

Living our mission alongside people with disabilities



Mission
Support

Small group resource





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Welcome



It is always crucial that the things we know, and learn about God influence and impact how we live our everyday lives. Our faith should impact every aspect of who we are including how we engage and live our mission in the community around us. Thank you for making time to engage with this small group resource to reflect on living our mission alongside people with disabilities in your local context. May what we know and learn in these studies impact how we express our mission.

1 in 5 Australians are now reported to have a disability.¹ This increasing trend provides an opportunity to stop and consider the prevalence of people with disabilities in our mission expressions. Are people with disabilities simply present? Are they fully included and able to flourish?

The Salvation Army's International Position Statement on people with disabilities begins, 'All people are made in the image of God and are of equal intrinsic value.'² Echoing the words of Genesis 1:26-28, we have a biblical call to recognise the image of God in all people,

including those living with disabilities. Beyond this we have responsibility, '...to ensure that we are a church that makes the embodied gospel accessible for all.'³

This resource helps us deepen our understanding and application of disability inclusive mission by listening to the experiences of Salvos living with disabilities and exploring key Scripture verses about disability. As we encounter the stories of our fellow Salvos and the teaching of God's Word there is an opportunity for new learning as individuals and as faith communities.

Through these small group discussions, I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you to ensure that our local mission expressions are intentionally including people with disabilities and treating all people with dignity and respect. As we recognise the image of God in each other may our own journey of inclusive mission grow stronger and deeper.

**Lieutenant-Colonel Gregory Morgan,
Secretary of Mission**

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, viewed 20 August 2024, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>>.

² The Salvation Army 2020, International Position Statement: Persons With Disabilities, viewed 20 August 2024, <<https://www.salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips>>.

³ The Salvation Army 2020, International Position Statement: Persons With Disabilities, viewed 20 August 2024, <<https://www.salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips>>.



Introduction

The Salvation Army is a Christian movement dedicated to sharing the love of Jesus. We share this love by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

Living our mission alongside people with disabilities is a four-part small group study. It utilises the mission intentions as a practical framework for exploring disability inclusive mission. Each study focuses on one of the mission intentions, incorporating lived experiences of people with disabilities and relevant biblical perspectives on disability inclusive mission. This framework aims to engage mission expressions in exploring how our movement can more intentionally and authentically share the love of Jesus alongside people with disabilities.

Study Focus	Lived Experience Interview	Key Scripture Verse
Caring for people with disabilities	Sue's Story	Genesis 1:26-28
Creating faith pathways alongside people with disabilities	Owen's Story	Luke 14:15-24
Building healthy communities alongside people with disabilities	Warren's Story	1 Corinthians 12:12-27
Working for justice alongside people with disabilities	Tanya's Story	Mark 10:46-52

Outline

Each study contains the following elements:

1. Introduction
2. Lived Experience Video
3. Scripture
4. Discussion Questions
5. Mission Intention Video
6. Application Questions
7. Prayer

How to get the most out of this study

These tips will help your small group get the most out of this study. Please read them before starting and apply them as needed.

Facilitators

- Allow 60-90 minutes for each study. Aim for depth of discussion over getting through all the elements and questions.
- If there are people with disabilities in your small group, respectfully ask them how they would like to participate. They might be willing to share more of their experiences with the group. Equally they might prefer not to do this and that is okay.
- Alert the group that some of the videos include lived experiences of trauma and exclusion. Ensure you have adequate pastoral care supports in place for any participants that are affected by these videos.
- Encourage respectful discussion. Using the appropriate language can sometimes be a barrier to people participating in discussion about disability inclusion. Consider sharing a copy of the Disability Inclusion Language Guide on mySalvos with participants.
- Reflect on whether everyone in the group can participate in the different elements of the study. Devise strategies and feel free to adapt the elements of the study so that everyone can fully participate.
- The New Living Translation is used for the Scripture passages. Feel free to use another translation but note that some of the discussion questions might need to be revised where a specific verse and word/phrase is referenced.
- Videos can be played from the Salvos Studio YouTube channel or downloaded from the Toolkit on mySalvos.

Participants

- Each study focuses on one Bible passage. Read and reflect on the passage before the small group study so you are ready for the discussion.
- Each study incorporates the lived experiences of Salvos living with disabilities. Listen deeply to their stories and prepare to be challenged by their experiences.
- Be willing to share your perspectives on the discussion questions about the Scripture passage and the application questions about disability inclusion in your faith community. You do not need to be an expert in the Bible or people with disabilities to participate in the discussion.
- Be sensitive as other members of the group share about their lived experiences of disability. Personal connections to disability will vary and so it is important that the discussion is safe and considerate.
- Approach the small group discussion with respect and humility. We are all on a journey to being a more disability inclusive movement. Holding this posture will help us demonstrate a positive learning attitude.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance about how you can be more inclusive of people with disabilities in your faith community.

