New Possibilities for People Experiencing Multiple Disadvantage:

Insights from Clemente Australia.

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Abstract

This paper provides insight into the experiences of six people who completed a Clemente university unit in the second semester of 2009 at the Mission Australia Centre, Sydney. Clemente Australia is a community embedded university humanities course providing higher education opportunity in collaboration with social agencies for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Each person participated in a semi-structured conversational interview in early 2013 which explored their life journeys since 2009. The responses confirm what is known from the literature regarding the complexity of the lives of people experiencing disadvantage, the immediate and short term value of humanities education, as well as the importance of structures and processes which support this learning. Significantly, the interviews provide a vantage point from which former Clemente students reflected at some distance and considered how participation in Clemente affected their lives. These interviews provide detailed insight into the way each person wove what they encountered in their own way. The findings highlight a shared pattern of Clemente students raising new possibilities, planning on these new possibilities and acting upon them. Together, these insights speak to increased personal self-determination, and offer significant practice and research learnings for Clemente Australia, the higher education sector and social policy.

Keywords: multiple disadvantage; humanities; social policy; higher education

Introduction

Many people at some point in life face an obstacle or setback that hinders their participation in society. For most this is a temporary state of affairs. However, a significant number of people face ongoing adversity across a range of life areas which can compound to reduce their capacity to build the sort of lives they would otherwise choose for

themselves. At issue is what support is necessary for people facing ongoing adversity and how can this support be best provided.

This article explores how Clemente Australia, a particular example of higher education in the humanities, may influence the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Clemente Australia has a well evidenced track record of the personal efficacy of an educational approach that provides social supports and is embedded in the community (Howard et al, 2008; Howard et al 2012, Gervasoni, Smith & Howard, 2013). While Clemente is premised on purposeful engagement between university and community, the focus on this article is on the journeys of six students who successfully completed a unit in 2009 and how they look back on their participation. The authors together with the participants contribute to the growing body of research on Clemente Australia in particular. More generally, the article adds to the evidence-based case for an approach grounded in support for individual capability and capacity in which people are genuinely able to determine the future for themselves.

Disadvantage and the potential of education

In Australia close to one million people (5%) aged 18-64 currently experience at least three types of disadvantage *(How Australia Is Fairing*, 2010 Australian Social Inclusion Board). A common set of co-existing disadvantages are: low income and assets;, low skills; housing stress; unemployment or underemployment; and poor health. Factors such as substance misuse, mental illness, disability, family violence, discrimination and homelessness (and combinations of these) can also contribute to and further entrench multiple disadvantage.

Vinson (2007) who mapped disadvantage in Australia highlights that pockets of concentrated and severe social disadvantage have become entrenched across certain communities. These communities and many who live within them are experiencing long term and sustained social exclusion. Vinson notes "it is difficult to deny the centrality of limited education and its impact on the acquisition of economic and life skills in the making and sustaining of disadvantage in Australia" (2007, p. xiv).

While education has long been acknowledged as a key social determinant of health and wellbeing (Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999), some have investigated the specific impacts of education upon health and resilience throughout the lifespan (Hammond, 2004; Grossman & Kaestner, 1997; Hammond, 2002; Hartog & Oosterbeek, 1998; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999). Many of these impacts are related to psychological qualities which "may promote attitudes, practices, and life circumstances that are conducive to positive health outcomes" (Hammond, 2004, p. 552). A number of studies have indicated that relevant education can lead to improvements in: self-confidence (Carlton & Soulsby, 1999; Dench & Regan, 1999); self-efficacy (Wertheimer, 1997); self-understanding (Cox & Pascall, 1994);

competencies, communication skills, and civic engagement (Emler & Fraser, 1999; Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992); a sense of belonging to a social group (Emler & Fraser, 1999; Jarvis & Walker, 1997); and substantive freedoms and capabilities (Sen, 1999).

Ken Henry, former Treasury Secretary, has argued for the importance of education in the Australian context of extreme disadvantage (Henry, 2007). Henry, following Sen (1999), sees education as both an instrumental freedom and a substantive freedom. In other words, while education can be a powerful means for addressing multiple disadvantage it also has significant value in itself and perhaps especially for multigenerational disadvantage. The psychological benefits noted above can be particularly relevant. Yet people experiencing disadvantage who are most in need of access to education and the critical pathway it provides to transformative learning are often those least likely to access it (Butcher, Howard & McFadden, 2003).

