Capabilities for Later Life Wellbeing

Later Life Learning & Wellbeing Forum
Fitzroy, 20 April 2011
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Brotherhood of St Laurence
Overview

1. The capability approach
2. BSL capability research
3. The capabilities people value
4. The opportunities people want
5. Some barriers
6. Capabilities, learning & wellbeing
What are Capabilities?

• Achieved functionings
  – what a person is and can do

• Capabilities
  – the functionings a person would aspire to given the freedom to choose
  – opportunities to be and do what one values in life

• Agency
  – the freedom to choose

(Sen, 1999)
The capability approach

What is the capability approach?

• A new discourse on development and freedom
• A new evaluative framework for a multi-dimensional consideration of disadvantage
• A new approach to social & practical justice
Using the capability approach

Capabilities and the Brotherhood of St Laurence aged services

Using the capability approach as a foundation for developing and evaluating BSL aged services in terms of their contribution to making lives worth living.
Using the capability approach

Research focus

- To identify capabilities valued by clients of BSL aged services
- To map BSL aged services against valued capabilities
- To construct a capability framework for aged services
10 Central Human Capabilities

1. Live a normal life span
2. Bodily health
3. Bodily integrity
4. Senses, imagination & thought
5. Emotions
6. Practical reason
7. Affiliation & dignity of self
8. Other species
9. Play
10. Control over one’s environment

(Nussbaum 2003 pp 41-42)
BSL Aged Services

- Community care
- HACC
- Residential care
- Day centres
- Respite care
- Social inclusion program

Working for an Australia free of poverty
The capabilities survey

Survey respondents - Total 208

- Low income
- Broad demographic
- Northern Region
- Southern Region
- Aged 61+ 180
- Aged 41-60 33
- Female 134
- Male 74
What BSL clients value

94% My health (Nussbaum 2. Bodily health)
89% Being safe (Nussbaum 3. Bodily integrity)
Making my own decisions (Nussbaum 10. Control over one’s environment)
88% The place where I live (Nussbaum 3. Bodily integrity)
My independence (Nussbaum 10. Control over one’s environment)
87% My family (Nussbaum 5. Emotions)
85% Feeling respected (Nussbaum 7. Affiliation)
84% Being well-informed (Nussbaum 6. Practical reason)
What BSL clients value

76% My friends (Nussbaum 5. Emotions)
74% Being active (Nussbaum 7. Affiliation)
65% Achieving my goals (Nussbaum 6. Practical reason)
   Being with other people (Nussbaum 9. Play)
56% Helping others (Nussbaum 7. Affiliation)
   The natural environment (Nussbaum 8. Other species)
49% Learning new things (Nussbaum 4. Senses, imagination and thought)
45% Helping the community (Nussbaum 7. Affiliation)
Knowledge, choice and making decisions

93% survey respondents claim they make their most important life decisions

BUT

Only 50% claim they have enough knowledge to do so

Only 25% indicated they have enough choices in their lives
Enhancing capabilities

Opportunities clients value

- To live a healthier life
- To have better social relationships
- To have more financial security
- To spend more time with family or friends
- To have more mental stimulation
- To have more independence
- To feel valued and respected
- To have greater self-esteem and self confidence
What BSL clients want to know

Many survey respondents would like a better understanding of:

• Their government benefits & entitlements
• How to use a computer & the internet
• What the doctor tells them
• What the pharmacist tells them
• The legal system
Preferred ways of learning

Most focus group participants framed lifelong learning around the enjoyment of joining groups, socialising, and participating in activities that could amount to learning.
Barriers to learning

Among Australians aged 55+

1% participate in formal or informal learning

Prose literacy – more than half < Level 3
Document literacy – almost 80% < Level 3
Numeracy – almost 80% < Level 3
Problem solving – about 90% < Level 3
Barriers to learning

- Poor health
- Poor mobility
- Lack of transport
- Lack of money
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of opportunity

Very similar to barriers to social inclusion
Capabilities & later life wellbeing

• The period of later life is expanding. It will soon occupy a third of the lifespan

• Later life is becoming in itself a vocation for which people need to prepare

• Wellbeing in later life depends on our capabilities: what we can be and what we can do
Capabilities & learning

Further research directions

• What sorts of learning will enable us to realise our capabilities?

• What learning opportunities do we need to live ‘a good (later) life?’
Thank you