



# The Inclusion Club



<http://theinclusionclub.com/episodes/inclusionwa>

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## Peter

Hello and welcome everybody, it's Peter Downs from The Inclusion Club. It's a great pleasure today to introduce you to Inclusion WA and their CEO Paul Fleay and Jessica Kain. I've been wanting track down Inclusion WA for some time to quiz them about the work that they do and more specifically about a project called Youth Connect. Now, it is impossible in this short time frame of this video to do justice to the work of Inclusion WA so I do urge you to look at their website and take a look at the great work that they do over in Perth. My first

question to Paul in this interview was simply to describe what the work of Inclusion WA is. So my first question to Paul is 'what do you do?'

**Paul**

Thanks Peter, well Inclusion WA do two things really. For about 20 years we've focused on working directly with individuals to help them connect into the mainstream community. That is for all ages, but we'll focus on Youth Connect in a moment, but we also focus on helping the community support and supporting the community as well so we are expecting that the community will turn up and deal with and assist people we bring along. So we work with both sides, the community and individuals and bring them together.

**Peter**

How long have you been around Paul?

**Paul**

We were first set up back in the 1980's as a pilot project actually because there were some quite visionary folk who realised that people with disabilities had more to offer the community and the community had more to offer people with disabilities so we started up working as very much one-to-one way, helping people connect into the mainstream community. And it progressed from that as it was so successful that our whole organisation grew out of that. Over the last 20 years our focus has been primarily connecting people with

disability through sport and recreation. That's not entirely how we work but that's one of the main vehicles that we use.

Peter

So there has been a lot of learning over that period of time and it's an important part of what you do these days I'm guessing.

Paul

Absolutely, and we are also involved in some research through Curtin University here in Western Australia where we further our knowledge and understanding around the community and how we continue to support the community because I think there is that element of expectation from the community, whatever shape that takes, whether it's a sporting club, a recreation group or an art group, that they'll automatically know how to include people. But in actual fact, if we are asking people to do that then we need to support all of the community on that journey as well so we are doing some research at the moment to really understand how communities function and what support the community actually needs.

Peter

Great, I look forward to seeing that. Youth Connect program. Paul, can you give us a quick introduction into Youth Connect and then I'll ask Jessica about some of the detail of that program because I think that would be really interesting for Inclusion Club people to have a look at.

Paul

Sure. We've worked with people who are 18 and over for all of those 20 years. What we were finding was that the older people were, the more complex it was in terms of connecting to mainstream groups because (a) there's a greater skill gap and secondly there are cliques and niches within groups that are harder to break into, the older you get. So we always felt like the earlier we started in people's lives and helping them in their journey then the more success we would have. So we pitched to a local funding body to trial a pilot project which is called Youth Connect, basically working with 12 to 17 year olds, essentially teenagers, to go on that same journey and work one-to-one with them and really understand what they want to do and what they want out of their lives and how socially connected they want to get and in what forum, and walk them through that journey and connect them into mainstream groups with their peers that are age appropriate, and they have valued roles, those type of things.

Peter

Jessica, what kind of results have you got so far. You are the Youth Connect Program Coordinator, is that your correct title?

Jessica

Yes it is. Other than building relationships and making friends – that sort of social connection with other people in their local area – one of the other main

outcomes that we have seen is an increase in independence. Some of the young people so far have gone to groups and activities on their own for the first time. Things like catching public transport on their own for the first time and all sorts of things revolving around independence. Also, social skill development. So, having things as well, to talk about like developing their interests and practical skills has a roll-on effect in terms of having social relationships and being out in the community and people knowing what you like and what you are like as a person – so that makes things easier to make friends.

There are other outcomes that are less expected. Such as the ease of transition from school to adult life. I've never really worked in the sector and I didn't realise that it was something that was difficult for a lot of young people. But we are finding that the more connections people have outside school in those teenage years then they form relationship that follow onto adulthood. So that transition is eased.

Another outcome would be an opportunity to contribute more and higher expectations. Through volunteering and all sorts of things really, whatever people get involved in.

**Paul**

One of the important things around that is that valued role that I touched on. So that the community has higher expectations of the person with a disability so that they don't develop that 'eternal child' type mentality. There are standard expectations of operating in a certain way in that environment but also the individual and their own family in some cases have had higher

expectations, or learns higher expectations as they see they can do more and more as well.

