

For me, over the past eleven years there has been three distinct periods all of which have had a positive or direct impact on my life and supports. Throughout these stages in my life I have created meaningful relationships - some still look the same, some have changed and some have moved on.

Early Adulthood, University & Self Discovery

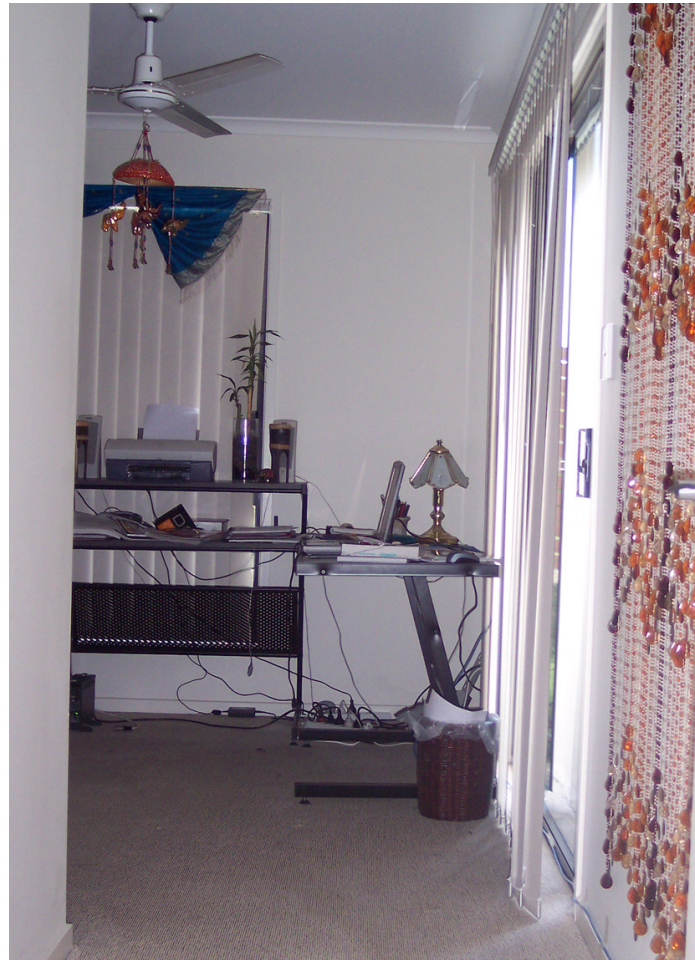
When studying at University, I lived independently for three years with friends who were also my room mates and informal supports (no formal funding). Throughout this time I lived in accommodation settings such as:

On campus: I engaged a fellow student to assist me with my support in exchange for subsidised rent. This arrangement fizzled out in its infancy, leading to a search for a new solution.

Purpose built apartment: Through word of mouth within my university community I came across an apartment that had been purpose built for wheelchair access. Together with friends we privately rented this apartment and our student life was ignited.

This stage of my life was like a complex web. Surrounding my informal supports was a very carefully balanced operation of relationships between friends and family. Due to the interweaving of friendship and support, this often caused social isolation and limited the capacity for me to make new friends and pathways for my life.

With a little of my degree left to complete, my friendship and support group were headed in different life directions. I unexpectedly found myself at a crossroad with no support. It was here, I realised the importance of **being clear** with the **vision for my life** – a life where I am happy, healthy, valued for my distinctiveness and the decisions I make.



My learning's were:

Understanding roles and separating them: the difference between a friend and a person who assists with support. Due to the support being linked with friendship, when the friendship broke down this had a direct impact on my support and in turn my health.

