



A D E C A D E O F D E M O C R A C Y
Achievements, Practices, Challenges & Partnership

APPENDIX II

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY REPORT



11 Pine Close
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15th January 2005

ACCESS 2004 – NATIONAL DISABILITY CONFERENCE

Report on the introduction of an Appreciative Inquiry process at the Conference

NEEDS ANALYSIS

The purpose of this national conference was to take stock globally, continentally and nationally of access related achievements: legislation, best practices, poverty alleviation and commercially; examining the effect democracy has had on people with disability, with particular focus on progress since Access 2002. The conference aimed to highlight legislative, educational, employment and social requirements for integrating disability into mainstream society. The Large Group Facilitation methodology of Appreciative Inquiry was identified as a powerful process in which to engage conference delegates in identifying best practices and achievements and in determining the way forward.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry is a practical and highly flexible process for engaging people in building the kind of future in which they most want to live, learn and work. AI is significantly different to other transformative processes, in that it invites people to seek out and inquire into that which is best practice and to explore hopes and dreams for the future. It holds that these stories of excellence, when explored and shared, release a positive energy and innovative insight that is greatly superior to the kind of energy and insight achieved through the negation, criticism and blame placing often associated with problem and deficit-based approaches to change.

It involves everyone in the systematic **discovery** of best practice and best past experiences relating to the topic at hand, and in crafting a vision created out of people's deepest hopes and **dreams** for their own lives and communities of the future. It then supports realisation of the vision through individual and group **design** of the desired future state into society's formal and informal infrastructure, systems and working practices.

Discovery

2 hour session – directly after the opening Plenary.

This phase of the conference provided a highly inclusive process that, through one-on-one interviews, connected participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences of disability, giving each an equal voice in identifying best past experiences of access and constructing a mindmap with other members of their groups of these best experiences. The interview questions invited individual stories and encouraged an appreciation of what people valued in themselves and their world. As these were exchanged, relationships developed, creating a sense of community and building positive energy and commitment.

This set the scene for shared learning in the topic-specific plenary and breakaway sessions over the next day and a half. Those without disabilities were given a real glimpse into the world of a person with disability; many of the stories were inspirational and affirming.

Dream, Design and Delivery

4 hours on the closing day

In typical Appreciative Inquiry Summits these phases would be conducted over 2 – 3 days. We condensed the process into 4 hours on the last day of the conference.

Participants were invited to join groups in their chosen area of interest and to share with each other their aspirations for access in these areas. The group's collective ideas were then drafted in both writing and in pictorial ways, as a vision for the future. The group then agreed the kinds of key strategies or actions that would determine the way forward to achieve the vision. The video 'Celebrate What's Right with the World' was shown, to illustrate the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and build the case for taking a 'strength' based approach to change.

This process served to consolidate learning from the plenary and breakaway sessions, to build a shared vision of the future that people could aspire to, and to identify 'recommendations' for the way forward.

Time was cut even shorter by a delay caused by a shortage of interpreters. The 'recommendations' and feedback process had to be kept very short. The presentations of the visions and recommendations, provided by the group spokespersons, were both inspirational and profound. With more time and more in-depth discussion the recommendations would have been more useful.

Presentations were made by a deaf woman, and by a blind person talking through the artwork he personally had done for the vision. The natural participation of these people in the process was a living demonstration of rightful and natural access in action.

IN CONCLUSION

The methodology was impacted by the layout of the room (long rows of tables making interaction difficult) and logistics (teas and lunch far from the conference room) and a shortage of co-facilitators due to cost constraints and because of the limited time, we could provide only a limited version. However in spite of these restraints, I believe that the one on one and group interaction was invaluable in building relationships and real understanding, that the positive approach set the scene for a more constructive ongoing dialogue and that the group visioning served to create a clearly picture of what people really wanted future access to 'look like'.

I personally learnt a great deal from the experience and was inspired and touched by the courage of people with disability. The event served to create a deeper sensitivity to the world of disability and access and the challenges and opportunities.