

Building Local Capacity for Person-Centred Approaches

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“Development of a person-centred approach requires real changes in organisational culture and practice. Achieving these changes should be a priority...”

–*Valuing People*

Who We Are and What We Did

At David Towell's invitation, teams from Bexley, Bury, East Kent, Oxford, and Poole gathered at Cranfield on 17-18 November 2003. Teams included people with learning disabilities, family members, managers of service providing agencies, and commissioners of services. There was also a team with national responsibility for assisting in the implementation of person-centred planning. This was the second such workshop in what we plan to be a series of similar events, to be continued in 2004. In the Spring, we had worked with a similar cross-section of stakeholders in the delivery of *Valuing People*, but invited as individuals. The lessons from this workshop can be found in *Person-Centred Planning In Its Strategic Context* (available from david.towell@iahsp.fsnet.co.uk). In particular we learnt from sharing and reflecting on experience across England that success in delivering *Valuing People* objectives requires a balanced investment in the three main areas – helping people make and act on person-centred plans, shifting the culture of specialist services and opening up access to resources in the mainstream – and continually exploring the links between these three areas of development. Taking this core idea seriously, we also were able to see how, starting small, it might be possible to establish in each locality a positive spiral of change which would

ensure increasingly large numbers of people get individualized opportunities and support consistent with *Valuing People* principles. And in meeting the many challenges involved in achieving positive progress, we identified the importance of maintaining a focus on the twin outcomes of people with learning disabilities

crossing the boundaries of mainstream services and wider community life (inclusion) and gaining power over their own lives (self-determination).

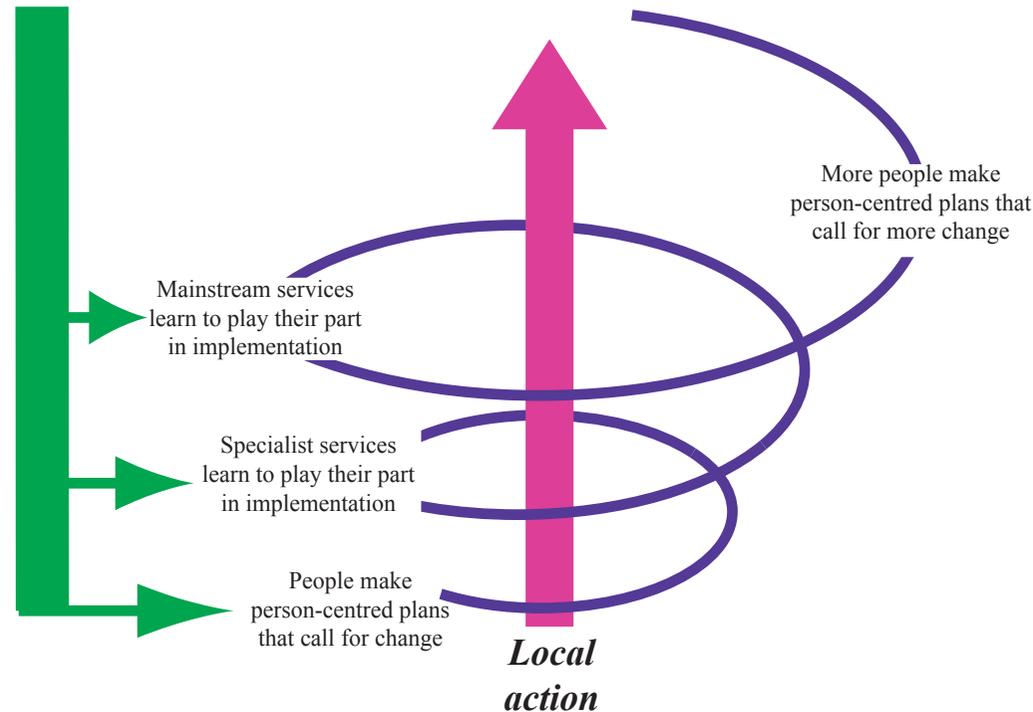
These ideas formed the backdrop to the second workshop but with the important difference that this time we invited people in local teams who, working and learning

together, would be better able to act on their diagnosis of their own situation so as to strengthen local strategies for systemic change.

Each team made its own record and was able to take home a locally-tailored workshop report to share with colleagues and inform action.

Rather than writing our own workshop report we reflect further on some of the key ideas discussed in the large group and start to sketch some 'thinking tools' which might be useful to

Valuing People



teams in developing local action plans which support a positive spiral of sustainable change.

