

ORGANIZING FOR DESIGNING LIFE: NEIGHBOURS, INC. WORKING FOR ONE PERSON AT A TIME

In The Beginning.....

On a Friday night in 1995 I (Patti Scott) wound up spending several hours on the phone with representatives from our State DD agency. We were debating the future of a woman I had grown to know well over the course of a year. She had lived through a rough time and we had planned for her future based upon her dreams. She saw herself in her own place, with needed supports; having a job; falling in love; getting married. After a lot of planning and support from her family and Case Manager, there was a plan in place for her to have the life she wanted and there seemed to be no reason that she wouldn't move forward.

On this particular Friday evening the debate became whether her future would become a reality. While everyone agreed that her supports could work, and financially it was viable, there were existing group home "slots" that could accommodate her. The woman's father and brother and I went back and forth with the powers that be for several hours (this was pre-conference call days), and finally, around 9pm, her fate was sealed. She was told by the funders that she could either go back home to her father's house (a situation that had been truly disastrous) or move into an existing "slot". It was a devastating moment for her, her family, and me.

It seemed that despite our best efforts, hard work and commitment, the system that we had to work in -- and the organization that I worked for that was a part of that system -- were leading to lives that didn't make sense for people. Instead of following dreams, people were placed in "slots".

The thought struck a colleague and I that we had become a part of the problem; the outcome of the work we were doing was that people were having fewer options. After thinking it through further -- and following a couple of bottles of wine -- we thought perhaps we could do something about that. Maybe we could start an organization from scratch that was not enmeshed in the system and slots, but rather an organization designed to support people in an individualized way to create a life based on their dreams. Perhaps we could design an organization in such a way that many of the systems issues that were leading to segregated, isolated, congregated lives would not only be mitigated but would be mostly eliminated.

We realized that the service world that creates group living and other segregated options that keep people separate from the mainstream of community life doesn't happen by chance. It is designed that way, and reinforced by the rules and practices of the system in which it exists. Our thinking was that we could design an organization differently--- we could invest our time, energy and resources differently; we could create a culture that supported individualization, citizenship, and full lives in the communities where people would choose to live. If what currently existed was a result of what had been designed, we could support people differently also by design.

So if we were going to start a new organization we realized we needed to be firmly rooted in what we believed was important....what people who had the label of disability had been telling us for years now was what they wanted. We thought a lot about what those key values were...and, what was available to us (that we could access) to invest in creating an organization that could support the lives people wanted.

And so Neighbours Inc. was formed in 1995 to work for people with developmental disabilities, and their families, as they pursue the life that they dream of in NJ and PA.

Neighbours is designed to:

- pay attention to one person at a time
- work FOR the people who seek out Neighbours support
- listen to the dreams and visions that the person holds for their future
- identify and gather people who know and love this person and can support their dreams and contributions
- plan together for actions that will move people in the direction of their dreams
- identify, find, and access resources that can be invested in this effort
- support people as they develop their capacity to be in charge of their lives, learning to balance their choices with the responsibility for those choices

Planning with each person we work for is built into the core structure, design and purpose of Neighbours. In the simplest of terms we shape what we do around a cycle of planning:

- *What is this person's vision and dream -- what is important to this person?*

- *What is available to invest in what is important?*
- *What CAN we DO about what is important?*
- *What are we learning from what we do about what is important?*

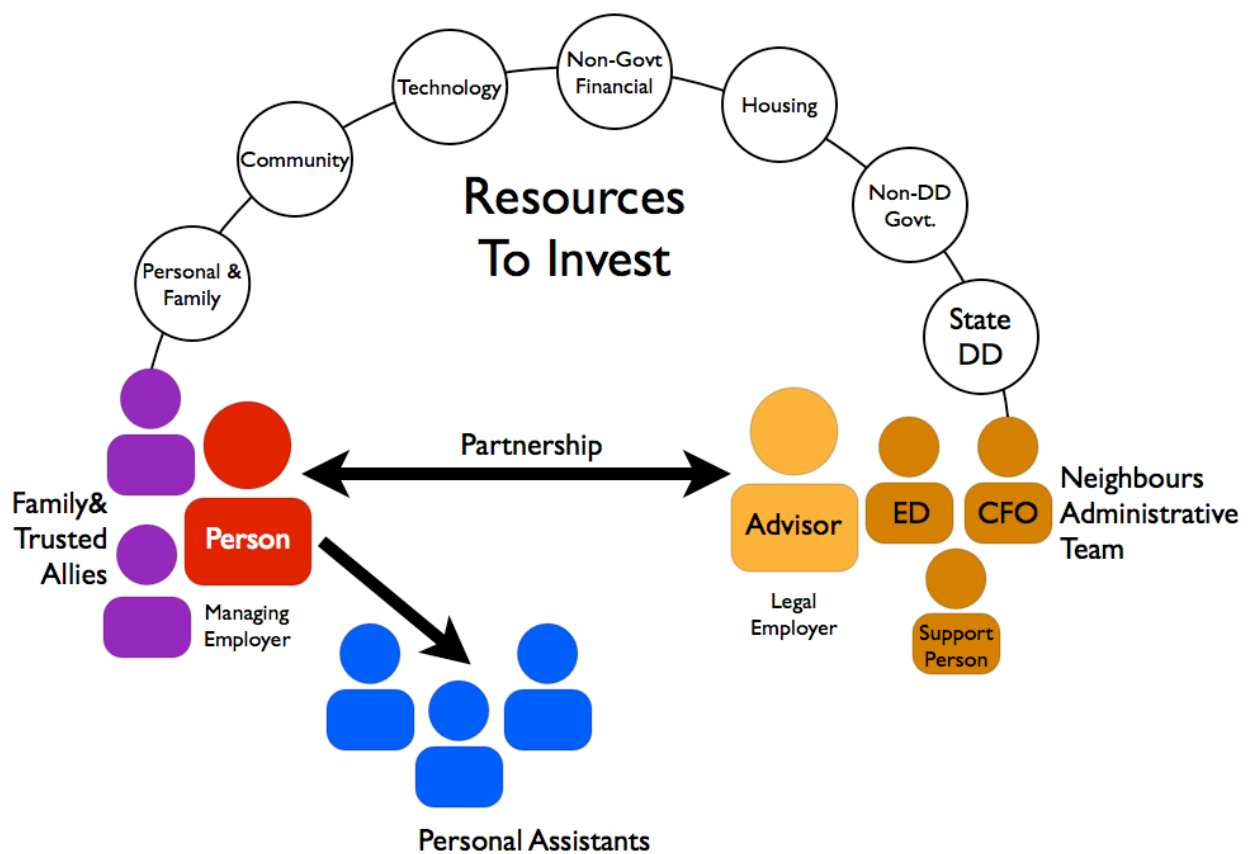
A RELATIONSHIP FORMED TO DESIGN LIFE

Neighbours began working for people in what has been called “**Supported Living**”, but at the time we just thought of our work as entering into a relationship, working for individuals and their families, one person at a time, supporting their vision and effort to establish the life they would choose and control. To deliver on pursuing the life outcomes that each person uniquely seeks, through this cycle of planning, action and learning, we established a partnership relationship between each person and Neighbours. An “**Advisor**” is the person who directly relates with each person and their family and trusted allies. Advisors facilitate the process of pursuing answers to the questions above, and following through on the actions identified.

