

What are we  
learning about  
person centred  
organisations?



**Richard Williams and Helen Sanderson**

# Introduction

Are you passionate about the person or people you support having a great life? Are you concerned to see report after report highlight the huge gap between the quality of life of people with learning disabilities and those without? Are you frustrated that so much of the support we provide seems dangerously similar to that provided 5 or 10 years ago? Then read on.

As person centred planning has significantly developed over the last five years, there has been an increased recognition that organisations providing support also need to change. Indeed they can block people having the lives that they want, and frequently do. Whilst it can feel pretty difficult to support change in even one person's life it can appear overwhelmingly difficult to support or lead organisations to change.

We both work in provider organisations, and have spent the last two years thinking about what it really means to be a person centred organisation. We settled on 7 key elements. We are sure we haven't got it just right and as we learn over time some other elements will appear more important, others less. However the seven we have identified for now are based on lots of real life experience and supported by research and theory. The VPST provider checklist was based on this paper.

Here are the 7 key elements that we believe are the foundation for person centred organisations:

1. Visionary leadership
2. Shared values and beliefs
3. Outcomes for individuals
4. Community focus
5. Empowered and valued staff
6. Individual and organisational learning
7. Partnership

What we all require is the courage to take a step forward and do something new or different or stop doing even one thing that we know doesn't support someone to have the life they want. We do need some time to think, but above all we need courage to act. That is why we suggest three things to try at the end of each section and share stories from the organisations we are or have worked in (and some from Richard's recent study tour). If you are doing the 'things to try' already, brilliant. Email us and tell us what is working and not working and when we update this paper we will add your suggestions. If you are not yet doing any of them, commit to doing something new or different next week.

# 1. Visionary Leadership

“I am completely convinced that most organisations today lack the leadership they need. And the shortfall is large. I’m not talking about a deficit of 10% but of 200%, 400%, or more in positions up and down the hierarchy.”

John Kotter (On what leaders really do)

John Kotter wasn’t speaking specifically about the learning disability sector but the White Paper, Valuing People, picked up similar themes - that there is a significant shortfall in great leadership skills. Kotter suggests that this isn’t because of a lack of leadership potential but because such potential is not nurtured and developed. Many organisations have people in leadership positions because of technical know how, but without critical assessment of their leadership skills. Does this matter? Does technical knowledge - whatever that is - matter more than leadership skills? David Schwartz, a purchaser of support for people with learning disabilities, carried out some research into the impact of the funding he had made available on the lives of people with learning disabilities. He concluded:

“Leadership is everything”

If that is the case, or if leadership is really important, what should leaders be doing?

Leaders have 3 key responsibilities:

1. Establishing direction (vision and strategies for producing the change necessary to achieve the vision).
2. Aligning people to the direction (communicating vision in ways that influence people to make it happen).
3. Motivating and inspiring (energizing people to overcome barriers and obstacles to change).

(Kotter 1996)

Person centred organisations need leaders who are prepared to say that the organisation (region, department or service) that they lead is going to be person centred and to act on that basis. Often organisations and departments within organisations lack any clear sense of direction or purpose.

Those with positions of authority can be hesitant to 'nail their colours to the mast' and to declare publicly that they lead a person centred organisation. That requires a vision which is more than a statement of intent, which is a picture of a future where people really do have the lives that they want. It needs to be held in the heart of the leader.

Sometimes leaders will be able to articulate a vision but will fail to develop the detailed strategies necessary to ensure implementation. In such situations vision remains an ideal, a good intention, but with few steps taken to make it happen, staff frequently become disillusioned.

Visionary leaders need to understand how to make change happen, as part of implementing strategy, and have a broad sense of the changes needed to develop a person centred organisation.

There are likely to be major objectives around:

- recruiting, training and developing great staff
- major changes to existing services
- finances
- establishing and maintaining vision and values
- person centred thinking and planning
- systems, processes, policies and procedures
- organisational structure
- organisational culture

Frequently the strategy is not developed, or different elements are not integrated as they need to be. Many 'for profit' organisations outside of the 'care' sector will put a great deal of emphasis upon changing the culture of the organisation - all too frequently that isn't seen as part of our planning.

Second, once leaders have developed vision and strategy,

they then need to communicate it genuinely and continually to everyone involved. Vision is communicated much more by people's actions than by the official vision/mission statement. It is communicated in the multiple decisions that a leader must take every day. "Is it right to spend more time on certain paperwork than with people supported? (Sometimes it will be.) If there is a spare £100, £5,000 or £100,000 at the end of the year how will that money be spent? Do staff being appointing bring the right values, beliefs, attitudes and integrity to develop a person centred organisation?" It is communicated in the time they spend with people they support. It is communicated in the way they treat and relate to staff.

Third, leaders need to motivate staff to overcome the obstacles and challenges that achieving the vision and implementing the strategy require. People don't like change, we don't want to be pushed outside of our comfort zone - so why bother? Only if we have a compelling long term vision of the future will staff forego the short term sacrifice.

What can you see in a visionary leader? They are:

- great listeners and enablers
- people who relate well to people they support, and have great values
- courageous
- people who can plan the key elements of a change process
- people who can motivate others
- full of integrity
- pro-active
- people who understand how good organisations work.

