

# Mamrebillia

AUTUMN 2009

## A word from the Director

The topic for this edition of Mamrebillia is a challenging but exciting one – Community Engagement. It touches at the heart of all of us, because we all love to be part of our community, contribute to it and receive from it even though it may be different at different times in our lives.

My next door neighbour has just had his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday. His wife has recently gone to live in a Nursing Home. We invited him for drinks and invited other neighbours to celebrate with him. What a lovely event. His stories were fantastic....he had lived his whole life in the same area and in the same house since 1927. We were enthralled at his reminiscences and he loved talking about his memories. The children were surprised to hear how their homes had been farmland when Bob was a boy. Bob regularly beats us to the punch and drags our rubbish bin out to the footpath even though we think we should be doing that for him. He checks our house when we are away, feeds our dog when we are late home. We like to do similar ordinary things for him. Last week when we were called away because there was a death in the family, we found a curry prepared for us by our other neighbours when we returned home. When we are in the garden it is great to catch up over the fence with other neighbours as they walk by....just to hear their news.

My point in relating these few instances from my own routines is to emphasize that it is the very ordinary everyday things that engage us with our community. It's the people we chat to at the dog park. It's the people who own the flower shop at the end of the road. It's the man who always is at work at the local post office....and the attendants at the local Coffee Club. This is where the belongingness is experienced. And for me it has taken a while to make these relationships. For my husband it has been quicker. What I do know is that it is in the 'being there time and time again' that makes the difference. It's familiarity.

*(Cont on page 4 )*

*Welcome to the latest edition of Mamrebillia! In this issue we are exploring the idea of engaging with our local communities. We have compiled a number of articles and stories around this topic and hope that the experience of others might provide insight, hope and inspiration in your life. Maybe you have a*

*story of how you or someone you know with a disability have connected with their local community. If you do, we would love to hear about that. We hope you enjoy this edition and if you have any feedback, our contact details are on page 4.*

Peter Vacca



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## Reflections on Friendship

*by David and Faye Wetherow*

What steps can we take to invite and support real friendships for our sons and daughters who live with disabilities? We sometimes see other children moving along in a sea of friendship, and we see our children struggling with isolation. The natural ebb and flow of play, enjoyment and affection may seem out of reach, and we worry about the possibility of a life-long pattern of separateness. What can we do?

To begin, I'm not sure that I know anything about 'making' friends. The older I get, the more I think that we discover each other. Then if we're lucky, pay attention, stay faithful, and don't mess up, we have a friend for life.

We hope that our children who live with disabilities will receive the blessings of friendship. As we seek that blessing, it may be useful to examine how the ordinary patterns of discovery and friendship work, and see if we can follow those patterns, but perhaps in a way that is more focused and intentional.

How did our most important friendships come into being? Where were we when we discovered each other? Among the dozens, hundreds, even thousands of people we've met in our lifetimes, how is it that some of us are still friends 'after all these years'?

### Being There

At the simplest level, we were 'there' in the same place at the same time. If I'm not there – if I've been sent away for 'special' [you fill in the blanks] – friendship doesn't have much of a chance.

Now I was 'there' at a Janis Joplin concert at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco in 1967 with about a thousand other people. We were close-packed. It was, after all, the Summer of Love. We were young, feeling groovy, and we loved the same music. But nobody from that concert is in my life today. In fact, nobody from that concert was in my life the next morning. We can spend a lifetime going from one 'activity' to another and still be alone the next day (and for the rest of our lives), or we can try another tack.

If we think about it, we see that one basic condition for the development of friendship (love-at-first-sight being a wonderful possible exception) is that we keep going back to the same place

over time.

Sharing time, space, conversation, and most importantly, sharing a common interest helps too. This is even more powerful when the interest is passionate. When we share a passionate interest, we begin to feel that we share an identity.

Passionate interests don't have to be big deals, but it helps if they're about more than 'consuming' something. Making music brings people closer together than listening to music. Listening to music (especially if we keep going back and the place is small enough) brings people closer than merely buying (or these days, downloading) music.

