

## Record

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**Abstract**

These notes were taken by Wendy McGlynn, a parent who attended a seminar on Family Support Networks by Bruce Uditsky, an educator who has worked extensively with families, individuals with disabilities and organisations. Uditsky encourages families to start building up networks while their child is still young, and offers suggestions on how families can become involved in their community. He emphasises that people with disabilities who have more relationships in their lives as a child have greater possibilities of developing their own networks as an adult. **Keyword: Families**

# FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS

BRUCE UDITSKY - August, 1991

Family support relates to:

- What is important for you as a family.
- What is important for the child.

People are not fallible ... and we can expect that this will affect the support given.

Supports develop with nurturing ... they are supports for everyday life - crisis support is different. Crisis resolution should not become the permanent solution. Segregation builds service-dependency - and experience has shown that children with a disability who are segregated are catered for in a different way. This doesn't lead to true emotional fulfilment and can bring about a mind-set.

Informal family support is preferable as formal created supports are least likely over time to do the best by the family and child, even though organised with good intentions:

- Their ability to sustain over time has not been substantiated.
- An organisation is less flexible than informal supports.

**Informal Social Support depends on the idea of friends, colleagues ... an informal network in your life. All of us are interdependent, i.e. we need other people in our lives.**

Time needs to be spent on building relationships.

Maintaining a natural network to the extent that it exists is easier than creating a new one. Sustaining a network takes time, but the time will be well spent because it will change people's lives.

It's important to work on networking while your child is young, as it is easier to establish networks at this stage. You must be willing to be humble ... to be ready to ask people in your network (e.g. friends, grandparents) if you need or would like assistance. Generally there will be opportunities to reciprocate.

The 'community' we build up around us helps mould our self-image.

People need to discuss what it means and talk about how they can assist.

## Strategies:

- Meeting with family friends to look at issues - these groups are more likely to come up with problem-solving ideas. The members then often feel more prepared to follow through with ongoing contributions, e.g. give the child a lift somewhere.
- "Return to what you already know best" - invite people over, nurture friendships because we need social support, i.e. a social network whether or not we have a child with a disability.
- Work at keeping friends ... "friendship is giving".
- Work at all inclusive opportunities, not segregated. This doesn't mean it's always achievable but it does mean working towards that end. **Understand what the pathway should look like.**
- Identify through commonality (role identity commonality), e.g. while not a playing member, the family person with disability could be equipment manager for a sports team. In this case the contribution is recognised for what it is - the person with a disability challenging themselves at their own level.
- Remember, if you don't get involved in the community outside your families, the opportunities and possibilities don't present themselves.

If you have difficulties with lack of support within your network, remember that failing and giving up is problematic and it's natural to hold off for a while if things don't work out.

Where possible, the family (including the person with a disability) should involve itself in the life of the community: This results in an expanded network. If we don't do this we end up turning to other families who have a child with a disability. This is fine but needs to be balanced if the community is to be involved.

Don't concentrate only on disability issues as it is too narrow a base from which to build natural supports.

Conversations in community situations, e.g. working bees, form the 'glue' of future friendships/networks.

Those people with disabilities who have had more relationships in their lives as a child have greater possibilities of developing their own network as an adult. For this to happen it's important that families/parents do not think of their child with a disability as a burden as this message will affect other people's attitudes.

The family has to decide how to go about it ... it has to do with values, relationships with one another, and how you want people to see your relationship with your child.

For effective networking:

- do your utmost to get your son or daughter involved in the life of your community
- you need a multiplicity of opportunities - you can't just rely on family
- you can't tell siblings what to do ... but you can open possibilities
- always be open to possibilities - even if it sometimes brings disappointment