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One newly appointed chief executive interviewed 50% of her staff from all levels of seniority to find out what they thought of the organisation and what they felt needed to be done. Staff were very honest, indeed it was a form of therapy for them, and they were able to tell her virtually every single issue that needed to be addressed. When the new strategy was launched she was able to show how that reflected what they had said. It was also highly symbolic - a WOW moment as staff felt they had been listened to and responded to for the first time.

Another director never closes the door to his office unless someone asks to meet him privately. Whilst this no doubt creates hassles and interruptions at times it gave an overwhelming sense of accessibility, openness, approachability and 'we're in this together'.

Presence is vital for the leader. If they are to encourage and motivate staff to follow the direction set it will not be achieved by memo but by spending time with people. Staff need to be able to look the leader in the eye and decide if s/he has integrity and is genuine.

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# How to spot a person centred leader

## Support workers

You might think that you have no leadership role within your job but that is very rarely true. A leader is anyone who helps to define and change the ways that things are done. A support worker demonstrates leadership when she suggests that it would be much more person centred to support Nazeem to choose his own clothes rather than staff members shopping independently for him. A support worker demonstrates leadership when they assert that something really can be achieved that others are doubtful about, and swing the team's momentum towards "we can do it". Many writers on change describe the importance of the 'champions of change' - this is another way of describing leaders.

## How are you doing?

5 areas to think about:

1. Are there things that you know can be done in a more person centred way but which you haven't spoken up about?
2. Are there others you could encourage to do the same?
3. Are there staff who don't get a lot of support from managers whom you could encourage?
4. Is there a member of the team who might be more receptive to help to change coming from you than the manager?
5. Could you be sticking your neck out to challenge poor practice?



## Team leaders

The role of the team leader is to:

- Work with the team to deliver what is important to the people they support and what they want for the future
- Work with the team to fulfil the purpose and strategy of the organisation
- Develop the team to its full potential, through coaching, knowing what support team members need and providing this, and using team member's strengths and gifts to achieve the teams purpose
- Represent the team and what they are learning to the rest of the organisation

### **How are you doing?**

Do you:

- See yourself as a coach who brings out the best in people and creates an environment where team members can identify and solve problems on their own, delegating real power and responsibility?
- Demonstrate and articulate the values of the organisation?
- Act as spokesperson, idea generator and a guide where necessary?
- Keep relationships constructive?
- Keep team members informed?
- Show the team how and where to get information for decisions?
- Help the team use the consensus approach to decision making?
- Assess the team's abilities with them and find ways to use untapped potential?

- Ensure that team members get coaching and training?
- Recognise and celebrate the team's achievements?
- Treat team members with respect while acknowledging different opinions, motivations and work styles?
- Help teams get unstuck when differences lead to conflict without resorting to 'power over'?
- See the team in action in order to be able to give people feedback on their performance?
- Review the progress of person centred plans and the team member's performance on a regular basis, using this as an opportunity for joint problem solving and setting further goals related to staff performance and personal development?
- Ensure that the team complies with funding requirements and, where these seem less than relevant to people's sense of what matters in their work, help people with this frustration?
- Ensure that there are regular team meetings and away days and other forums for sharing and celebrating achievements and for learning from other people's experiences?
- Find ways of communicating the organisational barriers to people with the power to change things?
- Represent the team to senior managers?
- Represent the rest of the organisation and senior managers to the team - sharing information?
- Provide the team with a framework for thinking through difficult situations in terms of the values of the organisation.

Ask the team:

- Do you know what is expected of you at work?
- Do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?
- Do you get recognition and praise every week?
- Do you feel like I care about you as a person and care about your development?
- Do your opinions count?
- Have you had opportunities to learn and grow in the last year?

“If she (your manager) sets clear expectations, knows you, trusts you, and invests in you, then you can forgive the company its lack of profit sharing program...It is better to work for a great manager in an old fashioned company than for a terrible manager in a company offering enlightened, employee-focused culture.”

These questions are taken directly from a book called ‘First Break All the Rules’. The book is based on research that says that the manager is key in whether staff stay or not, and this is much more important than other employee-focused initiatives.

A staff member’s relationship with her manager will determine how long she stays and how productive she is while she is there.

Ask you team these questions and see what the answers tell you - these are your opportunities for development.

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Use the person centred thinking skill called the ‘doughnut’. Based on Charles Handy’s work, Michael Smull developed an exercise to help staff reflect on their core responsibilities and where they can use creativity and judgement. The doughnut has three concentric circles. The first, inner circle, is identified as ‘core responsibilities’ the second outer circle as ‘requiring creativity and judgement’ and the third outer circle as ‘not our paid responsibility’. Using the doughnut exercise involves teams

working out together (ideally with the person themselves) which aspects from the individual's person centred plan goes into which circle. This determines the roles of the staff team in supporting the person.

- 2 Do a 'purpose poster' with the team, to graphically represent what the team sees as their purpose. This one of the exercises for developing person centred teams. To learn more about this, and see examples of purpose posters, go to [www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk)
- 3 Begin team meetings with a round of what is going well, and end meetings with a round of what people have appreciated about their time together in the meeting. For more information about this and how you can make your meetings more person centred see 'Positive and Productive Meetings' on [www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk).