### So what does this have to do with our children?

Understanding where and how adult friendships flourish tells us that there are some things we can do to make friendship more likely for a child with disabilities:

- ◆ Children need to be present with other children.
- ◆ Children need to be in a place that allows time for them to connect.
- ◆ It helps to have a bridge builder on the scene. The school playground allows time for children to connect, but in the absence of conscious bridge building, an isolated child can remain isolated for a very long time.
- ◆ Introductions help. We have the power to introduce children in ways that define them as 'alike' or as 'other', so it helps to focus on shared interests and gifts and let disability fade into the background.
- ◆ One of the important ways in which children might be alike is that they share a passionate interest. It also helps when we have the time to identify, mobilize and celebrate gifts and contributions. Community exposure isn't enough.
- ◆ Even when a child is present, there are places that are more or less conducive to connection. Places that are primarily based on consump-

tion or competition are not particularly fruitful.

- ◆ Competition can quickly define us as 'other', so it makes sense to look for places where cooperation is the hallmark.

### Following Natural Opportunities for Connection

If we think back and remember where we met our best friends, we see that many of those friendships emerged in the context of doing something interesting together over time. We went to school together. We worked in the same company. We were members of the Naturalists' Society. We sang together in a summer stock production of Annie Get Your Gun.

We may begin with one shared interest and discover others and repeating the connection makes a difference.

The depth and quality of the introduction makes a big difference. We don't just introduce our friend to another person, we share our enjoyment; we give a good account; we announce the ways in which we think they might connect.

'Numbers' have something to do with this: Most of us have met thousands of people in our lives, but only a handful of them have become good friends. We need to create many opportunities for connection.

### Ordinary Ways and Tender Work

In Bob Perske's words, 'I have the will to believe' that all of the qualities, experiences, and blessings of friendship can be available to our children and our friends with disabilities. But because we are working to overcome the distance associated with disability and the fact that the ordinary 'rules of attraction' may not be immediately in play, we know that we will have to be 'on purpose' about this. The good news is that all of the 'ways' are the known ways of friendship, family and community. They're not disability-specific or special, but they are more intentional.

- ◆ Because the ordinary balance of time and energy may be stretched by the presence of disability, we may have to think in terms of inviting and supporting an intentional 'circle' of companionship. But the ways of doing this are familiar—literally 'of the family'.

- ◆ Because mutuality might be harder to see at the outset (it's likely to start out as a mystery) we will need to be more conscious and self reflective. Once again, the ways of doing this are nothing special.

- ◆ Because it is tender work, we need to move in a way that allows people to feel safe, loved, loving and very gently engaged. Friendship is a discovery, not a requirement, and it helps to remember the value of small beginnings. At the outset, we're not asking for a lifetime commitment; "*Murray, you know that Amber is interested in peacemaking. Could you come for coffee and help us think about how she might get connected with the Monday night Group?*"

The good news is that to find friendship, we don't need a 'program'. All of this is within the reach of families and friends. As Wendell Berry reminds us in Home Economics:

*We hear again the voices out of our cultural tradition telling us that to have community people don't need a 'community center' or 'recreational facilities' or any of the rest of the paraphernalia of 'community improvement' that is always for sale. Instead, they need to love each other, trust each other, and help each other. That is hard. All of us know that no community is going to do these things easily or perfectly, and yet we know there is more hope in that difficulty and imperfection than in all the neat instructions for getting big and getting rich that have come out of the universities and agribusiness corporations in the past fifty years.*

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CommunityWorks website  
(condensed with permission from a longer article of the same name)

*Cont from page 1*

I get nervous when we talk about community access programs when we are discussing support for young people who have disabilities. There seems to be an underpinning belief that if someone goes out somewhere then they are engaging with the community. This is mostly not the case. I think that it is more about returning time and time again to the same places that one loves, or has a reason to visit, and gradual introductions and conversations that makes the difference. These are my hints.

