Making Space for Social Integration

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Summary

This work tested an 'Intentional invitation' mechanism to facilitate social integration in a small scale setting. Working with community organisations to design inclusive environments, we identified and addressed specific barriers to social inclusion and designed a series of interventions to foster engagement, from early intervention to in-situ encounters during creative community pop-up events. Intentional invitations proved effective in facilitating the engagement of people with disability. This in turn allowed for authentic interactions between all participants to unfold in a community setting.

Data collected via participant observation and interviews reveal new perspectives about disability and experiences of togetherness. Our aim was to facilitate engagement of people with disability as a channel for authentic contribution bringing potential societal gain within our communities. Findings point to possible changes in professional practice that would encompass intentional invitation mechanisms under the Keys to Citizenship (Perez & Duffy, 2024) framework.

Foreword

This paper explores critical ground in the work of achieving inclusion and everyday citizenship. Too often we set the bar too low and seem to think that once we've closed the institutions or adopted more respectful language then we've done enough. However, not only is this response inadequate in terms of human rights, it is also hugely wasteful.

People with disabilities bring gifts. But these gifts can only be exchanged with the intention to connect and in spaces where connection is possible. This project thoughtfully connected two artistic communities: a mainstream community and a disability community. It required attention to details and it allowed people to reflect on what they had in common as artists and the meaning (or emptiness) of the labels we apply.

In the keys to citizenship model we try to show that inclusion is created by contribution to community; however the logic of this contribution is important. People must pursue their own dreams, do what is meaningful for them and have the other keys to citizenship, like freedom, to pursue those dreams. As the authors show, ending prejudice is not enough, inclusion requires a commitment to always build new bridges.

Dr Simon Duffy, Citizen Network

Introduction

In order to engender social integration, profound changes in attitude and behaviour are required, both with disabled and mainstream society, each tackling their own stereotypes, assumptions and fears. This is even more pertinent today with increasing emphasis placed on disabled people exercising choice and control in living a good life (Van Eden, 2013).

Factors underlying social exclusion

The World Bank (2011) 'Inclusion Matters' reported on research that stressed the importance of participation, suggesting that cultural choices are partly responsible for the way in which some groups take advantage of, or reject policies and programs. People with disabilities are one such group, but by no means the only one, at risk for making "self-exclusion" choices. Self-exclusion often results from negative past trauma. People may feel excluded because of stigma, and in turn, may internalize stigma to the extent that it prevents them from re-engaging with the mainstream. Exclusion, often conflated with discrimination, can affect the performance of excluded groups: In the labour market for instance, perceived discrimination can alter both the expectations of jobseekers and their future labour supply decisions, and may result in members of excluded groups dropping out of the labour force of their own volition. These experiences may equate social devaluation experiences where people feel rejected, subjected to degrading stereotypes (Kendrick, 2011) and generally excluded from community (Abbott & McConkey, 2006). The same phenomenon of renouncing engagement is constantly reported in education, where past discrimination experiences cause drops in learning ability or decreases in motivation to engage in further education. Elmslie and Sedo (1996) apply the concept of learned helplessness to demonstrate how negative events, such as an episode of discrimination, can result in the exclusion of the individual or group, with their 'resignation' to their 'fate', in turn diminishing human capital, constraining effort, and becoming somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Social integration does not naturally unfold from protecting against exclusion

Whilst in years gone by, disabled people have been specifically excluded from life in their communities, this is not the case anymore as most organisations communicate, and sometimes boast of inclusive values. Conversely, social inclusion is often defined by its apparent semantic opposite - social exclusion (Craig et al., 2007). Sherwin (2010) has shown on the other hand that social

exclusion and inclusion are generally seen as having a binary and exclusive relationship - if people are not excluded, then by inference, they are included. This could lead organisational leaders to assume that when 'protective' mechanisms against exclusiveness are put in place, inclusive outcomes naturally follow. Most organisations fail to offer any processes to specifically include marginalised people or indeed put in place mechanisms to systematically identify and facilitate social inclusion, even when they do have high level disability strategies (Cobigo et al, 2012). This leaves matters of inclusion to the personal interpretation, or lack thereof, of individual frontline staff, often resulting in latent exclusion (World Bank, 2011). Statements that are not backed up with specific systems or protocols to implement inclusiveness are therefore, to a large extent ineffective, compounding the lack of effective tools to understand or measure inclusion (Lemay, 2006). Kendrick and Sullivan (2010) warn that the complex issue of social inclusion represents a substantial leadership challenge because it involves multifaceted perspectives and concepts that elude straightforward measurement.

