

# Widening the Circle: Expanding Friendship Opportunities

November 23, 2015

Widening the Circle is a partnership between The Arc of  
Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Department of  
Developmental Services



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## Today's Agenda

- Friendship Facts
- What we mean by "Friends"
- Benefits & Obstacles to Friendships
- Tips for Community Inclusion
- Using Social Media...CAREFULLY!
- Case Study
- Questions

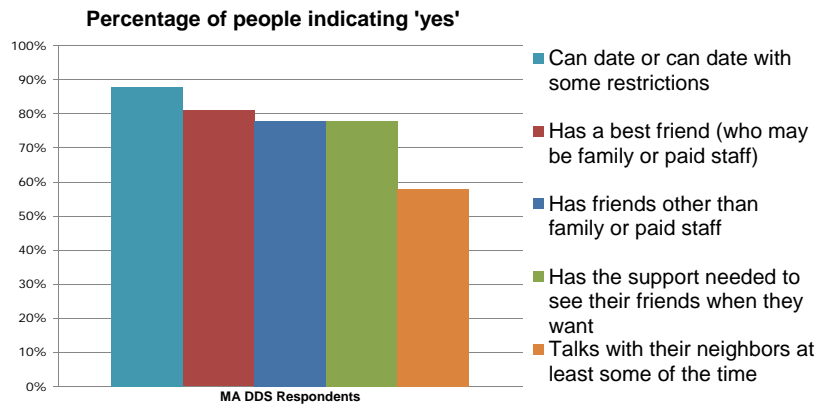


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# Friendship Facts

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# Friendship Satisfaction

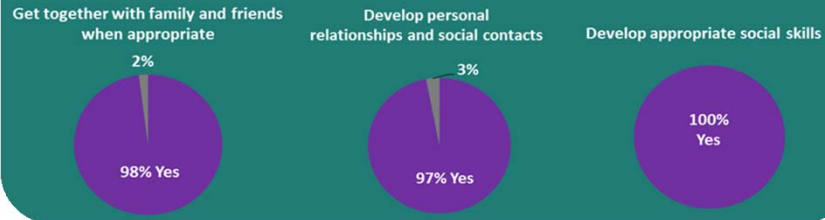


Source: National Core Indicators  
[www.nationalcoreindicators.org](http://www.nationalcoreindicators.org)

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## Licensure and Certification Data

### Most Recent Licensure and Certification Data FY15 Providers support people to:



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## And yet...

**4 out of 10  
people feel  
lonely at least  
half of the time**  
(Source: NCI FY14)



— Feels lonely — Does not feel lonely

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# Speaker Introduction



Jim Ross

Mary Ann Brennen



## WIDENING THE CIRCLE

Widening the Circle has been busy since 2012 promoting friendships between people with and without disabilities by:

**RESEARCH!**  


**TRAIN-THE-TRAINERS**

We trained over 100 people across the state, with and without disabilities, to present the "Introduction to Friends" training.



**COMPILING RESOURCES**

**WIDENING THE CIRCLE**  
<http://www.commonwealthmedicine.com/press-releases/2012/08/2012-08-20-widening-the-circle.aspx>  
  
 Everyone needs friends!

**DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS**



**"INTRODUCTION TO FRIENDS" TRAININGS**

- What Does "Friend" Mean to You?  
 150 Presentations to 4,100 people including:
- > Parents (20%), W/M Family Leadership, etc.)
  - > People with Disabilities (24 conferences, etc.)
  - > High School Students
  - > 200 Staff (11 Institutes, Conferences, etc.)
  - > Provider Staff (2 conferences, Leadership Institute, Community College, etc.)



**BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS AT WORK**

A TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYERS: EFFECTIVE JOB DEVELOPMENT AND JOB DESIGN



## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “FRIEND”?

- Trusting
- Kind
- Got your back
- Honest
- Dependable
- Reciprocal
- Freely Given



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## BENEFITS IN HAVING FRIENDS

**People with Friends are:**

- HAPPIER
- HEALTHIER
- SAFER



Friendships benefit both individuals, their families, their communities and society as a whole!

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## FRIENDSHIP CAN LEAD TO:

- Increased happiness and sense of self-worth.
- Increased social skills.
- A greater sense of community and enhanced connection with community members.
- Reduced isolation and the negative effects associated with isolation.
- Better emotional and physical health.



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## MAKING & KEEPING FRIENDS ISN'T EASY!

