

# **WHAT ARE WE LEARNING ABOUT BRIDGE-BUILDING ?**

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**A Summary Of A Dialogue  
Between People Seeking  
To Build Community For  
People With Disabilities**

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George Ducharme**

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For People With Disabilities.

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Production of this material was made possible by a grant from the  
Connecticut Developmental Disabilities Council.

Graphic Design: Chris Page

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We are very grateful to all who attended the conference and who contributed  
to our growing understanding of affective bridge-building practices. We are  
thankful for the layout work of Chris Page who has helped us portray our  
ideas. We greatly appreciate the support and encouragement of the members  
of the Connecticut Developmental Disabilities Council.

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# Contents

<b>What Are We Learning About Bridge-Building?</b>	<b>1</b>
A summary of a dialogue between people seeking to build community for people with disabilities	
Contrasting the Basic Assumptions Between Traditional Human Services and Community Bridge-Builders	2
<b>What Do Effective Bridge-Builders Have In Common?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Community Building</b>	<b>6</b>
Cathy Bartholomew-Lorimer: Bringing people together and expanding opportunities for relationship	
<b>Citizen Participation</b>	<b>8</b>
Sharon Gretz: Finding bridges to community	
<b>"One-Candle-Power"</b>	<b>10</b>
George Ducharme and Pat Beeman: The Connecticut experience building circles of support	
<b>Community Integration</b>	<b>12</b>
Janice Gross: Helping people be part of community life	
<b>Supported Employment</b>	<b>14</b>
Arthur West: Supported employment is an opportunity to build community	
<b>What Are We Learning About Building Community?</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>How Do People Build Connections?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>How Do I Respond When People With Disabilities Challenge Me To Find Creative Ways To Build Community?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>How Do Bridge-Builders Renew Their Efforts?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>How Are Bridge-Builders Managing the Tensions Between Community and Service Systems ?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>21</b>

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# What Are We Learning About Bridge-Building?

## A summary of a dialogue between people seeking to build community for people with disabilities

Community integration is a goal for many programs serving people with disabilities, however, many people with disabilities continue to live isolated and lonely lives. Just being in the community does not lead to real integration. Real integration, the development of genuine networks of support, requires very focused and assertive effort on behalf of facilitators who initiate, support and maintain new relationships. We call these facilitators "bridge-builders" because they build bridges and guide people into new relationships, new places, and new opportunities in life.

The role of the bridge-builder takes many forms and a growing number of people work full and part-time to strengthen the ties between people with disabilities and their communities. The bridge-builder works very hard to invite and include people with disabilities into community life. Bridge-builders share a vision, assumptions, and practices that distinguish them from traditional human service workers.

In October 1987, a number of bridge-builders met in Evanston, Illinois to discuss their values and experiences and to tell stories that reflect these values. A record of this discussion, The Gift of Hospitality: Opening the Doors of Community Life to People with Disabilities \* provides a vision from community bridge-builders and a rich source of information concerning the process of building community for people with disabilities. The Gift of Hospitality offers an excellent overview of the philosophy and vision of bridge-building.

In this monograph What Are We Learning About Bridge-Building?, we are seeking to further develop the concept of bridge-building by exploring the implementation of this approach. Many interested people have asked us "how do bridge-builders approach their work?" This document reflects the experiences and practices of a small number of community builders. Their activities illustrate the contrast between the assumptions of bridge-builders and the assumptions of traditional human service workers. Some of these basic assumptions are summarized in the next section.

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\* The Gift of Hospitality by Mary O'Connell.

### Contrasting the Basic Assumptions Between Traditional Human Services and Community Bridge-Builders

#### Traditional human services are breaking down because:

1. They often fail to support positive outcomes in the lives of people with disabilities.
2. Traditional services focus on the disabilities of people with handicaps, and focus energy on the correction of these deficits.
3. Traditional services segregate people in congregate settings, and they weaken the natural ties people have to community life.
4. Traditional services give power and decision making to professionals and other people paid to be in the lives of people, and all of these practices reinforce the belief that community is rejecting, unsafe, and hostile towards people with handicaps.
5. These traditional service practices lead to labeling, segregation, and dehumanization of people with disabilities.

