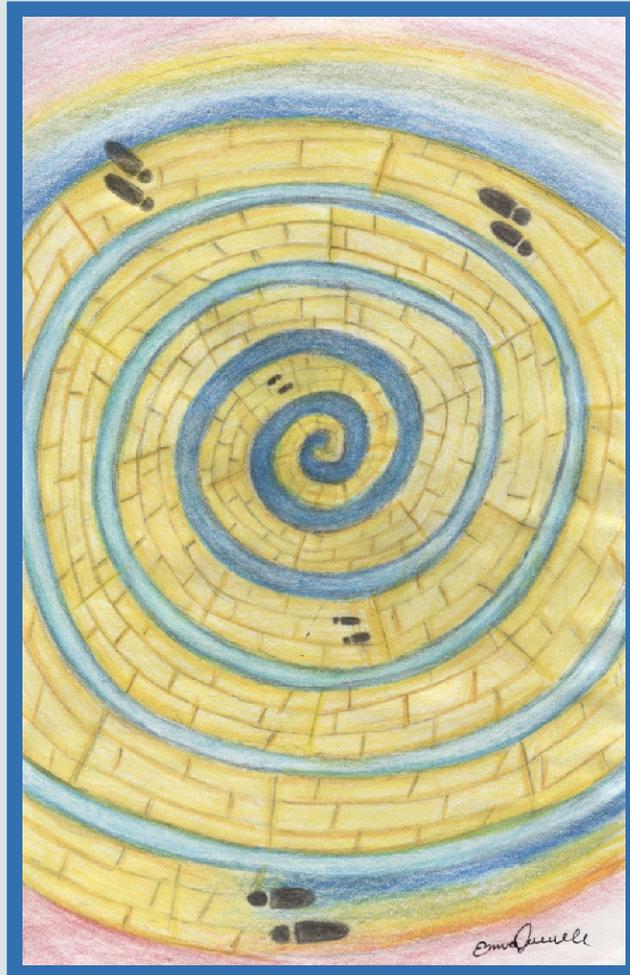


Mapping The Learning Journey

**Expanding Our Vision, Experience & Resources About Training/Learning
To Make A Real Difference**



by
Susannah Joyce

Realizations Training & Resources

Mapping The Learning Journey

*Expanding Our Vision, Experience & Resources About Training/Learning
To Make A Real Difference*

To John O'Brien

**For your passion and gifts of learning and teaching how we welcome each other
into our communal lives**

“One of the first things we learn from our teachers is discernment: the ability to tell truth from fiction, to know when we have lost our center and how to find it again.”

*Anne Hill, *The Baby and the Bathwater**

I am also grateful for the generosity and wisdom of all who contributed their thoughts to this work, both those listed below and others who have inspired so many in continued learning.

Anna Eliatamby, Anne Hill, Ashley White, Audrey Cole, Barb Biscaro-Swartz, Barb Fowke, Barbara Leavitt, Beth Barol, Beth French, Beth Mount, Brenda Laviolette, Bruce Anderson, Bruce New, Bud Carter, Carole Verdun, Cathy Stroud, Colin Newton, Colleen Wieck, Connie Lyle O'Brien, David Hasbury, David Pitonyak, De'Amon Harges, Debbie Boardman, Don Justrabo, Emma Van der Kluft, Gail Iris Gillingham Wylie, Gail Jacob, Ginny Focht New, Guy Légaré, Herb Lovett, Jack Pealer, Jack Pearpoint, Janet Duncan, Janice Fialka, Janice Strickland, Jennifer Leslie, Jill Gromen, John Guido John Jones, John Lord, John O'Brien, Joe Whittaker, Judith Mc Gill, Judith Snow, Julie Malette, Kathy Lee, Kathy Lorimer, Kory Earle, Laurie Larson, Linda Perry, Lisa Louttit, Lynda Kahn, Lynne Elwell, Marg McLean, Marilyn Haywood, Marlyn Shervill, Marsha Forest, Martha Leary, Mary Romer, MaryJo Alimena Caruso, Maurice Voisin, Micah Fialka Feldman, Michael Kendrick, Michelle Friesen, Nancy Thaler, Norman Kunc, Patricia Gallin, Patti Scott, Peter Dill, Peter Leidy, Richard Ruston, Rick Tutt, Rosa McAllister, Ruth Seigfried, Theresa Somerton, Yvonne Spicer

Cover Art by Emma Seonaid Jewell

Please see information on *Realizations'* resources and trainings at the end of this book

Table of Contents

“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

Albert Einstein

In my last book, *Meeting The Challenge*, an exploration of respectful and effective support regarding people’s struggles around behaviour, I created the Table of Contents as a checklist, in the spirit of Dr. Atul Gawande’s influential book, *The Checklist Manifesto: How To Get Things Right.*

I have used the same approach here, with an intent of invitation for people to think about how they may act on some of the ideas offered here by myself and the many contributors. Gawande’s research reminds us that something as simple as creating and referring to a checklist of what we want and need to do, will dramatically increase what we accomplish and how well we do it; in this case, fostering a culture of ongoing learning for ourselves and others.

- ✓ **Introduction: We are discussing our Vision of continued learning with one another.....** p. 1
- ✓ **Guideposts Along My Journey: We are sharing stories and experiences about important milestones on our own Learning Journeys.....** p.2
- ✓ **Challenges to Learning: We are considering what challenges we face around learning and how we start moving beyond these.....**p.5
- ✓ **Gathering Information on What People Want and Need to Learn: We are looking at what we are and aren’t accomplishing in our Mission/Goals and in helping people supported to realize their Dreams, and how this informs training/learning.....**p.10
- ✓ **Achieving a Balance: We are exploring learning opportunities that include Values, Skills, Knowledge and Personal Qualities.....**p.14
- ✓ **Individual Learning: We are taking time to understand what people in various roles in our group/organization want and need to learn.....**p.26

- ✓ **Expanding Our Vision of Who Attends Learning Events:** *We are moving forward in offering people in various roles more learning opportunities.....*p.29

- ✓ **Where and When:** *We are considering a variety of times and settings in which people can learn.....*p.35

- ✓ **Finding Teachers:** *We are accessing a range of teaching styles, approaches, and expertise.....* p.37

- ✓ **Encouraging an Attitude of Learning:** *We are helping people be more aware of how they learn best.....*p.45

- ✓ **Ensuring Follow up:** *We are building in ways for people to share and act on what they are learning.....*p.50

- ✓ **Ongoing Learning:** *We are actively developing a culture of continued learning and engaging people to take a leadership role in this.....*p.56

- ✓ **Conclusion:** *We are developing leadership among everyone in our learning community and supporting this as essential to helping people have the lives they envision for themselves.....*p.59

Information on Realizations.....p.62

Introduction

“There is only one thing for it then — to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the only thing for you. Look what a lot of things there are to learn.”

T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*

Although I would challenge Merlin to put relationships first, if ever there was a time to attend to learning, among those of us engaged in understanding how people with disabilities experience welcoming communities and social justice, it is now. The challenges we face today in Canada, the US and the UK, appear to me as some of the most significant since my involvement began in the mid 1980's. Funding cuts have taken their toll and so have requirements for additional structures and paperwork that seem to contribute little to and often detract from, the day to day wellbeing of people who receive support.

I believe this is a crucial time to reflect, discuss and determine what is truly necessary to achieve the goals of this movement and commit to ensuring that these conditions not only exist, but thrive, despite the very real obstacles we are facing.

Training is certainly viewed as an important component of thoughtful and effective support. However, it is not only a matter of finding resources to offer and provide it, it is also important to expand our definition and ideas about training, to develop and promote a culture of ongoing learning in a variety of ways, seeing everyone as teachers and learners, personally and professionally.

I believe that we are caught in the middle of systems that have not always addressed the multifaceted nature of learning. Of course, there are numerous people within these systems who do indeed value and promote meaningful learning, but frequently, the priority of schools is the successful memorization of facts and the priority of government is the desire for skills that will ensure accountability. Neither system has been able to invest significantly in deeper and individualized approaches to how we grow and develop, and so frequently our task is helping people learn how to learn, with fewer external supports.

If we do not envision, define and create circumstances in which everyone involved in our movement---self-advocates/people who have a disability, family and friends, people paid to offer support, and our neighbours in the wider community---can learn from one another, then things simply won't change in a major way.

Committing to the development and implementation of a learning culture must not be so laborious or time consuming that it is dismissed as an interesting idea---someday---when we

have more resources. That day may never come but investing in the knowledge and gifts of each person, as our most valuable resource, will indeed lead to better lives for people receiving and providing support.

This Guide is a collection of thoughts---some of my own as well as those of many people in this movement whose opinions and experience I value highly---about how we can make a greater difference through deepening and expanding our commitment to ongoing learning, in a variety of ways. I hope it will offer some helpful suggestions on how we continue accessing new information as well as using what we already have, more consistently and intentionally.

The challenges in our movement today invite us to remember why we became involved in this work and way of life to begin with, what and who we value within it, and the gifts we have to offer. These strengths, individually and collectively, are more than enough to meet whatever comes along. It only requires being who we are!

Guideposts Along My Journey

In 1985 I was hired to coordinate some training on “quality supports” through The Trillium Quality Assurance Project, for six counties in my area of Southwestern Ontario. The highlight of the various events we sponsored during the first year was a weekend with John O’Brien. I was new to the field of developmental disability supports, other than a connection through a Citizen Advocacy group, and hadn’t heard of John, but people on my advisory committee were enthusiastic about him.

They mapped out various Agenda Topics for the two and a half days, such as “The History of Evaluation” and had me send the list to John, who politely (and wisely) overlooked the suggested topics and began by telling a story about a young woman whose idea of good support was not losing her place in a group home if she went away for two nights to go and visit her mother’s grave. The regulation that prohibited an absence of more than one night from your “residence” was a reality in her world of services and definitely didn’t contribute to a good quality of life.

In both content and form the weekend with John was excellent, offering people valuable points of information, more stories to inspire and practical strategies for moving forward. I was fortunate that my introduction to creative support and to training was of such a high calibre and provided a standard that I still use today, in thinking about my own work, as well as that of others.

Our Project was quite successful. I had previously been involved in producing a video on accessibility in our city, and suggested we record all the Trillium training sessions to create a tape on Quality Supports. Today, in 2013, the sections of that tape based on John’s sessions are

as pertinent as ever, and we are doing a bit of minor editing on “*quality is...*” to raise funds for People First Ontario.

I continued to learn about learning and teaching/training from attending seminars within human services as well as business leadership companies like Career Track, and saw the importance of combining the ability to inspire with content of substance and authenticity. One particular favourite of mine back then was a taped presentation by Jack Canfield, before the Chicken Soup days. His thoughts on Self-Esteem still offer a wealth of information and insights.

Part of understanding effective training involves the style of the presenter and the value of the content; another essential piece is about the learning environment---not just the comfort of the room and the inclusion of windows and control of the heat, though these are important details. But the actual design of the process---the holding environment---can be transforming for people.

My first experience of this type of innovation was at The McGill Summer Institute in Montreal, which I first attended in 1989. The Institute had begun primarily around Inclusive Education but had started to expand into other topics. The courses back then were two weeks long and having the luxury of time and the company of a small group of dedicated leaders provided opportunities for amazing conversations and insights. My first time there I was again with John O’Brien and our group spent several days just reflecting on and discussing our values and how these had developed.

The atmosphere at The Institute was a heightened one and I always felt that we lived the equivalent of several years over the two weeks. There were opportunities to think and listen to others and form supportive relationships that would weather the miles and years. The Toronto Summer Institute, though of a shorter duration, still offers that same spirit and opportunity for connection and shared learning. Numerous other Institutes on various topics now take place every year in a number of states and provinces, as well as in the UK and other places in the world.

In Montreal I first heard about another form of Institute, developed through the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities, called *Partners in Policymaking*, an opportunity for family members of people who have a disability to come together for a series of weekends, to form connections and learn together about planning, Circles, and other areas of excellence in support, as well as advocacy, lobbying, and political change. Many *Partners in Policymaking* workshops have been held over the years in the US and the UK and have added greatly to the power and knowledge of families and their ability to effect change.

There were also Leadership Institutes being offered in various locations. I was invited to present at one developed and facilitated by Beth Barol in Pennsylvania, where a group of families, self-advocates and paid people learned together about different approaches to being a leader. Pennsylvania later hosted these types of Institutes, over a number of months, on topics related to

supporting people labelled with challenging behaviour, holding the gatherings in strategic locations across the State.

Another approach that has had a strong impact on how people learn is *Framework for Accomplishment*, a week-long learning opportunity created by John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien. Framework offers each person participating the chance to get to know someone receiving support. At the end of the week those attending make some suggestions for "constructive actions" that could make a difference for the person, without the need of extra funds or resources. I was present at the very first *Framework*, in Kingston, Ontario, and later coordinated several in various parts of the province. I saw the impact these gatherings made on people because of the experiential nature and the advantage of time with others to learn together.

Two other events stand out for me. One was a weekend conference sponsored through Ontario's literacy initiatives, entitled "*101 Ways To Tell a Story*". Participants were literacy learners and their supporters and each person was invited to join a collaborative group for the weekend on song writing, mural painting, storytelling, quilt-making, or poetry writing, facilitated by a professional in that art form. Over the weekend the task for each group was to develop a work to be shared with everyone on the Sunday afternoon. This was true community, where everyone's contribution was expected and valued and the experience modelled how inclusiveness and hospitality really work.

The other event, the International People First conference held in Toronto in 1992, was organized so that participation by everyone occurred in respectful and welcoming ways. I recall gender specific Talking Circles, each facilitated by a Native Elder, to discuss very sensitive experiences of sexuality and abuse. These conversations offered a safe space for everyone to speak as women or men together; disability was not an issue.

The conference provided information in an atmosphere where relationships could be formed or strengthened. I saw countless instances where two people recognized each other from a time when they were both in the same institution---now reconnecting under such different and joyous circumstances. One of my fondest memories is of the late Roland Johnson, a leader in the self-advocacy movement in the US, dancing in the aisles of the banquet room with my friend, Nancy Thaler, who was at that time Deputy Secretary of Developmental Services for the state of Pennsylvania.

