

Living Arrangements for the Developmentally Disabled Inc.

The Community Connections via Social Connections Project

Project Manual

The Vision

"We are seeking nothing less for individuals with a disability than a life surrounded by the richness and diversity of community. A collective life. An everyday life. A powerful life that gains its joy from the creativity and connectedness that comes when we join in associations as citizens to create an inclusive world" (McKnight, 1993).

The Mission Statement

To assist people with developmental disabilities into gaining access and membership into community groups or associations in order to develop enduring relationships with community members based on common interests, strengths, and capabilities.

The Social Guide Model

This model consists of four primary components:

1. Project Coordinator
2. Assistant Project Coordinator
3. Social Guide
4. Bridge Builder

The ***Project Coordinator*** will supervise, train, and orient the Assistant Project Coordinator and administer the overall project.

The ***Assistant Project Coordinator*** will train and supervise the Social Guides and report to the Project Coordinator.

The ***Social Guides*** are individuals who recognize and understand that people with developmental disabilities are often isolated socially from their community. The Social Guide will assist with the identification of areas of interest and will then assist the individual in locating formal and/or informal community groups whose members share those same areas of interest. As a companion, the Social Guide will then assist the individual into entering the identified community association and will begin to facilitate the development of relationships. After relationships are developed

and established, the Social Guide will gradually fade from the scene allowing the natural ties of the community to sustain those relationships.

The ***Bridge Builders*** are individuals who already belong to a community group in which the individual with a disability is seeking to join. The Bridge Builder will be educated regarding the scope of the Project and will assist with the facilitating of relationships with its members. The Bridge Builder will be more of an informal role with no formal contacts to the Project.

In essence, a triad will be formed between the Social Guide, the Bridge Builder, and the project participant. Since the role of the Social Guide is short term, the Bridge Builder will continue to facilitate the development and maintenance of relationships. As illustrated in the cartoon below, all three components of the triad, working together, will fulfill the mission of the Project.

Insert Cartoon

Desired Qualities of Social Guides and Bridge Builders (McKnight, 1993)

1. Individuals who feel that they do not have to "fix" someone. They see the inherent capacities and gifts that are in the person regardless of their disability.
2. The individuals are already well connected in the interrelationships of community life. They are personally part of the web of community life.
3. The individuals believe strongly that the community will accept a person with a disability into their web of everyday life.
4. The individuals are very tenacious and do not give in easily. If one group does not accept an individual, they keep trying. As illustrated by the cartoon to the right with the caption that states, "We are looking for an aggressive, tenacious salesperson, like, for instance, the one who sold you that suit."
5. They are committed to the cause of assisting people into becoming part of the citizenship of communities. They believe in the vision of the Project.

Training and Mentoring of the Social Guides

Each Social Guide will receive an extensive orientation on the Project, their role, and their responsibilities. They will also receive on-going training and mentoring throughout their tenure as Social Guides. Detailed training modules on the five strategic goals of the Social Guides are included in the appendices (Please see Appendix A-1).

Taking a closer look at the Vision and Mission of the Project

What it is not: It is not just a volunteer program where people take out a person with a disability once a month to a ball game. It is not feeling sorry for the person with a disability or feeling a sense of pity for that person. It is not focusing on a person's weaknesses and deficits. This type of limited focus, characteristic of some other volunteer programs, has contributed to their lack of success and lack of significant impact they have had on an individual's life. This Project has a much greater vision and contains specific objectives and plans to facilitate community integration and the fostering of relationships with community members.

What it is: Instead, this Project is an opportunity to assist people with disabilities in discovering the uniqueness, the strengths, and the interests they possess inside themselves. Once these abilities and interests are discovered, the Social Guide, as well as others involved in the person's life, will nurture, encourage, and further explore their potential and growth in these areas. From this point the Social Guide, the Bridge Builder, and the other supporters will begin the connection (in a sense become the bridge) that will support the person in becoming a part of the community. Once strengths and interests are matched with community groups, the Social Guides will support these connections and gradually fade out when the person develops friendships and relationships with community members. The Bridge Builder will assist and continue the work of the Social Guide.

