



BUILDING PERSONAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

A PLANNING GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTORS



full circle
CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE

Connecting to
Create a Good Life



Full Circle is a capacity building initiative spearheaded by FIRST in Asheville, NC and the ABCD Institute of DePaul University and Plan Institute, a Canadian organization sharing the concepts and practices of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network. This program, funded in 2018 by the North Carolina Council of Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD), was created with the ultimate goal of "connecting to create a good life" for those with disabilities.



introduction

Loving, caring relationships are key factors to achieving a good life. Most of us cannot imagine a life without others to connect with and share about what is going on and what is most important to us. Yet people who experience enhanced vulnerability are frequently lonely and alone. Without caring, supportive relationships, a person's health suffers, choices are diminished, and vulnerability increases.

Many of us have personal support networks - even if we may not call it that. These are our friends, neighbors, and family. These are the people we count on to help us out.

Unfortunately, people who are vulnerable often don't experience the support provided by friends and unpaid relationships. Professionalized systems of care can sever their connections with those who would otherwise provide natural support, and societal attitudes towards people who are vulnerable can pose additional barriers. These challenges can be addressed through the facilitation of personal support networks.

Personal support networks are groups of committed friends and unpaid relationships who play important and specific roles in the life of a person experiencing isolation and vulnerability because of disability, age, living arrangement, limited opportunities, or society's perception.

Each member of the network voluntarily forms a relationship with the person at the center of the network and with each other. Each member offers companionship, support, advocacy and ongoing awareness of what is going on in the person's life.

There are many principles and concepts that form the foundation of personal support networks. These principles are the core values that guide our work:

- Relationships are key to a good life
- No disability precludes relationship or friendship
- Successful networks are directed by individuals and their families
- Networks focus on contribution, inclusion and active citizenship
- Everyone who is part of a network benefits



As a Community Connector, you can play a key role in collaborating with people to create their personal support network.

This will include:

- Developing a friendship with the person and their personal support network
- Using your time together to understand their life and what is important to them
- Celebrating and nurturing their gifts and what makes them unique as a person
- Knowing about their current relationships and identifying potential new roles
- Understanding important considerations, especially around health and safety
- Identifying the community assets that fit with the person's gifts and interests
- Creating opportunities, social gatherings and activities
- Planning and facilitating planning meetings

This planning guide provides sample questions, ideas and conversation starters that will create a strong foundation for the collaborative work of building a personal support network.

celebrating your gifts

“*Every single person has capabilities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capabilities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to the people around them.*”

- JOHN MCKNIGHT
Asset Based Community Development

Spending time together in a natural and friendly relationship is an important first step in helping another person to build and mobilize a personal support network.

You need to know each other and enjoy spending time together in order to develop a strong sense of trust and be able to work in collaboration.



Here are some questions that help us to get know a person's gifts:

- Tell me about your favorite places to go.
- What kind of things do you do on a GREAT day?
- What do your friends like about you?
- What do you care about?
- What makes you happy?
- What are you or your family already connected to?
- Is there anything that you have always wanted to try but haven't yet?
- What would you show me around your house?
- If you had a million dollars, what would you do?

Consider the following:

- How are things going for you lately?
- What is the vision for your network?
- Are you going through a transition or at a specific crossroad?
- Are there things in your life that you want to change or improve?

IDEAS FOR NEXT STEPS:

Using the information that you gain from these conversations, find a creative way to highlight the person's gifts.

Sharing this information with network members can help nurture relationships and spark ideas for activities and gatherings.



your friends and relationships

In order to invite people to become part of a stronger and more engaged personal support network, it is important to first know who the friends and relationships are.

Here are some questions that you can ask to start taking this inventory:

- Who are the people that you are closest to?
- What is your relationship with these people and how often do you interact?
- How do you typically communicate with your family, friends and network?
- How often do you spend time with your friends?
- What do you and your friends like to do together?
- Are there people in your life that provide practical support?

Also consider the more formal roles:

- Are there any other important people in your life (Including people in paid support roles)?
- Who are the people that support you in making decisions?
- Who supports you to navigate the healthcare system towards good physical and mental health?

IDEAS FOR NEXT STEPS:

Create a contact list or a phone directory of all of the people in a person's life. Sharing this list with each of the personal support network members makes it easy for them to communicate with each other and get in touch when the need arises.

Social media platforms like Facebook and Tyze can also be helpful for making sure that the network can contact each other.



home, neighborhood and community

When you have an opportunity to spend time with a person and members of their network, try to find out more about their life and current situation.

Describe your current home life:

- Have you lived anywhere else?
- What do you like best about your home?
- Is there anything that is not working about where you live?
- Are you anticipating any transitions in your home life?
- What are your current daily routines and activities?

Be sure to make careful notes about these conversations as they will provide information and insight into what is important to a person and their network.

- What activities do you enjoy?
- Which groups and associations are in your neighborhood?
- What activities or programs happening in your area might you be interested in?
- Which community centers and neighborhood houses are closest to your home?
- What places near you do your neighbors like to spend their time?
- What newspapers, websites, and newsletters provide information about what is happening in your neighborhood?
- Is there anyone that you know who seems to be in the loop about what is happening in your neighborhood?
- Are there activities or interests that you used to participate in but don't anymore?
- Is there anything that you would like to learn more about?
- Do you feel satisfied with your involvement in spiritual and religious activities?

NEXT STEPS:

If there are actions to take regarding a person's home life, continue to have planning conversations with the personal support network to coordinate actions and resolutions.

Ask how each person can contribute and who else needs to be involved.

Use this information as a guide when you are helping to plan social gatherings activities with the network.



important considerations and safeguards

- How would you describe your social style?
- What makes a good day for you?
- What makes a bad day for you?
- Describe your preferred method of communication.
- Are there things that other people need to know about you in order for you to be healthy and safe?
- Is your family or personal support network concerned about risk or any other areas of your life? If so, what intentional actions would reduce that risk?

NEXT STEPS:

Create a confidential document summarizing the important considerations that you learn about the person.

With their permission, share this document with the personal support network and ensure that everyone has a good understanding of how they can best support their friend.



planning a good life for now and in the future

For you and your network to think about:

- Are there any places that you could be introduced to that are a good match for your gifts and where you can meet new people and make friends?
- Are there any groups that you could be a part of where you can share your gifts and experience a greater sense of belonging?
- What specific actions can each member of your network take to increase your opportunities to make choices and have more control in your life?
- How many times do you and your network want to get together for planning meetings?
- How do you and your network want to stay connected throughout the year?
- Are you interested in using a formalized planning process like MAPS or PATH?
- Do any of your network members know other people who they can introduce you to that can help you with any of these goals?

At least once a year, have a formal planning meeting with your personal support network using the Future Planning Consultation Tool as a guide. Incorporate action items and next steps into the workplan.

NEXT STEPS:

With the personal support network, identify the three key priorities for the next 6 months and create a work plan.

Ask each person how they want to be involved and which areas they will take leadership in. Be sure to include these commitments in the work plan.

Ask the personal support network what they would like your role to be in facilitating this work plan. Include the specific tasks that you will contribute to the achievement of the priorities.

Each month, work together with the person at the center of the network to send out a monthly update highlighting accomplishments, stories and celebrations that have happened.



work plan

Based on the information in this Network Plan, the Personal Support Network will facilitate action towards the following priorities:

- 1:
- 2:
- 3:

During the period of (insert specific dates), the following specific actions will be accomplished:

MONTH	SPECIFIC ACTIONS	TOTAL HOURS
		4-6
		4-6
		4-6
		4-6
		4-6
		4-6

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