The current 'Arts2Gether' research, explored potential shifts in attitudes and behaviours of people, both disabled and mainstream, through participatory art: Artists of varied backgrounds gathered to create together and through these encounters, new experiences of togetherness fostered community integration. Following Rhodes' call (2010) to take intentional steps to place relationships at the center of our social change agenda (Duffy & Murray, 2013), we were interested in finding out what elements of human relations may be at work in new encounters that could, in turn impact relationship formation. Beyond impacting on the participants themselves, the Arts2Gether project sought to create a ripple effect transcending these encounters, generating knowledge to build change capacity for the long term. The intervention was underpinned by the Social Change model (Field et al, 2012, p.35) that seeks to "Increase the willingness of the community to engage with disabled people, Increase the willingness of disabled people to engage in the community and Increase the direct exposure of people with disabilities in the community".

Methods

'Inclusive research' refers to a process wherein participants with intellectual disabilities are actively involved beyond being observed or interviewed (Walmsley, 2001). Collaborative groups refer to partnerships "*in which people with and without disabilities work together have both shared and distinct purposes, which are given similar attention and make contributions that are equally valued. The position of the people with intellectual disability is not privileged in terms of power or control and researchers are not simply there to assist*" (Bigby et al, 2014; p.8.)

Inclusive research addresses the matter of previous lack of control experienced by disabled people (Stevenson 2011) whilst upholding the authenticity of their contributions to the research. Researchers have adapted the concept of spaces such as 'non accessible' space (Bigby, Frawley & Ramcharan, 2013), 'interactive' space in which new connections and common assumptions can be built (Nind, 2011, p. 356) or as space to 'air arguments and debate' (Walmsley & Johnson (2003, p. 15) congruent with the notion of 'nothing about us without us' (Charlton, 1998). Bigby, Frawley and Ramcharan (2013) also refer to a space where critical research and development necessary to scaffold inclusion occurs.

We adopted the strength perspective characteristic of the collaborative group approach described by Nind (2011, p. 356) so that '*data generation and analysis occurred concurrently in conversation and in directed activities'* during a '*process of dialogue, seeking input and feedback rather than sitting down together to do a task'* (Nind 2011, p. 358.)

Settings

The project piloted interventions in different settings, covering a range of learning situations . Interventions were designed, each time with the purpose of magnifying the micro-interactions taking place, where evidence of shift may be traced from feedback received from the community leaders and participants. The community encounters were planned to benefit from cumulative learning in real time. These encounters gradually increased in scope, ranging from supporting a brand new initiative from the ground up, to early intervention activities, through to designing ongoing encounters:

1. Inception: We facilitated discussions about launching an artist network designed with integration in mind, in collaboration with the local community arts organisation and artists, involving about 100 participants. These meetings were informal gatherings for the purpose of networking and exchanging information and contacts.
2. Early intervention steps with small groups of marginalized people: A disabled artist attended a three-day Art's Trail, mentored by an art teacher to engage with 30 local artists.
3. Designing open-ended encounters: Starting on a local university campus, these open-ended encounters spanned a month, with over 70 participants joining in participative art.

Though different in scope, these interventions had two core methodological points in common: the way people were approached and the way the data were collected.

Intentional invitations

Abbott and McConkey (2006) noted that an important component of social inclusion is meeting other people in ordinary settings and being treated similarly. These get-togethers were planned to facilitate meetings in ordinary settings, as people with disabilities often have few spontaneous occasions to take part in these. An Intentional Invitation is a facilitative mechanism during which we approach a disabled person, explaining that we are organising encounters where everybody is welcome and diversity is valued. We gave some examples of what may happen during the encounter and shared as much information as possible so that the person receiving the invitation could form a good idea of what may happen.