We appreciate that this paper is not easy to read. We are still exploring ideas which can be difficult for all of us to understand. We want to continue to work with people with learning disabilities to find more accessible ways to talk about these things. In the meantime we hope people who find this hard to read will work with others in their teams to figure out what to take from this to assist their own local efforts.

Our purpose was to explore **what needs to happen locally if person-centred planning is going to be a key part of delivering the kinds of supports described by *Valuing People***. We worked in teams, in groups constituted by role, and in a large group to answer four questions:

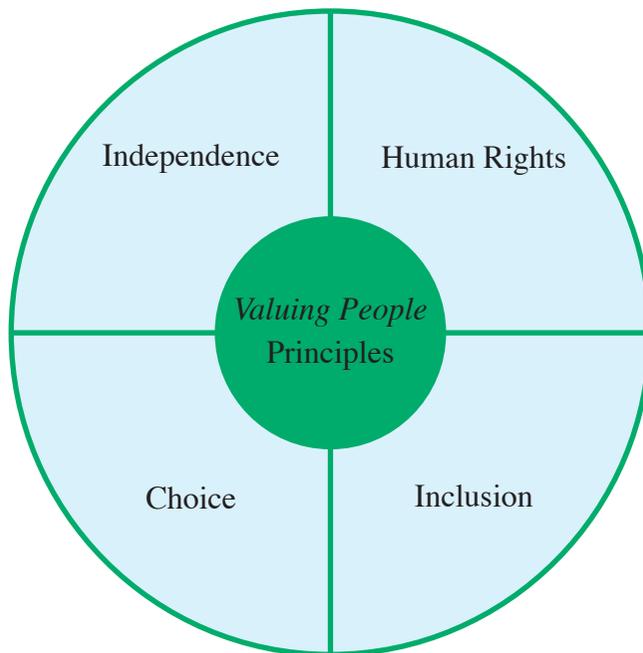
- What is the big picture in our locality: what is happening around the implementation of *Valuing People* and how does person-centred planning fit it?
- What needs to happen locally to make person-centred planning effective?
- What contributions to this agenda do our different roles make possible and what do we need from others in order to make those contributions?
- Based on our answers to the first three questions, what is our team action plan?

This paper represents work in progress. We welcome comments from those who use these ideas. We hope also to continue this process of learning from local experience through further workshops with a mix of local teams – next time perhaps nominated by local Partner-

ship Boards – and thus to further develop ideas and tools which assist principled local action.

***Valuing People* calls for deep changes**

Valuing People is based on clear principles. Organizing and delivering services consistent with these principles to the large numbers of people who deserve them calls for deep change of two kinds.



The ways that people with learning disabilities receive services need to change to embody the principles so that...

- ...Mainstream services accommodate people with learning disabilities alongside other citizens.
- ...People and families receive individualized assistance in ways that respect their identity and their choices about how they want to live.

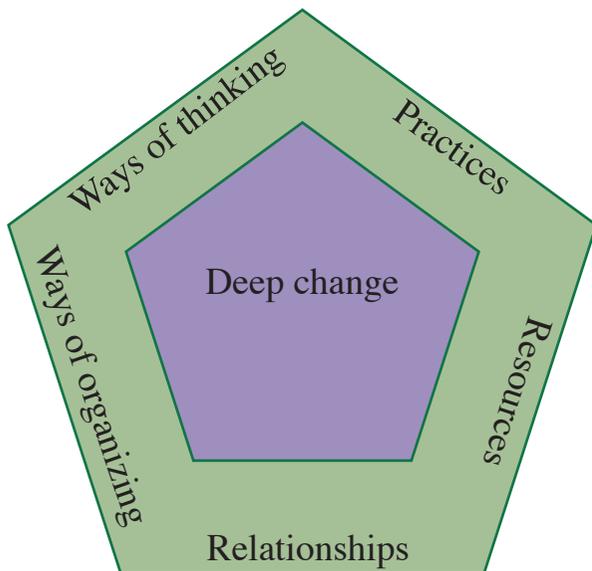
- ...Many more people have more income from paid jobs.
- ...People have life-long opportunities for learning.
- ...Many more people live in their own homes.
- ...People contribute to the life of their communities in ways that reflect their interests and gifts

The ways that changes are made need to embody the principles, so that...

- ...People and their families get the support they need to play an active role in defining, planning, steering, and evaluating changes in their own lives (This is where person-centred planning comes in.)
- ...Some people and families play an effective role in representing service users' point of view in planning, implementing, and evaluating changes in the delivery of specialist and mainstream services.
- ...Action for change in mainstream services includes the concerns of people with learning disabilities and actions for change in specialist services are informed by the concerns of those reforming mainstream services.
- ...Changes demand an investment in learning how to think and act differently: better understandings of disability, effective practice, and community life emerge and are widely shared.
- ...Local networks of people committed to the principles develop trust and mutual help based on shared action.

