

# **The Possibility of People**

## **Program Guide**

**A Life Like Any Other investment by  
the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities**

## The Possibility of People

### Program Guide

“All great change begins around the dinner table”  
-Ronald Reagan



## Getting Started

A few people got together and began asking the question *“how can we support more people to be in valued social roles outside the boundaries of disability services. We were thinking about roles that are valued and ones which attract respect, facilitate contribution, engage and expand capacities and hold the possibility of belonging. So, we set out to make that happen.*

We were encouraged by Beth Mount, who says, “We believe everyone has a gift; wants to share their gifts, and that there is a place that needs that gift”

Our thinking about “Quality of Life,” was motivated by Dave Pitonyak, who asks “How can we help the person to:

- Achieve a greater sense of health and well being?
- Expand and deepen his/her relationships?
- Have more fun in ordinary, every day community places?
- Have more power?
- Make a contribution to others?
- Learn valued skills?”

This guide has been created to ignite an interest in helping people move away from the old story about “client” or “consumer” and begin helping others build a reputation of active “contributor” and “creator”. Our goal is to help you consider taking action on moving deeper into community or helping someone who is interested in moving deeper into community. As with all things in life, this is an organic process and while we have worked hard to accurately reflect our experiences in this guide know each person, their gifts, their community, conditions for success, the people in their life, and the people we have connected them to, have created a very rich web of connections that cannot be captured easily in a linear pattern.

The guide is divided into the following sections:

- Section 1: Steps in the Process
- Section 2: The Approach
- Section 3: What We Have Learned About Our Partners
- Section 4: A Few Stories
- Section 5: Unexpected Gifts
- Section 6: What Else We’re Learning
- Section 7: Other Ways to Get to Know One Another
- Section 8: Now It’s Your Turn
- Section 9: Resources

# SECTION 1: Steps in the Process

To begin, we had to find people who were willing to partner with us. The requirements we had of partnership were these:

1. To be alive
2. To be willing and interested in the possibility of exploring and contributing to the community (the people who support them must also be willing and interested)
3. To agree for us to respectfully tell the story of our experiences.

The main steps in the process include accompaniment, discovery, following the threads, using personal networks, respecting ideal conditions for community or employment, and developing a plan for when we are no longer there. We will discuss each of those steps below:

## STEP 1: Accompaniment

We walk with the protégé through accompaniment – meaning, we get to know the family, the community, and those who share similar interests. This is humble and persistent work where curiosity, patience and openness is the path to building trusted relationships.

## STEP 2: Discovery

Using a modified discovery approach, follow the threads of interest. Above all, **we believe in possibility**. We follow threads of interest, provide support for connection or paid work, and step slowly back while nurturing needed supports. Continually we ask: “Where does the person see themselves engaged as citizen? Is it in paid work? Volunteering, or as a member of a club or organization.”

## STEP 3: Follow Threads

When we look at the threads of interest – we begin by looking at themes. Once you find an interest, we think about ways to learn more: How do we go about this? The answer: it depends. You can find things in a variety of ways. First, think about people you know, or people you know and trust who know people passionate about this area of interest. Meet with those people, chances are, they’ll be happy to connect you with more opportunities to explore. For example, a protégé you know expresses interest in electronics. Do you know someone who is involved with – a radio station? A sound studio? A DJ? Guitar store? A band? A computer repair store? A resale shop? A pawn shop? A record store? Stay curious as you explore such places and talk to people who know about the topic of interest.

- **Places:** Look to these areas where people gather around: Art, music, culture, technology, social service, administration, nature, farming, food, health and fitness, transportation, aviation, animals, theater, fabric/textile, woodworking. **Where** might people need these gifts?
- **Making Connections – the Sweet Places** - The way to making our way “through” involves showing up in regular ordinary ways, over and over again. Finding the “sweet” places in community - places where people show up in ordinary ways, gather, offer gifts, and are open to new ones

**Sweet places** are where:

- People gather together by consent (rather than control);
- Relationships are based on affiliation and shared interest (rather than exchange);
- People are always identifying, inviting and mobilizing one another's gifts
- Culture expresses itself in the form of stories (rather than data)
- We hear people singing because they are making music (rather than consuming music)

#### **STEP 4: Personal networks – Finding the experts**

We begin to think about people we know, people the protégé knows, people who can connect us to people who know a lot about the area we want to learn more about. As Tom Kohler reminds us: “The answer to what or how is...*WHO*”

#### **STEP 5: Respecting Ideal Conditions**

Q: What are Ideal Conditions of Employment or Community?