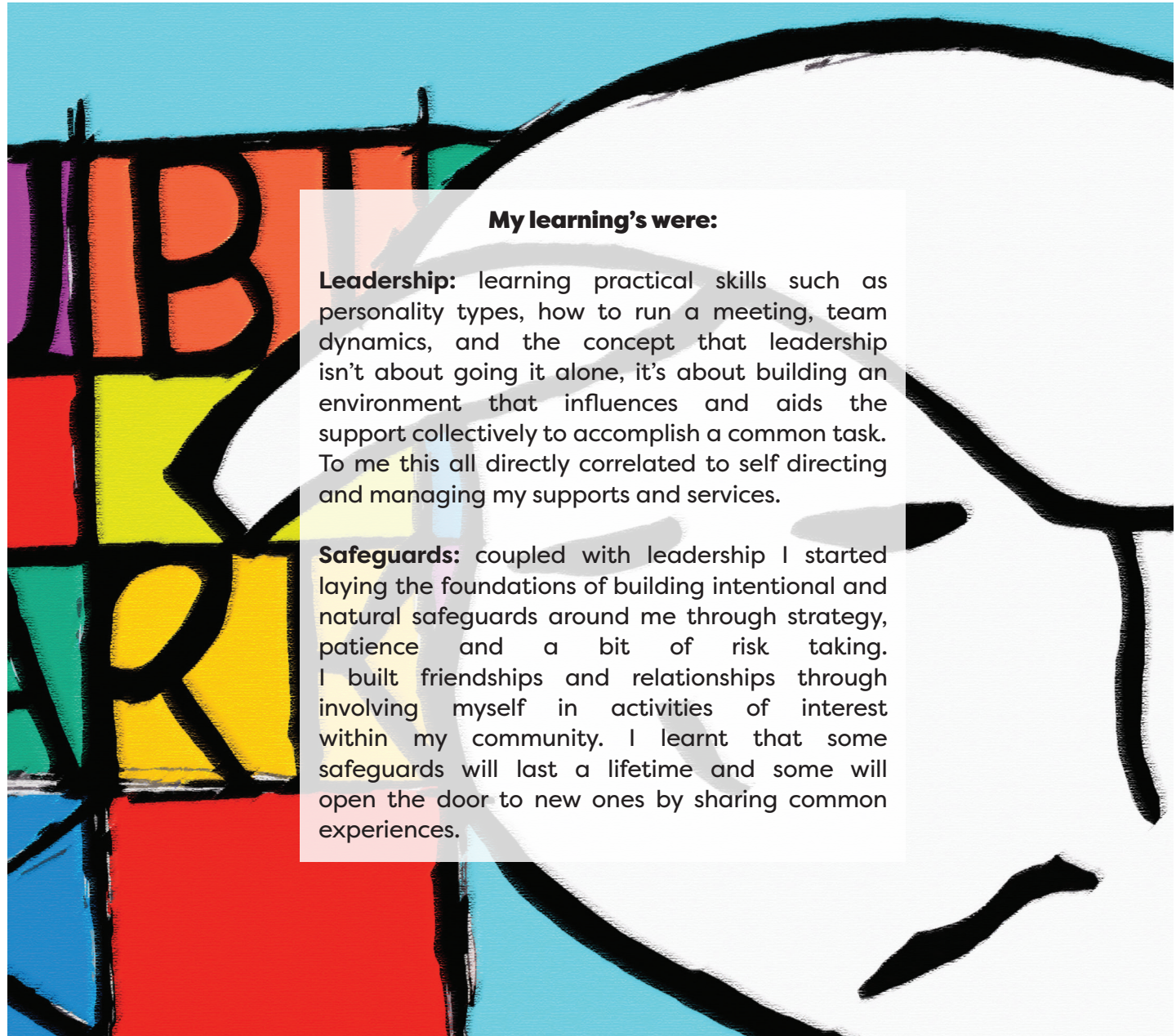
Realistic expectations: planning for the future rather than living in the moment. It was idealistic of me to believe that this time of my life would forever be like an episode of the sitcom "Friends".



Young Adulthood, Work Life & House Sharing

I set about the journey of gaining formal paid supports in my life. However, I experienced rigid service structures such as a bed curfew and restricted choices of workers and how my supports happened - leading to social isolation. Friends did not feel comfortable visiting anymore, due to restrictions placed upon them by paid workers, informing them it was my bed time because they finished their shift at 10:00pm. I then discovered self-directed support through a host provider, which enabled me to have choice and control over my supports and services. My friends started visiting again!

I started building new friendships, networks and safeguards within my community by enrolling in a leadership program, gaining employment and living independently with three housemates of my choice. It was here that I started to build natural safeguards and the importance of being in the driver's seat, taking control of my life, supports and services.



My learning's were:

Leadership: learning practical skills such as personality types, how to run a meeting, team dynamics, and the concept that leadership isn't about going it alone, it's about building an environment that influences and aids the support collectively to accomplish a common task. To me this all directly correlated to self directing and managing my supports and services.

Safeguards: coupled with leadership I started laying the foundations of building intentional and natural safeguards around me through strategy, patience and a bit of risk taking. I built friendships and relationships through involving myself in activities of interest within my community. I learnt that some safeguards will last a lifetime and some will open the door to new ones by sharing common experiences.

Adulthood, Career & Commitment

I live independently with my fiancé in a beautiful little yellow cottage, with modifications and have a very understanding landlord who is committed to our lease. I manage my own small business from our home office and self-direct my own supports and services.

I engaged a former work colleague who's core values aligned with mine. With my leadership she is now a paid contractor who assists me with the operations of my supports and services.

Our home is nestled within a community where I have easy access to shops and public transport, feel safe and involved. Neighbours visit, people wave, friends stay over, family get together and my supports and services happen around this.

I maintain a good life for myself by:

Being happy: knowing I have choice and control over my life. Loving myself and those around me. Having flexibility not only with my supports and services but my work life, to take some time out, sip on a cup of tea outside in the sun and potter around in our veggie garden.

Continually learning: taking the time to reflect, plan, change and grow. I make time each day to look at what is and is not working within my business, life and supports.

I meet monthly with my support team, family and key networks to work together in accomplishing supports and services that work for me.

I am proud of my work of art that hangs in my home everyday where I am surrounded with meaningful relationships & safeguards of my choice.

