

5b2

Helping Friends Get on Board

Do

Help the person's friends and acquaintances to support the goal and method of increasing social inclusion.

Story

A worker helped one person to fix up a regular meeting with some of his friends. Not only do they play football together regularly, but the group members offer mutual support to each other and have also drawn the person into a range of other social activities.

One college in Nottingham runs computer courses on various evenings, but Wednesday was designated 'singles night'. People were invited to come along and see if they could catch Mr. or Mrs. Right's eyes over the keyboard. Time was assigned to socialising as well as learning, and people knew that this was part of the programme on that evening. Places with strong networks or where inter-connected relationships are forming can be particularly helpful places to start new friendships.

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Hints & Hazards

Creative networks can be much more responsive to change than institutional structures. There are opportunities to design and build networks in every community activity. Once the person has a number of acquaintances, some of them can be supported to become involved with a more active support network for the person, such as a Circle of Friends (see 5a1). One employment project influenced a disabled person's work colleagues by providing some basic inclusion awareness training (see 4a5) to the whole team of co-workers. As a result, the disabled worker was accepted and supported more effectively.

If service agencies are involved in supporting people to develop new relationships, remember to check and rewrite policies and procedures that may hamper them. If the people you know also know each other, then you have 'high network density'. In a rural situation, network density means that news travels fast. Without intervention, it will be bad news that travels quickly, and so bad reputations can go ahead of the focus person. Low network density gives people an easier chance of a fresh start. In areas of high network density, allies need to work harder to positively re-frame the message, so positive news travels instead of bad news.

For a discussion of these issues see *Pugh 2007*