

FAMILY MENTORS

PERSON CENTRED PLANNING AND FAMILY MENTORS

“MAKING IT COME ALIVE FOR FAMILIES AND ENSURING IT STAY’S ALIVE!!!!” by Caroline Tomlinson , family leader

Valuing people the White Paper has set out very clear guidance for local Partnership Boards around person centred planning. It emphasises the need for long term strategic change and the necessary shifts in culture and practice, and emphasises how person centred planning will play a significant role in people gaining the lives they want within their local communities.

Valuing people states:- Development of a person- centred approach requires real changes in organisational culture and practice. Achieving these changes should be a priority for Partnership Boards.

HAPPINESS DOES NOT DEPEND UPON GETTING OTHER PEOPLE’S APPROVAL – IT DEPENDS ON GETTING YOUR OWN APPROVAL.

The whole emphasis on a person centred approach is that the person and their family are central to all planning. It isn’t a merely set of tools used to plan for people, it is a whole system approach to planning WITH people that involves a radical and cultural change to traditional ways of working. The term ‘person centred’ means what is important to the person from their own perspective and if we are truly going to move towards a person centred culture we need to ensure we embrace and include family members along the way. Hence person centred planning can promote person centred approaches. In other words commissioning, providing and organising services need to be rooted in listening to what people want, to help them live in the communities they choose.

THERE ARE AS MANY PATHS AS THERE ARE TRAVELERS.

This is by far the most radical paper we have had in 30 years for people with learning disabilities and we must take the opportunity to ensure families feel that it can make a REAL difference for them. We must see family members and self advocates as real partners and invest in them wisely. After all the majority of families are in this for the ‘long haul’, investment should contribute to long term sustainability and the re-energising of families who are in this with both their heart and their minds. For far too long investment has taken place for people paid to be in the lives of people with disabilities, which is a short term

investment as people in modern society do change employment quite frequently, and this is notorious in human services.

CONTENTMENT IS A FORM OF HAPPINESS THAT GOES BEYOND THE SENSES OF TASTE, SMELL, SOUND AND VISION.

Until recently families fortunate enough to hear about person centred planning have developing their own person centred plans for family members in isolation. They have found it an extremely useful to influence change in their own son/daughters or family members life but have struggled in getting services to understand and many cases being effectively able to contribute as partners in the plan. The families have struggled from the lack of support and recognition from professionals and only the very few have been able to maintain continuity for their family member.

I have experienced first hand the progress that my son has been able to achieve through using person centred planning but have struggled in the maintenance of this because of the lack of guidance, understanding and external support. I have had to rely on the 'goodwill' input of experts for whom I was eternally grateful, but ultimately the continuity has been left to ourselves as a family which can sometimes be counter productive if there are not enough outside influences to make changes happen and to enable us to effectively problem solve. My main source of support did come through other family members who were also working in isolation but this was so fragmented, uncoordinated and geographically wasn't local it impacted significantly on the support we as a family were able to achieve. However looking on the positives it inspired the 'dispersed' families to dream and believe in the possible, yet at the same time gave a real focused plan to work to.

So where are the gaps? We looked at models of where families had access to person centred planning, what worked and what didn't work. We established that families really valued the process of person centred planning as it was positive and essential for the well being and future of their son / daughter or family member. The gaps that families felt were present was the long term support to continue to update their plans as their son's and daughters became older and when families and individuals needed to re-vision because things had dramatically changed. There also were significant gaps in organised peer support, we were left to seek out others but the distance between us all impacted on the effectiveness of this.

Not being defeated we sought to find a positive way forward and analysed what seems effective and does really work for families. Leadership training such as Partners in Policymaking has really empowered family members and has embraced them to become part of a movement in influencing systems to change. Using the model of empowerment and leadership a few of us got our heads together to plan a programme specifically around person centred planning. The idea evolved of Family Mentors, based on work by Michael Smull and his colleagues. We wondered why couldn't we train and develop local

people to take real control of their own lives and join up with others allowing effective and well resourced peer support? This ultimately would enable local families to come together to share ideas, to promote person centred planning to the wider community and to be a resource for other families wanting to develop their own plans.

YOU CAN NEVER HOPE TO KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS IF YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT.

So what is a Family Mentor?

A Family Mentor is an individual who has a relative with a disability or is someone who works for a family led organisation who would like to support families to develop person centred plans on a long term basis. The family mentor would be trained in all aspects of person centred planning which would enable and empower individuals to assist in developing a long term family focused person centred planning strategy which will be practical and sustainable for local people.

The Family Mentor would as part of the training gain real life experience by developing their own plan, their relatives plan and then enabling others to develop theirs. This would ensure a 'win win' situation for all. In other words the training would be productive on an individual level and would develop the enthusiasm, knowledge base and leadership for sharing and coaching others.

THERE IS MORE HAPPINESS TO BE GAINED BY PLEASING A FRIEND, THAN FROM A FRIENDS ABILITY TO PLEASE US.

How would this develop alongside the Partnership Board?

The family mentor initiative would work in partnership with all other person centred planning initiatives locally, ensuring a cohesive, transparent and an excellent opportunity for sharing good practice and real involvement. The initiative could provide choice for families in the way they wanted to facilitate their plans and offer real life experience in the process. As human beings it is natural to want support from individuals who have gone through the experience on a personal level. It is also extremely important for sustainability and continuity and family members are the obvious people who are going to be around for a significant amount of time.

YOU CAN'T BUILD A REALTIONSHIP BASED UPON FALSEHOOD ANY MORE THAN YOU CAN BUILD A HANG-GLIDER OUT OF MARGARINE.

The family mentoring could be extended and rolled out to all individuals interesting in developing plans and the maintenance of those plans extending good practice to all user groups. This would radically impact on systems change for all human services and would ultimately evolve an enhanced quality of life for individuals requiring additional support. Long term this would enhance the community to recognise and celebrate diversity amongst all citizens, bringing about significant change to no longer see disabled people as passive recipients of care but as active members of their community. A significant outcome for partnership boards and fundamentally what they are designed to do.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Success will be self monitored by family mentors and families benefiting from trained mentors. The outcomes will be the 'proof of the pudding' and long term sustainability will also be a measure of success. Families will be encouraged to be open and honest throughout the process and will be encouraged to be part of the developing project as stakeholders rather than critical analysis's at the end of yet another pilot project. They will be able to identify the real possibilities, be able to effectively benchmark where they are now and will evolve creative solutions to achieve their dreams. The tools of person centred planning will enable 'live' evidence to be recorded on an individual level and with peer support community practice sessions evolving will give a group overview, thus ensuring both qualitative and quantities data available to be analysed.

The movement and cultural change will move families from passive dependants on services with no control to customers with a real stake in the development of their relatives life and ultimately the development services and the community as a whole. You could use the analogy of an 'inside out' approach, that is from inside our hearts and minds, in our own front room, on our own terms, making a difference to our own lives first, to then impacting on services and the wider community. A significant shift from the traditional ways of service function, consultation and other methods previously used to engage local people.

GET USED TO A DIFFERENT WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS. A CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE BRINGS A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY.