

Supported Living – Setting the Culture

Supporting a person to live in their own home requires a significant shift in thinking. This shift in thinking is wonderfully explained a video called [Self-Determination: "Dignity of Risk."](#) The video features Chris Lyons, a nationally recognized attorney specializing in the defense of community service providers. The text of his example is as follows:

Chris Lyons: Imagine for a minute in your world that I was the boss of you. That I was your boss. And the boss of your life, not just the boss of your job.

And let's say you wanted to go across the street from where you live to the corner store to get some ice cream. And in order to do that I had to go with you. And I had to decide when we went. And I had to decide how we went. And I had to decide what you did when you were there. You might come to me and voice a desire to do that but essentially all the decisions in going there were mine.

How would that make you feel as an individual here in this room and across the state of Minnesota? What kinds of sensibilities would that invoke in you?

Well let's change it a little bit. The next day, I'm still the boss of you and I don't have to go with you across the street, but you do have to come to me to cross the street. And you have to ask me for permission to cross the street and I have to annually check you for "street crossedness" or whatever we want to call it, and assess your ability to do that. And I must approve that activity.

Well, now I'm going by myself so I feel a little bit better and it's a little bit more meaningful activity for me, but I'm still tied to this person who is making decisions for me and deciding my abilities and deciding and directing my intentionality.

Let's change it a little bit. Remember, I'm still the boss of you, but today, you don't have to come to me and tell me you're going to cross the street. You don't have to ask my permission and you're going to be going on your own.

But I want to make one thing certain, as the boss of you, that if you cross the street, and of course we'll have the annual assessment of your "street crossedness" or whatever you want to call it, we'll have that assessment, and if you cross the street and you fail to use common sense in looking both ways and you're struck by a car because of your failure to look both ways, it's going to be my fault. Okay? I'm still the boss of you so if something happens to you when you go across the street to the corner store, it's going to be my fault.

Well, this is where the rubber meets the road in our cultural shifting and our philosophy in providing new residential services. Hold that thought because I'm going to contrast it with the final day in our exercise.

And that is, you decide when you're going to cross the street. You choose how you're going to cross the street. You choose what you're going to buy when you get across the street. You don't check with me or ask my permission. And if you, by some act or mistake of your own fail to look both ways and an accident occurs where you're struck by a vehicle, it's your fault and not mine.

And I'm suggesting to you that this simple model, if you could just embrace that simple model, then we could close up early in about two hours and I'd be done. Because what I'm suggesting to you when I try cases, when I talk to provider agencies, this is at the core of the paradigm shift in service delivery.

We're going from a system where we consider ourselves still responsible for the acts of those we serve, to a system where those we serve are responsible for their acts.

And why is this so important? This is important because it is at the core of our human dignity. I suggest to you that that which makes us most human is our ability to enjoy our successes by having the ability to own our own failures. It is that contrast, that yin and that yang if you will, of human nature that allows us to truly be a person. A true human being.

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This example captures perfectly the mindset that is required to support people in their own homes. An agency providing services must first recognize the person with disabilities' humanity and their civil rights.