

KEEPING THE MOMENTUM OF VISION BUILDING AND PLANNING: WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY?

by Catherine Raju

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As a parent, Catherine was involved in a voluntary capacity for many years with organisations, which work for people with disabilities and their families.



“Have determination as well as vision.”

This statement, and the others included in this paper, are part of a collection of strategies compiled from the weekend live-in workshops, From vision to action through planning, which Pave the Way has conducted in different parts of Queensland since 2004. The workshops are for small groups of couples who have family members with disability, either two parents together, or one person with a close friend or relative; someone who shares the vision they have for their son or daughter’s life and who is prepared to work with them to put that in place.

The weekends focus on the importance of having a clear and positive vision for the individual and their life and on working with others to plan and to implement the vision. There is time for group process and discussion

Remember that your son or daughter is central ~ it is their journey, not yours.”

and also for reflection, both individually and as a couple. Families respond positively to what they often describe as this “rare chance” to be able to talk with each other about the

deeply held hopes and dreams they have for their son

or daughter which are often lost in everyday, practical concerns.

An important part of these workshops has been the final session in which people are asked to consider what is likely to slow or stop the momentum of the weekend or stand in the way of their vision coming to reality and then to identify strategies that can help prevent this happening. What is clear from the notes compiled from these brainstorm sessions is that people are extremely aware of both the intrinsic and extrinsic barriers they face in trying to do this.

Some of the intrinsic barriers, which have been identified include people’s deeply held beliefs and assumptions about people with disability and how they can live in the world. In an early part of the workshop participants are asked to reflect on what it means to live a “good life”

and on how this experience is so often denied to people, including

their own son or daughter.

Facing this reality can be confronting to family members who may have always believed

deeply, for example, that their most important role as parents is to keep their children safe and protected

without thinking of how this can be done in the context of a full and meaningful life. When this is identified as a barrier, people talk about the need to be in touch with positive ideas and stories about how other people live and to surround themselves with people who encourage them to push the boundaries of their thinking.

Hearing from other

participants at the workshop is often a starting point for people to begin to think differently and to imagine what might be possible.

Other intrinsic barriers, which people frequently identify are those related to their own personality, especially as it relates to

inviting other people to share their vision and to be part of their thinking and planning. The most common issues listed are being a perfectionist; a procrastinator or having a great fear of failure; of being too shy, self-conscious or proud to ask people to be involved; of being someone who acts with anger and aggression rather

than being strategic about choosing their battles, learning how to deal with frustration or "letting things go through to the keeper" as one parent suggested.

The aim of this discussion is not to change a fundamental personality style but to

"Centre on the person~ their strengths and passions."

understand and raise to consciousness the possible consequences of the way one operates in the world. This has proved to help people recognise how they could work better with others to vision and plan for a good

"Be flexible ~ nothing is set in stone."

life for their family member. For many couples discussion hinges around how their different styles can complement each other rather than be a cause of conflict.

The most common extrinsic barriers that people identify during the workshops are

"Get rid of putting things in the "too hard" basket; act "one brick at a time" ~ wisely and slowly."

those related to time management, dealing with unexpected events including ill health, and having to deal with bureaucracies and negative people. The most common advice people offer each other in this regard is to prioritise and delegate tasks even if this is not one's preferred way of behaving.

"Break tasks down into manageable bits; plan for what I can do today but keep the long-term vision in mind. Accept that there will be set-backs; have a Plan B and a Plan C."

It is also important to recognise and accept that changes and unexpected events will happen. People encourage each other to

“keep the vision clearly in mind and shared with others, including siblings and supportive family members”. In this way, other people can

positive people in your life; take small steps ... keep moving forward.”

“Succession planning ~ ensure one person is not totally responsible. Pick your battles: don't doubt yourself ~ don't let the negatives drag you down.”

be there when parents become ill or tired or simply lack the energy for yet another battle.

While families talk about the importance of working with others as a positive strategy in helping to maintain the momentum, the negativity of others is also one of the most frequently identified barriers. Dealing with negative people, especially when they are friends or family, is difficult. Sometimes what looks like entrenched negativity can simply be the result of someone playing a devil's advocate role in discussions and it is worth checking if that is the case. At other times it can be destructive negativity that is time wasting and energy draining. When this is the case the advice families give to each other has been to proactively seek out and engage with positive and knowledgeable allies, give others time to understand but realise that eventually you may need to, “ease the negative people out of the team if they don't come on board”.

While the lists of barriers are often long, once named, people do acknowledge that there are strategies, which can be put in place to counter these, if people are willing to try to

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“Acknowledge the preparation and thinking required to make it happen. Know that this will be a marathon, not a sprint.”

effect change. In the words of one parent after a long night of discussion around the open fire:

“We need to recognise that all situations have both the 'hot coals' and the 'dead wood'; keep