## Provider senior managers or board members

The role of senior managers or board members is to:

- Translate the values into a vision
- Develop strategy to put the vision into practice
- Oversee and monitor the delivery of the strategy throughout the organisation
- Represent the organisation to its commissioners and the community
- Recruit, mentor, appreciate and monitor team leaders, and provide a development programme for them
- Provide structured opportunities to reflect and act on what is being learned, celebrate success, and problem solve

### **How are you doing?**

- Is there a vision or mission for the organisation?
- How were the stakeholders given an opportunity to contribute to the development of the vision?
- How do you know how close you are to achieving the mission statement or vision?
- Do you know whether people's lives are getting better or not?
- Does the strategic plan reflect the views of the stakeholders?
- Is it specific, measurable, achievable, and with assigned responsibilities within a given time-frame?
- Does it specify how much time each level of staff should spend directly with people who use the service, including the most senior managers?
- Is there a training and development plan for team leaders?
- Does each team leader have a regular mentoring session that involves feedback on their performance and problem solving?
- How are you encouraging the participation of people from the community within the organisation?
- How are you developing your relationships with stakeholders? Do you know how they want to be consulted on issues?
- How are you listening to the views of people who use the service, their families and carers?
- How do you reflect on what is going well and badly within the organisation?
- How do you know the values are alive within the organisation?
- How are our values reflected in our budgets, job descriptions, supervision and training?

- Are you in direct contact with at least one person who uses the services of the organisation to assist looking at the impact decisions make on people's lives and what decisions need to be made?

### **3 ideas to try**

- 1 Spending a week each year going 'back to the shop floor' and working as a support worker (in a way that makes sense to the person supported), and then presenting a report to the whole organisation about what you have found and anything in the organisation that needs to change.
- 2 Getting together a representational group of staff every few months and asking them: Is there anything that is important that you think I may not be aware of? If you were in my position what would you be doing differently? Do the same with a group of self advocates, and parents and carers.
- 3 Have a family 'mentor' who you see regularly to keep you focused on what matters to families and meet regularly with self advocacy groups just to listen, and to report back on what you are doing to ensure that people have more of what is important to them. See them as your 'steering group'.

## 2. Shared values and beliefs

'Effective organisations have clear philosophies and values that are known throughout the organisation, and that shape everything that the organisation does. This culture is passed on to new workers in a variety of ways and is reinforced through training, support and supervision, and the very way everyone in the organisation talks, writes and acts.'

Peter Kinsella

In the first decade of the 21st century we are working in what feels like an increasing values void - SRV and the 5 Accomplishments (or is that 7?) appear to have had their day and there appears a virtually automatic assumption that people who work in services will carry the right values. Unfortunately that is not the case, and staff often struggle to articulate the values of the organisation they work for.

We need to re-establish clear values for our work to ensure that everyone who works for, and with, our organisations knows exactly what our values are.

Does everyone recruited to the organisation have these values? Does the recruitment and selection process focus on these? Does the induction programme develop what might well be very raw values and beliefs into deeper perspectives which will inform and direct the work each staff member does every day and every hour of every day? Does ongoing training, mentoring, and support to staff further develop the outworking of these values? Does supervision help staff to work through issues in implementing the values, and support them to push the boundaries of what they mean in supporting Andy, or Jan, or Ashok? Does the organisation's budgets - where it focuses its expenditure - reflect the values of the organisation? Does decision-making at every level constantly come back to the values that are held by the organisation?

So organisations need to have clear values, which permeate (and sometimes explode) into every aspect of the organisation.

But who says these are the organisation's values? A lot of leaders would have you believe it comes from an

'Organisational Values' statement and from a big launch speech, but the acid test is in the day to day actions and decisions of the most senior managers/leaders in an organisation. Managers will reinforce or destroy stated values by what they do each day in work.





We believe that we operate at our peak as an organisation by regularly reflecting upon and talking about action that really matters and makes a difference. This keeps everyone's energy and creativity focused on getting better lives for people. Over the last two years we have been developing a shared statement of purpose, looking at what this tells us is important to us as an organisation, and using this to measure what is working and not working about what we do. We are also using it to agree promises or standards for the organisation, and to identify where staff can use their creativity and judgment.

The process we used enabled all teams, the two self advocate forums and the two relative forums to think deeply about what the organization stands for and what it is trying to achieve. This work began with a steering group, made up of a cross section of people who worked out thoughtful questions to help everyone to think about what is important to us in relation to the people we support, staff, the community and how we work as a company. The group produced information to keep everybody updated in the process and organised training for all the team leaders to ensure that they were equipped to facilitate the full participation of the team. A large scale gathering pulled this work together. Almost half of the organisation, self-advocates, and some commissioners attended.

This resulted in a statement of purpose and what is important to us in the organisation that reflected contributions of the many people

involved rather than mysteriously appearing from on high!

One organisation in Vermont has its offices in an old ranch type house. The building still feels much more like a home than an office. Indeed you would struggle to spot the office furniture around the building. The Director's office looked like the lounge of someone's home. The whole ambience oozed of the importance of relationships, community and ordinary life. Was that why everyone seemed so relaxed - especially people supported and family members when they met there for meetings?



