

Self empowerment, Relationships and Respect



IDEA 1: BECOMING A PART OF THE COMMUNITY: CULTIVATING AND NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

We can spend a lifetime going from one 'activity' to another and still be alone the next day (and for the rest of our lives), or we can try another tack. -David and Faye Wetherow

IN A NUTSHELL:



As people, we know other people. Usually, we have connections and relationships all over the place and don't think much about it. We've got connections through our family, our school, our neighborhood, our job, and through others we meet during our life. We don't really think about how the connections developed, they just kind of did. Not all connections become deep, long-lasting friendships but connections of all kinds seem to be important to us as human beings: whether it's discovering a best friend or just having the ritual of saying good morning to the McDonald's employee who takes your order every morning on your way to work.

Facilitating community for others is not much different from how community is built for anyone else: we participate in our community's life and connections result. So if the idea of cultivating relationships for others seems intimidating, be reassured that your own personal experience has prepared you well for the job.

The only real difference when facilitating relationships for others is embracing our responsibility to always have our eyes, ears, and minds open for possible connections and then act on what we notice.

LIVING IT: A SUCCESS STORY

Michelle and Carol's Story

Michelle has been a working woman for years, having held down two jobs at the same time. As luck would have it, Carol, who supports her as a host family provider is active in the *American Business Women's Association*. Several years ago, Carol began inviting Michelle to join her at ABWA's meetings and Michelle began attending the local chapter's dinner meetings on a regular basis. While it took the other members a little time to get to know Michelle, over time they bonded over the dinner part of the group's meetings. Michelle also gained the group's respect when it learned that she held two jobs. Michelle liked the group so much that she joined as a member. She is now invited by other members to assist in various projects and has met members from all over the country!

BRINGING IT TO LIFE: **THOUGHTS AND IDEAS**

Focus less on the activity and more on the relationships that can be created through it.

-David and Faye Wetherow

Over the years, we seem to be doing a better job of getting people with disabilities *into* their communities: going to the library, to the recreation center, to the park. But how would our support change if the measure of "success" became meeting people and not simply being around people? There are some very concrete ways that may be useful in facilitating relationships for people, like becoming a regular and tipping big in restaurants. For additional ideas, take a look at "Some Easy Ways to Be an Ambassador" paper, in the *And Yet More* part of the *Idea Book*.

It's Not What You Know, it's Who You Know: Tapping Into the Relationships of Likely and Unlikely Sources

We know that relationships are built through people getting to know other people. And often when thinking about how to expand a person's relationship network, we ask ourselves, "who do we know?"

Consider expanding the circle of people we ask to help us move a person's life forward.

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People Who are Often Asked:

members of a person's service team: a family member, middle managers, therapists and case managers.

Some Other People We May Not Think to Ask:

- A person's direct support staff and *their* families and friends.
- Other staff within the organization: the receptionist, the financial manager, cleaning crew.
- The family members of *other* people served by an organization.
- People who the person sees casually on a regular basis: a coffee shop employee; a waitress, the minister of a person's church.
- Others who share a person's passion.
- A person's employer.
- DDSD regional coordinators and other staff.

Give up on Uniformity and Dare to think small

-Mike Green

In large organizations, we get used to thinking in terms of systems: programmatic, human resources, IT, etc. We often think in terms of "administrative efficiency" and "cost effectiveness." We initiate organization-wide efforts and programs to improve the lives of the people who use our services. And while there may be value to thinking in systems, a person's life is often transformed by ideas, relationships and connections specific to that person.

So, as organizations work to facilitate the community for the individuals they serve, let's take some of the pressure off. Instead of thinking of programs that can transform the lives or employ "60 people with developmental disabilities," consider focusing on changing John's life...then Anna's....then Roberto's. By concentrating on *one* person's life, the conversation, ideas and commitment are likely to be more thoughtful and creative.

