

Building a bridge to a good life for children with disability

Parents want a good life for their children as they grow and become adults.

At Plumtree, we imagine this journey as crossing a river.

Some families manage to navigate their way. However, we have found that many don't understand how to reach the other side—a life of citizenship, acceptance and purpose—by themselves. When children are little, big picture visioning is important for the future. For some parents, it can take many years for this idea and a plan to even take shape.

We need to build a bridge that helps them cross the river. This hypothetical bridge will require investment for capacity-building initiatives involving family leadership, peer work and education to be planned, implemented and sustained. Learnings for many families will need a developmental approach, for them to learn at their own pace over time, to layer and build skills.

Getting on to the bridge

The broader community, early childhood intervention services and the medical and diagnostic community are the earliest connection for families. These groups need to provide messages including hope, potential, community and independence for a positive future from the very start to get them 'on the bridge.' There are three laneways of support:

1. Community inclusion.

Communities and being a part of a community are vital for families, as inclusion is a core principle in intervention. Experiencing and participating in activities outside of the home help pave the way for children to become independent, capable and self-fulfilled adults.

2. Peer-led organisations and networks.

With lived experience, these networks provide valuable knowledge and perspective that complement specialist services. They help families on the journey explore multiple possibilities to go forward.

3. Specialist services

Therapy is usually foremost on parents' minds. While important, we need to communicate that there is more to disability support than therapy and formal services. These are helpful when needed, and become less important as a child becomes older, more skilled and independent.



The journey ahead

Over the next eighteen years, parents will use these lanes as required. They will build their child's understanding of a good life, and their own skills, for the whole family to arrive at the destination.

As their skills grow on the bridge, families can be linked to existing organisations for disabled persons that have been doing exceptional work for years. Having gained more insight, they will be more prepared and open to value the benefits that these organisations offer.

Before that, families need planned, practical capacity-building opportunities based on contemporary disability approaches to learn and keep momentum. We want everyone to go in the right direction on this bridge.

Building a stronger bridge

More can be done by the community and government to enable further support during the journey. Investment is needed for initiatives to help mothers, fathers, siblings and the child. We need to make this bridge wider and stronger.

Because at the destination, these empowered families will thrive—and more. They will build the future. They will establish their own organisations, develop other strategies for children with disabilities and their families to lead. They will innovate ways for others to cross the bridge to a good life.



Interested in investing and working together?

Get in touch <https://plumtree.org.au/get-in-touch/>

Come visit us:

Plumtree website - <https://www.plumtree.org.au>

Youtube channel ----- <https://bit.ly/2ZIEVal>