

Friends

Connecting people with disabilities
and community members

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rtc on community living

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Driven to DiscoverSM

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This manual and additional activity worksheets are available at rtc.umn.edu/friends

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Foreword

For more than a hundred years, from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century, many people with disabilities were sent away to institutions. In the 1970s and 1980s a movement began to transition people back into the community. As this de-institutionalization movement started, many noted that although people with disabilities were now IN the community, they were not OF the community. That is, although individuals with disabilities may have been physically living in the community, they had little sense of belonging to community life. Some community programs were small institutions, and people still belonged to “the system” rather than to the community. They were still seen as different, needing special places and services — and not seen as contributing community citizens.

As services have changed in the last 20-30 years, most individuals with disabilities do not face having to go to institutions. Yet, the current disability services system design still results in people with a disability label being socially isolated from ordinary community members. While many schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and faith communities experience the physical presence of individuals with disabilities, there are still walls separating people socially. While people with disabilities may experience physical integration, they often do not experience social integration.

From the perspective of community members themselves, individuals with disabilities are often still seen as needing special help or are seen as “other,” rather than as fully part of the whole community.

In the late 1980s I began working with residential service and day program agencies that supported individuals with developmental disabilities to explore addressing this issue of increasing community relationships and belonging. We started to learn together if there were actions which staff could under-take, were there things that agencies could do, to bring people with disabilities and community members together? What roles could the services system play in encouraging more relationships and friendships between individuals with disabilities and other community members? What roles can ordinary citizens play in increasing the inclusiveness of their community? From the first “Friends” project in 1989 through to the present, the learning process continues.

This manual is a compilation of more than twenty years of learning from agency staff, people who receive services, and community members who have befriended people. It is written from the perspective of working with agency staff and the design of many of the exercises come from this “staff” approach. However, the exercises and strategies have been used by many people — parents, support coordinators, teachers, staff, and people with disabilities — to support community relationships.

The lessons have been learned from supporting people with primarily intellectual and other developmental disabilities, but also have been used to support relationships for individuals with other disabilities, such as mental health issues. Much of the learning has also gone on with individuals with a wide range of disabilities, including many individuals who have been seen as quite challenging, such as those who don’t use words to communicate, those who have extreme behaviors, or those about whom people said they wouldn’t or couldn’t be friends with community members. Thanks to the agencies, the staff, the people receiving services, and community members who provided the opportunities for this learning.

Much of the material has also been developed by listening and learning from others who are engaged in this work of having communities that value and include a wide variety of individuals, and from whom I continue to learn. Thanks to Beth Mount, John O’Brien, Carolyn Carlson, Sharon Gretz, Tom Kohler, Kathy Bartholomew-Lorimer, and Michael Smull for some of the examples and ways of thinking represented here.

Please use what is useful to YOU!

Angela Amado



Friendship is a thing most necessary to life, since without friends no one would choose to live, though possessed of all other advantages.

~ Aristotle, (384 BC–322 BC), Greek philosopher

Using this manual

- This manual is to help people with disabilities increase community membership and belonging and for promoting relationships with community members
- It is written for agency staff but can be used by anyone such as individuals receiving services, families, and support coordinators, etc.
- Many strategies were developed with people with intellectual/developmental disabilities, but the strategies are useful for anyone
- Not everything will be useful for everyone — use what is useful to YOU!
- For additional information or training on this topic or any material in this manual, please contact —

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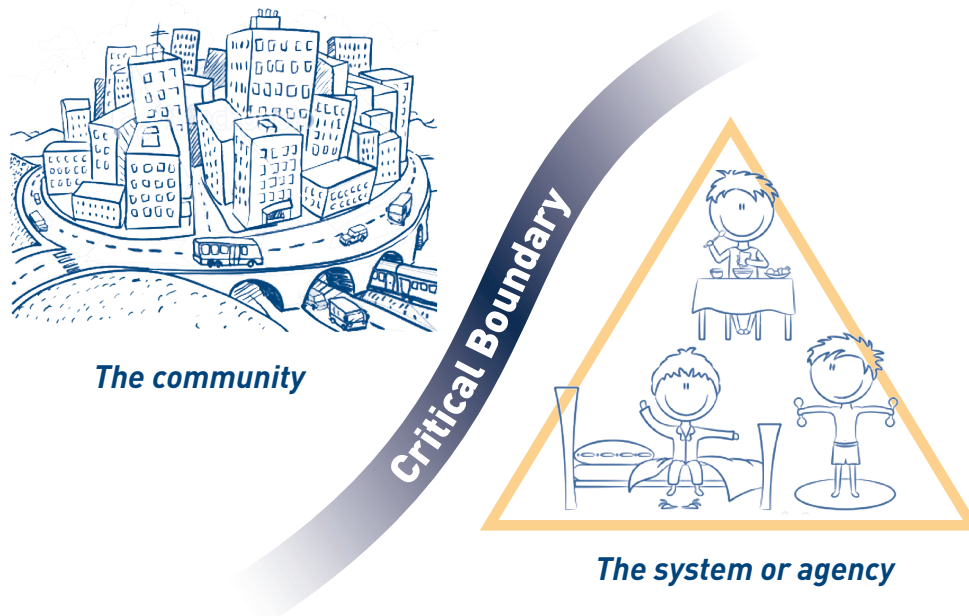
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1.

**Why friendships with
community members
are important**

The context of services for people with disabilities



This diagram illustrates the situation of many people with disabilities. The triangle in the lower right corner is a symbol of “the system.” It is a triangle because typically there is one person at the top of a hierarchical structure, and many people at the bottom. The triangle represents The System or The Agency, and everything that happens in an individual’s life because of system or agency rules, funding streams, decisions, etc. — everything that affects and shapes how people supported by an agency or a system receive that support. Many System and Agency decisions affect a person’s life —

- Where they live,
- Who they live with,
- Where they work,
- Whether they get to go to a movie or not, etc.

The System or The Agency affects the quality of life of an individual inside the triangle in ways very different from those not subject to it.

The upper left represents the Community. Often rules, timelines, and many other aspects of life are different in the Community. A staff person can understand the differences between the triangle of The System and The Community by looking at what they have to do on the job that they do NOT do when they are at home. Those are typically two different worlds, almost like two science-fiction-like “parallel universes.”

Many people who receive services have some or most or all aspects of their life inside the triangle. The Critical Boundary is what separates the two worlds. It divides the world into “us” and “them.” One of the tests of the strength of the Critical Boundary is: how do community members see the people who receive support? Do they see people with disabilities as fellow community members? Do they see people as belonging to themselves, or to “the system”?

Even people who live in a home in the community, or in their own apartment, or who have a community job, often face isolation and separation.

Can you be committed to bringing people together across this great boundary?

One of the most important reasons to work on building bridges between community members and people with disabilities is to alter this structure, this current paradigm.

Many times staff will say they are the only people in someone’s life, or they find it hard to think that there would be other people who would care about the person. What if it were a staff’s role to find more people to bring into the person’s life? To find more people to love them?

Thanks to John and Connie O’Brien for this diagram.

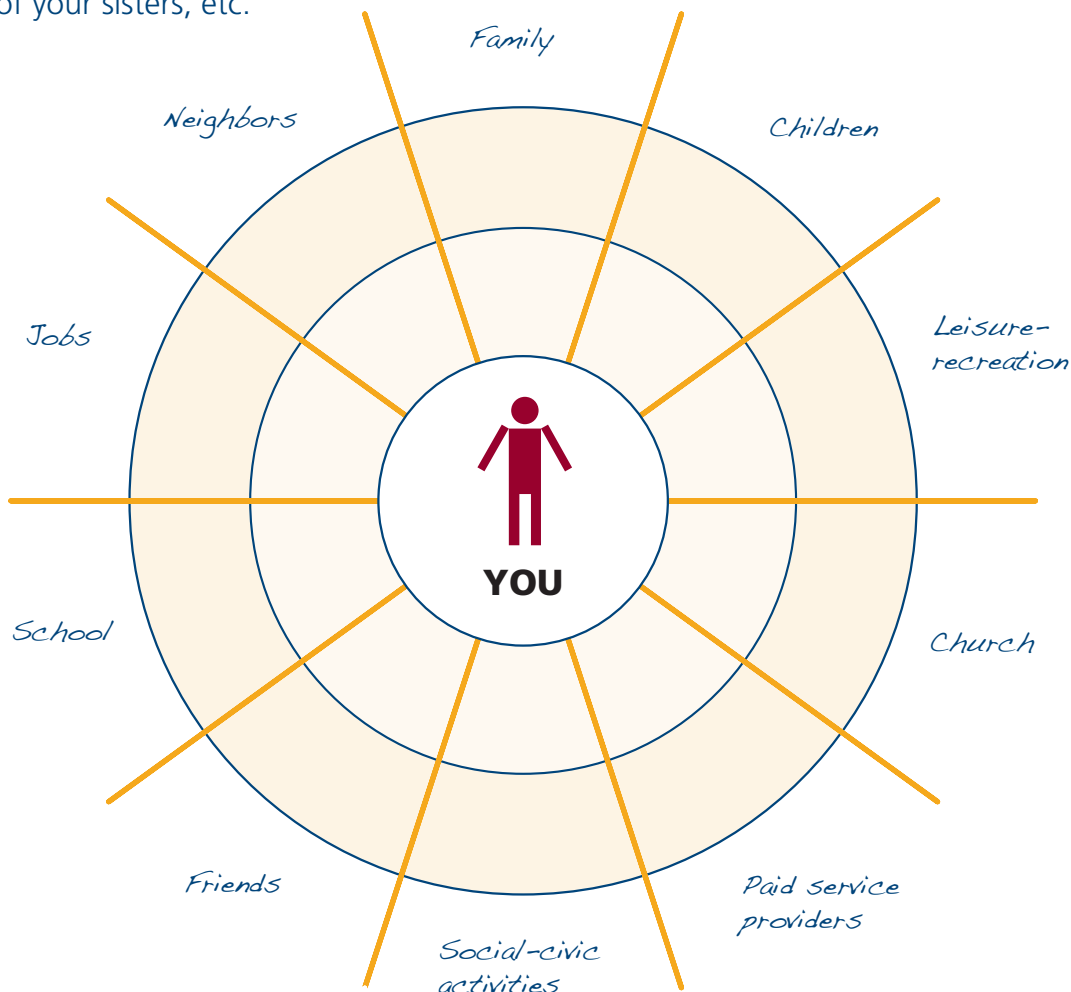
Activity 1

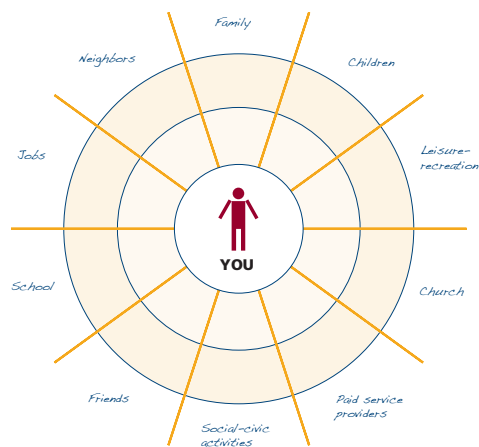
Relationship map

A Relationship Map is a way to diagram a social network and can show us why it is important to work on community connections. Here are four steps to filling it in —

1. If you were doing a map for yourself, YOU are in the middle
2. In the first, inner-most circle put the people you see the most frequently, love the most, are closest to
3. In the next outer circle put people you associate with but know less well than the inner-most circle
4. In the outer-most circle put people that are acquaintances, people you might know by name but not that well

The different titles of each section represent different life arenas through which you know people. So “Leisure-recreation” does not mean that you have recreation activities, but rather: who do you know through that recreation? If you’re on a softball team, who are the other team members, coaches, others you know? “Family” — not just your own family members, but others you know through your family — like friends of your sisters, etc.





