

Planning for a good life

Planning for a happy and secure adult life is usually at the forefront of the minds of parents of a young person with an intellectual disability. Cheryl and Brian Linaker decided to take a proactive approach to securing a good life for their daughter Karli. Cheryl learned about the concept of Vision Days and, when Karli was 18 years old, the family supported her to arrange and host a Vision Day, to help her articulate her dreams, encourage local understanding of and support for these, and to consolidate her position within the local community. They successfully included a large number of people directly in making a difference in her life, and creating a community safeguard around her. The following, written by Cheryl, is an account of how this went.

My husband and I feel that employment is an important part of community living. It provides people with one of the most valued roles in our community and it assists community inclusion. We believe Karli needs to pursue the same pathways to employment as anyone else. Her future was looming and nothing much was happening.

While young adults in our culture may not ordinarily hold a 'vision day' to explore their future with family and friends, we wanted to do this because we were conscious of the fact that Karli needed assistance articulating and pursuing her dreams.

We spent time planning with Karli and asked a good friend to facilitate the day.

We wanted to be sure our friends would go home feeling good about the day and we also thought it important that our friends look on the day less as a formal workshop and more as a typical family gathering... but with a specific focus: to share Karli's vision and explore some future possibilities. Twenty five heads are better than one!

We believe our community has the capacity and willingness to welcome people with disabilities and their families. Within our town, we have many good hearted friends with positive attitudes and some of them are well connected within the community. People with disabilities have lots to teach us and can actually help communities see ways in which positive change can be made.

The outcomes we were wanting to achieve from the day were:

- To share the vision with friends
- To acknowledge the valuable contribution that friends make in life
- To explore ideas around employment opportunities for Karli

We opted to hold the day in our family home and sent invitations out to 25 family members, friends and members of the local community. We wrote our own vision for Karli's future (see box) and had it on display at the Vision Day, together with a list Karli compiled of her interests.



Our Vision for Karli

The future we see for Karli is for her to have a valued life of contentment in her own home, surrounded by personal friends and family who care about her, and to find love and happiness with a life long partner and enrich her own family as she has enriched ours.

In this future we envisage for Karli, she will be valued by people for who she is and for the contributions she makes to our town. We see Karli progressing down interesting pathways through life, like all of us. These may include courses at TAFE, Involvement in interesting groups or even travel. She will have an interesting and secure job with challenges where she's around good people and that this will lead to her being legally and financially secure.

On the day itself, our facilitator friend introduced the event and thanked everyone for coming.

We acknowledged that our daughter is a valued member of the community with lots to offer. Following this the group brainstormed an inventory of Karli's interests and gifts and spoke of possible opportunities based on her interests. We talked about developing and supporting new networks for her.

During the day we also brainstormed, as a group, a list of important things for a good life, and then my husband and I shared our prepared vision for Karli's life and future – which contained all the same elements.

We then focused on how people get jobs in the community. How could Karli find a challenging job, and how could she find roles in the community that would lead her to independence and support her pathway from school? We also talked about how important friends are, and about family and community connections. The list below is the product of our brainstorm.

How do people get jobs in our community?

- By using your connections of friends and family.
- Being known well and connected in the community.
- Doing voluntary work in and for the community.
- Volunteering to do work experience for free as a way of increasing your skills and exposure.
- Doing varied work experiences.
- Answering ads in the paper for job vacancies.
- Using employment agencies.
- Increasing your skills at TAFE to become more employable.
- Realising that small jobs lead to big jobs.
- Identifying and being clear about what you want.

- Canvassing for work through letters of introduction.
- Broadening your horizons and experiences through travel.
- Expanding your networks by joining committees and doing voluntary work, which could create employment opportunities?
- Develop a CV and keep it current and relevant with positive references from past employment or work and life experiences.
- Being seen as competent by developing greater independence.
- Starting your own business.
- Being prepared to have a go at anything as a means to other employment.

We followed with a BBQ. The day seemed to flow. We had fun and a positive environment was maintained throughout the day. We achieved all the outcomes we wanted and, interestingly, no-one talked of any specialist employment agencies or any segregated settings – and the word ‘disability’ wasn’t mentioned all day! I am sure everyone went home feeling happy that they had contributed something worthwhile. Expectations held of Karli are now higher than before – but achievable. I am not suggesting that life is perfect or uncomplicated for Karli. It is still unresolved to a certain extent but it is infinitely better than it was and we are now feeling a lot more confident about her future.

Today, Karli is actively involved within her community. She attends TAFE where she is studying for Certificate I in Visual Arts, and has her own small business at a local market here, with some support, she learns new skills in making chocolates and all other aspects of being a stallholder and where she is an important part of her community.

by Cheryl Linaker

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