

# Belonging Matters' Podcast

## Transcript

Episode 15: Valued roles and their likely benefits

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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 Fifteen, "Valued roles and their likely benefits." Michael Kendrick is an independent international consultant in human services and community work, who resides in Massachusetts. His interests have included leadership, service quality, the creation of safeguards for vulnerable persons, social integration, change, innovation, values, advocacy, the role of individual persons and small groups in creating solutions, alternatives to bureaucracy, personalised approaches to supporting people, and reform in the human service field amongst others. In this podcast, Michael explores valued roles in the community and their benefits.

I'd like to talk today about the importance of acquiring and being supported and valued social roles. Now, these terms may not necessarily be self obvious. And so what I'd like to do is to try to make them a little bit more approachable or, or accessible. And the reality is that the world is full of experiences, opportunities and life possibilities, that if you can properly tap into them, a person can get to enjoy life much more richly and, and find ways to fulfil their greater potentials. But if they don't have access to these experiences, then all this scope for enriched living will be lost. And the practical means to get to these experiences is through the taking on of what we're calling valued social roles, within community life that show promise of enriched life experiences that may be of interest to a particular person. And these roles can be for example, being someone's friend, a companion, club member, traveller, employee, sports fan, music lover, party goer, neighbour, a church member, adventurer, coins, even next door neighbour. And all of these are roles that potentially can bring life giving benefits to the particular person. And there are countless numbers of these roles. So, what people need then is to see roles as a pathway to a stronger presence of the person within community life so that they can get more opportunities for life enrichment that is satisfying for them. And of course, if you don't have those pathways, and you don't get the benefits of those pathways. So these pathways are available generally to all people in our community. And don't require that the person not have special needs, because these are roles that are available to all kinds of people in everyday life. For instance, if you joined a group of people that were had the same hobby, that would be a hobbyist role, and all kinds of people could take

an interest in that particular hobby. So the roles are really the pathway to life experiences. And this is the good news. If people don't have those roles, they can be created, that people can be helped to find those roles, take them on and get the benefits that come with those roles. Now, there are a diversity of valued social roles that you could engage in. And so people might in fact, have many of these roles and in the process, they can taste a lot of life, depending on what is, you know, of interest to them, and to their liking. And so valued social roles within community provide ways for people to build a life for themselves. And there are many such benefits that come with roles that people find very satisfying. Now, it is true that you may need support in carrying out certain roles and things like that, but it's not a reason to take them up. It's just a reason to get support at times when you might need it in relationship to a particular role. For instance, if you wanted to join a particular community, group or organisation, they would have their own rules and their own pathways. And so you might need some help figuring out well, how do I join this group, or how do I help somebody else join that particular community group or organisation. Now, people with disabilities, and others who may be at risk of being sort of on the outside of society looking in, are at risk of not getting the kinds of benefits and life experiences that come with these roles. So getting these roles for people with disabilities is very helpful, very positive, and is quite doable. So it's not that these roles are difficult to take on, they may actually be quite manageable. But people may not think to do that, because their sense of what the person could benefit from may be too limited. We tend to underestimate what people with disabilities can do when they get the help and

assistance they need. And so, you know, it's very important to be very open minded, relative to a particular person with a disability as to what roles they might actually enjoy and be able to manage with proper assistance. Many people simply have too low expectations of persons with disabilities, and in a sense, kind of devalue their true potentials. This may not be done intentionally, but it may come from having assumptions about the person, they're too negative, and not really fully aware of what people can do. So it's very important to start with positive assumptions that people can do many things, rather than just start on the negative assumption that it's not doable. And so if you make the positive assumption at the outset, then the means to pursue that role, and those life opportunities will be a whole lot easier to, to forge ahead with. So having support to find these roles can be very helpful, because a lot of people aren't necessarily good at even knowing what their roles are, how they might benefit from them, but also how to progress themselves through the various steps that may be involved in acquiring the particular role and the benefits that come with it. It's not typical for any of us to be part of everything that's going on in the community. So one of the ways to think about valued social roles is where are the roles that would be most suitable for a particular person in the community, and then pursue those rather than to assume that you have to do everything just to find the things that you're interested in, you may not need to do that at all. And so it's different for each person, what it is that they would appeal to them in terms of valued social roles. And it is good that we choose roles that are suitable for us or that are of interest to us. And that's different from one person to another as to you know,

what they find interesting, exciting, useful, or whatever. And so it isn't unusual, that there needs to be some kind of an exploration of roles by people. Because the, you know, like anything else where people haven't done something before, there is a necessity for exploration of these roles, some what I would call life tasting, of the different roles that may be out there. And of course, it is inevitable that some of those roles won't be of interest to some people. And the benefit of tasting them and finding you don't like them is that that gives you an idea what you do like or what you think you would like. So roles have to fit well. And the best way to find out whether they're going to fit well is of course to try them out, have a look at them, talk to people about the roles and see if it is something that ultimately still appeals to you. And of course, some roles may have requirements that just are not workable at a particular moment. So it's not that one can jump into new roles and obligations that come with those roles. You know, on short notice, there may be some instances where you already have to be at the right time and place for you to take on a particular role. Now many people would say with people with disabilities and others, are vulnerable people. And that's certainly true because all people are vulnerable. We're vulnerable and countless different ways. And yet, it doesn't stop us from having lives of interest. So one shouldn't think of vulnerabilities or reason not to do something, what we need to think about is actually managing vulnerability so that they don't become an issue. In other words, if we have the right support with there vulnerabilities, the right arrangements, the vulnerabilities are not likely to cause us any difficulty. And if they did cause this difficulty, we could figure out new ways to manage those

vulnerabilities so that we didn't have our difficulties. So the mere presence of vulnerabilities isn't a reason not to do something, but rather a reason to do it in a way that takes account of our vulnerabilities and offsets those vulnerabilities, or compensates for them, or adjusts to them. So a lot of people walking around having quite good lives and live with all kinds of vulnerabilities. So it shouldn't be seen as a prohibition from enriching your life or finding experiences that enrich your life and roles that bring experiences that are satisfying. So, living with vulnerability is a much more practical strategy than avoiding life, because with living with vulnerability, you learn ways to have a life and not let the vulnerabilities derail it. And this can all be done rather thoughtfully and effectively, such that you can have a quite rewarding enriching life as long as you keep in mind the vulnerabilities and do things to offset them as much as possible. And so many valued social roles, bring with them opportunities for vulnerabilities, but also opportunities to manage those vulnerabilities prudently. So in this way, we should think of the good life as something that we can sort of organise ourselves to, to optimise and thereby, you know, find some life satisfactions that possibly endure for much of the remainder of our life, in some cases. It's an interesting kind of challenge to sort of create a life, make a life, and safeguard that life. Yet it is what millions and billions of people have done year in year out down through the centuries. So we know this can be done. And people with disabilities are no exception with the right supports in place that people with disabilities can enjoy their lives just as much as anyone else.

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