# Ideas to try

## Support workers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 If you had to describe the work that you do in one word what would that be? Carer? Enabler? Supporter? Advocate? What are the differences between the roles, for example, how might the role of a carer differ from that of an enabler? A carer might describe himself as someone who 'looks after' someone, whereas an enabler might describe her role as 'supporting someone to find their own place in the community'. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
- 2 What does the way you act and what you choose reveal about what you value? As well as thinking about the words that best describe how you see your role, consider how you spend your time and which aspects of your work give you the greatest pleasure. Remember the old adage 'Actions speak louder than words.' The way you act and what you choose may be more accurate revelations of what you believe and value than what you say you value. That is why a focus on actual outcomes for people supported is so important. Think about your experiences at work. List your top 20 work experiences or activities. For each one, take a minute to close your eyes and remember the last time that you had that experience. Then rate it out of 10, with 1 for a pleasant activity or experience, and 10 for those that give you a real buzz or the most satisfaction. Then, for the ones with the highest rating, ask yourself what it is about it that get so much satisfaction from. What does this tell you about what is important to you about your work, and what beliefs you may have that underpin this?

How can you get a better 'fit' in your work with what you value?

- 3 Writing your own epitaph. An idea from Stephen Covey to find out what you value at work, is to think about what you would like a work colleague, someone who you support, and your manager to say about you at your funeral. Would you want to be described as someone who was creative and gifted, or someone who worked tirelessly for people's rights; someone who challenged other peoples thinking, or someone who was always there to listen to people? How you would like to be seen and remembered, will give you clues about what you believe is important, and what you value. Are you currently working in an environment and in a way that reflects these values? Write down one or two things you would change, plan and do it.

## Managers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Praise and trouble. Michael Smull suggests that one way to learn about what organisation's value is to ask what people get praised for and what they get into trouble for. He suggests that you ask a team of people to think about what they got praised for, and in trouble for, over the last two weeks. He defines 'in trouble' as anything your manager said or did that would make you think that she wanted you to do less of that behaviour. When you then consider the two lists, it will tell you what your manager values. Sometimes organisations say that they value creativity and developing relationships above everything else, yet what they reward employees for most is compliance with paperwork. What does this exercise tell you about the beliefs underpinning your organisation?

2 You could ask employees a number of 'if the organisations was a...' questions, for example,

If the organisation was an animal, what would it be and why?

If the organisation was a vehicle, what would it be and why?

If the organisation was a building, what would it be and why?

For example, you might suggest the organisation was an old Volkswagen Beetle - lots of noise, but out of date and getting nowhere very fast. Alternatively you might suggest a Golf GTI - a classic, that has gradually developed over time without losing its distinctiveness and with lots of power/capacity to get where it needs to go.

3 Defining mission and vision. One way to identify an organisation mission is to imagine what the organisation would look like, what it would feel like to work as part of it, what people would say about it, and what it would achieve if it were hugely successful. Other ways of identifying mission are to ask people to think about someone that they know who uses the service. If the organisation was amazingly successful, what would the person's life look like and what would the contribution of the organisation have been to that?

## 3. Outcomes for individuals

Person centred organisations, by definition, need to be focused on the people they support, and not simply on their 'care' or support needs but on their aspirations and wishes. This provides us with huge challenges - comparable to moving back from mass car production to bespoke car production where every car is made to order. We have registered care homes - mass produced in the 80s and 90s and now need to tailor our support to individual aspirations and hopes. Now, innovative organisations are exploring people having their own Individual Service Funds which guarantee that the money they are entitled to is only spent on their service. This is not easy and will not happen overnight but person centred organisations should show some clear intent and focus upon achieving this.

Traditionally our focus has been upon inputs and outputs - how many staff hours have been provided, the size of rooms, the fabric of building, good nutrition etc. - all elements of good support, but failing to focus on the primary objective of supporting someone to achieve in their life what they want. I may jump on a plane to watch an Ireland rugby international in Dublin. The service on the plane might be fantastic, I might have a great meal on the way over, the stewards might be really helpful and kind, I might get an upgrade to give me more leg space, and I might even get it at a bargain price - but if the plane takes me to Cardiff instead of Dublin, and I miss the match it has failed to meet my wishes and aspirations. Valuing People clearly tells us that despite fantastic effort, huge amounts of money and lots of dedication and commitment many people with learning disabilities still have very poor lives - with few of the outcomes that they want. Our organisations continue to care for, rather than listen and enable.

So what should we see in a person centred organisation?

The first sign must surely be listening to people supported to find out what they want from their lives and then planning and action to support them to achieve this. Person centred planning should be really helpful in doing that - but will require staff with the right values and skills for it to succeed. Chat to support staff and first line managers to see how much the aspirations and desires of the people they support are uppermost in their minds, and check out what they are doing to achieve these. Crucially is there an action plan focused on people's aspirations? Do the goals staff have and their training needs reflect the aspirations of the person they support?

