

Facilitating an Everyday Life

INDEPENDENT FACILITATION
AND **WHAT REALLY MATTERS**
IN A **NEW STORY**

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Facilitating an Everyday Life

Independent Facilitation and What Really Matters in a New Story

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Acknowledgements

About the Authors

*Life... is in the living, the tissue
of every day and hour.*

Stephen Leacock

Introduction

It was a warm summer day when we first got together to begin to make this book a reality. But the truth is that it had been a growing idea for many years as we each have journeyed through various roles in our communities.

We have been part of an increasing number of individuals who believe that people, communities, and services need a New Story. Many of the systems created to help simply do not provide the necessary supports for people who have been labelled or who are vulnerable because of disability, chronic illness, poverty, or aging to live an everyday life. This New Story idea was originally explored in-depth in the book by John Lord and Peggy Hutchison, *Pathways to Inclusion: Building a New Story with People and Communities*.

In a New Story, there are many important levers for change, and independent facilitation is one of the most important. And this is where we began on that warm summer day.

What compelled us to focus on independent facilitation was our experience with the difference it makes in people's lives. We get excited talking about the depth and range of independent facilitation. As an independent facilitator there is the freedom to listen and to respond without traditional constraints. There is the satisfaction of being dedicated to a single person and how they want their life to unfold. And there is the beauty of building a relationship with someone while having few predetermined assumptions about possibilities.

We know we are on the right path: research has shown over and over that independent facilitation leads to positive community experiences for people.

Independent facilitation is an emerging craft. Facilitators in the New Story believe

that community is always the answer. We reject approaches that do not lead people to relationships in their community. And while independent facilitation frequently touches the service system to access supports for a person, it is independent of agendas, expectations, and accountabilities of service systems.

This book is for people like us, people who want to make a difference, who want to feel free to be dedicated to a person, who want to use an effective process that is a change-maker. Becoming skilled at independent facilitation is often more about the ordinariness than the big flashes — a homeless man choosing (finally!) to have a hot lunch every day at the soup kitchen, but not yet (if ever) choosing to leave the streets. This book is for people who are not always looking for a fairy tale ending, but who see the beauty in helping people build an everyday life, and in doing so sometimes see big change.

As facilitators, we bring our life experience to this work. John is a researcher who initially learned the craft over many years of working on community research projects, where collaboration with vulnerable citizens was central to the work. As a father of a daughter with a disability, he also has direct experience with the challenges and joys of his daughter living an everyday life. He has played a leadership role in developing New Story ideas through his previous publications.

Barbara has worked as an independent facilitator in several areas of Ontario, as well as working in various roles in the service system. She also has personal experience in navigating systems and community with someone she loves who lives with autism. Barbara now works in the public health field where her work with social determinates of health constantly informs her facilitation.

Charlotte is a facilitator and has been for many years, both in a community organization and independently. She has been involved with an Ontario provincial initiative designed to enhance independent facilitation. Charlotte has intimate understanding of the power of relationships to effect change in someone's life. She is currently involved in building an independent facilitation and planning organization.

We all now work as trainers of facilitators and find we are always learning in this process of teaching! Our work with the Facilitation Leadership Group has engaged us with several communities in Canada and the U.K. who are working to implement a New Story. We find that people are hungry for conversation and reflection about facilitation and ways to include people in everyday life.

As facilitators we are both patient and impatient. We always walk with people at their pace, encouraging, questioning, and supporting growth and change. There is a deliberate patience to this work and a commitment to staying with people as they build their lives in their communities. We also notice injustice and the numerous barriers faced by people who need support to participate in community life. We are impatient with the slow pace of change in our communities and service systems, and work with others to create positive change.

Although we are experienced facilitators, the process of creating this book has deepened our insights into our own facilitation. And this is how it should be for facilitators: standing still to reflect in order to move ahead and hone our craft.

The book is structured in a linear way by necessity, but each chapter is intertwined with all others. How can you talk about relationships without talking about community! The chapters move from the craft of facilitation and the values, knowledge, and skills needed by facilitators, to ways the craft is used to support self-determination, relationships, community connections, planning, and building safeguards.

We believe this book is needed now, as many communities and service systems are undergoing significant changes in philosophy and approach. We expect that some readers are already embracing the values and principles of a New Story, while other readers will be facilitators in search of a meaningful framework. Still others may not have thought of themselves as facilitators, but in reality are doing a lot of informal facilitation. This book will contribute to practical, knowledge-based approaches to facilitation. You may be searching for ideas on how to build an everyday life. Or you may be a facilitator, a family member, a member of someone's network or support circle, a leader in the non-profit sector, an outreach worker, a neighbourhood leader, a community developer, a support co-ordinator, a social service worker, or a manager in service systems. Whatever your role, this book will bring to light the important aspects of facilitation.

We have a vision of community; we see communities and services changing to include all citizens in every aspect of community life. Facilitation that is independent plays a key role in this vision of abundant communities. We believe there is a growing number of facilitators and facilitators-to-be who share this vision. We invite you to find yourselves in these pages and reflect on how you can bring a New Story to your community through facilitation.

The beauty of independent facilitation

Independent facilitation puts belief and hope in community because that is where relationships and safeguards play out for all of us.

Independent facilitation frees facilitators to be dedicated to the person they are engaged with and are independent of biases from other pressures such as service systems and funding bodies.

Independent facilitation builds resilience and capacity in individuals, families, and communities.

Independent facilitation flourishes when it is embedded in community, in facilitator networks, and is supported by local action and government policy.

Principles that guide independent facilitation

Self-Determination

1. The power of decision-making about the person's life rests with the person and others whom he/she chooses.
2. People's strengths, as well as what they imagine for their future, guide how they build an everyday life.

Community

3. Community is the first resort in building a good life.
4. Relationships and networks of people are intentionally developed.

Capacity Building

5. Independent facilitation leverages strengths in individuals and groups to mobilize people to act in new ways.
 6. Funding for supports and services is individualized and portable.
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