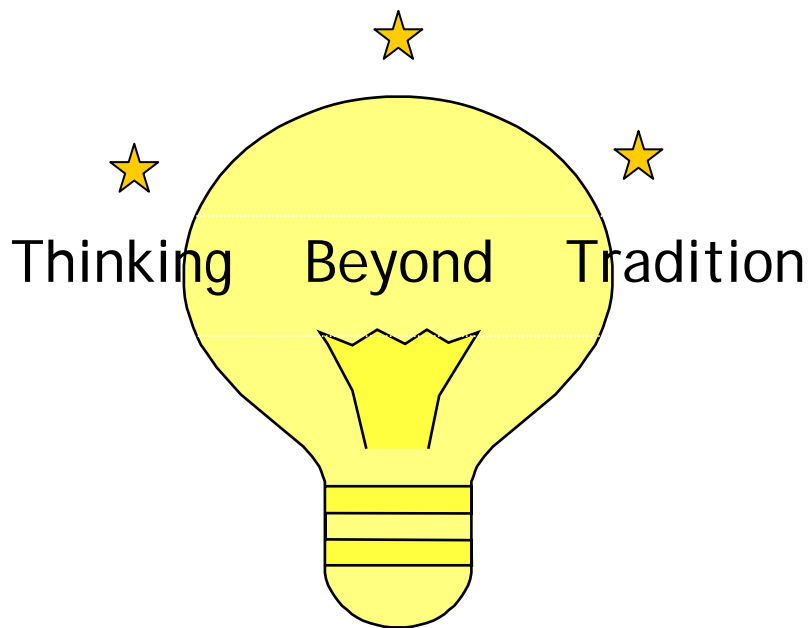


Personalised Lifestyle Assistance project



The PLA project believes that ALL people should have the opportunity to pursue a unique lifestyle that is personally meaningful, relevant and typically intertwined in the community

Updated Report 2 on Progress 27.01.06

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(Facilitator, Personalised Lifestyle Assistance project)

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PLA: Updated Report on Progress

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1. THE AIM OF THIS REPORT

The aim of this report is to state the progress of the PLA project and to reflect on some of its achievements and learnings in assisting people with a disability and their families/allies to pursue *personalised* lifestyle arrangements that are highly *inclusive, typically available* to other citizens and highly *influenced* by each person and their advocates.

2. BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

Following the initiation of the Person by Person project and a tour throughout Victoria in December, 2002 with Michael Kendrick that was organised and funded by DHS, much interest was created in the establishment of support options which were more personalised, "typical" and influenced by the people themselves. Most of this interest stemmed from people with disabilities themselves and their families. However what became apparent was that although wanting such options, people had difficulty imagining such options, they were unsure of where to begin or how to operationalise such options in practice.

In April 2003 a proposal was submitted to The Minister of Community Services and the Department of Human Services (DHS) for the establishment of a small assistive project to help people create such options. The application was successful and a non-recurrent amount of \$69,800.00 was granted for one year to establish the Personalised Lifestyle Assistance (PLA) project. Subsequently at the end of April, 2003 a Working Party, consisting of a person with a disability, a family member and the Executive Director of Melba Support Services was established to oversee the project and a Project Facilitator, Deb Rouget was employed for twenty hours per week to give the vital assistance to people with disabilities and their families/allies throughout Victoria to imagine better, and craft lifestyle options that:

- Create "typical" lifestyle responses and supports (that foster community inclusion)
- Create personalised (**one person at a time**) supports
- Give people influence and self determination over their own lifestyles
- Give people the opportunity to govern their own projects/arrangements at a grass roots effort so that they have high degrees of influence over service design and implementation.

The PLA project is a genuine attempt to enact the principles and goals outlined in the Victorian State Plan and Individual Planning and Support framework with an emphasis on the in depth assistance required to imagine and enact better solutions and sustain them over time. Not only has the PLA project achieved significant outcomes in Victoria, with the shrewd use of its resources it has also had far reaching effects interstate and overseas. The original funds allocated to PLA expired at the end of 2004. Since that time

the PLA project has received monthly funding from DHS to support its efforts and have just recently received a small non-recurrent grant.

3. PLA PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS/OUTCOMES

3.1 The establishment and continual support of several grass roots projects/initiatives throughout Victoria

It must be acknowledged that in the scheme of things our efforts are small and embryonic. We continue to learn from the many experiences and wisdoms that come from people with a disability themselves, their families and allies. This in essence is what drove our efforts from the beginning and what continues to drive them today. We do not claim our efforts to be a panacea but in their own small way they provide significant learnings for the future.