Mamre has just completed its strategic goals for 2009 – 2014 and stated its mission for the next five years as “Mamre is a community driven organisation that works with families so that they build rich, meaningful and inclusive lives for their family members with a disability”. Needless to say there will be many events, discussions and forums to look at what this means and how it is achieved.

In the following pages some friends of Mamre have been generous in sharing their experience of being part of, and contributing to their local communities and engaging in ways that are good for them. This gives us all food for thought. Enjoy the stories. My thanks to those who have contributed to these pages of Mamrebillia and know that in the coming months we will take this discussion further.

*Kathryn Treston*

**If you would like to contact Mamre, you can do so in the following ways:**

**Phone:** Newmarket  
3622 1222  
Mt Gravatt  
3291 5888  
Pave the Way  
3291 5800  
Kedron  
3357 9190

**Post:** 40 Finsbury St  
Newmarket 4051  
or PO Box 949  
Mt Gravatt Q 4122

**Email:** [mamre@mamre.org.au](mailto:mamre@mamre.org.au)

**Website:** [www.mamre.org.au](http://www.mamre.org.au)

## An Exciting Initiative

*Mamre has recently heard of an exciting initiative to improve communication with retailers....*

The Communication Resource Centre, based in Victoria, have a number of initiatives which aim to improve the communication options for people with complex and difficult communication in the community. One project the centre recently trialed was at a shopping centre where some retailers were asked to use a communication board specific to their service. The communication boards have been positioned permanently on the shop counter. Some of the symbols include hello, how has your day been, can I have..., coffee, tea, soft drink, I would like to use credit card or cash for example.

Behind this practice is an invitation for people with complex communication needs to be able to go to their local shops in the same way that many of us just take for granted. This gives retailers an opportunity to be partners in communication rather than the onus always being on the family or the person themselves.

While CRC is a Victorian service they produce an informative newsletter with some great initiatives. You can find them at [www.scopevic.org.au](http://www.scopevic.org.au)

If your family member frequently uses or would like to use a particular retail service in your area, for example, a café or newsagent, you might like to consider developing a communication board in consultation with the retailer so that your family member is able to access the service more readily.

If you would like to know more please contact your Keyworker at Mamre.

## A reflection on community access

by Dianne Mandeville

I recently attended the workshop by Janet Klees entitled, "What We Do In the Meantime". One concept that struck a chord with me was when Janet talked about strategies to foster inclusive lives within the community.

Many support services are based around the concept of *community access* which involves people venturing out on excursions "into" the community. However, as Janet Klees pointed out, we shouldn't talk about going *into the community* because in fact we *are the community*. We need to be constantly thinking about opportunities within the community for developing ongoing relationships. We need to foster connections with people in the various places we go. Just being there is not enough!

I liken "community access" to going on a holiday to a new and exciting place. You often spend your days sightseeing – visiting numerous sites of interest and attending events with a lot of other people. Your day is interesting but exhausting and you come back to your hotel room alone at the end of the day. You rarely make connections with other people, especially the locals, because you are only visiting and you do not keep returning to the same place. Just being there is not enough to form relationships with people. It is even more difficult if you do not speak the same language. If there is difficulty with communication, it is rare that you are able to connect with the locals other than on a really superficial level. If you have a tour guide you are even less likely to connect with other people because the tour guide talks for you and makes all the arrangements. You will tend only to talk with the other people in your tour group.

However, if you had the opportunity to stay longer within a new community and you were able to learn the language (or they were able to speak yours), you would inevitably develop connections with people. It would also be more likely that you would develop a valued role within that community.

Janet Klees talks of an "enduring presence" as a way of developing relationships. i.e. being in the same place on a regular basis so that you become

known to the same people. She also emphasized the importance of always keeping a radar open for new opportunities within the community for the development of valued roles and how as parents, we should also be open to developing relationships. As she put it, *we have to be the community we want for our sons and daughters.*

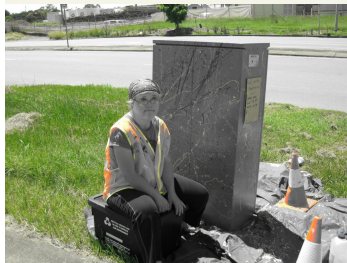
**Dianne Mandeville**

(Dianne has a 22 year old son with a disability and has recently begun working for Pave the Way as a development worker.)

