

Circles of Support for People with Disability:



**RESEARCH AND PRACTICE –
TRANSITIONS.**

• AINSLIE GEE

What is a Circle of Support?



- “A group of committed men and women who are in a relationship with a person who is isolated and vulnerable by reason of disability, age, living arrangement, limited opportunities, or societies perception”. – *PLAN Institute 2009*

What is a Circle of Support?



- “A group of people who are intentionally invited to come together in friendship and support of a person with a disability, for the purposes of protecting their interests into the future. Not with the expectation that this group might have a responsibility of “caring for” the person BUT with the expectation that if asked people might be pleased to make time and agree to join the Circle to “look out” for the person”. – *the Circles Initiative, SA.*

Ubuntu



- One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu – the essence of being human. My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in your humanity...I am a person through you as a person:
 - ❖ Southern African word for humanness
 - ❖ Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation;
 - ❖ It speaks about our inter-connectedness;
 - ❖ You can't be human all by yourself;
 - ❖ An expression of community life and collective responsibility;
 - ❖ Refers to understanding diversity and engaging difference.
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 'No Future Without Forgiveness'.***

A Circle of Support is...



- One way of holding and shaping the work, the thought, the caring, and the people that are the only ingredients that matter in whatever set of ‘solutions’ are decided upon...the circle is one way to hold and invite relationship. – *Janet Kleese*

Circle Technology:



1. Purpose –

- Why do I want a circle?
- What is the reason for this circle?

2. Who is the circle for?

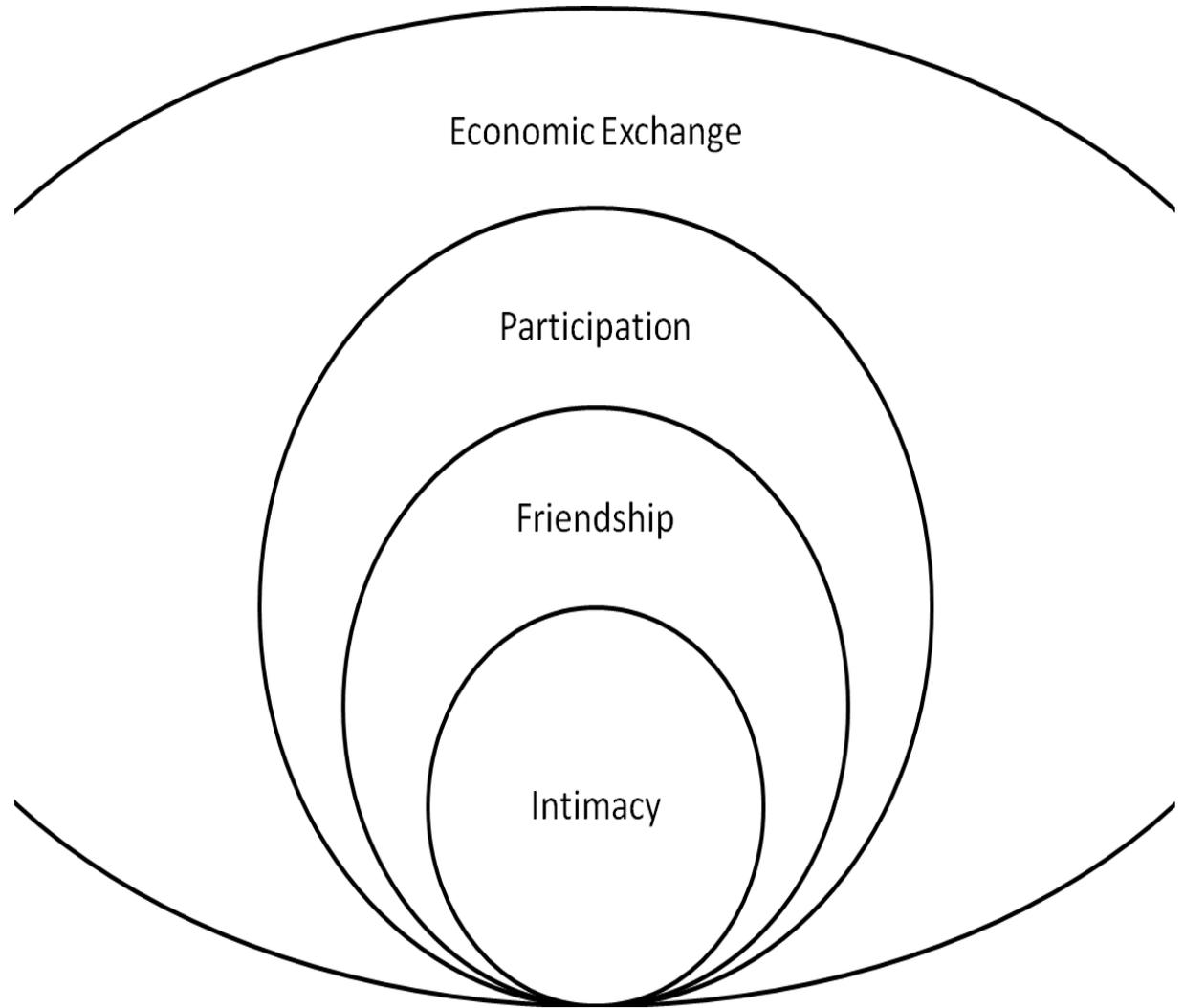
3. What is my value system, and my vision for a good life for my son or daughter?