Since then I have sponsored, offered, and participated in countless workshops, retreats, Institutes and training events. I have learned a lot about what is helpful to those attending and what is not, and continue to gain new insights each time I am involved as a participant or presenter. I believe we need to stay open to what will help us make a difference in our work and in our world and that we have a much greater chance of doing so when there is intentional thought, discussion and action around how we continue learning individually and together over time.

In the spirit of collaborative thought, this book includes perspectives and experiences on learning and teaching from many colleagues and friends whose values and experience I admire wholeheartedly. I hope the ideas here will help you and those with whom you work to move forward in deepening and expanding opportunities for learning, to increase meaning and joy in your own life and in the lives of others.

Challenges To Learning

Although it may not seem like the most positive approach to list the challenges to learning before discussing how it can be explored more fully, sometimes potential obstacles can seem less overwhelming when they are mentioned up front. Following are some that have been identified by myself and others over the years:

Issues of Vision and Focus

This may be the most common and least identified reason that training and learning so frequently happen sporadically and in ways that don't have the most impact for change and excellence. Although most people are interested in learning new things and being as effective as possible, there is frequently a lack of focused thought and planning about what, specifically, they want and need to learn.

People will see an event advertised and ask to go or be sent, hopefully to gain some good ideas and act upon a few strategies that have been shared. But without more time taken to identify the specific Values, Knowledge, Skills and Personal Qualities needed to do the work and designated champions to promote and encourage learning for everyone, the benefits from training opportunities will be much less effective.

Issues of Resources

“I was talking to somebody recently about training. I have always viewed training as very important, especially as we try to shift staff culture and attitudes from one of ‘taking good care of people’ to that of providing supports to help people build a good life of their choosing. There isn't any one training ‘event’ that will accomplish this so I have tried to provide training that complements and builds upon a foundation.”

In our current reality of rising costs, including labour and unfunded pay equity obligations, and no increase in funding in four years, we have had to reduce spending wherever we can, including reducing staffing levels. While it is tempting to look at training budgets, training is now more critical than ever. With fewer staff, it's even more important to provide training to help them be the best they can be.”

Cathy Stroud, Huntsville, Ontario, Executive Director, Community Living Huntsville

Currently there are financial realities in all of our provinces, states, and countries that are having a direct impact on the day to day support of people, as well as on the philosophical foundations for supporting them well, such as ongoing learning opportunities. This is a complex situation, requiring varied solutions but cutting back on what will help us offer thoughtful and creative support is only making a difficult circumstance worse. I was saddened recently to hear that someone invited to a day of learning with colleagues in her area, was forbidden to attend because her organization had made a statement that there would be no training until funders increased the budget of someone supported. For so many reasons, including that the person could have come for free if the situation had been known ahead of time, this well intended strategy was not helpful to anyone and deprived her of a day that might have actually contributed ideas to helping the person supported have a better life, with or without a budget increase.

Something of importance I learned at The Mc Gill Summer Institute was that if you are clear on the “why’s” then the “how’s” will start to come to you, particularly if you work on it together. Finding financial resources isn’t easy but it is not impossible if there is vision and commitment.

“We have identified training as a priority; so it is a priority and we need to find ways to make it happen. We try to budget for the worst case situations so that we take training needs into account early on rather than as an afterthought. We have a strong organizational commitment to training and learning!”

Marg McLean, Executive Director, Community Living St. Marys & Area, Ontario

It is also very important to keep in mind that not all resources are about money. Outside trainers and consultants are one important aspect of a learning culture but so are people within a group/ organization and among groups of many interests, not just disability supports. Mining the gifts and passions of individual people and organizations and seeing how these can be shared will add significantly to your list of who has information and knowledge to share.

Another resource often misunderstood is that of time. In these days of increased regulations, expectations regarding paperwork and other bureaucratic accountability, some administrators are feeling so beleaguered that they cannot envision much breathing space for initiatives beyond “compliance”. The old adage of “Render unto Caesar” has merit but it is important to keep in

mind that this is only half of the quote and that a moral responsibility---in this case to people we work for --- remains a core allegiance. Issues of time also require our creativity.

My hope is that we will stay grounded in what is most important to our movement and realize that there need not be conflicting priorities or accountabilities. With leadership and collaboration we can ensure that the gains people supported and their allies have made in the last few decades are not lost.

“Living morally and ethically is the process of living with questions that will not resolve themselves easily.”

Judith McGill, Toronto, Ontario, Adult Educator, Lifepath Training, Executive Director, Families for a Secure Future

Issues of Attitude

We already know that

“Learning is an ongoing and never ending journey for a full life. So it must be for work! Unfortunately training is one of the first things reduced in times of economic stress...it should be one of the most preserved elements. Training exposes employees to the best thinking and most current strategies to support people to live a meaningful life in their community. We would not trust a car mechanic or computer technician who was unaware of current technology. Why should people trust a human service worker without the most up to date attitudes and skills?”

Rick Tutt, Ottawa, Ontario, Rick Tutt and Associates

When I have had conversations with people in our movement about obstacles regarding any aspect of what we do, attitudes are always raised as the most challenging problem. I often caution people that the only time they will be in real difficulty is if they start to believe they have nothing left to learn about planning, connecting, Circles---whatever it is they are focusing on.

Another distressing moment for me was a manager mentioning that they weren't interested in receiving any information on books or training because they already had their own internal training program and that was all they needed. I don't know what their approach to learning is and maybe it is quite wonderful but again I felt sad that they weren't open even to reading about other options and opportunities. My concern isn't based on any professional relationship I might have developed with their organization, I just felt badly that they are missing out on a whole world out there of connections and ideas from many sources. I am not sure where this perspective of staying so insular originates---what the fear is. I hope someday they open a bit more, to someone, to see all that is there waiting for them.

We already do that.

Another problem arises when people have attended one or even several training events on a particular topic and then believe that they have mastered every nuance, so that no more learning is ever needed. On the one hand, it is important for people to honour their growing wisdom and not become addicted to attending training or to the personal mystique of particular consultants. But all of the creative approaches to our work---personal planning, facilitating connections, advocacy, leadership, have evolved over the years---that is what makes them innovative.

Often, too, people don't fully understand an entire process or concept the first time and additional opportunities to learn, discuss, and practice are essential. Recently I heard of an organization doing what they believe to be a version of personal planning, talk about how often they do this without the person present. I really thought we were beyond this at least. There needs to be a common sense balance of celebrating and utilizing what people are learning and an acknowledgement that there will be more to absorb over time.

"All things that we do are predicated on assumptions and theories, and our conclusions about what will most benefit people from any kind of educational experience will themselves arise from the theories we hold, whether these be conscious or not. Obviously, our assumptions could be incorrect, so it is always consciousness raising and precautionary to regularly revisit, critique and test the rationales for why we do what we do. Otherwise, it is habit, a convenience, and the momentum of unexamined agendas that is driving the process rather than watchful mindfulness."

Michael J. Kendrick, Holyoke, Massachusetts, *Kendrick Consulting International*

Challenging Ourselves: Questions To Encourage Discussion and Learning

- **How much of a priority is training/learning in our organization or group? How do we show that it is a priority?**
- **What would it take to make it more of a priority?**
- **Who do we know who have a passion for learning and could offer leadership in this?**
- **What creative ways are we---or could we---find more resources (money, people's gifts/knowledge/interests/passion, information...) to increase learning for everyone?**
- **Who else can we invite to think with us about accessing more resources?**
- **To what extent are we using all we know? How can we remember and use more of what we already know?**
- **What have we been learning recently to add to our knowledge and practice? What else can we learn?**
- **How certain are we that we are actually practicing certain processes as they were intended?**
- **What do we see as challenges to our continued learning? What and who can help with that?**

Envisioning The Learning Journey

Gathering Information on What is Needed

“We would not send people out to buy groceries without a list of what is wanted (verbally or written). So how can we expect those working on behalf of others to know what is expected if this information is not shared explicitly?”

John Jones, Guelph, Ontario, Executive Director, *Community Torchlight*

As individual people and as groups and organizations, our tendency is to reflect intentionally on things from time to time, and in between we mostly just go about the business of doing and living from day to day. This practice works fairly well as long as our initial reflections and discussions have provided us with a sure path to follow---one that will help us move forward to where we wish to go. And we also need to take time to revisit our assumptions once on a while.

Our approach to training and learning falls into this pattern, I believe. Frequently we hear about what seems like a good idea or approach, such as person centered planning or circles of support, we learn about a training event and decide to go or send people to it. Sometimes there is a responsibility attached to those attending to come back to their group or organization and give a summary of what was discussed, perhaps even sharing copies of the Handouts.

Hopefully one or two ideas stay with some of the people who experienced the workshop first hand. Possibly a point they communicate back home may have an impact on a few colleagues or a supervisor and be pursued, or the person giving the training may be invited to their area so that more people can experience the learning directly..

This process has some merit but depends a lot on happenstance. Did those attending the event choose to go or were they sent? If they chose to go what were they hoping to learn? To what extent do their beliefs and actions coincide with those of the organization or group (they may be stronger in their philosophy than the overall approaches of the organization or they may not whole heartedly embrace the same values). What is their style of learning and what is their current state of satisfaction and stress in their work? How comfortable are they with new approaches and sharing information with others?

These factors and many others will have a bearing on how much people attending a training will derive from it and how effectively they will be able to convey ideas from the presentation, to others back home. We must also consider with whom information gets shared. Most training events are geared toward those directly involved in support as paid assistants and coordinators/facilitators and families. Some are also relevant for managers and supervisors and on a good day a few executive directors attend. We need to give more thought to the inclusion of

interested self-advocates at more general events as well as supporting them and their families to attend conferences and workshops specifically for non-paid people..

Taking some time initially to consider what each person wants and needs to learn and what themes and patterns emerge within your group or organization will add to everyone's ability to be more effective.

There are several ways of discovering this information, that needn't be overly time consuming. Often much can be learned through conversations at team and staff meetings, a membership gathering, or when a group comes together as part of personal planning or a Circle meeting. Below are two resources for understanding more about what people already know and what they may need to learn.

A. What Can We Learn From How We Are Fulfilling Our Shared Vision, Mission, Goal, Principles of Support?

Usually a group or organization's Vision, Mission, Goal and Principles get revisited when doing strategic planning but they don't necessarily get consulted around various day to day activities and processes. During planning and visioning, it is helpful to have a clear picture of what things would look like if we were living our Vision and Principles fully. Because these are phrased as broad statements they take some breaking down, some deconstructing, to figure out how they actually happen in meaningful ways for each person, and are supported by the culture of the organization. Inviting some intentional discussion can shed light on what learning needs to occur to come closer to fulfilling overall goals.

Suggested Process

1. Identify and list the key points in your Vision, Mission, Goal and Principles. Some examples frequently included are:

- **inclusion and community living**
- **dignity and respect**
- **self-determination, choice and control**
- **opportunities for mutual relationships**
- **accountability to people we serve**
- **creative planning**

2. At times when people are already getting together---at a general meeting, team meetings, a Family Network gathering, People First or Self-Advocate meeting, ask people:

- a) What are we currently doing to make each Key Area happen?
- b) What is supporting our good work here?
- c) What else needs to happen?
- d) .What would support us to do more in this area?

Example

Key Area from Vision/Mission: Dignity and Respect

1. What people are currently doing to promote dignity and respect:

- ✓ ensure language is always positive and respectful
- ✓ help people choose clothing, makeup, etc., that reflects a positive image
- ✓ explore valued roles in planning with each person

2. What is supporting our good work in this area?

- ✓ discussions based on attending Social Role Valorization trainings
- ✓ including the Five Accomplishments/Valued Experiences in our planning process
- ✓ working in an atmosphere where everyone is shown respect

3. What else needs to happen?

- ✓ Conversations about the inherent value of each person
- ✓ Listen more carefully to people and pay more attention to what they are trying to tell us through words and actions.
- ✓ Get more creative about ways people can share their Gifts.
- ✓ Invite people to think about and talk about what they are proud of .
- ✓ Express our faith and confidence in people's abilities in genuine ways

4. What would support us to do more in this area?

- ✓ More practice in deep listening skills
- ✓ More intentional discussions about how people can use their Gifts in community

The information gathered will help you see what has already been learned and what else people need to know more about and understand at a deeper level.

B. What Can We Learn From What People Supported Want Us To Do?

More helpful information can be found in the personal plans of people supported. In my experience, human services of all types do well when they base their structure and activities on themes arising from what each person has defined as important to them..

Some fair assumptions about what many people supported would say---*do* say---they want would include the usual “quality of life’ list: friends and other important relationships; more money; getting to choose what they do, where they go, who they spend time with, what they buy, etc.; being treated kindly and with respect; getting to go to interesting places and do enjoyable things; getting to help others and share their gifts. Many of these are covered somewhere in the Five Valued Experiences put forth by John O’Brien and Connie Lyle O’Brien: Respect; Relationships; Community Participation; Choice and Contributing.

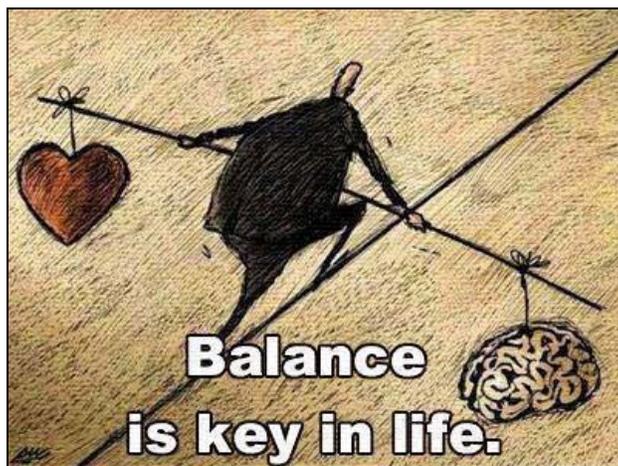
Suggested Process

1. Ask facilitators and others involved with helping people to do personal planning to list each person’s Dreams and Goals for the future. There will be similarities among what people say they want and what is stated in the organization’s Vision/Mission/Principles, but likely expressed in more specific ways. For instance, helping people develop a range of relationships may be mentioned in your Principles. Some examples seen in people’s plans may include having a romantic partner, having a child, or reconnecting with family, as well as making friends.
2. What progress is being made on people’s Dreams/Goals? Where are things stuck? This could be discussed and identified at team meetings, staff meetings, Circle and planning meetings. Seeing what has been successful and what has not in helping people get what they want, along with ways you are and are not realizing your Mission and Goals should provide some good ideas on where more learning and practice needs to take place.