A: Whatever is needed for success: Allow for extra time or breaks? Space for movement? Is there a way to accommodate lighting or sound? Do we need to provide schedules, adapt the physical set up for a work system? Can we un-bundle responsibilities? Does the number of things to do need to change? What can participation look like? Does he/she need formalized supports or can we identify and nurture the support from a fellow co-worker or club member over time? Is a communication device needed?

#### **STEP 6: Developing a Plan**

**Last, consider what is needed as we step slowly out of the picture:** Through accompaniment and the role that is emerging, begin to look for ways to invite relationships, enhance independence, natural supports, or encourage a “just right” level of paid support if this kind of support is necessary. As fading back begins, we check in to gauge this stepping back works best week by week.

## **SECTION 2: The Approach**

*“You can’t make choices if you don’t have preferences. “You can’t have preferences if you don’t have experiences”*

- Russell Sickles



As we worked through the steps outlined above, we knew we needed to have a strong philosophical basis for our work. We relied on the work of Griffin Hammis & Associates as well as the work of Tom Kohler and John O’Brien to guide our thinking as to how we approached our partnerships protégés. We share the following with you to help in guiding your work.

#### **Discovering Personal Genius**

As you start working with people, here are some process questions to keep in mind:

- What about this person led me here?
- What am I learning about the person by doing this?
- Where/who/what activity does this lead to next?

- What do we need to learn or ask about (people/locations/skills)?

As you think about the person, think about the following:

- What would it look like if we got it right?
- What question, if answered, could make the most difference in the person's life?
- What's important to the person and why does she care?
- What do we know so far – the emerging themes?
- Where are people with similar themes working/gathering?
- What do we still need to learn about?
- What are the person's dilemmas/opportunities in their situation?
- How will this person stay in contact with friends, acquaintances and how will we support this?

### **Supporting Valued Experiences and Valued Roles**

John O'Brien has identified valued experiences and roles. As we are in the process of supporting people to find their place in their community, we need to be thinking about discovering what valued social roles they can play. Some examples of valued social roles are: Family member, friend, neighbor, citizen, athlete, partner, home owner, worker, learner and artist. These roles all allow people to experience one or more of the five valued experiences outlined below:

1. **Belonging** – in a diverse variety of relationships and memberships.
2. **Choosing** – what they want in everyday situations in ways that reflect their highest purpose. Having the freedom, support, information and assistance to make the same choices as others of a similar age and learning to make wiser choices over time. Being encouraged to use and strengthen voice regardless of mode of communication, clarify what really matters, make thoughtful decisions, and learn from experience.
3. **Contributing** – by discovering, developing and giving their gifts and investing their capacities and energy in pursuits that make a positive difference to other people. There are gifts of being and gifts of doing: contributions can include interested presence as well as capable performance. Contributions may be free, exchanged or earn pay.
4. **Sharing Ordinary Places** – and activities with other citizens, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers. Living, working, learning and playing confidently in ordinary community settings.
5. **Being Respected** – as whole persons whose history, capacities and futures are worthy of attention and whose gifts engage them in valued social roles.

O'Brien further teaches that these valued social roles are "*Portals to a Good Life*". As we work with our partners, we can explore these portals to find what matters to them.

Portals to Good Life #1 – Spiritual and Religious

Recognized as a member and participates in service, study or social activities related to their membership (member, parishioner – deacon, elder, prayer leader, usher, choir member, etc.)

Portals to Good Life #2 – Cultural Affiliations

Active participation within a relationship of shared group identity which can be traced historically between the present day and identifiable earlier group.

Portals to Good Life #3 – Home & Neighborhood

Active in the work and activities of the household, perhaps with assistance or through participation strategies

Portals to Good Life #4 – Family & Friends

Expected and expects to maintain contact with other family members, to participate when possible in family events and rituals, and to call on and be called on by other family members for emotional and practical support. As a friend, is expected to initiate and respond to invitations to share time and to exchange with the other person.

Portals to Good Life #5 – Learning

Engages in study or teaching for a purpose. Study can be formal or informal and the purpose may be personal interest, research & exploration, skill development, social contact, or advancement toward some goal that is meaningful or useful to the person such as a qualification, certificate, degree or license. Teaching can be formal or informal, paid or for other rewards.

Portals to Good Life #6 – Community Association

Joins formal or informal efforts for service, for mutual help; for political purposes, for the promotion of a cause, for the protection of members' interests; to celebrate a person, a people, a place, or thing important to members; or for enjoyment. Recognized by other members as one of them and will usually contribute in some active way to the association.

