

Keywords in person-centered planning

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What, if anything, unifies the different forms of person-centered planning?

At its heart, person-centered planning is a quality of relationship, a quality of listening that focuses attention on living a good life in community: a life of belonging and contribution. Listening respectfully, with an open mind, an open heart, and the willingness to join in action, shapes a space that makes visible people's gifts, concerns and longings and a community's assets and opportunities. This forms the context for designing and delivering whatever individualized accommodations and assistance a person may require.

Person-centered planning guides and energizes social inventions that resist and undo the ill effects of social exclusion in its obvious and subtle forms. It engages collective intelligence to guide each person's journey to a more inclusive community life.

Person centered planning has become a required function in the systems that finance, regulate and coordinate long term care. This development may do useful work for the service system, but usually at the cost of building relationships and innovating. This leaves the relational forms of person-centered planning I know where they began: outside the system, drawing on what it offers when helpful.

What is your definition of inclusion?

To sense the meaning of inclusion, look at the reality of social exclusion. People with developmental disabilities are too often seen and treated as *Other*: less than, unacceptable, incapable of choice or contribution. Inclusion is the mindful effort to reverse Othering and support belonging.

inclusion is the continuing work of creating conditions in every aspect of community life so that all are welcome, each belongs, and everyone has what they need to make a contribution. Social exclusion is deeply rooted so this work has occupied people of good will for generations and will continue to do so for generations to come.

What is your definition of *person*?

For me, *person* takes its meaning from the philosophical tradition of personalism. So ***person* is a word that points to these aspects of being human...**

¹ I am grateful to the organizers of a Korean gathering of practitioners of person-centered planning held in October 2023, *Navigating the Nexus of Person-Centered Planning and Personal Budgets: Charting New Horizons in Individualized Support*. They raised a series of questions to guide my contribution. My responses to their requests for definitions of some key terms are the foundation for this paper.

... **we're are inviolably dignified by our existence**, not by what we do or by what interests we serve.

... **we are relational beings.**

... **we are irreplaceable in our uniqueness.**

... **we are moral actors.**

... **we thrive when we can be responsible for our freedom.**

This appreciation is at odds with the far stronger currents of individualism and materialism that powerfully shape North American public life.

Obviously, not everybody who developed and practices person-centered planning would share this understanding.

What is your definition of *planning*?

Our whole world struggles to find the most effective ways to organize ourselves to be friendly to people and other creatures, to be friendly to the planet, and to be sustainably productive. A family of approaches to planning is developing in response. Person-centered planning as I know it is a member of that family.

***Planning* cultivates collective intelligence and animates social invention. It brings together people with different identities, different roles, different interests and different beliefs to search for images of a desirable future and generate ways to embody those images in their common life.**

This approach to planning recognizes that much of the work of inclusion is complex, a matter of pathfinding through many cycles of connecting, sensing, trying, reflecting, and trying again. It contrasts with other forms of human service planning that match an eligible person with a service setting and specifies the goals the placement will serve. It contrasts again with plans that transmit the will of those at the top of an organization by setting targets, drawing blueprints, and prescribing timelines.

How do you define *gift*?

In the context of person-centered planning, **I take a gift to be a way a person makes a difference to others that embodies what is meaningful for them and expresses their distinctive identity.** This is an intentional challenge to the assumption that the ability to make a difference to others depends on a particular form or fluency of communication, mobility, or cognitive ability. We assert that everyone has a gift. The task of person-centered planning is to discern what the gift is, discover where in the community the gift can be welcomed and strengthened, and develop any necessary accommodation or support. It asks those who are certain in their diagnoses to let go of their certainties and attend to possibilities.

This contrasts with a common understanding of gift as an exceptional talent. It stretches the frame for revealing what more is possible.

How do you understand *support circles*?

Social devaluation—being seen and treated as less than a whole person—makes any meaningful change in a developmentally disabled person’s life difficult. Difficulties multiply when a person and their family are alone in their search. The purpose of a support circles is clear: its a way to assure that a person doesn’t walk through life alone.

A *support circle* is a vehicle for a person’s allies to make a conscious commitment to walk with them on a part of their life journey, sharing their imagination, their connections, their practical and emotional support along the way. Circle members scheme together, celebrate together, grieve together, and share adventures in discovery together. Circles intentionally nurture trust and friendship that can’t be bought and paid for.