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**Abstract:**

This interview discusses the Personalised Lifestyle Assistance project, (PLA) established by Deb Rouuget in Melbourne. PLA assists families to implement person-centred planning for their family member with disability. Genuine person-centeredness builds a life plan around the unique identity and desires of each individual. The program is built around the individual, rather than the traditional approach of offering the individual choice within a limited range of pre-determined alternatives.

The success story of Cameron, a young man living happily with a house-mate without disability, highlights how PLA helps individuals and their families to break down barriers and pursue the unique future of their dreams.

# What Money Can't Buy

Deb Rouget, edited by Quinn Stacpoole

Deb Rouget is empowering people who have a disability to determine their own future by marrying love, understanding and compassion with disability service provision. She's the project facilitator of the Personalised Lifestyle Assistance (PLA) project, a small government funded resource and assistance project that works with people who have disabilities and their families to design solutions, arrangements or projects that enable them to have greater control over their lives.

Infoxchange's Quinn Stacpoole recently caught up with her and asked a few questions to find out more:

## **Quinn Stacpoole (QS): What is the person centred approach to disability service provision?**

**Deb Rouget (DR):** Person-centeredness is often confused with technologies and fads e.g. person-centred planning approaches. However person-centeredness goes well beyond any technology or plan, as it is an ethic that speaks to how we treat those we serve and what we do in people's lives.

We can no longer assume just because people share the same label or disability they will want the same things and thus we need to avoid predetermining our models of support or giving people a list of limited options and confusing this with genuine choice.

Genuine person-centeredness searches for the identity of each person and forces us to ask the person specific questions that search for their uniqueness and how they want to live their life. For example, where they want to live, work, study and recreate and who with. If genuine person-centeredness is our guiding ethic then inevitably we will need to craft a unique response around each person. Such responses may not even presently exist. This takes imagination, creativity and thinking beyond what might be presently available today. In this sense we would create as many service or support responses as there are people.

## **QS: What's an example of the current system not taking the individual's needs into consideration?**

**DR:** Many of our current support structures may be inadequate as they are designed well before the person arrives. Thus the person needs to "fit" what is offered on a limited menu or even experience responses that seem

peculiar to most other people in society. Examples of this would be services that congregate people based on their label and offer predetermined models of support that are designed before the person arrives.

**QS: What's your future vision for the disability sector and how far have we come?**

**DR:** What would assist people would be space and encouragement from government departments and agencies to support and encourage the creation of small, family/self governed semi-autonomous projects that build capacity (i.e. the capacity to support unique individuals) in people and communities. One way of achieving this would be to expose people to others who have imagined better and have a proven track record in creating genuine personalised support arrangements. This would not necessarily use more resources but rather seek to use current resources differently.

**QS: What are some common questions or issues raised by people who come from a more traditional service approach but want to know more about the person centred approach and what would be your response?**

**DR:** There's often confusion about what genuine person-centeredness is or involves. Often traditional services adopt the terminology or language of a particular way of doing things. Thus we see congregate care facilities adopt the terminology of "person-centeredness" but when one examines what is being provided people are still served as groups of people and come together based on a label rather than a genuine desire to share life.

There is also an assumption that individualised funding or brokerage systems is all that is required to create person-centred approaches. These can be helpful but we need to place faith in the reality that there are simply some things that money cannot purchase or produce. For example money does not purchase love, compassion, trust, understanding, humility or respect. It does not end loneliness, seek out relationships, or make a house a home. It can't on its own assist a person who has been isolated from their community to become intertwined in their local neighbourhood and develop friendships. It can't be "with" people in times of crisis, need or desperation. These things come from the hearts of people and their personal investment to find the humanness in each other.

**QS: Are there any success stories of the person centred approach that stand out in your mind?**

**DR:** There are possibly too many to mention. But I would like to share a recent story of a young man in country Victoria. Cameron (who has a dual disability) shares life with a friend (who does not have a disability) of his choosing in his own place. His housemate receives free rent in return for support but it is more than an inexpensive model of support. Its driven from Cameron's wants and need for friendship and companionship rather than an over reliance on paid service or staffing model. Cameron's story also highlights the notion that people will come forward to share life with people who have a disability if asked. Recently his housemate said that Cameron was the best person she had ever shared with!

Cameron's story is an example of a continual search to get it "right" for him. To listen deeply and for those around him to admit that they did not have it right rather than think something was "wrong" with Cameron. It's an example of where people came together to assist Cameron to create a typical lifestyle that embraces his own desires. It is a genuine attempt towards person-centeredness as all efforts begun with Cameron and will change with Cameron as he so desires.

[Read Cameron's Story as told by his parents \(Word document 23kB\)](#)

### **More about the Personalised Lifestyle Assistance (PLA) project**

The Personalised Lifestyle Assistance (PLA) project was created after the success of another project that Deb was involved with called 'Person by Person'. This was a project that brought together several families and helped them create a new, more self-sufficient way of caring for their family members who have a disability. By joining forces the families were able to become independent from the conventional models of support that were available, which in turn gave the disabled families members a greater ability to determine the course of their own lives.

The project is funded by a non-recurrent grant from The Department of Human Services (DHS) as it fits neatly into the government's new approach to disability service provision, an approach they call Individualised Planning and Support (IP&S). This new way of matching service provision to the individuals needs is a stipulation of the ten year State Disability Plan formed in 2002.

If people would like further information they can contact:

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