Portals to Good Life #7 – Sports & Leisure

Participates in athletic or fitness activities, as workers who make events possible and as active fans.

Portals to Good Life #8 – Creative Expression

Plays valued roles as creators, as workers who make arts events possible and as publicly active supporters.

Portals to Good Life #9 – Work

Performs a task in exchange for a wage or, as an owner, invests resources in the expectation of a return. Worker will interact productively & regularly with other people: customers, coworkers, supervisors, employees.

## SECTION 3: What We Have Learned About Our Partners

**The world they (the protégé and those who care about them) envision has been shaped over many years** before they met us. We're trying to offer a little bit of a new version to replace that old version— the one that may have taken the wrong turn. We know this isn't like flipping a switch. It's more like opening up a flower. Through accompaniment, encouragement and respect, we have been able to partner with people to help them open up their gifts. We also work to build the gifts that are already in place. People need to trust and trust comes from building good relationships. Relationships come over time and from quality experiences.

**Families are often concerned about risks** involved in venturing out into the unknown. Helping people move forward when they don't know what's coming next is one of the tough questions we grapple with. As we think about risk, some of the answers begin to emerge. *So, what kind of risk are we talking about?*

- **Risk of an Evil Actor** - Many of us know of or heard stories about people with disabilities who have been hurt by someone intending to cause harm. What we also know is that keeping people isolated and separate from the world actually increases the possibility of harm. To move away from the likelihood of being hurt or abused, move toward community. The more people you know and who know you – the safer you are.
- **Risk of Being Disappointed** - It's possible. Nobody can promise anyone anything, really. What this work does have is great possibility and disappointment is built into it. We need to have reasonable expectations.

*Another way to look at the question about risk is this: **"if we choose not to explore this path or this possibility, what is the risk of that?"***

This is messy work. Having someone, or a few people show us how to come forward helps ease into this. Community guides are creating a bridge for the person over a period of time, then at some point, bringing in others who have this natural gift. As Gillian Grable once said "People are just waiting for the invitation to discover each other." Our work is about finding them.

## SECTION 4: A few stories

“It’s going to take a long time, to get to know her, a little bit. And that’s ok”

- Tom Kohler

### Odalys’ and her Dance Club



Odalys is a young woman who enjoys music and dancing.

Together, we explored dance studios, but it wasn't quite the right fit. After some deeper thinking, the idea of a dance club at her high school emerged. For the last few months, Odalys has shared her love for dance with other students. She helped with promoting the club and has added Gabby, a college student majoring in dance to facilitate the group. Her efforts to start a dance club has spurred a renewed interest in clubs at the school. Up until now, after school offerings were limited to sports. Next year, Odalys and Gabby plan to visit classrooms to invite others in.

Odalys’ mom said she has “learned that Odalys is more sociable than I thought.” Her sisters are “really happy Odalys has the dance club.”

Getting to know Odalys has taken some time, and that is ok. It turns out her love for dance is becoming an opportunity to invite others to enjoy dance too.



### Amelia on Becoming Independent

Amelia has a warm personality and a heart to help others.

On her journey to share her gifts of welcoming and a cheerful demeanor, she first joined the Stand up to Cancer club at school and sold over a hundred bracelets for charity in a single weekend!

Amelia also wanted to be more connected to her community in an independent way. Amelia and Lynn began volunteering at the library, and worked to set a plan in place for Amelia to walk from the high school to the library on her own, and volunteer on her own.

After lots of practice, planning and patience, Amelia is doing it!

Amelia reflected on her work this last year: “At first I was afraid, but now I know I can do it on my own.”



### Derek – on Finding his Way into the Big Story

Derek is a young man who enjoys country music, nature, quiet companionship and a good meal. About a year ago, he moved into a group home and hasn't had much contact with people who are non-paid.

We were introduced to Derek by a case manager at the group home where Derek lives. We asked if he was interested in exploring the community and he indicated that he was. Derek had very few experiences so far, and the support team didn't know him well, as his mom, who was raising him on her own, died unexpectedly and there was no other family who knew him. He was cautious in getting to know me, so we took it slow. At first, it seemed best to spend time with him at home, so we prepared some healthy food together. I learned he liked country music and nature, so we set out to find places we could find that.

The first time I picked up Derek to go out exploring he was very quiet and pointed gently to the radio. Since then, he has gotten to know me, and pokes me and controls the radio stations to indicate which songs he wants and which ones he loves.

