

From the President

In these times, sustaining ourselves both as individuals and as part of society requires us to keep on 'peeling an onion' – stripping away at the issues and concepts that have influence over the lives of people with a disability, their families and the wider community and attempting to understand the message behind what we discover. We cannot afford to be content just to accept the superficial veneer of life; life must have a meaning, if it is ever to become worthwhile and meaningful. Thus, we must constantly delve into ourselves to discover the fundamental values that we so dearly hold on to, consciously or unconsciously. These are the beliefs and fundamental values that inform our attitudes towards our work practices and toward people generally, but of course particularly those with a disability.

We have to show leadership in raising meaningful worthwhile dialogue around actively promoting positive values in regard to people with disabilities. When we maintain or even raise the level of discourse around values, and attempt to focus greater attention on values engagement, we contribute actively to how people who are the most vulnerable now and in the future will lead their lives within society.

The prevailing milieu for many people with a disability, their families and allies and community organisations is one that presents many challenges, some of which are major changes in funding arrangements, uncertainty within the political sphere, and the extent of unmet needs. When we live in a values vacuum, the significance of these challenges is not only heightened but can be more systematically damaging for those of us who have been labelled as having a disability. The more sophisticated society becomes, the more under threat the very lives of people who have disabilities become. We definitely need to take more of a leadership role in this precarious situation and we need to promote, nourish, nurture and sustain leadership wherever we see it.

I believe that when individuals embrace some of the current challenges to sustainability with a feeling of energy and a clear sense of direction and have strong commitments to that which they are passionate about, then, this can be both inspirational and grounding at the same time.

We can be sustained by the realisation that there may not be any right answers, or indeed, any easy answers at the moment. We can be guided by our history while constantly searching for new strategies and fresh perspectives which might spark fresh enthusiasm and a sense of hope and help us to retain our viability.

Above all, we must be guided by an unwavering commitment to our values and our mission by continuing to be clear and vigilant about our commitment to the positive value of people with disabilities and their needs for a decent life in the community. This means keeping people with disabilities and families at the centre of our work, seeking ways to make it possible for the grassroots and leadership of the community sector to be visible, focused, united and influential, and continuing to inform and encourage people who are working to protect and promote the interests of people with disabilities.

And in all of this it is important to remember to look after ourselves. Let us not forget the value of a well-earned rest; a time 'to pick the flowers' and to nourish and invigorate the soul is one of the many ways we retain some sense of self in the midst of difficult times. A very good friend said recently that we should be able to experience joy in our lives. I really think this is so true.

PEACE!

Mike Duggan