Over a short period of time the PLA project has worked alongside people at the grass roots to imagine better, design and begin to implement small consumer driven projects that address the needs of the people themselves within their local communities. Thus, rather than design options for people or "slot" people into pre-existing services the PLA project has put people themselves in the driver's seat and at the table on both an individual level and collective/project level. This has not only led to a high degree of empowerment and community capacity building but has also ensured that the solutions created are and remain relevant to what people actually need. People themselves also provide an important safeguard over time to protect the original intent, purpose and ethics of such efforts and sustain them over time.

The people assisted by the PLA project have not automatically imagined better solutions. Often people rely on what they have seen before and thus struggle to imagine better. People at the grass roots are also often at a loss as to where they might take a good idea and have it listened to and supported within the broader disability sector. Thus the PLA project has been able to do the extensive work often necessary to stretch people's imagination and visions around more "typical" lifestyles, assist people in articulating such visions on paper and submitting them in the form of proposals to relevant parties who can assist within the bureaucracy. The PLA project has also assisted people to develop and record their individual goals and aspirations, initiate their projects, review their progress and ensure that people achieve the quality of life they seek. This often takes continual support to evaluate efforts and a willingness to revisit the drawing board to get things right. This has meant the PLA project has had to work with numerous parties e.g. people with disabilities, families, allies, agencies and departmental staff to ensure positive relationships develop so that people can work together in partnership to create better lifestyle options that others can join and enjoy.

Most of the projects supported by PLA utilise a "hosting" or auspice arrangement (see attachment 1). In this sense the projects have an

agreement with existing disability support agency to "host" or "auspice" their project, delegate the authority to them to make decisions around their own lifestyles while obtaining the support necessary to take care of administrative and legal requirements. This has been quite an advantage to small grass roots efforts as it means they do not have to duplicate costly administration processes or manage them. It has also meant that some traditional agencies have had the opportunity to see how people can be supported in a different culture that genuinely embraces personalised, inclusive support arrangements.

What the PLA project has tried to ensure in the development of the projects it has worked with is that the services/supports created are not just about what is provided but "*how*" they are provided. Thus a great deal of time is spent not only on developing people's visions but creating sound *principles and ethics* that restore each person's unique personhood and way of life.

Although still somewhat embryonic and with much learning and development to undertake the following describes some of the projects established with the assistance of the PLA project throughout VIC and their progress.

3.1.1 One by One

One by One emerged from most of the families who were original members of Person by Person. One by One is a small family governed arrangement in Melbourne that has a vision to create highly tailored personalised support arrangements around each of their daughters so they can follow natural pathways e.g. work, recreate, study and develop friendships in the community. Each person (together with their family and advocates if necessary) develops their own vision for their future and has influence over their allocated funding and other resources to craft a unique support arrangement that is personally relevant and fulfilling. In this sense no two individuals supported by One by One do anything together because they want different things out of life. The individuals supported have now taken up many valued roles within the community that were previously not available because of the standardised or congregate supports generally offered by traditional services. Such individual roles include work, volunteering, further education, recreation, membership of specific interest groups etc. This has also led to the development of many valued skills, relationships and networks. For example one person was attending a congregate educational program and was not very satisfied with her life. Her passion was watching television and she thought an alternative was to stay home and watch soap operas all day! With some assistance from her family and the Project Coordinator she was able turn her passion into many valued roles. She is now an Usher and sells programs at a picture theatre amongst trying and pursuing many other interests in the community.

As people and families did not want to become burdened with the fiscal and legal responsibilities of receiving their own funding directly, they employed a "host" agency (Melba Support Services). The host agency stays in the background while taking care of administration and legal requirements. The host agency has become a strong ally for the project and its vision. The people and families of One by One

have demonstrated (over a five year period) that *small* grass roots efforts are sustainable, financially viable and often get closer to what is actually wanted and needed by people. Thus counter balancing the notion that services need to be large and maintain a corporate image to remain viable. It has also demonstrated that high degrees of influence/governance at both an individual and project level by people who have a disability and their families/advocates can be created and maintained via a hosting arrangement.