At first glance this may seem simplistic, however, experience has shown that for a disabled person, receiving an explicit invitation is an atypical occurrence. The rare invitations they may receive are impersonal invites to exclusive events – i.e. dedicated to disabled people. As noted by Rhodes (2010), intentionality is a core mechanism of social transformation. Some disability services we contacted said they would mention to the people they serve, the possibility of joining in our encounters. However, they offered no transport to get there, arguing that the point of their interventions was to encourage disabled people to participate in community life independently. We worked with people with an Intellectual Disability and people on the Autistic Spectrum, being amongst those responding to the Intentional Invitations.

Data collection: Participant observation and interviews

Our data collection was designed to document the thoughts, attitudes and behaviours that accompany such a collaborative experience. We paid attention to the type of data that would uncover what may enable or hinder attitude and behaviour shifts. Since some of these changes may occur in 'micro-interactions', sometimes minute details buried in human exchanges – we filmed participants' interviews during encounters to include verbal and non-verbal data, using the methodology documented by Büscher (2005).

Results

The following describes the findings from the range of encounters that were crafted. For each section, disabled people's accounts are reported first, followed by those from mainstream collaborators.

Working with community organisations to design inclusive environments

A partner organisation providing support for clients of the mental health system include artists who report varying degrees of isolation. Some of this isolation is self-imposed as they battle with social phobia and communication challenges - however in discussions, their support worker understood that joining an artist group with the right support would be a step in the right direction towards their goal of participation. The obstacle, however, was the lack of artist networks in the region. What characterized this intervention is that the network was designed as inclusive from the start.

Overcoming specific barriers

The disability perspective emerged as the support worker co-designed with a local community art facilitator and a group of disabled artists[1] the launch of the artist network. Disabled participants helped gather names and information about local artists, collated contact details from various sources in the community and co-planned the first sessions. This idea had germinated as a result of their discussion of what happens across art forms:

> "In my job, I meet with lots of people in network meetings. This teaches me about what is out there in the community and I get to know others who can help me. That is really similar to what I do in my personal life as a musician – we often get together. Music is an obvious one, musicians love to and need to play together... the vibrations grow endorphins and that makes you happy. But this kind of encounter does not happen with visual artists – art is often done in the solitude of your studio... so especially if you have a block or an issue, you are on your own... but if you are together with a group of others, then others can help you overcome your top of mind problem. Such groups exist for professional artists that know each other. The idea of artists coming together especially welcoming disabled peers does not exist in NZ to the best of my knowledge. Disabled artists should not be confined to doing arts in a disability setting only... it's not right."

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[1] See http://creativewaikato.co.nz

When the support worker talked about community integration, he was referring to the specific group of people that could contribute to each disabled person. In the case of artists, other artists with shared passion and interests – they are the Community of Interest that is relevant in this case. The support worker thought that in spite of the challenge in helping disabled persons to understand the benefit of networking, it was crucial to explain this to the best of his abilities. One way to explain was to give examples of people who achieved their goals through networking or through finding suitable role models to follow:

> "Thinking about how to create an open and inclusive space to get disabled artists to participate, one has to start with helping these artists understand the benefit of networking and getting together with other artists. Talking with my clients, some tell me about personal barriers to entering the mainstream; others tell me that they are weary of engaging in activities when they don't know the benefits or risks. A lot of it has to do with the outcome… I am ASD myself and was bullied at school by students and teachers – we build up this big brick wall to protect ourselves. We worry about this negative experience happening again."

Illustration 1: Meeting at a University Campus

The support worker discussed with his clients how to address each of their barriers – such as social phobia or communication challenges. Working with clients who say that they usually do not like to talk to strangers, he remarked that when meeting with him at his office, they were comfortable with talking to everyone there. This provided an example to counter his clients' argument that they are uncomfortable meeting new people with a demonstration of how slow integration into the community can actually work – one small step at a time. Furthermore, the support worker convinced his clients to meet other artists and test whether this would help them become more comfortable once they realized that others have goals and interests similar to theirs.