## Kath the Artist

by Sandra Cartwright

Kathleen Flemming loves to paint. Knowing her love of painting, her mother contacted Brisbane City Council's urban ecology unit offering Kath's services. Brisbane City council then offered Kath



a box to paint with her artwork located on the corner of Fairfield and Palomar St, Yeerongpilly. Here are some pictures of Kath painting her first traffic box.

Kath submitted a design that was approved by the Urban ecology unit.

She then did freehand drawings that were photocopied, enlarged and cut into stencils. After completing a background of scatter painting, Kath stencilled the drawings on top. Kath's design is a self portrait and a portrait of important people in her life. Kath is currently designing artwork for a new box in Sherwood.



**Sandra Cartwright**

## Luke is a poet. Matt is a teacher

by Matt Kurth

Matt is a teacher. Luke is a poet. They came together with their skills to change the lives of the class of Year 6/7 at a local Brisbane state school.

Luke lived in close proximity to the school and was looking for some involvement in the wider community. The first



thoughts were that he could assist in keeping the grounds in good order, though Luke wanted a more active and meaningful role with the children. Matt who taught at the school saw Luke could offer much more.

“Luke is a thoughtful, sensitive guy who loved to write poetry. His story and the challenges he faced were inspiring. He had a lot to contribute to my class,” said Matt.

Many of Matt’s class came from harsh family backgrounds. “My class had a poor attitude to writing and reading and certainly for most they had never written poetry!”

Luke joined Matt’s English class once a fortnight for an hour. His communication using a facilitator and a letter board first made the children stop and stare in wonder. However, Luke’s passion for poetry and his infectious manner put everyone at ease and the class quickly embraced him as one of their own.

Two years on, Matt has seen a miracle in his class. “The poetry session has broken down emotive walls. There has been a real growth in their appreciation of words and feelings and personal expression. They can now openly share their joys and fears.

“As well, the children now have expanded their vocabulary and their use of imagery and emotive language. They have acquired skills in editing and reviewing their own work. They often write poetry at home now and their parents are amazed.”

Matt has no doubt about Luke’s influence on the

class. In a poem about Luke, one child wrote of “a heart that truly beats”. They love his friendly, amiable way and how he writes and shares his own poetry with them. For this class Luke has truly broken down the stigma of disability and contributed to their personal journeys through fun, sharing their emotions and discovering the joy of poetry and expression.

**Matt Kurth**

## Bobby’s story

by Tracy Pate

My name is Tracy Pate I am going to tell you a little bit about our family. I have a wonderful husband Stephen, step daughter Annie, and we have three children Molly, Bobby and Jack. In particular I am going to write about Bobby, who is 7 years old and has Down Syndrome.

To our family and friends Bobby is just another one of the “Pate family”. Stephen and I had a strong vision for Bobby from when he was born. He is to be treated like the other family members, to be given the same opportunities and the ability to really experience life and feel part of the community. I believe we have achieved this so far. Here is a little snap shot of his life.

Bobby is in Grade 2 at the local Catholic school, his sister and brother are also at the same school. I attended this school many years ago along with my 8 brothers and sisters and about 20 of his cousins have attended since. The school is obviously a strong part of our community. One of the most emotional periods for us as parents was not being accepted at the school when we enrolled Bobby. However, with much discussion, determination support from family and friends we decided this was the path we wanted. It was a battle worth pursuing. School is one of the highlights of his life, he is the first to get changed, make his bed and pack his bag.

Bobby is fully immersed in the school community





and gives as much as he gets from the community. It filled my heart with joy when a child, not from his class came up to me one afternoon and said, "I was sad today and Bobby came up to me and told me 'You are beautiful', it made me feel better." Or sitting in the pick up line and I get a call from another mother saying, "I have Bobby in the car is it alright if he comes home with me for a while."

