A Toolkit for Building Friendships Between People With and Without Disabilities
We can’t overestimate how important it is to support people in developing friendships.

In this Toolkit we’ll share some strategies that can help make these connections wherever someone may live.

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Section I.
Introduction

In our travels, we see over and over again that people with disabilities have relationships primarily with family members, people who are paid to be with them, and other people with disabilities. These relationships are important even critical—and deserve to be celebrated.

But people with disabilities should also have opportunities to connect in deeply meaningful ways with unpaid people in their communities, living without a disability label. In a world that still largely segregates and congregates people with disabilities at all ages, this can be a challenge.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY FRIENDS?

Merriam-Webster defines a friend as a person whom you like and enjoy being with. Another definition is one attached to another by affection or esteem. Friends are distinguished from acquaintances, who are considered persons with whom one is not especially close.

Synonyms for friends include such words as amigo, chum, compadre, comrade, confidante, buddy, and pal. Anne Shirley of Green Gables considered her best friend a “kindred spirit.”

We can define friendship as a voluntary, reciprocal relationship in which two people exhibit mutual attachment to one another, enjoy frequent proximity and companionship, and display evidence of enjoyment or affection.

It is helpful to understand that friendships typically include multiple related components:

- **PROXIMITY** - people are in the same place on a regular basis
- **SIMILARITY** - individuals have a likeness such as age or common interest
- **TRANSCENDING CONTEXT** - friends spend time together in multiple settings, not just the one in which they first met
- **COMPANIONSHIP** - friends share experiences and do things together
- **RECIROCITY** - friendship is a give-and-take relationship with a balanced exchange of social interactions
- **MUTUALITY** - friends choose to be with each other and name each other as a friend
- **HELP/SUPPORT** - friends provide advice (information support), emotional support, and tangible/practical support (instrumental support).
- **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT** - friends may disagree but can usually resolve their differences
- **STABILITY** - this develops from a conflict-free relationship, over time, which is important for maintaining friendship
- **TRUST/LOYALTY** - friends can share things with each other without judgment and will not betray one another
- **INTIMACY/DISCLOSURE** - friends feel and can share personal information which deepen the relationships beyond mutuality.

Mature friendships among adults may include most of these components.
In essence, our friends are people we like to spend time with and in turn they like to spend time with us. They may share our interests, offer us support when needed and their presence in our lives becomes part of our story.

Our friends “get us”—they lift us up when we feel down, they share our joys and our sorrows, they provide a listening ear as well as a critical eye, they may challenge us to be our better selves but also accept us for who we are. Spending time with a friend is often a sure cure for loneliness and boredom. Our friends may introduce us to new activities, new places, new foods, and new people we might not otherwise encounter. Indeed, our circle becomes wider, deeper and broader. Our friends make our lives richer.

“I TOTALLY “GET” THE PERSON FOR WHOM I PROVIDE SUPPORT. HE CALLS ME HIS FRIEND. CAN’T STAFF BE FRIENDS?”

The relationships between staff and the people they support are very important. Staff support is invaluable in helping people with many of their needs. These are functional relationships—the individual has a specific need for support and staff are assigned to fulfill that need. Good staff develop trusting and respectful relationships with the people they serve, they get to know the person well, and commit to this role for extended periods of time. Direct support staff are often very caring and express this care in ways similar to that of friends. However, these are paid relationships. If a staff member gets a new job or is assigned a different role or shift, they may end their involvement with a particular person. Friendships are unpaid relationships. If a former staff person continues a relationship with someone they used to support, this can become a good friendship.

“WHAT ABOUT FAMILY MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY SIBLINGS? THEY MIGHT KNOW A PERSON FOR THEIR ENTIRE LIFE. AREN’T THESE FRIENDSHIPS?”

Family relationships are important to all of us. Some of us have very close relationships, particularly with certain family members. We may see each other frequently or be in touch through phone calls, emails, Facebook, letters, occasional visits, shared activities, and so forth. Other family relationships may be more distant—with either limited contact or none at all. Some people may consider a close family member their “best friend.” However, we typically think of friends as people who know and care about us who are not part of our families. Sometimes we think of our friends as “chosen family.”

“THE PERSON I SUPPORT HAS LOTS OF FRIENDS. WHEN WE GO TO THE GROCERY STORE AND THE YMCA EVERYONE SAYS ‘HELLO’ TO HIM.”

It sounds like he is known to many people and has a lot of acquaintances. This is a good beginning for building friendships and is the first component—proximity. Does he get to see anyone outside of these two settings? Do any of these people visit him or invite him to do an activity together? Does he know how to connect with them—by phone or email or social media—perhaps to extend his own invitations to others? Taking the next steps can move an acquaintance relationship to friendship.

"Friendship improves happiness, and abates misery, by doubling our joys, and dividing our grief."  
MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO
WHY ARE FRIENDS IMPORTANT?

The philosopher Aristotle said, “In poverty and other misfortunes of life, true friends are a sure refuge. They keep the young out of mischief; they comfort and aid the old in their weakness; and they incite those in the prime of life to noble deeds.”

Look up “the benefits of friendship” on the internet and you will find many articles about the benefits of friendship. Staff at the Mayo Clinic and other studies note:

- Friends pay a significant role in promoting overall health. Adults with strong social support have reduced risk of many significant health problems, including depression, high blood pressure, and unhealthy body mass index.
- Older adults with a rich social life are likely to live longer than peers with fewer connections.
- Friends increase our sense of belonging and purpose.
- Friendships play a role in identity development.
- People with friends experience increased self-confidence and sense of self-worth.
- People with friends are safer than those without friends.
- Friendships are part of establishing our sense of civic contribution (engaging with and giving back to others).
- Friendships can boost happiness and reduce stress.
- Friends help us cope with traumas, including serious illness, job loss, or death of a loved one.
- Friends encourage us to change or avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as excessive drinking or lack of exercise, and can influence positive activities and personal growth.
- Friends prevent loneliness and provide needed companionship.
- Friends help us celebrate good times and provide support during hard times.
- Friendship offers a foundation for development of a romantic relationship.
- Friends may disappoint us and not always live up to our expectations. We may want more time than the person can offer, or we may be seeking practical or emotional support that they are unable to give.
- Not all relationships are balanced in reciprocity. Some people we think are friends may exploit or take advantage of us.

WHAT ARE THE INHERENT RISKS OF FRIENDSHIP?

Research and our own personal experience provides us with the understanding that friendships lead to happier, healthier and safer lives.

However, this is not to imply that having and keeping friends is easy nor is it without some personal risk. When we pursue our own friendships or support someone else in making friends, we need to understand some of the potential downsides.