Another lesson that the support worker learned was to avoid taking for granted the possibility that his disabled clients would naturally initiate follow up. This was made clear at a later network meeting, assuming his clients would look up information about the next gathering; however this did not happen and they missed the meeting.

Uncovering gaps and misconceptions

A community event organiser remarked: "*last year I organised more than 25 community events attended by over 50,000 people. We don't have any policy to specifically include marginalised people and our reporting does not include such categories either. We do have a Disability Strategy, but I have no idea what it means on the ground*". This gap is yet unaddressed by community leaders.

The data also pointed to unexpected reactions to the project and shed a new light on what to pay attention to when working in the community sector, as opposed to a service provider for disabled people. Following a number of positive meetings with the local community arts organization, we realised that they had assumed that because we were working with differently-abled artists, our focus was, actually, on disability. They asked what the next meetings will focus on: "*What is your next topic after disability*"? This was a surprising question to us but it brought home the idea that even when we think we have shared inclusive values to the best of our understanding, there still can be misunderstandings. Clarifying that disability is not a 'topic' we explained. The intention was to build an artists network with the help of other artists, offering a space where a wide range of people, disabled and non-disabled would focus on their professional art practice - like getting their work in the best galleries and exhibitions. The lesson we learnt was to pay closer attention to possible misconceptions – even amongst our closest allies.

Early interventions to foster engagement

Running a series of micro-interventions bringing people together in creative activity, we were surprised by the level and quality of energy liberated during these encounters. Our data showed that this new energy was then reinvested in making space for new encounters with people different to oneself. Some mainstream artists reported a personal effort to engage with others who previously may have felt marginalised. Steve, a graffiti artist explains that the reason why he loves hip hop culture is because it is rooted in participation and collaboration: "*I take on at-risk youth as my apprentices and show them how to harness their creative potential to become recognised for what they can offer.*"

The artist remarked that such inclusive sparks happening at an individual level need to be extended to the macro level, and that community event organizers need to change their practices to involve disabled people in an intentional way (Janson, 2013).

Spelling out the gains

From the perspective of the disabled artist, engaging in an organized event such as an Arts Trail reduced some of the 'risks' in engagement and was fertile ground for disabled artists to open up to the idea of connecting with others based on commonality of interest. Following the new experience of travelling together with a facilitator for 3 days to meet a large number of artists in their studio, the disabled artist reported gaining some understanding of the benefit of short term networking activity as opposed to developing in-depth relationships.

Finding the common grounds

This methodology allowed us to delve into the reasons why mainstream people may connect to others with a disability. The answers that participants shared with us were about how they identified commonalities with the disabled artists. Mainstream artists for instance repeatedly noted that they enjoyed spending time with the young disabled artist because they recognized themselves at his age through their common interests in art – not through his disability. This reinforced the fact that it is what people share that brings them together. One well-known mainstream established artist kept some contact with the disabled artists after they visited him in his studio. Others exchanged emails with a potential to share future opportunities to collaborate in joint exhibitions or art events. These encounters may bear further fruit but we are unable to report on these yet.

Crafting shared creative encounters

We found that in working side by side on creative projects, people experienced first hand a moving quality of authentic human connection. Getting to know each other better has the potential to reduce fear and the negative attitudes that go with prejudice as well as provide marginalised people with healing and participative experiences (Hall, 2009). As a follow up to these encounters, participants crafted collaboratively their next involvement stage: planning a community garden as a contribution to their communities.

A new experience of togetherness

Amongst the disability group there was a great sense of excitement as for some it was their first visit to the local university campus.

Illustration 2: Social Media Campaign Supporting the Arts2Gether Project

"Join in and make friends and whatever"

Many of the artists reported that the experience of painting together was positive and fun, especially in meeting new people and contributing to the collective canvas. Some of the artists were also excited to be trying a new creative medium than their usual art. To them the word 'disability' is functional and positive. They use the term often, and there were no further philosophical stigmas associated with it. In answer to a question about whether they have heard of or practice Disability Pride, they say that they are proud to be people with disabilities.