In *Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage* (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2011) emphasis is placed on addressing the psychological impact of disadvantage if the cycle of disadvantage is to be broken. The Board, drawing on existing literature, notes that the experience of disadvantage has a significant psychological impact, 'Living in crisis and high stress situations can undermine an ability to plan or think long-term leaving people without a strategy for changing their circumstance.' This emphasis on lives 'of necessity' and where there is likely to be limited personal control over the immediate environment and few opportunities for self determination is well recognized (Shorris, 2000). Practical support, the Board suggests needs to address the psychological impact of disadvantage, be flexible, tailored and specific, and be provided for the long term. Further, the Australian Social Inclusion Board notes the role service providers can play as a force for good while acknowledging that there is also the potential to reinforce a sense of hopelessness or powerlessness that may exist. (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2011). Three key principles are identified for addressing cycles of disadvantage that can be used to inform government work around service delivery reform: the way you treat people matters; continuity of support is essential; and a focus on addressing structural barriers must be maintained. The Australian Social Inclusion Board usefully warns against seeing any one thing as a solution to multiple disadvantage. However, appropriate and purposeful education has been shown to be a powerful pathway enabling people experiencing multiple disadvantage to make life choices that further enhance their social inclusion.

Clemente

Clemente Australia is sourced from Earl Shorris' Clemente program in the United States. Shorris (2000) sets out a vision for confronting the

reality of disadvantage, especially multigenerational poverty through studying the humanities.

'...poverty in contemporary America...is the life of necessity with all the violence the Greeks found in that word. To live in poverty, then, is to live according to the rules of force, which push people out of the free space of public life into the private concerns of mere survival' (p. 32).

According to Shorris, education in the humanities can help socially disenfranchised people out of the cycle of poverty and homelessness. Therefore, the program is different from 'life skills' or 'vocational' courses. It does not seek to train people directly for specific kinds of work, because work on its own is not seen as the "structural solution to poverty, particularly multigenerational poverty" (Shorris 2000, p. 63). Rather, it is premised on the belief that studying the humanities through courses such as philosophy and ethics serves to engage and empower people to think about and reflect on the world in which they live, so that they might become less likely to react simply to contexts and events and more likely to examine, question and contemplate. In doing so, learners would engage in "activity with other people at every level" (Shorris 2000, p. 127) and become engaged 'public citizens.'

Shorris (2000) has expressed the following as key pedagogical principles of the Clemente program.

1. It is generalist in content. The curriculum breaks down the substantive distinction between learning (for well off) and churning (for the poor), thus opening a regular routine of participation.

2. Dialogue is the purpose taking the place of a teacher-centred education.

3. The classes become a temporary public space, a public sphere to be involved in for its students to escape their private troubles and confront public issues. Clemente is a place and a time that students can break out of isolation.

4. While academic grades are recognised as of importance to the students turning-up and participation is considered to be the key indicator of success. .

The potential of the Clemente course was recognized in 2003 by Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the St Vincent de Paul Society (Sydney) with the establishment of the first site in East Sydney. Since then ACU, with other partner organizations and universities have collaborated in implementing Clemente across multiple Australian locations and contexts. In 2014, Clemente Australia is offered across nine locations nationally (Fitzroy, Ballarat. Canberra, Surry Hills, Campbelltown, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane and South Brisbane) with a further three sites being developed for implementation within the next twelve months. After a decade of Clemente Australia, more than 800

Australians experiencing multiple disadvantage have accessed educational opportunities which have resulted in personal life choices from enrolling in this university-community program. The expansion of Clemente Australia has occurred through the collaborative ongoing sharing of initiatives, resources, skills and knowledge through purposeful engagement amongst universities, community agencies, government and businesses. Reporting the processes and impact of this community engagement continues to be a focus of Clemente Australia's ongoing research agenda (Butcher, J., Howard, P. & McFadden, M., 2003; Howard, P., Marchant, T., Hampshire, A., Butcher, J., Egan, L. & Bredhauer, K., 2008; Howard, P., Marchant, T., Saggers, S., Butcher, J., Flatau, P., Cherednichenko, B., Taouk, Y., Bauskis, A., Falzon, J., & French, G. , 2012; Gervasoni, A., Smith, J., & Howard, P. , 2013). In this paper, insights into the experiences of six people who completed a Clemente Australia university unit in the second semester of 2009 at the Mission Australia Centre, Sydney are shared.

