

Using person centred planning and approaches with children and their families

Helen Sanderson, Clive Acraman and Alison Short

Introduction

"I thought I knew my son so well but until we started planning with John. This changed our whole way of thinking about what John was capable of doing now and in his future. He no longer is going to a day centre, which we found out was making him very anxious and upset. He now is getting supports from home to go and do the things he enjoys and with the people he enjoys doing things with. We recognised that John needs to establish relationships with people he shares interests with rather than it being just based on family relationships and support workers. We are starting to look into expanding John's social networks and giving him more opportunities to experience different things. We learn something every time John experiences something new and then we build on this."

Over recent years, families like John's have shared stories about the difference that person centred planning can make. Many of these plans have been developed or led by family members themselves.

Plans have traditionally been facilitated just for the disabled member of the family. Sometimes, this can cause difficulties, as one family member put it,

"I love my sister but since my mother died and she has come to live with me. I have lost who I am. She has a plan but what about me?"

Through work with families over the last year, a new approach to person centred planning has evolved - family essential lifestyle plans.

This article explores the repertoire of person centred working with families - beginning with person centred approaches that professionals can use or adapt to enhance their work, followed by person centred plans and concluding with the introduction of family essential lifestyle plans and family mentorship.

Using person centred approaches with children and families

Using a person centred approach simply means working in a way that reflects the values underpinning person centred planning. There are also a number of practical tools called 'person centred approaches'. These approaches offer a different way of gathering information about what is important to someone, what they want for their future or what support they need. This is very different from typical assessments. It is a shared journey of learning to discover what Beth Mount calls the 'rich folklore of people'.

Professionals can use person centred approaches, to learn more about the children and families they support, but in a different way. At Sure Start Waterbridge, all the staff team were taught a number of person centred approaches. These included 'positive reputations', which records what people like and admire about someone, and 'good days and bad' which identifies what a good day looks like for someone, and what a bad day is like, and then work out together what it would take for the person to have more good days.

Terry, a health visitor, describes how using person centred approaches enabled him to write a more meaningful report with a family who were moving out of the area.

"My initial attempt at using some person centred approaches was with a family who are soon to move out of the area. Three of their children have multiple problems and the family have demonstrated a good deal of perseverance and tenacity in their dealings with a variety of services. In helping the parents to write-up the nature of the services the children need I have been able to use a person centred approach called "Positive Reputation," which have captured aspects of the children's personalities, abilities and behaviours that would have been left out of the picture if I had simply focussed on a sort of "Problem -Service" report.

By teasing out the essence of what is important to the children and their family as well as what is important for them it made my report much more meaningful and richer."



Diane, a family support worker, used the principles of the 'positive reputation' person centred approach and to develop 'feel good folders' with a family.

Diane developed 'Feel Good Folders' with a family who were struggling to identify positives about themselves individually and as a family. Diane made 'Feel Good Folders' for each individual in the family, and gave the family small pieces of coloured card to write things they liked about each other. They were also encouraged to write something positive about themselves. The family enjoyed the activity and it gave them the opportunity to share positive messages that they may otherwise have left unsaid. Each message had the name of the person who had written it on the card, and they were encouraged to place things that made them smile (pictures, photographs etc.) into the folder. With other professionals the family had previously found it difficult to recall 'positive interactions', however using this person centred approach they had a permanent record of what they liked and admired about each other, which Diane helped them to add to, and use, through her work with them.

Person centred reviews

Person Centred Reviews are a person centred approach which offers a way of changing the structure of any review process (for example year 14 transition reviews, care management reviews, health reviews). The person centred review process involves gathering person centred information, exploring what is working and not working from different people's perspectives, and generating actions (Sanderson and Mathieson, 2004). The information gathered at person centred review can be the first step in developing a person centred plan. Julie's year 14 transition meeting used a person centred review process.

Julie chose 'Club Tropicana' by Wham to welcome people to her meeting. She was delighted to see her Mum, Mandy there, with the head teacher, Connexions advisor, teacher, social worker, community nurse and educational psychologist. Julie had prepared some pictures that she put up, and became fascinated with the spray that we used, and enjoyed spraying the paper.