He has numerous activities outside school a number of these have been instigated by his interest in a particular area. He has doing gymnastics for a number of years and participates at all the carnivals held by the club. Last year he started piano lessons. Both his sisters Annie and Molly are keen pianists. It was Bobby's ability to sit still and watch Molly intently for 30 minutes for her entire lesson for a year that I realised he was ready for lessons.

Bobby also started playing rugby union at the local club where he is a fully fledged member of the under 8 silver team. At the start of the season last year we couldn't keep him on the field and at the end of the season we couldn't get him off! He is a catalyst for bringing out the best in people. One of the greatest triumphs for humanity that we witnessed is the forging of an agreement between two opposing teams coaches that a try be arranged for Bobby. He obligingly put on a show scoring in the corner to the tumultuous applause of all in attendance!! He then came running up saying "I did it, I did it". Every week he begs the coach to be "man of the match" and without doubt he is a key player in our family and local community.



**Tracy Pate**

## Scotty's Journey

by Scott Braithwaite

"I have been a support worker for Mamre since February 2006. In that time, Mamre has changed who I am as a person. I initially wanted to keep work and home separate. Now they are enmeshed. I have come a full circle.

"I thought a young man I supported would enjoy the company of the guys I live with. They did not know much about people with a disability. I gave them the benefit of the doubt and they came into their own. From my simply asking, these guys now have become an extension of his community.



"Mamre challenges me to explore what we mean by informal networks at a real level. It means being proactive and intentional and also being natural, being who I am. I am learning to build on what is there rather than look for something new. I love the asking – it's exciting and scary.

"Someone in Mamre said 'the job of a support worker is to work yourself out of a job'. I know I am doing a good job when the people I support don't need me – they have folk in their informal network to take my place. One man I support now has two and a half days work without support. This took us two years.

"Each day is different and challenging and sometimes I am asked to take on big responsibilities. There are such a variety of families at all stages of life. The work has helped me not to generalise or to assume anything. This pushes me to work hard.

"Sometimes I get down when things overwhelm me. My key worker is there to guide me – to guide me to step back or take a risk. This is an important role. They advise that saying 'no' gives value to my "yes". It's a fine line that Mamre workers walk.

"Right now I need to earn a living; however what I do know is that being paid is a barrier to real relationships. In the future I want to keep connected with the Mamre community and allow the connections I have made to develop and grow. You think quite differently when you give your time for free."

**Scott Braithwaite**

## Learning with Laura

In January 2002 we were all very excited to be starting our first year of school. It was an opportunity to discover new things, learn to read and write, make friends and meet lots of new people. Little did we know that we were about to meet someone who would change our lives and encourage us to look at the world from a different perspective.

Laura Humphrey joined our class in the first term. She was the same age as us, she wore the same uniform as us, she liked the same things as us, but she was a little bit different. She had Cornelia de Lange Syndrome which is a congenital syndrome, meaning it is present from birth. It meant that Laura looked a little different to us and wasn't able to talk to us, but it didn't mean that she couldn't communicate. We always knew when she was happy or sad or frustrated. She couldn't play the kinds of games we played either because she needed a walking frame with wheels to get around and couldn't keep up when we played tiggy or hide and seek. That didn't stop us from playing with her though. We discovered that Laura loved ball games, the kind where she could sit down, and we'd gently roll the ball to her and she would roll it back. Sometimes she would roll it in a completely different direction and we'd have to go and chase after it. Laura thought that was funny, proving that just like us she loved to laugh and had a sense of humour. Like us, she also liked colourful things. Our friend Nadia had a stripey pencil case with all the colours of the rainbow. Laura loved to look at it and touch it. One thing she was very good at was matching up coloured blocks.