Deep change* is a shorthand term that underlines the seriousness of the work of changing the culture of specialist and mainstream services. It calls for people and systems to identify settled patterns of working

*See R. E. Quinn (1996). *Deep Change*. London: Jossey-Bass



that do not serve *Valuing People's* principles and to purposefully challenge them in order to discover new relationships, new ways of thinking, new resources, new practices, and new ways of organizing. Top down control of the details of deep change is impossible because these dimensions of deep change influence each other and create new interdependencies, which generate new possibilities and new problems. Some examples:

- Listening to people's preferences about how they would like to live calls for new practices to support people's decision making, new ways to think about risk.
- Thinking about everyone as a choice maker highlights the need for staff learning how to better understand people who do not use words and how to assist people with very limited experience to get a real sense of their options.

- As people draw on different funding streams and more people take up direct payments, contracting practices need to evolve.
- As mainstream primary care assumes responsibility for health care, specialist services need to consider their continuing responsibility to monitor and assist people to maintain good health and how to organize to meet that responsibility effectively.
- As mainstream housing resources become more available to people with learning disabilities as individuals, some service providers will face decisions about how to deal with property that they own.
- Groups with responsibility for planning and policy implementation are challenged to develop ways of discussing issues and making decisions that encourage genuine participation. Members with disabilities and family members are challenged to find ways to overcome what may have been a painful history of being ignored or disregarded and make the most of their opportunity to be part of the planning process.
- Because new capacities take time to develop and often depend on making the most of local circumstances, access to better opportunities will be patchy, at least during the time it takes to develop effective practices for disseminating competence from place to place.

These are interesting and important problems because their resolution will bring both specialist and mainstream services into better alignment with the principles of *Valuing People*. Positive changes in the lives of a growing number of people with learning disabilities demonstrate the practicality and the benefits of deep

changes in services. However, reflection on these changes shows that accepting risk and the responsibility to deal with real difficulties are part of the cost of improvements. This will be so at least until a new pattern of community expectations and services and supports stabilizes around *Valuing People's* principles.

Necessary changes are not only deep but also broad.

Especially in early efforts to cross the boundaries of mainstream services, people and their families will need to trust themselves and the people who support them to deal effectively with the many potential problems of relying on a new and different system. A person whose family feels secure with the day centre's bus may face a test of their trust at the prospect that a person will use public transit to pursue an individualized schedule of activities. Their capacity to support change will depend, in part, on their confidence that the person will re-



ceive adequate assistance to learn to use public transit. A person with a paid job in view needs confidence that the people she counts on have accurate information and willingness to help with potential benefits problems.

There is no single family voice or staff voice. Different voices represent very different estimates of the benefits and threats of change. Person-centred planning provides an important forum at the individual level for making sense of new possibilities, figuring out how to deal with problems, making agreements about action, tracking progress, and making adjustments and renewing direction.

Staff and their managers will find new demands around how and when they are available to the people they assist. The central management of service providing organizations face new strategic issues around what to provide and how to pace changes in their service offerings. Commissioners need new processes for assuring the adequacy and appropriateness of services because they can no longer rely solely on simple and impersonal professional assessments to judge the fit between services provided and people's preferences about how they want to live.

Shared themes in social policy raise uncertainty

Deep changes in learning disability services –both in the way services to people with learning disabilities are delivered and in how necessary changes in the system of services are made– resonate with a set of themes common across current reforms in social policy. These themes –social inclusion, citizenship, increasing choice