- Not all relationships work out. Sometimes interests, personalities, or circumstances just don’t jibe.
- Not all relationships are long-lasting. Some connections are specific to a shared activity. When the activity ends, the people we have met may move on to other interests and don’t maintain connections, or their own life circumstance changes and they no longer prioritize the relationship.
WHAT ARE THE INHERENT RISKS OF FRIENDSHIP? (con't)

- Not all friends are the best influence or have our interests at heart; they may introduce us to activities or people that present risks for which we are not prepared.
- Even when intentions are good, there may be times when the unexpected occurs when friends get together—including accidents that might result in harm or injury.
- If a person has been disappointed or exploited in a relationship, or if a person has left them, the individual may be afraid of forging a new relationship for fear of hurt or rejection.
- Sometimes the demands of getting to know a new person create anxiety which can be overwhelming.

However, these and other risks are far outweighed by the benefits.
One way to minimize risks within a single relationship is to have a variety of relationships so that the individual has multiple caring people in their life, in the event that one relationship ends or does not work out in a positive way.

We can’t overestimate how important it is to support people in developing friendships.

In this Toolkit we’ll share some strategies that can help make these connections wherever someone may live, including:

- At home with their family (ideas for other household members)
- In a 24-hour group setting (ideas for residential managers and administrators)
- In a less than 24-hour setting in the individual’s home (ideas for program coordinators)
- In a home sharing living situation, including Shared Living and Adult Family Care (ideas for other household members)

Others who may benefit by having this information include: direct support professionals, families, service coordinators, human rights officers, and community connectors.

Information for this Toolkit was gathered, in part, during trainings, discussion groups and planning sessions related to the above living situations. These opportunities offered input from people receiving those supports, families, people providing supports, and supervisors/administrators from the various support organizations. Participants posed concerns and possible solutions during these and other forums. Each of the settings has some unique opportunities and challenges for friendships between people with and without disabilities to be established and sustained. But there are some ideas that apply to all of these settings. Let’s examine those first.
Section II. General Strategies for Supporting Friendships Between People With and Without Disabilities

No matter where an individual lives, the following tips may be helpful:

1. Know the person you support well:
Be sure that you dig deeply to find out what the individual likes to do or wants to try or learn. (See “Community Interest Inventory” in Section IV.) Enlist the support of a team. Input is always helpful. Consider a team of staff, the ISP team, a family network team, advocates or a more formal Circle of Support or Person Centered Planning Group.

2. Know the places in the community well:
Where are the places in the community that the person you support can explore his/her interests with others who share the same interest or passion? There are a number of ways that family/staff/people with disabilities can “map” their communities with an eye towards enhancing the chances of friendships. Mapping exercises can open up new opportunities for everyone.

3. Identify formal and informal places of gathering:
Formal, i.e. organized places might include recreation/leisure/sports groups, clubs, support groups, faith communities, and social/civic organizations with posted meeting sites and times and specific ways to join. There are also informal gatherings such as the folks who typically have coffee at the same time at the local diner or the volunteers who spruce up the memorial park gardens each weekend.

4. Identify places where the person will be accepted just the way they are:
Think about the environment and activities that work for a person and those who will appreciate or support the person. The individual who needs to vocalize might not be so happy in a quiet setting such as a library, but might be greatly appreciated cheering at a sporting event.

5. Know the people in the community well:
If someone wants to join the local Garden Club, it will be much easier if there is someone who is already a member who will help welcome the newcomer and introduce her to the members. If you “survey” your staff, extended family members, Board members, and others you know, it is likely that you’ll find allies in the community who are already involved in the kinds of activities that the person you support is interested in. Use these people as connectors!

6. Identify who the person already knows and where relationships might be fostered or deepened.
Are there previous relationships that the person had or would like to renew? Are there former co-workers, staff, or neighbors that might be invited into a person’s life? Perhaps the grocery clerk who always makes a point of greeting the person you support when you go shopping might be receptive to an invitation to go out to coffee or would like to
6. (continued) visit the person at home and get to know them better. Pay attention to currently friendly people and encourage them in getting to know the person you support. Find out about past relationships and reach out—social media is an excellent resource for tracking down people who were once in our lives.

7. Be thoughtful about who might appreciate getting to know the person.
The local radio DJ might enjoy meeting the man you support who knows every radio call station in New England. Is there an opportunity to meet others at the radio station? Another artist might enjoy meeting the woman who loves to paint and invite her to a gallery, or perhaps you can help facilitate opportunities to paint together.

8. Consider who in the community might be seeking out a relationship with the person you support:
There are resources in the community that are also reaching out to connect people in relationships. These include disability-focused programs such as Citizen Advocacy and Best Buddies, and community programs such as welcoming or caring committees in faith communities, Retired Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP) that match people as friendly visitors, community cares programs, and neighborhood associations that promote neighbors getting to know neighbors, and so forth.

9. Identify persons who might be enlisted as community connectors:

9. (continued) Some community or university programs provide volunteers or interns who can assist with friendship building. A role assignment for a volunteer or intern could be to facilitate friendship building by mapping the community, researching places that might match a person’s interests, or accompanying a person to an activity with the responsibility of supporting connection to others. These volunteers or interns typically are available only for a short time period, so don’t assume that this person will become a new “friend.”

10. Be “present”:
People with disabilities should be supported to participate in their favored activities IN THE COMMUNITY. Even though “presence” does not guarantee that a friendship will develop, it is an absolutely necessary ingredient. Woody Allen said, “80% of success is showing up.” You need to show up so people get to know you.

11. “Community” is less about place than it is about relationships:
Some people—perhaps because of social anxiety or health reasons—may be unable or initially unwilling to go outside their homes or current social circles. Consider bringing other people to them, meeting in the individual’s home where they are comfortable and familiar.

12. Be regular and consistent:
People are creatures of habit. Going to the same restaurant/fitness center/church/etc. on the same days and times will increase the chance of people getting to know each other.

13. Be persistent:
Friendships develop over time. Be patient and stay involved for the long term. There are many small steps to developing a friendship.

14. Be “typical”:
Dressing neatly and appropriately, being clean and well-groomed, using “regular” transportation, “fading” staff support all help to make individuals more approachable. If you assist the person to join a group, learn the rituals of the group: How to people dress? Do they need to bring something to the group such as snacks? How else do they prepare themselves? Participating in the church choir requires different clothing and preparation than joining the Saturday morning walking group.

15. Work on social skills:
Those individuals with the best social skills may have an easier time making and keeping friends. But DO NOT hold efforts at supporting friendships hostage to the mastery of social skills!

16. Be a good neighbor:
Welcoming new neighbors with homemade cookies, helping neighbors rake leaves or shovel snow, inviting neighbors to a cookout at your home, etc. are all good ways to encourage friendly relationships.

17. Practice reciprocity:
Support the individual to reach out and give back. Send birthday or holiday cards. Acknowledge special events. Extend invitations. Offer to help with yard work or household project. Make a friendly phone call or plan a visit together.
Section III.

Specific Strategies for Different Living Situations for Adults

Facilitating Friendships for Those who Live at Home with Their Family

Description of Setting:
Nationally, nearly three quarters of the 6.2 million people with intellectual/developmental disabilities in the United States live with family members.

