

COSMOS RECREATION SERVICES

Leisure Pathways

**“Promoting genuine inclusion
For people with a disability”**

Background to a proposal for
the establishment of a project to trial a new approach to service provision in
Tasmania

Contents

Introduction	1
About Cosmos.....	2
Project background	3
Inclusion issues in Tasmania.....	3
Responding to Individual Needs	3
Operational times of services (specialised and generic).....	3
Service Dependency.....	4
Community Attitudes.....	4
Staff/client ratios	4
Some Alternate Approaches across Australia	5
Connections Project.....	5
Side by Side.....	5
Interstate Services	6
Key Elements for Success	7
Small numbers.....	7
Shared interests.....	7
Motivation of individual.	7
Flexibility of hours.	8
Finding the right staff	8
Clearly defined principles.....	8

Introduction

This document explores a number of issues relating to inclusion for people with disabilities in leisure activities in Tasmania and proposes a trial of a new service delivery model that will lead to inclusion of individuals with disabilities in generic leisure organisations.

The proposal is based on a review of some alternate approaches that have been and currently are in operation across Australia and the key elements for success identified within those projects.

This proposal includes a summary and description of the project, expected outcomes, the proposed target group, evaluation processes, timelines, a budget and project management details.

This document was developed by a working group which included representation from:

- Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Services Policy Unit,
- Office of Sport and Recreation,
- Cosmos Inc Board of Management and
- Cosmos Recreation Service staff members.

This document will be used as the basis for funding submissions seeking financial support for the project.

The proposed model that will be presented in this document is underpinned by the principles of Social Role Valorisation, which requires that:

“to the highest degree and in as many life areas as feasible, a person has the opportunity to be personally integrated into the valued life of society.”

The project is modeled on the Hornsby Challenge approach from New South Wales.

About Cosmos

Cosmos is a non-government community organisation, which provides developmental opportunities for people with disabilities (mostly intellectual) through the provision of recreation and leisure activities in community based settings.

The service was incorporated in 1982, and has a long established commitment to developing and providing innovative program options to meet individual and community needs.

Cosmos has a strong focus on enhancing the relationship between people with disabilities and the wider community through its programs, including a Community Education and Training program that informs and educates the wider community on current issues affecting people with disabilities.

The proposed project will extend and complement the services that Cosmos currently provides, as well as filling a long-standing gap in service provision more generally. The project will also extend and create new links between specialised disability services and sport, recreation and other leisure organisations.

Cosmos is funded primarily by the State Department of Community and Health Services through the Commonwealth State Disability Agreement (CSDA) and the Community Integration Project (CIP).

Project background

Inclusion issues in Tasmania

Tasmania has a number of services that provide opportunities for people with an intellectual/developmental disability to participate in leisure and recreation activities. However within these services there appears to be a lack of focus upon supporting people to carry out their chosen pursuits within mainstream clubs/organisations in a manner which strives to be as inclusive as possible, and that supports the establishment of genuine friendships and networks.

It seems there is an assumption within many services, both specialised, and generic that 'community presence' equals community integration and inclusion. While services may access a variety of 'community based' organisations, in reality there are limited opportunities for ongoing and true inclusive practices to be developed and maintained. Some of the more specific reasons behind this are as follows:

Responding to Individual Needs

The level of service input required to ensure positive outcomes for people can vary greatly from person to person, and it is not realistic to assume that the amount of time needed to support one individual will be the same for the next person. Therefore a level of flexibility is required. However, given that existing services operate within fairly rigid time frames, and taking into account the limited ability to provide one to one support over an extended period of time, opportunities for true inclusive practices can be greatly hindered.

In addition people with disabilities are often grouped together to enable organisations to provide a service to as many people as possible within the existing allocation of resources. As a result of this it is often difficult to dedicate sufficient time to any one person.

Operational times of services (specialised and generic)

Many specialised services that offer recreation and leisure options to people with disabilities operate within standard business hours, with only a handful of organisations providing a service outside of these. However, the broader community tends to participate in recreation and leisure outside of standard business hours, and so opportunities for people with disabilities are often restricted to accessing the limited number of generic services that have the same operational times as specialised services. This greatly reduces the choices available to the person with a disability.

Service Dependency

Existing service systems are often unable to provide the planning; coordination and support necessary to assist individuals to move through their service and onto a generic based organisation.

Long term effects for some people who are 'caught' in this 'specialised service' system can include service dependency, and limited opportunities for development of social networks, other than with paid workers. These relationships are more often than not inadequate, as workers move on and there is little or no opportunity for reciprocity, which in turn creates an obvious inequity in the relationship. Moreover, these relationships are founded on a professional working relationship rather than shared interests

Other relationships that may form through the use of specialised services maybe between other members of the group with disabilities, however many people would like the opportunity to extend their networks outside of this group.

Community Attitudes

Generic services that do have people with disabilities as members of their organisation often do so with a level of trepidation and uncertainty.

Research shows that fears may be due to concerns about difference, and that there may be a lack of understanding about some of the more specific support requirements for these members. This can lead to a less than effective relationship between the two parties or in many cases the complete breakdown of the relationship. This in turn may create further feelings of failure and a possible unwillingness of the person with a disability to 'try again', likewise the generic service may be reluctant to involve any person with a disability in future.