### Commonly identified obstacles include:

- People look & act “differently”
- Necessary adaptive equipment
- Lack of accessibility in community
- Having few or no interests which can be shared with others.
- ***Different ways of communicating***

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## OBSTACLES CONTINUED

- Over-protective parents
- Staff not trained on how to facilitate relationships
- A lack of experience with forming close relationships or in communicating or socializing with others.
- ***Largely, still, segregated services***

## TIPS FOR MAKING FRIENDS

Opportunities for friendships can be found wherever people:

**LIVE**



**LEARN**



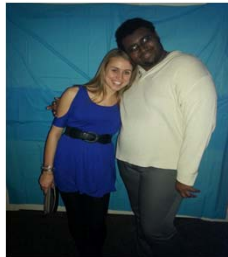
**WORK**



**PLAY**



## TIPS FOR MAKING FRIENDS



- Be a good role model
  - Do not underestimate your influence
  - Staff vs friend relationship
  - Model friendship characteristics like trust and caring
- Get to know the person really well
  - List things they like
  - List things they want to try
  - Identify gifts and talents
- Be ready to advocate!



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## SUPPORT THE PERSON

- Support people with grooming and hygiene if necessary
- Support people to practice good social skills



- Regular participation is key - habits form over time!
- Maximize interactions
  - Treadmill vs spinning
- Support reciprocity – help people initiate on occasion

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## COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

- Find community activities through local sources – newspapers, community boards, online
- <http://thearcofmass.org/resources/recreation/>
- Poll family and friends



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## WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIPS

- Coordinate efforts across organizations
- Build relationship-related goals into the IEP
- Help people understand and participate in workplace culture
- Replace agency vans with co-worker rides
- Consider natural job supports



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## SOCIAL MEDIA

How can you use technology and social media in ways that enhance relationships and don't interfere with them?

What is Social Media?



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## PROS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

- Many people use social media to communicate and engage with each other.
- Eliminates physical distance as a barrier to communication.
- Sites like meetup.com have enabled people to find others who share their passions for specific activities.
- Social media can be a stepping stone to face-to-face interactions
- E-mail can be a wonderful tool!

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## BE CAREFUL!

- People with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups to bullying, including cyber bullying.
- Social media may not allow for the full range of non-verbal cues that some people need
- Ensure that the use of social media or other technologies does not lead to isolation from the community.
- The rightful place of social media is NOT to replace real friendships!



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## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY GUIDELINES

1. Individualize support plans based on people's interests and risk levels.
  - Proposed revisions to the DDS Licensure tool will include supporting people to privately use social media
2. Make sure that people have information about the benefits and the risks of the platform they are using and know how to protect themselves

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## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Assume everything is permanent. The internet doesn't forget!
2. Use your security settings. For example, Facebook profiles should not be public
3. On some platforms, like discussion groups, you might want to use a fake name to protect your privacy.
4. 'Liking' books, movies, places, organizations, etc. on Facebook can be a good starting point to interacting with people who share your interests

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## SUPPORT WITH 'FRIENDING'

1. Be selective about who you friend. Do you know them?
2. Don't arrange to meet someone you don't know without sharing the location with someone you trust.
3. If you have questions about an interaction, ask someone you trust like a staff or family member

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## 5 THINGS NOT TO SHARE ONLINE

- Date of Birth
- Social Security Numbers
- Home Address
- Bank info
- Personal passwords
- Don't send money to someone!

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## Case Study

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## THE CASE

State budget cuts had just been announced, and one cut directly effecting people was the halving of the DDS (Department of Developmental Services) transportation budget. Transportation to work for many people, including **Armand**, was threatened.

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## SOLUTION...AH HA!

### What is the right question to ask?

“How can we restore the cuts?” will result in one set of predictable answers.



But “How will Armand get to work?” will yield a much more meaningful set of possibilities that will not only get him to work, but may result in increasing Armand’s relationships—even friendships—with others.



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## FINAL THOUGHTS

- Incorporate “Relationship Thinking” whenever you can
  - Exercise in groups
  - Community CSA’s
- Everyone has a role in this!
- There are endless opportunities for community interactions!

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## DDS INITIATIVES

- *Creating our Common Wealth*: Targeted training to staff and providers about creative thinking in supporting friendships and community connections.
- *Social Inclusion Policy*: DDS plans to develop a formal policy
- *Widening the Circle Mini-Grants*: Final report: <http://thearcofmass.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Grants-merged.pdf>

## Questions and Answers

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## RESOURCES

- Mass Advocates Standing Strong (MASS): Self-advocacy groups exist in most areas. [mass.office.info@gmail.com](mailto:mass.office.info@gmail.com)
- Widening the Circle project and resources specifically around developing relationships:  
<http://thearcofmass.org/programs/widening-the-circle/>
- “Friends: Connecting people with disabilities and community members”, a support guide. U. of Minnesota
- [http://rtc.umn.edu/docs/Friends\\_Connecting\\_people\\_with\\_disabilities\\_and\\_community\\_members.pdf](http://rtc.umn.edu/docs/Friends_Connecting_people_with_disabilities_and_community_members.pdf)
- INDEX database: search for “Consultants” who may be able to help establish relationships. <https://www.disabilityinfo.org/>



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