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Getting Support Right

Planning support in
person-centred ways



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A challenge for Serviceland

The support and care services are awash with planning processes, and discussions over the best approach abound. We often speak to organisations that are intending to "implement" or "roll out" something that they see as a replacement for the old ways of working.

If only it were that simple.

What distinguishes the best planning processes usually isn't the choice of planning tool as such. Instead the key factors are:

- the assumptions underlying the planning
- the objectives of the planning
- the values, skills, and attitudes of the person/people supporting the planning.

Organisations that are trying to work in a person centred way often look for a version of person centred planning that they can use to replace existing planning systems. They may have been inspired by the Map and Path person centred planning processes but want to find something which fits better with their existing structure. These attempts rarely work well.

When we create a new way of working as a direct replacement for an old way it ends up working just like the old way in all important aspects. What we're talking about with person centred planning and working is what Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky call an adaptive change. The problem we're working on isn't open to a technical solution, but relies on people making more difficult changes in their assumptions, beliefs, objectives, values, and attitudes.

So what is support planning?

Really good support planning does two important and different things. Firstly it looks at how someone can be supported well on a day to day basis. Secondly, it looks to the future. It is vital to recognise this second element. For many people, good day to day support is necessary to enable work towards a good life, but is far from sufficient on its own. Without great care support can stifle an individual's capacity to work towards a good life, can contribute to their exclusion, disempowerment and devaluation, and can discourage existing or potential allies from helping. This is the case even when it is respectfully provided and kindly meant

Good support planning also isn't just about applying a particular tool, and it isn't a simpler alternative to Path and Map processes.

The characteristics of support

Support takes many forms. It can be physical, emotional, practical, financial. All of us need support, some of it formal, provided by people paid to be involved with us. We rely on doctors, dentists, estate agents, taxi drivers and many others. Most of us remain sufficiently in control of this support. We do this by

- choosing who provides the support
- complaining if things don't go well
- stating our needs sufficiently clearly and firmly
- spreading word of good or bad practice (the person providing the support knows that their livelihood relies on this).

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we aren't completely in control. We receive poor quality goods but can't work up the energy to complain. Our dentist does something that we're not sure we need. Our doctor doesn't really listen, but we don't want to make a fuss because our care depends on an ongoing relationship.

For most people this is a minor inconvenience. At the worst we feel frustrated and angry, or it takes us time to get what we want. But when we are more reliant on paid support the consequences of this loss of control are far worse. Poorly delivered support can change the course of our lives and even stifle our individuality.

One of the roles of good planning is to ensure that support is provided in a way that genuinely recognises and protects the individuality of the person who is being supported. This isn't easy, but it is important. It's also the real challenge for any service that is organised according to labels or categories of people.

A good life, a good future

A good life depends on us:

- being somebody - having people value us, having people want to know us, having people want to listen to what we say, etc.
- belonging - having friends, being included, love
- contributing - giving our gifts, having chance to express our passions and use our skills
- sharing ordinary places - not having our freedom curtailed, not having society group us together with others who are seen to be like us
- control and choice - having control over our lives

This list is based on the work of John O'Brien and others and is often referred to as the five accomplishments or the five dimensions of inclusion. For more, read "What's Worth Working For?" on "<http://thechp.syr.edu/rsapub.htm>"

For some people well designed support is all that is needed to allow them to pursue a good life. Perhaps some particular need has been getting in the way, and once support is provided they can get on with their life just as normal. For many others a legacy of disempowerment, devaluation and exclusion means that they need more. Support must be creatively provided, be individually tailored and must be able to help a person make real steps towards a good life however they have been labelled and whoever they are.

Supporting ordinary solutions

Another feature of good support planning is that it actively looks for 'ordinary solutions' rather than 'service solutions'. It sees the lack of a good life as an ordinary life problem, not a technical one. It assumes that finding solutions, while difficult and complicated, won't rely on special training just imagination, creativity and people. It's taken for granted that a person is worth knowing, that a good life is possible, and that ordinary people are both knowledgeable enough and motivated enough to take part in supporting the person to work towards this. It recognises that support can often get in the way of ordinary solutions and works to avoid this.

Focusing on capacity

Often when support is planned the process looks something like this:

- The person's situation is assessed to find out if it is bad enough to justify receiving help. Some attempt to measure the level of need is made in order to help prioritise effort.
- A document is created detailing the person's labels (diagnosis, categorisation, disability etc), and detailing the ways in which they are lonely, disempowered and devalued or what it is making them ill or unhappy.
- Sometimes some of the person's aspirations, skills and interests are talked about or written down.
- Services to which the person has an entitlement by virtue of their labels and needs are offered.
- Planning about coordination of these services takes place.
- After a specified period, or when a crisis arises assessment and planning takes place.

Doing it differently

A really good support planning process might be fundamentally different:

To begin with, a judgement is made concluding that a person needs help because of a difficult situation (or to prevent a difficult situation). It is recognised that this isn't a scientific process, but a human one. No attempt is made to categorise the person by any 'label'. Their deficiencies aren't listed. No attempt to measure need is made.

If the person and their allies have identified ordinary (non-service) solutions serious consideration is given to what might be done about these. If simple (non-service) solutions can be imagined immediately, these are offered.

Some examples of simple non-service solutions might be:

- A single woman living with her child, who isn't coping because all her time is taken up with him, is offered money to employ someone to do the washing and to tidy their home.
- A man who needs help with moving around (and washing, etc) is provided with two personal assistants who help him do this (he is well able to instruct them).
- A ramp is built to allow a person who can no longer manage the front stairs to her house to get in and out.

- A man is provided with debt counselling, someone to accompany him to a meeting with the mortgage company, and support to ask for help from his friends to avoid getting more depressed.

Of course it must be recognised that while these solutions are simple, many service support systems wouldn't find them easy to provide because things aren't set up that way.

Often a solution will be more difficult. The person may need help to make friends, become valued, control their affairs, and to make a contribution.

In this case, any planning process must help the person to feel good about themselves, bring creativity and imagination into the situation, engage allies, help the person to ask for help and to coordinate their allies and any paid support. And where paid support is needed the person will need help to make sure that their individuality is supported and protected.

Part (only part) of this process may be the production of a document which can help to:

- provide an introduction to the person
- engage people
- indicate how support can be provided
- protect the person's individuality

Capacity thinking

A key element in any planning process and the production of any document must be that a person's characteristics are known in positive terms. This isn't about ignoring difficult things, but about viewing them from a supportive perspective. It assumes that people don't need to be fixed, and that working towards a good life doesn't depend on people changing themselves, passing any tests, or learning to behave in a particular way.

It is likely that any good process will involve talking about the person's skills, passions, interests, hobbies, and gifts. It is unlikely that such a process will involve discussion from a perspective of deficiency. Labels and diagnoses and categories will be seen to be the least interesting thing about a person (and they may not be seen as in any way relevant or accurate).

Gifts

We all need to make a contribution to the world. When we think about what contributions look like we often start by considering our skills and our knowledge. For instance I might be good at knitting

and be able to pass on what I know about computers. However, there is another category of contribution which Judith Snow and others call 'gifts'.

Here we're thinking more about our uniqueness - more about those special parts of our personality that form the hooks on which relationships can be built, and which it is essential for us to express.

I have a friend who is regularly late. She has always been criticised for this and told that she is lazy. Sometimes people also call her picky. Over the years she has absorbed these ideas of lateness and laziness and pickiness as part of a fairly low self-image. The criticism hasn't changed her character (lateness and pickiness), but instead has caused more significant, deeper damage.

Recently my friend altered her thinking. She realised that her lateness was a consequence of her overriding tendency to be meticulous and to focus on the task in hand. She sees her ability to focus and to be meticulous as useful qualities, and knows that her job depends on them. Her self image has improved, and now she can see these qualities as useful and strong parts of herself which she can contribute widely. Now that she understands more about these and feels more positive she is also more able to control how she contributes these capacities.

We know we are beginning to understand some of our own or others' gifts is when we are aware of them being double sided/edged quantities. Parts of ourselves that are strong, and that can be described positively, but which also get us into trouble sometimes.

Our gifts are likely to be inconvenient to those providing us with traditional support services. These services are much more likely to see our gifts as defects in our character than as the most useful parts of us. If my friend were to need support, she might quickly be labelled as obsessive not focussed, and fussy not meticulous. She might be rewarded for being on time and have privileges removed for lateness.

Understanding what gifts someone has to offer can be a key feature in providing them with good support.

Individuality

Part of what defines us as individuals are our simple preferences, likes, dislikes, rituals, routines, odd ways of doing things, and peculiar habits. We all have these. We're just not talking here about

our most obvious choices like 'vegetarian' or our choice of wallpaper. We're thinking about how our individuality can be seen in every aspect of how we behave and live our lives. This is expressed in everything from our choice of words to what part of ourselves we wash first in the shower (or bath, sink, lake, etc).