A space to surprise and work

One artist commented that seeing the artwork that her friend was producing was surprising, as she hadn't seen his drawings before. A visual artist herself, she specialises in abstract painting and drawing. Another painter in an interview focused on describing the painting and the subject matter itself, instead of the group experience or the disability narrative. She described her main colour schemes in other artwork, which also showed up in the group painting.

"To be honest, I love having a label"

Tyler works everyday with disabled people and self-identifies with Autism. How does he change people's views? He says that he does not inform some of his friends about his disability until later on in their friendship. When he does tell them about it, their views on people with Autism change because the taboo is lifted and they can openly discuss it with him. Being 'label-free' to some of his friends, and later intentionally talking about his disability, shows the people around him that disability was already part of their life. This, he says, changes their views towards other people with Autism and Aspergers, because they are not, [as he jokingly put it] "diseased" or off-limits.

Tyler continues to say that Arts2Gether is "showing that people can achieve no matter what... if their brain is wired differently or physically disabled... it makes no difference". Even though Tyler identifies with disability, he liked our idea of a label free space: "A space where people can make artwork, and people are defined by what they do rather than how they are perceived". His call to others is a critical perspective which was able to be expressed in the space (Bigby et al, 2013), "think about yourself and what benefits you" otherwise people with disabilities won't meet their needs because society doesn't necessarily account for them. He is encouraging people from his community to support themselves first, and lead the way in the transition to inclusion.

A new perspective of the different

"I'm not even sure sometimes - is he disabled or not?"

Our non-disabled participants reported actively engaging with new thoughts about disability. Jan raised the concept of visibility, or discernibility – looking around the group, at times she wasn't sure who had or didn't have a disability. Another participant, Peter, echoed this feeling "it's not really that evident. It's not like I can go from 'disabled' person [motioning to one side] to 'abled' person [motioning to another]. This is the impact of the label free space. Another participant commented on working creatively together- as a new experience for her. She enjoyed this and again, meeting new people while painting together was a positive result.

The same excitement was reported by the artists with disabilities, which highlights the inclusive method, where one group does not necessarily have more power, but both work towards some common interest (Bigby et al, 2014). One participant suggested that the term 'disability' 'boxes' people into one definition, and doesn't allow people to be themselves. Her personal definition of disability was that some things pose more challenges to some people. She contrasted this with the perspective that most people have at least one area of their life that is challenging. She thinks that labelling someone as 'disabled' is unfortunate because there are many preconceptions attached to that word that are stigmatising. Physical disabilities are those we can immediately see when we meet someone, making it easier to help that person. But for social barriers, people are less likely to help someone because it is less easily noticed, or if it is noticed some people may not know how to act or find it socially awkward. Other evidence of interest from the mainstream group was found in spikes around these encounters on our project social media site[2] – stretching engagement beyond the face to face, situational engagement. These results will be reported more in-depth in another publication.

Labels

Disability is "a word of convenience", according to Peter, who represented a local community arts organisation. "I try to stay away from words that define people by something they don't have," he said in a discussion. He also preferred to avoid the term because he saw it as having negative connotations. "*It felt like just a bunch of people rather than a mix of abilities.*" He continues that the root concept of 'ability' is a misnomer because people may not have a lot of ability in one area, and have more ability in another. One thing he did assert was that:*"There was "lots of able artwork going on".* Jan carries on: *"Disability… that doesn't mean that a person can't think for themselves".*

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[2] https://www.facebook.com/StoryBehindEveryNZ.YOUth

Discussion

Inclusion does not just happen as a result of a mission statement or from an increase in awareness about disability. What may facilitate a shift towards more inclusive outcomes, however, is the experience of new situations leading to behaviour changes, that in turn may create human capital assets (Miller & Russell, 2010). Intentional Invitations were sent out to a group of people with disabilities and some turned up, keen to share everyday experiences with others. In the process some shifts in attitudes and behaviour occurred in many participants. This was encouraging as it hints at the possibility that shared spaces can help create more social inclusion and cohesion.