As is true for most Agencies, Neighbours works for a wide range of people with diverse levels of skills and capacities. There are those who are quite knowledgeable and skilled and require minimal support to stay on track with managing the life they choose. But there are other people for whom speech and communication, cognitive understanding, physical and mental health, serious medical issues, and physical limitations, require a far greater intensity of support. The amount of time that each person may require from an Advisor is negotiated when the relationship is formed, and is reviewed regularly as people develop their own capacities, and/or expand the personal network of caring trusted allies who become engaged in their life. In either case, the goal of the Advisor

is to be sure that they are listening and seeking direction from the interests and passions, and the way that people communicate what is important to them.

No matter how much time is determined as necessary, a primary task for the Advisor is to listen deeply to what is important to this person and then facilitate the development of relationships and actions that move people forward toward the desired life that they choose.



THE BREADTH OF OUR WORK

In the years that followed when we began, States have developed Individualized Funding programs that have made it possible for Neighbours to expand our effort with the same spirit and values in mind. Neighbours has worked for people as “**Support Brokers**” through Self-Determination funding initiatives in NJ and PA. We fostered the

development of an “**Association Of Independent Support** Brokers in 3 counties in southeast Pennsylvania. We have provided “**Fiscal Intermediary Services**” for people who have received Individualized Funding in 2 counties in southeast Pennsylvania. Since 2005 in NJ Neighbours delivers “**Support Coordination**” for people receiving Individualized Funding resources through the State’s Self-Directed Services initiative. And Neighbours established an “**Agency With Choice**” in southeast Pennsylvania designed to support people who receive Individualized Funding in operating as Employers of their own staff, and managing the financial resources available to them.



THE FOCUS FOR THIS CHAPTER

This chapter will primarily focus on our original work -- **Supported Living** -- which we began before the State's individualized funding systems existed. At any given time Neighbours has worked for 30-40 people through this option.

It is important to note that when we began there were no mechanisms developed within the State systems for individualizing supports. We began with an idea, and then proceeded to develop our vision, and have conversations with individuals and their families, and representatives from within the State DD system. We negotiated with the State to access resources that would normally be provided for congregated Residential and Day Programs, but that we would use for individualized support systems. The work that we began in 1995 was an individualized alternative to traditional congregated Residential/Day Programs using no more resources than would be available in the traditional programs.

We have always seen the vision of our work to be the same no matter what initiatives we have engaged in:

People with disabilities directing their own lives and how they will be supported to live, love, learn, work, and play as valued citizens who contribute to, and receive the benefits of belonging to the communities where they choose to live.

And so, we "just did it", committing to learn and adjust every step of the way.

A CORE SET OF BELIEFS

Every organization builds upon a set of core beliefs about people, and the world they live in. For Neighbours, the following are some of the beliefs that shape the organization and how it works for people:

PEOPLE ARE UNIQUE

Every person wants to be seen as a unique individual. Our uniqueness is the result of all of our family roots, our experiences, and our choices, and what happens in our lives. People need the opportunity to explore what makes a good life for them; to experience a full array of options in life so they can discover their own dreams; to know that there are multiple.....perhaps limitless.....options and possibilities; and to become their own unique self and shape their character as individuals.

PEOPLE WANT TO HAVE AUTHORITY AND POWER OVER THEIR OWN LIVES

The choices that we make shape who we become. Our ability to decide to do something, and then respond to what happens, is how we learn. Having authority means also learning how to be responsible for that authority and for our own decisions. To some degree each person wants, and needs, to feel powerful. We all need to feel that somehow we have the ability to make things happen in our lives, to have an impact, to create.

PEOPLE WANT AND NEED TO BE CONNECTED.

"We are ALL born IN." Shaifk Assante¹

Human beings are social by nature. We are all born into relationships. The need and desire to be connected is built into our DNA.

At the same time that people want to be recognized as being a unique person, they also want to be a member of society, community, family - they want to experience belonging. People want to be “just one of us”. People need and want to have people who can support them, and they want and need to be needed by the group or community.

EVERYBODY HAS GIFTS TO CONTRIBUTE

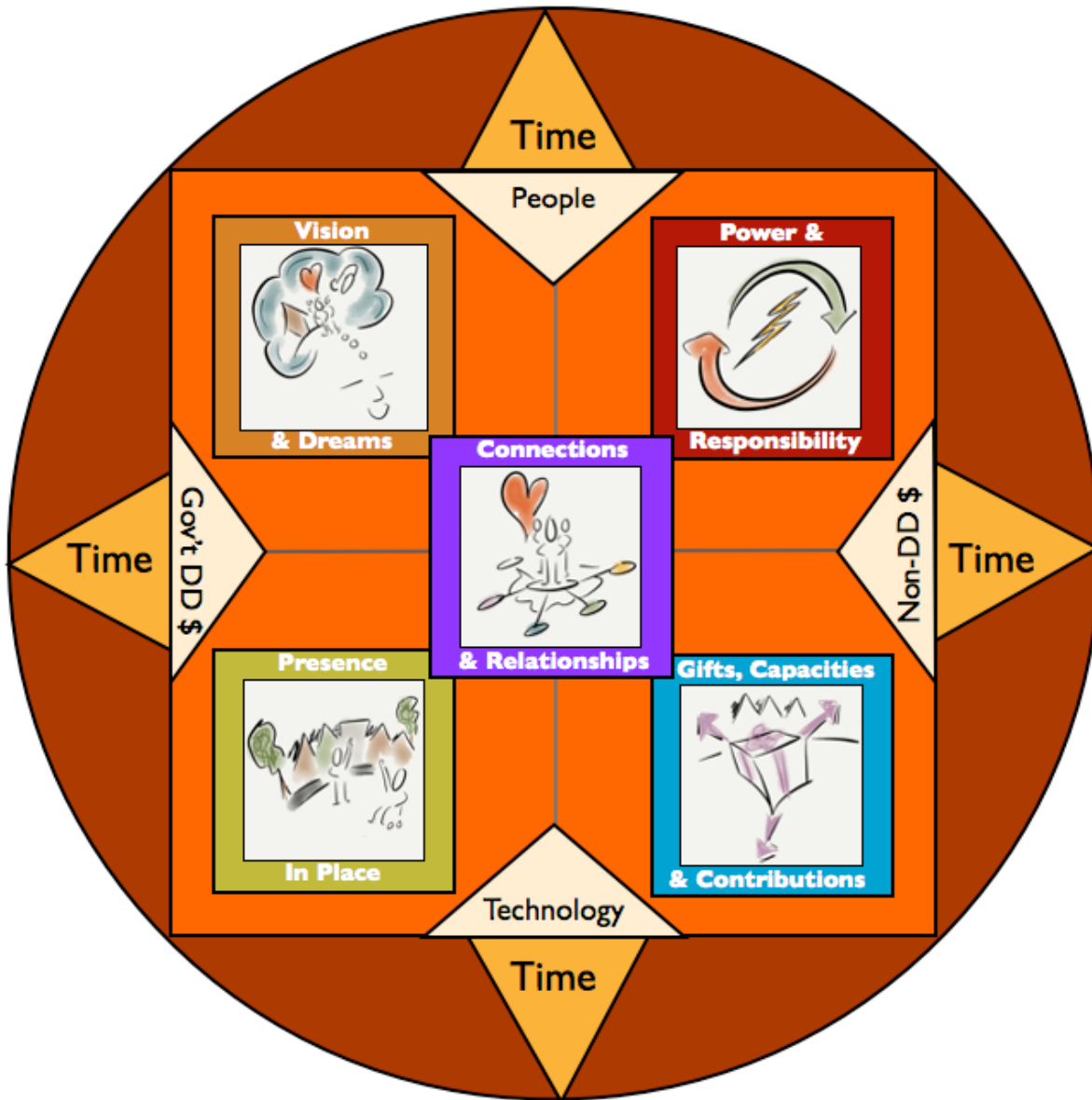
To sustain our connections and relationships, people need an experience of not only receiving value, but also bringing value to others. Both parties need to bring something to the relationship. When this happens, people can stay connected to each other, because the value shared between them keeps them connected.

PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SAFE AND HEALTHY WHEN THEY HAVE PEOPLE WHO ARE “THEIR PEOPLE”

When people recognize our value, they are more likely to be aware of whether we are doing OK, or not. Our health and safety are more likely to be secure when there are people who know us and care about us, and are aware of what is happening with and to us.

These common beliefs inform the foundation for all of the individualized “person centered” work that Neighbours engages in. Over the last 17 years these beliefs have shaped the culture, the policies, and the practices of Neighbours effort to work for people who want to direct their own lives with the support of people who love them.

A FRAMEWORK FOR INVESTING



If people were to truly have a life of meaning, there were five key areas we thought we should pay attention to and invest in, and design our organization to support these areas:

- Creating a vision of what a desired future could be.
How might people be freed up to imagine and dream?

- Supporting growth and learning regarding responsibility and control. People being in charge of their funding and resources; being in charge of their own staff and supports; and having a home of their own (that they rent or own as they might choose).

How might people experience power and authority for their lives, balanced by their responsibility for the decisions they make?

- Exploring gifts capacities and opportunities to contribute.

How might people share their gifts and contribute to the world around them?

- Creating a valued presence in the places where people live and work.....

How might someone show up in the places where they live, work and play as valued and participating citizens?

- Supporting and nurturing the development of a rich network of friends, relationships and allies.

How might people experience “belonging”?

INVESTING...A Shift In The Way We See Things

As Neighbours evolved its practice of supporting people “one at a time”, it became clear that Neighbours work was less about being the “Provider of Services”, and more about partnering with individuals (and those people they love and trust) in investing the “assets” and resources that are available to them.

By INVEST we mean to devote the resources available -- such as time, effort, money, and people -- to an outcome that is important to the person (and those who they trust and love) with the expectation that something will grow as a result. Investing is about deepening and expanding something worthwhile.

It may seem like just another change in language, but the idea of investing, differs from the idea of “providing service”. It changes the nature of the relationship, and the skills

that will be required. Investing implies growing something --“assets”-- that will increase in value -- that value may be financial, practical, experiential, etc. -- but there is the assumption that there will be “more” that can then be further invested.

After 17 years, Neighbours identifies a framework for investing resources in the following “assets”, or things of that can hold and grow in value in someone’s life:

VISION AND DREAMS

At the age of 13, Tyrone found himself beginning to live in a long series of different arrangements, including small institutions, nursing homes, rehabilitation hospitals, foster homes, and group homes. By the time he hit his 30's, he really wanted out. He wanted control over his life. He wanted to build a life that was his own, in the community that he would choose.

Tyrone sought out Neighbours. He was clear. He had lived in Hackensack, NJ when he was young. He wanted to go back. He wanted to reconnect with people he had known when he was a boy. He wanted to be involved in his local church. He wanted to go back to school and get his GED. He wanted to work, to meet someone he could fall in love with, settle down, and make his home in Hackensack.

Tyrone’s vision was worth something. It provided the basis for the working relationship he established with Neighbours. It defined the jobs that were needed. It created the opportunity to go and look for the people he had grown up with. It shaped the direction of the search for other resources, and lead to Tyrone

accessing a 1% mortgage, with the support of Neighbours, that enabled him to purchase his own 2 bedroom condo.

His condo was located across the street from a woman he had known as a child who helped him find another woman who was a good friend of his mother, who now lived in Florida, but whose daughter still lived in Hackensack. In the condo Tyrone became active in the Condo Association. He made it his business to get to know his neighbors, and offer his help if they ever needed it, and as a result, people in the building knew Tyrone, and looked out for him, supporting him when he needed a hand.

Today, more than 14 years later, Tyrone is widely known throughout Hackensack. He has completed his GED through Bergen Community College, and was recognized for his academic efforts and achievements at a NJ State Education Awards event. He has shared his condo with a number of different housemates over the years, in ways that have been practically and financially mutually beneficial. He has a strong network of people in his life, who he brings together to celebrate his life, and think with about his future plans. Tyrone could never imagine going back, only forward toward the things he still envisions, but has yet to fulfill.

A vision and dreams are not just “nice things” to have, they are actually essential to creating anything new. People run the risk of just getting “what exists”, if they do not invest in developing a vision and dream of what they would hope their life could be. Currently the world, and our communities, are not designed to include people with disabilities. To a large degree, creating a valued life and experience in our

communities, will depend upon people with disabilities, and those who know and love them, imagining what that life could look like.

On the other hand, there is also a huge opportunity to engage people who live in the community, through sharing a well articulated dream and vision. There is something moving in hearing someone's clear, heartfelt, deep desire for their future. There is something that is ignited inside of us when we hear someone's dream...if there is something that we CAN DO to make someone's dream come true, we are motivated to do it. Having a clear picture of a dream and vision, opens the opportunity to share this with other people that we would hope to engage.

Having a clear picture of a dream that we would like to see come true, is something that holds real value and that is worth a great deal.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT VISIONS AND DREAMS

Visioning and dreaming takes practice, and far too often people with disabilities have been discouraged to dream, often being told by others (professionals and family members) that "dreaming is not realistic". So it is critical that people practice dreaming. There are a few ways that we support people in dreaming:

Conversations About Dreams and Visions

It is pretty simple -- we encourage people (individuals and their families) to talk about their dreams, to let themselves go in imagining the world as they would like it to be. It is important that people not worry about whether their dreams happen or not, but let themselves envision what they would like, if they could have it...and then we must commit to listening to what people say with curiosity, and without judgement. Through this listening we learn what this tells us about what is important to that person.

Drawing Dreams and Visions

We use visual tools in planning. The most simple of which is to draw what people would like to have their life look like. We encourage people to free themselves from worrying about how much it will cost or how long it will take. Actually drawing this vision usually takes place using large wall charts and is done with people that this individual knows and trusts, but it can be done one on one, over a kitchen table, at a coffee shop, using a piece of paper, or a napkin.

Visual Planning Processes -- MAPS AND PATH

MAPS and PATH are visual community building planning processes developed by John O'Brien, Jack Pearpoint, and Marsha Forest (Inclusion Press)^{2,3}. Both processes are designed to facilitate⁴ and graphically record conversations with a group of people who know, care about, and are trusted by the person who is planning their life; conversations include talking about Dreams and North Star Visions; Goals and "Doable" actions that can be taken by the people gathered that will move people forward toward their dreams and visions for their life.

It is important to note that this planning is not about "services", but rather it is about LIFE. While there may be useful information that can be translated and applied to the necessary Service Plans (IPP, IHP, etc.), the purpose of this planning is not to meet funding requirements. The purpose is to identify what is important to this person, what is worth doing, and planning how that can be done, so that the person can experience what it means to be in charge of creating their own life.

POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

Brad^{5,6} lived for close to 25 years in a Hospital School. In his mid 20's Brad was single minded in his vision of living in his own apartment, with staff that he would

choose. Brad lives with cerebral palsy, and he uses a large electric wheel chair that he controls with a head switch. He is a skilled and determined man. He is not able to speak, but instead uses a sophisticated communication system that involves pointing to numbers on his wheelchair tray (with his eye gaze), forming a combination of numbers that translates into a word or phrase listed on a piece of paper on his tray. He is an artist who has studied and mastered painting using a paint brush that is attached to a head strap. Brad is a powerful person, committed to learning how he can make things happen, by any means available to him.

Brad was the first person that engaged Neighbours. When Brad met Patti Scott at a Provider Fair, he clearly let it be known that he wanted to move out of the hospital school where he lived, and he wanted to choose the people who worked for him. After they planned together for all of the things Brad wanted to see in this new life he wanted to create, Brad and his Patti worked together to recruit people who Brad could hire as his Personal Assistants. They created flyers, posted ads, and then set up interviews.

After the interviews, they talked about which people Brad would like to hire. Brad was clear about who he preferred, and it just so happened that they were 3 attractive young women. Patti spoke with Brad about what he wanted and needed in his Personal Assistants, and she even shared her opinion that a couple of the people Brad had chosen might not be the best choices, particularly for that sense of reliability that Brad would require. However, Brad was determined about his choices, and he hired the 3 young women.

Over the first few weeks, it became obvious that some of his choices were not all that reliable, and would often be late or not show up at all. At those times Brad would call Patti. This was a short lived solution. Eventually Patti had a conversation with Brad and his Mom (a key person in Brad's life), to talk about how this staff arrangement was not working. Brad's physical needs and his safety required that he have people show up when he needed them every day. Patti was not hired as his Personal Assistant, so she was posing the question to Brad, "how will you have people here when you need them to provide your personal assistance since I won't be able to come and fill in, and I am pretty sure that your Mom is not in a position to do that either?". Patti recommended that they fire the people Brad could not rely on, and try the interview process again, this time looking for "reliability". Brad knew that he needed that reliability, and as much as he did not like it, he did understand that it was not Patti's job.

Brad has been hiring Personal Assistants for more than 16 years now. Of the 3 main people he has working for him now, 2 of them are men. His primary Personal Assistant is Charles, who has become someone who Brad can count on, and has been working for Brad for more than 10 years.

Brad's initial vision was that he would have "control" over his life, but he was new to the experience of balancing choice with responsibility. In the early years Brad, and Neighbours, learned together just what it would mean for Brad to hold the Power AND Responsibility for his own life. He has continued to harness his power and authority in managing his apartment, his Personal Assistants, and his skill as a painter and photographer channeled into his business, BRADesigns.

When we speak of “Power”, we are talking about the ability to have an impact, to make something happen through our intentions, our personality, our effort, our actions; and to move other people to act. We all hold the potential to be powerful. Self Advocates have been articulating, and acting upon, this desire to have the power to determine what their lives become. They have expressed huge frustration and anger about not having the freedom to choose...where they live; who they live with; where they go; when they go; how they spend their money; how much money they can have to spend; who they relate with; how they relate; when they get married; when they have sex; and so many other choices and decisions that the wider community takes for granted. The bottom line is that many people with developmental disabilities have experienced their choices being limited by others, and all too often by the Agencies assigned to provide services. To be able to use our power to create a life that we want to live, means that we also need to develop our capacity to be responsible for the choices that we make. It means learning that something happens when we choose to do something, and to be “able to respond” to what will happen. It means learning how to make choices that support the dreams, visions, and outcomes that we want to see happen.

The key to this is that harnessing our power to achieve the outcomes we desire is a skill set that we all need to develop. And we develop this through a constant learning process that is built upon making decisions, acting upon them, noticing what happens when we do this, and reflecting upon whether this outcome supports our vision, or not. We then can use that experience of decision making to inform future decisions we might make.

While a huge amount of learning about power involves taking risks and trying things, seeing what happens, and learning from what we have tried, there is also room for seeking out good advice from people who have more experience than us; people that can help us think about things we can do, and the potential consequences of doing these things. Learning requires us to take risks, but seeking good advice can help us take “calculated risks” that enables us to gain experience, limit the harm that can occur from our decisions, experience success, and/or learn from our experience.

Developing our capacity to harness our power to create outcomes that we desire is valuable in so many ways.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

Signed Leases and Bills

Neighbours does not own or lease the homes where people choose to live. Each person chooses where they live. They sign their own lease. It is their name that is associated with their home. The utilities and services that are associated with their home are also listed in their own name. All of this provides an opportunity for people to experience (and master) the benefits and obligations that come with authority and control.

Credit Rating

Taking responsibility for their own home means that people often need to deal with establishing a credit rating that positions them for being seen as a "good risk". This often involves supporting people to do things like get a secure credit card with a low limit, use it for daily purchases and pay it off on time.

Budgets and Banking

Each person that Neighbours works for has an individual budget for their supports.

Advisors (employees of Neighbours who partner with the people we work for) work with each person and their support network (trusted family and allies) to establish a budget that includes the Personal Assistants wages and employment costs, basic costs of living such as housing, utilities, food, transportation, personal needs, and the cost of personal preference items such as internet, recreation. Each month Neighbours Administrative team provides the individual with a summary of their spending for the previous month, and a running total of their spending for the budget year. The person with the support of their people, their Advisor, and their staff, review their spending and assure they are living within their budget (and do some planning around what's next if they've exceeded their budget!).

Co-Management of Employees

Neighbours establishes a partnership -- a shared employment arrangement -- with each individual in employing the Personal Assistants that they will hire. The individual and their trusted allies (family and/or close friends) act as ***“Managing Employer”***. This means that they will determine (with the support and advice of Advisors as little or as much as is needed): what they need their staff to do --a job description; when they need this support; where they need this support --at home, in the community, at work; and how they need to be supported. The individual and their trusted allies, in effect, are the Boss.

Neighbours serves as “**Legal Employer**”, ensuring that all of the legal aspects of employment --payroll, taxes, benefits etc. --, and other matters relating to regulations and laws are adhered to.

Neighbours' Advisors support people as much as is needed in developing job descriptions, recruiting Personal Assistants, and a process for collecting staff time sheets etc.. When there is a conflict related to Employer/Employee relations, Advisors can help to problem solve and mediate as necessary. But Advisors always hold the importance of the people we work for deepening their capacity to be responsible for the power and control in their lives.

Follow Through On Planning

At Neighbours, the purpose of planning is to actually identify what is important, and DO something about it, so that people's lives move in the direction that they desire. So Advisors support the individual, their family and allies, and their Personal Assistants, in remembering all that is identified through any Life planning that has occurred, and encouraging and facilitating the follow through so that people will experience movement and change as a result

Reflecting On Action

One of the best ways to “calculate risks” and be safe while trying new things, is to develop a practice of reflecting on the things we do, noticing what happens, what we can learn from the experience, and applying what we learn to future plans to act. Our good friend, colleague, and mentor, Jack Pearpoint (Inclusion Press)⁷ shared a phrase that we have grabbed on to, “*Master failure faster*”. The goal is to try things, and learn quickly from what happens when we try. Advisors support people to reflect on the

things they do, with the goal of learning as quickly as possible. This can be done individually, and ideally with the individual's personal support network.

