

BELONGING INITIATIVE

*The Belonging Initiative is a community development partnership between four small agencies, **Parent & Family Resource Centre Inc., Standards Plus, Parent to Parent Inc (Bay of Plenty) and Family Action Support Team Inc.** This initiative is part of an approach to build a co-operative movement for the development of innovative service models in New Zealand that will support families of disabled people.*

What is the Belonging Initiative?

The aim of the Belonging Initiative is to:

- Build and strengthen personal networks for a person with a disability.
- Help friends and family to better include the person with a disability.
- Assist the person to identify their hopes and dreams for their future.
- Enable the person to develop and share their interests, gifts and talents.
- Develop a plan for each person to achieve their lifestyle, hopes and dreams.
- Facilitate personal networks to come together to form a circle of support.

What is a Circle of Support?

A group of people who are intentionally invited to come together in friendship and support of a person with a disability, for the purposes of protecting their interests into the future. Not with the expectation that this group might have a responsibility of “caring for” the person BUT with the expectation that if asked people might be pleased to make time and agree to join the Circle to “look out” for the person.

Why Have a Circle?

- Most people who are vulnerable because of disability will always need someone to “look out” for them.
- People with an intellectual disability are often less able to represent themselves, make wise decisions without good advice, protect their interests or speak up for themselves.
- Many people with a disability are vulnerable throughout life; their parents are often the only major source of guidance, support and protection.
- Most parents worry about asking others to take on these roles and are concerned it will burden them or that others won’t want to get involved in the life of their son or daughter.
- Support for parents who, usually have done this looking out for on their own.
- When parents are no longer able to fill these roles there will be people who will retain knowledge of the person, their history and ambitions for their lifestyles.
- Some people have no one filling these roles except paid service workers.
- Paid services will often require that somebody holds them accountable for their support to the person; a Circle would have this role.
- Gives authority to people filling roles in the persons Circle.
- To support a person to shift from a life of isolation and loneliness to genuine friendship and a more rich life.



Getting Started:

The first step in establishing a Circle is to identify a facilitator. You may wish the Belonging Initiative to provide a facilitator at first, or there may be someone in your network who is willing to facilitate the circle.

The facilitator will get to know the person and help identify who may be in the person's network. They will approach those identified and invite them to be involved. The facilitator will be involved in helping people connect with one another individually as well as help organise a get together of everyone involved.

The get together will be fun, include food and will happen in someone's home in an evenings or weekend. While being enjoyable it will be a time to share important things happening in the person's life and how everyone might contribute to make the person's hopes and dreams for their future come true.

Who is involved in a Circle of Support?

People who care about or love the person and are prepared to commit to their friendship and involvement in the Circle for the long-term;

- Family members, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins etc.
- People who step forward might be friends of family, friends of the person, people who support the person,
- Outsiders who have been identified as interested in being involved in the person's life for the long term, advocates etc.
- No one is paid to be a member of a person's Circle of Support.

What roles does a Circle of Support fill?

- Helps the person think about their life and picture a great future.
- Monitor and provide guidance to the person as they move through their life.
- Help the person with the decisions that they make.
- Help the person to pursue their ideal living situation.
- Encourage ways to bring about a range of rich friendships to the person.
- Help the person to have a good support system (possibly be involved in recruiting and informal teaching of paid workers).
- Helping the person retain their personal history and relationships.
- Incidentally Circle members would need to stay in regular contact, to fulfil their commitments within the Circle for the person.
- Help the person to have a fulfilling career and pursue enjoyable and challenging recreation and leisure interests.
- Hold the service provider accountable for their support services.
- Help the person to have and monitor, so that they receive, excellent health care, are emotionally healthy and have financial security.
- Consider issues relating to Guardianship and the Public Trustee.
- Potentially take on helpful roles as needed which may include things like help with budgets, second signatory to bank accounts, holiday planning, coordinating home maintenance, making appointments, overseeing health issues etc.
- Celebrate the person's achievements and stand with them through hardships.



Keeping Strong and Effective for the Long Term

- Identify and recruit people who are passionate about the person and have an interest in looking out for them and their future.
- Develop a shared vision with and for the person that is centred in belonging, participating in family and community, and experiencing ordinary life opportunities, rather than being isolated and lonely.
- Meet on a regular and routine basis (monthly or bi monthly or as often as necessary).
- Identify a method of coordinating and sharing about the work of the Circle, keeping notes of meetings, setting agendas, facilitating the meetings etc.
- Safeguard from becoming professional or owned by the system or a service (i.e. meeting in someone's home around the kitchen table rather than a services office).
- Seek out opportunities to examine the Circles stewardship of their responsibilities, and opportunities for growing and learning about the critical roles the circle and it's members fill.
- Each person in the Circle would need to commit to spending individual, regular time with the person, getting to know them well, learning about their aspirations in life, their daily changing and evolving needs and opinions, their vulnerabilities, strengths and gifts.

The Belonging Initiative is deeply committed to helping people build an inclusive lifestyle in a home and community of that person's choice.

For more information about the Belonging Initiative and Circles of Support please contact:



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