In Massachusetts, more than 20,000 people with I/DD, known to the Department of Developmental Services, live with family members. The configuration of these households can vary in style and composition. These homes are rural, urban, suburban, and small-town communities. Homes are small, large, rented as well as owned.

One-third of families indicated that they are on waiting lists for services (FINDS Survey, 2011). In Massachusetts, families can receive support through DDS Family Support Centers and Autism Support Centers (see links in Section V) which offer information and referral, service navigation, access to flexible funding for respite care or other resources that support the family member, support groups, education and training opportunities, future planning, networking and social opportunities.

REFERENCES:

In Their Own Words: The Need for Family Support Services

MA DDS Annual Family Support
https://www.mass.gov/lists/dds-family-support-services-information

DID YOU KNOW?

Approximately 58% of family caregivers report that they provide 40 hours of support each week to their family members and 40% estimate that they provide more than 80 hours of support each week.

These families may receive supplemental support services for their family member with a disability, such as personal care assistance, transportation, service coordination, respite care, employment or day support, or therapies, but many do not receive these supports.
WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF LIVING WITH FAMILY IN MAKING AND KEEPING FRIENDS?

• Family members are invested!
• Family members are in it for the long haul. They are part of the person’s life for many years, perhaps a lifetime. They have deep knowledge about a person’s evolving interests over time and are aware of many formal and informal connections. They can use this knowledge to explore interests, enlist allies or pursue activities.
• Families often include extended family members and close friends who care about the person and can open doors, make connections or provide support.
• Family members may jointly be involved with community groups or activities (faith communities, sports or recreation groups, clubs, neighborhood associations, etc.) and are likely to have school or work connections. Family members can be the bridge builders for relationships in settings that are part of the natural rhythm of the family’s life.
• Family members have knowledge about their own neighborhood and community, particularly if this is a place they have lived for a long while. They may know the informal connections and people who can be used as allies, introducers and bridge builders.

WHAT ARE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF FAMILY LIVING SITUATIONS THAT MIGHT IMPEDE BUILDING AND SUPPORTING FRIENDSHIPS?

• Family caregivers may be overwhelmed—they may have a full plate juggling caregiving responsibilities for one or more family members along with work and/or household responsibilities. They may not have time or energy to support social activities and relationship building.
• Family members themselves may be isolated, lacking friendships or social support.
• Older caregivers may not be able or willing to drive or go out at night. They may have their own health concerns that restrict activities.
• Single caregivers in particular are often stretched very thin with no additional time.
• Social support may be seen as less crucial compared to medical and therapy appointments or attending to personal care needs.
• Family members may feel reluctant to ask others to becoming engaged and feel fully responsible for meeting their family member’s needs (some even use the word “burden”).
• Family members may not trust that others will pay close enough attention to their family member’s wellbeing, particularly if the person has medical concerns.
• There may be cultural or language differences (from others in the community) that result in barriers for the family and individual.
SOME ISSUES & ANSWERS:

“I know I’m over-protective and that interferes with my son making friends. What can I do?”

Good for you for recognizing that you feel overprotective. This is a common feeling among many parents. Consider taking steps that will open up opportunities to your son to interact with others, independent of you.

» Can you create a welcoming environment in your home? If your son is meeting people in community settings, support him with invitations for people to come to your home. Get to know these new friends first, so you will be more comfortable if they take him out.

» Are there siblings or family friends who might be connectors or bridge builders to others, so that you can let go a bit and have someone else who knows your son well be the liaison?

» Are there people your son has met through church, at the Y, in the neighborhood that you know who might share activities with your son? You are likely to have more confidence in encouraging relationships in places where he is familiar.

“I’m just so tired of taking care of everything! I don’t have the time or energy to help my daughter with her social life.”

You are not alone. Many parents feel there are not enough hours in the day to do everything, let alone orchestrate a social life.

» Are there allies you can enlist to support social activities? Siblings, extended family members, trusted friends? Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to invite others to become involved—accompanying your daughter to chorus practice, driving her to the Y swim class, volunteering with her at the park clean-up, and introducing her to other volunteers. People are often pleased to be asked and likely to say “Yes!”

» Are there people you know who like to do activities that interest your daughter? Ask them if they can include her in their activity or introduce her to others who share that interest. Others may be delighted to get involved but won’t offer if they don’t know this support is needed. They may worry about “intruding” and may not know how to get involved.

» Some faith communities as well as some towns or neighborhoods have “cares” groups or committees whose reason for being is to be available and reach out to assist people. Don’t hesitate to call on these folks and describe what you and your daughter need.

“I’m my daughter’s best friend. We do everything together. She doesn’t really need anyone else.”

It is wonderful that you and your daughter have a close relationship, but she needs other people as well. If something were to happen to you, who else would she have in her life?

» One way to show her how much you care is to introduce her to other people who might share her interests.

» You might seek out community activities to do with her (singing, joining a club, volunteering). Make sure she is involved with choosing these activities. Notice who she connects with; support her to do things with the others that she has met.

» Once she becomes comfortable with an activity or setting, fade back and have her participate independently (or with another support person if needed).
SOME ISSUES & ANSWERS (CON’T)

“The really don’t have other support. My brother's on waiting lists for services. We don’t have extended family in the area and are too busy to get involved with community activities. In fact, I could use some friends!”

Many family members have this experience. Perhaps you don’t have time for new activities but it sounds like you and your brother could use support.

» Many families connect with their local affiliate of The Arc or Family Support Center (funded by DDS) for networking, support and guidance for family members. In some parts of the state the Massachusetts Sibling Support Network (http://www.masiblingsupport.org/) offers gatherings for adult siblings. Each of these organizations or groups may have resources to suggest and people you might enjoy meeting.

» What are your brother’s interests? What does he like to do? Use this knowledge to seek out places you might call to seek someone who might share his interests.

» If you and your brother grew up in this area, are there people who knew your brother in the past who you could invite back into your lives? Start with an invitation for supper or to just to watch a ballgame at home.

» Contact a local volunteer organization or citizen advocacy group. RSVP (https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/myprograms/rsvp/) and Best Buddies (https://www.bestbuddies.org/ma) (often affiliated with a local college) match people as companions. Special Olympics offers Unified Sports (https://www.specialolympicsma.org/what-we-do/real-sports-experience/unified-sports/) in many areas involving persons with and without disabilities.

» Even if you are not connected to a local faith community, you could contact a local congregation and see if they have a member who might be interested in meeting your brother or doing activities with him.

"Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead.
Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow.
Just walk beside me and be my friend."

ALBERT CAMUS
FRIENDSHIPS PARTICULARLY BENEFIT OUR FAMILIES BY PROVIDING:

- Natural opportunities for respite.
- Opportunities for other family members to connect.
- Peace of mind knowing that their family member truly BELONGS.
- Natural opportunities for your child to increase their social skills.