Even though these particular families have been part of such a project for several years they have faced like all human beings many struggles and continue to seek guidance and advice from others in their search to achieve better. The PLA project has assisted One by One with the development of: an extensive agreement with their host agency (which has become a useful resource to others nationally and internationally), development of guiding principles, ongoing guidance and advice on a range of issues, evaluation, renewal and refocusing in regard to its guiding principles. The PLA Facilitator also provides support to the Coordinator of One by One in her unique role with individuals and families and attends monthly meeting with the One by One governance group.

3.1.2 NightLife

Nightlife aims to create a flexible nighttime service for people with disabilities living in their own homes in the Southern Region of Melbourne. With the assistance of the PLA project a small committee of people with physical disabilities has been established to create a service that not only aims to be an emergency over night service but a service that liberates and gives "ordinary" life to people. It will enable people with disabilities to live as independently as possible in their own homes and enjoy an inclusive lifestyle that most people take for granted (especially in the evening).

The type of support people receive from Nightlife will vary and will be available for approximately 8pm-6am, 7 days per week, 52 weeks of the year. Mobile Support Workers (MSWs) will be rostered on shifts to cover this period. People who are supported by NightLife will be able to ring MSWs and obtain support during this period without pre booking support. Support will be varied and might be called upon several times per night. However support will be for brief periods of time e.g. ½ hour in duration so as increase the availability of MSWs to others. Support may include assistance to go to bed at any time during the night (even after going to pub!), turning, having a drink, connecting an electric charger etc.

NightLife aims to provide people with a sense of security and liberation without having to rely on costly paid 24-hour staffing or congregate care models. In addition it aims to reduce the stress on families, many of which are aging or at breaking point.

The NightLife committee with the assistance of the PLA project Facilitator, Darren Meyers (Mobile Attendant Care QLD) and Michael Kendrick developed an extensive proposal for the service. The proposal was enthusiastically

supported and funded by DHS in late 2005 as a small pilot project to support approximately 20 people. The project hopes to be in operation by early to mid 2006.

The Nightlife Committee has chosen Melba Support Services to host and take care of its administration and legal obligations. Together the host agency and NightLife Committee have developed an agreement to specify roles and responsibilities. The NightLife Committee have the delegated authority with (some agreed limitations) to maintain responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the service together with ongoing monitoring, review etc.

3.1.3 Yoorooga

The Yoorooga project started with the vision of one person with a disability and his family. Cameron wanted to move from his family home but due to Cameron's dual disability several attempts had failed in the past.

We started with assisting Cameron and his family to build a vision and design his unique supports based on his needs and desires. Although his family's original thoughts were for him to share with another person with a disability, when exposed to other life sharing options Cameron clearly articulated he was more interested in a person's qualities rather than automatically wanting to share with a person with a disability. It also seemed that sharing with a person without a disability had many advantages. For example, it would give Cameron an ordinary experience of sharing with a person of his choice and he would gain the supports he needed in a natural, unpaid capacity thus saving on costly resources and avoiding a life of "staff" driven supports and rosters. Cameron also wanted to work and recreate in the community. To cut a long story short after submitting a proposal of Cameron's vision with the assistance of the PLA project to DHS, Cameron's proposal and vision was supported with much enthusiasm.

Cameron has now lived in his own place that he rents for well over 12 months. He shares with a Housemate that he chose who offers him some support in return for free rent. Cameron is also supported via a Support and Choice package to employ a wonderful support worker (that he and his family chose) to assist him to find work and pursue other community interests. As a result he has completed a traineeship, found part time employment and joined the local gym amongst many other things. Cameron has also become very well known in his local community.

Cameron and his family chose a disability support agency in their region (E.W Tipping) to "host" Cameron's arrangement and administer the fiscal and legal requirements while delegating the necessary authority to him and his family to design all support features e.g. choosing staff and other supports and live the life he desires. This arrangement has been very successful.

Several months after Cameron moved into his own place his parents were able to fulfil their own lifetime dream of travelling around Australia for twelve months. Cameron's family created a circle of natural supports around Cameron to assist him during this period. Because people were invited into Cameron's life they came forward to take up roles that previously they would have not been involved in. Further more we have witnessed enduring friendships develop because of this opportunity. This has provided a reassuring safeguard around Cameron if something was ever to happen to his parents and many leanings around fostering "natural" circles of support around people.

While Cameron's parents were away his original Housemate decided to leave. Although many people were worried about this change Cameron was unperturbed. Cameron found a new Housemate and the relationship is blossoming. This new relationship has extended Cameron's friendships even further.

