



Heading West

We may not all be going to exactly the same destination, but we are all heading west and one of our responsibilities is to keep each other honest.

One of our ways of understanding person-centered work is as a pioneering journey west. The task is to follow trails opened by a few adventurers, a trail that can be difficult to find and follow and from which it is easy to wander. Our discussion identifies some of the trail markers that provide reliable signs that we continue to head west. We can experiment with using these markers to assess what we are learning on our journeys.

In our projects

- People with disabilities are a major source of ideas and energy.
- Family members are a major source of ideas and energy

- We find ourselves in a wider and wider diversity of partnerships
- More and more, people's opportunities come as a result of our collaboration with community outside the service system.
- People with disabilities are actively and personally involved in changing community members understanding of the capacities of people with disabilities.
- We sometimes find ourselves in situations that make us anxious/energized because we have to go with the flow into places where we don't have ready answers.
- Our respect for the capacities & resiliency of people with disabilities & families continues to grow.
- The commitment of staff people to making things happen with those they support continues to grow.
- We have discovered more ways that our beliefs assumptions have blocked our ability to provide what's needed to shift things.
- There are a growing number of examples of sticking with and standing up with people and families.
- We are able to establish relationships that encourage more people who are currently satisfied to clearly communicate desires for development & change.
- We are using less service language to guide what we are doing except in situations that would be professional/technical interventions in the life of non-disabled people (e.g. physicians and their colleagues will talk among themselves about cancer treatments in the jargon of their profession; support staff will use ordinary language to describe their work: no more stigmatizing people with 'high functioning' or describing assistance in living a real life as "day hab" or "res hab".) 'behaviors' or).
- Communicating what we are learning will require more than just words: we will be relying more on story, imagery, art, music.
- We will be struggling to act ethically in response to more and more important questions.

From the point of view of the OMRDD system

- “Putting people first” will not be a slogan that encourages cynicism & timidity but a call to purposeful action and learning.
- It will mean that DD system money will be very significantly easier to use to sustain flexible responses to the priority support needs expressed by people with disabilities & their families in ordinary language.
- It will mean that significantly more OMRDD money will go to supporting people rather than to the costs of paperwork & rule compliance.
- The legislature and the public will see OMRDD expenditures as investments in people (e.g. asset building, workforce development, supporting citizenship and contribution) not as delivery of medical or quasi-medical services.