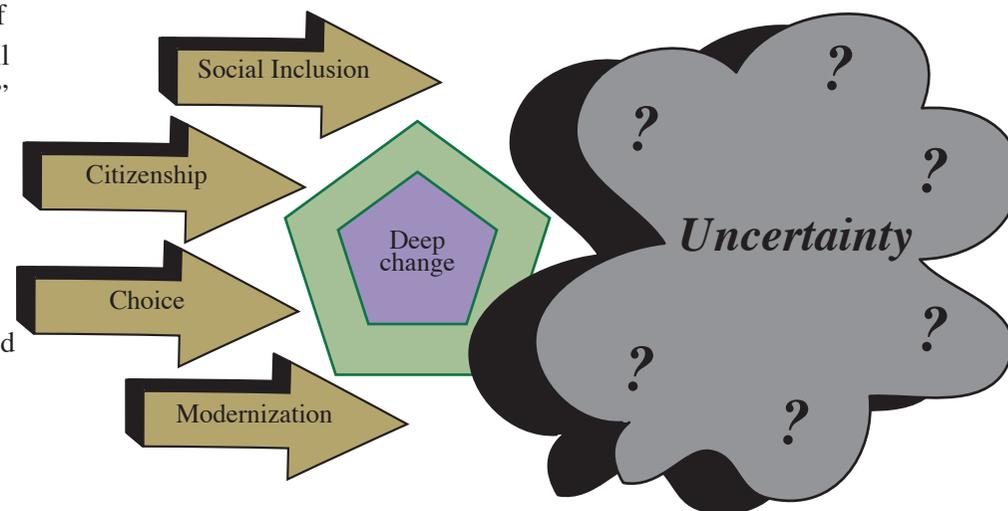
and involvement in the way services are provided, and the demand for fundamentally different approaches to service delivery– underline the importance and enrich the definition of the *Valuing People* principles. The breadth of their application means that people throughout local government and across mainstream service provision will recognize the intent of *Valuing People*, especially if those of us who are serious about its implementation learn to frame our proposals in ways that clearly express these themes.

So there is promise in the widespread call for deep change. But there is also a drawback: a further increase in uncertainty.

- People count on specialist and mainstream services while those services are changing. Not everyone who is affected would choose significant change in familiar arrangements in either specialist or mainstream services. A commitment to participation and responsiveness disallows ignoring those who want most to avoid the disruption of deep change. How will voices for “no change” be acknowledged and accommodated?
- These themes give people in other systems good reasons to respond to action based on *Valuing People's* principles. However, people with learning disabilities may not

figure in their planning unless people with learning disabilities and their families and allies actively represent their concerns.

- Other sectors face their own challenges of deep change. They may see people with learning disabilities as integral to their mission or they may see people with learning disabilities as an unwelcome distraction. Learning with people with different organizational cultures takes effort to cultivate relationships and understanding. This takes time and introduces even more demand on our capacity to learn outside familiar boundaries.
- Themes like social inclusion and citizenship are topics for controversy and much conversation as well as for the multiplication of initiatives. This may promise a stronger platform for joint action, but keeping up requires considerable effort.



Avoiding distractions

Situations of high uncertainty generate at least three predictable distractions from the work of deep change:

- **Focus on task over principle.** We get busy holding meetings and training sessions, and submitting papers in compliance with external deadlines, and dealing with the inbasket. Busy-ness provides both a feeling of change and a good excuse for avoiding deeper changes in relationships, resources, practices, and ways of organizing. Person-centred planning can be a tempting busy-ness trap when the goal becomes simply increasing the number of people who attend training and the number of plans filed.
- **Narrow options under stress.** The changes required to implement *Valuing People's* principles call for a significant increase in the variety of resources accessed and supports offered. The stress of uncertainty may lead us to lock-in to single solutions at just the time that we need to be exploring a wider horizon. A set of person-centered plans that all call for small variations on more of the same things that people already get signifies a fall into this trap.
- **Denial.** Reducing the demand for deeper change can be accomplished by simply re-labeling current practices as exemplars of principle, or by claiming that expressions of satisfaction with current arrangements mean that no further opportunities need be explored, or by resigning from responsibility for taking any action until some other external change happens.

Developing the capacity to implement *Valuing People* for large numbers of people and not just a fortunate few

calls for leadership that will keep people from mistaking the walls of distracting traps for the horizon of possibility. This leadership is as important among commissioners and senior managers of services as it is among the participants in person-centred planning.

Creating tools for strategic change

Everyone who wants to play a constructive part in meeting the challenge of deep change needs to improve their ability to think and act as strategists. Our discussions sketch the outlines of three kinds of tools for better strategic thinking.

There are important conditions to enable good use of these tools:

- Time to get together
- Support for reflection (good places to meet; capable facilitators and recorders)
- Inclusion of people with diverse perspectives
- Shared commitment to continually improve ability to listen to different points of view and to present a true picture.

1. Sharing a big picture

It's easy to focus on a single family of tasks and miss a big picture of the context for all the different changes necessary to implement *Valuing People*. Taking the time occasionally to construct and revise a shared picture of the environment gives people with diverse interests and perspectives the chance to discover opportunities for shared action and to consider priorities. Answering questions like these provides a useful background for using the other tools outlined here. Choosing key points

and considering the relationships among them defines the art of constructing a useful big picture.