Clemente was offered at the Mission Australia Centre (MAC), Surry Hills, Sydney, in 2005, and began delivering two units per semester at this site from 2009. MAC is a specialist homeless service offering a range of supports and services from a single location in an integrated model. In Australia, the basic requisites for students enrolling in a Clemente course are: a desire to learn; a willingness to commit to learning [initially to a 12 week unit]; a literacy level sufficient to read and discuss the contents of a newspaper; and a degree of stability in their lives.

Examining student journeys over time

There is a strong and growing evidence base for the effectiveness of Clemente education in Australia that stretches from 2005 (Yashin-Shaw, Butcher and Howard) to the 2012 Australian Research Council (ARC) Grant Report (Howard et al.). Existing research, most recently through the ARC Linkage Grant results (2009-2011), has provided a detailed understanding of the impact of participation in Clemente over the course of a semester and over the course of a year. It was evident from this research that more needs to be known about what happens to students in the longer term. This is a keen interest of practitioners and researchers alike.

This research project adds to the developing understanding of the journeys of students, drawing upon existing research and extending it through research undertaken at one site, the Mission Australia Centre (MAC), three years after the students had initially participated in a Clemente unit. It is anticipated that the findings can be used to inform service development and future research. The key aim of the research was to understand the life journeys of Clemente students three years after participation in Clemente Australia through an empirical study in which the voices of the students were primary.

Following from existing Clemente research, the emphasis was on a 'methodology of engagement' (Howard et al, 2008) which emphasized the role of participants as partners in the research. Conversational interviews were conducted with six participants who had completed a unit during Semester 2, 2009 at the MAC. There were 14 students who successfully completed a unit, either *Sacred Australia* or *Philosophy for Living*, at the MAC in the second semester of 2009. It was decided to limit the number of interviews to six to ensure depth of interviewing and analysis. All 14 were approached and the first six who responded and were willing to participate became the interview group. The interview focused on four aspects of the lives of participants: circumstances prior to entry to Clemente; participation in Clemente in semester 2, 2009; the period from the end of 2009 until the day of the interview; and, reflections on the influence of participating in Clemente in these past three years.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Methods derived from grounded theory, with an emphasis on a realist and inductive approach, were used to identify key categories and themes that emerged from a close reading of the transcripts. For validity and credibility the categories and themes were corroborated and refined by a five member Clemente research team as part of the data analysis process. The research project was approved by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 14 March 2013 (protocol 2012 325N).

Student insights into the impact of Clemente on their life journeys

Below the results of the research are reported in four sections: first, what people telli us of themselves and their background, second, their personal circumstances immediately prior to entering Clemente, third, their experiences of Clemente, and finally, their life journeys since the end of 2009.

Participant data

Basic demographics and administrative data were collected as part of the interview process. This data showed:

- Gender: 4 male; 2 female;

- Age range: late thirties to late 50s (2 late thirties; 2 mid-forties to mid-fifties; 2 mid-fifties to late fifties);

- Housing: 3 live in public housing; 1 in parental investment property; 1 in family home; 1 in own home;

- Employment: 2 in part time employment (both studying); 3 on Disability Support Pension (1 unknown);

- Family: 2 indicated they had children;

- Education: 1 had a Master's Degree; 1 had an undergraduate degree; 1 had begun an undergraduate degree and completed 1-2 years; 2 have post school diplomas; (1 unknown);

- Means of referral: 4 came to Clemente through the MAC (3 commenced Clemente whilst living in the on-site crisis accommodation; the 4th learned about Clemente while attending counseling at the MAC); 1 learned about Clemente from a television program (and after initially considering that it might be useful for a family member realized it might be right for her); 1 heard about it from a fellow participant at a 12-step program.

