

PHILOSOPHY & VALUES

SELF DETERMINATION

Team Building

It is important that the team function effectively if it is going to accomplish tasks when supporting a person. All team members must contribute to a common goal. All team members must have a sense of commitment to make the process work. Self-determination for people is the keystone of all that is done. Self-determination for the person is a continuing process of developing the attitude and abilities required to act on one's own behalf and perceived best interests. This includes making choices and decisions regarding oneself which are free from undue external influence and without infringing upon another's right to be self-determined.

Self-determination

Self-determination is another way of saying freedom. It means that people will have authority over the way their lives will be lived, where and with whom (MO People First link www.missouripeoplefirst.org). Persons with disabilities are well aware when they are being treated in a manner that is demeaning (i.e., controlling, punitive, without choices and possessions). Without other choices, the person may resort to aggressive, destructive, and self-injurious behaviors in order to manipulate and manage the environment. Self-determination means a shift in *power* from staff, providers and administrators to the person, their family and friends.

Self-determination should be the ultimate outcome of every service and support that is provided for people. It should be the goal of everything that is taught to people and staff.

Service Coordinator's Attitudes

Attitude: A position or manner indicative of feeling, opinion, or intention toward a person or thing. --Webster's Dictionary

A Service coordinator's values and attitudes can influence, or even determine, how persons are perceived. Over the years, various labels have been used to classify people with disabilities. Labels tend to take on negative meanings and images that demean and stereotype people with disabilities. This further emphasizes differences, rather than highlighting individuality and abilities. Labels can close our thinking and cause us to make predictions about people, based only on prejudiced assumptions about what they can or cannot do. This leads to lower expectations, restricted lifestyles, intrusive "programs", negative images, limited access and isolation.

Attitudes may also influence how a person is supported in his community, therefore shaping the day-to-day life of someone with a disability. Historically, people who have developmental disabilities have often been observed living, working or recreating together. This reinforces a tendency for society to think of "them" as a group, not as individual people. What is thought

when a group of people with disabilities is shopping in a department store, for example, with a staff person? As a group, they may be seen as “different”. Sometimes when people are grouped together it makes it difficult for others to see each person as a unique individual.

Many of us have had the opportunity to discover that people with disabilities can contribute to our lives as friends, co-workers, teachers and neighbors. Higher expectations are created once we get to know people as “people first”. Our attention shifts from the person’s deficits to what the person can contribute and accomplish. We begin to reshape our roles from caretaker to support person. We begin to focus on choice rather than control. To have a quality of life, we all need self-respect, and the respect of others. We must remember that because a person relies on us for support does not change the fact that the person is capable – more like us than they are different from us.

Person-Centered Planning Process

The concept of person-centered planning has had a significant impact on the field of developmental disabilities. It represents a shift from a “system-centered” approach to a person-centered approach in the way supports and services are provided. It means we truly look not only at each individual’s basic needs, but also at his or her unique preferences and desires. We do this not so that every single desire will be fulfilled, but so that the person can structure his or her life, to the maximum extent feasible, around his or her own choices and preferences.

Here are three concepts to keep in mind when doing person-centered planning.

- **Autonomy:** people acting according to their own priorities
- **Self-actualization:** people exploring and developing their unique talents and gifts
- **Self-regulation:** people learning to manage his or her own behavior

Self-determination develops attitudes and abilities that enable us to take charge of our lives, to make choices, to establish goals based on our needs, interests, and values. We all possess the drive to be self-determined. We need the opportunities and skills to act on it, and thereby increase our quality of life. As we plan and provide supports and services, we must build in opportunities for people to develop relationships and socially valued roles. This includes supporting people to live and work in positive environments, to develop skills and to recognize their own unique individuality.

The practice of person-centered work is a value, a philosophy, and a process that focuses on the capacities and strengths of an individual, in order to create a vision for a desirable future. This includes an emphasis on each person’s gifts, interests, talents, and skills, not deficits. It is a process in which the person teaches us about whom and what is important to them and how they want to live. It must be emphasized here that a crucial part of supporting a person to be successful is understanding how that person communicates. The people who know and care about the person share in this exploration, which includes figuring out what needs to be done to support the person to reach his or her personal goals. It is about respect, listening, commitment

and teamwork. It is a continuous process that enables lifelong growth and development. The process is much more than a written plan.

Communication

Communication refers to *all* the ways we express and receive information. It is often difficult to understand what a person is trying to tell us, especially if he or she cannot or do not use words. It is one of the primary responsibilities of the service coordinator to make sure the person he or she supports is able, *through some means*, to communicate with those around him or her. This can be done by utilizing some form of communication technology, such as a communication board. Or it can be done by making sure the person is surrounded by people who understand the person's communication cues or behaviors. This is a crucial part of the person-centered plan and should be addressed in a systematic manner.

Communicating is much more than talking. Focusing only on the exchange of words does not ensure that understanding will follow. To begin understanding, the focus must be on the person. We must realize there are many methods for communicating one's needs, wants and desires. The person's behavior represents a powerful method of communication.

Learning New and Positive Ways to Get What You Want

Behavior is motivated by something; behavior is functional. To substitute a non-desirable behavior with one that is more desired, the new behavior must have the same outcome for the person. The new behavior must be such that it is functionally equivalent to the old non-desired behavior, and be just as easy to use for the person. We ethically cannot remove a functional behavior from a person without teaching an alternative that will be just as successful for the person. That means that if the undesired behavior has proven to be an effective communication tool (such as a way of communicating, *I am frustrated and I want to stop this activity now, or I don't like it when you do that*), we are obligated to teach the person another way to get what he or she wants that is just as quick and effective. Sometimes, the staff (or even family) around the person may not actually realize that the person's unpleasant or disruptive behavior is achieving some desired outcome for the person.

Creating a Positive Environment

In order for people to have control of their lives (to become self-determined) they must have a positive environment in which to learn and practice these skills. Many things are influenced by the environment: behavior, decision-making and happiness. When the person perceives the environment as positive, it will promote positive behavior, decision making and satisfaction. Many factors can help make an environment a positive one, in which people can live and learn. Healthy organizations that support people can greatly influence this.

Socially Valued Roles

In 1983, the concept of Normalization (the goal of people with disabilities being able to lead "normal" lives) was refined or enhanced to be called Social Role Valorization. A man named Wolf Wolfensberger began asking how a person's social roles could in fact be enhanced, or how

persons who have not had access to valued social roles in the past could now be supported in having these opportunities. Social Role Valorization says that each person should have a role within his or her social circle which is respected and valued by others.

The roles we play in our lives are very powerful. They shape our routines, rhythms, schedules, and activities. They give each of us a clear message about our own personal worth and status in our communities. Roles affect our reputation, who we associate with, and how we are likely to act out our values and beliefs.

In order to support people in roles that are valued by others we may need to work at enhancing the person's "image" or perceived value in the eyes of others, as well as enhancing their skills. As we grow, our roles get more involved, diverse, complex and potentially exciting. Work, school, community, family and leisure are some of the areas of our own lives in which we develop roles.

There has been a tremendous focus on how to integrate people with disabilities into the community. No one should be excluded from his or her community. People with disabilities have been alienated physically and emotionally for far too long. It is essential to develop a process for planning that will result in a better life in the community for people who have been denied participation. The planning process should be viewed as an opportunity for mutual learning, sharing among community members and the development of life experiences that will help shape new and valued roles.