

Person-Centred Planning As A Support To Transformation

Valuing People Now (VPN) challenges everyone to raise their expectations of what is possible for people with learning disabilities. As more and more people, families and organizations learn to act on its priorities, the number of people who are in control of the supports they require will grow, the number of people working for wages in jobs in open employment that match their capacities will grow, the number of people living in their own homes with personalized support will grow, and the number of mainstream health care providers who are capably serving people with learning difficulties will grow.

VPN's sub-title, *From Progress to Transformation*, makes clear that change in these key areas will not result from improving what we typically do in small steps, but from people taking up new roles (worker, home owner, director of personalized supports, contributing citizen) by everyone learning to do new things in new ways.

Person-Centred Thinking Tools, for example:

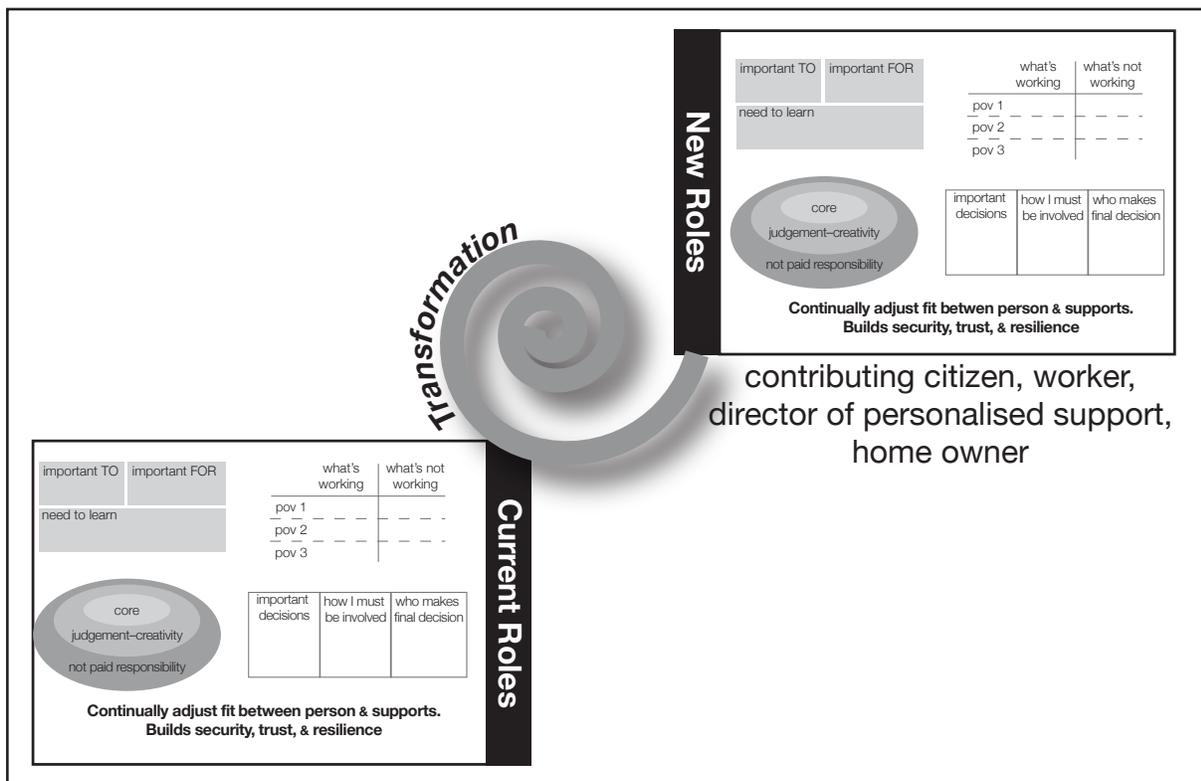
important TO	important FOR
need to learn	

	what's working	what's not working
pov 1	---	---
pov 2	---	---
pov 3	---	---

important decisions	how I must be involved	who makes final decision
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**Continually adjust fit between person & supports.
Builds security, trust, & resilience**