GIFTS, CAPACITIES, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Grace was the last person to move out of a Developmental Center that was closing in the central part of the state. Her State appointed Guardian had contacted Neighbours to see if we could support Grace in living in the community. Grace had grown up in institutions. She had no ties to her family, or connections beyond the facility. While living in the institution Grace would have periods when she would become extremely anxious, and during these times she had developed a reputation for pulling hair. Everyone was nervous about how Grace would do living in the community, and how other people who came in contact with her would do.

Neighbours' Advisor helped Grace find an apartment, hire some staff, and begin to explore spending time in the community. Grace was one of those people who was deeply affected by physical setup -- when she was in places that had many people, that were closed in, or were loud and noisy she could get incredibly anxious.

When she moved into her own apartment with the support of staff during the day, and a room mate at night, the setting was much quieter, and Grace learned how to relax.

As time passed the staff who were getting to know Grace, began to see that there were other sides to her, beyond the reputation she brought with her from the institution. They learned that Grace really embodied "joy" when people would come to visit, or show up for their shift. They learned that Grace had an incredible memory. When she learned your name, she would never forget it. And she would

ask questions about your family, who was in it, where they live, how they were doing, and this too she would never forget. Every time she would see you, she would call out your name, laugh, and give you a big hug. And if you received this hug, you just felt good, because Grace was genuinely happy to see you.

Since Grace had no relationships outside of the institution, in the early days after her move, her Advisor, staff, and housemate were the only people who knew her. They would get together and begin to think about where Grace could begin to spend time in the community where she would be welcome, and valued.

Among the first ideas to emerge was having Grace become a visitor for people who were in hospital. The people who knew Grace felt that she would bring a ray of sunshine to people who may not be feeling well. Her Personal Assistants supported her to become a volunteer at the local hospital. Grace got the job of bringing the book cart around to rooms for people to choose something they might like to read. After a couple of weeks her Advisor got a phone call from the Volunteer Coordinator at the Hospital. When the Advisor spoke with the Coordinator she discovered that Grace had been “let go” from her volunteer job. It turned out that Grace’s joyful exuberance was just too much for people who were tired, sore, and on the mend.

Grace’s team did not give up. Everyone on the team really believed in Grace’s gift as someone who could warm your heart and make you smile. They began thinking of just where in the community Grace’s gift would be welcomed and valued. Together they thought that it would be worth trying out a local soup kitchen, They

felt that Grace would be particularly good at bringing some sunshine to people who may be having a hard time, people who may be without a home, or disconnected from loved ones. Sure enough, Grace showed up at the soup kitchen and began to meet people, and every day that they would come back to the soup kitchen when Grace was there, they could count on Grace to remember them, call out their name, give them a big hug, and ask them how they were doing. Grace volunteered at that same soup kitchen for more than a decade. One year she received “Volunteer Of The Year”, an award that was presented at a formal Saturday night banquet.

All relationships are built upon valued exchanges between people. Being aware of what we have to contribute, and finding ways and people to make those contributions to, is important in fulfilling our dreams of friendship, love, connection, as well as work, employment, and citizenship. Communities^{8,9} are built upon the gifts and capacities of their members. To belong to community ultimately means contributing what you have to offer.

People who have been labeled and identified as “disabled”, have experienced much of their life having people pay attention to, and even highlight or magnify, aspects of their life that either don’t work well, or that people do not value. There are lots of reasons for paying so much attention to these aspects -- to the “disabling conditions” -- but the end result is that far too often not nearly enough attention has focused on what people have to offer, their giftedness, their capacities and strengths, and where and how these valuable aspects of who they are may be needed, welcomed, and appreciated.

People need to identify, develop and grow, aspects of who they are that bring value to the lives of others. There are many layers to this, ranging from pursuing passions, practicing skills, and studying. But there also is a need for looking again at who someone is, with a lens that looks for strength, capacity, and wisdom.

Every person needs to have experiences of being “valuable”. Part of that is developing our talents, skills, and gifts. Part of it is dependent on having people in our lives who value us, and introduce us to others who may benefit from what we have to offer.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT GIFTS AND CAPACITIES

Conversations About What People Have To Offer

Again, it may sound simple, but Advisors simply encourage conversations with individuals, their families and Personal Assistants, that are not about what a person “needs”, but rather about what this person has to offer. It is simply important to continually raise the consciousness of the individual, and those who know them, about what they can and do bring to the world around them. So this often means facilitating conversations about this person’s gifts, capacities, and contributions. It also means reframing conversations that become focused on deficits, behavior, and neediness.

MAPS

As far as Person Centered Planning processes are concerned, we have found that there is no better vehicle for re-visioning someone as gifted, than the MAP process. It is simply a powerful experience when a group of people who care about someone are gathered to share stories and experiences, imagine dreams and visions, and think about who this person is, what they have to offer and contribute, and what they will need to make those contributions that can move them closer to their dreams and visions.

PRESENCE IN PLACE

Pearl had lived with her parents in Western NJ until she was 29 years old. When her mother passed away in the mid 1940's, it was not uncommon for families to be advised by doctors and professional staff that "the best place for your daughter or sister to live, would be an institution", and it was with trust in this recommendation that Pearl's remaining family agreed to have her move to an institution that was about 1 1/2 hours away in the center of the State.

She lived there for almost 50 years, when the State made the decision to close this facility. By this time in her life, Pearl had no interest in moving. Patti visited Pearl while she was still living in the institution. Neighbours had already begun working for a number of people with some success that had been built around the idea of pursuing each person's "dreams". The process had been exciting and energizing. It was with enthusiasm that Patti approached Pearl, and began engaging in conversation with her about how Pearl would be able to move out, and do all of the things that Patti imagined she would want to do. Pearl, who was slouched over, barely tolerating listening to her, raised her head, looked at her eye to eye, and said "F_____ OFF".

Patti knew that Pearl was not happy about moving, but she also knew that the institution was closing, so she committed to coming back, and trying new ways to get to know Pearl, and slowly discover what Pearl loved and enjoyed. She eventually learned from the staff at the institution that Pearl seemed to like some cats that lived out back of her building. So Patti brought a cat for Pearl, who Pearl named Tommy, and she clearly loved spending time with this cat. Having Tommy

changed how much Pearl would open up to Patti and an Advisor who also began to visit her. She shared how she had two brothers that she remembered and missed, and when asked where she would like to live, Pearl said she wanted to live near her brothers.

This desire set her Patti and the Advisor off in search of Pearl's brothers, and then a place to live that would be near to them. It turned out that only one of her brothers was still living, and he was definitely open to seeing his sister again. Time and distance had separated them, but he looked forward to spending time with Pearl.

Initially Pearl had indicated that she wanted to spend time at a local Seniors Day Program, but eventually she indicated that she wanted to "retire", a totally sensible idea at 80 years of age. This lead to sorting out how Pearl could have time to choose what she would like to do, and how would she not become isolated.

Pearl would visit her brother while her Advisor helped her find a house that she could rent. It was a 2 bedroom house, and they found a woman who was a student who could live with Pearl. Most days Pearl would spend some time with her brother, either visiting him at his house or having him over to visit.