#### Bridge-builders seek to break old patterns by:

1. Bridge-builders recognize and encourage the capacities and gifts of people with disabilities.
2. Bridge-builders build community by establishing and strengthening relationships for people with disabilities.
3. Bridge-builders often rearrange human service supports so people can live in their own homes, work, and contribute in community life.
4. Bridge-builders learn to take direction from people with disabilities and the people who know them well.
5. Bridge-builders believe in the capacity of natural communities to accept and include people with disabilities, and they believe that when community is responsive to one person, it becomes stronger for all of us.

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“I ask you to reauthorize the Developmental Disabilities Act and to expand on its ability to empower individuals and families to control our own futures. I ask you to move the developmental disabilities program away from providing service toward empowering me and families to acquire the support we want. I ask you to move the developmental disabilities program away from enhancing specialized disability organizations to adapting generic neighborhood associations.”

*From the testimony of Raymond Kilroy  
to the US Senate, April, 1987.*

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The activities of bridge-builders are very different from the activities required of traditional human service workers. The stories in this monograph illustrate the job of a bridge-builder to provide a contrast to traditional human service jobs such as case management. While we know that the "life of a bridge-builder" is different, there are few descriptions of what bridge-builders actually do.

We gathered with other bridge-builders to increase our understanding of effective bridge-building practices. On May 18, 1988, 20 of these "bridge-builders" met at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Newington, Connecticut to discuss community building experiences. Five of the participants shared their experiences with a group of interested people, and 20 people stayed to discuss what we are learning about effective community bridge-building.

These bridge-builders tell very different stories. They work in vastly different communities and work from a variety of agencies. They are very different people, and their approach reflects individual personalities and gifts. Each bridge-builder is developing an approach that reflects 1) the unique characteristics of their community, 2) the ties they have to agencies and associations in that community, 3) the interests and desires of the people with disabilities, and 4) the bridge-builder's individual personality and gifts.

We are learning that strengthening and building community is no easy task. Building community goes against much of what we've learned and practiced. Building community goes against many of the dominant values of our time. However, we are learning and discovering many of the essential practices that lead to restoring community for people who are otherwise excluded.

The stories presented here illustrate both the diversity of approaches as well as the assumptions and practices that these community builders share. These common practices are followed by five profiles of community bridge-builders. Additional strategies and insights essential to effective bridge-building are also outlined.



## What Do Effective Bridge-Builders Have In Common?

- ⇒ Everyone is working through trust networks—a network of people who know each other and can open doors for the bridge-builder on behalf of the person with a disability. If a bridge-builder does not have a network, then she is taking the time to build one.
- ⇒ Bridge-building works best when the person “guiding” is connected—when she is part of the town or organization to which a bridge is being built. Familiar, trusted people are the best people to introduce and escort people with disabilities into new settings and associations. When a bridge-builder is not familiar to people, she must find an ally to help her make connections to the local community.
- ⇒ Bridge-builders take time to get to know the people they are going to connect. They spend unstructured, personal time with each focus person. Building bridges works best when matching the personal interests and choices of the focus person to like-minded people and places in the community. Bridge-builders must spend lots of time with the focus person to gain a good understanding of the interests and preferences of the focus person in order to make a good match.
- ⇒ All bridge-builders are starting small. They work with no more than 10 people at one time. They receive administrative support to start small.
- ⇒ Bridge-building takes time and patience before things occur. Bridge-builders work in their own time and in their own way.
- ⇒ Bridge-builders spend most of their time in the community. If they work for human service agencies, they have been freed from the demands of human service systems. If they work for a human service agency, then they are exempt from paperwork and other distractions.
- ⇒ Effective bridge-builders are not “professionals.” They are small business owners, beauticians, local politicians, church members, neighbors. They use common English to describe their feelings and experience.