- Clemente participation: 4 completed only 1 unit of Clemente; 2 completed all 4 units

The picture appears to be broadly consistent with the larger and more detailed demographic profile of Clemente students presented as part of the ARC Research (Howard et al, 2012).

Circumstances immediately prior to entering Clemente

The interviews confirmed what is already known from the existing body of evidence including the ARC research (Howard et al, 2008; Howard et al, 2012) with regards to the multiple and complex set of issues students generally face. All those interviewed had been through a period of considerable distress prior to beginning Clemente, often immediately prior, with 3 of the participants (Sam, Greg and John[1]) recently homeless and living at the Mission Australia Centre (short term crisis accommodation) and confronting mental health and drug and alcohol issues when they began '…bad everything…mental health, substance abuse, homelessness…' (Sam, p. 9). Two other interviewees while living in more stable accommodation had been through difficult periods. The first, Kerry, was experiencing intense health and grief issues '…I had a number of circumstances collide in my life…which floored me' (p. 2); the other, Paul, through drinking and depression, 'I would have said my worst case of depression' (p. 2) and with the former describing herself as 'lost' immediately preceding participation in Clemente. The sixth person, a refugee to Australia from Viet Nam (she left Viet Nam in 1975 first to Malaysia for two years), had worked consistently for thirty five years in Australia but saw the rewards disappear as a result of her husband's gambling problem, 'I lost everything in my life' (Jae, p. 2). She had been in hospital for an extended period with 'great depression' and after a period in crisis accommodation found herself in public housing which she found 'dreadful' and 'terrifying'.

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[1] All names used are pseudonyms

Experiences of Clemente

The interviews explored how people experienced Clemente and what if anything they gained from it at the time. It confirmed findings from the 2012 research (Howard et al) that people were able to learn specific skills, such as referencing, research and computer skills. It also reaffirmed themes common to the Clemente literature with respect to, for example, the way Clemente helped individuals to gain confidence (Kerry), develop their self-esteem (Paul), offer hope (Sam), and provide motivation (John). Once again, it reaffirmed much of what is known from existing research about 'what works': small classes, being in the community, the Socratic method, passionate lecturers, and the fact that 'no big commitment was required'.

However, there was greater emphasis compared to previous research (Howard et al, 2012) on the subject matter:

'Philosophy was very exciting…I was always very interested in it…and I think that was the clincher…the fact there was a philosophy unit' (Paul, p. 6).

'It's philosophy you know. I was at the crossroads wondering which path to take, what to do, the meaning of life…' (Sam, p. 4).

'When I saw what it was…I just went for it, I thought how lucky am I…I thought this is the one for me' (Kerry, p. 13).

The sense of achievement felt through completing an assignment or unit or number of units, while not a new theme in Clemente research, was strongly registered even after three years:

'I got a lot out of doing the assignment. It gave me a sense of achievement. The fact that I proved to myself I had the capacity. I'll never get rid of that…it's in the cupboard' (Kerry, p. 6-7).

'…I got a very high achievement for that' (p. 3)…'(if hadn't done) I wouldn't have known if I was capable of doing university again and I would have just gone out and done a labour job or something (Greg, p. 10).

'I got a high distinction for my paper' (p. 5). 'I'm still very pleased with the essay. I've posted it on Facebook' (John, p. 14).

Life journeys since the end of 2009

Centrally, the interviews explored key dimensions of participants' lives following completion of the second semester 2009. In stark terms:

> a. Paul, Sam and Greg went on to study on a university campus. Paul and Sam who completed 4 Clemente units went to ACU, while Greg completed one unit and enrolled in a Bachelor of Applied Social Science at University of Queensland (UQ). Paul and Greg are still at university (Paul at ACU; Greg at UQ), while Sam has decided university is not for him.

b.   John went on to begin a Librarianship degree, completed part of it but struggled with the programming aspects, 'dropped out' and finished with a diploma.

c.   Kerry had become interested in tactile pursuits (making shoes) prior to entering Clemente. While deriving a great deal of satisfaction from the unit participation confirmed her decision to pursue crafts (machine knitting) especially after beginning a second Clemente unit and struggling with it. 'I've pursued other things' (p. 7).

d.   Jae tried a couple more units, involved herself more in her local community through volunteering and wants to return to Clemente studies.