FRIENDSHIPS BENEFIT OUR COMMUNITIES BY:

- Enhancing perceptions about people with disabilities.
- Creating more inclusive attitudes and opportunities in the community.
- Teaching community members how to be friends with people who have differences.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF FRIENDSHIP?

- ATTITUDES: Lack of education, fear, misunderstanding or pity
- ENVIRONMENT: fewer social opportunity, inaccessibility, separate programs, staffing

GETTING TO FRIENDSHIP CAN BE A PROCESS!

10 THINGS THAT FAMILY MEMBERS CAN DO TO PROMOTE FRIENDSHIPS

1. Create Membership—at school, work, and in the community
2. Identify Relationships you already have that can be deepened or that can connect you to new people and activities
3. Identify and Share your family member’s Gifts and Interests
4. Identify Places where people with similar interests regularly gather
5. Identify Environments and supports that allow your child to shine
6. Find “Bridgemakers”—people who can connect your child to others
7. Teach Others what they need to know about your family member
8. Emphasize Similarities and Gifts
9. Invite People into your life and home
10. Use Your IEP, ITP, ISP or other planning process to focus on friendships

ADAPTED FROM A PRESENTATION BY INGRID FLORY AND BRITTANY ANTUNA
Facilitating Friendships for Those Who Live in 24-Hour Group Settings

Jack is an older man who lives in a group home run by Seven Hills Foundation. He had previously lived with his brother who is his guardian and also spent time in a nursing home. He uses a wheelchair to get around and is considered to be medically fragile.

Although his communication is limited, he clearly loves celebrations of holidays, birthdays and church fellowship.

Jack’s brother is a Jehovah’s Witness so his residential staff developed an action plan to connect Jack to a local Jehovah Witness community. They signed up for mailings and staff began to take Jack to services. Over time they noticed that one of the members, Eric, had taken an interest in Jack. Eric offered to bring Jack home from services so staff, who were not members of this religious community, did not need to stay for the services. Staff confirmed with his guardian that this arrangement would be OK with him. Staff also reached out to Eric and invited him to visit Jack at his home and have coffee.

Jack has become a member of the Witness community. If he is unable to get to a service, Eric and fellow members come to the house to conduct a service with and for Jack. They attend parties at Jack’s house. They go with Jack to the national Jehovah’s Witness conferences held each year in New England. It’s been two years since staff initiated the action plan for Jack—building his connection to a faith community was important to Jack and therefore it was important to staff.
WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF LIVING IN A GROUP RESIDENCE FOR MAKING AND KEEPING FRIENDS?

- Fostering relationships can be incorporated into the staff role. Staff may be able to spend focused time planning and supporting friendships.
- Staff teams often have broad outreach and connections in the community and may be able to build on the connections of other staff, administrators or volunteers within the agency.
- Within a large staff pool it is more likely that someone might share an interest with a person in a residence and can be assigned to support that individual in exploring the interest and meeting others with similar interests.
- Staff can spend focused time supporting an individual to explore areas of interest and participate in activities in the community.
- Staff can provide information and support to new friends so that they become comfortable in their relationships.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES IN THESE SITUATIONS FOR MAKING AND KEEPING FRIENDS?

- Staff often must support multiple people and may not be able to focus on the community engagement, interests and relationship desires of one person in a household.
- The staff role has many responsibilities with priority often given to medication administration, appointments, household upkeep and maintenance, meal planning and preparation, personal care needs and so forth—with time spent on record keeping as well.
- Staff orientation/training/job descriptions may not include anything related to community connections, relationships and friendships.
- Staff may be reassigned with short notice to another home or area of responsibility and may not be available for follow up activities that are part of an individual’s action plan.
- Direct support roles are typically the entry point for a career in disability services. Turnover may be high as staff move on to other positions with better pay or preferred schedules or decide to pursue other careers.
- There are typically multiple staff working in a household and good communication and shared commitment is essential—details about plans, activities and personal connections may get lost with shift changes and staff turnover.
- Staff may not be from the community where the group home is located and may not have the connections or knowledge that would help them in fostering relationships. There may be language, ethnicity, age or other barriers.
- Staff may not believe that community members will respond to invitations to friendship and may not know how to support budding relationships. They may fear rejection if they reach out to community members who do not respond positively to an invitation.
- Staff may be risk adverse, fearing that they will be held responsible if something negative occurs when a person is with a friend. This is of particular concern when a person is medically fragile or has limited communication skills.
“I work in a home with 4 people who need a lot of care. We have two staff on each shift since we need double coverage. We can’t let one staff leave to take an individual to an activity. I know people are bored at home.”

Think about the interests of people you support and try to identify people, who share those interests, and might pick up an individual and take them to these activities.

Consider outreach to community organizations that recruit companions to come into the home to spend individual time with a member of the household. The woman who likes to draw might enjoy an artist buddy. Someone who enjoys sports on TV might be happy to have someone visit to watch his team play. Think about each person individually, rather than recruiting a volunteer for the household.

Consider each person’s personal network or past associations. Are there former classmates, staff, neighbors, co-workers or others that you might invite back into a person’s life for visits at home or activities out of the house?

Advocate for more staffing so people can do the connecting and still have two staff at the home.

“We work a 3-11 schedule with two staff and then overnight 11-7 with one staff since people are sleeping and 7 - 3 schedule with one staff since some of the residents go to day and work programs. The person who is at home during the day likes to go the local baseball game but the games begin during one shift and end during the next. It doesn’t work to go to these events. We always leave early and he gets upset.”

If this is a priority for the individual there could be a number of solutions:

The staff and manager might be able to work out a flex schedule on days of sporting events so that staff are able to support the person to fully attend the games.

Have you noticed anyone else who always attends the games? Perhaps you might approach the person about bringing the individual home if staff leave mid-way through the game. There are steps before this “ask,” including getting to know this local fan and spending time with him or her, at the ball game as well as an invitation back to the house.

Perhaps you can talk to the sports association to recruit a person who would accompany the individual to the games.

You can brainstorm as a staff team or with others in your organization to identify an interested individual who might be approached to be a companion for this sports fan.

“The group home I work in is the largest home in the neighborhood. It feels like it dwarfs all the other single family homes. Sticks out like a sore thumb.”

The beauty of a larger home is that it can often more easily accommodate visitors. Consider using your large space for neighborhood gatherings. The household can host a potluck or picnic. Hosting is a great way to get to know others a little better and might create positive feelings about this large home. Chances are people in the neighborhood have been curious about who lives in the home and hosting often leads to invitations from others. One group of women got to know their neighbors by hosting Sunday tea.

Be sure to keep up appearances. Is the grass mowed? Are there flowers or shrubbery? Make sure broken items or unwanted items don’t accumulate on porches. If you are planting spring bulbs with a person in the house offer to do the same for a neighbor.