Staff/client ratios

Existing services are generally only able to provide support to people within a group structure, and with finite resources. While this provides a social setting among peers, it is often extremely difficult to find the time necessary to allow for more concentrated and specific one to one interaction and skill development. Staff/client ratios present greater challenges when the above issues of service hours, service dependency and community attitudes need to be addressed before a person with a disability can participate in their activity of choice.

Some Alternate Approaches across Australia

There have been a number of attempts across Australia to establish a service model that supports people with disabilities to be included into mainstream groups and clubs.

Tasmanian projects include:

Connections Project

The Connections Project was established in 1990 and aimed to provide opportunities for people residing at Willow Court, to access generic groups and clubs in the New Norfolk area. The project was based on the Leisure Buddy scheme, and was designed to build friendships and social networks through volunteers within identified organisations.

The staff responsible for the program put a great deal of effort into getting to know the individuals at Willow Court, facilitating community education sessions which were complimented by extensive marketing and advertising in local papers.

This project was operational for approximately 2 years and while there were some documented successes, the overall project was reported to be fraught with problems.

Given that the target group was restricted to people residing at Willow Court at the time and that the generic groups and clubs were largely only within the New Norfolk area, this significantly reduced the scope for the project.

Out of a reported 8 individuals involved in the project some long term relationships were developed for at least 3 individuals. Whether those relationships have been maintained is unknown.

Discussions with the people who established and co-ordinated the service suggested that there were a number of difficulties associated with the project, which included a general lack of support for the approach from many staff at Willow Court. This situation was combined with resistance from the community to participate (generally due to a lack of understanding of the needs of people with disabilities and possibly because of the institutional label attached to the project and its participants), and the changing priorities of Willow Court given the Community Integration Project.

Side by Side

Side by Side, has been operating for approximately three and a half years and is coordinated by one individual, who is responsible for all facets of the service. The program is offered in Southern Tasmania and aims to link people with a disability and volunteers through common interests or age.

This service has provided matches for 18 individuals and at present there are 6 successful and ongoing relationships.

Given that this service relies wholly on volunteers and is managed by one individual it has done remarkably well, however the ongoing need for volunteers, and the ability to maintain existing volunteers has been extremely difficult. In addition to this problem, the time required to train and then support the relationship in the early stages is very limited given the resources.

Interstate Services

There are a number of organisations throughout mainland Australia that currently aim to support genuine participation for people with disabilities within generic clubs/ organisations. These organisations include:

- Recreation Network Inc. (Western Australia),
- Hornsby Challenge (New South Wales),
- Total Recreation (Northern Territory),
- Inclusion Works (Queensland).

While each of these services has similar goals and aims, their models vary.

One organisation works primarily with people with physical disabilities, another is inclusive of all people with disabilities, however their client base is predominantly made up of people with an intellectual disability. The target group for the remaining two services is again people with an intellectual disability.

The next Section discusses the key elements of success in the interstate projects.

Key Elements for Success

While all of these organisations have a degree of success there were some consistently stated key elements that all reported were necessary and preferable, in order to maximize the opportunities for success. These are as follows:

Small numbers.

All but one service that was contacted supported a growing number of people, with one organization having in excess of 300 individuals on their database. Only one service works with a consistent number of people and this figure was in excess of 60.

While the actual figure varied across organisations all reported that it would be far more beneficial to have smaller numbers of people to support through the process and for fairly obvious reasons, which are as follows:

- Increased opportunity to spend 'quality time' with individuals to determine what their interest/s might be.
- Ability to design a more comprehensive plan for each person.
- Increased opportunity to spend more time with the designated group or club and eventually with the person with a disability in becoming involved in the group.

Smaller numbers can be an important in another context: where an organisation is welcoming of people with a disability, it can be easy to refer several people to it with the consequence that either people with a disability have a greater presence than in the community in general, or that the group feels that it is being 'taken-over'. It is important to ensure that the number of people with a disability present does not alter the nature of the organisation or activities that it conducts.

Shared interests

It is not surprising to learn that often people make and maintain friendships and relationships with people who share a common interest. These relationships are forged not on feelings of benevolence but rather of mutual enthusiasms.

Motivation of individual.

All organisations reported that finding what the person is passionate and interested in is a vital key to the success of the process and for the development of genuine friendships.

Therefore, it is necessary to support the individual's interests and foster their enthusiasm and motivation. In some instances, this may require some work to discover what the interest is.

Flexibility of hours.

Ensuring that staff have sufficient flexibility in supporting people is obviously a vital component in making this 'networking' process a success. Staff need to be able to work with individuals outside of the traditional 9am to 3.30pm time slot at the times when generic clubs and groups are operating. If the person with a disability is not able to access at these times then not only are we reducing their opportunities to participate but also we are significantly minimizing the variety of clubs and groups available.

Finding the right staff

Given the type of work involved in these organisations, it was stated by all contacted that finding the right people for the job was of paramount importance. Some services did employ people with a strong recreation or traditional disability background, but others moved away from these skill areas and focused on people with above average social and interpersonal skills.

Clearly defined principles.

One particular service stated the absolute necessity to ensure that the program and the staff have a clear understanding and belief in the principles of the service. These principles need to be clearly defined in the early stages of the projects establishment and should be the basis from which the service operates. It is also essential that the project has clearly defined referral processes where the organisation determines an individual's suitability.