

# hunter circles

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## Hi friends!

### **Welcome to our mid-July Newsletter!**

(we're late again...but it's still July, right! )

In this edition, we're excited to share:

- **Highlights from our workshop with the brilliant Dr Jo Watson** where we did a dive deep into supported decision making for people with complex communication support requirements, "**Listening to people rarely heard**".
  - **An update on our reflections so far** - we are so fortunate to be working with an [inclusive research team from UNSW Sydney and Flinders University Adelaide](#) to evaluate the work we're doing supporting people to build community connections.
  - **Upcoming events** - our July Meet Up and two days of Circle Facilitator training.
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## "Listening to people rarely heard"

### Listening to people rarely heard

It's time to stop talking about "best interests" — we have a legal and moral obligation to uphold people's will and preferences. Autonomy is a human right. Full stop.

Nearly 40 passionate local people came together with the brilliant Dr Jo Watson on July 1 to dive deep into supported decision making for people with complex communication support requirements, "**Listening to people rarely heard**". And WOW—we left changed. Challenged. Fired up.

Here are just some of the big lightbulb moments people shared:

🧠 **Relationships are everything.** The right to loving relationships is universal—and **it's these relationships that help us make decisions.** For all of us. So let's focus on supporting people to build and grow loving, trusting connections.

🗣️ **Everyone is communicating, all of the time—if you can breathe, you can communicate.**

👏 **We all need help** from people who really know us to make decisions.

⚖️ **Supported decision making is a human right**—let's stop talking and start doing.

💡 Top tips from Jo:











Badu, a member of the research team, join us at our June Meet Up to listen and gather reflections from people involved.

This project is led by people with intellectual disability, working together with [university teams](#) and our organisations ([Side By Side Advocacy](#) and Hunter Circles). We start by **listening to people with disability first** — and we keep listening. Their ideas and experiences guide how the project is designed and improved as we go. People with intellectual disability are leading the way, shaping what gets researched and how it gets done — **as it always should have been.**

There isn't much research yet on strategies for building and maintaining social connection for people with intellectual disability who are socially isolated. So we are learning as we go - together.

We're guided by a fantastic framework developed by the legendary Angela Amado from the University of Minnesota, who reminds us to:

-  See the person and their gifts
-  Find the people and places where those gifts can be shared
-  Show up to the same place, at the same time, with the same people — over time
-  One person at a time — one situation, one environment at a time
-  Become an asker — asking opens doors to connection
-  Always ask, “What more is possible?”
-  Be persistent — community building takes time
-  Work at the pace of trust

It's not a magic formula — but it gives us hope, and something solid to build from.

Thanks to everyone who came to our Meet Up and shared their reflections.

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## Events and workshops

These events are coming up. Follow the links for more information and to register.

 [17 July Meet-Up: Planning for a good life](#)

**Who it's for:** People involved in our *Community For Everyone* project — and anyone else who wants to find out more.

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**What:** A chance to connect, share stories, and explore **practical tools to plan for a good life**. This helps us reflect on our existing networks and connections and find ways to strengthen and build on them.

**When:** Friday 25 July, 12.00 - 1.30

**Where:** 437 Hunter Street, Newcastle

**Cost:** Free

[Register here](#)

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### [Circle of Support Facilitator Training - 2 days of training](#)

**Who it's for:** *Anyone interested in getting involved in our Community For Everyone project by starting or joining a Circle of Support.*

**What:** Two days of hands-on training to learn the values, principles and practical tools to facilitate or be part of a Circle of Support.

**When:** Monday 28 July & Monday 4 August, 9.00 - 3.00

**Where:** 437 Hunter Street, Newcastle

**Cost:** Free

[Register here](#)

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## **Be part of something bigger - A Community For Everyone**

***“Community is the sense that one is part of a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships.”***

— John O'Brien (RIP: Nov 1946 - June 2025)

John O'Brien's teachings on inclusion, human rights, and building communities for everyone have shaped the work of Hunter Circles since we began. We were deeply saddened to hear of his passing, and we pay tribute to him at a time when we most need to remember what he taught us: that everything we do must be led by an unwavering commitment to **deeply listen to people with respect and love**.

We will continue to honour his legacy through our work — and we invite you to join us.

There are many ways to get involved. You can start or join a Circle, meet up once a month (or whatever works for you), or simply share what you love with someone new. However you join in, you'll be part of a growing community that holds people's dreams, autonomy, and rights at the centre.

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**If you or someone you know is interested, please get in touch!**

- Reach out to us any time. Contact Jen (she/her) at [info@huntercircles.org](mailto:info@huntercircles.org) or 0401 388 164
- Tell us more about yourself by [filling out this form](#)
- Visit our [website](#) for more information
- Follow us on [Facebook](#) to keep up with the action.
- Share this email with others who may be interested in joining our [mailing list](#) to stay in touch.
- [Contact us for a chat](#). We'd love to hear from you!

**There are so many ways to get involved - join us and be the change you want to see. We hope to see you soon 😊**

Our project partner, Side By Side Advocacy is running the Community For Everyone project in Parramatta and Ryde. Contact Kim (she/her) at Side By Side Advocacy: [info@sidebysideadvocacy.org.au](mailto:info@sidebysideadvocacy.org.au)  
9808 5500

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**There is no justice in this country without First Nations justice. Hunter Circles acknowledges the Awabakal and Worimi peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders both past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded.**

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