The Verdi Club, an Italian Heritage club seemed like a welcoming place to start with weekly gatherings and bocce and we got to know some of the members there. Derek quickly got to know the ladies and eventually connected with the servers and bus boys. He even began to help them out a little. We thought about the possibility of volunteering there, but something was missing, so we tried another place. Another opportunity for exploration began at the office of a local pregnancy care center. While Derek enjoyed the office work, there weren't a lot of people there, and it seemed he was needing more of an opportunity to get to know others and be known. We tried a home school learning center where Derek got to know a few folks and if we would have gone over a longer period of time, perhaps more connections would be made.

Derek was invited to join in some events within the family of one of our community guides. A couple of young men meet at a hotel pool to swim, and Derek has joined them a few times. He seemed to enjoy spending time with the group, but he wasn't quite ready to get in the pool. We'll keep trying and look forward to seeing if doing this another way might help. A friend was graduating and he was asked to join in the outdoor party. After a little nudging he played a little volleyball. Next, we invited Derek over for dinner, and it seemed he enjoyed the fellowship, smells and sounds. This is where he has seemed the most content. Upon some deep reflection, and in "listening" to Derek, it seemed having a small group of people to enjoy a meal with, was something to look at more closely. This led to thinking about other families and young couples who enjoy meeting new and interesting people, and asked some friends who might welcome this idea. They were interested in the invitation, and we've since shared fellowship and meals together. They're getting to know each other and, in time, will hopefully become friends. Derek's story remains in an exploration process as he is able to experience new opportunities and meet new people, so the "threads" of his interest continue to be followed.

Kristina, his caseworker told us "at the beginning, he had nobody and everybody in his life was here at the group home. What I see brings me joy – to see his joy. He can't wait to be with other people. The constant has been that there are people out there who care."

### Cameron- Working towards his future

Cameron has been thinking about earning his own money for some time. Utilizing Griffin Hammis' Discovering Personal Genius approach we looked at Cameron's interests, ideal conditions of employment and the people we know. This led us to begin talking to people in the restaurant industry.

We introduced Cameron to Susan, an energetic small business owner at the Wild Rhubarb in Roscoe and we set out to take a tour. Next Cameron said he was ready to "get his hands dirty" (literally and figuratively) to learn more specifically about the inner workings of a restaurant kitchen.

Cameron learned about the importance of organization, sanitation, tools and cleaning.

After a few days of learning, we stopped at a local pizzeria where we were regular customers. We shared Cameron's work experience and interests with the owner and the conversation led to summer employment.

When we talked with Cameron about exploring work he replied: "I can't believe I get to have a job."

Cameron is looking forward to starting his summer job at Ana Maria's in Roscoe very soon! Be sure to stop by, pick up some dinner and say hello.



### Jordan on Making a Club that works for him

Jordan is a young man with a love of fishing and good company.

He wanted to combine these passions and sought out clubs where others shared these interests. Jordan couldn't find one, so he decided to start his own! His leg work for the fishing club included making gmail and Facebook accounts, typing up and passing out flyers, hosting talks about his club at the local library, and getting interviewed by the local newspaper to get the word out. Jordan's parents said "We didn't know what to expect, but we knew we wanted Jordan to have a say in what was important to him. We've seen a huge growth in his ability to step out of his comfort zone as he invited others to the club."



Jordan's fishing club has opened the door for others in his life and his community to share a love of fishing in an open and relaxed way. Join him at 9 am in Rockton the second and fourth Saturday - April through October! Jordan says "I'll teach anybody to fish anytime"

### Ben – On Creating a Circle and Planning for the Future



Ben and his family and friends got together to think about ways he could grow more as a young adult. When we asked his mom what she thought about the process, she said: *“We thought it was going to be a plan for the year, like a service plan. What we’re learning is that its not just my plan, but a LIVING plan among family and friends. I love that Ben had a friend who has been part of the circle call HIM to ask when they’re going to swim as they had planned. My mom now brings the clarinet over so they can practice the birthday song for his little sister’s birthday (without me organizing it) I had no idea Aunt Karen*

*wanted to skype with the boys-Now they’re beginning to get in touch and talk about things every week; I didn’t know our family wanted to support us but didn’t know how. This process really lifted our hearts.”*

### Kristen – on Paid Work



Kristen and her family decided that the sheltered workshop was not a good fit for her. Kristen wanted to earn a regular wage and to get to know a variety of people. She liked to work hard, she just needed a little help in figuring out how to connect her gifts with the needs of a local business. As we got to know Kristen, through her work at her church, the Lions Club, her neighbor’s farm and the local food pantry, we learned she likes to engage with people, is very caring and she wants to stay active.

