

A Power Tool

~~ Moving forward by looking back ~~

A guideline and tool of self-examination for people providing supports to people with intellectual disabilities

This easy to use tool has been developed to provide agencies a means to enter into a process of discussion and self-examination. It is an opportunity for us to look at how we are doing and what we can do better when thinking about power and rights related issues. It has been developed by a group of peers who are presently working or involved in service agencies in Manitoba communities. What makes this exercise and ongoing discussion workable is that.....

We are all struggling together.

The process is a simple one. There is a question or series of questions for each of the agency “stakeholders” in five categories. Find your own agency’s unique opportunities for presenting these questions to the various groups. It may be that you take 15 minutes out of one staff or board meeting a month. It may be that you convene a special time together for parents to participate in the discussion.

You might decide to set aside some time each month for self-advocates and request that they help you in this endeavor. Perhaps you already have a newsletter or fact sheet that is distributed. It could become a regular part of this communication. Whatever method you use we hope that you, in fact **we challenge you**, from our communities to yours, to make time for this exercise that is so often put at the bottom of the list of ‘things to do’.

The questions are based on *5 Valued Experiences. We felt it was a good and solid foundation on which to begin examining what we do and how we do it. Below you will find a simplified definition of each ‘valued experience’ however, if reading this tweaks your interest, we will be pleased to help you access additional information. **There are also several, more comprehensive ways that you can evaluate or review your agency.** If you find you are interested in exploring some of these ways, we would be very pleased to refer you to the right people.

5 Valued Experiences:

1. **Sharing Ordinary Places and Activities** - Are the people you support spending time in ordinary places, doing ordinary things in their community – places where non disabled people frequent regularly?
2. **Growing in Relationships** - who comprises each individual’s network of relationships? Is it mainly paid staff or is there a number of individuals, family and friends who are part of, and spend time with that person ‘just because’ they care and want to? What is your agency doing to promote this?
3. **Experiencing Respect and Dignity** - do people you support contribute to their community in some unique way? How is he/she represented in Board Meetings, staff meetings, written documentation (logs, communication books), what words are used to describe him? Does he/she have a valued role to others not related to the agency? In what way does your agency address these issues?
4. **Making Choices** - who **DOES** have the power in each persons life that you support and how does your agency struggle with this issue on a day-to-day basis. Are you making choices for people or are you truly striving to assist people in living their own lives?
5. **Developing Competencies** - how does your agency ensure that your service (on all levels) builds on the skills and competencies of the people you support?

As you move through the exercise we suggest only a few hints:

- Only focus on **your** service that is within **your** control to change. Stay away from criticizing or judging other agencies that you have no ability to change. This will only diminish your energy for looking at your own stuff!
- If a question is **not** applicable, move on. Only focus on what is applicable to the services you provide. All of us can find plenty of good solid discussion within the framework of the 5 experiences.
- Some categories will require more time than others. Take that time to ensure that people are able to process the discussions.
- Some of these questions may be new issues for you to think about. This tool will challenge you to look at the 5 valued experiences and how they relate to the people we support within our services in Manitoba.
- Please **do not discuss funding** issues. That is an important discussion but at another time.

And last but not least.....

- **Please don't become discouraged.** We are all moving along this road. None of us are doing it 'right'...but by taking a serious look at what we do and how we do it, and then sharing the issues that arise with each other, we **will continue to do better.**

Valued Experience: **Making Choices**

Clarifying Information:

Choices are the decisions a person makes either on their own or with support. For example:

- Daily routine (such as what to wear, what and when to eat, when to go to bed, etc.)
- Routine scheduling (such as choice of recreation activities, choice of companions, etc.)
- Money matters (including large and small purchases, bill paying, and decisions about investments)
- Major choices including job and schooling, intimate personal relationships, etc.

Here is your first set of discussion questions:

Staff:

- What barriers do I create for people who are trying to making choices in their lives.
- What is one thing I can do different.

Board:

- What policies are in place that creates barriers to people making choices in their own lives.
- What action do we need to take?

Self-Advocates:

- What kind of choices do I make in my own life?
- I would like to decide for myself _____.

Families:

- What choices do my family member make in their own lives.
- How can these choices be expanded?

These questions may require more than one discussion. Take your time and allow for the process to take place. Each Valued Experience may take several discussions before people feel ready to move on to the next.

Valued Experience: **Sharing Ordinary Places and Activities**

Clarifying information

This category looks at the community settings the person uses regularly (daily weekly, occasionally). This does not include segregated services/activities such as Day Programs, Special Olympics, etc. This includes places in the community that people go (ie: grocery store, bank, public pool).

To help you create a base of information to answer the questions below, try doing this simple exercise:

- Identify a person
- Where does he/she live
- Where does he/she spend the day/evening/weekend
- How does he/she get around
- Which of these places does he/she go alone, as part of a group of 2 or 3, or as part of a larger group.

