

READING ROOM

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PATHS

"PATH is there when a situation is complex and will require concerted action, engaging other people and resources, over a longish period in order to make an important vision real."

Pearpoint J, O'Brien J and Forest M, 'PATH: A workbook for planning positive, possible futures' Toronto Inclusion Press

PATH was developed by Jack Pearpoint, Marsha Forest and John O'Brien from 1991 onwards. It can be used as a planning style with individuals and with organisations. When used in person centred planning, the person and the people she wants to invite meet together with two facilitators to work through the process.

PATH works well when an individual has a group of people around her who are committed to making things happen. Using the PATH process enables people to understand and take control of the situation.

Step 1 The dream

The facilitator asks the person to describe her personal vision for the future. She might talk very generally about how she would like life to be different, or much more specifically about how she would like to live day to day. The graphic facilitator draws this up as the person talks.

The facilitators may ask other people to make suggestions but will always check back with the person. The dream guides and gives direction to the rest of the meeting.

Step 2 Sensing the goal

The next step demands that participants imagine that a year has passed and that they are back in the same room recollecting what has happened. They tell the facilitators what it is like to live in a better future, what events have taken place and what they have done to make the dream more of a reality. There are two rules to this stage - all goals recorded have to be both positive and possible.

Step 3 Now

Step 3 examines the situation now and analyses the tension between where the group is now and where they want to be in a year's time. It is this tension that gives energy and dynamism to the process.

Step 4 Enrol/Who's on Board?

None of the goals are achievable by the person working on her own. Step 4 looks at who needs to help. This could be people at the meeting but also those who are not present. Sometimes there are people who could stand in the way of the goals. Their names are recorded so that a strategy can be developed for winning them over.

"Path is a way for diverse people, who share a common problem or situation to align...their purposes...their understanding of their situation and its possibilities for hopeful action...their action for change, mutual support, personal and team development and learning."

Step 5 How are we going to build strength?

This can sometimes be a very important step in identifying what the group will need to do in order to maintain strength and commitment to the goals. It can sometimes be as simple as meeting regularly and supporting each other by phone. Sometimes it means acknowledging and changing destructive patterns in the group.

Step 6 Three/six month goals

The facilitator asks the group to pick a date within the next year, normally either three or six months later, and to set interim goals.

Step 7 First Steps

First steps are identified and the date for another meeting set.

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Jack Pearpoint, John O'Brien and Marsha Forest

Mary's Path

Mary has never enjoyed living with other people with whom she cannot communicate. Two years ago, she began to talk about moving on. Mary's experience of planning is typical. She has had hundreds of assessments done to her throughout her life, none of which made any attempt to involve her in a meaningful way. She has some very clear ideas for the future and she has a strong group of people around her who get on well.

Mary is her own best advocate, continually campaigning to change arrangements which do not suit her. Mary and her support staff decided to invite in outside facilitators to help them plan for change, using PATH. An all day meeting was scheduled to which Mary invited her parents, her keyworker from the day centre, members of the house team and her speech therapist.

A year later, Mary has achieved many of her goals. She goes out weekly to the same pub, she is learning to read and she has been on holiday to York. However in many ways it has been a frustrating year for Mary. She still lives in the same house, although plans are being made for her to move on. It has taken a year for the social work department to agree to fund a dayworker so she can cut down her days at the Adult Training Centre to three a week. Mary has been to biology classes in an ordinary school but it is proving difficult to persuade a college to offer her a place in an integrated class.



The review meeting had a very different tone from the original PATH. The same outside facilitators were asked in and the same people attended the meeting. This time Mary took far more control of the process than she had the year before. She did not allow anyone else to speak on her behalf. When people suggested that she needed to get out and meet more people she indicated that this is not a priority for her. She feels that she has enough people to talk to although sometimes they do not have enough time to talk to her. Her main priorities at the moment are her reading, her RE classes and moving into her own home.

Things had changed. The other people at the meeting were there to listen to what Mary wanted and to say what contribution they could make to supporting her to get it. Mary now has a dedicated team including her parents and paid workers, many of whom also see themselves as her friends. Person centred planning has helped Mary become an assertive young woman who is both sure of what she wants and determined to get it. However, she is still frustrated by the amount of time it takes for her to get anything and by how much still has to be achieved. She chose to have a plan because she was not satisfied with her quality of life. The planning was the start of a process of change which has not moved fast enough for her.