These parts of our individuality are often stifled when we receive paid support:

- The choices immediately available to us may be radically reduced.
- We may be encouraged into going along with things that make life easier for those providing support.
- When we do make our wishes clear we may be seen as fussy, picky or selfish.
- Features of our individuality that are most unusual may be seen as abnormal and unhealthy or as part of our condition, illness or disability.
- Those supporting us may try to challenge these characteristics.

Often people who provide support are horrified to realise how completely and unintentionally they impose their own personal characteristics, values and habits on those they support. And worse, how the individual is expected to accept continual change as different support staff come and go.

Good support planning can help to protect and develop individuality.

Production/process

One feature of a poor support planning process is that it sees the organisation of paid support as very separate to consideration of other support. A second feature is that it aims for the production of a piece of paperwork.

Instead, a good support planning process:

- sees support as a continuum, including paid and unpaid support
- recognises that problems of exclusion, devaluation and disempowerment can often be tackled more effectively by ordinary people using ordinary solutions, imagination and creativity than by paid workers providing a service
- makes a difference as much (or more) through the process than through the production of paperwork
- sees any documents, however useful, as only one result of the process

Will this be person centred?

'Person centred' is a description of an approach to planning. There are many ways to plan with a person in a person centred way, many of which can be designed in response to a unique situation.

These questions may be helpful if you are designing or facilitating a process, or thinking about changing the way that an organisation plans for those it supports.

Assumptions and focus

- Will the process assume that the person is already whole and does not need to be fixed?
- Will the process see the focus person entirely from a capacity perspective?
- Will the process start from the assumption that everyone needs to have friends, be valued, contribute, have choice and control, be part of the ordinary world?
- Will the process assume that these things are possible?

People

- Will the focus person be the primary authority in this process?
- Will the process fully involve (to the extent that the focus person and they desire) people who care about / love the person?
- Will people who love / care about the person be trusted more than those who don't like them?
- Will the process support the person to co-ordinate the efforts of those who offer or provide help?
- Will both the process and any documents engage people (in an emotional/involvement sense) with the focus person?
- Will the process stimulate community hospitality?
- Will the process lead to people understanding the person better (in terms of empathy not analysis)?

Process

- Will the process support the person to feel good about themselves?
- Will the process help the person to feel valued?
- Will the process help others value the person?
- Will the process support the person to give their gifts?
- Will the process support the person and others to understand what gifts the person has?
- Will the process support the person to express their passions and interests?
- Will the process motivate the person and their allies?
- Will the process lead to creative and imaginative ideas and solutions?
- Will the process support the focus person and their allies to imagine new possibilities?
- Will the process help to protect the person's individuality?

Documents

- Will any documents support the person to feel good about themselves?
- Will any documents help others value the person?
- Will any documents see the focus person entirely from a capacity perspective?
- Will any documents lead to people understanding the person better (in terms of empathy not analysis)?
- Will documents and graphic records be used as tools and reminders and not seen as the end result of the process?
- Will any documents help to protect the person's individuality?

Action plan

- Will the process create an action plan?
- Will the action plan have backup plans?
- Will the action plan create a team approach so that progress doesn't depend on one person?
- Will the action plan come up with ideas for working around problems that can be anticipated?
- Will the process bring out any significant disagreements among those who love the person and support them to negotiate a way forward in a suitable forum and environment?

Facilitation & location

- Will the process and the place that it takes place be conducive to the person and their allies learning from one another, thinking of new ideas, and working together?
- Will the process and the place it takes place be conducive for the focus person to learn about themselves, and to come up with new ideas and possibilities?
- Will those supporting or facilitating the process be free to do this without factors such as their job role, any conflicts of interest, or their existing relationship with any of those involved getting in the way?
- Will those supporting or facilitating the process be able, and be suitably skilled, to express unconditional positive regard for the focus person?

Resources

Useful websites

www.isja.org.uk

This site provides direct links to articles on inclusion and social justice, and contains a section specifically on person centred planning.

Some of these articles are selected from the collections provided on:

www.inclusion.com

Inclusion Press / Jack Pearpoint and others

thechp.syr.edu/rsapub.htm

Articles by John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien (Responsive Systems Associates)

Good books

People Plans and Possibilities

An introduction to person centred planning including descriptions of some of the tools.

From Inclusion Distribution (see below)

People Plans and Practicalities

A practical guide for would-be implementers of person centred planning who want to travel the road between making plans and changing lives.

From SHS Trust or Inclusion Distribution (see below)

A Little Book about Person Centred Planning

Edited by John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien

Available from Inclusion Distribution (see below)

Implementing Person Centred Planning - Voices of Experience

Edited by John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien

Available from Inclusion Distribution (see below)

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