Given the success of Cameron's arrangement the PLA project assisted Cameron and his family to submit a proposal to the DHS Innovation in Accommodation Grants to establish a small consumer/family governed service. The intent was to employ a Project Worker for approximately 20 hours per week who could work alongside people with a disability and their families to design and implement the project and make this opportunity available to approximately 10 individuals. It aims to assist people with disabilities, to live in their *own homes* in the community and design their own unique lifestyles and supports and thus provides people with an alternative to group home living. The funding obtained does not include individualised funding for each person nor does it include funding for buildings or houses. However the purpose of the Project Worker is to assist people to create their own vision and pursue resources and opportunities to assist that vision to become reality. This submission was successful and as a result the Yoorooga project was developed in 2005.

Yoorooga has developed some guiding principles for the project. Even though each person will have their own separate living arrangement, families govern the project at a collective level. This helps to ensure that it remains relevant, driven by the people who use it and remains true to its original intent, principles and vision. The project is "hosted" by E.W Tipping. The PLA project continues to assist the Yoorooga project.

3.1.4 Living Distinctive Lives (LDL)

Living Distinctive Lives (LDL) is a similar project to Yoorooga but based in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. The PLA project assisted LDL to also submit a successful proposal to *DHS Innovation in Accommodation Grants*. As a result LDL received funds to employ a Project Worker in April 2005 for approximately 20 hours per week.

Living Distinctive Lives has formed a Governance Group of families and they have chosen and employed a "host" agency, Uniting Care Community

Options UCCO (Box Hill). UCCO not only take care of administration and legal aspects but also have a very clear understanding of the project's ethics and aims. The Governance Group have put much effort into the project's design and implementation with assistance from PLA and the host agency.

The Governance Group selected a Project Worker who assists families on both an individual and collective level. There are currently five members building their *own* visions and each person has plans to move into their own place and pursue a unique lifestyle in the community. For example, one individual wanted to move from a group home. His family found that he had become very unhappy and he had become disconnected from his local community and friends. They also found that his full potential was not being reached due to the dynamics of group home living. As a consequence the family created an alternative vision with their son. He now lives in a flat on his parent's property with two housemates that have come forward to share his life and offer relationship as well as offering some support in return for free rent. His future vision will be built over time and eventually he would like to live in his own place that is not located on his parent's property. He has also left a segregated day service and with the assistance of some creative paid supports he has rekindled many of his old connections as well as creating new ones. One of his passions for the police force has now become reality. He now works ½ a day per week at the local police station helping out in the office. The support of those involved has been commendable!

Families are devoting much effort into establishing circles of support around their sons and daughters from the onset. This has been a very interesting process that has many useful learnings for this crucial and enriching safeguard.

Over time some of the advantages of families coming together who share a similar vision has become apparent. Recently one parent stated that she had always struggled to “bring other people along”. She now feels supported by other families and people who share a similar vision, philosophy and struggle. Small collectives of support can be vital for families as they can provide strength, motivation, understanding, compassion, empathy and a feeling that they are not alone.

3.1.5 EQAL (Empowerment for Quality Active Lifestyles) - Formerly known as REAL

EQAL is a small, family governed community-based project located in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. It was designed to identify and facilitate uniquely tailored business, lifestyle and social opportunities in the community around each person supported and their unique passions and abilities. It was developed from the visions of two families whose sons have struggled to find or “fit” traditional employment or support options as they have quite complex needs.

The EQAL project is not about creating a business or a lifestyle option for a group of people with disabilities but it aims is to assist each person to craft a unique support option based on their passions, abilities, wants and needs. For example one of the individuals is a very talented artist. His vision together with his family is to assist him to pursue his role as an artist in a very valued, creative and flexible manner so that he can create his own business in addition to pursuing a fully integrated lifestyle in his local community. The other individual is extremely talented with computers and can disassemble a computer hard drive and soft drive and rebuild it. His vision together with his family is to have his own small computer business as well as create an inclusive lifestyle based on his other passions and interests.

Although EQAL is in its developmental stages the PLA project has assisted the two founding families to establish their vision, write a submission for a seeding grant, discuss possibilities with DHS and establish a relationship with a host agency. Late in 2005 EQAL was successful in its application for a small non-recurrent seeding grant to employ a Project Worker for approximately 20 hours per week for a twelve months period to work alongside families to develop the project. Eventually EQAL will assist up to 10 people who affiliate with its aims and principles to join the project. The project is hosted by Melba Support Services.