Holiday times are a great time to deliver cookies to neighbors as well. Neighborly generosity leads to reciprocity. Get to know those who live nearby!
FACILITATING FRIENDSHIPS FOR THOSE WHO LIVE IN 24-HOUR GROUP SETTINGS (CON’T)

SOME ISSUES & ANSWERS (CON’T):

➤ “We use a big van. It was donated by a local business and has their logo and our agency name on it. Whenever we go somewhere people know we come from a program, making it hard to fit in.”
  » This can be the challenge of competing organizational interests. In this case, development or administration wants to keep the donor happy and do community PR about your agency. Staff just want to fit in and be low key. This requires some thoughtful conversation with managers and administrators about individual and service priorities.
  » Is there a policy that the large vehicle must be used for individualized outings? Talk to the manager or administrator about an individualized approach to activities and relationship-building with use of smaller vehicles. Many agencies offer mileage reimbursement for use of staff private vehicles for transportation.

➤ “Everyone’s ISP requires that they have weekly community outings. We go out every week as a household to get pizza and go to a movie. We always see lots of people and they know us at the pizza place. Everyone has a good time.”
  » These outings are probably fun. Many households have weekly or monthly traditions like this. Group outings don’t usually foster individualized friendships. However, this could be an opportunity to get to know people at the pizza place. If the staff are friendly, perhaps you could invite one or more back to visit the group home to spend time with a particular individual. Be observant—is there one staff person who takes a particular interest? Does this person connect better with one person from the group home? Friendships can be fostered from many types of interactions.
  » Continue to identify individualized activities that members of the household might want to do. Can you schedule these opportunities into the week? Can you identify persons (non-staff) to support or share these activities? Conduct individual interest surveys as your starting point.
  » Advocate that future ISPs include opportunities for individual connections to the community, not group outings.

➤ “Our house is very busy and some people go to bed early. We have a rule of no visitors after supper. Visitors have to stay in the common areas. Actually we don’t have too many visitors so it’s not really an issue.”
  » Think about your own home. Do you have these rules? We want to foster and support friendships. You can talk with staff and members of the household about ways to welcome visitors and address each person’s schedule. Perhaps there is agreement about a time when the household is quieter or when and where loud music is played, but this doesn’t need to limit visitors to the house.
  » Members of the household have a right to have visitors to their rooms. You might want to discuss this with your human rights officer.

➤ “We have training throughout the year—CPR, first aid, human rights, fire safety, abuse & neglect reporting, seizure management… the list goes on and on. These are all required. There really isn’t time for staff training about friendships. We don’t have anyone who focuses on this. We’re supposed to make sure that people are healthy and safe.”
  » Studies have indicated that our health and well-being is impacted by our relationships. Supporting friendships is part of health and safety.
  » Consider including a conversation about goals and actions taken to support friendships at every staff meeting. You can focus on one person at a time. Agencies that have successfully supported friendships have discovered that action plans with shared commitment, assigned responsibilities and deadlines are able to maintain a focus on relationships.
  » There are lots of resources about building friendships. Provide readings for staff and invite them to present ideas to one another. People get excited about this topic. Success fosters enthusiasm and further success. Send staff to trainings, and especially in pairs or groups.
  » Everyone can be a connector but, as a group, you need to make this a priority.
  » Review job descriptions with managers and make sure that relationship development is part of staff responsibilities. This should also be part of regular staff performance evaluations.
“We’re supposed to CORI everyone who spends time with people in household. No one really wants to do this and we don’t have the budget for it anyway.”

» DDS does not require background checks on family members, friends or acquaintances. (DDS provides guidance regarding when and for whom background checks are required at: https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/11/01/si-1-cori.pdf)

» Staff can discuss this with management at their agency and may consult with DDS.

“We are not allowed to mix our personal and professional lives. We’ve been told not to use personal connections on behalf of the people we serve.”

» Consult with your Human Rights Officer or staff and DDS on this issue. DDS has developed a “Position Paper on Social Inclusion” that provides some guidance on this issue at: (https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/10/31/DDS%20Social%20Inclusion%20Position%20Paper.pdf)

» Most of us were introduced to new activities, found employment, or met new friends through the connections we have. We need to provide the same opportunities for people we support.

» Social capital—the set of relationships and social ties, with organizations and to individuals—expands opportunities, create choices, and leads to a richer life. Your connections are the social capital that can enrich the lives of the people you serve.

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

DALE CARNEGIE
Facilitating Friendships for Those who Live in Less than 24-Hour Individual Supports

**HOOKED ON FISHING!**

There is an oft-quoted Chinese proverb: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” And, sometimes, fishing can lead to friendships.

Bill lives in his own apartment in a complex with neighbors who are mostly older than he is. Bill gets a few hours of support a day, mostly for medical stuff and shopping. Bill is unemployed. Bill loves nature and he is a fisherman.

Bill’s support staff struggled with how to use their limited time to help Bill connect with others in the community. Bill’s loneliness often had him dwelling on medical issues, real and imagined. He was a “frequent flyer” at the local emergency room. One thing that Bill really liked to do was fish, so staff decided to see if that interest could lead to connections with other people.

At first, a staff person made time to drop Bill (and his fishing equipment) at various local ponds and rivers. Bill excelled at catching bass, pickerel, perch and (when the stocking trucks arrived) trout, but he was usually alone. Staff pretty quickly decided that it might be better if Bill regularly fished somewhere with someone(s) also interested in fishing.

An ex-staff person, “Bob,” happened to live on a nearby pond and often fished there with his kids. Staff began bringing Bill there on Saturdays for a few hours to “wet a line.” Before long, fishing went from the goal of the day to the “excuse” to get together. And good things have happened:

- Bill got to know Bob’s large extended family and they came to know and appreciate Bill. Bob got a chance to know Bill’s brother, too.
- Staff stopped transporting Bill; Bob and his family members began taking turns to pick him up on weekends.
- They began to have meals on the weekends, Bill often bringing food to share.
- When Bob’s children were young, Bill would sometimes be their “fishing guide” at the town’s annual Kids’ Fishing Derby. Being a “guide” is a pretty valuable role in the fishing world!
- Bill now spends every Christmas with Bob and his family.
- Bill loves bird-watching, too, with his friends. Bob helped him join the MA Audubon Society and they plan on visiting local sanctuaries to join other bird-watchers on guided hikes. Maybe those connections will lead to other friendships!
- Bill has met Bob’s neighbor, Dave, who also fishes. Dave and his wife, Lisa, welcome Bill to come to their home and fish when Bob is away.
- Bill often walks down the shore to a nearby park where he has gotten to know several other regular fishermen.
- Bill has found some people at his apartment complex who like to fish and sometimes goes out with them.

By the way, Bill spends much less time at the ER now than he did before he hooked his friends!

**Description of Setting:** “Individual Supports consist of assistance with a variety of activities that is provided regularly or intermittently to enable individuals to live as independently as possible in the community. Individual supports include help with food shopping, cooking, banking, and housekeeping.”
WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING SITUATIONS FOR MAKING AND KEEPING FRIENDS?