Here is your next set of discussion questions:

Staff:

- What can I do to assist this person to spend more time in ordinary places and doing ordinary activities

Board

- How can our agency assist this person(s) to increase their community presence and involvement.
- Do we need policies?
- What information do we need in order to address this issue in an informed way?

Self Advocates:

- Do the above exercise on yourself.
- As a group, create a list of all the places people go to spend time in their community.
- What other places would I like to go.
- How would I get there? Who would I go with?

Families:

- Where does my family member spend their time?
- What other things/places might interest them.

These questions may require more than one discussion. Take your time and allow for the process to take place. Each Valued Experience may take several discussions before people feel ready to move on.

Valued Experience: Respect & Dignity

Clarifying Information:

Respect is how we show our regard for each other. Respect indicates that we believe that someone is a valued person. Everything we do and say to people makes a statement about their importance.

Examples of this are:

- Listening and responding promptly to a person.
- Ringing a doorbell before entering someone's home, even if you work there.
- Asking permission to use a person's phone.
- Creating policies that reflect what people can do versus what people can't do.
- Being sensitive when providing personal care.

Here is your next set of discussion questions:

Staff:

- Identify a person you support.
- What are some concrete ways that you demonstrate your respect to that person.
- What are some concrete ways that you disrespect that person (ie: language/labels, etc.)
- How can you move towards a consistent, respectful approach.

Board:

- Give an example of disrespect.
- What policies ensure the respect of the individuals we support.
- How do we ensure accountability? (Ie: Do the Board members ever meet the staff of the residential program or day programs? Does the Board ever have the opportunity to spend time with the people we support? Does the Board expect the managers spend time in the homes when the people are at home?)

Self Advocates:

- Talk about a time I was treated unfairly/made to feel unhappy.
- What do I do if this happens to me again?

Families:

- In what ways are your family members respected and disrespected? (Ie: Labels, language, etc.)

These questions may require more than one discussion. Take your time and allow for the process to take place. Each Valued Experience may take several discussions before people feel ready to move on.

Valued Experience: **Growing in Relationships:**

Clarifying Information:

Who is included in each person's social network? Is it mainly paid staff or are there a number of people, family and friends who are part of, and spend time with that person "just because" they want to and just because they care?

Exercise: Choose one person who has a very small network and discuss who they spend time (ie: who do they go out with, to movies, dinners, holidays, etc).

Here is your next set of discussion questions:

Staff:

- What are the ways that I can facilitate this person to have more opportunities to meet people and make solid connections?
- How do I make sure that I don't get in the way of this happening?

Board:

- Do we as a board fully appreciate and understand the importance and the value of personal relationships for the people we support?
- Do we understand the difference between paid staff vs. friends?
- How does our Agency support that? (training, professional guidelines, supervision/feedback to staff, policies, etc.)

Self Advocates:

- What is a friend?
- Who are my friends?

Family:

- Who are the important people in our family members life?
- Are they paid or unpaid?

These questions may require more than one discussion. Take your time and allow for the process to take place. Each Valued Experience may take several discussions before people feel ready to move on.

Valued Experience: Developing Competencies

Clarifying Information:

As human beings, we all share the need and desire to grow, learn and contribute to our family, community and others. Historically, people with disabilities have not had these opportunities. This category will focus on developing a person's capacities, gifts and interests. It will also ask the question, "what contributions does the person make to other people's lives".

Try this exercise:

At your next Board or staff meeting, invite each person to identify two capacities and gifts of yourself, and the person on your left. Share this with others. Talk about this process. (Was it difficult or easier to come up with gifts about yourself or others?) Implement this at your regular meetings. Use this and other kinds of exercises to refine your own skills of identifying gifts and capabilities in yourself and others. This may make it easier to do this with people you support.

Here is your last set of discussion questions:

Staff:

- Choose one person you support.
- In what ways are you helping this person identify his capacities, gifts and interests?
- Talk about the concrete ways you are helping this person to identify and develop their competencies.

Board:

- Do we as a board recognize the importance of people developing their full competencies.
- What does our agency do to support this?

Self Advocates:

- What do I do well?
- What do I have to offer others?

Families:

- Are there gifts and interests that were part of your family members early life that have been lost over the years?
- What are your family members greatest competencies now?

These questions may require more than one discussion. Take your time and allow for the process to take place. Each Valued Experience may take several discussions before people feel ready to move on.

Please use this space to identify **what your agency will do next** to keep this discussion moving forward. Develop your own action plan, which might include starting at the first set of “power tool” questions and moving through the series again. Or....contact someone from another community who is moving through the same process to share experiences.

Our action plan:

Acknowledgements:

*The concept of the Five Valued Experiences was developed by John O’Brien and Connie Lyle. It is the foundation for “*Frameworks for Accomplishments*”, a workshop that helps people develop better services.

If you have any questions or need clarification on this tool, or wish to have a more formal discussion or dialogue with people in another community in Manitoba who are involved in the same process, please feel free to contact any one of the following people who participated in the development of this document:

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