NB. REAL had to change its name in the development stages due to copyright

3.2 The establishment and continual support of several personalised solutions that could lead to small projects

3.2.1 This Is My Place

This is My Place developed out of one family's desire to create an ordinary and "typical" lifestyle that would continue to support their son to live in his *own* home rather than with his family or in the traditional accommodation services (that had been disastrous in the past given his highly complex needs and dual disability). The vision was to create flexible, highly tailored supports with high degrees of self-determination and influence from the individual and his family. The PLA project assisted this family to extend their vision and submit a proposal to DHS in mid 2003. DHS supported the proposal after some negotiation and the family chose an agency to "host" their son's resources.

Despite everyone's best intentions, the original host agency did not work, as there existed a degree of confusion in roles and responsibilities. After lengthy discussions, the family was supported by the PLA project and DHS to initiate an agreement with another host agency. This arrangement has worked well with a clear undertaking of the original vision and his family believe it has led to "marked improvement in their son's quality of life". This arrangement speaks to the need for ongoing assistance in difficult times and to persevere and seek better. Important learnings were also gained in relation to possible misinterpretations of goals and principles and that rhetoric does not always mean people understand what needs to be done.

3.2.2 Fountain Gate

The PLA project has assisted one young woman in Fountain Gate who has for many years lived a very flexible, inclusive lifestyle with the assistance of her family. Although receiving her Futures for Young Adults Funding directly for many years the DHS had proposed that it was no longer in a position to provide people with their funding directly. This was of great disappointment to the person and her family. The PLA project spent much time assisting this family to negotiate a solution with DHS and find an agency that they could trust to host their daughter's resources while delegating the necessary influence to her and her family so she could continue to live her chosen, inclusive lifestyle. With the support of the PLA project the host agency has seen much potential in expanding the idea to other people with disabilities and families who would like to create personalised, inclusive support arrangements with high degrees of self determination. The PLA project continues to assist this family as required.

The PLA project has also consulted and assisted another individual and family in the same situation. Both families are interested in creating a small project in their region in the future.

It is worth noting that the PLA project supports the notion that it should be possible for people to receive their funding directly if they choose while meeting all accountability and legal requirements. Whilst this appears to be a future vision of the DHS it did not seem possible to achieve at this time.

3.3 Host agency development

Over 5 years ago Melba Support Services was approached to “host” *one* individual’s personalised lifestyle arrangement. This “hosting” arrangement not only proved to be very successful for the individual but enabled important learnings about what was required not only from a personal perspective but how a medium sized, traditional agency could assist people to regain the authority over their own lifestyles and enjoy “typical” pathways that are commonly available to other citizens.

Given Melba Support Services largely provided group home living and day activity, on an organisational level it needed to devise new processes so that people genuinely have say so over the design and implementation of their lifestyle, resources and support features. This took concerted capacity building, investment, humility, trust and belief in people and an understanding of the ethics involved. On a very practical level it also required an ability to be open to new ways of doing business so that semi autonomous arrangements could be operationalised in practice and well supported. Due to its investment, clear understanding and leadership, Melba Support Services has provided fertile ground for many new projects thus we have witnessed many of the family/consumer governed initiatives viewing Melba Support Services as a sound host agency (including the PLA project which is also hosted by Melba Support Services). It is important to note that the family/consumer-governed initiatives have chosen Melba Support Services as their host agency (the projects were not initiated or driven by Melba Support Services). However if such options are to become more widely available to people this capacity needs to be built in other agencies. Thus the PLA project has also worked alongside other agencies that are willing to explore and support such options.

3.4 Consultation with individuals and families

As a result of its limited resources, the PLA project has had to concentrate most of its efforts on the above projects. But as other people with disabilities, families, advocates and professionals have seen what is possible they have contacted the PLA project. At times many people are in crisis and the PLA project has only been able to provide limited assistance via brief consultations that ultimately may not have been sufficient. However there have been examples of particular individuals living in group homes who have been assisted by PLA to gather people around them and create visions and proposals to enable them to move from such facilities with a range of creative support options. However this is limited if people with disabilities don’t have families and allies who can provide the necessary motivation and assistance to bring people’s visions for an ordinary life into reality.

3.5 Consultations and presentations to organisations and their members throughout VIC

The PLA project has presented to and consulted with over 23 Victorian agencies and government departments throughout VIC in an effort to either

establish hosting arrangements or discuss how agencies might develop genuine personcentred arrangements that are inclusive.