Having Laura in our class has taught us a lot and made us better people. For starters, it's taught us to be tidy. We can't leave our bags or books lying around on the floor because Laura might fall over them. It's taught us to be more patient because we often have to wait for her to catch up. It's taught us to be compassionate and how to treat people equally. It taught us that you should never underestimate people or judge them because they're different. When Laura's mother visited our school she told us things about Laura we never knew. We discovered Laura had been rock-climbing, ridden on a motor-bike, horse-riding, traveled over-seas. In fact Laura's done heaps of things that most of us haven't done. The more we get to know about Laura,

the more we realize that she's just like us. Despite her disability, she's been able to grow and learn just like us. She no longer needs the walking frame, she doesn't need help to eat anymore and she doesn't need her mum to take her into the classroom. In some ways she's the most popular girl in school because every single student knows her name.

Laura attends Our Lady of Dolours one day a week. The other days she attends a Special School. Since that first year back in 2002 we feel we've learnt more from Laura than she's learnt from us. We're all in year 7 now, our final year of Primary School and as we all prepare for High School we hope that Laura continues to learn, live and love life in her own special, unique way.

By Madison, Hannah, Izzy, Nadia, Nathan, Megan, Emily and Claudia  
Year Seven Students  
Our Lady of Dolours

## MLAK—Master Key

The MLAK master key (Master Locksmiths Association Key) is available for people with a verified disability, and is a master key that fits into specially designed locks allowing 24 hour a day access to public toilets.

You can apply to Variety Queensland for a free MLAK key by sending a letter outlining your request and eligibility, along with a copy of your letter of authorisation from your doctor, disability organisation, local council or health centre, to:

Appeals Coordinator,  
Variety Queensland,  
PO Box 2071,  
Milton QLD 4064  
or phone 07 3368 3321.

MLAK keys are also available from some local councils and can be purchased from the Master Locksmiths Association of Australasia.

Phone: 1800 810 698

## The Wandering Farrellys

by Anne OBrien

Wednesday 31st July, 2008 was an exciting day for our family. The car was packed, the camper trailer attached and the children safely stowed in our van. We drove out of a driveway with the sound of "So long see you honey" blasting out of our windows. Our adventure was about to begin. Our plan was to travel around Australia for 6 months, returning in January 2009 in time for school.



It is now early February and we have been home for just over two weeks. We had an extraordinary time as we travelled around this

great southern land. There are so many highlights, and achievements for each of us and for our family as a whole.

My husband Dan and I have 3 children: Luke is 10, Isaac, 7 and Nathan will be 6 next week. Travelling with a young family presents many challenges, especially over an extended period of time and I am pleased to report that as we travelled we became better at meeting these challenges.

Our eldest boy Luke has severe cerebral palsy, is almost blind and has epilepsy. As I think back over the many discussions my husband and I had about our trip I don't recall ever thinking that we couldn't do it because of Luke's disabilities. I remember being very concerned about all the things that could go wrong but I also knew that we could put in place what was needed to keep Luke safe. I guess I also believed that if something did go wrong somehow we would deal with it at the time. The saying "a life lived in fear is a life half lived" kept coming into my mind as we planned this epic adventure. It truly was an extraordinary trip! Luke went everywhere we went. My husband carried him on his back up mountains through gorges and into caves.



He went swimming, boating and floated around on "noodles" and swimming rings in the thermal waters of Bitter Springs and the waterholes in Kakadu. At times it was not easy: 5 people in a camper trailer for 6 months was not without its share of challenges.

I have spent a lot of time reflecting on this experience as people have asked me what was the highlight of the trip. I guess the highlight is the fact that we did it. We gave it a go and it worked - we made it around Australia!



It has taken me a lot of years to get to this point in my life. I would never have imagined in those early years of Luke's life that such an adventure would be possible. As Luke's Mum I believe that our family can live a rich and full life. It is a daily struggle (some days are harder than others) but it is a choice that I make. I can either live with hope that anything is possible or I can accept the limitations that the label "disability" places on our family.

Where to next you may be asking? Who knows: anything is possible; well almost anything!

