

Pathway to Independence

“I want to live in my own home” is a common catchcry for some adult people who have a disability and who still live in the confines of the family home. In January 2004, three groups of parents with their adult children with disability, met together in Toowoomba with a common aim – to work out a way for their adult children with disability to live a more independent life.

This group, along with their allies, attended the Pathways to Possibilities 25-hour workshop over a period of 12 weeks which focused on the aim of independent living for all the people. It was discussed throughout the sessions that independent living would be the focus; it became evident that family strength and commitment was the struggle even though everyone was eager for positive outcomes. Every participant was aware of the goals; they just didn't expect that it would be the emotional challenge that it became.

At the start of the Pathways to Possibilities course, every participant had a young adult with a disability still dependent on the family and the family home. By the end of 2005, after actioning the plans and setting in place the safeguards that were needed to deal with parents' fears, each family member had moved on to a new type of accommodation – two living independently in their own units while the other has made the first step into a hostel. None of the people with a disability has any type of individual funding. The people living in their own unit have strict budgeting plans to allow for financial independence, although there are times that the family 'kick in' a few dollars to allow the person to have a good life. The person who lives in the hostel utilises limited block funding for agency support for assistance with building skills for independent living.

The phrases that I now hear most from these participating families are:

“If I hadn't completed the Pathways to Possibilities course, it would not have given me the strength or courage to let my son/daughter leave home”

“If we hadn't completed the Pathways to Possibilities course, we would not have had the direction to know how to achieve our son/daughter's goals of moving out of home”

Pathways to Possibilities also enrolled the support of allies to see the visions of the sons and daughters and to assist them to act upon these. Through the process, the allies gained information for the parents regarding the different types of housing options available and, more importantly, gave moral support and encouragement. The course also made it clear to the allies that all the preconceived ideas that they had about the ability of the person to live independently were incorrect or needed to be challenged. They actually saw that it was possible to achieve, with the right supports, what these people wanted.

Fears that the family held were their biggest blocks, for example:

- their sons or daughters would be taken advantage of;
- they would be lonely;
- they would not cope, etc.

There were many fears every step of the way. Pathways to Possibilities allowed for people to voice and work through their fears in a group where every person felt the same. Ultimately, the group became its own support group encouraging each other with their goals, which had the overflow effect of all working with each other to achieve their dreams.

As a Parent to Parent Family Facilitator, it was most satisfying to hear these comments. To see successes like these, knowing the challenges that all the participants – both parents and their sons and daughters – had and the amount of hard work that was put into planning, verifies to me that Pathways to Possibilities is hugely successful.

Annette Mayer, Parent to Parent Qld.
Guest Editor

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