Do manager and senior manager objectives focus on removing the organisational objectives to individuals achieving what they want? For example if staff aren't great at listening is there investment in training in listening skills? If team leaders aren't great at planning are they supported to learn? If existing risk protocols prevent someone from doing something they really want to, are senior managers working to remove such barriers? If staff are overwhelmed by bureaucracy, so that they spend too little time with people they support, are senior managers working to reduce the paperwork? If people supported keep losing staff they have built important relationships with, is personnel working to improve staff retention and is finance working to free up money to support them to stay, and is the Chief Executive creating an organisation people want to be part of and stay with? (It's back to the compelling vision).

When you look at how time is spent in the organisation are priorities driven by Senior Manager Teams or the aspirations of people supported? If in doubt ask the question "How will achieving/doing this assist the people to achieve their aspirations?"

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## Some flying stories

Sometimes we can only hear what we believe might be possible within the boundaries of our imaginations. One team leader, after being challenged at a values workshop, opened his mind to the possibility of the unthinkable. Why shouldn't Andy who had lived for nearly 40 years in a special hospital fly? Because he knew in his heart of hearts that was what Andy wanted to do. So Andy flew to Majorca for his 60th birthday, his first holiday overseas, after 40 years in secure settings. We cannot let people's opportunities be limited by our thinking and artificial boundary settings.

Gary wanted to have a holiday overseas in the sun, but staff assured the new team leader that wasn't possible because of his hole in his heart, which prevented him flying. The team leader checked out with Gary if he really wanted to go overseas and Gary confirmed that was the case. So Gary and the team leader made an appointment at the local hospital. When the results came back Gary did have a hole in his heart, but flying carried no more risk than any other activity. Gary aged 45 enjoyed his first ever holiday overseas in 2003 and had a fantastic time.

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# Ideas to try

## Support workers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Work out what it would take for everyone you support to have information about what is important to the person, what support they want, and what they want for the future...and act on this. This can be the beginning of a person centred plan.
- 2 See this description of what is important to the person and what is important for them, as your job description and use this to evaluate how well you do your work.
- 3 Compare your life with that of the person/people you support? What might they want to do that has never been considered?

## Managers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Think about how you can check whether the service you provide is enabling people to achieve what they want out of life. Work with people, their family, and the staff who support them to discover what is working and not working from different perspectives, and act on what you learn.
- 2 Set up Action Learning Sets (or another type of problem solving group) for person centred planning facilitators and first line managers (separately). The feedback and issues raised from these will tell you what is stopping people getting what they want out of life. Act on what you can act on, and ensure that other issues are addresses by the person centred planning implementation group.

3 Spend time with people supported. Would you be satisfied with what you see if your son or daughter, brother or sister, mum or dad was being supported? What are the blocks and obstacles? Find a way of removing just one of those next week.

## 4. Community focus

Person centred organisations seek to play a part in the communities in which they work. They don't seek to work in splendid isolation.

“Fog in the English Channel.  
Europe isolated.”  
The Times 1890

There is a rich experience for people supported, for staff and for communities if we seek purposefully to work together. Community provides an opportunity to people supported to contribute to their local communities, and to develop relationships as part of that, and to be valued as a consequence of both. This is probably the area where even the best organisations have struggled but there are things that we can do to improve things:

1. Employ staff from the area in which they are going to work - they will bring a whole bunch of local relationships with them, and these are vital in providing opportunities to work or contribute for people with disabilities. Cold calling is very different from approaching your local landlord to see if there's a few hours work going lunch times or whenever. Does your recruitment check out people's connectedness?
2. Encourage staff to use their personal networks. Many employers are very nervous of this because of the vulnerability of people with disabilities in these situations. They do require checking out and they do need to be based on the bedrock of great staff values. That said many of us build relationships and community through introductions from others - it is just the way that things happen - and we need to break down the artificial 'professional' barrier. We are all people.
3. Community mapping to find out what's out there - remember that for many of us our communities can

be 30 minutes away at the local sports centre, bell-ringing club, church, pub etc. We probably need to get away from the idea of the walking distance community. Remember that community is more than an A-Z of activity groups, it is about relationships.

4. Many people we support have never experienced many of the aspects of community life, and therefore they might never ask for them in their person centred plans. Providing activities don't obviously clash with what you know about someone then it is a proper role of staff to help people experience new things - they don't need to wait for it to be an active choice of the person they support.
5. Community and relationships are two ways things, with responsibilities as a key part of them. Dave Hingsburger tells the story of returning to work after a prolonged period of illness, and the first person he spoke to with a learning disability was solely interested in himself. He highlighted from this story the dangers of us not educating people we support around the responsibilities of relationship.
6. Get your risk management systems sorted so that they do not impede but facilitate people achieving the outcomes they aspire to.

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Phil loved watching cars and lorries, planes and anything that was mechanical and moved. That interest had got him into a fair bit of trouble in the past, and there was some considerable debate about whether his new home should be in a quiet area away from traffic or front on to a busy road. The latter option prevailed. But Phil discovered that a call on his phone and he could have all the excitement of emergency services, sirens and flashing lights outside his house in no time. He was soon facing a possible court case if the emergency services applied their official policy for hoax callers. That was when a support worker mentioned that his friend worked in the local fire station. A couple of calls and arrangements were made for this friend to pop by (with fire engine) to see Phil. And so the deal was struck - no hoax calls and the fire officer would arrange a visit every couple of months to the fire station. Connections make things happen.