“I’ve always been interested in why one of the most important elements of both training and learning journeys is often overlooked—leaders being clear about the purpose. Without clarity of purpose, training can’t be designed effectively, participants have to guess about how to engage the material, and effectiveness is difficult to evaluate. Is the purpose to learn and implement a technique? Highlight portions of content for adaptation to the organization? Clarify common values? Engage in conflict resolution/peacemaking? Accumulate group wisdom? Sponsor creative thinking time with no implementation expected? Create common understandings of issues? The list goes on and on. The first task of training and learning starts with leadership clarity!”

Bruce Anderson, Vashon, Washington, Independent Consultant, *Community Activators*

Achieving a Balance in Learning



"Training is an opportunity to open our minds and hearts, and have conversations that matter."

**Jill Gromen, Haddon Heights, New Jersey, Director of Training & Consultation,
Networks For Training & Development, Inc., Valley Forge & Sunbury, Pennsylvania**

It isn't just a matter of identifying that people need to learn more in a particular area, such as facilitating community connections. There are various aspects of learning that also need to be considered. Four that I can think of are: **Values, Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Qualities**. We may be able to teach people some strategies but unless they also have a lifetime of chances to deepen all aspects of learning, things won't move forward significantly.

Using the Example below on Friendships, there are a number of workshops, books and DVD's that share stories of people who have gained friends, that help people reflect on what is true community, that invite people to look at ways to support someone who has been marginalized, by connecting them through passions, gifts, friendly places, welcoming people and other means. There is also plenty of information about Support Circles, Circles of Friends, Support Clusters and Friends of...Clubs. All of this information is helpful and valuable, and has made some difference, but most people who have a disability are still lonely and isolated.

A big part of this is not concentrating enough on the work of community building, by contributing to and learning about the hospitality and reciprocity of ordinary civic life. Another problem is that many people don't feel comfortable with this aspect of support, which requires confidence, striking up conversations with people you don't know, issuing invitations, practicing the art of hospitality, and many other qualities.

This raises questions of who should be doing this work as well as how it should be done. Defining what is needed only as “competencies” seems to be setting the bar fairly low---let us, instead, look for, strive for, talent, flair, gift, capacity, art! Even when these are clearly present in someone they need nurturing and experience to develop. Think of how a sculptor uncovers the form within the block of stone. People need some guidance and inspiration as they evolve in what is essential to do this profound work.

Example

Dream/Goal: Having Friends

Values(some aspects)

- ✓ **Community as first resort**
- ✓ **Reciprocal relationships**
- ✓ **Everyone has contributions and gifts to share**

Knowledge (some aspects)

- ✓ **Who is in the person’s life currently**
- ✓ **Their Passions/Interests/Gifts**
- ✓ **Their personal style/way of being with people**
- ✓ **What they want in a friend**
- ✓ **What help they need to participate**
- ✓ **Understanding how communities work**

Skills (some aspects)

- ✓ **Searching out community activities of interest to the person**
- ✓ **Initiating conversations with people**
- ✓ **Identifying welcoming and hospitable places**
- ✓ **Seeing people’s gifts**

Personal Qualities (some aspects)

- ✓ **Deep Listening**
- ✓ **Optimism**
- ✓ **Creativity**
- ✓ **Confidence**
- ✓ **Intuition**
- ✓ **Common Sense**

Following are some additional insights from people who provide training as well as those who invite it into their groups and organizations, on the importance of ongoing learning in Values, Knowledge, Skills and Personal Qualities.

Values

All learning opportunities need to be based in Values. If you consider practical Skills, such as assisting someone to bathe, that type of support still needs to be attached to a Value base of Respect, Sensitivity, Intuition, Attentiveness, etc. Usually we err in not offering enough discussion about Values and how these play out in our day to day interactions with people. Once in a while an organization may focus on Values to the exclusion of any practical Skills or Strategies, such as creative ways for helping a person to meet people or get a job, but overall, we are less likely to go wrong when people have chances to think about Values such as Choice, Respect, etc., at more than a superficial level.

*“Ask what is most important in the world,
‘tis people, ‘tis people!”*

Maori Proverb

Jack Pearpoint and Lynda Kahn, Toronto, Ontario, *Inclusion Press*

“When working with people in a training/learning environment I've learned how critical it is to begin with people spending time orienting themselves to themselves---their own beliefs and values. It's easy to think we can "train" people to understand the importance of a certain approach or way of looking at things, but that is, of course, misguided. We each see through our own lens of life experiences, so I've learned that spending time on that personal lens must

be the first step in any values-based training. Only then can we move on to broaden our lens and perhaps be open to a different way of seeing.”

Barbara Leavitt, St. Marys, Ontario, Independent Consultant, LPW Associates

“We believe that the best and most relevant training encourages us to revisit the reason we engage in the work we do. In other words, what are the values underpinning our practices? In these times of fiscal restraint, we often feel forced to focus on the pragmatic training issues like health and safety and medication administration at the expense of reflective values training. However, without a solid ethical foundation, we risk sliding into more custodial practices. If the work we do is truly about civil rights and self-determination, we need to listen to the voices of the people we support and tailor our actions accordingly. Good training helps us to dig deep and engage with each other through reflection and dialogue.”

**Norman Kunc and Emma Van der Klift, New Westminster, British Columbia,
The Broadreach Centre**

“Value based training is essential because without a strong sense of what is most important and why, when times get tough or a difficult decision needs to be made there needs to be a firm foundation of what is right, to depend on. There needs to be that solid grounding. That includes the reality of experience over the years along with inspirational conversations, books, films like ‘The R Word’ and ‘The Freedom Tour’. We need to know our history---the history of people who have been labelled.”

Marg McLean, Executive Director, Community Living St. Marys & Area, Ontario

Knowledge

We also do need to gather ideas and information about various approaches to supporting people well. Whether it is helping someone to do planning in their life, get a job, make friends or advocate for fairer laws, there are strategies and experiences that can be shared to help. These do need to be grounded in Values and they also require a thorough understanding of how these approaches really work---the premises and common sense that informs them.

“When working within our own staff team, we are all grateful for those learning events that allow us to step out of our day to day expectations and think about new ideas that can often have unexpected outcomes when we return to our daily responsibilities. Those ‘ah ha!’

moments created, sometimes weeks later, are so valuable and reinforce the experiences learned during the training event. It also provides us with a new shared experience that can renew our connections.

**Linda Perry, Vancouver, British Columbia,
Executive Director, Vela Microboard Association**

“Keeping minds alive is key to success and effectiveness. Training and learning are absolutely vital to open thinking, feeling and decision-making. Without them the organization simply repeats what has gone before. Thinking about how you are going to ensure that the learning continues in the workplace is essential so that people can practice and consolidate what they have learned in training.”

Anna Eliatamby, London, England, Independent Consultant, Clinical Psychology

“People only see what they are prepared to see.”

(The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ralph Waldo Emerson)

“I am inspired by this thought. In it I recognize the value of rocking the boat, if such rocking leads to disturbing some sleepy assumptions. Those deeply ingrained assumptions pass for fact and maintain the barriers between us, devaluing the real benefits of diversity in our community and characterizing inclusion as a sophisticated form of charity.”

Martha Leary, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Independent Consultant, Author, Aunt, Friend

*“It's not really possible for one to seriously challenge the fact that the society we live in does not treat vulnerable people very well. People with disabilities and/or other difficulties face lives filled with disrespect (at the least) and rejection of all kinds. I've often wondered how we could reasonably expect to devise 'helping' solutions---in the form of agencies that employ 'helping' personnel--and then recruit our personnel directly from the same culture, which unconsciously carries many of the same rejection-inducing beliefs.**

The answer, of course, is that we cannot reasonably expect acceptance, respect, dignified treatment of vulnerable people without doing something to counter the culture's beliefs. That something, sometimes anyway, is training--not just of a technical nature but training that directly aims to 'raise consciousness' and offer what we might almost call a counter-cultural set of values. If we want better responses to people we can't just wait for them to happen. We have to create them, at least partly through regular teaching that opens the eyes of otherwise culturally unconscious workers.

**Example: Many workers who directly support people with disabilities in those people's homes seem to have gained much of their work experience as employees in nursing homes. Given what we find happening to people in nursing homes, we can safely say that we don't really want those usual personnel practices carried over into other contexts, that are established to become real homes for people we care about. Among other things, we'll have to train workers away from much of their previous learning."*

Jack Pealer, Hamilton, Ohio, Ohio Safeguards

"Facilitators need to learn/remember that this is a process. You will learn about the person, and then you will learn more, and it may change some of the thoughts and ideas you originally had---that's ok! You may be involved in presenting options, possibilities and the person may take a long time before making a choice---that's ok! And then the person may change his/her mind, and decide to try something else, that you may not think is a great choice at all---that's ok too, even if you already had the plan written down with great graphics and next steps and everything!

You may want to keep moving along and the person may decide to take a break, or that this isn't the right time for things to happen---that's ok! Bottom line---it's not about you or your timeline---it truly is a process and what you learn along the way will definitely help you as you facilitate with the next person, but it may be completely different, because he/she is a completely different person, so don't expect the planning process to be the same. Be flexible and listen well!

Regarding the 'how' part of doing the listening and planning with flexibility and patience---think---spend time just thinking about what has been said by the person and others and spend some time processing and mulling that over, before getting to the plan. Speak to others about what you are thinking; maybe someone who isn't connected, just throw out some ideas and see what they think or if they have insight. Plan, but remember to do it in pencil!

Act--- no point in any planning if you or others don't do something, so make sure there are decisions made and follow through with the work to be done. Learn from failure---Benjamin Franklin said, 'Forget your mistakes but remember what they taught you.' There will be lots you don't get right the first time, but remember to learn from that, rather than letting it discourage you."

Carole Verdun, London, Ontario, Independent Community Connector, London & Area Family Network

Skills

These can include helping people with physical aspects of support such as lifting, bathing, cooking, driving, etc. If we think about interpersonal skills, these can encompass listening, the ability to initiate conversations, problem-solve, think creatively. Values and Knowledge are necessary for Skills to develop, and these do get attended to in many learning opportunities. However, Personal Qualities, discussed following this section on Skills, are not yet given sufficient attention.

“The most important thing for people to learn is how to really listen!”

Barb Fowke, Kitchener/Waterloo, Ontario, Past President and Board Member, People First, Ontario, Member at Large, Facile Waterloo

“When I was first introduced to this field the numbers of the population with a diagnosis of autism were 4 in 10,000, or, if you want to break that down further, 1 in 2500. Yes, there were probably a lot of people who fit the criteria who were not labeled at the time, but one rarely came across anyone on the spectrum. The majority of these people currently live in 24 hour care situations either with family or through specialized organizations.

Today we face the reality of a 1 in 50 diagnosis. We can argue about the validity of this number all we want, but I don’t think that anyone can ignore the fact that we have many, many more children diagnosed on the spectrum than we did in the past. The reality of their future is that we will not have enough workers to provide the 24 hour care which is common today for this number of individuals. This means that we have to stop creating adults that need 24 hour care and focus our efforts on freeing them to become active, involved members of the community.”

Gail Iris Gillingham Wylie, Saint Albert, Alberta, Family Therapist, Autism Consulting Service and Sciopathy

“ It is important to me that people who support my son, Jordan, have the ability to notice opportunities for relationships and possibilities for being involved and contributing, when they are out with him. Sometimes this may be as simple as just sitting with him and watching what is going on, looking for things he might be involved with. At other times, it is noticing when people remember and talk to Jordan, and then facilitating those relationships that might evolve into friendships. I think this is intuitive for some support workers and hopefully others can learn it over time. One of the best ways for people providing support to grow in this ability is by having regular opportunities to be together, to hear stories and examples from one another of creative ways they are helping connections to happen, by being aware of possibilities and acting on them.”

Janice Strickland, London, Ontario, London & Area Family Network

Personal Qualities

“Real training is a transformative experience. The trainer not only gives information, but facilitates the learner’s processing the information and creates meaning that is personal and valued.”

**Nancy Thaler, Alexandria, Virginia, Executive Director,
The National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services
(NASDDDS)**

If we want people to have the Skills to offer thoughtful and effective support, based on sound Knowledge and Values, we also have to keep coming back to an essential question: *“What does it take to do this work and live the Values?”* The ability to honour and promote someone’s desire to control their own life likely requires us to have Flexibility and a strong sense of Power Within and Self Esteem. Assisting a person to be more involved in community requires Optimism, Creativity and Confidence.

We all have some of these and other Qualities, but everyone needs opportunities to develop these traits and reflect on how they contribute to our work. They are often mentioned and even discussed a little in some learning situations but do not receive nearly enough attention, being seen frequently as “soft” topics. In reality, it is the Values and Personal Qualities that allow us to use Knowledge and Skills successfully. These aspects cannot be taught through traditional means but they can be developed through opportunities for meaningful conversation and reflection.

“Awaken and incite ongoing curiosity of who the person supported is, what resonates with her/him and the opportunities to be discovered and sought that will enrich this person’s life.”

**Mary Romer, Tacoma, Washington, Director of Supported Living, Total Living Concept,
Kent, Washington**

“Perhaps one of the greatest joys and strengths in life is to be curious. Curiosity overcomes fear, breaks through inhibition and carries us into spaces where we can meet newness and revival. To explore and learn throughout life’s span is to drink from the Fountain of Youth daily.”

**Judith Snow, Etobicoke, Ontario, Independent Consultant, President, World Peace
Through Inclusive Transformation**

“For many years we, in our organization, have been discussing what seems to make someone very exceptional at providing support --- that is, what informs their experiences and how might we influence that process. Sometimes, it seemed, people had life experiences that formed them in unique ways. Often it was clear that people brought an innate (or even discovered) sense of empathy about the (potential) struggle with powerlessness that many people we supported often had.

I have recollected a favourite quote of mine from To Kill a Mockingbird that seems to capture this: ‘Nobody knew what form of intimidation Mr. Radley employed to keep Boo out of sight, but Jem figured that Mr. Radley kept him chained to the bed most of the time. Atticus said no, it wasn't that sort of thing, that there were other ways of making people into ghosts.’ If you know the story you know that Boo Radley lived in his house for years --- hidden and unseen, like a ghost. It seems to me that people that I have met who provided exceptional support understood how, consciously or unconsciously, to stop doing things that made people into ghosts. Traditionally, and in our mission statement, we have called this empowerment.