- ⇒ Bridge-builders who have been human service workers have difficulty giving up control, letting things happen. They have to learn to trust community people to know what to do and to follow-through.
- ⇒ Bridge-builders do not “fix” or “change” the focus people. They accept and introduce the focus person as she is. They find people and places in the community who also accept the person as she is now.
- ⇒ Bridge-builders do not teach the community how to integrate. They tell stories about inclusion. They model effective interactions and acceptance by example. They learn a lot about acceptance from people in the community who are naturally inclusive people.
- ⇒ Bridge-builders must be responsive, present, and they must listen a lot. They are opportunity seekers, and they seize and support every possible opportunity they see to make connections for people. Circles of support provide a unique opportunity for bridge-building. Circle members make a personal commitment to the person with a disability. They do their part to make a dream, a vision, a goal come true. They extend the circle of support by making new connections.
- ⇒ Many bridge-builders feel very isolated. They are constantly making creative decisions and judgements along the way, and this level of innovation is stressful. They reach across many cultural lines and settings. They sometimes work closely with a partner.
- ⇒ Most bridge-builders have unclear roles. They are learning as they go. They are trying lots of things. The following five profiles illustrate the diversity of bridge-building approaches.



## Community Building

### **Kathy Bartholomew-Lorimer: Bringing people together and expanding opportunities for relationship**

Kathy works from the Logan Square neighborhood association in the heart of Chicago, Illinois. She is funded by a grant through Northwestern University facilitated by John McKnight. She has been working on this project for the past 5 months. Prior to this she worked with the OPTIONS program in Louisville, Kentucky matching the interests of 24 people to integrated, community sites. Options arranged 30 hours a week of community experiences for these people, and most of the time people spent in one focus site. This experience provides the foundation for her work in Chicago and strengthened her belief that we are learning to build community for all of us when we build and deepen relationships for people with disabilities.

Logan Square is an inner city neighborhood in Chicago. Many of the 120,000 people face the problems of poverty, lack of housing, and poor education. 40 gangs are organized in the neighborhood. 102 churches are a vital resource in the community although they struggle for survival.

### **Kathy's Approach**

- ⇒ I talked to 100 people in the community.
- ⇒ I am working through a trust network—establishing contacts and asking people to help me. It helps that I am new in the neighborhood because people want to tell me what they know.
- ⇒ The pastors are vibrant and have a vision of community. They are an excellent contact.
- ⇒ I identified five people with handicaps in the neighborhood. They have many interests and capacities. I am working to build trust with them and their families.
- ⇒ I established a six member community building group. These people have a long history in the community and they have many contacts. They are opening doors to the places I explore on behalf of the five focus people.
- ⇒ I concentrated on laying a foundation during this 4 month period.

## Difficulties and Lessons Learned

- ⇒ A neighborhood association has a “rights” orientation, which means they typically fight for what they want. You can't build community by fighting. It is hard to work from a place where the dominant process for making things happen is force, but I can't force community.
- ⇒ It is hard to work in a neighborhood with such diversity. Many social barriers such as language create tensions between people. Interacting in so many different situations is difficult.
- ⇒ I have had difficulty finding labeled people and families. People don't trust me because I am from a neighborhood association. I think they would trust me more if I were from a human service agency. People are also satisfied with the way things are. My visions seem like abstractions to people—they don't know where I'm coming from.
- ⇒ Working alone is very hard. I feel uneasy because I don't know exactly what I'm doing and I have so little control. I have to be very patient. I must make so many judgements, and I have no one else to talk with.
- ⇒ People are hungry to talk about community for everyone, not just people with labels.
- ⇒ I feel that this is healing work—healing the community for all of us. This is also the work of a peacemaking—in a small and personal way.
- ⇒ I have to spend a lot of time with people who see things very differently from me. I have to practice acceptance in all my interactions.
- ⇒ Community building takes time. You can't use force or pressure to speed the process. You have to plant many seeds and wait for growth.

## Citizen Participation

### Sharon Gretz: Finding bridges to community

Sharon Gretz works for United Cerebral Palsy in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Sharon's program provides housing supports that enable 16 people with disabilities to live in their own apartments. Most people moved into their apartments from nursing homes and they were very disconnected from the local community. Sharon received a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Council to pay three community members a small monthly amount (i.e., \$200.00 a month) to help people with disabilities get connected to their communities.