3.6 Leadership development via seminars and training throughout VIC organised and hosted by the PLA project

One of the important learnings from the experiences of the PLA project is that people will not automatically create better unless they can see examples of what's possible, understand the reasons *why* better should be achieved, *what* should be done, the *theories* and *ethics* that should underpin such efforts, how people can be safeguarded and *how* such efforts can be operationalised in practice. The PLA project has been very committed and active in bringing a range of local, national and international presenters to Victorians to demonstrate examples in which people have created genuine personcentred efforts that enrich people's lives in the community.

Given Michael Kendrick's extensive knowledge, achievements and continual contact with grass roots efforts throughout the world he has been a key contributor to the PLA training program. Other contributors have included people such as Marg Ward (Homeswest, Queensland), Darren Meyers (Mobile Attendant Care, MACS Queensland), Pat Fratangelo (Onondaga Community Living - OCL, Syracuse NY) and Jeff Strully (Jay Nolan Services, California). We have also seen it as vital to include a range of local presenters with disabilities and families to showcase their experiences of creating personalised solutions. This has proven to people that such efforts are possible in Victoria not just overseas and interstate!

Our training events have been very successful and have an attendance average of 80 participants at each event. However the "Thinking and Doing Differently" with Michael Kendrick and Pat Fratangelo in 2004 was fully booked with an attendance of 170 participants. Unfortunately people were declined due to the capacity of the venue.

On the 16th and 17th of June, 2005 the PLA project held "The One Person at a Time Conference" at the Hotel Y in Melbourne. Over three hundred people attended the conference from not only Victoria but also interstate and overseas. The conference stemmed from our vision to bring a range of local, national and international speakers together to share their valuable personal stories, experiences and insights with Victorians. It was an intentional effort to pass on the knowledge, wisdom and learnings from those who have shown leadership on personalised (one person at a time) lifestyle options for people who have a disability that are genuinely inclusive and available to other citizens. It aimed to encourage people to see that a range of practical options are possible and real if we can set our imagination and actions towards "what could be" and if we strengthen and support the capacity of ordinary citizens, allies, services and systems.

Below are just a few comments that encapsulate what this conference provided people and reaffirms the importance of investing intentional effort

into bringing such information to Victorians so we can support the next generation of thinking:

- *"I liken it to the "BIG BANG"*
- *"Down to earth yet uplifting and inspiring".*
- *"The same themes filtering through every presentation all supporting the "Ordinary Life" and sameness of all people"*
- *"All presentations were relevant to what we do and offered real alternatives - finally a relevant conference for two full days - I was never bored or distracted at any time.*
- *"The feeling of like mindedness and that one does not have to be alone on a journey"*
- *" Positive and creative ideas to problems rather than just \$\$\$"*
- *"Really enjoyed listening to Deohaeko, One by One and the role systems can play in enabling person centred possibilities to occur".*
- *"The opportunity to hear a diverse range of ideas and experiences involving the principle of self centred approaches"*
- *"I thought it was fantastic, I have attended 3 conferences this year and this is the best, it is the highlight of my year"*
- *"New ideas and approaches re supporting people with a disability"*
- *"Personal stories moving and empowering"*
- *"Excellent examples of hard work, creative thinking and the positive aspects of what listening and trying again, and again can do"*
- *"All speakers delivered messages to me of great importance and although styles were different it has been a very intently run conference"*
- *"The guts and determination of individuals who faced seemingly insurmountable pessimism and who kept their vision intact"*
- *"WOW! The gift of restoration of hope is so crucial and worthwhile to the human spirit"*
- *"I perceived many ideas as being dreams - now see that they are realities"*
- *"Endorsed, re-vitalised, energised, clarified, given direction of work to be done"*
- *"Personalised, inclusive lifestyle was introduced to me at this conference. Thank you"*

The various forums held throughout VIC by the PLA project have acted as a catalyst for many people to pursue different ideas and options. Interestingly the majority of people who have contacted the PLA project for assistance have previously been to one of its training events. This supports the need to continually invest in forums that build capacity in people to imagine and create better lifestyles. However, what is crucial is that people who attend such events have someone to contact to assist them to develop their ideas on the ground.

3.7 Consultation and presentations Interstate by the PLA project and articles published

The PLA project, because of its learnings and work on genuine person centred, self-directed inclusive lifestyle arrangements has also been requested to present, publish and consult on such issues interstate thus gaining good recognition for the State of Victoria in regard to its investment at a grass roots level.