A second factor that seems important in the training and development of workers is understanding that in the Western World we seem to have divorced philosophy from practice. That is, we can talk one way and act in a way that is incongruous with our beliefs. I believe it is more natural that our philosophy is our praxis. To me this means that our practice, or better, our habits, are merely the outworking of our beliefs or philosophy. I sense that Karl Marx (contrary to Aristotle and the Greek manner of thought that we still inhabit) argued that praxis is about change in the world, not merely theory about change. I think that this intellectual divorce has allowed us to theorize, but in actuality led us to expect little change.

The most beneficial form of training is a deeply personal, empathic experience -- an epiphany in the learner about their own sense of powerlessness, of existential loneliness, and their need for solace from community. This experience would give birth to new insight and a corresponding change in the learner's every action and interaction----at first leading to disorientation and failure and then, with practice, to a new and better orientation. Lastly, and most critically, their epiphany and their new praxis needs to be affirmed by community---- if not their learning will die, and a little of themselves with it.”

Don Justrabo, Ingersoll, Ontario, Director of Services, Ingersoll Support Services, Inc.

“ The true essence of working with people is much more than theory, it is about listening, respecting, and celebrating the uniqueness of everyone Training inspires us to develop our ability to nurture and dream of a life full of endless possibilities!”

**Debbie Boardman, Spencerville, Ontario, Executive Director,
Community Living Dundas County & Brenda Laviolette, Finch, Ontario,
Coordinator, Community Living Dundas County**

“For decades now we have done a good job helping everyone appreciate that people we find challenging to support have really good reasons to use these challenging or problematic strategies to get their needs met. What we have not done as well is to help everyone involved in supporting someone appreciate that even though we mean well, what we do in the name of helping often unintentionally creates conditions where the people we are trying to support experience situations where their most basic human needs are not being met.

I have changed my perspective a lot on this topic and for several years now I have been shifting the focus of what we do, what we offer, to help staff learn. We have shifted our focus so we can help support staff, caregivers, clinicians, etc., recognize the feedback that people are always giving us and create opportunities for them to learn to manage differently the influence and power they have as helpers in people’s lives.”

Guy Légaré, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Management and Clinical Consultant, PDSS Consulting, LLC

“Discovering our way forward invites possibilities for learning together that evokes our highest potential to co-create desirable futures. An “inside out” framework for development suggests that all of us have a vast array of inner resources that can be harvested via better conversations, creative engagement through the arts, mindfulness and awareness practice, journaling, and other avenues for mutual discovery that lets wisdom in, which I think of as “the arts of social change.” If we value the “arts of social change” then as change agents we create situations in which wisdom naturally comes forth.

In contrast, many traditional forms of “training” are based on an “outside in” deficiency model that assumes gaps in people and places, and suggests that outside experts can fill these gaps. These training formats often over-emphasize rational, analytic, and intellectual “infusions” that do not touch our hearts and inspire collective commitments and action. My view is not to diminish the intellectual life, but to lift up the intuitive and suggest that listening for wisdom through the arts of social change is extremely important.

There are two ways to think and to know. One is intuitive and the other is intellectual. The intuitive, affective, contemplative way is characterized by surrender, mystery, imagination, experience, surprise, and passion. It is at home with anti-structure, ambiguity, chaos and risk. It is a tacit way of knowing that is holistic, sensuous, mystical, and inner-directed, leading to consciousness and revelation.

The intellectual, on the other hand, is a cognitive, active way of knowing and is characterized by prediction, logic, analysis, reflection, control and disinterest. It is at home with structure, certainty, and the familiar. It is an explicit way of knowing that is particular, linear, argumentative, and other directed, leading to reason and comprehension.

The moral life is more than thinking clearly and making a logical choice; it is a way of seeing the world. The moral life is better understood through the analogy of the aesthetic mode of seeing, beholding, and visioning than in terms of analyses, decisions, and actions. The moral life is the progressive attempt to widen and clarify our vision of reality. “

“Sensing Beauty: Aesthetics, and the Human Spirit.” The Art of Social Change

Beth Mount, New York, New York, Graphic Futures

“Years ago when I was working with teenagers I came across a quote that had a huge impact on how I worked with them. It read: ‘Teens don’t resist change; they resist being changed.’

This, I believe is true of all human beings, of all ages. When any one of us feels forced, pushed or even nudged into a different way of being, thinking, or doing, our natural inclination is often to fight back, resist, not do it.

How does this quote guide us in thinking about training? Training that really matters does not begin with the principle that, ‘We are here to change what you do.’ Rather, ‘training that matters’ begins with the principle that we are here to learn what you do do, how you do it, what motivates you and your work. This kind of training sets the stage for participants to pause, step back, and observe themselves----in essence, to get to know themselves in a deeper and fuller way. The work we do with people often distracts us from being reflective. We easily get caught up in the doing, planning, creating. Training can provide the glorious opportunity to pause, think about our work, without having to DO something at that moment. Training does not need to ‘make us change’ but rather to allow us to grow in our self-awareness.

This approach to training parallels how we might BE with people supported and families. Our first principle in our work should be not to change the other, but to create a safe place whereupon we can learn more about what families and people supported do, how they think, what they feel, and what is important to them. This isn’t easy because our tendency is often to see what needs to be changed in the other and then to want to fix it.

Training that matters lets us experience what it feels like to truly explore with others without judgment, guided by a facilitator who is able to create a safe and encouraging space. When we experience this type of training, we are more likely able to have this same loving approach with our families and people who receive support.”

Janice Fialka, Social Worker, Activist, Author, Mom, Dance of Partnerships

“I believe that training should create a context for both personal growth and collective understanding. Training that emphasizes 'inside-out' learning can contribute to personal growth by encouraging participants to reflect on what they have learned. A key question is, what does this mean to me? It also implies that participants need to personally

experience what the people they support might encounter. For example, your role as a worker might be to facilitate relationships. Wouldn't it be valuable for you to have to first reflect on your own relationships, how they evolved, and how you maintain them? This inside-out approach maximizes personal engagement in learning.

Similarly, training can enhance solidarity and a sense of community when the training seeks collective understanding of key values and principles. When participants feel a shared understanding, it can create a bond and a commitment to work together in a meaningful way. Effective trainers are always aware of how their leadership impacts personal growth and collective understanding.”

John Lord, Kitchener/Waterloo, Ontario, Founder, Centre for Community Based Research, Partner, Facilitation Leadership Group

Balanced Learning

Wisdom, it is said, is that balance of Heart and Head, that informs our actions. Think about the learning events and trainings that people in your organization have attended in the past few years. Where would you say they fall in terms of Values, Knowledge, Skills and Personal Qualities? (Some will encompass more than one, hopefully) If, over time, there is much more focus on one or two, I would suggest that some re-evaluation is needed so that every aspect is being addressed.

It is also helpful to see what priorities managers and executive directors may have regarding categories of learning, as compared to direct support workers, families and people being supported. Sometimes administrators may be uncomfortable with events that do not seem strictly “business-like”. I recall a gathering I facilitated on leadership in Pennsylvania, that included a fair number of executive directors. Before the event began I took out paper and markers---just for people to write a table top, readable name tag--- and I could feel some people become extremely nervous.

“Intimacy is at the heart of competence.” Max Depree, Leadership is an Art

There can be a perception that particular activities and interactions included as learning might detract from people doing a good job, and certainly there is a danger of form replacing content and things getting silly and irrelevant. But usually people offering these opportunities have thought carefully about what will encourage various styles of learning, so that there is more openness to new approaches and a greater likelihood of acting on them. It is very important for managers to be aware of their own preferences and priorities, so that they can stay open to additional perspectives in their decisions about training/learning for others.

Individual Learning

Distinguishing Between What People *Want* To Learn and What They *Need* To Learn

“One of the greatest things I struggle with around agencies training staff is that the training is chosen for people and in turn staff are delegated/scheduled to attend. When this happens staff don’t see it as an interesting potential learning experience, they see it as mandatory training and may not open their minds to the learning available to them. Training human service professionals is most effective when the professional sees the training opportunity as interesting and something they chose to participate in to improve their own skills around supporting people; rather than an agency requirement.”

**Barb Swartz-Biscaro, Dunchurch, Ontario, Associate, *Helen Sanderson Associates*,
Person Directed Planning Facilitator, *Community Living Parry Sound***

It is obviously not an “either/or” regarding what people want to learn and what a group or organization requires them to learn. Engaging people in conversation will encourage them to start thinking about and sharing what they would like to know more about or develop within themselves. From these discussions, decisions can be made that can honour what the person is interested in as well as what they are required to know.

Questions About Individual Learning

For Paid People

- What are you proud of in your work?
- What has supported and inspired you to do well?
- What have you learned that has stayed with you over the years?
- What areas of your work interest you in particular?
- What would you like to learn more about?
- What hopes and goals do you have in your life and your work?
- What will help you move closer to these?
- What qualities would you like to develop more in yourself?
- What have you noticed about how you learn best?
- What can you teach others?

For People Supported

- **What are you good at, what are you proud of?**
- **What do you want in your life?**
- **How are you using what you are good at to help you get what you want in life?**
- **What would you like to learn more about?**
- **What have you noticed about how you learn best?**
- **What can you teach others?**
- **What do you wish support people in your life would learn, to help you ?**

For Families

- **What have you learned that has helped you to support and advocate for your family member?**
- **What do you feel proud of in your role as a family member of someone who receives support?**
- **What skills, gifts and qualities do you have that have served you well?**
- **What else would you like to learn?**
- **What have you noticed about how you learn best? When do you have time to attend events?**
- **What can you teach others?**
- **What do you wish support people would learn, to help your family member?**

“We consider what does it really take to keep people employed, to still want to help people to be fully engaged in community.”

Marg McLean, St. Marys, Ontario, Executive Director, *Community Living St. Marys and Area*

“At the retreat we hosted this year for independent facilitators we learned something very important. The original topic was one that was interesting but quite heavy emotionally. Some of the facilitators were not in the frame of mind for this and we realized that people must have the desire and energy to explore a subject at a learning event. People at that particular time needed nurturing, and our ‘Aha moment’ was in understanding that rejuvenation was not just the process that was needed---it was the topic, the focus!”

Marlyn Shervill, Essex, Ontario, Manager, Windsor-Essex Brokerage For Personal Supports

For Managers and Directors

- **What are your preferences and priorities around your own learning, personally and professionally?**
- **How do you feel these are reflected in how learning is designed and pursued in your organization?**
- **Are you noticing other areas where learning needs to happen? Is there sufficient attention to Values, Knowledge, Skills and Personal Qualities?**
- **What else do you need to know about what others in your organization/group want to learn?**
- **Who are or could be allies in being creative about resources (money, people, spaces, barter, etc.) to foster more learning?**

Expanding Our Vision of Who Needs To Be Involved in Learning

*“Ko koe, ko au, ko tāua, ko tātou katoa kia mahi tahi
(You, me, we, us, together we make a community)”*

Maori Proverb

Lynda Kahn and Jack Pearpoint, Toronto, Ontario, *Inclusion Press*

“Some of the best results that I have seen are when a mixed group of stakeholders come together for learning. The added benefit can be the learning that comes from each other's divergent perspectives. Community development/service organizations that reach out collaboratively with their learning resources and include service users, family members, board members, volunteers, community partners as well as their employees can complement their efforts to encourage community integration through these strategic investments. These approaches usually accompany a well developed vision of inclusion within an agency and the challenge is always to help get that translated into changes in the surrounding community as well.”

Bud Carter, St. Marys, Ontario, Executive Director, *Alice Saddy Association*

Another learning experience for me, while I was coordinating the Trillium Project was the design of an organizational planning retreat by Community Living St.Marys & Area, which was the host agency for the Project. People on my advisory committee envisioned a weekend with the involvement and contribution of everyone connected to the Association, in equal numbers. This included people supported, family members, people working for the Association, Board and Committee members,, and various people from the St. Marys community. The only minority was the funders, who also attended and learned a great deal.

We had the luxury of a full weekend for everyone to be together, so there was wonderful connecting and socializing on the Friday evening. On Saturday morning we invited people to be together with others who shared the same role. The topic was Power: who has it, who doesn't, why, how those without get more. The conversations were rich and enlightening and I still use those questions with groups today.

Other discussions took place over the weekend with people from various roles grouped together, and the retreat was so successful that we facilitated a number of others through the Project, based on the same design. Much of the success was in bringing people together as respected participants, not in a token fashion.

I believe that some learning experiences need to be role specific; people supported, families, paid people all need chances to speak with others who have similar perspectives. But there also need to be events, both internally and in the wider world, where people in different roles and from different locales come together to learn from designated teachers and from one another.

“Opportunities for training and education are important for staff, volunteers, people we support and their families. Training that is intentionally inclusive for all stakeholders is often a powerful way to ensure that an organization is developing a shared vision. Inclusive training opportunities really help everyone connected to the organization to understand the vision and their role in contributing towards achieving that vision.”

Lisa Louttit, Executive Director, Community Living Thunder Bay, Ontario

“When someone challenges, ‘All means All; Everyone is In’, one can respond with a question: ‘What part of All do you not understand?’ ”

Marsha Forest (adapted), late of Toronto, Ontario, Inclusion Press

The Importance of Family Voices

“I have always found it useful on our journey as a family to attend conferences and training opportunities. The chance to learn more and get some inspiration has always been the main reason I've attended, but the very great bonus has been the chance to meet others and to network. Such events have lessened the isolation I sometimes felt, re-charged me and introduced me to lots of great folks.”

Patricia Gallin, London, Ontario, London & Area Family Network

Tokenism doesn't only occur in attempts by paid people to include and involve people who are supported; many family members I know have felt vulnerable and not heard when attending various events hosted by organizations and funding bodies. There are some root questions here regarding the social justice movement we are part of, including whose movement is it and how do people most closely associated with it---people who have a disability and their families--- hold the vision, have the power and take the lead, with supportive allies helping in responsive ways?