Think about what YOUR map looks like, versus a map for a person with disabilities you support.

What are the differences between YOUR map and the map of people with disabilities you support? What would be the differences in the Relationship Maps of average community members and the people with disabilities who live in your community?

Write some of these differences:



Using a Relationship Map to appreciate the nature of the social networks of individuals with disabilities gives us more reasons to work on relationships with community members. Can you be committed to expanding the number and quality of relationships in the social network of someone you support? Can you be committed to bring people “closer in”? Can you be committed to add more people who are there for the person just because they like that person?

What others have said —

- The “paid service providers” section is usually larger for people with disabilities.
 - » We all have people we pay to do service for us (like our car mechanic, hairdresser, barber, etc.) but for many people who receive services, this is a large proportion of their relationships.
- Average community members typically have relationships in many more “sections” or areas than people who receive services.
 - » A typical pattern for individuals with disabilities is people in only three sections: paid staff, other people with disabilities they live with or work with, and their family (and some have no or few family relationships).
- The number of people on the map —
 - » The average community member typically has many more people on their map.
- The number of more intimate relationships —
 - » The average community member usually has more people in the “inner-most” circle.
- What other differences do you see?



“In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...

This is the inter-related structure of reality.”



~ Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968), American clergyman, activist, humanitarian, and civil rights leader

Ten reasons to support relationships with community members

In this section are ten specific reasons why it is important to support relationships with community members. While you may already believe or know it is important, you can use these reasons to talk to others about why to work on this.

1. Relationships are important to all of us

Our relationships define who we are as a human being. We are social animals.

Everything we know about or believe about ourselves and what's possible has come from our relationships with others.

There is also a significant amount of research that our relationships are our number one reason for happiness. If we are happy, or unhappy, we can look to our relationships.

Here is a quote from the psychologist David Myers, who wrote a book called *The Pursuit of Happiness*, about the reasons why people are happy or not —

“What comes up consistently at the top of the charts [for why people are happy] is not, as many might expect, success, youth, good looks or any of those enviable assets. The clear winner is relationships. Close ones. Followed by a happy marriage . . . Supportive intimate connections with other people seem tremendously important.”

Activity 2

What would it be like if you had no friends?

Write in your responses to these two questions. Look for yourself before going onto the next page. Really get present to what would it be like if you had NO friends —

- **How would you feel?**

- **What would you DO if you had NO friends?**

What others have said —

- How would I feel if I had no friends?
 - » Lonely
 - » Depressed
 - » Sad
 - » Alone
- What would I do if I had no friends?
 - » Turn anybody who was there into a friend
 - » Drink
 - » Sleep a lot
 - » Eat a lot
 - » Withdraw
 - » See what I can do to make friends — get more active

Most of us, if we had no friends, would do SOMETHING. For example, when we move to a new community we usually do something to meet new people there.

But, people who receive services often have a history of few friends or having lost relationships — so perhaps it's easy to understand why some people are reluctant to try new things or meet new people!



2. People with disabilities themselves express that relationships are important

People who receive services express in many ways that relationships are important to them, including that relationships with ordinary community members are important.

Many professionals who have worked in the field for many years will have had this experience: walking into a place where there are a lot of people with a disability label in one place, like a large group home or sheltered workshop or institution. What happens within 5 minutes of walking in? You get surrounded by people. Some have called it “being swarmed.” If you are present to the experience, you can feel the hunger — the hunger for relating, the hunger for being with new people, the interest in you. You get asked, “What’s your name?” “Where are you from?” etc. There is a message in this — people who receive services are often hungry for relationships with community members.

How many times have you been hugged — by a person with disabilities who just met you?
Another message, another communication!

How many times have you read in an individual’s program plan or description that “staff attention” is “an important reinforcer”?

If staff is paying attention to one person in a home, and not to another resident —

- What does the second resident do? Punch the first resident! (or some version of that!)

People who receive services are telling us something!

- The Council on Quality and Leadership has developed a system of determining quality of services based on determining outcomes in people’s lives. While conducting focus groups across the country about identifying life outcomes important to people who receive services, they were told over and over again by self-advocates and their families that relationships was one of the most important outcomes. And yet, it’s often the thing that gets the least amount of time and attention in our support services system.

3. People with disabilities really do have very few friends

Research has shown over and over again that the percentage of ordinary community members in the social network of a person with disabilities is usually very small. The majority of relationships are family members, staff, and other people with disabilities. One study found that 60% of individuals in group homes had no friends who were community members.

4. Health and well-being

There is a great deal of medical research that if you’re socially isolated and alone, you are going to get sick and die sooner than if you are not. Social isolation is as great a mortality risk as smoking.

With all the attention in our field on people’s health, do you ever see a health care plan that says “help the person have more friends”? Yet it’s something that is likely to affect a person’s overall health in the long run, more than many other things we do.

For example, one study found that a major factor affecting whether women recovered from breast cancer, and how quickly they recovered, depended on the size of their social network. If a woman had at least six others in her social network, she was more likely to recover and to recover more quickly. The size of the social network was as great a determinant as the severity of the condition, and the gynecologist conducting the research said, “and that is remarkable!”

5. Adjust the balance between personal and functional relationships

Tom Kohler has done a categorization of our relationships as either “personal” or “functional” —

- **Personal relationships** — are those we have with people because we want to, because we like someone
- **Functional relationships** — are those we have with people for a reason, there is a specific function in the relationship

Here is a table contrasting these characteristics —

Personal relationships	Functional relationships
No specific purpose	Specific purpose
Freely chosen	Often dictated
The person is valued	Person not necessarily valued
No authority or control	Always control, often authority
The person is more important than the program	Caring-concern with a particular attribute or characteristic of the person
Can't be taught; not an intellectual exercise	Has parameters; can be defined in rational logical terms; can be taught

What is the balance in **your** life between personal and functional relationships?

What is the balance in the life of the average person with a disability label that you support?

Most people with a disability label have a disproportionate share of functional relationships in their life — their day often consists of being told what to do or not to do. How would you feel about your day and about yourself if you had that many functional relationships (people there because they had to be there) and that much functional “time” in your day?

One of the most important reasons to work on relationships with community members is adjusting this balance. Can a staff person, with his/her functional time, bring more personal relationships into the person’s life?

6. More power and control

There is a great degree of social network research that shows that the size of your social network is correlated with how much power and control you have. A CEO of a major company has about 3000 people in their social network. The President of the United States sends out 100,000 Christmas cards a year.

The more people in an individual’s social network who care about the person, the more say they can have over how that person’s life goes. Someone who is all alone, who has no one who deeply cares for them, often has little say over how their life goes, especially if they cannot communicate with words or if they have difficulty speaking up for themselves. Without people who love the person having a say, there is often only professional say.

7. Reduce personal stress

The more that paid people make up your social network, the more likely there is a high degree of stress or resignation. How would you feel about yourself if you knew that most people who were around you were people who were paid to be there?

Paid staff come and go. That dance of people in and out of an individual’s life can lead to many stresses —

- Turning anyone who is there into a “friend.”
- Testing the new staff — are you someone who really cares about me, no matter what I do?

It can lead to —

- Not wanting to try anything new, or
- Trusting very few people.

Bringing people into someone’s life who care about them as a person can reduce this stress.

8. Reduce staff burnout

Let's say there are 10 people in the life of an individual who receives services, and that a given staff person is one of those ten. Let's say a staff person has 100 people in their social network. That means for that given individual, the staff person is representing TEN people that they themselves have. That one staff person has to do the work of TEN people for that individual.

There are individuals who turn to the staff for everything, who want everything from a given staff member. No wonder they do that — they have so few others!

Perhaps one of the most valuable things the staff can do with their time is bring more people into the individual's life.

This can also apply with family members who are caregivers!

9. When relationships are supported, people change

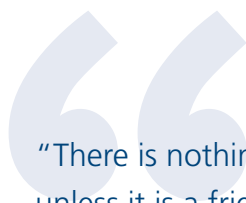
If a person only has staff and other people with disabilities in their life, if they only have a "service life" of being told what to do, why bother changing?

When a person has people in their life that are valued to them, that they know care about them, there have been many examples of reduced "behavior problems," increased self-confidence, and other desirable changes.

10. Provide community members the opportunity to be contributed to

One of the most important reasons to work on relationships with community members is what community members receive by getting to know an individual with disabilities. Each person has many gifts to offer.

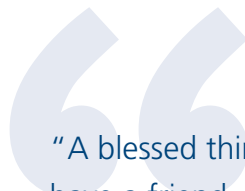
There are countless community members who have befriended individuals with disabilities who say something like "I'm probably getting more out of this relationship than they are."



"There is nothing better than a friend,
unless it is a friend with chocolate."



~ Linda Grayson, American children's book
author



“A blessed thing it is for any man or woman to have a friend, one human soul whom we can trust utterly, who knows the best and worst of us, and who loves us in spite of all our faults.”



~ Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), English clergyman and writer

What others have said —

- Learning patience
- Being reminded of what's really important in life
- Love
- Being loved unconditionally — no matter what I do, they still love me
- Making a difference in someone's life
- Seeing their accomplishments — brings me a sense of accomplishment
- They make me laugh



Our beliefs are critical to how successful we will be in any endeavor.

There are several beliefs that are at the core of being successful in building relationships with community members. Here's one at the core.

Test yourself, look yourself: What do you get from knowing this person?

Do you believe that community members will also benefit from knowing this person?

If you have this belief, you will be more successful in building community connections for this person.

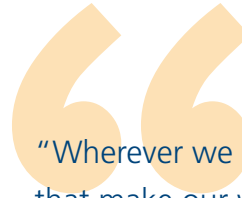
2.

Basic perspectives and principles

What “glasses” do you have on?

What we see as “real” and what we see as “possible” is determined by what “glasses” we have on. If we have on blue glasses, the world looks blue. If we have on yellow glasses, the world looks yellow. However, we often don’t know or have forgotten that we have on those blue or yellow glasses!

If you see an individual only as their disability, you will not see what they have to offer others. If you see community members as only unaccepting, you will not see the individuals who extend the hand of hospitality and openness. Your success in this work depends on the glasses you have on.



“Wherever we are, it is our friends that make our world.”

~ Henry Drummond (1851-1897), Scottish scientist and writer

Activity 4

How did you meet *YOUR* friends?

Think of your friends. Where did you meet them?



If you are doing this activity in a group with others, you can compare what is similar in the many ways we get to have friends.

How do most people make friends?

- Most people say they met their friends through —
 - » Work
 - » School
 - » Church
 - » Through other friends
 - » Through a club or interest
- What do all these avenues have in common?
 - » Almost all are places where you see the same people over and over again. But just seeing the same people in the same place is often not enough. For example, as a consumer, we often might see the same waitress, or post office worker, or grocery store check-out person — but have you made friends with any of them? Even if you see the same people over and over again, that's often not enough in itself.
 - » In those places where most people make friends there is meaningful interaction, over and over again. There are real chances to get to know each other.
- You don't become friends with everyone at school or work.
- When you want to become better friends with people, what do you do?
 - » Usually you ASK them to do something more.
 - » The people who are YOUR friends — what did you ask them to do when you first wanted to get to know them better? Or, if there was someone now you wanted to get to know better, what would you ask them to do?
 - Have coffee?
 - Have lunch?
 - Go fishing?
 - Come over?
 - Talk on the phone?
 - » We ASK people to do more.
 - » Becoming an “asker” is one of the most important skills to develop to become a community builder.



