

## **HOW TO USE THE ISP TO PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FRIENDSHIPS**

Relationships are a fundamental need for everyone. They bring richness to our lives, provide opportunities to learn, grow, and contribute, and give support to one another through times of joy and sorrow. Through relationships, we add to the life of our communities and enrich the world. People who receive services through DDS are no different but they do, often, experience challenges in establishing and maintaining relationships. Some of these challenges are specific to the person but many times external factors contribute to difficulties for the person to form and maintain relationships. For example, when individuals move, they may lose touch with old friends and have trouble figuring out how to make new ones. They may not be as close to a favorite sibling as they used to be, and have moved away from the faith community where they served a valued role in the choir. They may be experiencing health challenges that make it more difficult to access the community, or lack the social skills needed to connect easily with others. The bus route they used to visit their best friend may have changed, and they need to learn a new route. The ISP provides the framework to address all of these issues, and to support people to develop and maintain a rich variety of relationships and friendships in their lives. Relationships include family members, paid staff and others receiving services. Just as importantly, it includes friendships with unpaid peers in the community who are not family members or other individuals receiving services.

The Vision Statement of the ISP reflects principles of Person Centered Planning and provides the framework for efforts on behalf of the individual, including the means to promote, establish, and maintain relationships. It is the area where the Department encourages individuals to dream beyond the confines of service provision.

The Vision Statement is developed by answering four key questions:

- 1. What does (s) he identify as important activities and relationships to continue to be involved in? What other things would (s) he like to explore?*
- 2. What does (s) he think someone needs to know in order to provide effective supports?*
- 3. What does (s) he think are his/her strengths and abilities?*
- 4. What would (s) he like to see happen in his/her life over the next two years?*

The first question focuses immediately on relationships that are important to the person. Supporters should go on a “treasure hunt” to identify and record every detail of the person’s current and previous social networks as well as identifying the activities the person enjoys with the goal of maintaining them to the greatest degree possible through changing life circumstances. It also provides an opportunity for the person to dream of new activities and relationships to explore in the future.

The second question offers the person the opportunity to identify what helps them the most and what gets in the way. This is often a question that is difficult for people to answer, but perseverance in identifying the person’s preferences in how they receive support will

encourage success in addressing goals for the future. Things to pay attention to are the individual's rhythms and routines, what types of environments are most comfortable, whether they need time to feel out a new situation or are the type to jump into a new experience with excitement. Get to know what the best "fit" is for the individual.

The third question provides information on how the person perceives their skills. By focusing in on relationships in addressing this question, supporters may identify hidden opportunities or obstacles to relationship. For example, a quiet person may describe himself as shy, but it also makes him a good listener, something he might not highlight. Someone else may identify herself as a good friend, but doesn't always make note of important events in her friends' lives. Identifying conflicts between an individual's self-perception and actual abilities will strengthen the team's efforts in promoting relationships.

The fourth question tells the ISP Team what is most important to work on now, and what the person's goals for the future are. The individual should be supported to be specific about what they want out of life, especially in the realm of relationships and community connections. Do they want to re-connect with old friends? Establish a romantic relationship? Learn how to ride a bicycle? Have greater independence? Explore their new community? Encourage people to imagine the life of their dreams!

Whatever the person's goals, they are likely to have a connection to relationships or create opportunities to expand social connections, and we would expect those connections to be included in some way in nearly all ISP Objectives, not be isolated to a single Objective targeting friendship. Learning to ride a bicycle can lead to a biking buddy, gaining independence leads to mutually supportive relationships with neighbors. This is where the ISP Team's creativity comes in. Details in each of the four Vision questions will provide the unique picture of who the person is, what they want out of life, what resources they have to draw on, and how the ISP Team can best support them to achieve their goals. If there are missing pieces to this puzzle, assessments and consultation that are developed as part of the ISP can provide assistance in filling in the gaps and helping to hone in on the stepping stones and strategies that will support the person to achieve the life they have imagined, one that is rich in those people and communities that are important to them.

### **THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX**

The following three examples of individual Vision Statements offer an opportunity to develop Goals, Objectives, and Support Strategies that create greater capacity for community inclusion and freely given relationships. As with all forms of person centered planning and thinking, beginning with knowledge of the person's capabilities and attributes and an understanding of the resources, especially human and community based resources, that are available will provide the means to promote attainment of their unique goals.