Investing in family groups and assisting them to access information and learning in numerous ways is an essential part of the role of paid people. Often this is challenging since families can be exhausted, burnt out, depressed, and downtrodden. Supporting families needs to be on *their* terms and *their* timeframe, which requires the practice of deep listening and relinquishing power

and control on the part of professionals. Discovering how to help family members participate in learning should be part of any group/organizational training plan.

“It is important to invest in the families; they are there for the long haul, and while it is important to train staff, they move on. Giving families the information and helping them to 'dream' again through the Partners courses enables them to make informed decisions. As someone who has the good fortune to travel and share ideas through training events, I am always struck by the deep commitment of families, friends and those in relationship through their roles as caregivers. The training events offer new information, but really the information shared is acting as a catalyst to explore the deeper issues, without the context of a reactionary paradigm. It's a moment to pause and reflect using new information to stretch and grow. This is what makes ongoing training so valuable.”

Lynne Elwell, Manchester, England, Coordinator, *Partners in Policymaking, In Control*

My friend, Janet does not have a family member who has a disability, but as she shares in her story here, for the past few years many of her experiences are similar to those of numerous families we know. When we think of what those in helping roles need to learn there is much we can gain from understanding people's day to day vulnerabilities and frustrations and how we can make a difference.

Living with Uncertainty and Trusting Each Other

“For the past two years, my husband and I have been living an extraordinary life in a medical haze. Like all good adventures, ours started with high hopes and a straight path, all in an effort to fix a slightly crooked thigh, in preparation for a knee replacement. It didn't turn out that way. Fourteen surgeries later, the journey has become as important as the end result. It's too easy to turn toward anger, especially when responding to neighbors who say things such as, 'Was this worth it?' (I always want to say, 'Yes, we asked for all these complications!'); 'Are you going to sue?' (Where would we even begin?); and, my personal favorite: 'You must be so strong and patient.’

In the field of supporting those who have intellectual disabilities we are used to wearing a halo, or at least being complimented on our patience. This is different. This journey is teaching us so much about being on the other side of the coin, the one that we don't often flip. So what are the lessons in this for us? Well, humility is one. It is humbling to be reduced to a 'case', 'the external fix in room 7224', and, 'the wife with a lot of questions, and kinda bitchy'.

I still want to be able to control events, and have to keep reminding myself that so much of this process has no one in control, and I certainly can't influence things. I can be organized, which is helpful, but I can't tell people that they should return calls, or show up when they promised. All the characters in our play have their own back-stories and drama, and we are not their center. I didn't ask to be in charge: my husband needs this support in his most vulnerable time of his life.

Nurses are hard workers. They are also our lifelines, the ones who listen, and who can interpret our needs into action. They have also seen a lot. So their radar is usually finely tuned, and what they may be assuming about us can be wrong. An example: our first major medical crisis took place 5 months after surgery #1, when a huge infection was doing battle with Bob's whole leg, but it was masked as pain, possibly an overdose from a potent painkiller. When we got to the ER, the first main assumption was 'unintentional overdose', which sticks to your medical records like bad breath. From that moment onward, people looked at us askance, as if we were meth heads, or worse. It took a very long time to have that initial diagnosis expunged from Bob's record. Yes, he had a strange reaction to a pain med, but that was nothing compared to the primary septicemia that kept him near death in the ICU for over a week.

We look for the little things each day that really matter:

- *A nurse who took the time to stop by our house after discharge to bring us something we had forgotten*
- *A dietician who special ordered veggie burgers for Bob, knowing he is vegetarian in a mostly meat-eating cafeteria*
- *An Occupational Therapist who showed Bob how to propel his wheelchair easily with exercise bands wound around the wheels*
- *A sneaked in bag of crunchy Cheetos for a football game on TV*
- *The warm fall sun on your face after 3 weeks of living in air conditioning*
- *A loving shave with new sandalwood cream and a fresh razor*
- *The cheer in our dog's face as he realized Bob was home once again*
- *Our kind neighbors who knew how to install a ramp and railings on a moment's notice*
- *The realization that not all the gardening was a total failure this year!*

It becomes too easy to be annoyed at everyone and everything when you are in pain. I have learned from my husband that small acts of kindness that he can do for me, even with his limited mobility, are really important. He still gives the best foot rubs. He still has a kind ear when listening to my frustrations, and always sets me back on the path of forgiveness, rather than judgment. He has a way of reminding me that, all things being equal, we have a loving home, a beautiful view out every window, and a son who brings us continued joy. We are lucky indeed.

Janet M. Duncan, South Onondaga, New York, Associate Professor, Foundations and Social Advocacy Department, School of Education, State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland

Power and Participation for Self-Advocates

“It is important to me that when there is training that self-advocates are able to teach others how to put things in simple terms so that people with a disability will be able to take part in the conference or workshop. We can all learn from each other.”

**Theresa Somerton, Belleville, Ontario, Self-Advocate,
Board Member, *Community Living Ontario***

I have always enjoyed offering training to self-advocates; I have facilitated groups over long periods of time and have given workshops on leadership, planning and friendships. Several months ago, however, I was collaborating on a training about planning that involved families, facilitators and some people who have a disability. Several of us, who are quite accustomed to designing exercises and learning opportunities, realized shortly into the exercise that it just wasn't working for some of the self-advocates who were there. We recovered fairly quickly, offering a bit of help individually for people to participate, but we realized that there was more to learn for future gatherings, to ensure that the content and process would be comfortable and relevant for everyone.

Figuring this out requires us to use our own creativity and work with self-advocates to determine how we present material and include all who are attending in conversation. People with a disability have a great deal to teach us.

“The important thing for self-advocates is to have materials for people to understand in plain and simple language. Have pictures for people who do not read. When doing group work, it is hard to be in a loud environment if a person has a hearing impairment. When music is loud turn down the music so people can speak to one another..When planning an event or conference it is nice to have a dance where you can let off some steam and just have fun dancing with friends around you .When someone is feeling that they do not want to be in a crowded room there should be other places for people to meet and discuss things. Make sure that if someone isn't steady on their feet and they need help that other people will not stand around and wait for that person to fall and do something then. Make sure if it is a hot day that there is air conditioning in the rooms so that people do not pass out or get overheated. Make sure that there aren't a lot of people in one room; otherwise people may feel claustrophobic in tight spaces.”

Yvonne Spicer, Milton Ontario, Representative, *Self Advocates Council, Community Living Ontario*

As we are aware, attending learning events is not only, or sometimes even primarily, about what we learn. They are also about who we get to meet and spend time with and this needs attention too, to ensure that everyone present feels included at lunch and breaks as well as during the activities of the day.

“It is important for self advocates to be able to have training, as it increases our learning. We get to know new people and it expands the social networks, which has been forgotten over the years. Training also gives self-advocates an opportunity to be included and we get to give input, which is very important!”

Kory Earle, Carleton Place, Ontario, President, People First Ontario

“Good training helps families and paid people learn to really listen to the hopes and dreams of people who have a disability, even when people say that their dream is impossible. I had a dream to go to college, have friends, and have a job. I had people listen to me and support me so I could get my dreams to happen. This summer I got to do a Summer Internship in Washington D.C. at the Administration on Intellectual Disabilities. I got to share my ideas to members of the House of Congress on issues of health care and other bills about disability rights. I think people with disabilities should be a part of the trainings so they can learn how important their stories are and so that families and paid people get to learn to listen.”

Micah Fialka-Feldman, Syracuse, New York, Disability Activist

Partnerships with Community Members and Groups Reducing the Silo Effect

For years now we have declared the intention of helping people to connect to their community, to participate in it and contribute to it. There are numerous trainings on this topic that have resulted in limited success. But more often than not participants in these events are restricted to people involved in the disability movement. We now realize that our role is not “to teach the community to be more accepting” but rather to learn from our experiences and relationships with community members and groups how everyone is welcomed and included.

We are not yet initiating or participating, to any significant degree, in collaborative learning or activity with ordinary community, and until that happens we probably won’t make noticeable inroads into helping people be part of day to day community life. A few organizations and groups are putting energy into this now, not only inviting people from various roles in community to be part of workshops like Core Gifts , but also signing up for community learning hosted by groups such as Rural Institutes. The more we welcome and are welcomed by the wider community the more connected we will all be.

Where and When

The type of gathering being offered will, of course, influence where it is held. There is value in all kinds of events but again, variety is important because the experiences people have will be different depending on the locale and those present,

Some Types of Events

- One or two day typical training events
- Conferences with multiple presenters and sessions
- Institutes that are more focused than a conference, usually 3 -7 days
- Institutes with consecutive gatherings over a number of months
- Mentoring/Coaching, time limited or ongoing
- Community of Practice with ongoing sharing among colleagues, over time
- Short one time presentations by colleagues, discussions at team meetings, other gatherings, World Cafés, etc.
- Webinars, Teleconferences

It is important to consider some of the advantages and disadvantages of these, based on the following:

- What are the hoped for results for people: Knowledge/Information; Networking/Connections: Practice; Inspiration; Values Reflection; Team Strengthening; Understanding Others' Perspectives...?
- Will the event include people in just one role or in varied roles (people supported, families, paid people, management, Board, volunteers?)
- Do people from your group/organization need time just to be with one another or would this be a good occasion to have them connect with people from other groups/organizations as well?
- Do you have a role in designing/co-designing the event, hosting or co-hosting the event?
- What opportunities for follow-up are possible, such as another time when people gather in person or in through a video conference?

Obviously finances come into play and often now organizations in the same area are collaborating around training, but it is important that people co-designing or sending people to events take their individual group/organization and those involved with it into sufficient consideration. I have found frequently that two organizations near each other have significantly different Values---in practice if not on paper.

I have also noticed that many of these co-sponsored initiatives tend to be of the hotel ballroom 1-2 day type (not that there is anything wrong with that). The problem with only ever having these kinds of gatherings is that they are not the most conducive to going deeper. When there are more people, in a large space (usually with hideous carpeting and chandeliers and no windows) people are distracted easily by their surroundings and the crowd. Presenters also have to take into consideration people who are at various levels of experience and understanding about the topic, and so presentations are often more generalized. Some good things can be accomplished at these gatherings, but if they are the only forums in which learning is offered, much will be missed.

One of the most significant thing any group/organization can do alone or in partnership with others is to develop a list of venues that are conducive to people being relaxed, present and connected. This may take some time and effort and may not exist in some places but it is worth consideration. If you are serious about more collaboration with community partners then perhaps there can be some creative exchanges between your organization and groups with access to pleasant, human scale places to hold events.

“Some things can be “trained”. But the most important things have to be learned and experienced over time. Today most people with disabilities have lives dominated by rules and regulations supposedly based on their rights, when what they need is a wider range of relationships with a variety of people who love and value them. You can train about laws, but not about relationships. Relationships have to be developed, cultivated and maintained. In the work I do with group person centered planning, I have learned the importance of not doing one off trainings. I’m not willing to start one unless there is a guarantee that the process will continue for a minimum of a year. This allows people to learn about and do a plan with a person, and then come back together about every three months to review what has happened since the last meeting and to think about what they want to try next. It’s much more like a learning journey than a training event. And people learn as much or more from each other than they do from me. I just try to set a context for the learning and define the values that are the foundation for person centered planning. And I never expect people to agree to or understand everything. Understanding grows with each experience. Being mindful and reflecting on what we’re learning and experiencing are integral to supporting people with disabilities to have a full life in community.”

Connie Lyle O’Brien, Lithonia, Georgia, Independent Consultant, *The Center on Human Policy, Law, and Disability Studies, Syracuse University*

The “when” of learning is reminiscent for me of what I recommend about helping people to connect in community; opportunities need to be frequent and timely. For example, “lunch and learn” gatherings may not work for everyone but they are a chance for people in different roles to get to know one another a bit better as well as learn something together. Offering to co-host a World Café on a topic of general interest, such as transportation or including a 15 minute discussion at team meetings on a short article or YouTube video related to some aspect of supporting people, are only a few ways to “layer” learning, keeping the practice of discussion and questioning present in people’s day to day lives

We need to be particularly responsive to when family members can attend an event. Many families are so busy and tired that unless there is a compelling reason to be part of an activity, they honour other claims on their time and energy. In addition to discovering their preferences for scheduling events, finding other ways to share the information if they simply can’t attend and offering some support for their family member during a training can be very helpful.

Guides Along The Journey

Finding The Teachers You Need

“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

Theosophical Proverb

Who you involve as teachers can be a matter of style/approach as well as their familiarity with content. There is no lack of people offering training in North America and the UK. Consultants are often invited based on word of mouth or past performance. Every presenter, professional and collegial, needs to be able to engage their listeners. However, there are variations on this that are important to keep in mind.

Some people who do training are particularly charismatic and have the ability to captivate a group through their personal energy and eloquence. This approach can be extremely helpful and effective to inspire people and re-energize their commitment. There are people with this gift who can also share more specific strategies, while others are really best at the broad strokes. This is one important function of learning; the challenge is not to get stuck on always choosing a teacher based on personality first. Keep in mind that there are other voices that may be a bit less entertaining but offer essential lessons in Values, Knowledge, Skills and Personal Qualities that will lead to excellence in support.

Susan Cain’s bestseller, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking*, explores the growing preference in our world for that which is exciting. There is nothing wrong

with presentations that are dynamic and emotional. Be mindful, however, of content presented in a variety of styles that can be helpful.

In addition to varying styles of teachers there are also differences in voice and experience to consider. Each presenter will have their own unique stories, examples and approaches to topics such as facilitation, connecting, job/career development, etc.

Years ago Herb Lovett had the idea of holding a conversation among those of us who had developed and were working with various approaches to personal planning. This resulted in a two day event in Harrisburg, PA some years ago, entitled, *Finding A Way Toward Everyday Lives*. It was facilitated by Herb and John O'Brien and a booklet outlining our observations about similarities and differences among the various planning processes, was also created. The purpose was to encourage the use of a family of approaches and to help people realize that there is no one best way, but rather a menu of options that hold the same Values and provide choices to suit the needs of different people and circumstances.

Another example of this approach was a Leadership Institute in Pennsylvania, developed by Beth Barol, and held over a period of months to illustrate different approaches to being a leader. My presentation on Native Culture and Leadership was one of a number of perspectives offered to show people options that were all worthwhile. Learning from a variety of presenters exposes people to a wealth of viewpoints and expertise; it encourages them to think more for themselves and develop their own eclectic and ever growing ability to be helpful.

