

Getting Well Together

Active citizens

Strong families

Welcoming community



Wellways vision is of a society where people affected by disability and their families and friends can imagine and achieve their potential. We recognise many people affected by disability do not have equal rights and outcomes when compared with people who do not experience disability; and that people are excluded from valued areas of life – from employment and education, affordable housing, accessible services and social and cultural relationships within community.

From inclusion to transformation

Australia was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, recognising “the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others” (*United Nations, 2006*). However, in spite of a societal movement away from institutional solutions and toward community support and social inclusion, this commitment has yet to result into genuine equality of opportunity and outcomes for people with disability in Australia:

- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranked Australia in 2009 as the lowest of 27 OECD countries in terms of quality of life for people with disabilities
- Rates of social and economic inequality facing Australians with disability - compared to their fellow citizens - are among the highest in the world (*PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011*)
- Almost one in two people with a disability live in poverty: 45% in Australia compared to the OECD average of 22%; and only 54% of people with disability are employed compared to 83% of people without a disability (*OECD, 2010*)
- People with disabilities experience major health inequalities (*Mithen et al, 2015*) and disproportionate levels of violence (*Krnjacki et al, 2016*) compared with the general population

While access to effective treatment and rehabilitation is vital for people who experience physical, intellectual or psychological conditions, a contemporary understanding of disability sees social inclusion interventions as equally important to counter the disabling impact of marginalisation, discrimination and loss of human rights.

Social model of disability

While people with a disability may experience a physical, intellectual or psychological condition that causes significant impairment, the experience of disability is caused by social, economic or physical environments that exclude or limit people’s opportunities to live and participate in the community on an equal level with others

- World Health Organization, 2001

Social inclusion emerged as a policy direction in the late twentieth century, and has been a key driver in Australia’s overall social policy agenda; particularly in the work of community services and non-government organisations, and in policy research and advocacy (*Azpitarte, 2013*).

A review of the literature on social inclusion in Australia (*Gooding et al 2017*) suggests that policy aspirations in this area have yet to achieve much more than the “illusion of inclusion”, with few real outcomes for people affected by disability and little guidance for organisations and practitioners on how inclusion might be practically and effectively implemented. The researchers noted several relevant critiques of social inclusion:

- The scope of social inclusion is limited, and may focus on a minimal level of participation, which may still mean the person exists at the fringes without necessarily living a “good life” (*Goodin, 1996*)
- Social inclusion tends to be a top-down policy or practice, implying that someone else, typically a state-based service, is doing the including, rather than the person making active demands and contributions on an equal basis with other citizens (*Daly & Silver, 2008*)
- Social inclusion in disability policy and practice do not, on the whole, aim to radically transform communities or to engage with the broader systemic concerns that lead to and perpetuate exclusion and disability

More promising approaches for services to do effective inclusion work with a focus on longer-term and larger scale transformation included:

- Offering assistance to help people connect to local groups, employment opportunities, or to maintain and/or discover relationships
- Offering resources and advocating to community groups, services, workplaces, and other settings to assist them to become more open and accessible to people with disabilities
- Advocacy for change on exclusionary or discriminatory practices
- Offering resources and support to individuals and to families to increase their self-advocacy and capacity to develop social connections

A focus on active citizenship is at the heart of the approach. Being connected and having a sense of belonging is fundamental to everyone's experience of a full and rewarding life. Communities also benefit enormously from the diversity and richness of ideas, experiences and knowledge that people with a disability bring to cultural, social and civic life.

Achieving this means directing our efforts to community transformation – by engaging community members as allies; creating welcoming spaces in community; and

building and supporting a grassroots advocacy movement in which the people who are most affected by disability are able to join their voices, step into leadership roles and have real influence at local, state and national level.

