What is it that leads to situations where, as a person with a disability it is possible to feel completely and truly included as the person you are?

In this current era of disability policy reform in Australia, there is an unprecedented opportunity to bring about real social change to enable people with disabilities to have full inclusion in Australian society. Yet, it seems important to question whether governments, disability service providers and communities have a true understanding of what genuine inclusion for people with disabilities looks and feels like. This project recognises the timeliness to explore what factors contribute to situations where people with disabilities feel genuinely included so that this knowledge can be outlined and used to encourage the best possible outcomes from this social change effort. With more knowledge as to what factors constitute genuine inclusion, an increased capacity can be gained to overcome a great social inequity, that of stigmatisation and exclusion of people with disabilities.

The project is using qualitative interview data from people with disabilities to find out about the specific environments, circumstances, attitudes, behaviours or supports that they perceive lead to times of genuine inclusion. The project is being undertaken as a research dissertation as part of the author’s candidature of the Master of Disability Studies with Flinders University. The outlined project is a work in progress.

Purpose

• To increase understandings of the factors that shape genuinely inclusive settings for people with disabilities.
• To increase knowledge and capacity to plan for, create and foster truly inclusive environments, communities and programs.
• To assist in developing greater knowledge and power to overcome stigmatisation and exclusion of people with disabilities.

Significance

• ‘Inclusion’ is a primary objective of current Australian policy and is used frequently to promote the aims of initiatives and programs in the disability sector. Yet, inclusion is a concept with no single consensual definition.¹
• Varying perspectives on inclusion results in a varying quality of initiatives and programs, some falling short of producing a real sense of inclusion.²
• It is timely given the current policy context to contribute to resolving these issues by understanding what factors help foster genuinely inclusive situations; with the intent of such findings translating into practice.

Approaches to Inclusion

• Approaches to delivering inclusive initiatives and programs can be seen as fitting within two determinations;
  - Narrow – recognises only particular interactions and activities as counting towards inclusion, excluding other factors.
  - Broad – Considers in greater depth the meaning and quality of interactions and activities, paying greater attention to a person’s sense of belonging, quality of relationships and participation in valued roles.³

This study adopts a conceptualisation of genuine inclusion that captures the features of a broad approach to inclusion because these approaches appear to produce the most meaningful outcomes.

Genuine Inclusion

The experience of genuine inclusion is categorised by:
• Sense of belonging to a community and environment.
• Feelings of being valued, respected and trusted.
• Participation as a unique individual, recognised for more than disability.
• Participation in valued roles of one’s choosing.
• Meaningful participation.
• Meaningful, reciprocal relationships with others.

Now to find out what factors contribute to genuine inclusion...

Methods

• Sample of people living in Australia who identify as living with a disability, who are 18 or older.
• Telephone or face to face semi-structured interviews.
• Participants will be asked about the factors that help them to enjoy situations of genuine inclusion.

Interview question examples:

“With what people do you feel included?”
“Why do you think those people are particularly good at enabling you to feel included?”
“What supports or assistance are you receiving or not receiving when you feel included?”
“In what environments do you feel most included?”

Future Directions

Still recruiting participants!
• Thematic analysis of qualitative data
• Dissemination of results.