One agency simply doesn't advertise in any papers for staff. They use their staff, and involved families to spread the word and to make connections when staff are needed. The organisation has very low turnover and they get their appointments 'right' consistently.

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# Ideas to try

## Support workers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Reflect on your own relationships and connections and think about how far you are prepared to share these with the people you support.
- 2 With the person you support, map out all the places that the person goes to, and the people that she knows. Work out together how you can extend the places that the person goes to, in a way that maximises opportunities for relationships. For more information see *Friendship and Community* (Kennedy, Sanderson and Wilson, 2003) or a paper from this book on [www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk).
- 3 Read the local free press and see what associations or groups there are that are working to improve the local community. Think about, with the people you support, what contributions people could make and whether they would like to join any of these groups, or find another way to contribute.

## Managers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Explore ways of recruiting staff with strong neighbourhood connections - think how this changes how you find people (e.g. adverts in post office windows) and how you select them (asking about involvement in community activities). What richness of community involvement and engagement will new staff bring to their work?
- 2 Support staff (with time as well as encouragement) to participate in generic local associations of

organisations such as 'Heaton Moor in Bloom', as well as specialist local and national groupings. How well do you know the staff who work for you? Use getting to know you exercises to uncover the rich life experiences and interests of staff members. . For more information see Friendship and Community (Kennedy, Sanderson and Wilson, 2003) or a paper from this book on [www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk).

- 3 Review policies and procedures that may give people the conscious or unconscious message that sharing your connections with people you support is discouraged. Change these messages to demonstrate that this is positively encouraged.

# 5. Empowered and valued staff

Most organisations would now espouse a set of beliefs around empowering people with learning disabilities to do what they want to do with their lives. If you ask senior managers their beliefs around staff and how they are managed or supported they sometimes struggle to articulate a perspective. Where they are able to, there is frequently a gap between the rhetoric and practice.

Person centred organisations should have a clear view of how they lead and manage staff. That should be that they:

1. Recruit great staff with great values.
2. Train these staff giving them real clarity around their roles.
3. Empower staff to get on and do that role.
4. Support staff through supervision and coaching as staff decide what to do on a day to day basis.
5. Encourage, praise and reward staff for their achievements.
6. Act to support staff more directly where they are struggling or inexperienced.
7. Develop an organisational culture where staff feel valued and part of the organisation (including decision making).

The rationale for such an approach is threefold:

1. Staff thrive on making a difference and being recognised for it (Herzberg). Yet we often run our organisations on a belief that staff are fundamentally lazy, always trying to 'swing the lead' and want to do as little as possible.



2. It is impossible to run a person centred organisation on a command and control basis - a Chief Executive can have no idea of the daily wishes of maybe 100 people supported in their organisation. The people who are most likely to know what people want (apart from the people themselves) will be those closest to them. So let them get on with it.
3. If you operates on a command and control culture with staff, but expect staff to then enable and empower the people they support, staff are caught working to two different cultures and this won't work.

As part of this approach it is vital that the first two of the seven foundations of person centred organisation are put in place first. If staff have the wrong values for the work, or if they are unclear about their roles, then empowering them becomes dangerous. That is why during the first six months of employment new staff should be more directly managed.

This approach requires that senior staff let go and they need to trust and respect the staff they have working for them. Their role becomes much more of a coach and developer of staff rather than overseer, and it takes time and sometimes training and mentoring for managers to adjust to that role.

The manager/leader develops three key roles:

- To set broad direction.
- To nurture and develop staff.
- To free up support staff to get on and do what the people they support want.

Participatory management is a further aspect of empowering and valuing staff. Staff will not only want to be involved in and often lead the planning around supporting someone well, but will also want to make a contribution into the life of the organisation they are working for. Participatory management

enables this - and focuses on ensuring that staff have a real opportunity to influence the decision making of the organisation, first because they know the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation as well as a managers, and second because their sense of ownership of the organisation is vital to them making some of the personal sacrifices necessary to achieve a new vision.

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One organisation got fifteen staff (managers, support workers and personnel, admin and finance staff) and asked them to identify things that they felt they ought to do or not do if they were to be person centred. Their leader then asked them to identify the things that they felt they couldn't do because they were too risky (or maybe perceived to be too risky, or culturally unacceptable). They were then asked to reconsider one thing at the boundary between okay to do and unacceptable, and to go and do it (with thoughtful planning). With the Chief Executive in the room they were encouraged (in fact told) to take greater risks and to trust their own judgement. They came back a month later with a host of great stories of people achieving new things in their lives, of bureaucracy binned and a huge helping of increased motivation. It was interesting for the Chief Executive to comment that he thought the permission to make the decisions the staff had eventually taken had always been there. Indeed there was nothing written down to say they couldn't but there was an overwhelming perception that that was the case.