Big tip

See the same people
in the same places
over time.

Places where there's chances
for meaningful interactions,
contribution and reciprocity!

Activity 5

Who will Mary get to know there?

Mary's interest is in music. When staff identify that as her interest, a frequent response is "oh, let's take her to a concert." BUT — who will she get to know there?

What might be better places to pursue her interest in music?

What are places where she will see the same people, in the same place, over time?

Where are the places where she can really get involved with others there?

Write your ideas —

“

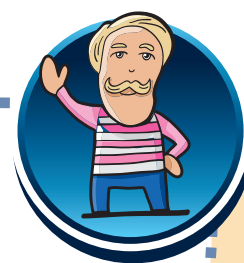
It's the friends you can call up at 4 a.m.
that matter.”



~ Marlene Dietrich (1901–1992), German-American
actress and singer

What others have said —

- Church choir
- Church choir practices
- High school bands/orchestras
- College orchestras/bands
- Music store, where they can have a regular role
- Radio station, where they can have a regular role
- Supporting a local rock band
- Concert series, where they could volunteer



Big tip for success

A big focus in many service agencies is for individuals to participate in community activities. Yet, participating in activities is different than getting to know people.

Some of the most common community activities for people who receive services (and for many of us!) are going to restaurants, shopping and movies. Yet, when was the last time you made a new friend at any of those places?

A big tip for success is to start shifting our focus, shifting our thinking, from “activities” to “people.” The most important question we can start asking is: “Who are they going to get to know there?”

Remember, where will they see the same people, in the same place, over time? How will they get involved with others there, in meaningful ways?

What is a friend?

Sometimes people ask, “What’s the definition of a friend?” Who counts as a “friend”?

Sociological research has defined “friend” in many different ways. The simplest way is that people are friends when both people say they are!

In encouraging people with disabilities and community members to come together, to get to know each other, and to possibly become friends, perhaps it is not that important that we worry about a strict definition of “friend” or whether someone can be “counted” as a “friend” or not. For many people who receive services, even if a community member is just an “acquaintance,” that is still a step up!

We can encourage a wide variety of relationships without being tied to a strict definition of the relationship. We can encourage deeper relationships with colleagues at work, fellow congregation members, deepening family relationships, tying people back to old friends, and many other relationships. And, we can encourage the “acquaintances” to get to know people better!



“Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It’s not something you learn in school. But if you haven’t learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven’t learned anything.”

~ Muhammad Ali (1942–), American professional boxer

Types of relationships

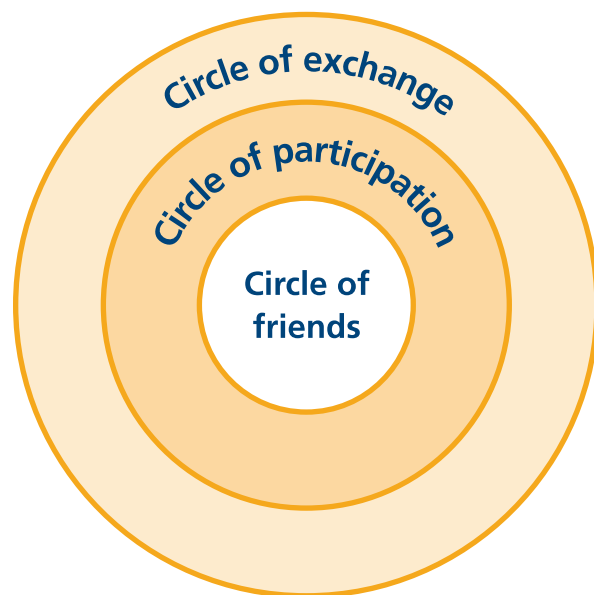
We can look at the depth and quality of relationships.

Apart from family, there are five categories of relationships —

1. **Customer relationships** — some service people may be friendly toward an individual
2. **Acquaintances** — For example, someone you see on the street, at church or in a class, that you say hi to, or know their name
3. **Places of community** — being a regular at a community place
4. **Places of community membership and belonging** — having a sense of belonging, like a community organization or group
5. **Friends** — people you do things with, for fun, people from whom you get support

Here is another example of a relationship map. You can use this to track progress in the number and quality of relationships.

How can we help potential friends move toward more inner circles?



What about friendships with others who have disabilities?

Nothing here in this manual is intended to take away from the fact that many people with disabilities have genuine, real, loving, caring friendships with others with disabilities. Of course if there are such friends who are important to people, we should support those relationships.

Oftentimes, though, it is assumed that people with disabilities only want to be friends with others with disabilities. Or, it is assumed that they ARE friends with others with disabilities, simply because they live with them or work with them. Or, there are skill training or behavior programs about teaching people with disabilities to get along better with one another — when they don't really WANT to live with, work with or get along better with other people with disabilities. It is important to not impose an assumption on people.

For example, in planning meetings a professional might ask someone, Who do you want to live with? Who do you want to have be your room-mate? And then the professional assumes that the answer will be another person with disabilities they have lived with before. Perhaps instead the professional can be open to that the person's answer might be that they want to live with a family member or a staff or a person who doesn't have disabilities.

Our focus here in this manual is on relationships between people with disabilities and community members, as it usually takes a significantly different type of effort, energy and activities to support those relationships. There are many segregated groups and programs in which people with disabilities can participate. The system is designed to keep people with disabilities together. If we are going to "cross the river" to build relationships with community members, it takes doing things differently, different types of effort, and that is the focus here.



"We all need friends with whom we can speak of our deepest concerns, and who do not fear to speak the truth in love to us."

~ Margaret Guenther (1929–),
American author

Activity 6

Track your progress with the relationship map

Let's look again at the "relationship" map diagram we looked at in Activity 1. There is also one on the next page. Again, here is how to fill it in —

1. Doing a map for yourself, YOU are in the middle
2. In the first, inner-most circle put the people you see the most frequently, love the most, are closest to
3. In the next outer circle put people you associate with but know less well than the inner-most circle
4. In the outer-most circle put people that are acquaintances, people you know by name but not that well

The different titles of each section represent different life arenas through which you know people. So "Leisure-recreation" does not mean that you have recreation activities, but rather: who do you know through that recreation? If you're on a softball team, who are the other team members, coaches, others you know?

In the "Family" section, put not just your own family members, but others you know through your family — like friends of your sisters, etc.

You can use this map in two ways —

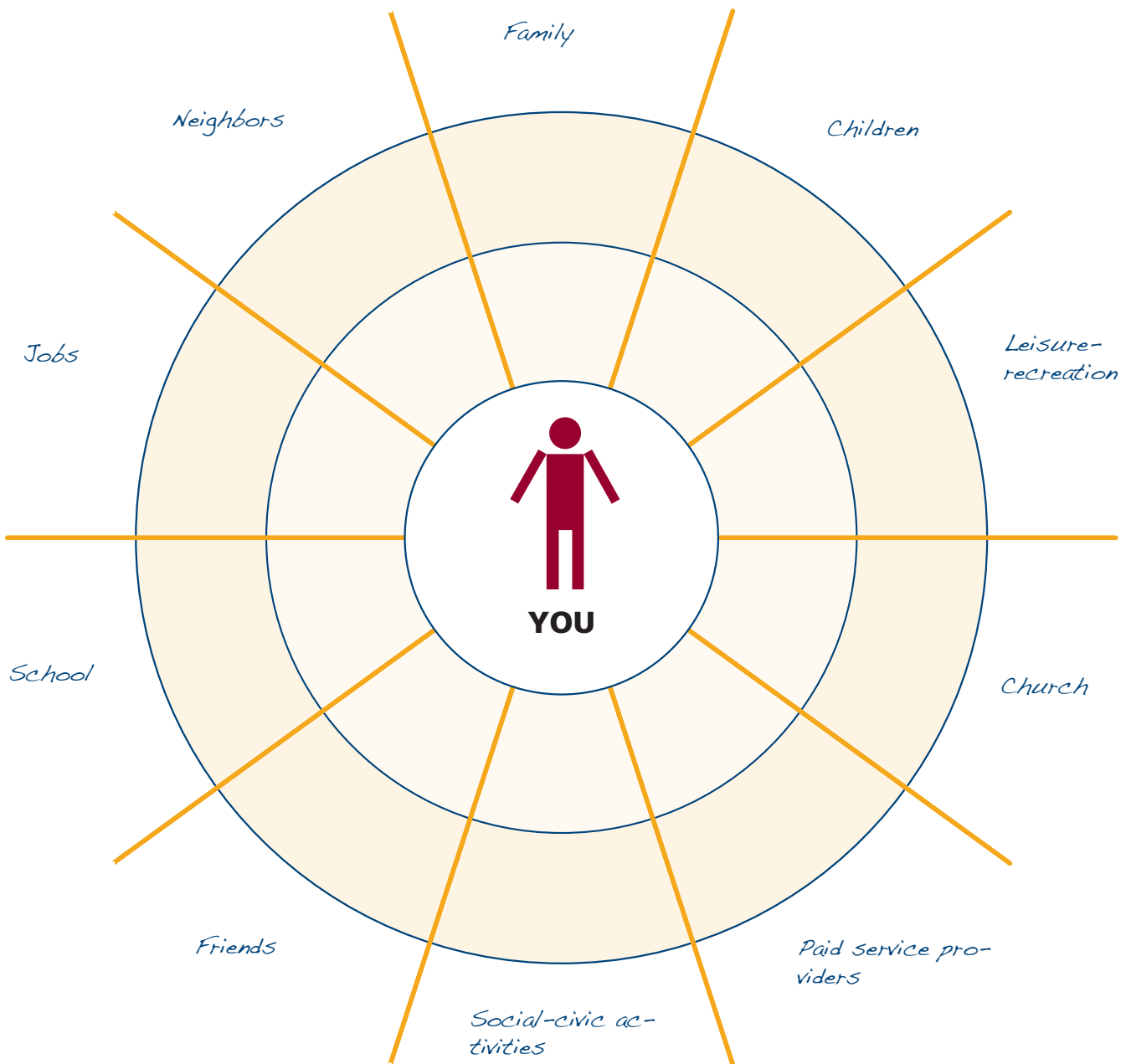
1. **Have each staff member make a map for themselves** — By doing your own maps, you can identify your own acquaintances and friends who share interests with those you support. Who do you know who likes cars, music, etc.?

In some small communities, the staff know virtually everyone in town — so if a person with disabilities is going to be connected to a community member, it will be someone the staff knows. Even in large communities, the people in the staff's networks can be rich resources for potential relationships and information about linkages to others.

2. **Make a map for each person you support** — Notice the areas of relationships — for most people who receive services, their social network is paid providers, family, and other people with disabilities.

There are some individuals who “everyone knows.” They say hi to everyone, lots of people in the community say hi to them. But if we examine these types of social networks more closely, we see that usually these other people are in the outermost circle of this individual’s relationship map, they are at best acquaintances. A goal in this type of case would be to see: how can these people be moved into more inner circles, how can we deepen these relationships?