References

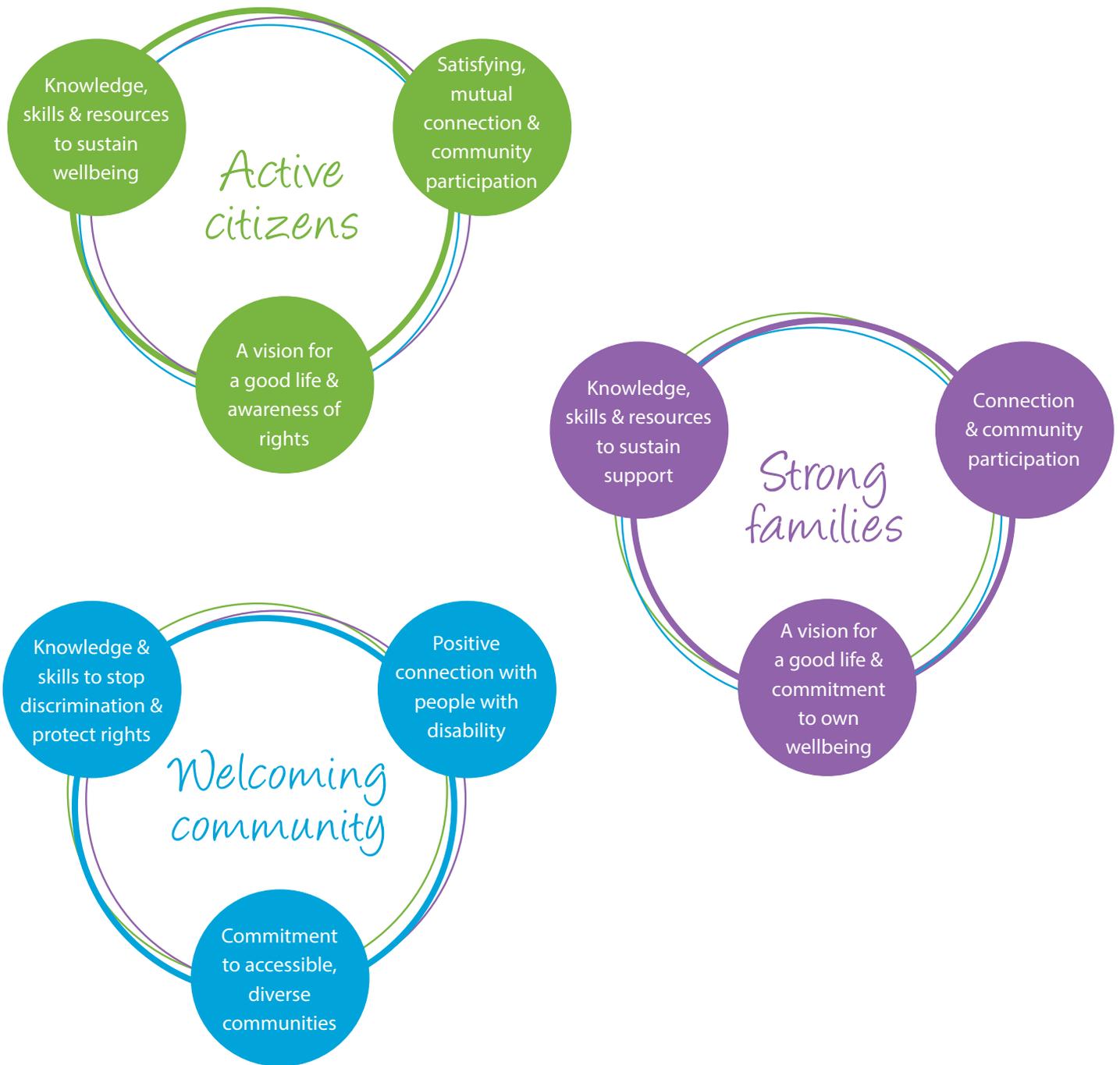
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Well Together

As an organisation dedicated to making a real difference in people's quality of life and equality of rights, Wellways believes our work must include effective methods to improve wellbeing and to transform our relationships, networks, communities and society to provide equal rights, opportunities and outcomes for people affected by disability. In collaboration with the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion, we have developed Well Together, an approach based in three essential commitments:

- **To ensure people with disabilities can fully participate in the community and claim their rights as citizens: material and physical security, personal autonomy and influence**
- **To work with families, carers, friends and kin to build the skills and resources they need as key supports, and to flourish in their own right**
- **To advocate for and create communities that actively welcome and value people with disabilities and uphold their rights as equal citizens**

The Well Together approach draws on the best contemporary evidence of what supports inclusion and wellbeing, and is fundamentally informed by the expertise of people with lived experience of disability. It takes a systems approach to improving wellbeing and citizenship; working in partnership with individuals, family and friendship networks, local communities and government to achieve greater equality of outcomes for people affected by disability.



The approach builds on a set of fundamental principles, forming a blueprint for effective supports and services.

The Well Together principles:

- Emphasise and **advocate for community inclusion as an equally critical intervention** alongside treatment and rehabilitation
- Ensure **opportunities for inclusion are available to everyone** who experiences a disability, even if others believe they are “not yet ready”
- See people as unique individuals with **strengths and gifts** to offer, and not defined by their impairments
- Support people to **take the lead in making choices and decisions** about things that are important to them, including managing any risks that may be involved
- Work with people to explore **multiple areas of life and community spaces that interest them**, not restricted by what others believe is possible or desirable
- Promote participation that happens **in the same places everyone else in the community can access**, and maximise opportunities for connection with others
- Offer **evidence-based support technologies that enable participation** including peer support, engaging family and friends, and natural support development
- **Support families and natural supports** to sustain their role, and to pursue wellbeing and inclusion in their own right
- Identify and address **environmental barriers** when working with people, including poverty, discrimination and accessibility issues
- **Work directly with community** members and groups to establish welcoming and mutually supportive and spaces for all people



Well Together

The Well Together principles form a foundation for all our work at Wellways; driving program design and delivery, and providing guidance for our workforce in creating real improvements in wellbeing and lasting community transformation.