Pearl had some staff who would spend time during the day with her, and support her in managing life at home. They would bake cookies together, and then take the cookies to neighbors or invite people over for tea. She got to know the young mothers who had small children in the neighborhood. They would bring their children over to Pearl's, where they would have cookies and spend time with Pearl

and her pets, with her staff there to help watch the children. Pearl grew to love coloring her hair and doing nail art with the young neighbors and staff.

Pearl now had Tommy the cat living with her, but she also had a bird, and a dog. It was clear that Pearl loved animals, and they seemed to love her. Pearl's Advisor and staff explored how Pearl could spend some of her time engaged with animals. Eventually they discovered that there was a very active Dog Show circuit in the area near where Pearl lived. Pearl would attend the Dog Shows, and get to know all of the "regulars" on the circuit, and their owners.

By the time Pearl died in her mid 80's, she had become known as a sister, a housemate, a neighbor, a "grandmother", a pet enthusiast, animal lover, and a much loved regular on the Dog Show circuit. The funeral parlor was full of people who had come to know and love Pearl.

Showing up at places within the communities where we live is important. It is hard to meet new people, expand our networks, grow new experiences that we can learn from if we don't show up in places where these things can happen. But equally important is "how we show up".

This is new work for people who have not had the freedom to pursue their own vision of life, or learn about how to "show up" in ways that build connections and enable them to develop new reputations as people who bring value and contribution to the places where they engage as "regulars". Many people have lived and attended places and programs that were "specially" designed, places that are separate them from the mainstream of community life.

Establishing a regular presence takes time, and commitment. It means shifting from filling the schedule with activities, to thinking about what places and things will build connection and valued reputation. It means helping people to think of themselves as having something positive to offer, and then imagining the places where that valued contribution would be welcomed.

For many people who have experienced rejection in regular community places, they may require support of people who are courageous, and good at social situations -- people who are not afraid, and have a capacity to get to know people quickly, and introduce people in ways that are positive and even intriguing.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT PRESENCE IN PLACE

Local Meeting Places

Neighbours works for individuals in towns and cities spread out across New Jersey and Southeast Pennsylvania. There is no one community that we work in. We work for people where they live. As such, we have no local office where people meet at. When Neighbours Advisors meet with people, and their Personal Assistants, it is in their home, at local coffee shops, restaurants, libraries, and other available community spaces. Gradually, over time, people become recognized and known. Advisors can serve as a bridge to local community folk, by acting as an introducer, facilitating the possibility that people will get to know each other in positive ways.

Showing Up As A “Regular”

When we gather to plan for someone’s LIFE, there are a few things that we are considering regarding: what does this person care about? (sports, social settings, art, music, food, gardening, etc.); where do people gather who care about these things?;

when do they gather?; what kind of support will this person need to show up in these places? And then Advisors do what ever's necessary to support the person and their Personal Assistants to discover ways to show up in these places, and make a valued contribution to what is happening there. The goal is to become a valued “regular” who is missed when they do not show up.

Advisors also help the individual, and their people, in recognizing the places that they already show up as a regular, local coffee shops, bus stops, bowling alleys, etc., and raise awareness of who are the people in these places that this person is getting to know.

Getting To Know The Neighbors

Most people spend a lot of time at home, so it is the place we show up most as a “regular”. Getting to know the people where a person lives is a great opportunity.

People with disabilities live with social prejudices that work against being recognized as valued. Advisors support people, their families, and Personal Assistants in thinking about how they would like to become known as a “good neighbor”, and the ways that they can begin to act that promote that. How can people be seen as helpful, responsible, friendly, neighborly? How can Personal Assistants and the Advisor support this?

There are opportunities to become involved in neighborhoods -- as a member of Resident/Tenant/Condo Associations; neighborhood projects such as gardens, park clean up, street parties and festivals; supporting local individuals and families in hard times due to death illness, loss. To do this we have to make it our business to be aware of what is happening, and then show up at the right time in the right way.

Scheduling The Right Staff At The Right Time

One of the advantages of individualizing staff hiring, is that it is possible to think about what are the different kinds of support that people need, and when and where do they need it. To support someone to show up in valued ways in the community, might take a different skill set and personality than helping someone to manage their home and finances, or assist them in getting out of bed in the morning, or back to bed at night. It is possible to hire someone who has the right mix of personality and capacities to help people make bridges into the community, and become known as someone who has something to offer.

Individualized hiring practices means that it is not a generic Direct Support Professional position, but one as Pearl's Personal Assistant hired to accompany Pearl in public places where Pearl is interested in being involved and would like to belong.

Community Volunteering

Volunteering provides an opportunity to "show up" regularly, and become known for bringing "value". Since so many people with disabilities experience unemployment or underemployment, time is a valuable asset that other people in the community can and do value. Advisors support people in thinking about what they "CAN DO" that other people may need and value, and what kind of support will they require to make this contribution.

CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Jason¹⁰ had already lived in "residential placements" that had just not worked well for him, when his mother Salene entered into conversations with Neighbours about the need to find another way. Jason had neither been safe nor happy and there

was a sense of urgency that Salene was experiencing. Salene is a teacher and a single parent, and at the time Jason was in his 20's. He requires a particular kind of attentiveness as he is blind, and does not use a lot of speech to communicate. Not having a place to live, or go to spend time where someone could pay attention to Jason, his interests, capacities, and needs, was not workable for Salene.

You know when Jason is doing OK by his emotions, and at the time Jason was not OK.

Jason had some financial resources available to assist him to purchase a condo. Salene needed an organization that would be willing to engage in working FOR Jason, and her, so that Jason's safety and happiness would be the number one priority. It was critical to design support specifically for Jason.

When Neighbours began to work for Jason and Salene, there was just the two of them. Jason does have a brother, but he lives in Florida where he works and is raising his family. Jason did not have current relationships with people other than his Mom.

So the staff they hired became the initial opportunity for relationships. One of the first people who was hired by Jason and Salene, was a young man named Nick. Nick was in his 20's, a laid back social guy, who had friends in college. Nick enjoyed being out doing "stuff". He got along with Jason well. So Jason and Nick would go out together, to do "stuff". Nick would meet people, and he would introduce Jason to the folks he met.

The condo complex where Jason moved into, had a swimming pool. Jason loves the water, and so does Nick, who also enjoys hanging out in the sun. Jason and Nick became “regulars” at the pool during the warm months of summer. It was there that they met Ellen, and her then 6 year old son, Justin. The pool was a great place to ease into getting to know Jason, for one main reason, Jason is genuinely happy when he is in the water. He also really loves people, and senses when he has made a good connection with someone. Ellen, and her family, eased their way into friendship with Jason and Nick. She became an ally in the condo complex, and when issues would arise, Ellen could help Jason and his neighbors bridge the issues.

There are 168 hours in a week, and when Nick began working for Jason, Jason had a lot of time on his hands that was unscheduled. Nick would explore places to go with Jason, but he also would just invite his friends who were attending the local college that was nearby, to stop in and “hang out” with them. Tommy was one of those guys who would drop in and hang out with them. When Jason is relaxed, and the people he meets are relaxed and open, he is a warm and friendly guy. And that is what Tommy thought...”Jason is a cool guy to hang out with”, and so they did. Tommy would come over and hang out after classes.