Insert Bridge

Why Work on Developing Friendships

Research has shown that when people in a residential program were asked what they wanted from the program, their top two answers included (Amado, 1990):

1. Learning to get along better with people.
2. Having more friends, especially friends who were not disabled.

A survey of residential programs across the United States has shown that about half of the people with mental retardation who are more than 63 years of age had no friends at all or never see their friends. Only 25% of the people identified as having friends see a friend once a month or more (Anderson, Lakin, Hill, & Chen, 1992).

These results do not appear to be restricted to just older adults with mental retardation. In another survey, representative of the nation's population in residential programs for people with mental retardation, it was found that about 42% of people in community programs and about 63% of people in institutions had no friends, even among other residents or staff (Hill, Rotegard, & Bruinicks, 1984).

In addition to the strong desire to have quality friendships, relationships offer many benefits to the persons involved. They provide people with intimacy, affection, and companionship. They also make people feel valued and encourage risk-taking. Conversely, the absence of meaningful relationships may result in loneliness, depression, isolation, and even mortality.

Holden (1993) states that community inclusion offers many benefits, which include:

- Helping people learn desirable skills and behaviors through imitation and modeling from a variety of role models;
- Providing opportunities for people to form friendships with others of differing backgrounds and experiences and abilities;
- Exposing people to a wide range of experiences and possibilities, from which they can learn and choose
- Helping people build self-confidence and the knowledge that they can contribute to the work of a group.

The positive and immeasurable value of friendships cannot be emphasized enough. Jeff and Cindy Strully spoke for many other parents who have children with disabilities when they said, "It is friendship that will ultimately mean life or death for our daughter. It is her and our only hope for a desirable future and protection from victimization" (Strully & Strully, 1993).

Historically, the service system and individuals with disabilities have been able to develop and provide supports and services to assist people with developmental disabilities in the vocational and residential components of their lives. Unfortunately, however, the social or relational aspect has often been left out. The social life and connection to the community can be seen as the missing piece of the "pie." If this component is added, it can lend itself to greatly increasing the quality of life of persons with disabilities (See Appendix A-2 for a chart on the Major Life Components).

Understanding the Concept of Community

As mentioned previously, the mission of the Project is to assist a person in escaping the social isolation that so often exemplifies the lives of people with disabilities and to assist them in crossing the bridge to the community. To effectively do this, all those involved in the Project

need to understand the concept of community. Even though individuals with disabilities may live in houses in the suburbs or work in “community” jobs, they are still often isolated socially. We could say they are integrated into the community geographically or physically, but not relationally. They are still separated.

To more deeply explore the concept of community, let us look more closely at the typical life of an adult with a disability. People with disabilities often lack the diverse range of relationships the rest of us take for granted. They are socially impoverished, lacking the normal daily activities and relationships with casual acquaintances, neighbors, shopkeepers, churches, taverns, bowling leagues, pizza parties, picnics, poker games, and etc.

"They don't play pick up basketball at the local park, but only in a special gymnastics program for the disabled. They don't join the gardening club, but only the horticultural therapy program. They don't go to a ball game with a few buddies, but ride together on the retarded citizens' bus. They are always in the company of other labeled people and their paid associates" (McKnight, 1993).

This type of life is not the community life the Project seeks to develop. Community is not a place, an activity, or a location. McKnight (1993) describes it as a web of relationships that are informal. It is analogous to the wind- "there is no visible presence but a powerful manifestation." In the most simple terms, it is the connectedness to everyday life and everyday relationships.

The distinction between community and service system is critical for the Social Guide to understand. "Communities are those social spaces where capacities are connected, expressed and manifested. Service systems are those social spaces where deficiencies are identified, adjusted, treated or cured"(McKnight, 1993). The mission of the Social Guide, and all individuals involved in the Project, is to assist people in entering communities and escaping systems (See appendix A-3 for more information on Service Systems vs. Communities).

This may be best exemplified in a story about a mother who gave birth to two sons (O'Connell, 1988).