**Ann O'Brien, Daniel, Luke, Isaac and Nathan Farrelly**



# Links to Helpful Websites

## Links to Helpful Websites

### [www.mike-green.org](http://www.mike-green.org)

Mike Green's website features booklets and articles on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). ABCD is about recognizing what assets exist in your local community and using them. It is also a framework for local people working together for the well being of their community. Of interest to families, support workers and others involved with assisting people is the book 'Hidden Treasures' which can be downloaded. Go to the Publications icon and scroll down to find it.

### [www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com)

This is an American website of Kathie Snow, a zealous promoter of new ways of thinking about disability. The mission of this site is "to encourage new ways of thinking about disability and to help create a society in which all people are valued and included." The section - Revolutionary Commonsense Library- has a number of well written, accessible two page articles that are a good starting point for thinking about disability issues. Titles include - "The Ticket to Inclusive Schools", "Humour to the Rescue-What to Say When...", Developmental Age vs Chronological Age" and many more.

### [www.scopevic.org.au](http://www.scopevic.org.au)

The Communication Resource Centre in Victoria works with organisations and community groups to enhance their capacity to be inclusive and responsive of people with complex communication needs. They produce a very informative newsletter which may be a good resource for families.

### [www.communityworks.org](http://www.communityworks.org)

Another wonderful Canadian website which includes mostly thoughtful and reflective articles about ways of thinking about 'an ordinary life' as the article Reflection on Friendship in Mamrebillia demonstrates.

### [www.socialrolevalorization.com](http://www.socialrolevalorization.com)

Social role Valorisation provides a theory about why some people in society are devalued and offers thoughts about reasonable responses to this. The UK Social Role Valorisation site provides an extensive list of articles about Social Role Valorization information and a forum for discussion.

### [www.gettingalife.com.au](http://www.gettingalife.com.au)

This family governed project for long-term housing, 'Getting a Life' has a website which follows the journey of 3 young men 'getting a life', including Jackson West, who also has his own website.

### [www.jacksonwest.org](http://www.jacksonwest.org)

Jackson West lives in Canberra and has a courier business. Jackson's website features many articles of interest written by his mother Sally Richards.

### [www.inclusion.com](http://www.inclusion.com)

A Canadian website which features articles, stories, tools and other links relating to inclusive lives for people with disabilities.

### [www.pavetheway.org.au](http://www.pavetheway.org.au)

Pave the Way website has a number of stories, newsletters, articles and papers relating to the work that families have done in relation to their vision for a good and safe life for their family member.

## Sharing passionate interests...

In the lead article, *Reflections on Friendship* by David Wetherow, David talks about 'when we share passionate interests we begin to feel that we share an identity'. The following is a great example of how this can occur.

Lynn and her son Robert were recently at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Japanese Garden at Mt Cootha where Robert, a keen photographer, was

taking some photos of the garden with his new camera. While there, two people with cameras approached Robert at different times to ask him about his camera, it was a real talking point said Lynn. Robert happily talked with them about their cameras. Lynn was really impressed with how the contact between Robert and others happened naturally and said the camera was the draw card. She also said that she was completely ignored, but that, was a good thing!!!!

## Bits and Pieces



Tricia Dietz has recently undergone a change in her work role at Mamre and is now working in the area of Community Support. Part of her new role is to send out birthday cards, emails and to support community events. Tricia has been a valued staff member for many years, and is really enjoying the personal interactions she is experiencing in her new role. She has been an enthusiastic participant in all of Mamre's events including Karaoke, Christmas parties, Carols and the Picnic in the Park. Tricia is currently working from 10am – 12.30pm every Friday. She is based at Mount Gravatt and can be contacted by phoning 3291 5888 or by email on:

[Tricia.Dietz@mamre.org.au](mailto:Tricia.Dietz@mamre.org.au)

Congratulations to Ryan Bryer, our reception/admin person at Mamre Newmarket, who has successfully completed his traineeship and is now working full-time for Mamre. Ryan would like to thank Mamre for this opportunity and for his warm welcome into this role.

