Inspiring abilities and promoting wellbeing through a structured social group for people with intellectual disability

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Social Group Study

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- Hayden Jaques
- Dr. Amanda Johnson
- Michelle Brotherton

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Background

- Social networks of people with ID typically consist of family, peers with ID and paid support staff.

- Health and wellbeing triple jeopardy of social exclusion, loneliness and lack of friends for many people with ID (McVilly, Stancliffe, Parmenter & Burton-Smith, 2006a).

- People with ID feel that the development of intimate friendships was likely to be with others with ID (McVilly et al., 2006b; Gilmore and Cuskelley, 2014).

- Barriers to participation in meaningful activities for people with ID extend well beyond environmental barriers and include need for support with planning, organising, travel training, money and communication (Lante et al., 2014).

- Lack of travel skills is a major barrier for people with ID to access and regularly socialise with friends (Dept. of Health, 2011).
History of the social group

- Social group started as volunteer project by staff at DES service
- Established to address a gap identified by clients who
  - were looking to meet and develop friendships/relationships with “People like me”
  - found available social groups unsuitable

Social group transferred to an existing recreation service and expanded into different regional groups
Features of the social group

- Capacity building - aim to develop skills and confidence to extend social inclusion beyond the group
- Co-ordinator arranges a schedule of activities with participants
- Meeting point of each group is at a major transport hub
- Use public transport to travel together to activity
- Day time activities
- Repeat activities
- Activities independently replicable
- Pay individually – no bill splitting, no group discounts
5 Amigos

AMIGOS

Boss

5

Front of card

Back

AMF
North Strathfield

Meet 11:00am

3-5 George St,
North Strathfield

2013 DATES
February 2nd
March 2nd
April 6th
May 4th
June 1st
July 9th
August 3rd
September 7th
October 5th
November 2nd
December 7th
Research study – aim and methodology

- Aim to explore and better understand the lived experience of people with ID of being involved in a structured social group.
- Individual semi-structured interviews with 10 people with ID who are participants of the social group.
- Participants:
  - 7 men and 3 women, aged between 19 and 48 years old
  - either working or in work experience in mainstream work settings with the support of a DES service
- Data were analysed using descriptive phenomenology. There were 290 significant statements drawn from the data that were given formulated meaning. They were then sorted into 16 categories, 4 theme clusters and 2 themes.
- The findings were returned to some of the study participants for validation.
## Findings

Two themes emerged with four theme clusters

<table>
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<th>Themes</th>
<th>Supported engagement fosters wellbeing</th>
<th>Developing social belonging and connectedness.</th>
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<td>Socialisation improves health &amp; wellbeing</td>
<td>A diverse support system helps connect socially</td>
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<td>Social engagement expands circle of friends</td>
<td>Psychosocial connection develops a sense of belonging</td>
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Findings – Supported engagement fosters wellbeing

Theme cluster - Socialisation improves health and wellbeing

- Move from sedentary leisure time to healthier more physically active fulfilling life

  “I just did nothing, sit at home doing nothing … just watch TV… watching DVDs”

- Activities prior to social group either sedentary or linked to the interests of parents

  ‘And now, now that I’m out, I’ve gained a few pounds. . . I feel more better as a person. . . I’m just more healthier’
Findings – Supported engagement fosters wellbeing

Theme cluster - Social engagement expands circle of friends

“Get to meet a lot of people”

“I’ve made some new connections that I had from the past”

“Just hang out and ah, get to have friends”

- Participation in the social group led to an increase in the size of all participants’ social networks
- Participants talked about reconnecting with people from school as well as meeting new people
Findings – Developing social belonging and connectedness

Theme cluster - A diverse support system helps connect socially

- Practical supports from group leader as well home support
- Parents supported and valued participation in the group
- Logistical support – planning, reminders of activity relies on the group co-ordinator
- Skills of using a mobile phone (call and/or text) and basic skills in catching the train gained from DES/TTW provider or parent

“Usually [the paid group leader] is the one that, that’s usually looking after all of us. . . tell me where it is and I tell her when I’m going ... she’ll either call me or text, text me... [but] if I don’t get it then I wouldn’t know”
Findings – Developing social belonging and connectedness

Theme cluster - Psychosocial connection develops a sense of belonging.

- Move from initial shyness to increased confidence

“I mean the first time I didn’t really know anyone . . . that was hard ... but once I got to know ‘em ... once I got to speak to ‘em and that, we all seem to click . . . shy, I was at first, it was just something new . . . after a while, I’ve just gotten used to it”

- The participants derived a sense of connectedness through their shared experiences, identity and lives.
Amanda’s experience
Conclusion

This social group has been successful in supporting people with ID
- to participate in a range of activities in the community linked to improved health and well being through being physically active and feeling socially connected
- to access community settings enjoyed by other adults of their age group
- to build on existing functional skills to foster further opportunities
- to develop friendships and relationships that extend beyond the bounds of the social group

The NDIS recognises the importance of supporting social and community participation. Funding for these supports is available as complementary to work not just as an alternative to work.

Through reporting on the experience of a supported social group from the perspective of participants themselves, this study highlights the features of a successful intervention that can be used to inform planning for social programs for people with ID.
References
