

Inclusion: “what does it mean anymore, anyway?”

Recently, I have come across different people in the disability, community and education sectors discussing how the concept of ‘inclusion’ has lost its meaning for a number of reasons ranging from inaccurate representations to its overuse. This suggests to me the need to delve deeper and learn more about social exclusion and its impacts, and the value of inclusive environments and practices as encapsulated by different peoples in different contexts. It is therefore timely that a number of the papers published in this edition of the journal demonstrate the importance of social inclusion in the disability, community and education sectors. In keeping with objectives to promote inclusive practices, this edition canvasses a range of issues, research methods, settings and perspectives within Australian and international contexts. These include studies from lower middle income countries such as Ghana and India and as well as research with diverse issues and peoples within Australia, a high income country. Upfront, it is acknowledged that in some cases the experiences detailed are excruciating to read. Nevertheless, the insights that are provided are powerful and further demonstrate the need for and value of inclusive approaches, interventions and programs in order to improve outcomes for individuals and the wider community.

The first article in this edition (Ruhindwa, Randall & Cartmel, 2016) identifies the need for inclusive practices to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. The review of literature explores the multitude of barriers faced by people with disabilities in securing both paid and unpaid work. Importantly, however, the review also examines possible interventions which have been found to be effective, as defined from an end users’ perspective. A range of opportunities from community development approaches, employment support strategies and the implications of the National Disability Insurance Scheme are discussed. However, the importance of strategies that promote and enable client ownership, consistent with human rights frameworks are given particular emphasis.

The recognition of employment participation and social participation as fundamental human rights, and moreover, the investments made in programs seeking to improve outcomes in this regard highlight some key international differences, including differences in the capacities of lower, middle and high income countries to respond to these issues. The study of parent’s experiences of children with disabilities in Ghana provides some distressing insights regarding the personal grief, social stigma and oppression experienced and reported by parents and carers of children with disabilities (Badu, 2016). Although the study did not seek to focus on either positive or negative experiences, the findings as reported by parents in the Ashanti region overwhelming indicate a host of negative experiences and examples of social exclusion. Indeed, many of the extracts provided from interviews with parents and caregivers indicate high levels of distress, pain and isolation can result. While various factors are cited, this may further explain why many of the carers of children with intellectual disabilities participating in the study were not the biological parents but other family members, in particular grandparents. The findings have potential implications for policy and programs in Ghana to improve support for caregivers of children with intellectual disabilities. However, the findings also suggest a need for more research to explicitly identify positive experiences and any attributes that can be built upon to improve outcomes for children and their caregivers.

Further demonstrating the value of strength-based approaches, the article on making music together describes how music provides opportunities for socialisation, making valued connections and more enjoyment in life - both for people with severe disabilities and people without a disability. The author (Tiszai, 2016) describes the social exclusion, poverty and powerlessness experienced by people with severe disabilities including those with

intellectual impairments, gross motor problems and other complex needs which necessitate high levels of support to undertake activities of daily living. Those of us, who can take social participation and engagement in recreational pursuits for granted, are indeed privileged. For many people with disabilities, the fear of rejection and pressure to conform has become entrenched. As a result, the value of the Consonante method to engage people in common or shared musical experiences is demonstrated. By offering participants the opportunity to be curious about and use instruments in ways that suit their movement patterns and preferences, and incorporating modified or custom-built instruments where possible, it not only ensures there is no wrong way of participating, but moreover, provides a level playing field for all involved. Indeed, it is clear that music can be a powerful tool for social inclusion and the authors demonstrate how a sense of equality and mutuality provide important pre-requisites for social inclusion.

Consistent with empirical findings on employment outcomes for people with disabilities, the results of longitudinal research in Australia suggest adolescents with chronic health problems also experience inferior employment outcomes in adulthood (Callander, Schofield & Shrestha, 2016). Of particular note, overall results suggest an individual's education attainment or education levels do not mitigate this effect. The employment implications for young people with chronic health problems are discussed, as are the longer term health implications of experiences of unemployment and underemployment in recognition of the determinants of health, in particular, the importance of economic and social participation.

Perhaps the most demonstrative and certainly the most distressing example of social exclusion and its impacts, however, is provided in the examination of recent cases of sexual violence in India. The article by Patil (2016) highlights how gender inequalities are further compounded by the caste-system. Indeed, the conditions and contexts that give rise to the sexual assaults are as disturbing as the way they were subsequently responded to by the state and media. The brutal consequences are intensified by the apparent injustice and way exclusionary practices appear to be further enshrined. Although Patil has suggested that attitudes towards sexual violence in India are changing, this has not yet resulted in the victims of sexual assault being viewed as survivors, even though significant efforts are made to raise awareness of these injustices and the need for reform.

Despite fleeing injustice and trauma, refugees who resettle in Australia may still face injustice and exclusion, in particular, given the deterioration in the political discourse regarding asylum seekers and refugees in recent years. The study by Bird, Cox and Brough (2016) explores the sense of belonging and settlement experiences of Karen refugees from Burma now living in Brisbane, Australia, and demonstrates the complexity of issues faced by this diasporic community. In contrast to the dominant discourse that currently exists, Bird and colleagues note the sophistication and commitment of the Karen community in seeking to belong and contribute to society. Accordingly, the prevailing view of refugees as victims presents significant challenges for those seeking to settle in Australia and who see themselves as willing and able.

Although participatory practices and empowerment are considered essential to redressing the effects of social exclusion, some debate and confusion remains in the sector regarding the best ways to enable participation and ensure the people who most need to benefit are the most engaged. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation was a seminal framework for encouraging participation in a human services context. However, the article by laquinto (2016) examines the implications of this framework for working with vulnerable clients in the community services sector. Based on a review of the academic literature and the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with service users, community sector staff, and board or managerial representatives, laquinto identifies the need for some further considerations. Differences evident among stakeholder groups suggest that views on participation reflect broader organisational culture and individual values and actions. The paper therefore

highlights the need for a more consistent and supportive environment for reinforcing messages of social inclusion and the imperative for active and inclusive practices.

The final article included in this edition of JOSI presents the results from a brief program evaluation of interdisciplinary learning issues for a postgraduate mental health education program (Stewart, Crozier & Wheeler, 2016). The course was designed to meet the interdisciplinary learning needs of the mental health workforce, which has been undergoing significant reform as part of the move towards recovery oriented practices in Australia. The greater focus on recovery and on people's agency, hope, their interests and core needs for social and economic participation underscores the need for transdisciplinary service approaches. Accordingly, the evaluation was undertaken to ensure that the program is responding to the interdisciplinary learning needs of the mental health workforce it also identifies opportunities to further improve learning and teaching experiences.

For future editions of this journal and in keeping with its aims and objectives, we are seeking to encourage a greater range of article types and submissions. The journal already encourages and accepts informed commentaries and perspectives, book reviews and may also include brief practice-based research or program evaluations as featured in the current edition. In future editions, we hope to include more review based articles and other media such as photo essays and narrative works to help provide greater insights and understanding of the issues. To this end, you will see further information provided by our Reviews Editor, Dr Jennifer Cartmel on the JOSI website. You will also see the call for papers for our special edition on social inclusion and health which is planned for later next year. We look forward to your contributions and thank you for your continued support of JOSI.

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