- What can we say about the larger environment that contains our work?
 - What national trends and forces do we need to monitor and connect with?
 - What is happening in our local area among mainstream services and in communities that we need to monitor and connect with?
 - What is happening at more senior levels of any provider organizations that also work in other areas as well as ours?
- How would we describe the current effectiveness of people with disabilities and their families...
 - ...in influencing the services that they receive themselves?
 - ...in gaining support from other people with disabilities and their families to inform and implement positive changes in their own goals and lives?
 - ... in influencing the implementation of *Valuing People*?
- How would we describe the current state of coordination among the services in our area?
- How would we rate our history of collaboration with mainstream services?
 - What has worked?
 - What has not worked?
 - What are our current assets to promote collaborative work?
- How would we rate our history of change within specialist services?

- What has worked?
- What has not worked?
- How do we transfer what has been learned in one setting to others?
- Where are the strengths to build on in our specialist system?
 - Good examples of individualized assistance to people and families?
 - Assistance to people using mainstream services in a way that promotes choice and personal inclusion?
 - Ways that the voice of people and families is strengthened?
 - Sources of system flexibility such as support for use of direct payments, service brokerage, incubators for new initiatives?
 - What are our current assets to promote better alignment with Valuing People’s principles?

2. Checking the balance of strategic investments

Achieving a better capacity to plan and work in a person-centred way requires investment in a variety of activities. From time to time, partnership boards should set aside time to check the balance of their investments by describing how much time, talent, and money they are investing, then judging how good the balance is along at least the five dimensions described in the table below, and then adjusting their investments to gain a better balance. There is no single correct proportion of investment, only the requirement to be thoughtful about the balance as circumstances change.

Focusing “inside” on improving our own specialist services	Focusing “outside” on developing opportunities in mainstream services and community resources
Helping people to form and express their aspirations	Supporting people to pursue their aspirations
Focusing on people’s current preferences about how they want to live	Supporting people and families and allies to learn about new possibilities
Taking more local action within local communities and particular services	Shaping wider policies
Refining the techniques for planning with people	Improving service capacity to assist people in individualized ways
Focusing on people and family members and direct support workers	Focusing on managers and commissioners

3. Refining understanding by developing and testing systems of measurements

An effective system of measurement accomplishes at least four things:

- It provides a credible account of the results of service investments in terms of Valuing People’s principles.
- It allows comparisons across groups of people and through time that identify situations to learn from.
- It offers one means of translating people’s experi-

ence of barriers into useful messages that stimulate problem solving and policy change.

- It improves understanding of the meaning of the principles.

The process of developing measures and systems to assure that monitoring is effective in the ways described above provides a good opportunity for people to improve their understanding of what *Valuing People’s* principles mean.

- What information would credibly indicate an increase or decrease in inclusion; choice; independence; promotion of human rights?
- What is the least intrusive, least expensive way to collect and analyze this information?
- How can the monitoring process increase the individual influence people and families have over the way services are provided?
- How can the monitoring process improve the effectiveness of Partnership Boards?
- What information is it best to analyze for groups of people in order to surface areas that call for focused change efforts? (Examples might be trends in income from wages from open market jobs or rate of uptake of direct payments by people with substantial needs for assistance.)

4. Learning from storytelling

Deep change requires that both singly and together we sustain the effort to learn from reflection-in-action about how to do better. Stories are a powerful way to communicate the possibilities opened by *Valuing People’s*

principles. Honest, clear stories can broaden people's sense of what is possible and encourage and guide action. Building skills in telling stories with purpose and in listening to stories to guide further action creates important resources for deep change.

Because aligning services with the principles calls for significant change in how services assist people and families, we need to invite stories about key results, including these:

- People working for fair wages in open employment with support from their co-workers.
- People secure in their own homes.
- People substantially increasing control over their own daily lives.

- People benefiting from the use of assistive technology and supports to communication, mobility, productivity, and independence.
- People making valued contributions to ordinary community associations and activities.
- Mainstream providers demonstrating competency in serving people.

Because change needs to happen broadly, we need to invite stories of change at different levels of the system. For example, we need to know what it means to a person to finally be able to have their own front door key. We also need to know what it took to make it possible from the point of view of direct service workers, and managers, and mainstream housing providers. And simi-

larly across the whole range of issues which contribute to a full life, we need to learn to tell and listen to stories that communicate possibilities and stories that communicate know-how and stories that serve as springboards to the kinds of action that will result in the deep changes required to offer ever larger numbers of people with learning disabilities opportunities for choice and independence and inclusion based on respect for human rights.

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