We visited a few businesses and found the local nursing home was a place where she spent a lot of time in recent years when her grandmother lived there. Her mother remembered how much she enjoyed connecting with many of the residents. We met with the Activity Director

to learn about the work involved in becoming an Activity Aide. After our meeting, we thought it would be helpful if Kristen had an opportunity to spend the day shadowing the aide. During this time, we looked for unmet needs within the activity department. During that day, we noticed residents having to wait for long periods of time to get to the activity room, or back to their room. They also longed for more engagement when working on crafts or having conversation about current events. Kristen slipped right into this role, and in fact, many of the residents remembered her and commented on how they had missed seeing her.

Following “Camp David” negotiations, Kristen began working 6 hours a week at Liberty Village. She is currently assisting residents in exercise and art class, as well as making and serving snacks. She has been an asset to their support team.

We met with Kristen and her mom, Laurie to reflect on the last year. Kristen said “I love my job!” Laurie said we have huge gratitude for your work because we couldn’t have done this without you. We needed the words you used and the steps to make it happen.”



### Gavin – Growing in More Ways than One

Gavin is a charming young man, who, when we first met, really wanted to be of service to his community.

Gavin had an interest in his church, animals and had a solid foundation in gardening and mowing lawns. Our journey began with exploring his interests and the idea of a service club at his church and volunteering at a local animal shelter.

After some time, Gavin realized he wanted more than just volunteering and so his search for employment began.

Through a local business connection, we found Farmer Wayne, a serious organic farmer whose love for farming is matched only by his love for teaching others. After a short time, Gavin began working on the farm where his reliability and work ethic is serving as a model for others.

Gavin’s mom said “Gavin is eager to wake up every day and go to work. He’s in seventh heaven and is excited to tell everybody about his job. We just wanted him to have a place where he could go, so having a paid job was more than we could have hoped for.”

When we asked Gavin how he wanted to spend his earnings he replied, “I want to save it, but I will spend some of it going to a restaurant.”

### Quinn – On Showing Up

“Why would we deny someone a little slice of heaven, just because they don’t show up the same way you and I do? When we consider it this way, then it becomes clear to me the way forward.”

- Tim Vogt, Starfire



Quinn has been a member of the Forest City Swing dance club for over a year. He loves to meet new girls, and types to communicate using his iPad with the ones he knows. He’s also been known to shake hands with the guys. Most weeks, he will ask a girl to dance, or he’ll be asked to dance. Everyone there knows him because when he arrives, he typically weaves in and out of the dance couples and waves his hands in the air expressing pure joy. Quinn had to take a few months off because of medical issues, and we found out he was truly missed. He’s back now, and there’s a renewed interest in more dance partners.

We take pride in helping people make meaning out of the ordinary.

## SECTION 5: Unexpected Gifts

This work has brought some unexpected surprises. Here are just a few:

- **Changing a mindset:** “Now that Odalys is engaged in after school activities, she interacts more with us” said Andrew, a fellow classmate. School staff are learning the importance of helping a student put their best foot forward. We had many moments where we were able to reframe words used when talking about someone in front of them. These conversations centered around using respectful reflections and bringing the student into the conversation even if it means reflecting on a shared experience, which could go something like: “Odalys – I remember how much you liked to write your name and add “ballet” after it. I’m glad we’re able to work together to make this dance club happen at school.”

These essential conversations are the beginning of shaping a new mindset of presuming competence, presuming interest in contribution and connection with others, regardless of the person’s current communication capabilities.