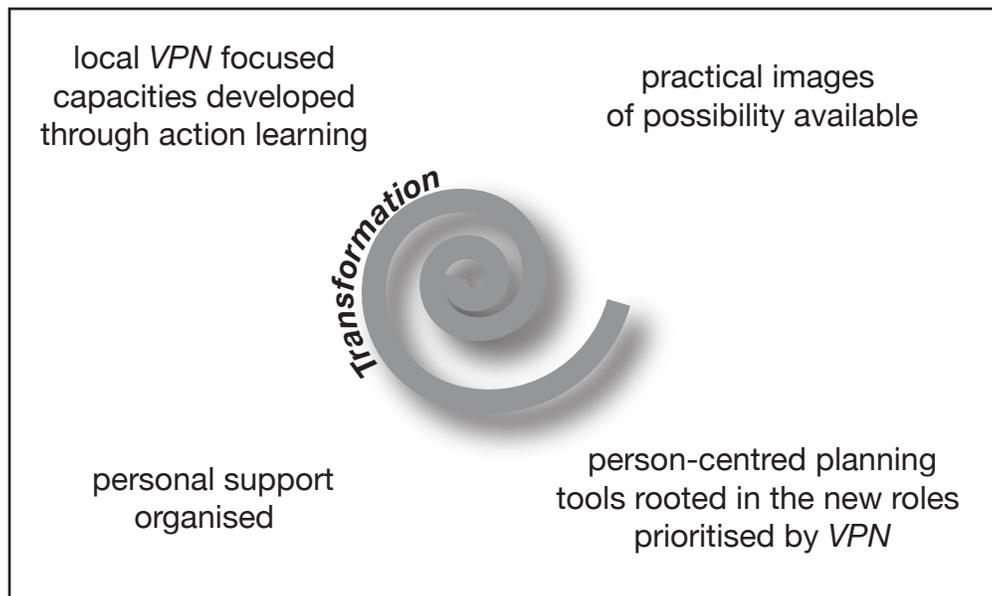
Person-centred thinking tools play a critical part. They guide continual improvement in the fit between person, assistants, and routines within current service arrangements. Well used by thoughtful people, these practices build and sustain the secure, trusting, focused support relationships that give people with learning difficulties and their carers the energy, confidence and resilience to do the work of transformation. And, once people have taken up the new roles that *VPN* prioritizes, there is a continuing need to keep adjusting the fit between person and supports as people and circumstances change.



VPN challenges person-centred planning as much as any other current service practice. As important as person-centred thinking tools are, they have only sometimes been sufficient to mobilize transformation. For example, research into the outcomes of person-centred planning showed no significant association between the approaches to person-centred planning used and people getting jobs (Robertson, et al, 2005) –a key *VPN* priority. Moreover, the personalization agenda offers opportunities for people and their families to assume responsibility for generating support configurations specific to

their requirements. Person-centred planning will contribute most to transformation when people use their plans to guide themselves and their allies to self-direct the supports they need to do good jobs in open employment, live securely in their own homes, and exercise their other roles as citizens. Self-directed supports for a life on the margin under the control of services will not fully realize *VPN*'s priorities, and person-centred planning needs to encourage people to imagine better lives and act to move toward their vision.

Four local conditions increase the chances that person-centred planning will contribute to moving people from progress to transformation.



Practical images of possibility. People with learning disabilities who are living the roles prioritized by *VPN* provide others with a model of what can be and useful advice about how to do the work of transformation. Without practical, local models people and their families can get locked-in by low expectations. When asked in a person-centred planning meeting, their choices will reflect an unquestioned judgement that a job is an unreasonable risk, self-directing support is an unmanageable burden, and home ownership is impossible. It is worth investing in extra support to those people and families who are most willing to pioneer new roles and purposefully connecting them with other people and families and advisors. Assuring that people with high

needs for support and members of minority communities are included in early transformation efforts increases the chances that members of these groups will benefit from local implementation of *VPN*.