Regularly updating the map for anyone you support can help you see how you’re doing on supporting the individual in expanding the size and depth of their social network.





“Friends broaden our horizons. They serve as new models with whom we can identify. They allow us to be ourselves — and accept us that way. They enhance our self-esteem because they think we’re okay, because we matter to them. And because they matter to us — for various reasons, at various levels of intensity — they enrich the quality of our emotional life.”



~ Judith Viorst (1931–), American novelist and newspaper columnist

3.

Seven strategies to support relationships with community members

Interests and gifts

One way we get to know others is through shared interests and contributing our gifts, talents and abilities.

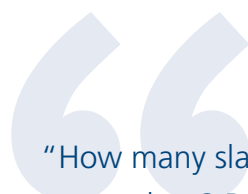
- Interests express the meaning in a person's life —
 - » What do you find most meaningful? Baseball? Sewing? Children?
- Once you identify interests, you can look for: where are others who SHARE these interests
- You can identify memberships and associations around particular interests
 - » There are clubs and groups around all types of interests: hockey, pigs, scrapbooking, etc.
- What are the person's gifts, skills, and/or talents — things the person does well that can be contributed to others?
 - » **Example:** Jason was a man with some mental health issues who liked to make up stories. Some people called them lies, some called them hallucinations. Where would this gift be valued? His supporters found a group for him to belong to: A local group of people who got together to do improvisation, just for fun. They really valued his gift for story telling!
- What are the gifts which a person with a disability label contributes to you, which community members would also appreciate receiving?
- Interests may not be easy to define — sometimes they are discovered and developed in action
 - » Perhaps someone has led a life where they have not had a chance to try many things — you can assist them in having new experiences and finding new interests.

- Interests express the person's life "calling"

- » What is this person "called" to do?

- » **Example:** Eve was a person who didn't speak, had temper tantrums, and was interested in very little. She was supported by an agency committed to finding places of community belonging for each person they supported. They used the approach of asking: "What is this person's calling? What are they called to do?" They finally decided Eve had two callings: to drink coffee and to smoke cigarettes!

What place of community belonging did they find? A local diner, where every afternoon a group of ladies got together to drink coffee and smoke cigarettes! They talked to the owner, and started bringing Eve there every afternoon.



"How many slams in an old screen door? Depends how loud you shut it. How many slices in a bread? Depends how thin you cut it. How much good inside a day? Depends how good you live 'em. How much love inside a friend? Depends how much you give 'em."

~ Shel Silverstein (1930–1999),
American author

Activity 7

First step: Identify interests and gifts

Pick one person you support for whom you would like to increase community connections. Work through these exercises about that one person from Activity 7 through Activity 24.

Person _____

Date _____

Group members participating _____

Interests	Gifts, skills, and talents What does the person do well?	Gifts — What you and others receive from knowing this person
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

“Life is partly what we make it, and partly what it is made by the friends we choose.”

~ Tennessee Williams (1911-1983),
American playwright

The seven strategies

The following strategies were found useful to support relationships with community members. Some strategies will be more useful than others for any particular individual. They are all useful for brainstorming ideas.

There are two different “groups” in the seven strategies: one-to-one connections and relationships, and increasing community membership —

1. Group one: One-to-one connections and relationships

- » **Strategy 1:** Identify who the person already knows and where the relationship can be strengthened and deepened
- » **Strategy 2:** Identify who would appreciate this person's gifts
- » **Strategy 3:** Identify where you can find an interested person

2. Group two: Increasing membership

- » **Strategy 4:** Associations and clubs
- » **Strategy 5:** Community places where people engage in one of the person's interests
- » **Strategy 6:** Community places that are hospitable and welcoming
- » **Strategy 7:** Community places where the person can fit in just the way they are

“The better part of one's life consists of his friendships.”

~ Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865),
16th President of the United States



If you work through these exercises, you can brainstorm many different ideas.

You don't have to select an idea right away. Have fun brainstorming first! A later section addresses how to select where to start.

Example of Strategy 1: Steven and the barber

Steven's day program became very committed to relationships with community members. They supported many people who had quite complex needs, including Steven, who had quadriplegia, used a complicated wheelchair, and did not use words to communicate.

The staff was consistently addressing relationships with community members at weekly staff meetings. The staff became very committed to noticing community members who were more interested in the people they supported.

Steven's staff Becky took him to the barber once a month. She noticed that even though Steven didn't speak, the barber seemed quite interested in him. Becky asked the barber if he would be interested in getting to know Steven better, and have lunch once a month. The barber accepted, and they started having lunch.

Then the barber told Becky he wasn't getting to know Steven well enough — that they needed to have lunch twice a month! This despite the fact that Steven doesn't speak!

This barber received a Friendship Award from a state advocacy organization. When he accepted his award at their annual meeting, he was moved to tears regarding how important his relationship with Steven was to him. He said, "I don't know what Steven is getting out of this, because Steven doesn't talk. But — it's important to ME."

Could you see this as your job?

To help people like the barber become friends with people like Steven?

Many times we hear or say things like "we need to build community awareness" or "we need to educate our community." What if this is the best community awareness or community education there is — for someone like the barber to get to know someone like Steven!

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.”

~ John Donne (1572–1631), English poet, lawyer, and cleric in the Church of England

Strategy 2: Identify who would appreciate this person's gifts

Look at the two lists of gifts you made for the person you selected in Activity 7 on page 27.

- The gifts — skills, talents, abilities — what someone does well
- The gifts of what the person contributes to you, what someone gets from knowing them.

Think about — where are the places, who are the people who would appreciate these gifts?

“A friend may be waiting behind a stranger’s face.”

~ Maya Angelou (1928–), American author and poet, *Letter to My Daughter*

Activity 9

Who would appreciate these gifts?

For the person you selected in Activity 7.

Gifts, skills, and talents

What does the person do well?

Gifts — What you

and others receive from knowing this person

Who would appreciate receiving this person's gifts?



When we first talked to each other
I knew we would always be friends.
Our friendship has kept on growing
And I'll be here for you to the end.

You listen when I have a problem
And help dry the tears from my face.
You take away my sorrow
And put happiness in its place.

We can't forget the fun we've had
Laughing 'til our faces turn blue.
Talking of things only we find funny
People think we're insane — If they only knew!

I guess this is my way of saying thanks
For catching me when I fall.
Thanks once again for being such a good friend
And being here with me through it all.



~ Rachel Ellis, American poet and fiction writer

Activity 10

What are Ken's gifts?

Ken was a student with quadriplegia who could not move. He was graduating from high school, and a facilitator got his school friends together with Ken to help look at what type of career he would have. What would Ken do with his life after he graduated?

The facilitator asked the students, "What does Ken do well?"

This was a hard question because Ken doesn't DO anything! He doesn't move!

Finally, one student said, "You know what Ken does well? He sits still really well!"

What kind of people would appreciate a gift for sitting still? What kind of job did they help Ken get? What are your guesses?



"We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."



~ Anais Nin (1903–1977),
French-Cuban author

You know who appreciates a gift for sitting still? Artists!

They helped Ken develop a career as an artist's model. Not only does he have a gift for sitting still, you can move his body into any position and it will stay there — that is a great gift for an artist!

He also became a "hand" model, since he has beautiful hands. One product which featured a photo of his hands was a calendar, with a mountain lake scene behind his hands — it was a calendar for a soap company.

Ken makes so much money as an artist's model and with residuals from various products like the calendars, he is not dependent on social welfare funding.

This, a guy who can't "DO" anything! What glasses did the people have on who supported him?

Here are some ideas others have used —

- Who do you know who would like this person?
- Social ministry programs — For example, the Befrienders program is in 40 states; many congregations have some type of social ministry
- Formal volunteer programs such as “Best Buddies” (i.e., college, corporate, high school buddies, e-buddies)
- Former staff
 - » There are many staff who were very fond of individuals they supported, who promised to come back and visit. Many programs have re-established these relationships and have consistent visits from former staff, where the two friends have coffee or take a walk once a week. One agency started an “alumni club” of their former staff, that continue to stay involved with individuals who they supported.
- Family members of staff
 - » Sometimes a family member of a staff person has a special connection with an individual, and can be supported to have their own relationship.
 - » Two caveats here —
 - ~ First, some agencies do not encourage this type of relationship and others do.
 - ~ Second, would the family member continue the relationship even if the staff stopped working for that agency? If they would not, it is not necessarily the type of relationship to encourage.
- Ideas for other people, other places?

What other ideas can you come up with —

- In a small town, a group of staff just kept brainstorming, since between them all, they knew almost everyone in town. The staff kept asking, who do you know who likes to sew (one of the person’s interests) — until someone suggested a former high school friend of one of the staff.
- One staff went to her church — there was a central group that coordinated all the women’s prayer groups. She told that group they were looking for someone to come over to visit a specific person. One of the church members read this in the minutes of the meeting and did come over to get to know that person and befriend them.

“‘Why did you do all this for me?’ he asked. ‘I don’t deserve it. I’ve never done anything for you.’
‘You have been my friend,’ replied Charlotte. ‘That in itself is a tremendous thing.’”

~ E.B. White (1899–1985), American writer, *Charlotte’s Web*

Strategy 4: Identify associations and clubs

There are associations and clubs all around us. America is a community group country (as are many other countries)!

There are groups not just based on interests, but all kinds of groups — cultural, political, social, men’s groups, women’s groups, religious groups, etc.

Groups and associations have been highly recommended as places for an individual to belong — since they meet regularly, there are always activities around which people participate and get to know each other, and there are lots of opportunities to contribute and be contributed to. Most organizations also have some social element — whether it’s coffee beforehand or after, parties outside of meetings, etc.

There are two categories of clubs and associations, formal and informal.

Formal groups

Formal groups can range from Kiwanis to Rotary to Wednesday night prayer groups. In one neighborhood in Chicago, an individual did an inventory of all the groups and clubs — just in that one neighborhood! See the list below.

An Associational Map

Prepared by John McKnight, Northwestern University Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, Illinois 60208

Artistic organizations: choral, theatrical, writing

Business organizations: Chamber of Commerce, neighborhood business associations, trade groups

Charitable groups: Red Cross, Cancer Society, United Way

Church groups: service, prayer, maintenance, stewardship, acolytes, men’s, women’s, youth, seniors

Civic events: July 4th, art fair, Halloween

Collectors’ groups: stamp collectors, flower dryers, antiques

Community support groups: “friends” of the library, nursing home, hospital

Elderly groups: Senior citizens

Ethnic associations: Sons of Norway, Black Heritage Club, Hibernians

Health and fitness groups: bicycling, jogging, exercise

Interest groups: poodle owners, old car owners

Local government: town, township, electoral units, fire department, emergency units

Local media: radio, newspaper, local access cable TV

Men’s groups: cultural, political, social, educational, vocational

Self-help groups: Alcoholics Anonymous, Epilepsy self-help, La Leche League

Neighborhood or block clubs: crime watch, beautification, Christmas decorations

Outdoor groups: garden clubs, Audubon Society, conservation clubs

Political organizations: Democrats, Republicans, caucuses

School groups: printing club, PTA, child care

Service clubs: Kiwanis, Rotary, American Association of University Women

Social cause groups: peace, rights, advocacy, service

Sports leagues: bowling, swimming, baseball, fishing, volleyball

Study groups: literary clubs, bible study groups

Veteran’s groups: American Legion, Amvets, Veterans of Foreign Wars, their auxiliaries

Women’s groups: cultural, political, social, educational, vocational

Youth groups: 4H, Future Farmers, Scouts, YMCA

Strategy 5: Identify community places where people engage in one of this person’s interests

Look at the list of interests you made in Activity 7 on page 27.

