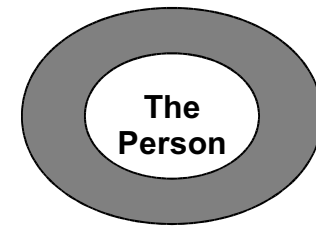


Proposal

Circles of Support



THE PROBLEM

In SA thousands of parents caring for an intellectually disabled adult son/daughter worry endlessly about who will “look out” for them if they are not around to do so. Sometimes a sibling might indicate they will take on this role but for most the future is not that clear. Helping people take action and plan for the future is crucial.

Everyone is likely to find themselves vulnerable at some point and time in life. People who have an intellectual disability are vulnerable throughout life. Their parents are often the only major source of guidance, support and protection.

In most instances people who have an intellectual disability are less able to represent themselves, to make wise decisions without good advice, to protect their own interests or to speak up for themselves. Most people who have an intellectual disability will always need someone to “look out” for them in these ways.

For many parents the very idea of thinking about this is scary and overwhelming. More importantly, they worry that asking a relative or someone else to take on such an involvement will burden them. However, in the absence of some clear action as well as some other people who may have agreed to take a deeper interest in their life circumstances, all the evidence points to the fact that when parents die, the person who has a disability will have reduced life opportunities and is at great risk of being institutionalised.

Parents need encouragement and help to start planning for the future now – financially, legally, making arrangements around their son's/daughter's housing, retaining knowledge of the person's life experiences, their history, their relationships, identity and the ambitions that their parents had for them. One response is to do nothing and just hope that "after I die" someone else will try to take care and look out for my son or daughter!

Another is to ACT ...

HOWEVER in most instances people don't know where to turn for help or what to do.

A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

Helping build a voluntary circle of support around the person who has as disability might be the very mechanism that would work to protect their interests into the future ... NOT with the expectation that this group might necessarily have a lifetime of responsibility “caring for” the person BUT with the expectation that they might make time and agree to “look out” for the person by staying in contact and taking an interest in their life.

In some instances this might involve a very formal role such as agreeing to become a person's guardian or a trustee to assist with a person's finances. In other instances it might be a less formal role such as joining together with a small group of others, all whom agree to make a voluntary commitment to meeting together regularly, or as needed (eg in an emergency), in order to “look out” for the person, and in the absence of the person who loves them most, to help them build a positive sense of the future and as rich and rewarding a life as is possible.

This would be forming what Community Living Project Inc. calls a “Circle of Support”

WHY WON'T FAMILIES JUST DO THIS ANYWAY?

It's hard for any of us to contemplate our death! It's acutely troubling to do this when all that fills our head is fear and worry for the future of a child that we love. It's yet harder still when you know that, even though your child is now an adult, they will always need someone or even several people, who together can help keep their lives moving toward the future that you have been passionately pursuing for them – not locked away and forgotten in an institution somewhere, but living in their own home, accepted and valued as a member of their local community.

For all sorts of reasons, most parents who face these circumstances won't want to ask people for help and probably more often than not are not even sure what it is they would want to ask of someone. In fact, we still hear stories of parents wishing that their son/daughter might die before them and in some tragic instances, of parents saying that they will kill a son/daughter in place of leaving them to face the world alone.

They need a person and an organization that they feel they can trust to give them the right advice, or at minimum, who can support them to start thinking about who might be interested, to start taking some positive action. This will inevitably demand a great relationship, probably built up over some time, as well as a deep understanding of each family's circumstances.

OUR REQUEST

CLP wishes to dedicate at least a part time position to initially work with a number of people who currently receive support services and their network, in order to create and establish an intentional 'circle of people'. We believe the strategy of circles of support will offer protection, and in the absence of parent/s, safeguard the person from bad things happening to them and hopefully make sure that the person has the best possible life for the future. We believe the strategy has wider application but there needs to be an opportunity to trial, learn and understand how to make these efforts most powerfully effective. For this reason CLP believes we need to start with a small group.

CLP believes that \$30 - \$40,000 per year for the next 2 years would enable us to create a part time role to support the initial development of 6-8 circles of support.

or alternatively,

A minimum of 5 individual sponsorships at \$100 per week per person for a period of 1½-2 years

We are seeking your support to raise the resources to enable us to commit to a dedicated effort around initiating and building circles of support for people receiving services from our organization. CLP is anticipating that, once established, the circle will come to function independently and continue to work for the person for the future.

WANT MORE INFORMATION:

Contact either:

Ross Womersley
Executive Officer
rossw@clp-sa.org.au

Or

Jayne Barrett
Project Officer
jayneb@clp-sa.org.au

Community Living Project Inc. Phone: 8384 7866
111 Beach Road.
Christies Beach, SA 5165
www.clp-sa.org.au

The Community Living Project:

Is a small, non-profit charity working with people who have an intellectual disability and their families in the southern suburbs of Adelaide. With a great reputation for providing highly personalised support to people, CLP has repeatedly demonstrated over almost 20 years that with thoughtful, well-constructed support, it is possible to enable any person, no matter what their level of disability, to live fulfilling, contributing and meaningful lives in a home of their own as members of our local communities

This has taken a vision, some first-rate strategic action and a capacity to bring both formal professional resources as well as informal resources to bear, in support of people and their families in their quest to enjoy an ordinary life in their local community.

We recognise that in 20 years though lots of parents are getting older and have all increasingly come to confront the inevitable question of “what will happen when I die?”

CLP believes it is possible to take action now that will increase people’s sense of security but this will demand additional effort and inevitably the resources to fund that effort. Funding that can be used to employ an outstanding community developer who can actively work to help these parents take action now and start to nurture and bring together these voluntary “Circles of Support”.

About Circles of Support

In the absence of the love, knowledge, and natural authority of a parent, a small group of people will be invited to gather in support of a person they know. The people who form this circle of support will have a general responsibility to help the person think about and picture their future and monitor and provide guidance to them as they move through their life.

This circle of support is not a meeting of professionals and family members, but a group of committed individuals who care about or love the person in question. What brings people together is not their title or professional role, but their desire to help build a desirable future for the person in need.

People who step forward into the circle might be friends of family, friends of the individual, people who support the person, outsiders who have been identified as interested in being involved in the person's life or others. In the first instance invitations would be extended to everyone identified by the person and/or their family as having a potential interest.

The circle might meet quite frequently in the beginning of the process as they learn to understand the roles they have been asked to take on. In the long term the circle may meet on a regular basis or in some instances may opt to gather on an as-needed basis. This decision is the circle's to make. The facilitator of the circle will probably take notes and make sure that these are shared with all of the stakeholders who are involved (as well as to make sure that the notes become part of the "record" for the person).

The circle will be a support for the person and especially so in helping them to make decisions about their lives. It is the commitment of CLP to place the decision-making power into the hands of the person - with the assistance of their circle of support. They, the circle, will help the person decide how they might pursue their ideal living situation with an ideal support system for the person. The circle may also help to train people, recruit people and support people.

The role of CLP is to help support the circle and to continue to deliver high quality daily living support to the person who has a disability. CLP would hope that, over time, a person's circle might come to hold CLP accountable for its support services to the person concerned.