The review began by sharing what people liked and admired about Julie – her beautiful brown eyes, helpful nature, caring, and what was working in her life. This was very different to the usual reviews that had often just focussed on their difficulties with her behaviour. Everyone participated in sharing information about what they thought was important to Julie, now and for the future, and what support she needed. People also contributed to what they thought was working and not working from the perspective of Julie, her family, the school, and others (e.g. the community nurse, connexions worker, and educational psychologist. Something that was working from Julie's perspective (our best guess) was 'Heather's coat' which was a conversation that Sue and Julie had about a 'magic coat' which helped Julie feel comfortable to get on the transport home. Julie shared some conversations about the coat in an excited and animated way. We wondered whether this approach that so clearly worked for Julie,



might be helpful in other situations that Julie found difficult and set an action to find out. Some of the actions that emerged from Julies meeting were to record in detail some of the strategies that school had found helpful in supporting Julie in difficult situations so that everyone in Julie's life could offer a more consistent approach. Communication between school and the respite service was an issue that began to be resolved by inviting the teacher to the respite service's review.

Personal portfolios

Personal portfolios are another example of a person centred approach in which a child is supported to describe their life in their own way (this has similarities with 'life story books' that are used with children who are looked after, or placed for adoption). Trystan was supported to create a portfolio in his own unique style to tell people about himself. The document was based on a format that he loved – readalong taped stories. It therefore included an outer box cover within which there was a bilingual booklet written in the style of a story, complimented by favourite photographs and images. An audio-taped version was also included with segments of his favourite songs to help highlight key themes. Another young man, Jamie had a fascination for newspapers, and magazines and he made a newspaper style portfolio. Other examples include Andrea, who used a wallet with personal credit card sized introductions and photographs.

These stories illustrate how a few person centred approaches are being used with families and children.

The following table lists many other person centred approaches and suggests ways that these could be helpful (Sanderson, H, 2004). Some approaches will be similar to the ways that professionals work already, others may be useful to explore and adapt.

Person Centred Approach	How it can be useful
'Relationship Circles'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for finding out who could contribute to getting the person connected • for identifying relationships that could be developed or strengthened • for showing the balance of family, friends and paid workers in the person's life.
'Identifying Gifts'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for showing what the person enjoys, is good at, and can contribute to • for identifying things that



	<p>the person may want to do more often</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for starting to think about the kinds of people the person gets on well with.
'Skills and Interests'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for showing what the person enjoys or has a passion for • for showing what talents the person has and the things they are good at • for showing what the person can contribute • for identifying things that the person may want to do more often • for identifying the places, people and activities that make the person happy
'Learning about Hopes and Dreams'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for finding the direction that the person wants her life to go in • for inspiring action • for bringing people together around a common purpose • for getting a sense of what makes the person tick – what motivates her.
'Recording how to provide good support'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for identifying exactly what good support means for the person • for describing in detail what people who support the person must do • for seeing what support someone may need to participate in community opportunities, college or at work • for discovering what



	<p>motivates the person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for examining ways in which the person might be supported to become more independent.
'Communication Chart'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for exploring peoples' different perceptions about how the person communicates • for explaining exactly how the person communicates with us.
'Sharing and recording histories'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to keep in touch with the person's history • to identify the landmark or milestone events in the person's life? • to trace themes through a person's life story • to identify experiences that must not be repeated • to celebrate achievements • to identify opportunities and positive experiences that can be built on • to identify people or activities from the past that have gone missing and which the person might want to reintroduce
'How I spend my week'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for identifying the activities that the person is already involved in • for understanding more about the person's preferences so that they can be expanded upon.

Person centred approaches can be used to enhance existing work, as Terry and Diane's stories illustrated, or can begin to build a picture that can be developed into a person centred plan.



Person centred planning and families

Families describe how person centred planning can change perspectives and futures. They explain how person centred planning can:

🌀 Help people see their family member differently:

"Planning made me stop and think about what my son wants – not just what me or his Dad wants "

"For me, person centred planning helped me to see the person behind the labels. I thought I knew my son, but now I am learning about him, and the real person behind the label."