Brainstorming ideas in Strategy 5 takes some discipline — don’t think about the person, just think about an INTEREST. One interest at a time.

Brainstorm with a group: for a particular interest, where are all the places where people engage in that interest?

Here’s an example for the interest “cars” —

- Auto repair body shops
- Auto parts dealer
- Service departments
- Auto inspection
- Auto rentals
- Performance racing
- Mechanics

- Parking lots-garages
- Auto magazines
- Used cars
- Car washes
- Auto stereos
- Race tracks
- Gas stations
- Tires

After you identify all the places where anyone does something with this interest, then look for: Who do we know there? Does anyone in the group have a connection to someone connected to one of those places?

You can make a relationship map for yourself — as on page 3 and 23 — who do YOU know with some of these interests? Who do you know who likes cars? Music? Etc.?

This is also an excellent strategy for developing possible job ideas for someone.

Activity 13

Places where people engage in one of the person’s interests

Pick one interest from the list in Activity 7: _____

Places this interest is expressed

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Who does anyone know at any of these places?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



A tip about volunteer work

One way to contribute to others is by volunteering. Some volunteering opportunities are great to get to know community members and some are not.

For example —

Volunteering at recycling centers has gotten quite common for people with disabilities. At some major recycling plants, several different agencies for people with disabilities are all congregating together. While people are contributing, it is not a great opportunity to get to know other community members!

Another place where some individuals volunteer is at humane societies. While this is great for those who like dogs, to get to be with dogs, it is often not a great opportunity to get to know community members. At some shelters, there are hours and hours where there is only one staff person working.

Think about other places for volunteering for getting to know people —

- Where do the people in your community with the most valued social roles volunteer? The opera? Different charity balls?
- Remember the question: Who is the person going to get to know there?
- For example, for someone who likes dogs, maybe walking dogs for people in the neighborhood would be a better opportunity to get to know people than at a shelter.

Strategy 6: Identify community places that are hospitable and welcoming

Some pioneers in community-building used this method. For example, a day program agency in Louisville, Kentucky, started with —

- For an individual who receives support, where do they live?
- Around that person's neighborhood, what kind of community businesses or centers of activity are there?
- Explore them — what are the places where when you walk in, it's very friendly, welcoming, hospitable, where the owners or people who work there are interested in people, where the locals congregate?
- Does the individual feel comfortable there?
- What kind of role could the individual play there? In a pet shop, can they visit regularly and pet the animals? In a sporting goods store, can they help break down boxes? Is there some regular way they can contribute and be involved?

Where this agency found they were more successful —

- Local places — not big national chains
- Small, family owned businesses
- Neighborhood groups and clubs

They looked to build interdependence over time and always used the rule — one person, one environment.

Example of Strategy 6

The City of Seattle had a project in their Department of Neighborhoods called “Involving All Neighbors.” This project was focused on involving people with disabilities in all of the city's neighborhood initiatives. The staff person who was focused on people with disabilities worked directly along-side all the other staff in the Department of Neighborhoods, toward ALL Seattle communities being inclusive of everyone.

One of their offerings was workshops to assist people in getting more connected. The first day was about identifying people's interests. Then each participant was given a disposable camera. They went around their neighborhood the next couple of weeks, into a number of different places, and identified the friendly, welcoming places — the places they felt comfortable, taking photos of those places. Then the attendees came back for a second workshop day, brought their photos, and made neighborhood maps of those places and what they would like to do at those friendly places. Strategies were identified for them to become “regulars,” to be involved and have roles in those places.



Big tip for success: One person, one environment

If a place is welcoming toward one person with a disability, don't then have the rest of the group home come. It is THAT person's place. That community organization is welcoming of ONE person. A big group of individuals with disabilities becomes overwhelming. Even two people with disabilities creates a “them-ness” — both for the individuals with disabilities and for the rest of the community group.

Activity 14

Places that would be welcoming

For the person you selected in Activity 7.

Places that would be welcoming (for instance, in the person’s neighborhood, etc.)

“A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow.”

~ William Shakespeare (1564–1616), English playwright

Strategy 7: Identify places where the person can fit in just the way they are

This is a particularly useful approach for people who have what we call “challenging behavior.”

The basic approach here is that you don’t have to fix or change the person.

Rather, where can they fit in just the way they are?

Almost any behavior a person with disabilities engages in, someone without disabilities also does — at least in some environments.

Fun exercise: Where would they fit in?

Where do people who do not have a disability do the following things? Where is it okay and even valued to do these things?

- Kicking
- Biting
- Hitting
- Screaming
- Swearing
- Spitting

This approach is to think about where people would fit in — just the way they are.

“I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light.”

~ Helen Keller (1880 –1968), American author and political activist

Example 1 of Strategy 7: Finding a place to fit in

Tom was a young man who had an autism label, who banged himself on the head, and who did it so frequently that he wore a helmet. He was also rather muscular from all his head-banging.

He was moving from a segregated school to an integrated high school, and his parents wanted him to be part of the school life as much as possible. They asked for kids to volunteer to help figure out how Tom could be part of the school life.

They also asked at their church. Eventually about 50 kids volunteered to help figure out how Tom could be part of the school life.

They got together in a church basement on a Sunday night. The facilitator first asked the kids how they felt about Tom — some of what he did was scare-y. Once the kids could get past their initial reactions or impressions, they could look more at the whole of Tom.

They got to a point of figuring out: okay, Tom banged his head, was muscular, and wore a helmet. Where are other kids like that? The answer: Football!

The kids thought, “Oh, he could be part of the football team!” Well, no, but they asked the varsity football coach and worked out that Tom could practice every day with the varsity football team after school. He could even do the exercise with the team where everyone jumps up and down and bangs their helmets! Tom fit right in, everyone was doing it, and no one was trying to stop him!

He started to have a different social role in the school, because now all the varsity football players knew him. Some kids also took him white-water rafting. He wasn’t banging his head at all, because he was too busy hanging on!

Example 2 of Strategy 7: What kind of job?

An agency in Maryland was committed to finding everyone a job, no matter what kind of behavior they had. One young man had a very high screechy voice quality, and was echolalic — so he repeated everything you said right after you, in a very high screechy voice. Most people could not stand to be around him for too long. The normal “human services” response would be to get him speech therapy, or to think he couldn’t get a job until he managed to reduce the echolalia. But no, this agency was committed they could find everyone a job.

Fun exercise

What’s your guess about what they found for him?

What others have guessed —

- Working around deaf people
- Carnival barker
- Working with birds

Great guesses! What did they actually find?
A job in a Chinese Laundromat!

Most of the people who worked there spoke mainly Chinese. They didn’t think his voice quality was irritating! They only thought he talked like that because he was from New York!

Activity 15

Places this person would fit in just the way they are

For the person you selected in Activity 7.

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Tip

Look for relationships on a one-to-one basis. If you work in a group home, don’t look for someone to come over to visit **EVERYONE**. Just ask them to get to know one person.

Selecting ideas to pursue

Out of all the ideas you brainstormed for your selected person in the seven strategies (pp. 29–44), which ideas are worth pursuing?

Here are four criteria to help select. You can balance them out to figure out which two or three places to start —

1. **How good an opportunity is it to get to know community members?** — This is probably the most important criterion!
2. **Person agrees/likes/is willing to try**
3. **Do-able** — The 6:00 a.m. Golden Kiwanis meeting is not necessarily a great idea, if the person hates to get up early and there is no staff person that can be scheduled to take them!
4. **Ease of welcome** — Do you or someone you know have a good connection there already?

Use the next two activities to help plan what connections and actions you are going to pursue.



“Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead. Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend.”

~ Albert Camus (1913–1960),
French Nobel Prize winning author

Activity 16

The three best ideas to pursue

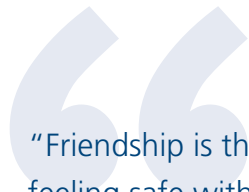
Review all the ideas you generated in Activities 8 through 15, pp. 29–44.

Pick your three best ideas. Then continue to Section 4.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



“Friendship is the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words.”



~ George Eliot [Mary Ann Evans] (1819-1880),
English novelist and editor

4.

Introducing and asking

Getting started

Probably the most important arena of activity is introducing people.

What do you say to each person? What do you ask of the community member? Introducing can be a “make or break” skill.

You probably met the people who are your friends at work, school, church, a club, or through other friends. No matter where you met them, think back to when you wanted to get to know them better. What did you do? One of you ASKED the other to do something! Whether that was having lunch or coffee, or talking on the phone, or going to a movie or fishing.

“The capacity for friendship is God’s way of apologizing for our families.”

~ Jay McInerney (1955–), American writer, *The Last of the Savages*

Activity 17

What would you ask them to do?

Think back to the people who are your friends now. When you first started to get to know each other, what did you ask them, or what did they ask you, to do?

If you met someone now that you wanted to get to know better, what would you ask them to do?

Activity 18

What increases your chances of saying yes?

If someone asks you to do something new, something you haven't done before, what increases the likelihood of your saying "yes" to them?

If someone asked you to meet someone new, what would increase the likelihood you would say "yes"? What would maximize getting to "yes"? What is more likely to have a positive response?



Share your ideas with others! Learn what others see about what increases the chances of getting a yes!

Activity 19

What would a community member get from getting to know this person?

First, think about: What would a community member get from getting to know the person you selected in Activity 7?

What does the individual have to contribute? Why would a community member want to get to know them better?

Activity 20

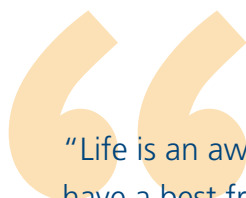
Your three best ideas for making requests

Go back to your three best ideas you listed in Activity 16 on page 45 and think about: what would you ask the community member for in each of these three situations?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



“Life is an awful, ugly place to not have a best friend.”



~ Sarah Dessen (1970–), American writer,
Someone Like You

Activity 21

Action plan

After you review all the ideas you generated in Activities 8 through 15 (pp. 29–44), and pick your three best ideas from Activities 16 and 20 on pages 45 and 50, make an action plan.

What will be done?

Who will do it?

By when?

How will you follow-up to stay in action?

By when and with whom?



“My friends are my estate.”

~ Emily Dickinson (1830–1886),
American poet

Eight tips on asking

One of the most important elements of being a good community connector is being an asker. Here are eight tips for becoming a successful “asker” —

1. Seize the chance

Start putting on the “community” glasses. What we see in the world is determined by what kind of glasses we have on. When you start looking for community opportunities, you start to see people differently. You start to see places you’ve passed by a million times, differently.

Seize the opportunities that present themselves.

Sometimes when you are with an individual with disabilities in the community he or she will say hi to someone they know, or someone they know will say hi to them. Do you know that community member’s name? Do you know how they know the person with disabilities you support?

Sometimes they say, “We should get together sometime.” Okay, great — get their phone number! What makes sense to do together, when does it make sense to get together?

2. “Case the joint”

It would be a bit too hopeful (or crazy?) to think you could go someplace for the first time, see a community member, and ask them to be someone’s friend.

- With a group or place —
 - » It’s important to first go to a community place or group and get to know the situation.
 - » Check out the people there. Is this a fitting group for the individual you have in mind?
 - » As appropriate, bring the individual — see how they like it. How do they respond?
- With one community member —
 - » If you are connecting someone with just one community member, get to know that community member a bit first, if you don’t know them already. Schmooze.
 - » What would make the most sense to ask of the community member? Chat, get to know them, THEN see what makes sense to ask of them.