Pittsburgh is the third leading corporate community in the United States. It is a very diverse community with strong community ties. It has areas of small identifiable communities and other areas that are mostly malls and highways.

### Sharon's Approach

- ⇒ We focused on the 16 people served by the agency.
- ⇒ We identified three community members in nearby areas to help people with disabilities become involved in community life.
- ⇒ We asked people at work who they know—we used our own network and we developed a network in order to find the three bridge-builders.
- ⇒ We worked with a minister association group.
- ⇒ We became a presence, we let people know that people with disabilities were isolated and that they wanted to be a part of community.
- ⇒ We recruited people through networks where people understand disassociation—places where people talk about building community.

### Stories

- ⇒ We recruited the mayor of Willberding to be the first bridge-builder. Gerry works two days as a beautician and she knows everyone. The first time we met, she told me about a labeled-person she helped involve in the community on her own. I knew right away that she was the person for the job.

- ⇒ Arthur lives in his own apartment and he wanted something to do during the day. He started volunteering at the local food bank where he greets people when they come in by handing them a number for service. Arthur falls asleep when no one is around and so people were coming into the food bank without getting a number. The people at the food bank solved the problem by putting a sign on the desk that says “Please stop here.” It was no big deal. Arthur sees 60 families a day.

## Lessons Learned

- ⇒ We use a different approach in each community, with each of the three people we recruited.
- ⇒ People who understand social injustice are a key link in our network.
- ⇒ We need to let people offer transportation as much as possible. We want to jump in and figure access out for everyone. First of all, we can't provide all the transportation needed, and secondly, community members offered to provide transportation.
- ⇒ We discovered we were scared to call people. WE were scared of rejection. I think the local bridge-builders are much more confident than we are.
- ⇒ We had to give up control in lots of ways. We have to let go. We have to trust people to find ways to communicate, and to figure out many of the problems that come up.
- ⇒ Community people can accept people just the way they are, and they can adjust when things don't go smoothly. We can't judge success or failure.
- ⇒ I'm learning to not be “an expert.” It's hard because I don't know what words to use, and I am used to just taking over. How do I not act like such a professional?
- ⇒ We see the value of community presence, the contribution of ordinary citizens. Several people have very different lives as a result of their experiences in the community.

## **“One-Candle-Power”**

### **George Ducharme and Pat Beeman: The Connecticut experience building circles of support**

George Ducharme and Pat Beeman work in collaboration with Beth Mount to build bridges to community for 25 people with disabilities. They are funded by a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Council in Connecticut. They have established 25 circles of support. These circles of support include an average of ten people each, involving a total of 250 people in the lives of the 25 focus people. These 250 citizens are deepening their personal relationships as well as opening doors to many opportunities in local communities.

As bridge-builders Pat and George assist a person or a family to achieve a goal, a dream, or a near or distant vision of the future. They help make new connections, and invite new people into the life of the person with a disability. As people receive both emotional support and concrete assistance from the members of their circle, overwhelming obstacles begin to shrink. Like lighting candles, circle members “light the way” for the person with a disability by contributing their support, knowledge, and connections to help the person with a disability accomplish their goals. As the flame grows brighter, new possibilities are seen, and barriers often melt away.

### **Approach**

1. We begin by listening to the person to discover personal desires and capacities. We then identify existing relationships and connections to the community. We help establish a circle of support for the person with a disability. We build immediate bridges to the support circle.
2. We help circle members find ways they can contribute, and we back up their efforts. We become more directly active in the local community when the capacity within the circle is limited. Sometimes we have to wait awhile to see where we need to step in.
3. We started with 5 circles of support. We are very actively involved

in ten of these circles. We seek to develop leadership and autonomy of these circles as much as possible. We can only be actively involved in about 10 circles at a time.