The potential impact of an intervention aimed at increasing social inclusion is on a continuum from raising awareness, fostering dialogue and debate, mobilising partners, challenging entrenched social and cultural norms, building inclusive environments, changing professional and service practices through to building change capability (Field et al, 2012). We aimed to reach as far as possible, within the scope of this study, towards deep change within this continuum and discuss below what has been learnt about mobilising partners and building inclusive environments as a precursor to changing professional and service practices.

Illustration 3: End of Creative Day Photo

Mobilisation to implement knowledge and create impact

Past research has placed significant weight on 'objective' measures of social inclusion, such as the frequency of leisure or productive activity in the community. After an extensive review of the research, however, Cobigo et al (2012) concluded that objective measures constitute a pale proxy of social inclusion and fail to describe the full range of human experiences. This research attempted to address some inter-personal elements that elude quantification.

Contribution impact indicator: Invitation to exhibit the creative works

Our approach was guided by contemporary social integration thinking as summarised by Perez & Duffy (2023), Cummins and Lau (2003) and Armstrong (2014) as relative to the groups people want to belong to, the valued roles they can play (Wolfensberger, 1998) or the interests they share with other mainstream people – in this case the art community.

In their interviews, participants have explained how they have felt a sense of belonging through these encounters. As noted by Armstrong (2014), sense of belonging is interrelated with notions of community connectedness and social capital. This research has attempted to surface components of social inclusion in a range of dimensions. We have, however, gone further than interviewing participants to assess their experiences – we have looked for evidence of social inclusion where they may be found. This supports Kendrick and Sullivan's argument (2010) that a contemporary definition of social inclusion needs to clearly emphasise authentic valued social participation, however arduous it is to appraise. Our community partners proposed, for the work produced by these encounters, to provide the backdrop for a national community gathering (a 'hui' in the Maori language), focused on using creativity as a community development channel. Our artists' works have secured a home and will represent a cause, in a statement that is political as much as personal. In this exhibition, the names of each contributing artist will appear in one list, symbolically bringing each contributor into the hall and sending out a message of 'on par' contribution in a concrete way to represent inclusion.

Contribution impact indicator: Co-developing a community garden

Directly as a result of this intervention, disabled people asked the group to continue working together to co-develop a community garden for residents to contribute to community building. We take both these impact indicators as noteworthy contributors to people feeling a sense of belonging as a result of activities that involve mutual relationships (Hall, 2009).

Mobilisation to change professional practice

Our first learning was about the disabling impact of mobility and transport. One of the poignant obstacles we faced in this work was the role logistics play in enabling community-based activities. We were unconvinced by the argument put forward by some disability support services, who offered no transport to the people they serve because their interventions were to encourage disabled people to independently partake in community life. Whilst we agree that this is a valuable goal in the long-term, we argue that the measure of social participation could not rely on transport independence at too early a stage on people's path to social independence. At the point where our concern is to help people overcome initial fears and reluctance, this would add an unnecessary obstacle to participation. Indeed no one from this service did travel independently to join in our encounters. Those disability service providers welcomed collaboration with our project, having organized transport for their clients because they strongly identified with social inclusion goals. They supported the gradual approach, first involving enjoyment of the new situation itself before making claims about the intrinsic value of independently getting to a new activity. Any attempt therefore, to increase social inclusion, must take into account how logistics barriers are to be overcome.

Our second learning is about the need to engage differently with community development staff. Community building staff are so busy with logistics and organisation that inclusiveness can become yet another task during otherwise crammed workloads. Even when frontline employees are passionate about broadening participation, they need to invest extra energy towards inclusive outcomes – which may then go un-noticed and un-reported (Cobigo et al, 2012). Our discussions with community events organizers, uncovered the lack of systems to identify and reach out to marginalized groups, e.g Intentional Invitations. They also have no method to verify that marginalized groups' integration is changing. The paradox is that staff could use large events' organising to leverage and impact community integration. At the outset of the project, they had asked for our help in designing 'Best Practices' that could be used by their different teams. We interpreted this request as taking ownership over part of the inclusion process with the potential for some change to happen over the participation continuum. On the mainstream side of society, it is about the extent to which community event organisers publicise their events beyond the 'usual' channels and the extent to which marginalised groups feel welcome and invited. Elsewhere on the continuum, it is the actions – not words – from the disability sector that need to be scrutinised. The websites of disability service

and mental health providers have carefully formulated mission statements that talk about community participation. In reality there are substantial differences in how they implement their vision to create authentic community participation - as opposed to token participation. It is arguable, whether the funding for service providers is efficiently used, if the ball of social inclusion is dropped by not fully enabling participation of target groups, thereby negating much of the good work and effort already in place.