3. Be intentional

One staff who was working on a community-connecting project for quite a while expressed how one day she just got really determined. She was taking a woman she supports to church, and described the decision she made one day: “I was on a mission that day.”

She was committed that day to find someone else in church to befriend the woman. The staff DID find someone — a woman who had often said hello. The staff asked her if she would like to come over and visit. She said “yes” and came over regularly to visit.

4. Be courageous

One staff who felt she was quite shy found a friend for someone by asking. She expressed it this way: “I got up my nerve.”

What would it take for YOU to “get up your nerve”? Why would you do that? This is important for everyone, but especially those of us who are shy. This staff said, “I did it because it was important for Bob” (the person she supported).

5. Accompany the individual

There are some individuals who can be completely independent in their relationships with community members. Sometimes, however, although we think some individuals can be independent, they might need some particular support in learning to be a friend. Here are some areas in which they might need support —

- **Reciprocity** — Are they keeping up their “end” of the relationship: are they sending cards, paying for their own lunch or occasionally buying their friend’s lunch, or some such forms of reciprocity. What makes sense?
- **Not being taken advantage of** — Some individuals do need support when the community members who have “befriended” them try to take advantage of them.
- **“Appropriate” behaviors** — Some individuals call too frequently or make too many requests. All types of issues may arise. How are both the individual and the community member being supported?

At the same time, there are some individuals who the staff may ALWAYS have to accompany if they are going to be with a community member.

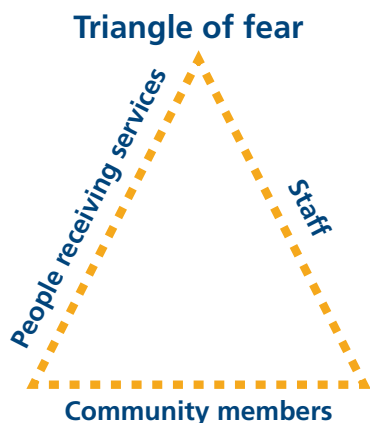
In these situations, the staff can really support the relationship by assisting the community member to understand the individual, to get to know them better as a person, to see what that individual contributes.

In some cases, the community member and the individual may need some or a great deal of support initially, and then the role of the staff will be to provide what each party needs and gradually back off. It is a delicate balance though. Some staff think they should back off without being sensitive to what the community member needs.

6. Address the triangle of fear

If we are going to change the dynamic of “system” and “community” separation (as portrayed in the river diagram on page 2), we often have to surmount the walls of separation that have been built up over centuries. Part of what has built those walls is fear. Asking community members to befriend individuals with disabilities, asking individuals with disabilities to expand their social network, and expanding the role of staff and family as community connectors often means doing something new, something that has not been done before. Trying out something new often brings fear.

Here is a diagram that represents that all the parties involved may have fears.



Look for yourself.

When connecting individuals with disabilities and community members, what are the fears of —

- The person who receives services?
- Their family?

- Community members?
- Other staff?
- You!?

What would help each party get past their fears?

What would help someone be more willing or more likely to say “yes”?

What would help someone go outside their current comfort zone?

7. What about confidentiality?

A question frequently asked when dealing with agency staff introducing people to community members is “What about confidentiality?” or “What about data privacy?”

In fact, some agency staff’s initial reaction is “I can’t do this — because of confidentiality.” Or “I can’t do this, because of HIPAA.”

Here’s the response!

“Confidentiality” does not mean you can’t talk about people. It means you cannot talk about people **without permission**.

So, in undertaking this work of community connecting, you do want to speak to the person, the guardian and/or interdisciplinary team about undertaking the work of building connections and introducing people to community members.

Is there anything the person does not want to be said about themselves?

Is there anything the guardian does NOT want you to say about the person?

You can have the guardian and/or team also assist in developing how to introduce the person, what to say about them as discussed in Activity 24 on page 57.

While we put a tremendous amount of attention on following HIPAA rules regarding confidentiality, there are other government rules just as or even more important, that also need attention. Virtually all human services in the U.S. are funded by public funds such as Medicaid (Medical Assistance). Medicaid and other state and federal rules governing services for people with disabilities all require —

- Promoting natural supports
- Community integration
- Community participation

When we follow THOSE rules — of promoting “community integration” — that means we MUST talk to community members! We have to find the ways to promote rather than hinder introductions.

Here are some examples of how some agencies have addressed this issue of ensuring that people are introduced to others with the person’s and their guardian’s permission —

- At annual meetings, the release of information form names specific community members the person has befriended or will be introduced to
- On the list of names on the release of information forms regarding who has permission to have information, there is also an item for “other community friends”
- Asking the guardian and/or the interdisciplinary team for verbal permission to talk about the person and to introduce them in a specific community situation or to a community member
- Addressing the issue in the “Risk Management Plan” or other document that addresses the person’s vulnerabilities

8. What about our volunteer rules?

Does the community member need a background check?

It is very important to distinguish between a “volunteer” and a “friend.”

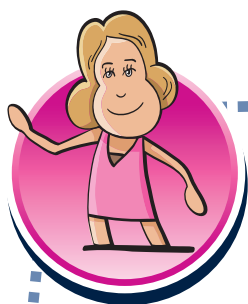
A volunteer is someone with a formal agreement, usually with a start and ending time — such as a one-year commitment. In many agencies, the volunteer fulfills functions the staff would have to do. Usually for volunteers there are specific training requirements, background checks, and other formal paperwork requirements.

There’s nothing wrong with volunteers — they are important!

A friend is very different than a volunteer. A friend is someone who fulfills companionship and friendship roles. They do not have a formal starting and ending time to their commitment. They do not need background checks or a formal 8-hour training program.

Some agencies try to turn “friends” into “volunteers.” It is important to maintain the distinction.

While a “friend” does not have to go through a formal training program, it is important to provide them the information and support they need about the specific individual they are befriending.



What if a community member thinks they are a volunteer?

If the community member asks about being a volunteer for the person, what would you say? How would you explain that you are not looking for a formal volunteer relationship, but more companionship and friendship?

Activity 22

Practice asking

How would you invite a community member to go out for lunch?

You can practice with a partner or a small group. One of you can pretend to be the community member. Practice asking them to lunch, or for something else.

Talk as if you are talking to the community member. Get feedback on how it sounds! The more you practice, the more effective you will get!

What worked? If something didn't work, what would have been better?



Big tip – become an asker!

Practice – How would you invite a community member to go out for lunch?

Activity 23

What kind of person are you looking for?

For a particular individual with disabilities that you are interested in connecting with more community members —

- What kind of community member are you looking for? What types of qualities are you looking for?

- If it helps, you can also identify, who would NOT be the right person to ask? What types of qualities would be best to avoid?

- If a community member were going to befriend this person, what would they have to know? What would be good for them to know?



“There are good ships and wood ships,
ships that sail the sea,
but the best ships are friendships,
may they always be!”



~ Irish proverb

Activity 24

What will you say about the person to the community member?

Here are some situations to think about what you will say about the person —

- If the community member has not met the person yet, what would you say about the individual?

- If you have not had a conversation with the community member beforehand about the person, what would you say about the individual upon their first meeting?

- If the person can speak for themselves, what would they want to say about themselves?

- Here are some interesting examples — what would you tell a community member about getting to know an individual who —

» Spits: _____

» Hits: _____

» Takes off their clothes: _____

» Screams: _____

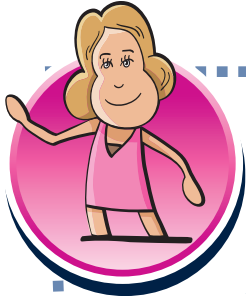
With some individuals, if a community member was going to befriend them, that community member might need to be a very special or particularly understanding or empathetic person. How would you let someone know that? What would you say? Here's a sample —

_____ needs a very special person to be their friend.

That person will need to be _____

That person will need to understand _____

and that _____



Examples of things that are good for a community friend to know

1. After spending time with a friend playing tennis or having lunch, when it was getting to be time to leave, Kay would start swearing. Then it was good for the friend to talk about the next time they were going to get together.
2. Mabel will always ask you or even beg you to buy her things — you don't have to. Just tell her no.
3. When John is in a place that is too loud, he gets very stressed.

What would be good for a community member to know about the individual you selected?

5.

Foundations for success

Employment/day program roles for supporting social relationships

Agencies which provide employment and/or day program support can also support relationships with community members. There are three particular avenues which some such agencies have pursued —

1. Work: supported or competitive employment

How can social relationships be deepened with co-workers? How can they be extended outside of work hours?

When an individual with a disability has a job, is there any assistance needed to support relationships with co-workers?

Are there reciprocity issues to attend to — for example, pot-luck lunches? Should the individual bring a dish to that?

Is the person with disabilities engaged in the “social times” at work like coffee breaks and lunch-time?

Are there social events other workers go to outside of work hours, in which the individual can be involved (e.g., happy hours, picnics, etc.)?

2. Day-time programs

Some day programs have made specific commitments to find community places and people to connect the individuals they support. They structure their staff time for these connecting opportunities. For example, there are many community groups and organizations which meet during the day.

A day program in Columbus, Ohio supported many individuals with severe levels of impairment about whom it was felt they were not good candidates for a paid job. However, the agency wanted the individuals they supported to have a meaningful role in community life. At the same time, they only supported people during day-time hours. And the staff thought: most people in town worked during the day. So, if the people they supported were not going to have jobs, where could they meet community members during the day?

The staff brought some creative thinking to it. They thought, well, not everyone in our community works during the day. What do the people do during the day, who don't work? The staff started researching that. They found six categories of activity which community members, who did not work, engaged in during the day. These places are listed on the next page.

The staff started working one by one to support individuals to find a meaningful role in these types of settings.

3. Day program staff: link to all of community life

Some programs responsible for people's “day program” hours have established flexible schedules for their staff to address evening and weekend hours as well. For example, if an individual is interested in gardening, and there is a gardening group which meets in the evening, the day program staff will take the individual there. Through this avenue, of establishing community social networks, they have developed jobs for people.

What do people who don't work do during the day?

Personal business

- Grocery stores
- Drug stores
- Shopping malls
- Nursery stores
- Department stores
- Specialty stores
- Hardware stores
- Outdoor markets
- Yard sales
- Craft supply stores
- Laundromat
- Gas station
- Post office
- Bank
- Beauty/barber shops

Leisure/recreation

- Fast food shops
- Cafeterias
- Restaurants
- Dairy & yogurt bars
- City, county, state parks
- Nature trails
- Cinemas, theaters
- Ballet, symphony, pop/rock concerts
- Fairs & seasonal events
- Tours, trips (boat, train, bus)
- Amusement parks
- Sporting events & games
- Museums, conservatories
- Zoos, farms
- Miniature golf
- Video arcade
- Bowling

Hobbies

- Art appreciation
- Fishing
- Crafts
- Photography/scrapbooks
- Nature walks
- Collecting (antiques, baseball cards, etc.)
- Pets (pet stores, shelters)

Club/organization activities

- Senior citizens
- Sororities
- Fraternities
- Church
- Political organizations
- Service/social organizations

Volunteerism

- Hospitals
- Universities
- Public library
- Public administration (city, county, federal)
- Elected officials' offices
- Park programs
- Animal shelters
- Free stores
- Churches

Continuing education

- Personal development
- Fitness (swimming, walking)
- Art classes
- Craft classes
- Make-up classes



“I count myself in nothing else so happy
As in a soul rememb’ring my good friends.”