- **Image Enhancement:** Image enhancement and valued social roles are intimately intertwined. How someone looks, how they spend their time, where they are, who they are with, what their schedules and routines look like, and how they communicate with others are all considerations when thinking about image enhancement. We noticed that support staff are understanding and appreciating the importance of a clean appearance when going out in the community. After a few requests to go back in the house to freshen up, support people understood this was an expectation and is now built in their support routine.
- **Citizenship:** Support staff learned that greetings, even if support is needed, are a natural and lovely way to begin and end an interaction. We noticed that at first, it seemed to be too much trouble, or not worth the effort. After a while, it became a celebration of sorts, in learning that this young man they support wanted to engage in this brief but valuable social exchange.
- **Letting Positive Characteristics Shine Through:** The protégé’s and those who care about them can “flip the script” so to speak – instead of trying to “fix” a weakness, we find and develop interests and passions – and through those positive, strength building experiences, weaknesses tend to diminish.
- **Cultivating Ownership** – in traditional disability services and programs, much of the work is done for the individual. We are learning to nurture and support the protégé’s ability to make their own phone calls, create their own flyers, and check in with other members. The stronger their relationships, the greater their confidence.
- **Bringing Others In:** A young man who joined the fishing club ended up helping another young man get a fishing license.
- **Teaching Others about New Skills:** One young man’s dad who said he didn’t like to bike ride, realized he wanted the same bike his son had (a recumbent trike) after giving it a try.
- **Getting Paid and Having Fun:** One young woman found out that working on Friday and Saturday nights is a fun way to hang out with people AND get paid!
- **Friendships based on shared interests (NOT deficits):** Christina found out that Odalys loved dancing, and so did she! They started a club. Had she been introduced a different way, things likely would not have

ended up going down the same path. Another way of thinking about this is: Which person do you see? Or, how would YOU like to be introduced?

- **Saving for Purchases:** Thinking about budgeting in real ways has been a big unexpected benefit. For those who wanted to work, they began to plan for things they needed to save for. We helped them create a binder with a focus on areas such as clothing, fun and travel.

## SECTION 6: What Else We're Learning

**Checking in with the Broader Circle** - Every few months, we schedule time with the person and those who care about them to talk about how things have been going and to see if there are ideas or offerings or questions that are coming up along the way.

In the beginning there seemed to be a force in the direction of the “expert” model – this occurs where someone waits for the so called “experts” to come in and talk about what needs to happen. We wanted to encourage the protégé’s to share as much as possible about their experiences and desires from their perspective.

**Sharing their experiences** - We’ve learned the critical importance of supporting the protégé to share with their family and friend what’s been happening – instead of having us do it for them. For some, it’s simple coaching, for others it’s helping them post on Facebook and still others its helping them formulate a text or a letter to bring home and review.

**Creating the Right Amount of Space** – Some of the people we’ve met are very interested and at the same time have a great deal of hesitancy. Sometimes conversations happen best over a video call or email. Other times, gentle assurances that we’ll stick with them is a big help. The amount of support and space needed is different for each person-and that is okay.

**On Giving “Permission”** - People in the community may be looking for “permission” to get to know someone who is appears different from them. We encourage them, and find ways to let them know it’s ok if they don’t get it perfectly right and we assure them we’re not asking anyone to “fix” anybody. Our hope is to help them feel comfortable and not scared to say or do the wrong thing. A young lady wanted to learn about re-purposing and we helped make a connection with someone who has been doing this for a long time. A high school student whose passion is the electric industry is connected to a man who owns an electric business. We use social capitol as well as encouragement and modeling. With trusted relationships, a request to meet with a protégé for an informational interview, or a learning session is more likely and has more possibility for growth.

**Introductions** - How we introduce people plays a big role in the outcome of the relationship. It turns out, first impressions matter to people with disabilities too. What words are we using and how are we introducing people we want to be connected? Start with positive attributes and shared interests. Bridge the connection – “Quinn, did you want to tell Emma that you started work last week?” “This is Laren, she just completed a babysitting course and is looking for business” “I know you’re musician – I’d like to introduce you to Jake. He just got back from the bagpipes club.”

**Enjoying the Exploration in and of itself** - One of the things that we have had the opportunity to do as we moved in to some of the lives of young adults is introduce and or support the idea of enjoying or accomplishing an event in and of itself. In other words, after going out and exploring, or filling out an application, or volunteering, doing this without having a “treat” afterward. We talked to the protégés about the task and engaging and that being rewarding in and of itself. This has been gentle work and it has shown the young adults and those who care about them, that the exploration or experiences they’re doing are enjoyable on their own merits.

**“Just Right” Level of Support** - We have worked hard to be ever mindful of opportunities to only be needed as much as is necessary – “Just Right”. Even when someone requires a support person, we look to invite informal supports into her life and encourage paid people to be out of the picture as much as possible – which has even looked like the paid support person is outside of the building. This is a good use of time, funding and planning, because the desire is to make space for freely chosen relationships.