“For much of my working life I’ve felt that helping workers to reduce the distance between ourselves and people we support is the key to quality support. I feel it offers the greatest potential for meaningful changes in the lives of people who depend on us. Larry Bissonnette, of Wretches and Jabberers fame, describes this as being ‘more like you than not’.

For me, how we get there is directly related to having opportunities for deep reflection about ourselves and about the people we are trying to help. When that distance between us goes away there is the possibility for magic to happen. This allows vision or intention to emerge from the relationship. This couldn’t be more different than setting goals or developing ISPs; and the best way for me to access that space is through creative effort: writing, music, making art helps to find the heart connection. I guess this all can come under the umbrella of “training”, though we rarely create the necessary space in an ongoing way to allow this to happen.”

Gail Jacob, Madison, Wisconsin, Independent Consultant

“People with disabilities have better life chances when those they count on for assistance know how to learn with them by searching for new possibilities, trying new ways and regularly considering the implications of what they are discovering. This learning process happens across time scales, from more skillful joint enactment of daily routines to occasional collaboration among allies to mobilize entry into new and valued social roles. This learning depends on what Aristotle called practical intelligence: the capacity to make good judgements about what is worth working for, which paths are good ones, and how to balance multiple considerations while traveling those paths. The kind of information that can be transmitted through a computer screen and the techniques that can be practiced in a training exercise can inform practical intelligence, but they cannot substitute for the experience of mindful, reflective working together for a better life in a more just and inclusive community.”

John O’Brien, Lithonia, Georgia, Independent Consultant, *The Center on Human Policy, Law, and Disability Studies, Syracuse University*

Everyone is a Teacher

“I think that teaching and learning can be a mutually empowering experience. For each seminar there is a teacher and a learner and then roles are switched throughout, so that everyone is teaching and learning at the same time.”

Ginny Focht New, Royersford, Pennsylvania, Independent Consultant, Psychiatric Clinical Nurse Specialist, Assistant Clinical Professor, *Widener University*

There needs to be a balance between using external trainers/teachers and inviting the wisdom and expertise of others in our professional and community lives. It is dangerous to think we know everything there is to know about something and it is also a problem when we put all our faith in consultants and people who do training professionally. Those of us who do this work put a great deal of thought into how people learn and we try to develop processes that inspire and inform and will lead to practical change. So it is not ideal to have only internal people always teaching others how to provide some of the more complex areas of support, such as facilitation and community connecting.

At the same time, there is much that colleagues can teach one another and that families and people supported can offer as well. Several years ago I coordinated a Personal Planning Project in our area. We had 25 facilitators, each helping several people outside of their own locale to do planning, and they received 32 hours of training as a group. I provided most of the content but I asked early on what others in the group were doing (there was a mix of experience among the 25) that might be of interest to their colleagues. I had a simple Handout for them with two headings: *Want To Learn* and *Want To Teach*. We then had a variety of “mini presentations”

during the trainings, one or two each during each Session, from people working with different aspects of facilitation and planning. This not only added more richness to the trainings but also helped the facilitators honour their own wisdom and see the importance of thinking for themselves.

“It is important for people who give support and people who get support to know that they can keep learning from each other. People need to be heard and understood. We all relate in different ways but we speak from the same heart, which gives us the same voice.

Richard Ruston, Windsor, Ontario, Past President, People First Canada, Vice President, People First, Ontario

“What I think about ‘training’ is the old adage that we are all teachers and all learners. In my experience, the best learning situations I have been in are ones where I am seen as knowledgeable, my experience is honored, and I am asked to participate with my whole self (not just sit there as a student). This respects the people who come together, puts the onus on everyone, and places the ‘instructor’ in the role of facilitator or host of the learning experience. This is not always easy to do as an instructor, and means checking your ego at the door. Nor is it always easy (or immediately welcome) for the participants, as it means a more active role is needed from them. But the richness that can come from this is a game-changer, in my experience----changing us from passive to active learners and teachers.”

Rosa McAllister, Lahaina, Hawaii, Co-founder & Organizational Advisor, Networks for Training and Development, Inc., Adjunct Professor, Arcadia University

“I get excited each time I facilitate a training, knowing that the group will teach me something unique.”

Bruce New, Royersford, Pennsylvania, Positive Approaches Coordinator, Ken-Crest Services

There are many things that colleagues internally and in neighbouring organizations can teach and learn from one another. In Ontario there are more Planning Facilitation Networks forming, to share ideas and make connections. These Networks embody a Community of Practice, an increasingly common and cost effective way for people with a common interest to share information and feel supported by one another.

“A community of practice is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Key elements are:

The domain: members are brought together by a learning need they share (whether this shared learning need is explicit or not and whether learning is the motivation for their coming together or a by-product of it)

The community: their collective learning becomes a bond among them over time (experienced in various ways and thus not a source of homogeneity)

The practice: their interactions produce resources that affect their practice (whether they engage in actual practice together or separately.)”

<http://wenger-trayner.com/map-of-resources/>

There also needs to be more attention to what can be learned from families and people receiving support. There is much to learn about who the particular person is and what they and their family want, of course. There are also many lessons regarding how well we listen and respond, how to offer help in respectful and timely ways and many other aspects of support. Help for families to connect with families and for self advocacy groups such as People First and Speaking For Ourselves, to learn from one another is also essential. Opportunities for this type of “peer support” (one of the few ways the word “peer” can be used accurately and respectfully) is so vital for people to feel validated in their experiences.

“While there will always be a place for 'formal' training regarding intellectual disability, it is important to realize that the best teachers are the individuals themselves. Get to know them, listen to them (in whatever way they communicate) and understand what they want/need from you. They will provide the best guidance on how to support them to lead full, inclusive lives.”

Laurie Larson, Biggar, Saskatchewan, President, Canadian Association for Community Living

“When I presented I was informed that I did a good job at public speaking and advocating for change. I was told that I would be excellent at speaking at a college to other people before they graduate.”

Yvonne Spicer, Milton, Ontario, Representative, Self Advocates Council, Community Living Ontario

“I spent my first years doing ‘staff training’ mostly as a lecture. I still do that occasionally, but I have come to recognize and appreciate how powerful asking people some questions and listening to their answers can be. It helps me to have the message and the medium congruent. If ‘positive approaches’ are about listening to people, then it helps to listen...Some organizations have also shown courage in asking me to do this not just for the staff, but for the people who use the service...Groups like this are often, collectively, radically gifted and I find they help me rediscover talents we have left too long buried...I can still be surprised at what people can teach in meetings such as these, how wise groups can be and how people who have lived on the frontiers of a culture have to know -- just to survive -- the majority's heart and center. As Eudora Welty pointed out, ‘It's the edges that define the circle's center.’”

Herb Lovett, late of Boston, Massachusetts, Independent Consultant and Author, “Choice”

“As the mother of a 49 year-old man with an intellectual disability, the notion of ‘training’ carries less than rosy connotations. The bizarre Foxx and Azrin period of intensive toilet training by behaviour modification, the consequential, all-encompassing control over one’s learning potential on the application by the school system of the label ‘trainable’ as opposed to the equally pejorative label ‘educable’, have left indelible imprints in my maternal mind. I shudder at the use of the term ‘training’ in the context of respect and broadening the understanding of the inherent rights of people with disabilities. Susannah’s encouragement to her readers to look at these processes as an ‘ongoing learning journey’ is, indeed, welcome. But there are dangers even in that ‘ongoing learning’ experience if it results in assumptions by those who have ‘learned’ that they now know best how others should live or that a particular ideology should shape that life experience. The last thing my son needs is people who have never met him training people who might be or might become his paid supporters on how to provide the support he needs. Pretty useless notion, if you think about it! Although my son does not speak, only he can teach them that. He does it, constantly, I believe, because, without knowing the word or its implications, he teaches humility.”

Audrey D. Cole, Disability Activist, Writer, Lecturer, Distinguished Associate, Canadian Association for Community Living, Associate, Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society

Traits of Good Teachers and Teaching

Below are thoughts about good teaching from some people who provide this in inspiring and effective ways, as does every consultant/trainer quoted in this book.

“Be positive. Begin boldly with a quote to catch the attention Speak from the heart. Make the group feel special. Build empathy wherever possible. Create scenarios where participants are reminded of their own emotional experiences--- guide them to learn from these and connect to the issue of the training.”

Colin Newton, Nottingham, UK, Director, *Inclusive Solutions*

“We learn more quickly when our brain finds a way to connect what's new with what's already known. For that reason, a good trainer will use examples about ordinary, everyday life to help people understand the experience of disability. A test of whether they have accomplished this is that their strategies should be helpful to most people in the room on a personal level.”

David Pitonyak, Blackburg, Virginia, Independent Consultant, *Imagine*

“After many years involved in teaching/training/learning I have come to very few conclusions. However, I have come to understand that, as a teacher/trainer I have no control over what people take away from what I have to say or do. After thirty-five years as a teacher/trainer I appreciate more the complexity of listening. Herb Lovett was wise in so many ways, but in his book, Learning to Listen, I think he captures the essence of supporting people with meaning, if you are listening to understand. This is not a one off event ; it can take a great deal of time. Good listening requires honesty about who you are and who you can be to another person. Honesty invites so much learning from each other and that is why it is an essential element of any learning experience.”

Joe Whittaker, Preston, UK, Retired Professor, *University of Bolton, Department of Teacher Education, Chairperson, The Alliance for Inclusive Education (Allfie) London, England*

“Asking oneself, what could I possibly have to teach about a given topic, is the first humbling step to deepening your own learning...The task of the adult educator is to gently upset preconceived notions and hardened conclusions, create a questioning culture and encourage others to express lived experience through image...True adult educators unite with their students in such a way as to create a third stream of knowledge brought in by the ancestors....Through acknowledging and sharing our own stories, our own biography, we live

in to our own truth and wisdom, our own way of knowing....Education is about drawing people forward into the story of their lives and others.”

Judith McGill, Toronto, Ontario, Adult Educator, Lifepath Training, Executive Director, Families for a Secure Future

“ I hope to only be giving training in an area that I am knowledgeable about, passionately committed to and readily available to help support people who want to learn more. When I have done otherwise I am disappointed in myself and selfishly, I miss out on the joy one gets when one sees a participant, or two or three, really get caught up in the ideas being shared.”

Marilyn Haywood, St. Marys, Ontario, Independent Consultant

“Three common themes in my work are 1) I encourage people to question structures and policies that may be getting in the way of a person's freedom or ability to form desired relationships; 2) I believe that people who are in support roles need themselves to be supported and appreciated by their team/supervisor/organization, in order to do their best work -- not only for their sake, but because I believe it improves the quality of life of the person(s) they support; and 3) ‘Challenging behavior’ is often the result of not seeing a whole person, not trying to imagine his/her point of view, or implementing/enforcing a bad plan.

We work in a culture of compliance, a system that values compliance. What if we began to value curiosity more than compliance? What if in training/learning opportunities, team meetings, conversations with people we support, we ask more questions rather than demanding answers?

If you encounter a policy, piece of legislation, a structure (real or imaginary) that you think might inhibit someone's chance for positive growth, a new relationship, or greater freedom, will you question it? Will you resist it? His Holiness the Dalai Lama famously said, ‘Learn the rules so you know how to break them properly.’ Many system rules hold people back from experiencing a more joyful and full life.

Encourage the people who do not typically feel heard to share their insights. Many direct support workers are not invited to share what they are learning about people they support. They are often left out of important meetings. Bring them to the table. Arrange trainings/conversations with their schedules in mind. Value their contributions. People feel inspired and motivated when they see that others notice their gifts and contributions --- and when others think of ways to put those gifts and contributions to good use.

Ask, ‘Why did you want to be involved in this work in the first place?’ Then, ‘Is that still alive for you now?’ If people feel removed from the original motivation to do this work, e.g., to make

a difference, to be part of someone's learning and growing, dream up ways of getting back to that... what gets in the way? How can we work today with that original passion?

I use music and humor when I am with groups for learning and thinking in new ways. I like to get people involved, singing with me, or playing percussion. A song about someone's 'challenging behavior' is a conversation starter about what really do we mean by 'challenging', and aren't we all challenging at times? And if someone half your age is telling you to go to bed when you are not tired, maybe you have a right to challenge that?

When someone (okay, me) is facilitating some sort of training for direct support staff, it helps if the person (ok, me) has experience providing direct support. I DO know what your job is like...and that is important."

Peter Leidy, Madison, Wisconsin, Independent Consultant, Singer/Songwriter

"To be good at teaching others it is imperative that I believe in what I am saying. I know that sounds silly but often these days we are asked to provide training on topics that are of a 'system based' nature. I love to come at a topic with a personal point of view. It is so important when I am teaching others that I get to have moments where I educate, inspire and motivate myself."

Kathy Lee, Meadville, Pennsylvania, Program Director, Supports, Inc.

Embracing the Journey: Attitudes about Learning

"A teacher cannot give you the truth. The truth is already in you. You only need to open yourself---body, mind and heart----so that his or her teachings will penetrate your own seeds of understanding and enlightenment. If you let the words enter you, the soil and the seeds will do the rest of the work."

Thitch Nat Hahn

I am not sure to what extent I believe in that old adage, "There is no such thing as a bad student, only a bad teacher." (source unknown) There are certainly lots of the latter, but I also believe there is an equal responsibility of those who are in a position of learning, to be present and open to the experience.

The following questions may shed some light on people's capacity for learning at events:

- Why is the person attending the event? Did they ask to go or are they being sent?
- What are their expectations/hopes from this learning experience? Consider Values, Knowledge, Skills, Personal Qualities, and Connections.
- What are the organization's expectations/hopes of the event? Consider the above areas.
- What changes in the lives of specific people supported do both the person and the organization envision because of this training?
- What is the person's preferred way of learning: information shared through lecture; interactive large group/ small group discussion; experiential exercises; handouts; video?
- Are they visual, auditory, kinesthetic learners?

What challenges do people experience at training events?

- Sitting still all day when they are used to being on the move
- Speaking in small/large groups
- Focusing/paying attention
- Putting aside work/personal issues, turning off the cell phone;
- Impatience with discussion...just want quick answers
- Tired, burnt out, cynical
- Not sure how ideas can be used after the training when there is no support for change to happen

What can the person and the organization do to help with these challenges?