~ William Shakespeare (1564–1616),
English poet and playwright

Nine skills for community connectors

Being a great community connector or “bridge-builder” involves many skills. Like any new job or role we undertake, sometimes we have natural skills and sometimes there are many new skills to develop. Some people are “naturals” and some people have to learn a great deal. Anyone who is a great human services worker has had to learn new skills — this area is no different.

1. See the person as their gifts and what they have to contribute

The disability system is established on identifying what is “wrong” with people, what they need to improve or change. Individuals are only in the services system because their “disability” has been measured or identified. Despite that fact, each individual is still a whole person, who also has gifts to offer. It takes a specific skill to see the individual as what they have to offer, what they have to contribute — for example, a great big smile, a big heart, making you laugh?

Example: Hans

Hans had lived in the institution for more than 40 years, and was in his 60's when he moved to the community. He used a wheel-chair and had very few spoken words. The words he did have were hard to understand.

His staff felt Hans had not really had many chances to explore his interests when he lived in the institution, so they decided to explore and try out some things. Two staff really liked to play pool, so they took him to their favorite bar.

They learned many things about Hans that night. One thing they learned is that even though his language is very hard to understand, he could get “whiskey coke” across to the bartender very well! They also learned that he got everyone in the whole place involved in their pool game that night, especially a table of three women who were right next to them.

When they left that night, the bartender said to the two women who had brought him:

“When are you bringing him back? Everyone who was here tonight had a better time, because he was here.”

Example: Missy

Missy lives in a small town in southern Minnesota. She uses a wheelchair and has very little speech. When her agency started working on friendships with community members, there were staff who said, “How can Missy be anyone’s friend? She doesn’t really talk. She doesn’t really interact. How can she be anyone’s friend?” But there were other staff who looked at what Missy had to offer. They had on a different set of glasses. They saw Missy’s beautiful smile, and that she cried very easily — she was rather emotional. They saw that she had a lot of love to offer. They just needed to find someone to receive all the love that Missy had to offer.

Missy also liked children. The staff thought of her being a Big Sister in the Big Sister, Little Sister program in town. They helped Missy apply to be a Big Sister. The community agency PRO (“People Reaching Out”) which ran the program went through something about deciding whether they were going to accept Missy’s application or not. They did decide to accept it.

PRO was having an after-school event one day, with a lot of little girls there.

Missy’s staff took her there, wanting to see if any of the girls particularly responded to her. When they got there, Missy was tired and she started to cry. Two girls immediately came over to her and started to say, “That’s okay.” They made vase planters on her wheel-chair tray and played Yahtzee with her. The PRO staff matched Missy up with one of these girls, Chelsea.

Chelsea and Missy would go swimming about once a week. Chelsea invited Missy to her Girl Scout Bridge Crossing (a ceremony going from one part of Girl Scouts to another), and introduced Missy to all her family and friends. They exchanged Christmas gifts and birthday gifts.

On Chelsea’s ninth birthday, they went to Burger King for her birthday. When they came into the Burger King, Chelsea pushed Missy’s wheelchair next to a table of boys. The boys got up and left. Chelsea looked right at Missy and said, “It’s their loss.”

After about a year of knowing each other, Chelsea and Missy were having lunch one day with Missy's main staff person Deb. Chelsea asked Deb if Missy was handicapped.

Deb was surprised, because they had known each other for a year at this point.

Deb asked Chelsea why she was asking. Chelsea said, "Because my friends are telling me that she is handicapped, and I need to know." So then Deb explained what Missy can't do, like walk, and that is her handicap.

When Missy's two-year agreement as a Big Sister was up, Chelsea's mother asked that their relationship continue.

When Chelsea was 14 years old, Chelsea and Missy presented at a conference about their friendship. In her speech, Chelsea said that being friends with Missy is one of the most important things that has ever happened to her in her life, and one of the best things that has ever happened to her. She said now all her friends want to have a friend who is handicapped. Someone in the audience asked Chelsea for her advice on helping more people be friends. Chelsea replied, "All you have to do is tell people to reach out, that's all they have to do."

2. See opportunities rather than limits

All of us get "set in our ways" of what we see as "the truth" or "what's so." We can see our communities and towns or the people we support or our jobs or our agencies as their limitations, without realizing that that is a limiting perspective! What we "see" is based on what set of "glasses" we have on.

Once you put on the "community" glasses, you can go down the same street you have gone down thousands of times — and suddenly see a new place where someone could have a job or you can suddenly see a club they could join. You might suddenly realize a long-time friend of yours could also be a great friend for an individual you support.

3. Look for "people" rather than "activities"

When we start to talk about participating in the "community," the immediate response of most people is to think about "activities." Individuals who receive services have "outings" or "community goals" or "activities" — usually connected to a place, like a restaurant or shopping.

- One of the keys to being successful as a community connector is to start asking the question, "But who are they going to get to know there?" It takes looking for PEOPLE rather than ACTIVITIES.
- Review Activity 5 on pages 18–19 about Mary's interest in music.

4. Seek out resources

Once you have an idea, do you know where to find that resource?

Do you know how to find a church that would include someone who is deaf?

Do you know how to find a walking club?

Where would you look?

Who would you ask?

Often an individual staff thinks it's up to them, and only them. But finding resources takes real networking — everyone around us has contacts. Who do you know, who knows . . . ?

The web is rich with information, and usually the information on a web-site is a good place to start. However, it usually takes some additional "legwork" to track down more information. For example, you can find web information on the churches that have services for people with hearing impairments, but which will be the right one? You can find a local chapter of a service organization listed, but who is the right person to contact? What times are their meetings? It almost always involves picking up the phone, emailing, and going to visit places and people directly.

5. Find the “right” person

At any group or organization, in a place of employment, how will you find the “right” person? What would you look for? Who would you seek out?

Not everyone in a community organization, for instance, will necessarily be friendly to an individual. Who are the formal or informal group “leaders” — who can assist the person get acclimated to everyone, who can be the bridge-builder themselves?

For a particular individual, what qualities would you look for in a community member who would get to know them? (See Activity 23 on page 56)

6. Become an “asker”

Becoming an “asker” takes a few things —

- Identifying the right person to ask
- Courage
- Going beyond one’s Comfort Zone
- Assisting others to go beyond their Comfort Zone

Becoming connected often means trying something new — that does take stepping beyond our current comfort zone, and empowering others to step beyond theirs!

7. Be sensitive to both parties

Sometimes an individual is taken to a group, or a community member is willing to come over to visit, and the supporters just go along expecting everything is fine. Or someone comes over to visit once, but then does not come again. There is a whole arenas of skills involved in talking to community members about their experiences in getting to know someone. How are they feeling about it? What are the breakdowns? What are they uncomfortable about?

The individual with disabilities may also be uncomfortable or experience breakdowns. Especially when an individual has limited verbal communication, it takes sensitivity to appreciate their experiences.

How can both people, both ends of the relationship, be supported to get to know each other?

Sometimes staff “back off” too soon for the community member, or for the individual with disabilities. Even if a staff or other support person has “backed off,” it is good to keep checking in periodically to see how things are going.

8. Be persistent

Oftentimes a staff person will call the church (or wherever) and if no one calls back, they will stop.

In contrast, one community builder tracked the number of phone calls she made and e-mails she sent. Just to connect one group home resident to a church friend took 20 contacts.

To connect one person who had a passion for fire engines and firemen, it took his staff trying four different fire stations until they found the “right” one.

Community-building takes persistence!

9. Develop a “community” sense, different than human services

We are very well-trained to focus on the person with disabilities. When in the community, the staff person usually has their focus of attention on the person being supported.

But — what are the community members thinking? How are they seeing things?

Sometimes we think community members are unwelcoming or unfriendly, but we don’t really know what they are thinking or how they are reacting. We have to ask!

Activity 25 on the next page is an opportunity to think about this!

Activity 25

What do community members think?

Imagine you work in a group home with four residents. One of the residents, Amy, is interested in the library, and because you are the only staff working that day, you think it will be a good activity for everyone. You walk into the library with all four residents.

What does the librarian think? What do the other patrons think? How do they respond?

Suppose you would like Amy to get to know the librarian better. How does the librarian respond to this group of four?

At the same time, what's happening with the group of four residents? What do they think? How do they respond?



“Some people go to priests, others to poetry — I to my friends.”



~ Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), American author

What others have said —

- For the community members, they are afraid, or back off.
- It's too much!
- The librarian might think you want her to befriend the whole group.
- She can't "see" Amy — only the whole group.
- For the group of four residents, there's safety in numbers.
- The person not interested in the library will start acting up.
- "Why does Amy get all the attention from the librarian, I want attention too. "

It doesn't work — for either the community members OR the individual with disabilities!

Note: This same phenomenon happens with only three residents, also — or even just two!

If you work in a service that supports more than one individual at a time, it takes something to figure out how to just have one-to-one time — which will work better for the individual AND for the community member!



"Community is the sense that one is part of a readily available, mutually supportive, network of relationships."

~ John O'Brien, one of the founders of Person-Centered Planning

Eight tips for managers and supervisors

Managers and supervisors are critical to having the work of community-building be successful. Here are eight tips for supervisors and managers.

1. Do it yourself

It is hard to ask staff to learn to talk to community members without having engaged in it yourself. One thing you can do is pick one individual yourself, to start, and begin exploring relationships with community members for that person. What do you see for yourself? What new skills are required of you? What learning is there to share with your staff?

2. Make it a priority: do “different” not “more”

Everyone’s “to-do” list is too long. You can’t add “helping people have friends” as one more item on a to-do list that is already too long.

Given schedules and structures already set up, beginning to do community connecting work often means making it a priority. Our relationships are, after all, a priority for all human beings. Prioritizing this means shifting around some other responsibilities or tasks.

Here is one example of doing different

Probably most individuals with disabilities who are being supported have community “activities” they are already doing. So sometimes making this a priority does not mean doing “more” but doing something “different.” With the community activity time already scheduled, how can that be rearranged so that it can be an activity where the individual is more likely to connect to community members? Instead of going to a concert, can they connect with a community choir? If they are already going to the library, how can relationships with regular people there be promoted? Remember — how can the focus be switched from “activities” to “who are they going to get to know there?” And, how can relationships be encouraged with the people that are there, in the community activities?

3. Select one person

One way to structure effort is to have each staff pick ONE person with disabilities to focus on. Or, a unit or household could pick just one individual to start with.

Then, how can the staff’s time be organized to make sure effort is spent on researching opportunities, making phone calls or surfing the web for information? How can the schedule be arranged for taking an individual to different places to see if one of those places is a good fit?

How can an individualized effort be supported for each person?

4. Schedule brainstorming time

Staff need to get together to share ideas, share resources they may know about, and brainstorm ideas. Examples of this are in the next section about Internal Structures.

5. Schedule staff time for these efforts

If these efforts are going to be a priority, scheduling staff time to pursue these efforts is critical.

How can staff time be scheduled to support one staff taking one person to a certain place?

Or, if that is also challenging, a good avenue to explore is finding community members who can come over to visit. Then it’s a matter of inviting people IN.

6. Set goals

What kind of ISP (Individual Service Plan) or program goals does the individual have? Many types of goals about community life are “activity” goals — like “go shopping once a week.” Or “skill” goals — like learning to make a purchase or order in a restaurant.

