

The Gospel of Mark (2:1-12) tells the following story:

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them.

They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?" Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk?' But that you may know that the son of man has authority to forgive sins on earth"—he said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home."

He rose, picked up his mat, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God.

The central character in this story is, of course, Jesus. In the second level of important characters would be the paralyzed man, and the scribes who challenged Jesus. At a tertiary level would be the four men who carried the paralyzed man.

Those four who play a supporting role were certainly unlikely to be direct support professionals or personal care attendants in the sense of people who are paid to offer such support, people who have decided on this role in order to make their way in life. They were much more likely to have been family and friends of the paralyzed man. But, as Janet Klees reminded me, the definition or type of their relationship is not so important as the quality of that relationship.

But please note: even though those four were not at all the most important people in the story, they were **indispensable** to it. Without them, it never would have happened. Further, without their remarkable creativity and perseverance, without their ability and willingness to think outside the box (and thus to bring the man they were serving inside the box), without their ability and willingness (as Marc Gold taught) to "try another way," in this instance a wildly radical way, it never would have happened. As my friend Dianne Rodrigues pointed out, "Oh, that we all would have friends like that, who would stop at nothing!"

And notice also that when the author wrote “Jesus saw **their** faith,” Mark was clearly referring not only to the faith of the paralyzed man but also to the faith of his four supporters. While the four were probably not paid direct support workers, the ingenuity and tenacity and faith they showed—and the quality of their relationship with the paralyzed man— are something toward which we all can aspire, as family, as friends, and even in our work.

So there may be lessons for human service work in that story, and surely there are lessons more broadly. The four supporters were indispensable to the story in the Gospel; and it is a story also about the indispensability of each of us to one another. As Father Derek Borek pointed out, almost always God works through people, not directly. We are **all** called to bear God’s call to others, we are all intercessors, whether we recognize it or not.