4. Who shall I invite?

- Who are where are the relationships (existing or potential) in my life?

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Relationship Map

Relationship:



1. What will happen to my daughter or son when I am no longer here?
 2. I can't do it on my own any longer...?
- In a world where relationship is the number one safeguard to vulnerable people's lives, circles may offer a beginning place for relationship to take place...[circles] have been a good place to learn lessons about building...the magic of relationship first hand. (Kleese, 2007, p.5)

Roles within a circle



- 'Focus Person'
- Circle Member
- Facilitator
- Other formal roles can include:
- Note taker, food organiser, event organiser, birthday monitor, phone call email and 'texter', chauffeur, host, party planner.
- ***The most important role in the circle is FRIEND – as circle members, people are there because they choose to be, in unpaid relationship with the focus person.***

The Power of Social Roles



- A social role may be viewed as combination of...

Behaviors, Functions, Relationships,
Privileges, Duties, Responsibilities

...that is socially defined, is widely understood and recognised within a society, and is characteristic or expected of a person who occupies a particular position within a social system.

Wolf Wolfensburger, 1988.

- Roles can be positive or negative – valued or devalued: eg:

POSITIVE:

Home/land owner

Worker

NEGATIVE:

Homeless/street person

Idler

The Power of Roles:



- It is largely via their roles that people define and situate themselves in the world
- ‘Big’ roles can negate or enhance usually perceived devalued roles
- Role hunger – people will seek out whatever roles they can even if that means negative ones
- The power of imagery
- Roles are particularly powerful for circles, without them members can get lost, and lack of clarity can lead the circle to dissolve.

The Power of Roles: - Torrin's Life



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Te mahi tahi ki nga hapori, ki te tiaki i a rauu taonga

fire.org.nz

Challenges of a Circle of Support:



1. Social Isolation:

- ❖ Couldn't continue doing it alone / Exhaustion
- ❖ What happens when I am no longer here?
- ❖ Wanted something more – imagining better

2. Clarifying Circle of Support Technology

3. Fear of Rejection – Vulnerability

4. Circle of Support Not meeting its goals

Benefits of a Circle of Support 1:



1. Exploration and Planning:

- Circle members genuinely care for the Focus Person
- Having a key person to assist negotiate technology
- Taking time in the planning stages
- Invited large group based on FP strengths & interests
- Members captured the vision of the FP and the circle
- Values based decision making – nothing was too difficult
- Clarity of roles of circle members
- Pioneering – permission to create a way that fits

Benefits of a Circle of Support 2:



2. Inviting and Establishing:

- Circle has a focus on reciprocal relationships
- Sustainability was nurtured through reciprocity
- Challenge for parents, while maintaining the integrity of the authority of the family
- Members genuinely care for the focus person
- Created possibility, dreams, options
- Intentionally nurtured relationships

Benefits of a Circle of Support 3:



3. Overall outcomes:

- Increased wellbeing;
- Reduced Social Isolation;
- Increased Relationships – Friends;
- Members committed to the person for life;
- Safeguarding ;
- Able to plan for the future;

Circles of Support & Transitions



- Transitions to increased wellbeing:

Decision making

Autonomy

Freedom

Independence

Power

Choice

Social Opportunities

Happiness

Trust.

- A transition to community
- From Isolation and loneliness to relationship

Relationships:



- Take time, motivation and skill;
- Require taking risks;
- Require having something in common;
- Sometimes friendship development has to be intentional;
- People who live with supportive relationships are less likely to become ill or die prematurely or develop mental illness;
- Contribute to the well being of people
- Positively affects our sense of personal control.



A circle of support can be the difference between living on the edge of community and active inclusion and participation.

It can be a persons strongest foundation for a meaningful future

Might a Circle of Support be Useful?



- Are there any unpaid people in this persons life?
- Do I believe there are others who will care and contribute to this persons life?
- Is there room for others to be involved in this persons life?
- Am I prepared to take some risks (and support this person and/or their family to do so)?
- Is this persons safety and wellbeing compromised and is this causing anxiety?
- Is this person (and/or their family) prepared to ask others to help?

Adapted from 'A Good Life', Al Etmanski