• Individuals usually live within the community in homes that fit in with other homes in the neighborhood.
• Neighbors include a variety of people with and without disabilities.
• The person is viewed as an individual and may not be seen as a part of a group or “program participant.”
• Individuals are able to be independent in their movement about the community and may be able to participate in activities and connect with others without always having a staff companion.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES IN THESE SITUATIONS FOR MAKING AND KEEPING FRIENDS?

• Individuals may feel isolated and lonely and formal supports may be limited.
• The person may not have readily available transportation to get to activities where they might make friends.
• The person might not have the knowledge of activities in the area or the resources to find out about activities or ways to make connections.
• The person may need more support than is available through their service provider to support the reciprocal activities important in developing relationships.
• Support staff may not be expected to help with community connections and/or they are not provided the training to enable them to be effective at facilitating relationships.

SOME ISSUES & ANSWERS:

➤ “The person I support tells me he is bored and lonely. How can I help?”
   » This is a time to bring in your staff team and to identify other allies. You also need to know the person well. What are his interests? Conducting an Interest Inventory and doing community mapping can help identify activities to pursue.
   » Where does he already have connections? Are there people in his past or on the periphery of his circle who might be invited into closer relationship? Can you or someone on the team take the lead in reaching out to try to build or rebuild these connections?
   » Review the list of general strategies. Discuss with this man if he would like to pursue a new activity, join a group, reach out to an old contact, or go to meet some neighbors. This will help you prioritize and focus your energies.
   » Many people who live semi-independently work or volunteer in the community. If this is the case, with the person’s permission reach out to the work or volunteer sites and see if there are related social activities that could include this individual. Some work groups sponsor sports teams or regularly go out for social times together. Volunteers may have other gatherings—such as luncheons or coffee times—before or after volunteering.
   » Remember relationships blossom over time and many small interactions.
Facilitating Friendships for Those who Live in Less than 24-Hour Individual Supports (con't)

SOME ISSUES & ANSWERS (CON'T):

> “I only have time to deliver his medications and take him grocery shopping. That’s what I was assigned to do to support him. I know friends would be nice but it’s not in his goals.”

  » Support the individual to advocate with his ISP team to include community connections and relationships as a focus area for his personal goals/objectives. Work with the team to prioritize this as an area of support for his services and begin to identify strategies.

  » Discuss with your staff team or manager how time can be dedicated to the things that are important for this person. Remember health and well-being are negatively impacted by a lack of relationships.

  » With the person’s permission, refer them to another organization that supports relationships such as Citizen Advocacy or a local visitors program through RSVP or an area faith community.

  » Is there a way you can use your current support time in a way that also provides an opportunity for him to connect with others? For instance, does he have a neighbor who could be invited to do his or her shopping at the same time that you go?

> “She doesn’t have any interest in going out or joining activities. She’s older and seems quite content just to be at home and spends most of her time watching TV and doting on her cat. That’s her main focus, not people. I worry about her though, since she is alone most of the week.”

  » Not everyone is a joiner but most of us want and need people in our lives. Consider outreach through your organizational networks to identify someone who might visit her in her home, perhaps another older person who loves animals, particularly cats. Her situation is not dissimilar from that of many older people.

  » Reach out to her neighbors. Are there people who might casually stop by or who she could call or visit or invite over for coffee?

  » Connect with the local senior center, Council on Aging or area agency on aging. She may enjoy attending events for seniors or there may be a volunteer home visiting program that matches people in the community with seniors.

> “She knows tons of people. In fact, as soon as she meets someone she collects their phone number and email so she can be in touch. She’s very friendly but she latches on and calls at all hours. It seems to push people away. I don’t see too many people reaching out to her— they seem to run the other way.”

  » Clearly she wants people in her life and people respond to her initially. This could be a learning opportunity. She may need guidance around boundaries and asking people when and how often she can call them. The people she is getting to know may also need guidance about being straight-forward with her to plan times they can talk on the phone or get together that work for both parties.

  » See if she will participate in doing an interest inventory to figure out what activities, places or types of people with whom she would most like to associate.

  » Help her identify specific people she wants to know better and develop action plans on how she might cultivate one or more meaningful friendships with greater depth.
Section III. Continued

Facilitating Friendships for Those Who Are in Home-Sharing Settings, including Shared Living and Adult Family Care

DESCRIPTION OF SETTING

People with disabilities have often been supported in other people’s homes. This is sometimes done informally, as when relatives take in another family member. It can also be part-time, including respite care situations. And it can be formal, as is the case with DDS-funded Shared Living and MassHealth-Funded Adult Family Care. In these situations, the individual usually moves into the home of the “provider.” The provider may be a couple, a family that includes children or a single man or woman. There may be more than one person with a disability who moves in to share the home. The provider is compensated for the support they provide.

At a recent conference on Shared Living there was a panel consisting of caregivers, agency staff and individuals being supported who shared their stories about how people came to live together and what life has been like for all involved.

When asked a question about people becoming more involved in the community through the connections of caregivers, a caregiver named Ann raised her hand and shared the following:

I am involved in a book club that meets regularly at the library. My daughter who also lives with me will stay home with Sarah so I can attend. Sarah is in her seventies and is deaf and blind. On this particular day, my daughter was not going to be home so I asked Sarah, using sign, if she would like to join me. When presented with the option of attending, Sarah asked, signing, “Will there be food?” The answer was yes so she said, “Let’s go.”

When we got there, I introduced Sarah to everyone and besides enjoying the cookies and coffee, she wanted me to translate what was being said now and then. She got the gist of the story, which was about a young woman who had to travel a great distance to go home because of the death of her father. When we arrived home, Sarah told my daughter about the book and then spoke about her own father’s death long ago. Now Sarah goes to all of the book club meetings and she learns about the new book before going. The other members of the club enjoy Sarah’s presence and some want to learn how to “sign” with her.

In shared living situations there can be opportunities to build relationships that are planned as well as those that are unexpected as home providers open the doors to their own life in the community. Sarah’s shared living opportunity is supported through Alternatives Unlimited.
Facilitating Friendships for Those Who Are in Home-Sharing Settings, including Shared Living and Adult Family Care (con't)

ADVANTAGES OF THIS LIVING SITUATION RELATED TO MAKING/KEEPING FRIENDS:

• Frequently these living situations are individualized, so the providers can focus on the needs and interests of the person with the disability.

• Providers may have their own community connections and involvements and are able to naturally introduce the person in their household to others in their neighborhood or circle.

• In some DDS-funded Shared Living situations, there may be additional support through an agency to promote social/leisure interests. Some individuals in Adult Family Care may have support hours from DDS-funded staff to support community activities/social connections. These adjunct staff can be asked to focus on relationship building.

• The living situations are likely to be typical of other residences in the community. There is not likely to be program “stigma.”