🌀 Enable families to gain confidence and take initiative

"Even though my plan is not yet complete I am confident enough to have started the ball rolling for direct payments. I wouldn't have done it without the knowledge I have gathered and the confidence that I have gained "

"I feel clearer and more focused for the future"

🌀 Have hope for the future

"Person centred planning has given us hope and a vision for a better future for Mohammed. We feel now we can have a say in how and what service support he receives. We no longer believe that only professional know best for our son. Mohammed's faith and cultural needs are recognised and responded to."

🌀 Strengthen families

" So to get a list of the things people like and admire about your child was quite an emotional moment - but you get the strength from it -the strength within the family."

Person centred planning is an important part of efforts to create change with families, but is only one link in the chain. There needs to be an equal investment in discovering what is possible, and how to make what is



possible happen locally. Therefore people supporting families to make changes in their lives need to focus on the following three areas:

1. What is important to the person, what support they require, and what they want for their future (through person centred planning)
2. What is nationally (or internationally) possible? For example people having their own mortgages, recruiting and employing their own staff, having paid jobs.
3. How to make this happen locally. Creating change that reflects what is important to the person, in a way that provides the support they want and moves towards their aspirations and reflects best practice? For example through individualised funding, using Trusts, working creatively with existing providers.

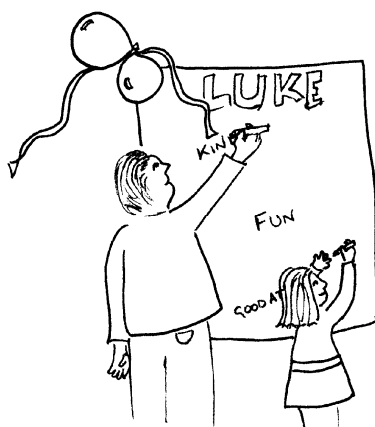
If people do 1) without doing 2) then there is a danger that families will still simply be fitted into what is available - more places at day centres, more people living in small group homes.

Jan and Wendy addressed each of the three areas when they were planning for their daughters Gemma and Katy.

Gemma (23) and her friend Katy (22) are described as having profound and multiple learning disabilities. Jan and Wendy were very concerned and depressed at the lack of options for Gemma and Katy to leave home. In desperation they decided to get together and write a vision for their daughters' happiness. They didn't know it at the time, but what they produced was very much like a person-centred plan. This vision formed the basis of a comprehensive booklet detailing the exact level of support they needed and how it should be provided. The person centred plans have been important in their journey to find a suitable bungalow for Katy and Gemma and funding to pay for their support. Two and a half years ago Gemma and Katy moved into their bungalows, with the support they need.

Family person centred plans

There are some situations when planning with one member of a family seems insufficient, counter-cultural and sometimes even counter-productive. This has led to the development of family essential lifestyle plans.



Luke's Mum, Della, has been working with Luke on his essential lifestyle plan. They decided to have an 'information gathering party', with other members of his family and friends. On a sunny August evening, the house was decked with balloons,

streamers and large pieces of paper on the walls for people to fill with their knowledge of Luke. There was a joyous, party atmosphere as friends and family used coloured markers to record what they liked and admired about Luke, what they thought his best and worst days were, and what support they thought he needed.

Luke and Della thought the evening was a great success, until after everyone had gone, Luke's older brother, Tim, burst into tears. The evening had once again emphasised for him the inequality that he felt with his disabled sibling. The family are now beginning a family essential lifestyle plan, that will describe what each member of the family likes and admires about each other, what is important to them as a family and individually, and what support each family member needs.

Skilful planning with a disabled family member, will always consider the person within the context of their family, however Family Essential Lifestyle Plans takes this a step further, and describes what is important to each family member, and the support that the family needs, with the disabled family member naturally part of this. The following table describes the headings from essential lifestyle planning and shows how these have been extended in a family essential lifestyle plan (for further information and examples of family essential lifestyle plans see www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk).