Encouraging People To Learn

“I believe in ongoing learning and I thrive on opportunities for inspiration and sharing with like-minded people who hold the same values, believing in inclusion to the fullest, every step of the way ----it has always been a part of who I am. There is always more to learn about really valuing people and what that looks like to others. Even forgetting the smallest thing can make a difference to how we demonstrate in action the value that someone brings to our lives and to those around them. I always want to go deeper, to take the time to be more intentional, become energized. I keep wondering how I can offer what I am learning to others ---- to families and personal assistants, so they are energized and inspired to go further in their learning and trying different things to enhance lives. It is easy for all of us, me included, to get stuck in one place – we really need others to encourage us along the way.”

Michelle Friesen, Woodslee, Ontario, Family Leader, Windsor-Essex Family Network, Co-Chair, Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario

Some people already have a passion for learning and are always looking for ideas and experiences that will add to their knowledge and understanding. Others require invitations and nurturing to open themselves to new approaches and beliefs. People will have different levels of confidence about learning as well. If we start with what they are passionate about and what they are good at, hopefully we can excite them to want to learn more.

Another challenge is that many support workers have never been encouraged to think for themselves by their families, their teachers or other employers. Leadership development is not often included as a learning focus in organizations and yet it is through supporting this in staff, self-advocates and families that dramatic change can occur.

“No matter where one is in life and no matter what position one holds, one is engaged in a constant search for a new dream, a new awareness, a hope unfulfilled ---- not in the way the ego requires --- which has to do with power, recognition for doing good, material possessions-- but in terms of happiness, doing good for others; one needs to continue to learn, to be awakened to more of the goodness of life. The following quote from Wayne Dyer is relevant in this regard:

‘Whatever you gaze upon, ask yourself, what is the true essence of what my eyes reveal to me? Wonder about that magical something that awakens a tree in the springtime and places blossoms where frozen limbs existed only a few weeks before. Inquire, what is the energy behind the creation of the mosquito --- or behind my thought, for that matter? Do the same thing with everything you hear as well. Those sounds emerge from, and return to, ...a silent world --- improve your hearing by listening for the “quiet sounds.”
[Emphasis mine]

Wayne Dyer, *Change Your Mind, Change Your Life, Reflection on 14th Verse of the Tao*

My 40 plus years of being with people who have an intellectual disability (and their families who are deeply engaged with them) have taught me about matters of the heart, about love, acceptance, warmth and caring. That did not come naturally. It was discovered through learning opportunities that I was blessed to be part of and people with whom I was personally involved: Jean Vanier, Wolf Wolfensberger, John McGee, John McKnight and with many other leaders in Ontario. I attended/participated in many, many workshops with these people. All of them were invaluable ---- read 'essential' --- to my learning and to whom I am today.

As the great work ([Lao-tzu's] Book of Tao) said in part in the 15th Verse:

'The ancient masters were profound and subtle....

Simple as carved wood

Hollow like caves....

Amorphous like muddy water.

But the muddiest water clears

As it is stilled.

And out of that stillness

life arises.'

When one participates in the kind of learning experiences I am speaking of, one is required to be still, to listen, to engage with others for some clarity --- but deeply immersed with the trainer and those at the workshop.

In summary, Wayne Muller has this to say: 'If we are quiet and listen and feel how things move, perhaps we will be wise enough to put our hands on what is waiting to be born, and bless it with kindness and care'."

Peter Dill, Markham, Ontario, Executive Director, Durham Association For Family Respite Services, Oshawa, Ontario

"The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud!"

Coco Chanel

"From the perspective of someone attending training, I always hope to learn something new, to be offered a fresh perspective in something I am familiar with and hope that very occasionally I will be inspired by a new idea and inspired enough to carry that idea forward, to make it happen. This of course requires more than just attending a training day/week. It means actively seeking out knowledge, finding mentors to help and being linked to like-minded people for encouragement, advice and support."

Marilyn Haywood, St. Marys Ontario, Independent Consultant

“The most essential skill to learn is how to manage your own learning...Adults tend to believe that they have already filled their vessel of knowledge and they forget how to go about learning day to day, moment to moment...It is far easier to accept someone else's conclusions than to formulate your own...As adults we become lazy with our thinking and rely on others to do the thinking for us...We are learning from our senses moment to moment, we only need to become aware of it....Keening our awareness through observation opens the gates of our senses further.”

Judith McGill, Toronto, Ontario, Adult Educator, Lifepath Training, Executive Director, Families for a Secure Future

“Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself.” Zen Proverb

“The older I get, the more I realize that my best learning has come through breaking the framework of what I know ---- the truth revealed in the story of a person whose life experience or beliefs are so different from my own, the novel use of language and imagery, learnings from my mistakes and failures, or those that come through the body instead of the brain. Then I can see things in new ways, make new connections between seemingly unrelated things, and incorporate the knowledge in my whole being. Of course you need a framework to begin with, the knowledge, beliefs, ways of seeing things that you have embraced and integrated. And you need the openness which comes from accepting that you will never have all the answers.

John Guido, Dundas, Ontario, Regional Leader, L'Arche Ontario

“Laws, rules, and regulations shape basic policies for all organizations. These are interchangeable to a large degree. The culture of the organization, defined to some degree in the policies, but more importantly defined and refined through the day-to-day practices of the members of the organization, is what differentiates one from another. The wisdom of academia tells us that adult learners acquire information when presented through various mediums and methodologies.

We learn by watching others and modeling our own behavior to match or be different from those others. We learn by trying various methods, analyzing them for success and failure, and selecting those that create the outcomes we seek. And we learn by exploring and tweaking our methods, talking with others to debrief and recoup after things went a bit wrong. Learning comes through all of these, both formal and informal, methods of exploration. And most often, learning comes through the opportunity for nonjudgmental dissection of our experiences so that we can avoid the same mistakes again. Training programs are only as good as the outcomes we achieve.”

Ruth Seigfried, Sewickley, Pennsylvania, Founder, President & CEO, In Vision Human Services, Wexford, Pennsylvania

Re-experiencing the Journey: Ensuring Follow-up

“Knowledge isn’t power. Application of knowledge is power.”

David Rosenhaus

“The challenge with sending people to an external training event is that very often they come back for a short time feeling inspired and possibly even produce some written notes that no one else reads. All of us need some kind of tool to encourage us to take the next step of putting new learning into action and create change in our work. Send people off to training with the expectation that they will be coming back with a plan for at least one new idea to implement and one idea that they will commit to discussing with another person from the organization. And then of course follow-up with people to see where the training has led them!”

Jennifer Leslie, St. Marys, Ontario, Manager, Community Development and Planning Services, Community Living St. Marys & Area

Just as many written individual Plans, full of good ideas, remain as filed paper without much follow up, so do a great number of Handouts and notes from learning events meet a similar fate. I have done it myself and it requires some intentional effort to take the time to refer back to information and resources following an event, to reflect and discuss and decide how these can be used to help people in practical ways.

Some organizations have a structure in place where anyone attending an event has a responsibility to share what they have learned at a team meeting or other gathering. This can be helpful as long as those expected to present this information have support to do so, since this type of expectation can be intimidating for some.

At many workshops there are feedback forms that invite participants to say what they have learned, but this benefits the presenter and hosts rather than those attending. Some people offering training will build in a Handout inviting those attending to jot down a few helpful ideas or ask them to write out a few goals that have emerged over the day. These are then put in a self-addressed envelope and mailed back to them by the presenter in a month or two.

Another simple strategy could be to create a user friendly internal feedback form that anyone attending a training could also fill out and return to their group or organization. Such a form could combine hopes/goals identified before the event and how these were fulfilled after it is over.

Following are a few suggested questions:

- My expectations from this event are:
- This is what I learned:
- I am hoping I can help the following people (names) more in these ways (specify) after this event:
- These are ways I now think I can help the following people (names) :
- The support I need to act on these ideas is:
- Here are some ideas I think are important to share from this training:
- Here are some ways these can be shared:

In these days of more and more paperwork I found it difficult even to type the word “form” above, but in the spirit of babies and bathwater, why not incorporate a simple structure for a good cause that helps make actual changers in people’s lives? Let’s not be so overwhelmed by bureaucratic requirements that we lose focus of where a small effort will yield important results for people!

Most organizations also have Newsletters and this would be another good place to include ideas gained from a learning event and how they are being used in practical ways. Checking up on how training resources are being used and what difference they are making is an excellent way to increase our accountability organizationally----and especially to people supported.

“To quote Gandhi, ‘Be the Change’--- as you listen to and collaborate with others, continually seek to find an area of agreement and act on it. Then look for another point of agreement and repeat this process. For example, if a person’s ‘world’ includes many people who appear to discourage them from using technology to support their communication or literacy, dialogue together. Determine what you can all agree to do, such as watching a training video on a piece of software and discussing the possibility of using it. No matter how small the goal, the important thing is to act! That step will pave the way for mutual agreement on other things to try. Eventually you may end up doing the big thing you initially wanted or even something better. A case in point involves the very successful LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program, rating systems for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of green buildings, homes and neighborhoods. If a small, diverse group of people can come together to improve environmental action, we can do it in our world too. Embrace this challenge and strive to make a real difference!”

**Anne Hill, London, Ontario, Professor, Developmental Services, Fanshawe College,
Independent Consultant**

“Training in person-centred thinking and person-centred practices is helpful for people interested in providing person-directed facilitation and planning supports and for those who provide direct supports to others. However, training by itself does not necessarily lead to the deepest learning and/or transformation in one’s perception, understanding or practice. To integrate the learning that happens while reading about or participating in a person-centred thinking or facilitation and planning course, it is important to have personal experience with the materials/approach/skill/technique. It is through experiencing firsthand the power and benefits of person-centred thinking and practices, that one really understands how to use these in their facilitation and planning work beyond surface application. It also provides an opportunity to understand the less obvious values and skills needed and used during practice which include but are not limited to inclusion, privacy, negotiation, positive approaches to conflict, and much more.”

Julie Malette, Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, CEO, HSA Canada at Helen Sanderson Associates

Mentoring

“Supporters working with vulnerable people need to know many important things, most of which are hard to find in typical training programs. They need to understand deeply not only what difficult experiences the person might have lived through, but also what they might be up against in the future. Then they need to understand how to prevent or compensate for those life experiences. The qualities of openness and empathy might not come naturally, or be taught in staff training programs, but they can be nurtured. I believe that supporters need strong, committed mentors who are prepared to show them what’s important though example, tell them the truth about the realities of living with a disability in our society and help them to come to grips with the responsibility to ‘bend over backwards.’”

Beth French, Brockville, Ontario, Executive Director, Brockville & District Association for Community Involvement

There are a number of ways that mentoring can be used to increase people’s learning and ability to be effective. There are now more opportunities to access mentoring from people who have proven wisdom and experience in offering supports such as personal planning, connections, friendships, job creation, helping people labelled with challenging behaviour and many other topics.

In addition to numerous hours of training facilitators received as a group, in our tri-county personal planning initiative, I also met with each one individually on a monthly basis. People were already doing good work but the calibre increased significantly because of these ongoing conversations. It was not only because I offered some suggestions---that did help, but more significantly, it was an opportunity for the facilitator to discuss what they were doing, which allowed them also to think out loud and consider creative ways to move the process forward.

Since then I have also done this with other groups and have seen the difference this type of support makes in people's ability to do this work.

I also requested that each facilitator work with what I call ***Planning to Plan*** Journal Notes, that they would bring to our individual meetings each month. These consisted of pages with a few questions on them and room for the person's thoughts on how they were moving forward in planning with a specific person. Topics included where they felt things were at with the planning at the moment, what was moving forward, what issues they were encountering and actions needed to address those issues. Various organizations and independent facilitators now use this approach and find it a helpful way to deepen their understanding of the work.

Although forging a mentoring relationship in person is ideal, the reality at the moment, where I live, is that there are many locales that do not have anyone yet, who can offer this type of support. I have done some of this long distance, by telephone and Skype or Google Plus and it still allows for the connection necessary to have meaningful conversations. Long distance worked surprisingly well when I was developing stories and articles for ***The Pennsylvania Journal on Positive Approaches***; those of us on the Editorial Board were pleased at the depth of connection that was possible by phone and email. I want to reiterate that in person is ideal, but until there are more mentors in more places, some long distance conversation and support is making a positive difference.

“Training introduces us to new concepts, helps to form a foundation in which to build our beliefs and ultimately moves us beyond the comfort of our status quo towards innovative ideas or evidence based practices. Training can connect us, motivate us and introduce us to new ways of thinking. Many of us see training as an ‘event’ ~ a day away from the routine of office responsibilities. However, can we as learners digest, explore, implement and sustain different approaches or practices after a few hours or days of training?”

When we are faced with new information in a training that challenges our current paradigm we may feel excited. That excitement can give way to dissonance, a feeling that our current beliefs or strategies may be ineffective or even wrong. Quality training moves us beyond dissonance by providing us with a language to express the discord we may be experiencing while introducing us to information that assists us as the learner to move forward.

So is it possible for training to motivate us and transform our practices through brief exposure? The effective application of training innovations requires behavior change at the practitioner, supervisory, and administrative support levels. Successful application of concepts and practices is best achieved when training is followed with coaching. Training and coaching are the principal ways in which behavior change is brought about for staff in the beginning stages of implementing new information or activities and throughout the life of evidence-based practices and programs. Most skills needed by successful practitioners can be introduced in training but really are learned on the job, with the help of a coach who can assist with deepened awareness of implementation strategies, concept application and problem solving.

In human services, practitioners are part of the actual intervention. The success of service provision is impacted by the degree to which the practitioner understands and applies strategies. Coaches not only expand the practitioner's knowledge and skills taught in training, they also impart craft knowledge such as engagement, ethics, managing work flow and judgment. Coaching is more than just routine supervision. Coaching acknowledges that while new information is being trained to staff, staff need the feedback in order to learn from mistakes, identify success and ultimately witness transformative changes. Coaching also seeks to clarify how all participants are shaped by implementing innovations including supervisors, administrators and individuals served. Coaches can help practitioners see how their personal beliefs and attitudes can be integrated with skills, knowledge, philosophy and values.