### Lessons Learned

1. We immediately moved from trying to do all the bridge-building in local communities ourselves to enabling the circle of support members to be the local bridge-builders.
2. We focus on just "being there" for people. We stand in the midst of a family's or a person's turmoil and share their struggle for answers and direction. We feel that physical presence will speak as loud as any word that can be said. Often, we have no idea what to do, what will help, but we will struggle together to explore options and share the difficulties.
3. We try to listen. We want people to tell us about their vision for themselves, to pour out their feelings about the obstacles and barriers they face, and we want to help them find solutions. We do not have preconceived ideas, packages, models, or slogans about what people need. We simply listen first, and then we develop a response as we work together.
4. We do explore a lot of alternatives with the individual and/or family and the circle of support. We do provide information and encouragement as much as possible. We do seek out resources and we do act. We provide a lot of encouragement by sending cards, making phone calls, and many other small acts that speak the message of caring and concern along with action.
5. We allow response. We wait a lot for people to initiate and explore ideas and feelings on their own without jumping in to take over. Sometimes we may wait too long, sometimes we may jump in too soon. The important thing is that we stay in touch so that we make better judgements about our role.
6. We build continuity by building capacity within the circles. There are no eternal solutions to the issues people face, so we want to build in life-long support by strengthening the circles. People will then have support long after we leave.

## Community Integration

### **Janice Gross: Helping people be part of community life**

Janice Gross works for Centennial Developmental Services in Greely, Colorado. Centennial provides support to 56 people labeled with mental retardation who live in their own homes. Centennial operated group homes and apartment programs until recently when all residential resources were reinvested into small living arrangements for everyone served. During the transition, two program director positions were turned into community bridge-builder positions. The full time job Janice (Paula is the other bridge-builder) holds enables her to completely focus on building community for the people served by the agency.

### **Approach and Lessons Learned**

- ⇒ We identified a small number of people to start with. I am focusing on building community for 7 people. I spent a lot of time with each person initially to get to know them first.
- ⇒ We act as a resource to the residential team that plans for each of these people. We design a plan for building community based on the interests of the person, the ideas of the team, and other information.
- ⇒ We have been learning about all the associations and groups in Greely. I have personally joined several of these groups based on my own interests. We talk to many people in the community, and I am developing a network to call on.
- ⇒ We have a different approach for each person. I can link some people to groups and interests by finding someone to help. I might join a group with someone else and go with them to the meetings and functions. In some situations we are building a circle of support for a person to deepen and broaden the connections they have. We use a different approach in each situation, and we operate through a trust network as well.



- ⇒ We don't do any residential service paperwork. I create workbooks for each person to help me find a focus and develop a plan for each person. These notes are pretty simple, but they help me brainstorm with others and keep track of what is working and not working.
- ⇒ Once a month Paula and I publish an update for the agency to let everyone know about the contacts and places we have discovered, and the ways that people are getting connected. This gives everyone ideas so that they don't have to wait on us.
- ⇒ We have to renew ourselves a lot. We do a lot of brainstorming together. This helps us find creative ways to work.
- ⇒ I started sending thank-you notes when people got involved, then I realized that the note should come from the person, so we have written several of these notes together.
- ⇒ We are learning from everything we do.

## Supported Employment

### **Arthur West: Supported employment is an opportunity to build community**

Arthur West works in Ashburn, Georgia, a small community in rural south Georgia. Arthur works for Turner Alternative Services Center, an outreach program serving people labeled with mental retardation in Turner county. This program was once a sheltered workshop and is now converted to a total outreach program providing jobs and building community for people. Arthur demonstrates how a job is a great bridge to building community. He works far beyond the boundaries of his job as a supported employment worker to help people become part of community life. Arthur is also the minister of a local church and his commitment to community goes way beyond his paid job in a human service.

Ashburn is a very small, very rural community in south Georgia, about 3 hours south of Atlanta. While Ashburn does not have many of the organized, formal resources associated with community life, Ashburn is rich in rural community life. As Arthur says, "We are fortunate, we already have community."

The supported employment worker job is often implemented based on traditional human service assumptions. Arthur chooses to approach his "human service" work using "bridge-builder" assumptions. Even though his job is least like the others described in this monograph, he illustrates his intention to build community by helping people find jobs.

