

6b2

Look-Alike Escort

Do

Seek a person to accompany the individual to the activity who makes them look like a natural pair of friends.

Story

Project Access worked with ageing adults with learning disabilities who were interested in joining a community group. The project recruited community members and twinned them with the participants. As they were matched for age, etc. they looked like a pair of friends as they joined the activity. The project reported four positive outcomes: (1) improved

use of language; (2) improved personal care; (3) increased number of identified friends; and (4) increased participation in a greater variety of activities in the community. *See Roberts & Sutton.*

'The key to success may lie in selecting the person most likely to help the focus person achieve integration to act as a co-participant in activities, e.g. a local teenager to help an individual become integrated into youth club activities.' (*Evans et al 1992, p33*)

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Hints & Hazards

The 'look-alike' escort can be a citizen with common characteristics who is not already a group member. The focus is upon the way both newcomers are perceived by the group. It may be difficult to find the escort as shared interest need to match and participation needs to start at the same time. 'Odd' couples (such as a retired man being escorted to a dance by a young woman) may draw out the wrong kind of attention or stereotypes. Is this a licence to adopt racist, ageist or sexist preferences? *O'Brien & O'Brien (1996)* describe friendships between people with and without disabilities as 'unlikely alliances'. Consider utilising the

person's existing contacts and relationships as escorts, rather than recruiting new contacts. Like-minded escorts are local people interested in joining similar activities.

A look-alike escort is simply another community member who has common links to the individual such as age, gender or interests. Remember that sometimes friendships grow between people who, on the surface appear to have nothing in common.