When we look at the role of training and coaching, we realize that one without the other is insufficient. Yes, behavior change is difficult. Ask anyone who has tried to quit a bad habit on their own. While training is usually designed to introduce the learner to the essential elements, coaching produces actual changes. Newly learned behaviors and skills are often unrefined, require support and could benefit from guidance. Coaching that is readily available and reflective provides a vehicle for the practitioner to develop skills in an environment that supports and affirms the practices while witnessing positive outcomes.

MaryJo Alimena Caruso, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Training/Technical Assistance Coordinator, FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community Based Child Abuse Prevention

Continuing the Journey: Creating a Culture of Ongoing Learning

“I just know that ongoing learning opportunities are essential! It provides an opportunity to stop and reflect and apply new thoughts and ideas to real world experiences.”

Kathy Lorimer, Louisville, Kentucky, Retired Independent Consultant, Parent, Painter

“I have always considered training as a life-long process where we are rejuvenated and inspired to continue to challenge ourselves with new ideas. I believe value based training promotes creative thinking and allows for a healthy discussion on how we support people. It provides opportunities to both share our success stories and to help us consider alternative ways of viewing complex situations we may struggle with at times. It gives me a boost when I listen to the experience of others and encourages us to think of how this can help us improve the quality of supports. Training provided to our staff is an opportunity to re-visit our agency philosophy, and encourages us to be open to different approaches and views of supporting individuals in unique ways in a shared effort to help an individual reach their goals and dreams.”

Maurice Voisin, Hanover, Ontario, Executive Director, South-East Grey Support Services, Flesherton, Ontario

“I see training as a type of leadership, that has the ability to change people individually and to influence the culture of an organization. What we are trying to create beyond sharing information is to help each person to feel, and be seen, heard, and known. When training is offered in a way where people can find their voice, then the material being shared can manifest within that empowering context. This is the guiding principle by which I operate as a teacher, consultant, administrator, and in my therapeutic work as well.”

Beth I. Barol, PhD , Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania, Independent Consultant, Director, MSW Program, Widener University, Chester, Pennsylvania

In the current climate of restrictions it can seem overwhelming to ask the question:

“How do we involve everyone in creating a culture of ongoing learning in our group/organization?”



All the challenges mentioned near the beginning of this book are still there 50 pages later. I believe the solution is a question of Leadership, Vision, and Courage---qualities I have purposely capitalized---they are that important. Today I came across the following quote: *“A society is not just defined by what it creates, but also by what it refuses to destroy.”* (source unknown).

Together, over the years, we have created some ways of helping people, that need to be preserved---that actually work and reflect Values we espouse in this movement. For various and complex reasons many of these ways of being with people are in jeopardy and require our attention to preserve what we hold dear. Not only do we need to keep learning new things, we must also be mindful of what already exists, that should not be relinquished. At the 2013 Toronto Summer Institute on Inclusion, Community and Diversity, De’Amon Harges, a community organizer and consultant from Indiana, told us of the African totem and symbol, Sankofa, pictured on the left. The meaning of this image is connected to the wisdom of looking back to learn from the past in order to bring awareness to building the future.

It is particularly important right now to understand the history and experiences of people who have a disability so that we can hold on to the gains that have been made and avoid any repetition of directions that have led to disaster.

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.”

Albert Einstein

Ways to Nurture a Culture of Ongoing Learning

“Our job is not to help a few people beat the odds, but to change the odds for everybody! Training is an ongoing need in our lives; it helps to give structure to what our hopes and dreams are.”

De’Amon Harges, Indianapolis, Indiana, Co-founder, Tesserae Learning Community

- Start identifying people in your group or organization who are passionate about learning in general or learning about certain things. See if there are certain topics or types of media they are interested in checking out and then sharing the information in easy ways-- through an email, on a bulletin board, in a Facebook Group, etc. In one Circle where I have been involved as a consultant, one of the person’s parents is interested in information about the brain, a support worker wants to learn more about certain aspects of neurodiversity and another staff member is exploring information on art therapy, all of which are relevant to the person’s support.
- Also start identifying people who are interested in connecting with other groups (general community ones as well as collegial) to see where common learning goals may be shared and pursued.
- As a simple one page sheet or as an email to everyone, ask people to fill out: ***“Want to Teach”..Want to Learn”*** and see what evolves. Consider a monthly “lunch and learn” using the topics people suggest.
- Consider a monthly or bimonthly book and/or film club---.it could actually just focus on a chapter of a book and the movies don’t have to be “training films”---.lots of mainstream movies have important messages related to our work.
- Ask everyone to make a copy of any Handouts and notes they have from training events they have attended, circling a few points from them that they think are important. What ideas do they have on how these could all be put together and shared---not necessarily the whole Handout or all the notes, but the highlights? They could be mapped out and put up in strategic places, developed as an attachment, used in newsletters, etc. Of course there also needs to be intentional follow up on discussing ideas from these past trainings.
- Consider holding a few open general meetings every year and invite more people from the wider community. One way to learn what is important to people might be to host a World Café and ask people about their communities.----what they want to celebrate, what they see as issues to work on.
- I consulted for one organization in Michigan where employees, family members and people supported who wished to share, each had one of their Dreams/Goals posted on coloured paper, along the hallways of the building where they worked from or visited. An

Association near me has people's Core Gifts posted in a central place; they also have a few inspirational quotes posted in a visible location and these change every week. A culture includes environment and there are lots of non-gimmicky ways to enhance where people spend time, that can encourage learning. This works best when the people who occupy the space have a major voice about what gets posted and how.

“Lifelong learning is the, ‘ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated’ pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. Therefore, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability. The term recognizes that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom but takes place throughout life and in a range of situations. Instead, learning can be seen as something that takes place on an on-going basis from our daily interactions with others and with the world around us.

For any individual with a disability or for any family member or professional, know your history. Take the time to look at historical videos and news articles to see what was happening in the field decades ago. What you will find is still repeated today but the language has become more subtle. For example, instead of seclusion rooms, a school or agency might call the same setting an accountability room. A segregated classroom will now be called a supports center.

Take the time to keep a file or folder of issues—it can be best practices or worst practices. You may find yourself in a situation where you need to draw upon this file or folder to make your points. This set of folders can soon lead to a lifelong passion and lifelong learning.”

Colleen Wieck, St. Paul, Minnesota, Executive Director, Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities

"When staff go to a training about helping people to do planning in their lives, they need to want to do it and then actually do it, not just do half of it. People get materials and handouts but they don't always really learn what is on the handouts. I wish people would try these ideas on themselves too. For example, one kind of planning uses one page profiles; I would like to see what that would look like for staff and facilitators. What is your life like and what is planning like for you as a paid person? I also think that facilitators need to practice, practice, practice to help people to plan, and then help us learn how to do it too. I would also like to be in charge of my planning meetings and get to see any paperwork about me, in plain language. I am proud that I start my own meetings!"

Ashley A. White, Timmins, Ontario, Self Advocate, Expert Advisor

“Change is not a one stop shop. It is a continuous learning cycle. There is collective energy that we can mobilize when we get the RIGHT MIX of people in the room; SEE and HEAR possibilities and FUTURE VISIONS that we want to create; figure out a PLAN of things that we “CAN DO”; DO what we have planned; come back together regularly to REFLECT and LEARN from our experience; and then do it all again, building on our experience together, creating a culture of possibilities.”



Patti Scott, Franklin Park, New Jersey, CEO , *Neighbours Inc. & Neighbours International*

and

**David Hasbury, Franklin Park, New Jersey, Collaborative Change Design & Facilitation,
*Neighbours International***

***“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”***

T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

Conclusion

“We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion.”

Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*

I believe that the pursuits of learning and leadership are deeply connected. My own vision of a leader is someone who is convinced that things can change for the better. Leaders believe that not only can they, themselves, make a difference, but that each person has a contribution to make, when invited and encouraged to do so. They see and support the power and gifts of others, and they are delighted to further ongoing learning for those around them.

Some organizations and funding bodies within our movement tend to look to the business community for leadership in practices and processes such as evaluation methods and skill development. There are many creative and effective ideas we can adapt from the corporate world but inherent problems also exist. One danger occurs when something that seems like a good idea in one context is simply lifted into another without considering the differences in sensibility and purpose.

The other problem I have seen is that non-profits sometimes assume that the efficiency of business precludes significant focus on a values centered, shared power approach, and then the importance of the latter is not given the attention it deserves. The De Pree quote cited earlier in this book: *“Intimacy is at the heart of competence”*, reminds us that people actually accomplish more in an atmosphere of supportive relationships and mutual learning, where they can thrive personally and professionally. It is not an “either/or”; it is a “this and then that”!

During Max De Pree’s time as CEO of The Herman Miller Furniture Company in Michigan, that company had one of the highest returns to its investors, among Fortune 500 companies. If we want to study some aspects of corporate culture, then this would be a good one to consider.

Profit or non-profit, the key to excellence lies in relationships, leadership and learning. Michael Gould, CEO of Bloomingdales was interviewed for *The New York Times* recently, and offered these comments:

“...we’re in the people business. I believe the business I’m in is giving people an opportunity to grow. At the end of the day, no one remembers anyone’s numbers, no matter how good they were at any moment in time. All anyone’s going to remember is, did they give me an opportunity to be more than I thought I could be? What people want is a sense of recognition. They want a sense of belonging. People want to sense that what they’re doing makes a difference....One of the very first things I look for is intellectual curiosity.

.... Life is an endless process. When you get out of college you say: 'I've got my degree... Now I'm going to go work.' No, you're not going to go work. You're going to go learn. Part of what you're going to learn about here is retail and part of what you're going to learn is about life and interpersonal skills. It's everyone's role at Bloomingdale's to make sure these kids are learning. And it's everyone's responsibility to keep learning.

I had one of my top executives say to me a few years ago, 'I don't want the same job next year.' I said, 'Well, you're not going to have the same job next year.' I've had the same title for 14 years, but I haven't had the same job. You have to evolve."

Michael Gould of Bloomingdale's On Passion and Compassion, Interview with Adam Bryant, *The New York Times*, October 5, 2013

In his interview Gould mentions that he regularly refers people to a famous speech on *Personal Renewal*, given by the late John W. Gardner in 1990. Gardner held many positions of power in the public and private sectors, including Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Johnson, during which time Medicare was launched, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and founder of two influential national U.S. organizations, Common Cause and Independent Sector. Following are several excerpts from *Personal Renewal*:

"...the proverb says, 'It's what you learn after you know it all that counts' ...Learn all your life. Learn from your failures. Learn from your successes... We learn from our jobs, from our friends and families. We learn by accepting the commitments of life, by playing the roles that life hands us (not necessarily the roles we would have chosen). We learn by growing older, by suffering, by loving, by bearing with the things we can't change, by taking risks.

... life isn't a mountain that has a summit, nor is it --- as some suppose --- a riddle that has an answer. Nor a game that has a final score. Life is an endless unfolding, and if we wish it to be, an endless process of self-discovery, an endless and unpredictable dialogue between our own potentialities and the life situations in which we find ourselves. By potentialities I mean not just intellectual gifts but the full range of one's capacities for learning, sensing, wondering, understanding, loving and aspiring.

...Many years ago I concluded a speech with a paragraph on the meaning in life. The speech was reprinted over the years, and 15 years later that final paragraph came back to me in a rather dramatic way, really a heartbreaking way. A man wrote to me from Colorado saying that his 20 year old daughter had been killed in an auto accident some weeks before and that she was carrying in her billfold a paragraph from a speech of mine. He said he was grateful because the paragraph --- and the fact that she kept it close to her --- told him something he might not otherwise have known about her values and concerns. I can't imagine where or how she came across the paragraph, but here it is:

'Meaning is not something you stumble across, like the answer to a riddle or the prize in a treasure hunt. Meaning is something you build into your life. You build it out of your own past, out of your affections and loyalties, out of the experience of humankind as it is passed on

to you, out of your own talent and understanding, out of the things you believe in, out of the things and people you love, out of the values for which you are willing to sacrifice something. The ingredients are there. You are the only one who can put them together into that unique pattern that will be your life. Let it be a life that has dignity and meaning for you. If it does, then the particular balance of success or failure is of less account.'"

**John W. Gardner, *Personal Renewal*, Delivered to McKinsey & Company,
Phoenix, Arizona, November 10, 1990**

This movement we are part of is a liberation movement and its success depends upon our treating one another with kindness and seeking out ideas and experiences to inspire our courage and creativity over time. This is the Journey; this is the path to which we must cleave.

*“...Let me
keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be
astonished....”*

Mary Oliver, *From Messenger*

I AM LEARNING

*I am learning the art of listening.
I wish to be an eternal student.
I am learning the art of believing.
I wish to be an eternal believer.
I am learning the art of serving.
I wish to be an eternal servant.
I am learning the art of becoming.
I wish to be
The parent of my silver dreams.
I wish to be
The child of my golden realities.*

Sri Chimnoy, Excerpt from *The Dance Of Life, Part 2*

Information on *Realizations*

Training/Learning

- ❑ Facilitation Skills for Person Centered/Person Directed Planning (Introductory and Advanced)
- ❑ Helping People Connect to their Community and Develop Relationships
- ❑ Growing and Developing Intentional Circles of Support Over Time
- ❑ Understanding and Supporting People Labelled with Challenging Behaviour
- ❑ Living the Values: Shared Power, Respect, Choice, Participation, Gifts, and Relationships
- ❑ Everyone is a Leader: How to Increase Positive Change in Work and Attitudes Around You
- ❑ Practical Ways To Use Stories For Change

We also offer mentoring, reviews, and consultation on individual supports, facilitation, planning, issues affecting people labelled with challenging behaviour and organizational change.

Resources

Planning Together: A Guide for Facilitators, Self-Advocates, Families, Friends and Support Workers
\$32.95 Can/US/ £20 UK

Collage: Sketches of a Support Circle
\$25.00 Can/ US/ £15 UK

friends in/deed! a handbook on focus planning to help people develop and sustain relationships
\$20.00 Can/US/ £10 UK

Shifting the Balance: Steps and Strategies to Increase Community Support (CD)
\$20.00 Can/ US/ £10 UK

Mapping The Learning Journey
Expanding Our Vision, Experience & Resources About Training/Learning
To Make A Real Difference
\$24.95 Can/ US/ £20.00 UK

For more information on training and resources please call 519-433-2387 or email susannahjoyce@rogers.com

www.realizationstraining.com FB: *Realizations Training & Resources*