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Slow Down

While our need to have more relationships in our lives may be urgent, in our efforts to facilitate community for each other, we may need to slow down. As we all know, *real* relationships don't usually happen instantly and can't be dictated by imposed artificial timelines.

As we all know, many relationships start as acquaintances: someone we meet randomly at a party or someone who sits on the same pew as we do at church every Sunday. To assume or expect these folks to immediately become a friend-for-life would be (let's face it) a little creepy. Most of us need the time to build rapport and a sense of safety with new people.

As we work to nurture new relationships between a person with disabilities and other community members, slow down and take the time to notice what's going on around you. And then simply try to create the space for potential and relationships to develop. Is there a particularly friendly waitress at restaurant you frequent? Try to always sit in

her section. Does your mom's best friend run a local hair salon? Maybe the person you know would like to get her hair done there if she doesn't have a regular stylist.

Always consider what the person is passionate about or seems to make her happiest. Seek others who share this. Go to places that are comfortable for the person you are supporting and don't cause anxiety. Make sure the person is told what's going on and what to expect. Listen and appreciate the cues the person you are supporting is giving you. You may introduce people, it's the person's choice about who he welcomes into his life.

Invite Organizational Leaders into the Relationship-Building Process from Time to Time

Many times, organizational leaders are extremely well-connected to people in the community and not as well connected to the people they serve (though most really want to be!)

When having an organized conversation about supporting

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a particular person in facilitating community, consider inviting the organization's Executive Director, a Board member, the Parent Advisory Group, and other "higher ups" to participate in some of the person-specific planning. Doing so will accomplish two important things:

- 1) it will give a person personal access to additional community connections and contacts and
- 2) with all of the busy-ness that organizational leaders experience, it will provide them an opportunity to slow down, and reconnect with the people to whom they are committed.

Get to Know People Outside the Services They Receive

Sometimes, even with good intentions, we box ourselves in to limited thinking by getting to know people only through service-delivery channels: through reimbursable services, through ISP meetings, through reading a person's assessments and writing quarterly reports.

Consider creating opportunities to get to know a person in

ways that we usually get to know each other: through informal channels involving others (both paid and unpaid) who love and care about this person. For some specific ideas, go to *Try it Out*.

When we "bond" it relieves the pressure to ensure that our interaction meets every requirement for billable services and creates a more relaxed, human way of relating to people. We learn about people in new and important ways and also build a stronger sense of community for everyone involved.

Avoid the Service Bubble

Oftentimes, when people receive services, there is an assumption that the provider will now meet all the needs of the person, even all of a person's needs can never truly be met through services alone. If organizations attempt to be all things to all people, it will likely result in people's identity, network and community being largely defined by the organization. The organization's role is to *facilitate* (not become) a rich community network for each person it serves. How do we let

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others in the person's life know this? When beginning services, do we look to family, friends and the community first to provide supports?

**✓ CHECK IT OUT:
GOOD RESOURCES**

- See *Articles* section at Community Works!
<http://www.communityworks.info/>
- *Importance of Belonging* by David Pitonyak, available at www.dimagine.com
- Make a Difference, A Guidebook for Person-Centered Direct Support, John O'Brien and Beth Mount, available through Inclusion Press at www.inclusion.com
- Asset Based Community Development Institute, includes free articles on community-building by John McKnight
<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd/abcdrelatedpubs.html>

- For tips for support staff on becoming a bridge builder See *How to Become an Ambassador* handout in the *And Yet More* part of the *Idea Book*.

**TRY IT OUT: ACTIVITIES,
EXERCISES AND
COMPELLING QUESTIONS**

**Ideas for Getting to Know
People Outside the Services
they Receive**

- If you're an executive director, consider inviting a person who uses services to go with you to your next Chamber of Commerce social meeting. Simply introduce the person by his name or invite a person to your home for your next dinner party.
- If you're a parent of someone using services, consider inviting the person's direct support staff over to your home for a cookout.

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