Nick was brilliant at accompanying, and introducing Jason to people and places. There were other “administrative” aspects of the job however that did not fit his interests. In the end, Nick left Jason’s employ, but his relationship with Jason and Salene was more important than the job. He continued to stay connected to Jason after he quit, and so did friends, like Tommy.

Neighbours has worked for Jason for more than 13 years, and over the years he and Salene have had the support of different Advisors. As a single Mom, Salene has always had that thought in the back of her head, “who will be there for Jason when I am not around?”. Advisors have supported Jason and Salene to gather a “support circle”, a place to bring out the ongoing questions, problem solving, planning, and celebrating, that often is left to parents to do alone, or is handed over to the agency “team” to take care of. People like Nick, Ellen, Justin, Tommy, and a variety of other friends, have come together with Salene and Jason, current Personal Assistants, and Jason’s Advisor who facilitates the gathering and meetings. The “circle” has served so many purposes, but largely it has been a way for people in Jason’s life to become, and stay, connected to one another, and importantly, to Jason, to explore where his life can go next, and who else might be there to meet?

As time has gone on, Salene has grown to trust the process and people who have gathered in Jason’s circle. She has invited people who she knows and cares about in her world at work. Since Salene is such a respected teacher, and mentor to many younger teachers, colleagues like Diana and Marasol have been moved to say “yes” when Salene asked if they would be open to joining the circle. As Diana said, “I was honored” to be invited.

Jason’s circle has found what works for them, what enables them to remain faithful to being involved in his life. They have chosen to gather every 6-8 weeks, for no more than 1 1/2 hours. They get together at 5:30 or 6:00pm, so that people can stop by on their way home from work. They have pizza, or some snacks. They talk

about life and how it is going. They imagine ideas of what Jason (and they) might explore next. They plan how it all might work, and who will do what, when they plan to do activities outside of the meetings. And when the moment is right, they take time out to celebrate...Jason loves a good party.

Jason's current Advisor (Lisa) says that she sends out the reminders of gatherings, facilitates conversations, listens, records what people talk about, disburses it all, and serves as a point person for the group. Lisa will also does behind the scenes leg work on things that make it easier for the group to follow through on their plans.

Salene comes to circle gatherings often, but not always, and she knows that she doesn't have to. Lisa will keep the invitations to gather going, and people come, because they have grown to know and love Jason, and they enjoy each other's company too. Diane has said, that the circle meetings "are really quite magical...they serve as a model for humanity, when people come together to pay attention to one person and how they can live a full life."

Having people who know you, who value who you are, who commit to walking through life with you, who appreciate that you are in their life, who recognize that you have made a difference, this is the most important outcome. If you have people, you can make your way through whatever else life brings along. If you have people, you have more than money.

Supporting connections, and fostering the growth of relationships that can be sustained over time, is as good as it gets at Neighbours. Advisors know that this always must remain front and center in their role. The design question becomes, "how

might we engage with people in ways that leave them with more and deeper connections when we are done?”

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Support Circles

Intentionally gathering people who know and care about an individual, is what we call a “Support Circle”. While not everyone is comfortable or familiar with the notion of bringing people together to think, plan, act, reflect, and celebrate, we have found that it is a powerful way to make change, and provide continuity to relationships and the stories they hold, beyond the life span of any particular staff or agency.

Advisors facilitate the gathering and process of Support Circles as much as is necessary. They support the development of a small focused living and learning community. This small group of people specifically invited to support the life and vision of one person and their participation as citizen holds great potential for deepening bonds and relationships over time.

Reconnecting And Maintaining Connection With People

For many people with disabilities who become immersed in the service system and programs, life becomes a series of losses of significant relationships. Many times they have established what they experience as a deep connection with a staff person, only to find that the relationship is totally lost when the person moves on to another job, or another place. People have often gotten to know someone in a previous place that they have lived, or worked, or participated, but have not been supported to maintain that connection. So one of the things that Advisors do is to help people think about significant people from their past, and how we might re-connect with them.

LESSONS LEARNED.....

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT AN INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP

Supporting people “one person at a time”, and partnering with them in investing resources in the assets available to them, is a different paradigm than what had existed in the service system at the time Neighbours was established. It required a different way of organizing, a different structure, different policies, and different practice.

There are no “Programs” at Neighbours. There is a relationship/partnership designed to support individuals in finding, accessing, and investing resources to grow the life of citizen that they choose. While the way we work is no longer new nor different from the approach of a number of other organizations scattered across North America (and other continents as well), we find that a majority of agencies still focus on programs designed to support groups of people in group homes, day programs, employment enclaves, recreation programs, etc. It is typical for the funding, rules, regulations (etc) to support those congregated services and programs. Working in a world that is designed to support something contrary to what you do, requires you have a culture firmly rooted in the values in which you believe.

There are several ways we have structured our organization, infrastructure and approach to our supports that we believe has enabled a culture of individualization and self-determination.

A KEY ROLE -- AN ADVISOR

When Brad, who was the first person we supported, moved to his new home we worked hard to help him set up his place and organize his own supports. He had his own budget; his own staff; his own accessible apartment; and transportation. If

we enabled him to access his funding, and assure his staff got paid, we figured everything would fall into place and he would live happily ever after.

We quickly learned it wasn't so simple. Staff called out or left; unexpected expenses came up; figuring out how to access activities wasn't as simple as it seemed; making new friends outside the facility Brad had lived didn't just happen; wheelchairs broke; the state required reporting; and so on. While Brad could manage some of this, what was quickly evident was that managing your own resources, staff, funding (ie- being in charge of your own life when you need intensive 24/7 supports) could take so much time that there wasn't any time left for living life!

That was the birth of the Advisor role. We thought about someone who could ADVISE Brad as opposed to directing or coordinating. Someone who could work in partnership with him to do some of the needed leg work. Someone who could facilitate, (in partnership with or under the direction of Brad) enabling his supports to work -- otherwise, it turned out to be practically a full time job for Brad to manage his own supports, leaving no time to actually live life.

The key to creating an individualized model for supporting people was this development of the role of **Advisor**. Once again, language is important. The role was not called, "Coordinator", "Program Manager", "Director". Choosing the name "Advisor", keeps the power and authority centered in the individual, and those who know and love them.

The word “facilitate”, means to “make easy”. It does not always mean “doing for” someone, since that would remove the experience of “power” that comes from “doing”, but it can mean doing things at times when the requirements of being an “employer”, “household manager”, “accountant”, and “staff coordinator” of my life can overwhelm the person who requires support. It also takes time for people to learn what it means to be responsible, and what are the skills that they need to develop so that they can increasingly take care of more of their own life. Advisors facilitate the process of learning the skills and practices needed, and in so doing may take on more responsibility while people are gaining confidence through practice.

In those cases where people require much more intensive support, particularly due to cognitive, or communication, or medical and mental health issues, a great amount of Advisor effort goes into connecting, building, and gathering an individual’s personal support network, a group of people not paid by the service system who can listen deeply to the direction and needs of the person Neighbours works for. Advisors also help the individual and their circle identify tasks that Personal Assistants can do that help the person manage life, home, and finances. In some situations an enhanced Job Description for a “Senior Personal Assistant” may be developed to address responsibilities for specific areas of need, such as finances, medical appointments, staff scheduling, etc.

Over time we have found a number of things about the Advisor role that have helped it to be a useful support to the person. The first is that sense of partnership. And, in fact, we have come to believe that the partnership is one of the key factors to successful individualized supports; and the lack of that partnership between a person and a

provider is what may make some self-directed systems difficult for people to navigate.