3.8 Development of a national network in regard to personalised support options and hosting arrangements

Given our extensive work both throughout Victoria and nationally we have drawn together a network of "like minded" people who are particularly interested in personalised solutions, inclusion and "hosting" arrangements. On the 08.09.04 the PLA project gathered 26 people (including people with disabilities, families and professionals from all over Victoria and Australia) who participated in the "Key Hosting and Other Crucial Supports for Small Person Centred Initiatives" event in Melbourne with Michael Kendrick, Anthony Kolmus and Deb Rouget. From this day we have created a national network of people who are committed to such advances Work is currently underway to establish regular forums at which participants in this network can share information and experiences.

3.9 Development of National and International networks

To enrich the learnings of the PLA project it regularly consults with numerous people to expand its knowledge, seek guidance/advice, review its progress and gain support and encouragement. Such people have included Dr Michael Kendrick, Jeff Strully, Pat Fratangelo, Marg Ward, Judith Ellis, Anne Cross, Bob Jackson, Jayne Barrett, Community Resource Unit QLD, Mobile Attendant Care, Mike Duggan and many others.

Various people and families throughout the world have also contacted the PLA project for information and advice.

3.10 Awards

On the 21.10.04 Deb Rouget the Facilitator of the PLA project received a Distinguished Service Award for a "Major Contribution in Fostering Personcentredness" from the Council of Intellectual Disability Agencies (CIDA), which was presented by The Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, Minister of Community Services, VIC.

4. WHY THE PLA PROJECT IS WANTED AND NEEDED

Over time our service system, in an attempt to support people with a disability, has become highly technocratic and bureaucratised. As a result such systems have attempted to meet peoples needs via standardised responses, many of which segregate people from their communities and offer costly congregate care responses that ultimately disconnect people from their homes and local communities.

Many attempts have been made to improve such systems. Some examples would be the introduction of individualised funding or brokerage. However even with individualised funding or brokerage people have still struggled to imagine better solutions. As a result purchase pre-existing “off the shelf” standardised, congregate solutions that tend to isolate people from the community. Such services may meet the needs of some people but struggle to meet the unique needs of many people, particularly if they have complex needs and want to live “typical” community lifestyles that are immersed in their natural support networks. Even if people have a vision for such inclusive lifestyles there has not been a great deal of ongoing support available to people to enact their vision or they may depend on costly individualised staffing models rather than alternatives that support people via natural and informal supports.

We have found that money is not enough to assist people to have a good “good” community life, although it can help! However at the end of the day money will not buy a person a friend. More important than money is people who:

- Can *think* community one person at a time,
- Are creative,
- Believe in community without idolising it,
- Have a sound knowledge about community - its advantages and limitations
- Support the community in their efforts,
- Are good role models and social networkers,
- Believe that each person has unique interests and passions to share,
- Believe that although repetitive presence and membership are vital they are only the first step to assist people to develop mutually rewarding relationships and valued roles,
- Ensure unique safeguards are designed around each person and people are well supported,
- Can engage and solve problems in positive relationship,
- Who rather figure out how something can be done rather than settle for “it can’t be done”
- Can resist the constant argument and pull into the “special” and standardisation.

It also takes vision, insightfulness, hope, enthusiasm, persistence, commitment and a belief that we are all of the “human kind”.

The PLA project, through its various activities has been able to not only act as a catalyst so that people can feel empowered to imagine better but has also assisted many Victorians with disabilities and their allies to operationalise inclusive principles and visions in practice while investing in the ongoing leadership of the people themselves.

SUMMARY

Since its operation the PLA project has gained significant learnings from not only the people who have gone before us but the inspiring people and families we assist today. Such learnings are not without their struggle and we have still much to learn and overcome. However given our openness to learn, focus on people and support from others (including DHS) we have been able to assist numerous people with a disabilities and their families to operationalise, at a grass roots level, a "good community life" as hoped for in the aims and objectives of the Victorian State Plan for Disability Services. Our ongoing commitment, emphasis and work in regard to inclusion has demonstrated that quality personal outcomes are possible if people with a disability and their families are not only *well assisted* to imagine better and develop and plan for their individual needs and aspirations, but are also *supported* in "Right Relationship" (Kendrick, 2000) to lead and direct the resultant supports required to implement such visions in the community.