Peter

Which is a very positive kind of outcome. I am guessing for you, as an organisation, it is quite labour intensive. Is that what is required to make it work? For you as an organisation there is a lot of human hours to support that. At what point is that a problem? That's the first part of my question. The other one is 'at what point do you start to detach from that program and make it a lot more independent for those people involved.

Paul

I'll start the first bit and then Jessica can answer the second bit. I think it is labour intensive. There's no question. All the types of programs we work with are one staff member working with one individual so there is no question that it is labour intensive and very resource intensive to begin with. But we would argue, and we do argue, that if you front end it with being resource intensive there and use less resources as you go on in people lives – and not just resources from our organisation point of view – but the health system and the broader system structure and that sort of thing – there is often less required to get those structures in place and the support and social aspect, and the mental health and well-being and associated things sorted out pretty early then the outcomes are better and less resource intensive in the long run. Specifically, how hard we work and how much time and how we transition out I'll let Jessica speak about.

## Jessica

I suppose it's different for everyone that we work with. The program looks a lot different for everyone. For some people it's 3 months. For some people it's 12 months. It really depends on how much support they need and also what their goals were in the first place. So we call it 'phasing out' when we stop working with somebody. So when they feel confident enough to be attending something on their own or going to something on their own – that's sort of a first step. So neither not going with them and meeting them there or going with them and waiting outside and not actually attending with the group function, or whatever it might be. Then we might go every second time or maybe every third time so it's a bit of a slow and gradual process. So it's important to be not pressured and for young people to take their time with that and it's really when they are ready. In saying that sometimes it is – things that come up which mean that we can't go so that's another thing that happens just naturally – young people having to go alone for the first time and then finding that it was a positive experience, so it happens again, and again, and again. And then when they are going on their own it's just checking in on them and eventually they are fine and the files are closed when they are all happy and attending independently.

## Peter

I guess there's no roadmap or template for that, it's just how it evolves on an individual basis.

Jessica

Exactly. And we are very clear with all of our members – with all of our programs – that it is a no pressure thing – it's when they are ready and when they are confident. In terms of the group or the club itself there is no real way you can make that happen with those groups. That sort of social inclusion has to happen naturally. It's not measured by that – it's when that young person is confident and happy to go it alone. The rest of it rolls on from there.

Peter

Great stuff. There will be more information about it on this episode but what do you see as the future for something like Youth Connect. I imagine you could go forever – for the next 100 years doing Youth Connect – so what do you think of the short term and long term future of Youth Connect?

Jessica

Well, I personally think that if we work for 100 years we'll be out of a job well before that. The idea is that, as Paul said, is reducing the dependence on services in the future so that the skills and independence that young people are building now then the less they are going to require from service providers and government in the future. Also, it's about breaking that cycle in the mainstream community so having young people with disabilities accurately represented in mainstream community groups so that it's a generational shift in that respect. These are big goals but that's certainly what we hope to contribute towards. Definitely.

Peter

And Paul, what kind of legacy do you expect from the program?

Paul

I think Jessica, to a degree, covered my main area which was dealing with individuals, and individuals we are dealing with right now but we also have a much bigger picture in mind which is to say that there is a point in time, and it may be many years down the track, where there isn't a need or we even talk about inclusion just because it happens naturally in the community and that we value diversity in such a way that it isn't even a question. Certainly that's a long term goal. But in the short term – we have a long waiting list – Youth Connect at the moment is just a pilot program and has only been funded for 2 years and we have to prove our case locally that there is a need for it and that it's valued and we are achieving some really good outcomes – and use that as a starting point, which is pretty hard to do if locally it is not valued so we about proving that in our case and we will go from there before anything else.

Peter

Brilliant. I wish you so much good luck with it because it's a fabulous program. There will be more information in this episode but I might just draw this to a conclusion there. I feel a bit guilty because it doesn't do justice to the full work of Youth Connect and Inclusion WA so I will encourage people to have a look at your website and have a dig around there to see the breadth of work that you

guys get up to. But Paul and Jessica, thank you very much indeed – I managed to nail you down eventually – hopefully the recording has worked fine this time and I wish you all the best and thank you very much for your cooperation.

Paul

Thanks Peter

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