Participants were asked about how they felt about where they were now in their lives. There was a strong sense of being in a better place:

'I'm working to try and balance my days. Sometimes it's more difficult than others. But I feel like I'm getting better… I feel like I'm managing myself pretty well in getting myself in that direction (of future plans)' (Kerry, p. 8-9).

'In the last couple of years I've discovered a…greater sense of being…my state of mind is good' (Sam, p.16).

'I'm very centred these days, very peaceful… In 2009, it (quality of life) was a 7. It's 10 now because I've got more of a hold on my own autonomy, self-determinism…then I was in Mission Australia accommodation , still waiting on the legal system to allow me the freedom to do what I want…now with self-determinism I feel more free, more relaxed…' (Greg, p. 9).

'I like the term a better person, more human, trying to get more human, be part of the human race and not a ghost…there's a real feeling you don't belong, don't fit in, that's slowly going now' (Paul, p. 23).

For John, this being in a better place was relative. He still referred to 2009 as 'my very worst year.' At the time of the interview he was experiencing a number of difficulties:

'I find it very hard to get motivated. My health is suffering, my blood pressure is up, I'm just not getting enough exercise' (John, p. 15).

Thoughts about the future, however, were yet more nuanced. Considering that it had been three years since completion of the unit (Semester 2, 2009) participants were asked where they thought they might be in another three years. Some found it a challenge to think in this way:

'Mate, I've got enough on my plate thinking about what the next day is going to be like…I kind of like, live in the present, I don't really live in the future or the past…it's a bit of a luxury to think along those lines…' (Sam, p. 15).

'…it's like I'm jinxing myself, because I'm not allowed to be optimistic. But I'll have a go. I'd like to think I've notched up quite a few units…I've

got few ideas in the air for short films and stuff I'd like to make. And to be more social with people I've got things in common with' (Paul, p. 16).

Others were clearer:

'I want to help people…I want to finish the course…I want to go back to uni' (Jae, p. 8-9).

'…really powering on with my knitting, sewing…and hopefully even more balance than what I am at the moment' (Kerry, p.10).

'…I would like to establish multiple streams of revenue. I'd like to be travelling and helping less fortunate people like say in PNG or East Timor…I'd like to have my own company established earning millions of dollars so I can put that money…we'd like to create a corporation through property development, trading in mining resources…' (Greg, p. 12).

Although declaring that he fully expected to be dead, 'pushing 60 with my lifestyle frankly I don't have much time left', John still had some ambitions for the future, 'I have projects I'd like to do. One of them is visualizing my poetry which is to put it into visual form and then perhaps I could exhibit in a gallery type situation…words and sculpture…I've had that idea for several years now' (John, p. 10).

Finally, participants were asked to reflect on the impact, if any, of Clemente in their lives. All participants looked back on the experience positively, one referring to it as a 'nice interlude.' However, the responses were nuanced. For Kerry it was about supporting a decision-making process which had been germinating:

'I was looking at directions …there really wasn't anywhere to go with my nursing…the experience with Catalyst just helped me really consolidate the fact that I just needed to let that go' (Kerry, p. 13).

For Greg it had helped to get him started again after writing off most of his twenties:

' I consider it as a springboard…yep, it was a springboard to allow me to know my strengths and weaknesses, and know that I'm capable of academic studies and you know sort of like just reconnect all those synapses' (Greg, p. 10).

From a current state in which he described himself as 'really tired' and lacking motivation, John looked back on Clemente as something of value:

'It was very exciting, very useful and very motivating…(without it) I think there's a good chance I wouldn't have done the librarianship course…' (p. 12).

He mused aloud:

'I think it probably would do me a huge amount of good to come back here and at least do the writing courses or something' (John, p. 13).

But he was careful to not over stress the role of Clemente in his life:

'...it was only a 2 month course and it was 4 years ago...I'd have to say my quality of life is better for having done it...but you know it wasn't an epiphany' (p. 13).

For Sam the impact of Clemente was more complex in that he had had hopes which at the time of interview were not fulfilled:

'...that I'd be able to use it to turn my life round. But what I found was that was going to be more difficult than I ever expected...because of society's attitudes to people like me' (Sam, p. 10).

