

## Oasis Support Team Principles

1. Nouwen's Concept of Hospitality
2. 'Elements of Hospitality' Model of Engagement
3. 'Appreciative Enquiry'
4. Seligman's Principles for Promoting Wellbeing

### (1). Nouwen's Concept of Hospitality

Henri Nouwen. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements in the Spiritual Life*. (1975 Doubleday. New York)

Hospitality... means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt a life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find their own. (p 68)

Nouwen's understanding suggests many fields in which such space-creation enacts hospitality - the creation of:

- **Physical space** – from architecture to the way we sit or stand with a person.
- **Social space** – creating openings for social connection; rather than being the centre, introducing people to each other in ways that create space for their conversations rather than ours.
- **Intellectual space** – entertaining the ideas of others rather than reacting or coming to quick judgements or overcoming the ideas of others with our own – proving *our* point.
- **Spiritual space** – creating the space for different expressions of the sacred to be entertained and have their own valid life.
- **Emotional space** – creating space for feelings to be expressed and affirmed.

## (2). 'Elements of Hospitality' Model of Engagement



The model of engagement espoused by Oasis begins with a commitment by the Oasis Support Team member to the principle of hospitality as the creation of a free space in all spheres and continues along the lines suggested in the above schema – the central purpose: entering each other's worlds with a view to appreciative understanding, empowerment and support of the other that may follow the listening process.

It begins with **contact**.

The Oasis Support Team member plans to be available to others. The drop-in space in Oasis is one such place where contact may take place. But Oasis Support Team members may also take initiatives to 'put themselves out' to make contact with others, particularly as the team or individual Oasis members are invited to take part in various university activities.

**Listening** is one of the most important aspects of hospitality. It creates space for others to express who they are, what they think, what they believe and opens the way for the deeper listening for and affirmation of feelings.

'Active Listening' is a process in which we tell back to the person to whom we are listening, what we have heard, including our perceptions of their feelings. This clarification process allows others to either correct what they thought they had said or how they are feeling and

also expand and go deeper into what is being entertained, having been affirmed. It is a way of checking understanding and encouraging it.

**Empowerment** happens when we encourage others to continue to explore or adopt a course of action that has come to their consciousness as a result of the hospitable listening process. One way we may be able to support others is to **connect** them with others who we expect will provide appropriate support. E.g. **referring** to Health and Counselling or the International Student Services Unit or FUSA Welfare or Financial Officers. Or it could be simply introducing people to each other to create the possibility of widening supportive friendship networks.

**Accompanying** a person is a powerful way of supporting self-determination – being present and ‘walking beside’ a person over the longer haul. Accompanying is a helpful way of complementing the specialist support services a person may be accessing.

**Resourcing** means putting one’s own resources and networks at the disposal of the other, whether an individual, a student service or a school of the university. Such resourcing may lead to collaborations or partnerships where each party contributes to an enterprise to reach agreed goals. Consistent with principles underlying yhr concept of the Oasis Support Team, Oasis seeks **collaborations** as a primary way of working in the university, each party bringing their own expertise and gifts for a common purpose, rather than Oasis seeking to build its status for its own sake. A key role for Oasis in such collaborations is to act as host for others.

### (3). ‘Appreciative Enquiry’

*Appreciative Inquiry* is a method of problem solving pioneered by David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University in the mid 1980s.  
(Book: [A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry](#) by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney).

To understand the basis of Appreciative Inquiry it is useful to look at the meaning of the two words in context.

**Appreciation** means to recognize and value the contributions or attributes of things and people around us.

**Inquiry** means to explore and discover, in the spirit of seeking to better understand, and being open to new possibilities.

When combined, this means that by appreciating what is good and valuable in the present situation, we can discover and learn about ways to effect positive change for the future.

Appreciative Enquiry was first formulated within the context of business. Rather than continually identifying problems in the running of a business and then trying to solve them, Cooperrider decided to identify and build on strengths. He found this gave the business a more positive culture.

E.g., [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\\_85.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_85.htm)

## **The lessons of Appreciative Enquiry may be applied in Oasis with respect to conversations about difference.**

In Oasis, the idea of Appreciative Enquiry particularly relates to how interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue might be engaged – seeking to understand and value the opinions, beliefs, culture and values of the other as the primary objective rather than primarily to seek to expose differences or to promote one’s own view. Without valuing, exposure of differences can easily become an exercise in reinforcing one’s own existing beliefs and values and become a source of creating conditions for conflict.

Such an approach is consistent with Nouwen’s concept of hospitality as making friendly space for the other, and allowing the other the freedom to explore and express themselves in their own way.

### **(4). Seligman’s Principles for Promoting Wellbeing**

The understanding of wellbeing adopted by Oasis is consistent with those of *Adelaide Thinker in Residence* 2012-2013, **Professor Martin Seligman**, as outlined in *Building the State of Wellbeing – a strategy for South Australia*.  
<http://www.thinkers.sa.gov.au/seligmanreport/> particularly pp. 9 – 29

Seligman’s Framework is:

- Positive Emotion**
- Engagement**
- Relationships**
- Meaning**
- Accomplishment**

A useful resource is Seligman’s book “**Flourishing**” - A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being by Martin Seligman. (Simon & Schuster © 2011. 368 pages)

A useful summary of the book is at:

[http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/\\_documents/a-to-z/s/Seligman\\_10.pdf](http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/s/Seligman_10.pdf)