Organized personal support. People and families who are actively linked to others who see a benefit for themselves in *VPN*'s priorities are more likely to accept responsibility for self-directing their supports and more likely to seek bold personal goals than people and families who are isolated, lack the opportunity to reconsider what is possible and feel victimized by the changes stimulated by *VPN*. Self-advocacy groups, Partners in Policy Making and related courses, and purposeful efforts to build circles of support as the holders of person-centred plans each make connections that facilitate transformation.

Developing support capacity through action learning. Too often, person-centred planning is defined as a driver of change without adequate attention to the effects that the culture and capacities of the services that people know on what they choose. Very few of the people and families who currently receive services experience the deliberations of the Partnership Board; their sense of what is possible is most powerfully shaped by what they experience in their day centre, college, or residence. Unless the organization a person and family rely on is itself actively engaged in transformation, very few people will bring transformational aspirations to their person-centred planning meetings. Most people and families will be satisfied with progress – a better fit between person and assistance within current roles- rather than seeking new roles and accepting the uncertainty of transformation. Making the person-centred thinking tools that promote good support a foundation of the organization's operations is a key step. So is thoughtful discussion of how effectively the organization is producing the results called for by *VPN*, what the organization is doing that is fit for *VPN*'s purposes and what must be transformed. This discussion forms the foundation for strategic action to build the organization's capacity to support people into new roles.

Consider the experience of DDRC, a large service providing organization in Calgary, Alberta (Ramsey, 2005). Beginning in 1993, DDRC closed its nine group homes and four

congregate day programs and replaced them with more individualized services. Person-centered planning approaches that focused on honoring people's choices and helping people to attain what they desired steered this change process.

A careful look at the result of these major and generally successful efforts revealed a new set of problems that resulted from success at individualizing supports. Choice had become a sort of sacred cow, and many people understood choice simply as looking for what a person would find familiar and fun to do. Expectations that people would find it desirable to reach for new possibilities were low, and so many people's social worlds remained small and limited to familiar networks of people served by the agency and its staff.

Reflection on these results stimulated revision of the person-centered planning process to incorporate a more explicit focus on community roles and relationships, a greater investment in widespread training on the benefits and responsibilities of active citizenship, and multiple investments in building community connecting skills. A renewed focus on encouraging work, volunteer activity, and then, a bit later on intentional support for friendships, has resulted in improvements, reflected in the changes summarized this table.

	2002	2005
<i>People employed individually in community workplaces</i>	35%	68%
<i>Average wage per hour</i>	\$5.17	\$7.56
<i>People with volunteer roles in community settings</i>	32%	48%
<i>People who pursue all activities during service hours in an inclusive manner</i>	35%	90%
<i>At least one friend in the community where reciprocal visits occur regularly</i>	13%	57%

Note that this is a story of a whole organization committed to sustained learning through reflection on current service delivery practice as it influences and is influenced by the choices people express through person-centred planning. It is not a story of a simple change in person-centred planning technique in itself resulting in new outcomes. Roles Based Planning, the tools that DDRC have developed is well worth studying, but it is the

whole culture of learning through action and reflection, sustained through more than 10 years, that shapes the changes reflected in the table.

Person-centred thinking and planning tools rooted in new roles. The mark of transformation is people with learning difficulties enacting new roles that embody their active citizenship. Some person-centred thinking and planning tools focus on assuring a good fit between a person and their assistants. Some, such as MAPS (O'Brien and Pearpoint, 2006), are aimed at revealing the conditions under which a person's gifts can flourish. Some, such as PATH (O'Brien & Pearpoint, 2006), guide action toward a personal or organizational vision. And some tools have developed in the context of assisting people into the roles prioritized by *VPN*. These include the discovery approach to developing customized employment in ordinary workplaces for people with high support needs (Graffin, Hammis, & Geary, 2007); planning in the context of making the best use of the opportunities afforded by personalization (Duffy, 2004); planning that builds relationships that will support young people as they transition from school (Coulson & Simmons, 2006); and a process for mobilizing direct support workers to learn to develop community opportunities that will stretch their organization's capacities (O'Brien & Mount, 2005). Adopting these more role specific forms of planning, along with the shifts in organizational practice that they require, should improve the chances that more people will experience the benefits promised by *VPN*.

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