• Although these situations offer 24-hour support, they do not have shift schedules and have fewer rules or regulations that might impede development of relationships. Many home sharing arrangements become long-term commitments.

CHALLENGES IN THIS LIVING SITUATION RELATED TO MAKING/KEEPING FRIENDS:

• Some home-sharing situations support multiple people with disabilities, resulting in many of the same challenges experienced in 24-hour Group Homes.

• Some providers include the person in their activities but do not explore or support separate activities and relationships for the person living in their home.

• Some shared living situations are not the best match for an individual; the interests of the providers, the location or the composition of the household does not match the desires of the person with the disability.

• Even the most caring home-sharing households may not recognize the importance of fostering relationships that are independent of the home provider.

ISSUES & ANSWERS:

⊲ “This woman enjoys her shared living provider but there are multiple people who need support in the home. She is never able to pursue her own interests.”

» If you are a support staff member for the person or an ally, review the list of strategies and identify actions to take. Is there an activity or group she’d like to attend? Could members of this group pick her up? Are there neighbors she can visit? Are there people from her past who can be invited back into relationship?

» If you are the home provider, review the list of strategies and think about who you can reach out to and bring into her life—former staff, current neighbors or neighbors she knew from past living arrangements, childhood friends, members of your (or her) faith community, your own friends who have gotten to know her, relationship-matching organizations, people involved with groups that are related to her interests. Be the bridge builder!

» If she is able to travel about independently, do community mapping to identify places and people she can visit.

» Is this an opportunity to create a Circle of Support? Can the support agency help facilitate?
ISSUES & ANSWERS (CON’T):

“The providers are very active and they include him in all their activities, but I have the feeling that he has other interests which they are ignoring.”

Most home-sharing situations are overseen by an agency. It is worth talking directly to the providers about the person’s other interests and help them brainstorm ways to support these interests. It may require conversations with the oversight agency manager or the ISP Team to make sure that everyone is aware that the person wishes to pursue individualized interests.

“Sharing” connotes that all parties bring something to this new living situation and that all parties need to be open to participating in or encouraging the activities that the others want. This is an educational opportunity.

“Our home-sharing situation is very strong and has been a positive arrangement for decades. He is very active throughout the week—he goes to a day program, volunteers at the animal shelter, takes an art class, and attends church with us on weekends. He knows so many people—we’re just not sure how many of them are true friends.”

It sounds like there are lots of positives, but your observation is a good one to consider. Does this person see people outside of the specific activities, i.e. visits to one another’s home or other times of connection? Is there communication outside of the specific activities by phone or social media? Does the person have relationships independent of the home-sharing family?

A full schedule of activities is not the same as a life full of friendships. If the answers to the above questions are “No,” spend time with this individual and the provider to identify people from the various activities and associations that he would like to know better or see in other situations. Create action plans specific to one or more of these people. Has he met other volunteers at the animal shelter that he seems to enjoy? Could a coffee date be arranged after volunteering or an invitation extended to supper? Perhaps inviting a person from the art class to visit a museum or come to the house to draw together? Are there other activities at church that he could join in on or roles he can fulfill, independent of the home provider? There are lots of possibilities. Just focus on one person or activity at a time and make sure he is involved with the choices and decisions.

“The providers are very kind but she wants to be with people her own age, not in a home with little kids, plus it is way out in the country and she likes to be able to walk to places in town.”

Even good providers are not always the right match for an individual. The oversight agency needs to pay attention to the desires of the individual and make changes as necessary.

Become an ally and an advocate, speaking up for what this person wants and needs.
Section IV.

Additional Tools to Promote Friendships

Person-Centered Planning

“A person-centered plan can help those involved with the focus person see the total person, recognize his or her desires and interests, and discover completely new ways of thinking about the future of the person.” — Beth Mount & Kay Zwernik, 1988

**Person-Centered Planning** is an ongoing problem-solving process used to help people with disabilities plan for their future.

In person-centered planning, groups of people focus on an individual and that person's vision of what they would like to do in the future. This "person-centered" team meets to identify opportunities for the focus person to develop personal relationships, participate in their community, increase control over their own lives, and develop the skills and abilities needed to achieve these goals. Person-Centered Planning depends on the commitment of a team of individuals who care about the focus person. These individuals take action to make sure that the strategies discussed in planning meetings are implemented.

**PURPOSE**

- To look at an individual in a different way, not bound by bureaucracies or rules.
- To assist the focus person in gaining control over their own life.
- To increase opportunities for participation in the community.
- To recognize individual desires, interests, and dreams.
- Through team effort, develop a plan to turn dreams into reality

**WHO IS INVOLVED IN PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING?**

The focus person and whoever they would like can be involved. It is best when there is a facilitator and a person to record what is being shared. The facilitator should be a person that is neutral and unbiased, leads the group through the process, handles conflict and assures equal opportunity for all to participate. Others that may be included are parents/guardians, other family members, friends, professionals, and anyone else who has a personal interest in the person.
WHERE IS PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING DONE?
At the focus person's home or somewhere comfortable, informal, and hospitable.

WHEN SHOULD PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING TAKE PLACE?
At any time in a person's life. Person-centered planning can be a very useful tool to develop a transition plan.

TOOLS NEEDED FOR PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING:
A flip chart or large pieces of paper to record the information shared. Several different colored markers.

THE STEPS OF PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING:
1. Develop a history or personal life story of the focus person. This is accomplished by everyone sharing past events in the person's life. The focus person's parents and family may share the largest amount of this information. Things such as background, critical events, medical issues, major developments, important relationships, etc., may be shared.
2. Description of the quality of the focus person's life is shared next. This may be accomplished by exploring the following: Community participation, community presence, choices/rights, respect and competence.
3. Personal preferences of the focus person. Things the focus person enjoys doing, also including the things that are undesirable to the person.
4. The meeting to develop the personal profile usually occurs several days before the planning meeting so the participants have time to reflect on what is shared. The meeting, which takes about two hours, may use graphic symbols in place of words to help stimulate creativity and encourage participation.

THE NEXT STEP: THE PLANNING MEETING:
1. Review the personal profile. The group at this point has the opportunity to make additional comments and observations.
2. Review trends in the environment. Identify ongoing events that are likely to affect the focus person's life.
3. Share visions for the future. Through brainstorming participants are challenged to imagine ways to increase opportunities.
4. Identify obstacles and opportunities. Things that make the vision a reality.
5. Identify strategies. Action steps for implementing the visions.
6. Getting started. Identifying action steps that can be completed within a short time.
7. Identify the need for service delivery to be more responsive to individual needs.

FOR A PLAN TO BE SUCCESSFUL IT IS BEST IF:
• The people have a clear and shared appreciation of the talents and capacities of the focus person.
• People have a common understanding of what the focus person wants.
• The group involved agrees to meet regularly to review activities.
• The group includes a strong advocate or family member assuring that the interest of the focus person is being met.
• The group includes persons committed to making connection to the local community.
• This is the beginning of a process that continues throughout a lifetime. It is not a product.