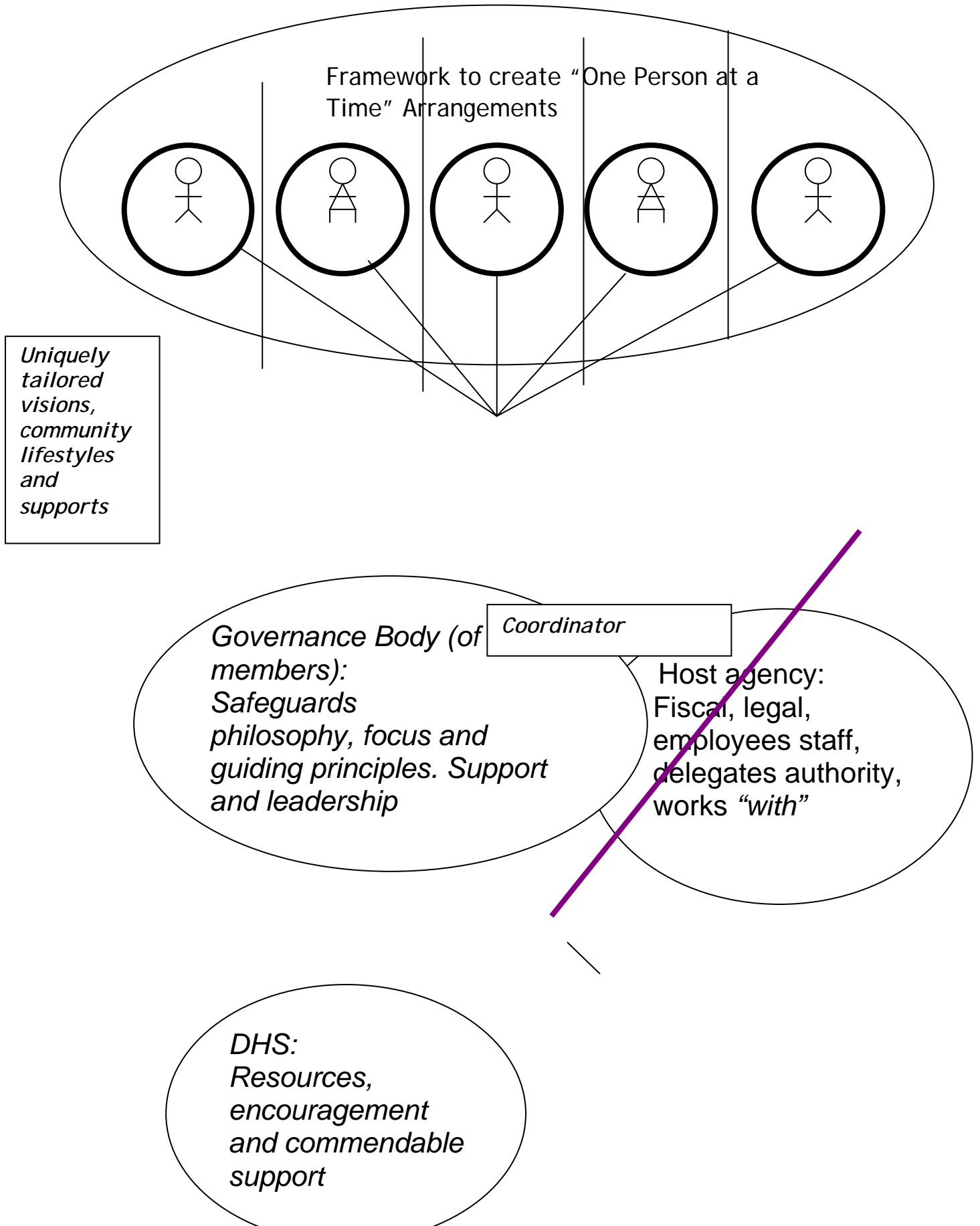
Ultimately, and most importantly, the PLA has been instrumental in the leadership of people with disabilities and their families to create grass roots arrangements and frameworks that empower individuals to take control of their own lives and lead valued, meaningful lives within their local communities. Another important learning has been that when people come together who share common vision they can achieve not only great things but support each other when the going gets tough.

As such, ongoing investments in assistive project such as the PLA project are vital if we are to continue to encourage and support people with a disability and their families to imagine and live better lives and sustain their efforts. Although many of the initiatives supported by the PLA project are in their initial stages the significance and "flow on" effects of these projects in regard to their potential inspiration and learnings for others should not be underestimated.

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Appendix 1: An example of a governance/hosting arrangement





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