Mamre warmly welcomes two new staff to the Family Support and the Pave the Way teams situated at Mt Gravatt. Claire Nicolls is a Key Worker who will be working with families on the south side of Brisbane and Dianne Mandeville is a Development Worker within the Pave the Way team that works with families across Queensland. Once again, welcome Claire and Dianne & we look forward to working with you.

We also want to congratulate Steve and Kris Pinkard on the arrival of their new baby boy - Samuel Levi and Patrick and Michelle Oliver on the arrival of their firstborn, Daniel.

## TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY – Blessings, Issues and Challenges

*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them*

(Matthew 18: 20).

*It takes a village to educate a child.*

African proverb

There is much talk today about the need for community. Social fragmentation in the wider community, ethnic tensions and family disruptions tend to accentuate the push for people to be reconnected to viable social groups, especially family and circles of friends. Social commentators discuss the impact of the culture of loneliness and the prevalence of individualism in our society.

From the very beginning of Mamre twenty seven years ago, the theme of community has been, and is now a foundational feature of Mamre's mission and service to families. Many aspects of society and the character of Mamre have changed since 1982. While community is still a core element in the life of Mamre, we need to constantly revisit what community and community engagement mean.

Let us reflect on some key features of the meaning of community and its engagement.

### Relationships

Authentic community is characterized by caring and compassionate relationships. Community is about people who genuinely relate to others in a spirit of respect and love. The quality of relationships emphasizes a sense of working together collaboratively for the common good.

### Mission

Communities are not self-enclosed groups that rejoice in being a community. Communities are always about being for something. Mamre as community is not an incestuous group thinking how good it is to be in a network of community relationships with families, workers and the wider community. The community of Mamre is intended to be an empowering energy among families and workers for service to families who have children with disabilities. Mamre's mission is one of caring service.

### Celebration

Good communities take time to ritualize certain marker events in the life of the community such as birthdays, life passages of birth and death among families and workers. Celebration times seek to share the need for linking and bonding as people who wish to publicly affirm one another.

### Spirituality

Community is more than feeling good about one another. The spirituality of Mamre is driven by beliefs in God's loving providential care for everyone. The spirituality of Mamre is

ecumenical with its embrace of all beliefs. Mamre's spirituality seeks to foster a sense of a Spirit driven organization with specific and intentional gospel values. Each person is valued as created in the image and likeness of God.

### System/community

The diverse and extensive services of Mamre function within a larger framework of a whole host of public compliance issues such as, accountability of funding, legal stipulations, union regulations, work place health and safety laws and professional care. There will always be a certain degree of tension in Mamre between the ideals of community and Mamre as an organization with the public scope of disability service. The healthy future of Mamre depends on walking a prudent line between fidelity to the Mamre Charter and Vision and conducting quality services in accordance with public policies and regulations. Mamre as community has much wisdom to share with the wider circle of people involved in disability services.

### Levels of community

There are many levels of community participation at Mamre. For some, especially staff members, one would hope that they are proactive in fostering a culture of community. For some families, their level of participation might only be an experience of sharing the values and vision of Mamre through the dedication of support workers. Engagement in Mamre as community depends on many factors such as home and life situations, energy, finance, individual roles in Mamre services and willingness to share the values of Mamre. Everyone associated with Mamre has some personal gift or talent to enhance the vitality of Mamre as community. A culture of community doesn't happen when people sit around and think community is a good idea but when people are prepared to do the little (and big) things that enhance caring relationships and contribute to professional service.

### Conclusion

Society can be cruel in its fragmentation, loneliness and sense of isolation. Mamre's traditional emphasis on community is never more relevant and needed today. Community building is hard work and requires constant personal investment of time, energy and talents to forge a bond that is supportive and caring as well as delivering quality service. Community building challenges people to move out of self-centredness and engage communally in matters of importance.

*A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle*

*James Keller*

*To love the world is no big deal.*

*It's that miserable person next door who is the problem.*

*Anonymous*

**Dr Kevin Treston**