An example: Julia loves joyful singing. She also likes meeting new people. Julia needs a ride to get places in the community, but is very friendly and able to get organizational support from anyone who she knows. She joined the Rockford Choral Union. While she isn’t interested in sitting in close quarters and practicing singing for two hours each week, she enjoys checking everyone in and making sure they have their name tags. She also copies the newsletter and distributed them. She brings a dish to pass at the various after choir events. Everyone knows Julia and appreciates her support. Julia appreciates a little help getting organized once she gets there. She has support staff who drive her, but after she’s dropped off, one of the other members help ensure she’s settled in and ready to hand out name badges and distribute newsletters.

**A Few Considerations When Encouraging Relationships** – when someone is interested in getting to know someone better, we want to help lay the foundation to establish rich, respectful relationships. Adapted from Linda Stengle’s book: *Laying the Foundation for Your Child with A Disability: How to Establish Relationships that Will Last After You are Gone*” is a valuable resource. This book is available through Woodbine Publishers. Below is an excerpt of her material.

**Being Mindful to Nurture Healthy Relationships** - Is there a balance to the relationship? Are there enough mutual interests? Is this an activity you want to do? Is the activity long enough to encourage the development of a relationship? Is the person interested in getting close to the person? Is the person free to take time to get to know the person? Are needed accommodations available? Is their presence interfering with the development of friendships? Do the same people participate or are there different people every time? Are there breaks, joint projects or committees which allow people to communicate freely? Is the other person in a relationship with the person out of a sense of duty? Is there enough structure?

**On Expanding One’s Circle** - Some of the protégé’s we’ve met were interested in having a PATH developed. A PATH is an exciting graphic process that invites family and friends to think about what might be possible when we approach the future in a positive way. See resources at the end of the book.

## SECTION 7: Other Ways to Get to Know One Another

### Possibility Parties

We wanted to find a way to help people build power and connection from the bottom up. We wanted to create a space for people to gather information in a comfortable way. We wanted to invite people in who might be feeling a little scared to do the wrong thing. So, we began hosting possibility parties.

Everyone is welcome to bring a dish to pass and then we share stories about

what's been working and what we'd like to see more of. We make some new connections and plan to get together again, and encourage everyone to bring someone new. There's no need to have anyone RSVP or plan a menu.

Whoever shows up are the ones who were needed, and whatever food is brought is enjoyed.



### Learning Lab

We wanted to find ways for people to give of themselves and to share what they know. A learning lab is a free, informal gathering of people who want to learn about interesting things, taught by locals, in their neighborhood, on all sorts of topics. Some topics might include: Bicycle repair, sushi making, sign language, fashion and style; carpentry, gardening, bee keeping, laughter yoga, toastmasters, photography, quilting, gluten free cooking, pottery, bagpipes, gratitude journaling, civil war reenactment, herb farming, re-purposing, hiking clubs, vermicomposting, choir, playing the ukelele, poetry, the possibilities are endless...

If you are interested in conducting a learning lab, it is important for you to know these key ideas:

- **Who can teach?** Anyone can teach if they're passionate about something and want to share it with people.
- **How long does it take?** Anywhere from 1 – 3 hours seems to work best. Starting with a potluck and leaving time for conversation is ideal.
- **Who can come?** Anyone! It's informal so people of all ages and abilities are welcome.

## Steps to Creating a Learning Lab

The idea of the Learning Lab was loosely based on Star Fire Council of Cincinnati. We will go through the steps we used for our learning lab. We offered a one-day event with a number of local people who were passionate about something and were willing to share it with their community. These “enthusiasts” would be present during the day to talk about their passions. They would also do a short presentation to tell people about what they do. The learning lab took approximately 3 months to prepare.

1. 3 months before event:
  - Find host/location
  - Reach out to local groups and organizations with a Save the Date
  - Set up a Facebook page for the event and begin promoting it on other local social media pages in the community.
  - Develop a list and reach out to local community people who might be interested in sharing their passions, skills, and groups.
2. 2 months before event:
  - Finalize enthusiasts that are willing to participate.
  - Create and share flyer with local community.
  - Reach out to local media and in nearby communities about the event.
3. 1 month before event:
  - Send out final confirmation to enthusiasts, outlining expectations for their participation the day of the event.
  - Post event details to local media pages
  - 3 weeks prior to the event, reach out to local media outlets via email and through social media.
4. Week of the event:
  - Coordinate final confirmations with the enthusiasts.
  - Purchase beverages and food for the event.
  - Create a sign-in sheet for the event.
  - Develop a schedule for presentations.
5. Day of the event
  - Set up, host, clean up.
6. Event follow up:
  - Review what went well:
    - The location was perfect for and sharing the day with the indoor Farmer’s Market brought in extra interest – approximately 45 people participated in the event.
    - We had a sufficient number of enthusiasts for the day.
    - Coordination of times for the event with the Farmer’s Market worked well.
    - There was good traffic as a result of the overlap with the Farmer’s Market.
    - Media coverage was helpful in bringing people to the event.
  - Review could have gone better or have been done differently?
    - Enthusiasts would have liked more time. They were given 20 minutes but would have liked approximately 45 minutes.
    - We could have had fewer enthusiasts present. This would have given those enthusiasts who were there more time to do their presentations.
    - We could have started at times more closely in coordination with the Farmer’s Market, as it could have meant more traffic for us.
    - We could have run for longer hours (earlier and/or later) giving the community more time to participate.