And again:

'Catalyst was good...I thought I could use university to change my life but it wasn't going to work out for me. Just too many things stacked against me' (Sam, p. 18).

Running through the interviews and around the questions was the centrality of creative pursuits. Most of the interviewees were very serious about and committed to these pursuits. John, for example, identified himself as 'a poet and video-artist by inclination if not by fame... (laughs)' (p. 5) and swore the interviewer to secrecy about the detail of his artistic plans. Kerry saw a future focus on machine knitting (and had previously made shoes) and showed the interviewer examples of both. Paul had pursued film-making through courses and some volunteer work in the industry and intended to pursue it further. Jae had a business in laser cosmetics and was both knowledgeable and interested in presentation, revealed most keenly in the story she told of

using her professional knowledge, skills and resources to help a fellow classmate turn her life around, giving the advice 'you wear junky clothes, you pick up junky people...change your life' (p. 8-9), Sam is an artist and takes his art very seriously which was part of his struggle with art subjects at university, '...the next unit was going to be art history, and I just looked at it, and I know the guy, the man who is in charge of that...I couldn't take him seriously' (p. 7). Only Greg did not express artistic ambition, although the scope of his ambitions, it could be argued, reveal a powerful creativity. Interestingly, when asked about what stuck in his mind about Clemente Greg said, 'The assessment was doable. It wasn't test based, like exam based, it was assignment based, essay writing and creativity, like we had to make our own art...it was just great overall' (p. 5).

Discussion

Following Guarnaccia and Henderson (1993), it is apparent from the interviews that people who experience multiple disadvantage are not passive victims for whom things need to be done. Each person wove what they encountered through Clemente in their own way to their own ends in a manner consistent with their own capacities and capabilities For most, involvement in Clemente lead directly to their enrolling in a further course of higher education, for others it helped to support decisions to pursue particular creative and community interests. Across

the interviews, however there is a larger, shared pattern of raising new possibilities, planning on these new possibilities and acting on them. It is clear from the interviews that participation in Clemente was only one step in the journey that people were undertaking and needs to be considered as part of and against a range of contexts. For example, Greg on entry to Clemente was 'at the crossroads'. He had been released from prison (again), had tackled serious addiction issues, was living at the MAC and trying to pull his life back together. While at the MAC in addition to participating in Clemente he attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, saw the psychologist, had some dental work done, passed his driver's license and did some part time laboring work. Clemente therefore sits together and as part of a range of supports that he was able to access. It is also clear that individuals such as Greg had often begun a process of preparation that was underway before entry to Clemente.

All those interviewed expressed strong motivation for initially enrolling in Clemente whether simply wanting to go to university (Jae) to wanting to change their life around (Sam). Often these expressed motivations stretched back in time but Clemente may have afforded the first opportunity for a long time, if ever, where they might be realised. Attached to this was a strong theme of grief and loss that people were prepared to speak about and carry with them, where individuals felt that they 'have kind of lost everything, started with nothing' or that

'Clemente would have been very good for me if I'd done it like twenty years before'.

However, Clemente did often play an important role in people's lives beyond the specific academic skills learned or increased self-esteem or confidence that they might have felt initially. One participant, as noted above described Clemente as 'a launch pad and a springboard' and which made new possibilities possible. From these interviews a much more granular understanding of how these new possibilities looked for each person emerges. It is clear, however, that these new possibilities always need to be situated in the context of individuals continuing to manage significant ongoing challenges, which may include issues such as poor housing and unemployment, as well as drug and alcohol, mental health, alcohol and other personal issues. Of particular note, are the legacy effects of issues which people may have been confronting across most of their lifetime. Participants are very aware of these legacy effects ('some died' Sam, p. 13, referring to other Clemente students he knew and knew of) which include how others in 'mainstream society' may perceive them. A couple of those interviewed spoke frankly of their age and their own mortality. Sometimes these individual challenges or a number of challenges together proved to be too great an obstacle to realising new possibilities that they had identified for themselves.

New possibilities

A pattern of new possibilities in the lives of Clemente students emerges from the data. Table 1 reports and explores these across time from prior to entry to Clemente to the time of interview.