Reflecting about spaces

Label free spaces are temporary intentional spaces, where visibility is for once lowered. Everyone has the potential to be someone with a label, but people are seen for their actions and not their identity markers. Even people that identified with disability labels said that they loved the concept and application of a label free space. Label free spaces solve the problem of wanting to self-identify, whilst also feeling that this separates or stigmatises people.

Some of these interviews changed our own perspectives, because surprisingly, most people with a disability liked and identified with the term disability. This begs the question, whether identification with the word has come from a normalisation of the narrative from the mainstream. Have we, as a society, just projected what we think is right for people with disabilities? It is already a problem because the disability group tends to agree with a lot of the things said - the question 'what do you think of the word 'disability'? Do you like it?' mostly elicited a positive answer during our collaborative discussions.

> *"We are always struggling with my brother: should we disclose that he has a disability background?*
>
> *He has never identified with the disability community - not in school, and not out of school. Perhaps he sees that there is a clear segregation in society, and that he doesn't want to be part of that."*
>
> *Melissa*

This matched the experiences of others who also didn't want to be involved with the disability community, in spite of having been assigned a label, for example intellectual disability'. When someone transcends the label of intellectual disability, it shows that they have been critical about their identity formation.

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Are these our leaders in '**middle spaces**'?

We were interested in finding out how both parties can start closing the attitude/behaviour gap. It is a movement requiring parties on either side to engage on the bridge and move towards each other.

Sam is the father of an artist who once was marginalised:

> *"We must look for solutions that do more than 'bridge the gap' but strive to create an overlap so that no one falls behind."*

There is however a great ethical responsibility in mainstream society to both initiate and follow up with disabled people. Given that disabled people have less experience of choice and control than their non-disabled counterparts, it would be a valuable contribution for the latter to understand and act on the need to follow up – perhaps more than they would be used to when instigating change in a non-disabled context. Fragile early successes could lead to yet more disappointments and renewed feelings of isolation.

In order to avoid setting expectations that may be unmet, action must be purposely taken to build on initial achievements – until new behaviour patterns can be set. The process of initiating and following through, however is no different to spreading innovation in service development, it takes place in 'interactive spaces' (Nind, 2011) and is certainly a pivotal part of how our changing social services can mesh with our community development services to create more inclusive societies for the benefit of all its citizens.

Conclusion

Our exploration of social inclusion describes how a fine balance between commonalities and differences, powers the engine of change. Whilst we recognize that this small-scale study cannot be generalized to larger populations, the work does point to some potential future directions to add value to the existing body of knowledge. In essence, it is about how shared values may help overcome potential obstacles encountered through diversity.

Furthermore, we have shown how the act of sharing spaces and working together may support the attitude and behaviour changes that help build these bridges and new community assets (Miller & Russell, 2010). Creativity is one such channel, but by no means the only one, where these potential barriers may be tackled. These changes are often subjective and challenging to appraise. These initial changes can be unpacked and explained, acting as a platform from which interventions leading to wider social impacts can be launched (Reinders, 2000). As with many episodes of social gain we start experimenting at the margins of society in small isolated spaces, progressively expanding to other activity domains, thereby progressively getting closer to the core of society.

The challenge here lies precisely in extending these findings to other environments, people and settings. In our work for instance, we have identified a number of target organizations where this work could be up-scaled. We plan to extend findings about Intentional Interventions in working with community development staff to build on local and regional efforts. In doing so, we hope to craft Best Practice in engaging with marginalized populations.

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