### **Approach**

- ⇒ I help people get jobs.
- ⇒ I help people develop connections at the job.
- ⇒ I help people join churches and deepen their involvement in church.
- ⇒ I help people live on their own.

- ⇒ I help people buy their own homes.
- ⇒ I help people manage their money, and I help find people in the community who can help them manage their money.
- ⇒ I help people look good, and I find other people to help people improve the way they look.
- ⇒ I help people get off the role of our services by helping them become completely a part of the community.

## Stories

Roland came from an institution and he was labeled with both mental illness and mental retardation. He wanted to work at the high school so we helped him get a job based on what he wanted to do. He has lots of contacts from his job at the high school. He has worked full time for minimum wage for 4 years and he has gotten a raise. He owns his mobile home and it is almost paid for. He is very involved in a church, he travels with several friends and he belongs to a singles group. He is reunited with his family and sees several family members on a regular basis. He sees a beautician on a regular basis who helps him with his hair ( you should have seen his hair!). Community members help Roland with many of the things Arthur did as a paid provider. Randy has a whole community of helpers around him, and he gives back to the people now in his life.

## Lessons Learned

- ⇒ Even jobs that don't work out help people meet people.
- ⇒ I develop jobs that the person wants to do, that match the interests and capability of the person. We quit trying to change people to be perfect.
- ⇒ We work with the school system so that graduates will already have connections, friends, and interests. We need to plan at a very early age.
- ⇒ We need to use the resources in our community. Ashburn doesn't appear to have a lot of resources, but it is rich in community. You have to find community and link people up to it.
- ⇒ We pray a lot!

## What Are We Learning About Building Community?

The bridge-builder profiles illustrate the activities, approaches, struggles, tensions, and celebrations of five bridge-builders. The activities of these bridge-builders are very different from traditional human service work, and they reflect a different set of assumptions. The descriptions also offer a number of concrete and practical ideas that may help other bridge-builders in their work. Bridge-building is highly creative work. The more options, strategies, and tools available to bridge-builders, the more likely they are to develop a variety of responses that fit the unique characteristics of each situation.

The last section of this monograph provides additional tools. Workshop participants identified issues for discussion and shared effective strategies and experiences. This discussion covered four major topics:

1. How do people make contacts and build connections to community members?
2. How do we respond when people challenge us because they don't speak or because they have unusual behaviors?
3. How do we renew our efforts?
4. How do we manage the tensions between building community and the demands of human service agencies?

## How Do People Build Connections?

All bridge-builders work through a trust network—a network of people who can open doors for the bridge-builder on behalf of the person with a disability. Building these connections is critical to the long term capacity to build community. The following strategies have helped people develop a trust network.

- ⇒ Focus on a neighborhood or on some other natural subdivision in the community.
- ⇒ Establish trust networks. Call on people to tell them what you are doing. Ask for ideas and other contacts. Spend a lot of time doing this before making specific requests on behalf of people.
- ⇒ Join different groups. Pay dues and contribute. Become part of the associational life of the community. Learn a lot about the community.
- ⇒ Find other “like-minded” groups—focus on groups that talk about building community. Work a lot with churches.
- ⇒ Find resource manuals and listings of community events. Show up at a lot of events, such as events that are sponsored by the local library, civic groups and associations.
- ⇒ Establish work groups to help think about ideas. Build a circle around a specific individual. Build a community group to help brainstorm. Build a hospitality group to welcome someone into a church.
- ⇒ One project pays people to work on behalf of a small number of people. This enables local people who are very connected in their neighborhoods to build bridges.
- ⇒ Talk through stories, not abstractions. Gently teach using stories.
- ⇒ Follow-up contacts with personal thank-you notes. Thank people even if nothing comes from the contact right away.
- ⇒ Find ways for people to give themselves, to give what they know.

## How Do I Respond When People With Disabilities Challenge Me To Find Creative Ways To Build Community?

Many bridge-builders find themselves stuck when trying to build community for people who may not talk or who have poor reputations in their communities. The following strategies may help people find creative responses in complex situations.