Table 1: New possibilities

	2009 >>>>>>	>>>>>>>	>>>>>>>	>>>>>>>>>
	Circumstances prior to Clemente	Raising new possibilities	Planning for new possibilities	Actioning new possibilities
Kerry	'Lost'	No longer need to maintain nursing registration. Creative options possible	Enrolling in machine knitting course	Buying new knitting machine
Paul	'Dead end job': couldn't move boxes forever	University study as an option	Completing four Clemente units	Enrolling at University. Keep pushing along with interest in film
Jae	Trauma/ Mental health/ Depression	Linking to University study	Finding ways to help others	Volunteer work in community with elderly
Sam	'Bad everything'	Always wanted to go to University; change was possible	Completing four Clemente units	Enrolling at University. Finding that it didn't meet his expectations and walking away.
Greg	'At crossroads'	Could return to University; could turn life around	Getting parole moved to Qld	Moving to Queensland; enrolling in University; getting part-time job
John	'My very worst year'	Further study	Considering librarianship course	Enrolling and completing part of librarianship course

It is clear from the interviews that these six individuals continue to face disadvantage which can be of a deep and entrenched kind. There is evidence of recent experience of adversity subsequent to 2009 by a number of participants through being homeless or in hazardous living conditions. There is also a sense in many of the interviews of the experience of trauma which stretches back to the past, to being a refugee, the strictures of parents (imaginary or otherwise) or family abuse. From the literature it is known that 'There is a huge body of evidence that our early childhood experiences combined with subsequent exposure to adversity explain a very great deal. This is dose dependent: the more maltreatment, the earlier you suffer it and the worse it is, the greater your risk of adult emotional distress. These experiences set our electro-chemical thermostats' (James, 2013).

Those interviewed may have inheritances which are not of their own making. However, there is good evidence from the interviews that individuals are moving from a situation in which their life may have been out of control to finding some degree of self-determination or at

least a greater degree of control. This is most directly expressed by Greg but also evident in the interviews with several others. This can be seen in choosing to do something but equally in deciding something is not for them. Even where original motivations might not have been fulfilled learnings were often able to be drawn. As Sam says of his time attending university on campus, 'I was glad I was in a place where I could try that academic thing but it fell short of my expectations.' (Sam, p. 5) The evidence from these interviews suggests that Clemente in conjunction with other supports and services appears to assist in supporting people to gain more control over their lives and become more self-determining in making decisions that suit them. The evidence from the interviews suggests that participating in Clemente may act as a springboard for people to raise, plan and action the wants that exist within.

Conclusion

The interviews in this research study highlight the complexity of the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantage, confirm what is known from the literature about the value of education and humanities education in particular, as well as the structures, processes and content which support this learning. In particular, it speaks to the strength of purposeful university-community engagement. Significant in this study, however, is the insight into the life journeys of Clemente students with respect to how they looked back on Clemente and their recent lives. A

new perspective of the influence of Clemente has emerged from listening to students three years after they completed a unit. This process of looking back at their life journey is significant for the ways in which each student raised, planned and acted upon new possibilities. Clemente was recognized as a valuable experience in supporting people in their personal life choices and in that respect was recognized as beneficial by participants, even where it had raised hopes that were not realised.

The Clemente course respects the dignity of the individual in a non-judgmental way. It brings together university and social agencies to support the students in their studies whilst recognizing that such issues as housing, employment, financial support, mental and physical health need to be continually addressed. This research supports the key principles of service delivery outlined by the Australian Social Inclusion Board (2011) in *Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage* in that: the way you treat people matters; that support needs to be ongoing; and that the emphasis on structural issues must be maintained. In so doing, it reaffirms how practitioners can best proceed as a force for good rather than reinforcing hopelessness.

It is the belief of the authors that the evidence from the interviews supports an approach, exemplified by Clemente, which acknowledges people's capacities and capabilities and which supports their own self-determination. In the words of Greg:

'…it's a bit like you know like natives to our country, if you allow them to determine their own future then they are more willing to accept responsibility and consequences of their choices…if there's a legal system hanging over them, laws, etc paternalistic choices saying you should do this or that then you take the freedom away from making choices and accepting responsibility and that is something I've got a really good hold on' (p. 9-10).

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