## DAVID

**David's Vision Statement, was developed by observing his interactions with staff during site visits and speaking with his guardian.**

**What does he identify as important activities and relationships to continue to be involved in? What other things would he like to explore?**

*David's guardian reports that he seems to like most of the people that work with him because he smiles whenever someone comes to check on him in his room. He seems most responsive with Julie who worked with David when he was still living with his parents and was recently hired as a support worker at David's new home. David spends most of his time in bed in his room and enjoys visits. He enjoys activities where he can use his hands such as knitting or doing puzzles.*

**What does he think someone needs to know in order to provide effective supports?**

*David is entirely bed-ridden as a result of a progressive neurological disease and his guardian wants his staff to follow all of his medical protocols very carefully to assure he maintains the best possible health.*

*David communicates through facial expressions. Staffs need to know David well in order to interpret some of the more subtle indications that he is uncomfortable. David's guardian says that Julie is very effective in reading these cues and has helped other staff to understand David better since she came to work at his house.*

**What does he think are his strengths and abilities?**

*David's guardian and staff say he has a great sense of humor and is very patient in trying to make his wishes known. He has shown great courage over the past year since his mother passed away and he moved into his current home.*

**What would he like to see happen in his life over the next two years?**

*David's guardian would like to explore the possibility of assistive technology that would allow David to communicate more effectively. He would also like David to be able to have more social contact than he does currently. Although David is bedridden much of the time, he has good days when he can be up in a chair for a few hours at a time.*

David's guardian has established two clear goals for David: enhanced communication and increased social contact. These goals work hand in hand. David's ability to communicate will increase the likelihood that he will form new friendships and additional friendships will improve the quality of his life. The simplest and most typical way that these goals could be addressed is to seek a referral to a speech pathologist and help David spend more time with his housemates

and staff. The goals would likely be achieved, but would not foster greater social inclusion or, likely, freely give relationships.

Another approach would be to start by thinking about how to find and include people he may have known before he moved by talking to Julie. Re-connecting David with friends and acquaintances from his past by inviting them to visit his new home will enhance his social network. Some of those individuals may have insight into communication strategies that they have found to be effective for him which will help staff learn those strategies. They may know of particular interests he pursued while living with his family. In finding and using assistive technology, perhaps there is a peer network where individuals who use similar devices get together. Maybe someone from that group could be a mentor for David and then David could mentor someone else in the future.

Perhaps David could host a knitting circle at his home to include neighbors who like to knit or crochet and want companions to share this interest. Getting to know other people who love handwork may lead to swap meets (every knitter has a stash of yarn they are editing) community projects devoted to helping others (like knitting hats for premature babies). By beginning the approach to these two goals with the concept that relationships and community resources have a great likelihood of contributing to success, the efforts made on David's behalf will be all the richer for him and the people involved in helping him achieve his goals, whether paid or un-paid.

## JUAN

*Juan's Vision Statement was developed with him at his home. Juan wanted his father to be included in the discussion as well. This is Juan's first ISP.*

**What does he identify as important activities and relationships to continue to be involved in? What other things would he like to explore?**

*Juan's lives with his father and two younger brothers and they are very important to him even though he sometimes argues with his brothers. Juan also has an older sister, Ana, who recently married and moved far away. Juan misses her and would like to see her more often. Juan recently graduated from High School and has two close friends, Sal and Bill; he wants to stay in touch with them now that they are all out of school. Juan is anxious to start working after taking the summer off. His father also thinks it would be good for Juan to have a job but he wants to be sure that Juan's income stays the same or goes up so that he can continue to help with household expenses.*

**What does he think someone needs to know in order to provide effective supports?**

*Juan communicates verbally. He speaks both English and Spanish but prefers Spanish. He wants people to understand he is a man and to respect his privacy by knocking on his door before coming into his room. He wants people to know that his dad helps him make decisions.*

*Juan's father reported that Juan is blind in his left eye and he is easily startled if people come up on this side and he doesn't see them. When Juan was in school, his teacher always made sure his seat was where he could see people coming in the door and coming up beside him. His father makes sure that he sits on Juan's left side at the movies and at ball games because of this.*

**What does he think are his strengths and abilities?**

*Juan says he is very strong and can work hard at things like painting, gardening, and lawn mowing. He likes to do a very good job and takes the time to make sure that he pulls all the weeds in his flower garden every week. Juan's father says that Juan is very softhearted. He shows concern for others and will go to people and pat them on the shoulder if he thinks they are sad.*

**What would he like to see happen in his life over the next two years?**

*Juan said that he likes living with his dad and brothers and he wants to keep living with them. He wants to get together with Bill and Sal more often (his father says he has not seen them since they all graduated). Juan would also like to get a job, especially if he can get a job that lets him work hard.*

Like David, Juan has two clear goals. He wants a job and he wants to reconnect with Sal and Bill. Perhaps these goals can be connected. The first step will be to find out where Sal and Bill are. If they still live close to Juan, then connections may be re-established through the efforts of their families as a starting point. If they are close by, visits can be supported at community events where they share interests and at each other's homes. If one or both of them live far away, it is worth exploring how they can maintain contact even at a distance.