The person at the focus of planning, and those who love the person, are the primary authorities on the person’s life direction.

The essential questions are: Who is this person? and What community opportunities will enable this person to pursue his or her interests in a positive way?

Knowledge gained from close, respectful, continuing relationships with the focus person is crucial in answering these questions.

Information gained from technical assessments of the person can be helpful, but only in the context of a knowledgeable account of a person’s history and desired future. Subordinating professional-technical information to personal knowledge turns the typical agency decision-making process on its head.

John O’Brien and Herb Lovett
A circle of support involves a group of people coming together to help promote and support the goals, interests and needs of a person with disability. It involves the intentional building of relationships around a person who may be vulnerable because of disability.

A circle of support is made up of people who care about the person with disability (and his or her family). Circles of support generally range in size from the intimate (3-4 people) to the expansive (10-12 people) and can be made up of a range of people including family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, colleagues, team and community members, neighbors, support workers and employers. Importantly, members are not paid to be involved. Some circles meet just to plan and strategize, and some circles are involved in both planning and in taking an active role in the social life of a person with disability. Among the things a circle of support can do is assist the focus person to create a positive vision for their future, identify and work towards their aspirations and dreams, overcome barriers (e.g. by advocating on their behalf), move into a home of their own, pursue interests in the community, generate ideas and share wisdom, build and strengthen their networks and safeguards and share in the celebration of achievements. Every circle of support is different. The nature of the people who participate in the circle, how often they come together, the issues that are covered and the formality of meetings can vary vastly.

FORMING A CIRCLE OF SUPPORT:
There are practical steps that can be taken to form a Circle:

» Creating a vision: Have a clear picture of the good life. This is what will help guide and keep you on track. It is important to continue to hold on to this vision when thinking about the activities, roles, places and people that might be involved.

» Clarifying the purpose of the Circle: A clear picture of a good life will help decide the purpose of the Circle of Support. For example, if expanding the person’s social networks is important, then this will help inform decisions about what you want the circle to do and achieve.

» Relationship mapping: It’s important to spend some time thinking about and mapping out the relationships and connections that exist or existed. These relationships can help identify potential members of the Circle of Support.

» Decide on who to invite: This will again depend on the purpose of the Circle. You will need to think about which skills, attributes, qualities, talents and connections would be best suited to achieving the purpose, and about which people would most likely be able to bring these qualities to the Circle.

» The Invitation: A personal invitation is the best approach! This could be in the form of a phone call, face-to-face, or a formal written invitation.

» First Meeting: This will help set the stage for the dynamics of the Circle. It’s an opportunity to engage everyone in a conversation about how they can support the aims of the Circle. It is important to talk about the practical aspects of the Circle, like the commitment involved, time and place of meetings, and who will lead and take notes on the conversation.

» The developing Circle: The strongest and most effective Circles meet regularly and include all members, as well as the person with disability. Trust, respect, and friendship will come from spending regular time and meaningful time together. These are the qualities that will help make a Circle successful.

Community Interest Survey

Vinfen has created a Community Interest Survey which uses pictures of dozens of potential activities as a prompt for discussion. You can access this survey at http://thearcofmass.org/vinfensurvey/

“150 Things You Can Do To Build Community”

Suggestions for Everyone!

Adapted from Bettertogether.org—an initiative of the Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. This list can guide you to activities that help set the stage for friendship. It includes:

1. Join a gardening club
2. Organize a social gathering to welcome a new neighbor
3. Get to know the clerks and salespeople at your local stores
4. Audition for community theater or volunteer to usher
5. Participate in political campaigns
6. Offer to serve on a town committee
7. Gather a group to clean up a local park or cemetery
8. Hold a neighborhood barbecue
9. Bake cookies for new neighbors or work colleagues
10. Ask neighbors for help and reciprocate

The complete list can be found at: https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/whatyoucando.html
Community Mapping

There are multiple aspects to a person’s life that can be “mapped.” These include creating:

- **A Background Map** to record highlights of the personal life experience of the focus person and a look at his or her family life and community life. This informs us of major events and influences that impact the person including medical events, moves, births, deaths, beginnings and endings of work or school, transitions and other life changes.

- **A Relationship (People) Map** which is usually shown as concentric circles with the focus person at the center. The circle around this person includes those who closest to him or her, often family and those with whom there is a close bond. The second circle includes those who are seen on a regular basis and are considered friends. The third circle is for those that the individual sees through shared activities and finds meaningful in some way but with whom there has not been much opportunity for deeper contact. The outer circle might include acquaintances and persons seen for some form of exchange. The map might be broken down into sectors of “Family,” “Friends,” “Neighbors,” “Service Providers,” and connections through work, school, volunteer or community activity/civic group affiliations and others. People Maps can help identify places where relationships can be built and people with whom relationships can be deepened. There are variations of Relationship Maps and templates which can be found on the web.

- **A Places Map** illustrates those places that a person already frequents and might include such locations as a work or volunteer site, faith community, family home, YMCA, grocery store, barbershop, local park, etc. Community settings and human service settings should be included and the map can include places of regular visits (i.e. day program for daily engagement or gym for weekly exercise) as well as places of only occasional or annual visits (local fairground for the annual fair). Although the word “map” is used, the places map can be documented in the form of pictures or lists.

- **A Preferences “Map”** This map can build on the other maps as well as interest inventories and can be thought of as separate lists of:
  - **What Works** for the person, i.e. what the person likes to do, wants to do, and enjoys; what engages the person and gives them pleasure?
  - **What Doesn’t Work** for the person, i.e. activities, situations or places that frustrate the person; what makes them anxious, bored or upset or simply is not of interest?

An awareness of preferences can help support people and allies focus on the desires, dreams and capacities of the individual and are a reminder of situations and conditions to avoid that might block or create additional challenges when trying to build relationships.

The different mapping tools can be used to create a snapshot of places and points of current connection, places the person enjoys (or might enjoy) being and places where connections can be made or deepened.

**Reference:** Mapping information excerpted and adapted from *A Brief Guide to Personal Futures Planning: Organizing Your Community to Envision and Build a Desirable Future with You* by Kate Moss and David Wiley

Section V. Additional Resources

1. A Brief Guide to Personal Futures Planning: Organizing Your Community to Envision and Build a Desirable Future with You by Kate Moss and David Wiley Texas Deafblind Outreach: http://www.tsbvi.edu/attachments/other/pcp-manual.pdf


5. Friends at Work Toolkit: http://thearcofmass.org/toolkit


in-depth/friendships/art-20044860

11. Index: www.disabilityinfo.org


18. The Key to Friendship by Al Condeluci: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52213873e4b-03168535370d3/t/55fd6fedde4b049b6f6c2a493/1442672621853/Key+to+Friendship.pdf


20. Your Closest Chapter of MA Network of Information Providers: https://disabilityinfo.org/mnip/