Are there any “relationship” goals for the individual? For example: Jesse will have the opportunity to try out three different community organizations. Jesse will have a new friend at church.

Having goals focused more on relationships is one way to switch the focus from “activities” to “people.” In some organizations, having a specific ISP or program goal means staff will spend effort on it.

One thing to be careful of is that this does not turn into “our friendship program.” Can current “activity” goals be more focused on relationships?

7. Support flexibility and the spirit of community

Some staff and agencies have turned community building work into a “friendship program.” They ask community members to join a “project” or “program.”

Community operates in different ways, on different schedules, than human services agencies! For an association or group meeting, for instance, sometimes meeting locations are changed at the last minute or a meeting is cancelled — often this information is sent out by email. Not all individuals with disabilities have their own email account! In a group home, sometimes not all staff have access to the home’s email. One of the biggest challenges reported by community organizations and groups about having an individual with disabilities be a member is simply communication.

Example

In one town in Louisiana, the human services agency staff had invited community members to come to a community forum about inclusion. A prominent assistant district attorney in town had a friendship with a young man with disabilities, that was very meaningful to the attorney. Another person at the forum was a videographer from a local TV station. He wanted to do a story about the attorney’s friendship with the young man. Near the end of the meeting, the group was looking at scheduling the next meeting. The social services director suggested they meet quarterly. The videographer wanted to meet again next week! Timetables are different in community life!

8. Expectations of staff/job descriptions

The agencies which have experienced some of the biggest successes in building relationships with community members are ones in which it has been defined as an expectation of staff that they will be community connectors. These agencies have often incorporated this expectation into staff job descriptions. Some agencies have also changed their interview process, and what types of people they hire — for example, outgoing people who are well connected and may have little experience with people with disabilities.



“Since there is nothing so well worth having as friends, never lose a chance to make them.”

~ Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540), Italian historian

Internal structure ideas for agencies

A staff person cannot work on this in isolation. There are many structures that support the agency's conversations, priorities and activities changing toward more community relationships and friendships within any particular program.

Here are seven ideas other agencies have developed.

1. Learning community structures

A "Learning Community" is a group that acknowledges it is learning together.

Members don't already know how to do things. They are exploring, trying things out, seeing what works. There might be failures, but what was learned from those failures? It is an atmosphere in which it is okay to try things out. The learning community goes on over time.

One place to create a learning community is with staff meetings. Whether your meetings are weekly or monthly, they provide an opportunity to find out how each other is doing.

Find out the barriers an individual staff is experiencing. When things are not working out, what ideas can others contribute? Each person brings different strengths.

Some agencies start each meeting with "Cause for Applause" — what great things have been accomplished? What successes are there to acknowledge, even small ones?

Here are some content ideas for staff meetings about community connecting —

- Share successes
- Identify failures and barriers — what did NOT work? Why? What can be learned from that? How could it have been done differently?
- Brainstorm different ideas and connections
- Share and support each other through ups and downs
- Expand and grow in our learning and skills

Throughout the whole agency, successes can be shared — photos, stories, videos — to help everyone learn and expand.

2. Write in community log, program book, schedule book, etc.

The plans and programs should be scheduled, as well as any feedback or information on "what happened." Different agencies have found different ways to keep plans in existence. In one home, the specific ideas and activities were posted on the bulletin board, and the supervisor checked on progress every week. In another home, it was written into the monthly staff schedule. Identify what is really effective to keep staff on track.

3. Frequently review log of community activities and progress notes

It is useful for the supervisor to regularly review what is happening. This can be discussed with individual staff or at meetings. Do staff remember what they committed to do? Are they reluctant? If there's too much else to do ("there's a lot going on"), what can everyone figure out together about how to make these connecting priorities work?

4. Support each other through ups and downs/provide feedback and direction

There will be many ups and downs — as there are in any relationship! And, as there are in any group of people learning to do things in new ways.

A context of learning is great to maintain — rather than a mood of failure or mistakes.

If something didn't work out, why didn't it? If something did work, why?

What were the key factors — was it how the community member was asked, would someone else doing the asking be more successful?

How could we brainstorm new directions or a different direction?

5. Practice!

Practice talking to community members.

Practice introducing a person.

Practice asking a specific community member or asking at a specific community place.

Listen to each other — is the staff being encouraging?

Would the listener be encouraged to say “yes” ?

What’s missing?

6. Are the selected places/ activities/people fun for the staff person also?

Sometimes a place or activity is not a good fit for the staff person who is taking the individual there. Is there another place or activity they can go? Or, is there another staff who can support them?

7. Positive acknowledgement

Even small steps should be acknowledged. Everyone is learning new skills, and sometimes in situations that are new or where they might be uncomfortable.



“I get by with a little help from my friends.”



~ John Lennon, (1940–1980),
English musician

Structuring one-to-one time

A key factor in community success is applying the rule of “one person, one environment.” That is, if a club or place is welcoming of one individual, don’t then bring everyone else there. See Activity 25 on pages 65-66.

Often when several individuals are supported, such as in a group home or day program, there needs to be some juggling with the schedule to be able to structure one staff taking one individual somewhere.

Here are some ways which some agencies have found to structure this one-to-one time —

- Each individual staff selects one person who receives support to focus on for connecting. All the staff together restructure the schedule so that each staff person has a given number of hours in a week or month to do the legwork involved in exploring connections for their chosen individual.
- The program coordinator does the connecting work and establishes the relationship or connection which he/she then turns over to the direct support staff.
- The program coordinator/director comes in to do the work a direct support staff would do, freeing up connecting time for direct support staff. (This also provides the program coordinator a chance to see what is really happening on a day-to-day basis in the program.)
- Accountabilities of all the agency staff are rearranged, to free up one staff person as a community connector. That connector establishes relationships and connections (for example, pursuing ideas for 5-10 different individuals at a time) and then turns them over to other staff.
- The agency gets additional funding or a grant for a community connector position. A grant is usually for a limited time, but new structures within the program or agency can be established in that time-frame, which the agency can then continue.

“Never leave a friend behind. Friends are all we have to get us through this life — and they are the only things from this world that we could hope to see in the next.”

~ Dean Koontz (1945–) American author, *Fear Nothing*

Enlisting support from the community

Does your community share your vision for an inclusive community? What would happen if community members themselves were approached about this vision? Can there be more community-wide efforts established?

One way is to have Community Member Forums. There is an article listed in the resource section at the end of this manual about these forums (Amado and Victorian-Blaney, 2000). There are many other ways to bring community members together and enlist their support and commitment to their community being inclusive of and valuing of all people.

Here are some ideas —

- Is there already some initiative going on for the town, the church, the business, etc.? For example, is there a “diversity initiative” or a “social ministry” group in the congregation?
 - Identify who are the town members who “know everybody” and “know what’s going on” — how can you involve them in your efforts?
 - Start a Community Member Forum! Make community-wide invitations to join. (Amado and Victorian-Blaney, 2000 article in Resource section)
 - One approach is to have the citizens at a forum meet particular individuals with disabilities, hear about their interests — what opportunities do the citizens know about for the individual to pursue their interests and connect with others?
 - Ask the community members in front of you to ask others who they know to get involved. Ask them who they know who has those interests, or would be good candidates for getting involved.
- What associations/clubs (based on people’s interests) do the community members know about? What clubs do they belong to? Who can they approach?
 - Get a list of associations and clubs in town from such groups as the Chamber of Commerce, etc. Sometimes these lists are on the town’s website.
 - Approach associations about having an individual join.
 - Ask ministers and key church people to initiate efforts within faith communities — is there a ministers’ association you can present to?
 - Sometimes when community members are invited to participate, they say something like, “Oh I don’t have time to come to a meeting, but let me know what I can do.” Great! Ask them to get involved on a one-to-one basis with an individual who receives services.



There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.

~ Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274),
Italian theologian

On-going support to sustain and deepen a relationship after the initial connection

If we look at our own relationships, we know they go up and down over time. We also know that stuff “happens” as we go along. Sometimes an excellent connection is made for an individual who receives support, but then “falls apart.” Energy, attention and effort is often needed to assist in sustaining a relationship, and to deepening it.

- **Continue to manage how much effort will be needed to help sustain the relationship or connection**

- » For example, does the individual with disabilities have a ride to the association meeting this week? Who is scheduling the next get-together? When something is cancelled because of weather or someone being sick, who is scheduling the next time?

- **Look for ways the relationship can be deepened**

- » Perhaps an individual is volunteering once a week at a preschool or a nursing home. How can the relationship with a particular individual be deepened? Can they visit with just one person?
- » Within a group or club, is a particular member more interested? Can they have lunch or come over for dinner?

- **Support reciprocity**

- » There are physical expressions of reciprocity, such as birthday cards, bringing a dish for pot-luck, etc.
- » But there are also ways to discuss and deepen the understanding of what each individual gives to the relationship. Especially when an individual with disabilities does not use words to communicate, or is difficult to get to know, it is important to engage in discussions about what the community member is getting from that individual, how are they understanding them as a person, what gifts do they receive from knowing them?

- **Remember that change in staff will affect the effort**

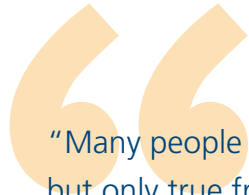
- » If one staff member has been key in sustaining a relationship, if that staff leaves or is assigned somewhere else, how will the relationship be “turned over”? What information is needed? What does the replacement staff need to know — about both ends of the relationship?

- **Remember that not every connection will continue to work out. Where else/who else can we try?**

- » Sometimes it’s important to recognize that it is time to move on. While every good effort may have been made to have something work, it just isn’t the right match.
- » Then brainstorm: who else/where else can we try?

“A good friend is a connection to life — a tie to the past, a road to the future, the key to sanity in a totally insane world.”

~ Lois Wyse (1926–2007), American advertising executive



“Many people will walk in and out of your life but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.”



~ Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), U.S. First Lady, diplomat, human rights activist



“Friendship improves happiness and abates misery by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief.”



~ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43), Roman orator

6.

Some final tips

Necessary beliefs for success

Whether you will be successful or not rests to a large extent on what you BELIEVE.

Here are three beliefs for you to wrestle with —

- 1. Valuing and personal appreciation of the individual with disabilities** — Do you value and appreciate this individual? Do you think they have a lot to offer? Do you think they would be a good friend? If you don't value and appreciate the person, you are probably not the person to assist them to have community relationships.
- 2. Faith and trust in community members** — Do you believe you can find community members who would be interested in getting to know this person? It won't necessarily be everyone in your community — but do you believe you can find at least ONE person — no matter how small your town?
- 3. Belief in the importance of community building for everyone** — Do you believe that doing this work is important for everyone —
 - » Staff
 - » The person who receives services
 - » The community members

If you don't have this belief, you probably won't make the effort to prioritize this!

“The best mirror is an old friend.”

~ George Herbert (1593–1633),
English poet



Tips for success

- See the person as their interests and gifts
- Seek out relationships rather than activities — who can the person get to know there?
- Introduce one-to-one
- Become an “asker” — “It never hurts to ask”
- Apply the rule: one person, one environment

Resources

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Many resources are also available through:

- Capacity Works: www.capacityworks.com
- Inclusion Press: www.inclusion.com
- Quality Mall: www.qualitymall.org
 - » Departments: Friendship and Social Inclusion, Empowering Communities for Inclusion



“Life is nothing without friendship.”



~ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43),
Roman orator