In another organisation each of the network managers has three delegated budgets to enhance local decision-making. The 'appreciation and recognition' budget promotes individual staff members on teams being acknowledged for 'going the extra mile' and for exceptional practice. Cards, small gifts or meals out ensure that there are many 'winners' and that the culture of appreciation evolves. An 'innovation budget'

encourages local ways of solving local challenges and develops new ways of working. This year one leader is using it to promote and fund 'peer mentoring' connected to a range of ideas/needs relevant to the current and future needs of the network e.g. making connections in the community, recognizing how experienced staff can invest in the early development of new staff, total communication etc. Using the innovation budget in this way not only recognizes the often overlooked skills of experienced staff but also reinforces the importance of creating a sense of local identity by enabling good ideas to be readily put into practice. The network managers also have a 'staff development budget' that supplements an extensive in house and external training program to ensure teams can respond to what their staff teams need and keep a local focus.

Much time can be spent in meetings, with participants often critical of the meeting and what it achieves. In one organisation 'Positive and Productive meetings' have been introduced to create wider ownership of the meeting with all participants having a role to play (agenda, Chair, hospitality, timekeeper etc.), so that it does not all fall on the Chair. By using rounds and 'timed talk' everyone has equal opportunities and space to contribute and meetings are not dominated by those confident enough to force their way into discussions. An opening round that has participants hear some good news helps balance a view of reality that often focuses on problems.



# Ideas to try

## Support workers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Think with your colleagues about what support each of you needs. You could do your own person centred plan, and use this to share what you need 'to be successfully supported'.
- 2 Appreciate each other! Find opportunities to genuinely tell people what you like and admire about them (without making either of you squirm!)
- 3 Take time to listen and share with a colleague about your work. You could do this through simply buddying up, or by using approaches such as thinking partnerships (for more information see information by Nancy Kline on [www.TimetoThink.com](http://www.TimetoThink.com)) or co-counselling.

## Managers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Establish development group or 'cross functional problem solving teams'. These are short term teams established just to look at one particular problem, issue or opportunity and exist for the time taken to resolve or achieve that. They again include all sections of the organisation (and stakeholders where appropriate) and all seniorities and are given a brief describing the problem, the scope for change and a realistic deadline.
- 2 Invest in mentoring - spending time with staff to help them to learn and to grow, not to give a set of actions which they should complete. Consider other people to mentor staff who may be from other parts

of the organisations, swaps with other organisation, or family members.

- 3 Consider what it would take to devolve power as close to the person supported as possible. This means that any decision that can be made effectively by the individual himself or herself or by the support workers, should be made this way. Requirements for uniformity amongst teams need to be carefully considered as teams need to be designed around people who receive that team's services

# 6. Individual and organisational learning

The context in which we are working is constantly changing. The White Paper, Supporting People, new European directives and legislation, development in our understanding of how to support people all create pressures to which we need to respond. Day by day we do all sorts of things; some which work and some which don't. The challenge for each of us individually, in our teams and organisationally is to learn from our experiences and adjust to changing circumstances to ensure that services become better and better.

What stops us from learning? Sometimes we are just too busy to learn - people mentally register something they've learnt but it disappears amidst the day-to-day pressures of life. Sometimes people simply don't think things through and so a mistake made or something which worked really well is forgotten. Sometimes learning doesn't happen because of a blame culture - because people feel unable to 'own-up' to mistakes, the learning that might have resulted is buried and instead people cover their tracks.

## How can we ensure learning?

A first step is to recruit staff who are keen to learn. Beware of people who suggest that they have all the answers. Look for staff who are asking, listening, questioning, reflecting, and keen to have training.

Second ensure the culture of the organisation encourages learning - a 'learning culture rather than a blame culture'. Do managers and directors talk openly about their mistakes and the learning that comes from it? Do managers ensure that they support staff through difficulties and problems, in a constructive and positive manner? Is a mistake seen as a learning opportunity?

Third is learning built systematically into the working of the organisation? Are training events followed up upon in support and supervision to capture what staff might do differently as a result of the course? Are incident forms reviewed at staff meetings? Is learning from last time a standing item at each team's meeting?



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A person centred planning implementation group used a process of content analysis to look at what people's plans were telling them about the organisation. They asked for 12 anonymous 'working' and 'not working' in peoples lives as described in their plans. For each plan the person centred planning coordinator randomly chose two items from each individual's lists of what was working, and two from the list of what was not working, and wrote these on separate cards. At the meeting, the implementation group clustered and themed the cards. They acknowledged what was working from people's lives, and the difference that person centred planning was making for people. They then agreed actions to begin to address what was not working for people and used this to identify organisational changes that were needed.

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# Ideas to try

## Support workers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Think about how you learn best. Is it from reading, talking to people, seeing things for yourself, or going on courses? Work out the best way for you to continue to learn and develop and share this with your manager.
- 2 Use the 'learning log' to keep learning about the support that you are providing, and what to keep the same and what to do differently (to see an example go to [www.helensandersonasscoaites.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonasscoaites.co.uk)).
- 3 Look at different person centred tools or approaches, that can help you learn more about the person you support, for example, communication charts from Essential Lifestyle Planning, community presence maps from Personal Futures Planning, personal portfolios. Talk to the person you support about whether they would be interested in using any of these so that you can learn about each other more.