The core of Neighbours is a relationship, a partnership, between the individual, the people they trust, and an Advisor.

While some people may need lots of support from their Advisor to manage their life and supports, it is in these situations that the Advisor figures out they can ensure that the person has maximum control, that their preferences are heard and honored.

We have found that Advisors working for 4 to 7 people is ideal. Each person that Neighbours works for decides how much time they need from their Advisor and that amount is budgeted for annually. Most Advisors tend to be full time and salaried; if people need more time from an Advisor any given week (or two or three or even six or seven) it's always available to them. If they require more time from their Advisor on a permanent basis they would renegotiate the amount of Advisor time they contract for.

Advisors tend to focus on the things we believe -- and people have told us -- are the most important. Person-centered planning; facilitating relationships and circles of support; assisting the person to recruit, hire and manage their own staff; assisting the person to manage their budget; assisting the person -- and their staff and circle -- to become connected to their community in a meaningful way.

Advisors do whatever is necessary to:

- increase the power, authority, and responsibility, of the person Neighbours works for;
- deepen and expand the valued relationships in their life.

Our friend and colleague, Steve Eidelman¹¹ (The National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities), speaks of a “dimmer switch” model of support, where the intensity is turned up when it is needed, and dimmed when people (with people who care about them) can accomplish things on their own.

EMPLOYER ROLE: “CO-MANAGEMENT”

As has already been mentioned, Neighbours establishes a partnership as “Co-Managers”. The Advisor is the key point of contact with Neighbours for the person and their allies. In addition to the Advisor, Neighbours also has a small Administrative Team that takes care of managing the various aspects of serving as “Legal Employer”.

The Administrative Team helps Advisors to know what is required to fulfill the legal aspects of being an employer. The Advisor then supports the individual, their support circle, and staff, in figuring out ways that they can operate that meets the necessary legal requirements of employment and ensure that Personal Assistants are paid and receive appropriate benefits.

The Advisor supports the individual and their trusted allies (Support Circle) in becoming the Managing Employers. Personal Assistants are hired by the person, and are responsible to the person (and/or their Support Circle when necessary). While the Personal Assistants receive a paycheck that comes from Neighbours Inc., the lines of supervision and evaluation for their job goes through the individual and/or their support circle.

Advisors support the individual and their circle in identifying strategies for recruiting the right people. Advisors may help in screening applicants, identifying questions for interviews, accompanying the person for the interview and developing back-up plans.

A chief goal of the Advisor is to ensure that potential Personal Assistants understand that they are working for the person they will be assisting. Evaluating their success as employees will depend on how well they accomplish what that person needs to be done.

No OFFICE

One of the things Neighbours has been most interested in is being sure we support people to be full members of their local communities. From the beginning we decided that in order to do that we needed to be out in the communities where people lived instead of in an office. So, we began with no office whatsoever. After about six years we did get a room where files are kept and have an official mailing address. We also use that space for annual meetings with auditors and regulators. All other meetings, interviews, etc., happen out in communities where people live. This has led to a number of outcomes:

- Advisors, the people Neighbours work for, their staff, and their friends and allies get to know the communities where people live.
- Neighbours saves a lot on overhead costs.
- Potential staff, when they interview with a person and their Advisor at a local coffee shop, recognize immediately both how important community is as part of their role AND that they will be working for a person and not an agency. There is a major shift when potential staff are not walking through a door and into an office that says "Neighbours" on it.

FLAT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Since individuals and their support circles operate as Managing Employers of the Personal Assistants that they hire, Neighbours has a relatively "flat" organizational

structure. There is an Executive Leadership Team that consists of an Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer, and there is also an Administrative Support Person, and finally there is the Advisor Team. This means that decision making is streamlined. There is not a huge bureaucracy that must be navigated. Decision making is centered with the individual and the people close to them, where they live.

SUPPORT AGREEMENTS

Relationships are a central focus for Neighbours. It is important that we begin working for people by having conversations about the nature of the relationship we are establishing. These initial conversations take the form of “agreements” that Neighbours makes with the people we work for and their trusted allies. It serves as an opportunity to identify what we hope for, what we need, and what we can expect from one another. There are some basic agreements that are similar for most of the people Neighbours works for, but most of the agreements are individualized and identify how this specific person needs and wants to work with Neighbours.

TWO RULES

Neighbours was established to serve the goal of people being able to be in control of their own lives and determine how and where they want to live. Like most of us, living out this self-determination means making choices that involve risk and learning. Rather than becoming the “gatekeeper” of people’s choices, determining what people “can” and “can’t” do, Neighbours established two rules to guide our own involvement in any working relationship we establish. These rules determine what Neighbours will and will not be involved in, not what the person we work for can and cannot do.

- **Nothing illegal**

Neighbours will not be involved in any decisions which will lead to illegal activity.

- **No Abuse or Neglect**

Neighbours will not participate in any activity or decisions that involve abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

These two rules are made clear when Neighbours establishes a new working relationship, and they serve as reminders whenever people are making decisions.

Advisors contribute this perspective when supporting and advising people in their decision making process for how they want to use the resources available to them.

MINIMIZING POLICIES AND PAPERWORK

One of the key roles of the Executive Director is working with the Board of Neighbours, the CFO, and the Advisors to establish policies and practices that minimize the amount of time that individuals and their support teams have to spend on paperwork and bureaucratic processes.

The Executive Director plays a key role in establishing good working relationships with key people in the State funding system, learning about what the State employees and system really need in order to maintain the flow of resources to people that Neighbours works for. This in turn enables people and their networks to spend their time and energy focused on living the life they choose as citizens of the communities where they live. At times this may mean challenging the bureaucratic process, but often it means finding simple streamlined ways to provide what is needed so that people can live as they choose while maintaining responsibility for the resources available to them.

While Neighbours has “2 Rules”, funders have rules and expectations that accompany the money they make available to support people. The Executive Director plays a critical role in relating with funders to make sure that Neighbours Advisors can assist people in understanding the expectations and requirements of the relationship that exists between the funder and the people who receive the funds.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP AS ADVISOR

Since it's founding, Neighbours has always had Executive Directors who maintain some engagement in the role of Advisor for at least a few people. This experience informs the organization's ongoing development of policies and practices, “keeps it REAL”, provides on the ground perspective for the Board, and meaningful and relevant mentoring for Advisors.

RECRUITING KEY PEOPLE

Our Advisors, and other key folks at Neighbours (as well as people's personal assistants) have come to us in a variety of ways but very rarely through advertisements. The best people have been found through circles, networks and personal connections. Our Advisors have gotten to know us by working with us in a part time role or on a short term project. Over time as both us and them were able to discover our values meshed and we worked well together, these key folks took on more responsibility; made longer term commitments; and wound up in pivotal roles.

CONCLUSION

The core of what we do at Neighbours continues to be figuring out:

- WHAT IS IMPORTANT?
- WHAT IS AVAILABLE?

- WHAT CAN WE DO?
- and WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

In the end, this is actually what the people we work for, and those who love them, have been faced with since they were born, as they inch toward their hopes and dreams.

The best that we can do is to develop a relationship where we can walk along side them and bring what we have to offer, as much as we can, as they invest what they can to the pursuit of the life they desire.

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