A note on language

A question that often arises when exploring disability inclusion is, “What word/s should I use?”

Each of us has a different experience with the words around disability. Some of us use the words ‘additional needs’, some use ‘special needs’, some, ‘all abilities’ and some, ‘impairment’. The most important thing to remember is that people are not defined by their disabilities, so we refrain from phrases such as ‘disabled person’, instead preferring ‘person living with a disability’, ‘people with disabilities’, and similar phrases.

This is a journey of learning for us all in times of change. If you want to use the most appropriate term, then continue to engage in relationship with family, parents, carers and people with disabilities. Listen to how they frame terms to see what they are comfortable with. And where necessary, respectfully ask the person.

Disability inclusion resources and support

Does your mission expression need support with disability inclusion?

The Salvation Army Australia Intercultural and Disability Inclusion Team from the Mission Support Department is available to provide territorial support through resources, training and coaching.

Email your enquiry to disabilityinclusion@salvationarmy.org.au

Artwork

A special thanks to artist Warren O'Brien for artwork for this small group resource. Warren is a soldier at Box Hill Corps in Victoria.

‘Warren O'Brien is a prolific painter whose abstract images echo the rhythm and repetition of his process. The layering of radiant colours creates the illusion of depth and texture in his work and his use of a repeated arc motif, seemingly based on forms found in arched windows, invites the viewer to explore the many complex layers within his works.’ (Arts Project Australia)





Caring for people with disabilities

1. Introduction

Caring for people can often seem like a straightforward proposition. We find out what someone needs and show compassion and care. In some ways this is no different for how we should care for people with disabilities. But sometimes, the experiences of people with disabilities, when receiving care, reveal underlying negative views about disabilities. When caring for people with disabilities, it is essential to recognise their individual needs. Always respect their autonomy and acknowledge their capacity for care.

In this session we will discover that the way we care for people with disabilities can reflect God's love and acceptance for all his creation.

2. Lived experience: Sue's story

Watch Sue's story and discuss what stood out to you.



Image 1: Sue's story <https://youtu.be/xpwa7bOfT-8>



3. Scripture

Read Genesis 1:26-28.

You might like to read it out two to three times to deepen everyone's understanding. Listening to different voices may help your group to dwell and be still in the presence of God's Word.

Genesis 1:26-28 (NLT)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the Earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the Earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

4. Discussion questions

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions.

After this time of reflection, invite different people in the group to begin the discussion on each question to provide a range of perspectives.

- a. What does it mean to you to be created in the image of God?
- b. What might this passage teach us about the relationship between God, humankind and creation?
- c. How might seeing people with disabilities as created in the image of God influence how we care for one another?

5. Mission intention video: Caring for people with disabilities

Watch the "Caring for people with disabilities" video and discuss what perspectives stood out to you.



Image 2: Caring for people with disabilities

https://youtu.be/4ftf6_2nJeQ





Creating faith pathways alongside people with disabilities

1. Introduction

It is common to hear faith communities state, “We welcome everyone”. This is an important posture in inviting newcomers, however, in practice, the welcome is less about the words on the sign or the website, and more about the experience of the newcomer entering the faith community.

For people with disabilities, having a positive first-time experience in a faith community can often revolve around aspects like whether they are able to comfortably access the church building, whether people engage them in genuine and respectful conversation, and whether they can fully participate in worship or the activity on offer.

2. Lived experience: Owen’s story

Watch Owen’s story and discuss what stood out to you.



Image 3: Owen’s story <https://youtu.be/n2RS0lw-bD0>



3. Scripture

Read Luke 14:15-24.

You might like to read it out two to three times to deepen everyone's understanding. Listening to different voices may help your group to dwell and be still in the presence of God's Word.

Luke 14:15-24 (NLT)

¹⁵ Hearing this, a man sitting at the table with Jesus exclaimed, "What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God!"

¹⁶ Jesus replied with this story: "A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations.¹⁷ When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.'¹⁸ But they all began making excuses. One said, 'I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.'¹⁹ Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.'²⁰ Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

²¹ "The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'²² After the servant had done this, he reported, 'There is still room for more.'²³ So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.'²⁴ For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet."

4. Discussion questions

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions.

After this time of reflection, invite different people in the group to begin the discussion on each question to provide a range of perspectives.

- Which of the characters in this parable do you relate to? Why?
- Who do you think Jesus is describing when he mentions, "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (v. 21)?
- What message do you think Jesus might be conveying through this parable about people with disabilities and the Kingdom of God?

