

## Person Centred Planning

The term, person centred planning, refers to a family of approaches to organizing and guiding community change in alliance with people with disabilities and their families and friends.

Each approach to person centred planning has distinctive practices, but all share a common foundation of beliefs:

- The person at the focus of planning, and those who love the person, are the primary authorities on the person's life direction. The essential questions are, *Who is this person?* and *What community opportunities will enable this person to pursue his or her interests in a positive way?*
  - Knowledge gained from close, respectful, continuing relationships with the focus person is crucial in answering these questions.
  - Information gained from technical assessments of the person can be helpful, but only in the context of a knowledgeable account of a person's history and desired future. Subordinating professional-technical information to personal knowledge turns the typical agency decision making process on its head.
- The purpose of person centred planning is learning through shared action. People who engage in person centred planning may produce documentation of their meetings, proposals, contract specifications, or budgets. These are only footprints: the path is made by people walking together.
  - The focus person and those who know the person best may be uncertain about what is possible or desirable for the person. One function of person centred planning is to decrease such uncertainty by encouraging people to try new things together and to learn from them.
  - The focus person and others the focus person relies on may disagree about what is possible or desirable for the person. Disagreements may be explicit and verbal or they may surface in the behaviour of all of the people involved. One function of person centred planning is to provide a forum for negotiating such conflicts.
- Person centred planning aims to change common patterns of community life. Segregation and congregation of people with disabilities are common. Devaluing stereotypes and inappropriately low expectations are common. Denial of opportunity is common. These negative patterns do not necessarily signify mean-spiritedness so much as undesirable habit. If invited to assist a person to pursue a desirable future, some people may remain closed and rejecting, but others will respond generously, based on their sense of justice. Person centred

planning stimulates community hospitality and enlists community members in assisting focus people to define and to work toward a desirable future.

- In order to support the kinds of community changes necessary to improve people's chances for a desirable future, virtually all existing human service policies and agencies will have to change the ways they regard people, the ways they relate to communities, the ways they spend money, the ways they define staff roles and responsibilities, and the ways they exercise authority. Person centred planning contributes to this paradigm shift by challenging existing practices. It requires collaborative action and cannot be legitimately substituted with superficial, faddish labels. Person centred planning fundamentally challenges practices that separate people and perpetuate controlling relationships.
- Honest person centred planning can only come from respect for the dignity and completeness of the focus person. This respect leads those who practise personal centred planning to work for...
  - ... equal, non-coercive relationships with the people they plan with
  - ... appreciation and celebration of each person's uniqueness, and constructive ways to understand one another's challenges and failings
  - ... effective ways to communicate the importance of respect and equality to others involved with the focus person.
- Assisting people to define and pursue a desirable future tests one's clarity, commitment, and courage. Person centred planning engages powerful emotional and ethical issues and calls for sustained search for effective ways to deal with difficult barriers and conflicting demands. Those who treat person centred planning simply as a technique and those who fail to provide for their own development and support will offer little benefit to the people they plan with.

These notes are from: *Finding a Way Toward Everyday Lives: The Contribution of Person Centred Planning* by John O'Brien and Herb Lovett, 1992.

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