

Changing the Pattern

Connie Lyle O'Brien & John O'Brien

People building communities competent to support people with severe disabilities have developed new ways of seeing people with disabilities and their communities and new ways of making decisions. This new pattern of thinking and deciding, which is based on identifying and building capacity, competes with a pattern deeply established in most existing disability services, which is based on identifying and fixing deficiency. The words in the right hand column describe the new pattern; the words in the shaded, left hand column describe the established pattern.

Like changing any habit, shifting from the established pattern to the new pattern requires conscious, disciplined practice. Current regulations, program designs, and professional practice establish the deficiency-fixing pattern. Steps into the capacity-support pattern feel strange because they break rules most people have been unaware of following. One person described the shift like this, "I feel like I'm learning a new language; I'm no longer fluent and I have to think harder and it seems like it would be easier to slip back into the language I already know. But the more I practice, the easier it gets."

How do we see people with disabilities?

- ☒ Deficits
- ☒ Inabilities
- ☒ Clients
- ☒ "Not us... one of them"
- ☒ Shameful
- ☒ Private troubles

- ☐ Capacities
- ☐ Gifts and interests
- ☐ Members
- ☐ "One of us"
- ☐ Proud
- ☐ Civic issues

How do we see communities?

- ☒ Dead
- ☒ Rejecting
- ☒ Dangerous
- ☒ Incompetent
- ☒ Enemy
- ☒ Client

- ☐ Lacking organization
- ☐ Potential for...
 - ... tolerance
 - ... welcome
 - ... assistance
 - ... appreciation
 - ... sharing
 - ... love
- ☐ Lacking connections to people with disabilities
- ☐ Deprived by policy and practice of opportunity and resources to include people with disabilities

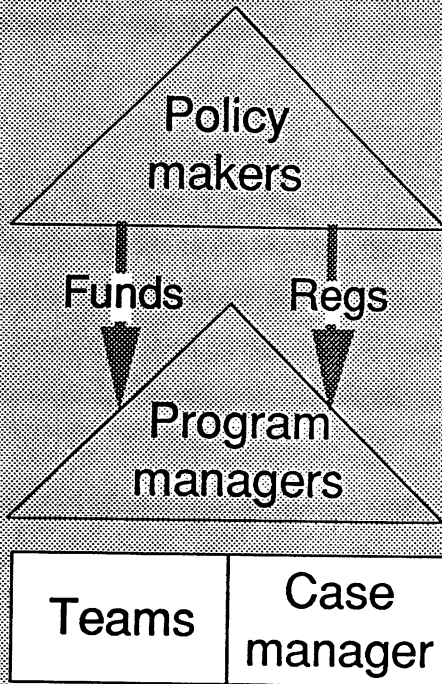
How do we define a desirable future?

- ☒ Residential service beds
- ☒ Vocational service slots
- ☒ Recreation therapy
- ☒ Socialization skills training
- ☒ Retirement services
- ☒ I_P's
- ☒ Active treatment
- ☒ Public support for comprehensive, life-long professional continuum of coordinated community services

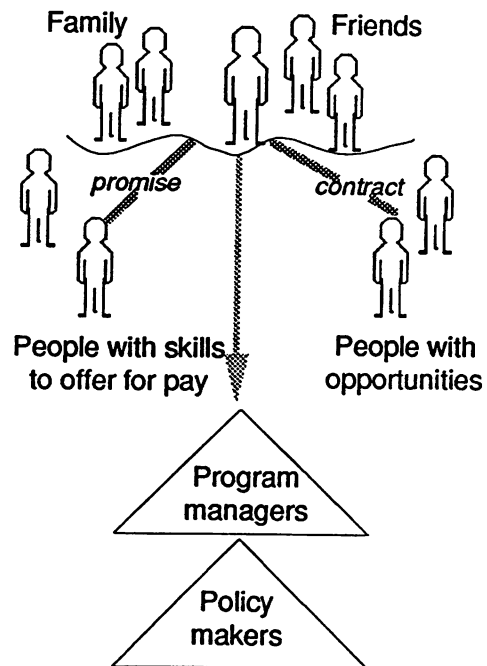
- ☐ Home
- ☐ A job
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Chances to learn
- ☐ Vision and plans
- ☐ Necessary assistance
- ☐ Personal involvement in civic action to build a more inclusive, more just community

Who makes decisions?

- ☒ Professional teams, organized by case managers, operating in conformity with program procedures and system regulations to allocate places in existing programs.

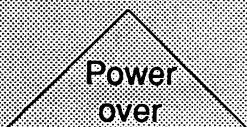


- ☐ People with disabilities and their allies in collaboration with community members who can offer opportunities and people who can provide relevant assistance. Policy makers allocate available funds flexibly to individuals.



On what basis are decisions made?

- ☒ Authority
- ☒ Role
- ☒ Position
- ☒ Money



- ☐ Negotiation
- ☐ Influence
- ☐ Shared problem-solving
- ☐ Caring
- ☐ Experience
- ☐ Involvement
- ☐ Mutually agreed authority