Perhaps Bill has a job in a garden center and they are looking for additional help during the summer that would be a good fit for Juan. Perhaps Sal works in a warehouse where Juan's strength can be utilized and he can contribute to his family's income. Perhaps these friendships don't connect up to any work, and the right thing hasn't come along for Juan. He can join a garden club and help with their annual fundraiser that will connect him to other people that share his passion. He can volunteer to help paint the hallway of his church and meet other parishioners. The more chances Juan has to connect to a wide variety of people who share his interests, the more likely he is to achieve his goals.

## MARTA

***Marta's Vision Statement was developed with her and, at her request, with staff that support her at work and at home.***

**What does she identify as important activities and relationships to continue to be involved in? What other things would she like to explore?**

*Marta's House Manager, Christine, reports that Marta has a very good relationship with three of the four women she lives with at Edgewater Road. She struggles sometimes with Judy, but they are generally able to resolve their differences. Christine also reported that Marta enjoys walking in her neighborhood and that she knows all of the dogs on her block as well as their owners (but she knows the names of the dogs better than the people). She especially likes walking with her neighbor, Carol. Marta would love to have a dog herself and wants to see if that is possible in the next year.*

*Marta's Job Coach, Steve, reports that Marta is a very good worker, easily mastering most of the jobs that come into the Work Center. Steve believes she is capable of more independent work but she wants to maintain her relationships and friendships at the work center.*

**What does she think someone needs to know in order to provide effective supports?**

*Marta communicates using a mixture of a few words, hand gestures, and by indicating her likes and dislikes with facial expressions and gestures. She will point at what she wants. Marta has a seizure protocol and people need to know what to do if she has a seizure and that she needs to rest after a seizure.*

*Marta is very attracted to dogs and both Christine and Steve report that she will approach them without regard for her safety.*

**What does she think are her strengths and abilities?**

*Marta says she is a very good worker and almost never misses work. She does all her chores at home when Christine reminds her and likes to make sure everything is very well organized, especially her sock drawer. She likes all kinds of animals and has become more patient with people, especially her housemates.*

**What would she like to see happen in her life over the next two years?**

*Marta wants to keep the same job she has now and she wants to keep living at Edgewater Road. She wants to get a dog of her own and learn how to take care of it.*

Marta's goal of having her own dog and learning how to take care of it provides many natural opportunities for community inclusion and forming additional relationships beyond those she has already established. She can learn about various types of dogs by talking with the neighbors who are dog owners to find out the best type of dog for her and the other people she lives with. Once she knows what kind of dog she wants she can visit shelters and canine rescue services until the right dog is available. As this may take some time, she can become a regular and perhaps volunteer at these organizations, getting to know other volunteers and staff.

Once she adopts a dog, she can take obedience classes with other dog owners, perhaps becoming involved in agility training after basic training is complete. All of these activities provide Marta with the opportunity to meet other people who share her interests. It may even lead her to consider other work so that she can more easily maintain the costs of dog ownership.

Marta is likely to need some support to become a responsible dog owner. As she already knows her neighbors and their dogs, she should be encouraged to approach them for advice. Perhaps her neighbor Carol can be of assistance since they already walk regularly.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

During the ISP meeting for any of these individuals, the team should spend time brainstorming all of the various ways they can be supported to achieve their goals. Objectives and Support Strategies which are submitted as drafts should be fine-tuned with attention to specific details that will support success. The more detailed the strategies are the better. For example, simply noting that staff will find out where the animal shelters are doesn't really identify who will do that and how, nor does it support relationship building or social inclusion for Marta. Having a Support Strategy that indicates that staff will help Marta to ask her friend Carol if she knows where the animal shelters are is a more specific approach. Even better will be to identify the days when Carol and Marta take the longest walk because it is Carol's day off. Perhaps Carol knows someone in the neighborhood who got their dog from a shelter. Again, the more specific and detailed the strategy, the more likely everyone's efforts will stay on track.

Equally important is the need for frequent check-ins with the team on their efforts. This can be achieved through a meeting of the ISP Team, a Progress Report, emails updating all the relevant parties, or conference calls. The important thing is for the entire team to stay in communication so that they can celebrate success and, when roadblocks arise, develop new approaches that continue to draw on the richness of community and relationships that sustain us all.