## Managers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Have regular times for reflection and planning taking time to reflect and celebrate what is working well, creatively problem solve what needs changing; and try new ways to look at and do things as a whole service (this is often called the learning cycle).
- 2 Use incident forms differently. Incidents inevitably occur in our services - but do we learn from them?

Do we review them to ensure that a response is worked out should the situation arise again or, even better, to stop the situation arising again. Ask what the form tells you about what is working and not working from different people's perspectives.

- 3 Meet with a person and their family each month and ask them how life is for them, and what the service can learn from their experiences. Ask them what is working and not working in their life, and think about what changes you can make together.

# 7. Partnership

People with learning disabilities, their families, staff and commissioners all have important contributions to make to the development of person centred organisations. Change can rarely be brought about in isolation and will generally be the weaker for absence of contributions from other stakeholders. There is sometimes reticence to work in partnership because change makers are concerned that purchasers are only interested in saving money, that parents are going to be opposed to change and more independence for their son or daughter, or that it takes too long to truly involve people with learning disabilities. Some of this is fed from dangerous stereotypes, some from bad experiences in the past, and sometimes from existing difficult relationships. Effective long-term change to person centred organisations requires partnership working, and cannot be sustained in the long-term without it.

That means a commitment to working through difficulties and differences together. It doesn't mean compromise (half of what each party wants), it doesn't mean working to the lowest common denominator (what everyone can agree to) but it does mean continually talking to and listening to each other to try to understand each others perspectives and living with tensions between these.

## How can partnership work?

Families often have insights into operations at a micro level that staff need to support people well. They need to have confidence in staff to trust their relative will be well supported in more independent situations. Families can be powerful advocates for change with purchasers when they appear reticent. They can also provide unique insights into provider agencies from the outside in.

Purchasers can bring a wealth of knowledge of what has worked in other provider agencies. They can provide finances for change or enable money to be redirected according to person centred priorities. Purchasers will often have good links with housing providers and other organisations (and sometimes funders) who can help make change happen.

People with learning disabilities must have the opportunity to provide the spec for the service they want, and the detail of the outcomes they want to see. They can also contribute to how the organisation should develop - there may be common themes from what people supported say is working or not working for them individually which should inform major organisational objectives e.g. my staff don't spend enough time with me to help me do what I want to do; meeting possible support staff over a buffet lunch really helped me to decide who I liked and didn't like etc.

Partnership is often really under-developed in our work. It is a journey which we are only just beginning and without too much sense of what the journey will be like. Some will feel it's a journey they don't need to make, or isn't worth making. There is a danger for providers that no matter how difficult the journey may be, if they don't pursue it, they will be left out in the cold as some partners, now viewed as junior partners, become much more powerful. Their views and perspectives will make provider agencies all the more person centred now.

In Vermont family members have a right to act as advocate for their relative, and most major decisions which can't be taken by the person alone require the agreement of the advocate. This has created a very different mindset from many relationships between 'professionals' and families in the UK. Meetings are less adversarial. Families are included more. Families also have a more open and tougher two way conversation with all professionals.

A large provider worked with their commissioner to de-register all its residential care homes and at the same time establish a process for reviewing each person's individual situation. Fifteen residential care homes were de-registered over a two year period. This enabled people to have their own tendencies, increased staffing levels to provide additional opportunities and gave people a higher level of disposable income. At the same time individual groups were set up around particular individuals to work out together what people really want in their lives. These groups included the individual, relatives, social worker and manager and a key worker. In the last three and a half years, seventeen people (just over 25%), moved on to supported living opportunities of their choice - the great majority at no extra cost and creative reuse of existing resources.

# Ideas to try

## Support workers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Imagine yourself in the shoes of the families you work with. Does this give a different perspective on how or why family members say or do the things they do?
- 2 Get to know families - invest time with them and their relative whom you support, so that you get to know them as people. It is about relationships between everyone involved. Decide on some actions that you can take to improve your relationship with the family of someone you support.
- 3 Ask a family with whom you work, what is working and not working from their perspective about the work that you do. This is a brave thing to ask, but could give you opportunities to improve what you do, as well as build your relationship with them (as long as you act on the discussion!)

## Managers

### 3 ideas to try

- 1 Work out what it will take for the management structure of the organisation to include people supported, families and local people.
- 2 Get family representation on the Board. They will have lots to contribute and helpfully remove a whole lot of professional speak and clutter from agendas.
- 3 Consider family members for interview panels, as trainers for staff teams and as sources of lots and lots of really useful information.

# Conclusion

We are in the middle of significant changes for provider organisations, as we work out the implications of person centred planning and self directed support in every area of our work. We both work in organisations trying to embrace these changes. One (where Helen works) is a large provider moving from traditional services such as group homes, to providing self directed support, and the other (where Richard works) is a smaller 'purpose built' organisation that is also undergoing change. We are passionate about making the changes that we have described in this paper. We are not there yet, so see us as fellow travellers. We invite you to share your learning and stories with us. We hope to regularly update this paper to reflect what we are learning together, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Richard Williams

Contact Richard at

Helen Sanderson

Contact Helen on [Helen@helensandersonassociates.co.uk](mailto:Helen@helensandersonassociates.co.uk)