- We could have made the event shorter and only had one or two enthusiasts present.
- We could have hosted a number of consecutive events with longer times and at other times of day.

7. Determine next steps:

- Find someone in the local community who may want to continue hosting events like this.
- Share what we have learned.
- Support others in this and other communities to do something similar.



*“What can people come to mean to one another?”* - Tom Kohler at the Possibility of People Learning Event

## SECTION 8: Now it's your turn

You've read and learned about our work and our adventures. We know this is messy work, and we invite you to, as Lynda Kahn said, "Feel the fear and try it anyway"



Ask yourself:

- What needs to be let go?
- What needs to grow?
- What will happen if you don't try?
- How can we help you?

Contact Wendy Partridge at [wendypartridge@gmail.com](mailto:wendypartridge@gmail.com) to get started.

"We have an obligation to unravel the way things "have" been done – and turn them into something new"  
- Shelley Nessman

*What we're learning over and over again, is that when people who experiences disabilities are believed in, connected with, and celebrated, what rises to the surface is the basic truth that we all want the same things: The opportunity to love and be loved, to contribute to the world in whatever way that makes sense and to feel good about their contributions. As Saint Mother Teresa said: "I want you to be concerned about your next door neighbor. Do you know your next door neighbor?" We deeply hope you will consider joining us in this work as we move forward in making this possible.*



Sincerely,

Wendy Partridge  
Erin DuChesne  
Lynn Doolittle

Community Guides

## SECTION 9: Resources

Where we've gotten much of our inspiration:

Websites:

- [www.neighbours-international.com](http://www.neighbours-international.com)
- [www.lifeworks-sd.com](http://www.lifeworks-sd.com)
- [www.openfutureslearning.com](http://www.openfutureslearning.com)
- [www.conversationthatmatter.com](http://www.conversationthatmatter.com)
- [www.Griffin-hammis.com](http://www.Griffin-hammis.com)
- [www.inclusionpress.com](http://www.inclusionpress.com)
- [www.starfirecouncil.com](http://www.starfirecouncil.com)

Youtube videos:

- Beth Mount TED Talk: Beautiful Justice
- Tim Vogt: Business as "Unusual"
- Dave Pitonyak: Being Needed by the Pack

Books:

- 101 Ways to Make Friends
- Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community
- Intentional Teaming
- Flourish
- One Candle Power
- Pathfinders

Learning:

- Toronto Summer Institute Every July for over two decades
- Open Futures Learning (online learning)

Articles:

- SSR: Supporting Social Roles, John Obrien and
- Dignity of Risk
- Creating What I know about Community, Dave Wetherow

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*"We have an abundance of fun. What we crave is JOY"*

- Tom Kohler



## Resources

### Books:

101 Ways to Make Friends, Aaron Johannes and Susan Stanfield, Spectrum Press, Vancouver, BC  
Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community, Tom Kohler and Susan Earl, Inclusion Press, Toronto, ON  
Intentional Teaming, Beth Gallagher and Kirk Hinkleman, Inclusion Press, Toronto, ON  
Flourish, Karin Melberg Schwier, Copestone, Saskatoon, SK  
One Candle Power, Cathy Ludlum, Inclusion Press, Toronto, ON  
Pathfinders, John O'Brien and Beth Mount, Inclusion Press

### Articles:

SSR: Supporting Social Roles, John Obrien and [www.inclusion.com/ssr.pdf](http://www.inclusion.com/ssr.pdf)  
Dignity of Risk, [www.disabilityrightswa.org/advocacy-news/what-dignity-risk-means-me](http://www.disabilityrightswa.org/advocacy-news/what-dignity-risk-means-me)  
Creating What I know about Community, Dave and Faye Wetherow, [www.communityworks.info](http://www.communityworks.info)