Headings used in an individual essential lifestyle plan	Headings used in a family essential lifestyle plan
What do we like and admire about the person?	What do we like and admire about each other?
What is important to the person?	What is important to us as a family? What is important to us individually?
What is important for the person (the support the person wants or needs)	What is important for us – what support do we need as a family? What support do we need individually?
Questions to answer	Questions to answer
What is working/not working from different perspectives?	What is working/not working from different perspectives?
Action	Action



Sometimes a family plan emerges from using different person centred approaches with a family. Lorraine, a community nurse, who has been

working with a family of four, used person centred approaches and realised that she had information about each family member that could form the basis of a family essential lifestyle plan. She suggested this to the mother, and showed her examples of family essential lifestyle plans. The mother was enthusiastic and delighted to have the opportunity to create a plan that would “reflect the very essence of her and her family”

Rachel, the Social Worker involved with the family describes how this approach differs from how staff in statutory services traditionally work:

“Previously I had very little time to establish a relationship with a family, I often needed to make an initial assessment of a families needs in a single visit. Working with person centred approaches has clearly demonstrated to me that preventative work which produces a clear, child centred, and family focussed plan should be the how all initial social work assessments are undertaken”

Family essential lifestyle plans offer another way of using person centred planning with children and their families. They may be particularly useful for working with families from minority ethnic communities, and professionals working with looked after children, and those seeking adoptive placements.

“I didn't know what to expect when I began creating my families Essential Lifestyle Plan with support from my local Sure Start programme. I had seen individual plans and commented how wonderful it would be for my foster children to have their own individual plan. However now we have our family plan I believe it is really important that foster children not only own their own plan, but that all foster carers have plans to enable better matching and, where possible for children placed to become apart of the foster families Essential Lifestyle Plan.

Families leading planning

The Government issued implementation guidance for person centred planning that specifically recommended that partnership boards invest in ways to support family members to lead person centred planning, should they choose to. Many families have taken this opportunity, with support from training, the Families Leading Planning pack (Short, Sanderson and Cook, 2004) a family-led list-serve, and of course each other.



"I am enjoying the challenge of starting an ELP and getting to know my daughter better"

"The hostel meeting was great - I had only expected a few staff - the whole staff team came to meet with me - It was lovely it reinforced what I thought but I learnt lots more about Michael - Really learnt how much paid support staff know and care about him - fantastic."

Person centred planning requires two kinds of expertise – content expertise (what should be in the plan) and planning process expertise (know how to plan) (know how to plan) Self advocates and family members, are always content experts – they have expert knowledge about their own or their daughter or son's life. Other people (person centred planning facilitators) can be process experts – they know how to use the process of person centred planning. When families lead planning, as well as sharing their context expertise, they are also being process experts by taking a lead in gathering information, drafting the plan and preparing for a person centred planning meeting, and sharing actions.

Some family members want to help other families in planning with their daughter or son, and have begun to work as 'family mentors'. This approach to supporting families is being developed by Caroline Tomlinson from Wigan and Leigh Scope, with Barbara Coles and Margaret Cook from the family led organisation 'Families Leading Planning UK' (for more information see www.familiesleadingplanning.co.uk). A 'family mentor' is someone who works alongside families to enable them to use person centred planning. Family mentors are family members who have used person centred planning for their own family, and who receive training and support so that they can work with other families to plan.

Conclusion

Person centred approaches offer professionals a menu of additional ways of working that could enhance their existing practices. In the first of this series of articles we offered 4 ways in which professionals may contribute to person centred planning (Kilbane and Sanderson, 2004). Person centred approaches extend the ways that professionals can integrate person centred working into their professional practice.

Person centred planning offers new opportunities for partnership – with plans being led by family members, family mentors, or facilitators; for individuals or the whole family.

One mother described how she needed to begin by doing a plan for herself before she could see how to plan with her son. It was only when



she saw that she had not been having the life that she wanted that she then realised that to have this she had to support her son differently. She was able to change her son's life through doing her own plan. Another mother took a different starting point through planning with and for her son first. She concludes this article by showing clearly how planning can help the whole family.

"Essential Lifestyle planning has given my son his life back and then I have been given my life."

References

Kilbane, J., and Sanderson, H., (2004) 'What' and 'How': understanding professional involvement in person centred planning styles & approaches

Mount B (1987) Personal Futures Planning: finding directions for change. Unpublished PhD University of Georgia.

Short, A., Sanderson, H., and Cook, M., (2004) Families Leading Planning. Helen Sanderson Associates: Manchester

Sanderson, H (2004) Person Centred Approaches in Transition

www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

Sanderson H., and Mathiesen, R (2004) Person Centred Reviews.

www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

Sanderson, H, and Acraman, C (2004) Family Essential Lifestyle Plans,

www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

