott's story about finding a job. His mum Cheryl asked Leanne and myself about work for Scott. We asked Roger, Roger asked at the printing company he knew. Scott now has a job. So in summary, our lives depend on asking. Our life and the lives of those we support and love can be restricted by our capacity to ask. Find a way that works for you. Focus on mutual interests and strengths. Believe in the generosity of others, and find 20 seconds of courage so something great can happen.

You've been listening to the Belonging Matters podcast series. For copies of this and other Belonging Matters programs, please go to [belongingmatters.org](http://belongingmatters.org). The Belonging Matters website features free podcasts, videos, and many other resources to assist people with disabilities and their families to lead ordinary lives in their communities. To contact Belonging Matters, please email [info@belongingmatters.org](mailto:info@belongingmatters.org)