5. Mission intention video: Creating faith pathways alongside people with disabilities

Watch the "Creating faith pathways alongside people with disabilities" video and discuss what perspectives stood out to you.



Image 4: Creating faith pathways alongside people with disabilities
<https://youtu.be/a9oWmQJVLAA>

6. Application questions

Discuss the application questions and explore how you might apply learnings from the session in your mission expression.

- What barriers do you see in our mission expression that might prevent people with disabilities from exploring their faith or participating in the life of our faith community?
- What might we need to adjust, alongside people with disabilities in our faith community, so that they can experience the love of Christ?



Building healthy communities alongside people with disabilities

1. Introduction

Being part of a healthy faith community is not about the meetings you attend. It is about participating in a community of believers you know and love. Community means availability, vulnerability and stability. The most valuable commodity you have is your time. Time to deepen your relationship with God. Time to develop relationships with others.

Building healthy communities alongside people with disabilities involves creating inclusive spaces where people with disabilities are welcomed and valued so they feel empowered to contribute their gifts and talents. This fosters a sense of belonging and unity within the community.

2. Lived experience: Warren's story

Watch Warren's story and discuss what stood out to you.



Image 5: Warren's story <https://youtu.be/k2-geosrZ1c>



3. Scripture

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

You might like to read it out two to three times to deepen everyone's understanding. Listening to different voices may help your group to dwell and be still in the presence of God's Word.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NLT)

¹² The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ¹³ Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

¹⁴ Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. ²³ And the parts we regard as less honourable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴ while the more honourable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honour and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. ²⁵ This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honoured, all the parts are glad.

²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

4. Discussion questions

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions.

After this time of reflection, invite different people in the group to begin the discussion on each question to provide a range of perspectives.

- Why do you think "the human body" (v. 12) has been used as an illustration in this passage?
- What might this passage teach us about diversity and interdependence?
- How might the parts of the body that are seen as weaker (v. 22), less important (v. 22), or less honourable (v. 23) serve in building healthy communities?

5. Mission intention video: Building healthy communities alongside people with disabilities

Watch the "Building healthy communities alongside people with disabilities" video and discuss what perspectives stood out to you.



Image 6: Building healthy communities alongside people with disabilities <https://youtu.be/mOw-5ITKyNU>

Working for justice alongside people with disabilities

1. Introduction

Working for justice with people with disabilities means joining God's work, building a fairer world for all. One where people with and without disabilities can thrive. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus persistently advocated for the marginalised and excluded. This included people with disabilities. He empowered people to assert their needs and rights so that they could be integrated into society.

To emulate Jesus' example, we must: maintain a steadfast commitment to justice; actively work towards societal transformation and inclusivity; and acknowledge that the journey towards justice requires ongoing dedication and effort.

2. Lived experience: Tanya's story

Watch Tanya's story and discuss what stood out to you.



Image 7: Tanya's story https://youtu.be/KvBy6JBW_ul



3. Scripture

Read Mark 10:46-52.

You might like to read it out two to three times to deepen everyone's understanding. Listening to different voices may help your group to dwell and be still in the presence of God's Word.

Mark 10:46-52 (NLT)

⁴⁶ Then they reached Jericho, and as Jesus and his disciples left town, a large crowd followed him. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road. ⁴⁷ When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ "Be quiet!" many of the people yelled at him.

But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, "Tell him to come here."

So they called the blind man. "Cheer up," they said. "Come on, he's calling you!"

⁵⁰ Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked.

"My Rabbi," the blind man said, "I want to see!"

⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go, for your faith has healed you." Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road.

4. Discussion questions

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions.

After this time of reflection, invite different people in the group to begin the discussion on each question to provide a range of perspectives.

- Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus several times before Jesus speaks to him. What might this teach us about listening to people with disabilities and amplifying their voices?
- What might Jesus' question to Bartimaeus in verse 51 teach us about working for justice alongside people with disabilities?
- Jesus ultimately restores Bartimaeus' sight. In what other ways do you think Bartimaeus is restored through his interaction with Jesus?

5. Mission intention video: Working for justice alongside people with disabilities

Watch the "Working for justice alongside people with disabilities" video and discuss what perspectives stood out to you.



Image 8: Working for justice alongside people with disabilities
<https://youtu.be/WFgH8T8ViSI>

6. Application questions

Discuss the application questions and explore how you might apply learnings from the session in your mission expression.

- Share about a time in your life where you felt powerless to change a situation and how it impacted you.
- Why is it important to advocate 'alongside' people with disabilities?



**BELIEVE
IN GOOD**