- ⇒ Spend a lot more time with people when they can't speak or if they have bad reputations.
- ⇒ Spend a lot more time getting to know people, and then spend a lot more time escorting people to places and building a relationship with someone new.
- ⇒ Model effective responses for newcomers—you have to stay in the picture to be a good model.
- ⇒ Always find an ally first before bringing someone into a group. Find the most valued member of a group to bring a person in.
- ⇒ Go with the person with a disability long enough to find out what they want and need, and how they respond in new situations. Stay long enough to know that someone else will take over in your absence.
- ⇒ Bottom line: do more groundwork, spend more time with the person, stay in the picture for as long as you are needed.
- ⇒ Remember that a lot of people with disabilities are AFRAID to go into community. Stay sensitive to the need they may have for a familiar escort.
- ⇒ People who have made few choices may seem disinterested. Be there no matter what. Stand by people as they are learning about power and go through all manner of hesitation. Be there.

## How Do Bridge-Builders Renew Their Efforts?

Bridge-building seems to become a way of life instead of just a job. This is also the work of relationships, which is highly creative. Everyone expressed the need to think about ways to renew their efforts, to create some boundaries to their work. The following strategies were suggested.

- ⇒ Accept that building community takes time. Change your expectations about outcomes.
- ⇒ Recognize that this is totally creative work. Every situation is different, every response is different. There are many judgements along the way.
- ⇒ Accept the need for renewal, and the need for support when making decisions. Find someone to talk to about your efforts. It really helps to have someone to work with who is doing the same thing. Share stories with other people.
- ⇒ Set aside days when you are not always looking out for connections. Allow yourself to go to the gas station without wondering what the attendant does on his off hours and if the cashier might want to get involved. One person leaves town once a month.
- ⇒ Take personal time for yourself. Maintain whatever spiritual practices are important to you. This work requires a lot of faith and trust—maintain that in yourself. Don't let your own work go by the wayside.
- ⇒ Help everyone else in the agency understand what you are doing. Maintain open communication with staff. Let them know what is happening for the people you work with.
- ⇒ Remember that this is fun! Use creativity and humor as much as possible. This work doesn't need to be so serious.
- ⇒ Have celebrations with people and with groups. Celebrate anything and everything—notice the small steps toward the outcomes you want.
- ⇒ Several people are working on temporary positions. Work now to build on-going support. Talk to people about your needs.



## How Are Bridge-Builders Managing the Tensions Between Community and Service Systems ?

Many of the people in this workshop work full time to build community. Some people work out of human service agencies, and several people still maintain other job responsibilities. These multiple roles create many tensions for people and the following ideas suggest ways to deal with these tensions:

- ⇒ Help the whole agency set community building as it's goal so that everyone is thinking about it and working toward it together. Don't let "bridge-builders" become the only people who think about it.
- ⇒ Eliminate as many state-requirements as possible from your job. Arrange for someone else to complete these tasks if needed. Bridge-builder types are usually terrible at bureaucracy anyway. Make the jobs as free from the system as possible.
- ⇒ If you are really committed to building community, but making connections seems like a luxury given all the other requirements you must fill, then try to find ways to redefine your job, trade off responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Bridge-building is both a set of ideals, and a number of concrete practices leading to greater inclusion of people with disabilities in community life. This document seeks to illustrate the variety and range of processes and tools that help bridge-builders do their work. The collective experience and the stories bridge-builders tell challenge us to be creative, flexible, and responsive to people and their communities. These daily experiences are our greatest guide to new ways of building community.

Many of us share a philosophy and a vision for building community for people with disabilities. We believe that a network of personal relationships based on caring, cooperation, and mutual growth, is the greatest safeguard to the quality of life for all of us. We are now challenged to implement our ideals, to discover new ways of interacting that facilitate the mutually supportive relationships we desire. The dreams, the feelings, the activities, and the insights of earnest bridge-builders can help us learn new patterns and responses that ultimately strengthen community for all of us.