As babies, each of them, like all babies spent most of the time with their parents, being held and cuddled and loved. One son gradually moved off from his parents' arms to explore the world. On the street he found playmates; at school he made friends with kids in his class; at his job he joined co-workers for lunch and parties; in his apartment building neighbors would say hello; he had girlfriends and fell in love. Watching it all his mother reflected: At the beginning he had only his family, but by the time he was a young man he had surrounded himself with other people.

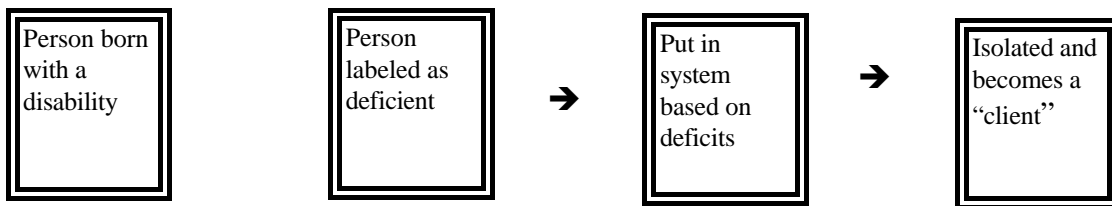
The other son also started out in his parents' arms. But he came with several disabilities, which were given one label or another, and those problems and labels got in the way of his exploring the world the way his brother had. Instead of having opportunities to define himself the way his brother had, his labels defined

him, until most people could only see the problem, not the boy. Instead of opening out, his life closed in upon itself. Instead of family and friends gathering around him, they fell away. He went only to special schools and special programs. By the time he was fourteen, the only people who saw him regularly, besides his mother, were other people with disabilities and people who were paid to give him some service. "He had," said his mother, "no relatives, no friends, nothing to do . . . "

The very nature and structure of human service systems is based on deficiency. After all, a person must be deficient to get accepted into a program. They must become a "client" of the service system. Acceptance based on deficiency is far removed from acceptance based on citizenship. We want to assist the individuals into becoming citizens who can contribute their inherent gifts, capacities, and interests to the community.

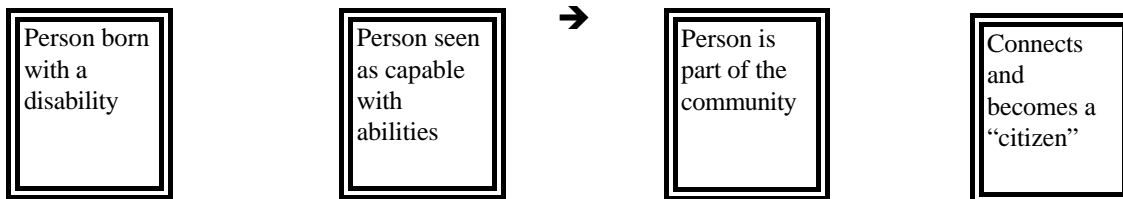
The Social Guide and the Bridge Builder will, in essence, break into the system and assist in the transformation from client to citizen. It would be ideal if this could be started at birth, but if this is not the case, the Social Guide and Bridge Builder can break in anywhere in the process and begin this transformation.

The theoretical process can be illustrated in the following manner:



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Or



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As illustrated in the diagram, becoming isolated is a process that begins at birth. The labels and the years of stigma that accompany those labels, further entrenches the person into the role of “client.” The good news, however, is that it is a process that can be reversed, and the person can escape the social isolation with the support of people who are committed to the art of community connecting. The isolation did not happen overnight and the process of becoming a “citizen” will not take place overnight. It will take time and effort, but the benefits that can result will be well worth the effort.

The Five Strategic Goals for Community Connecting

The process of community connecting involves five strategic goals.

1. Developing a sense of empathy and understanding of the lives of persons with developmental disabilities.
2. Discovering the capacities, interests, and needs of the person.
3. Searching the community for the expression and manifestations of those capacities.
4. Introducing the person to that part of the community
5. Supporting, encouraging, and facilitating the inclusion of the person in that community and the expression of their capacities. In essence, begin the fostering of relationships with community members.

A community connecting progress journal is kept by each Social Guide in order to record the community connecting process. Social Guides will be trained on how to record this progress (See Appendix A-4 for information on the format of the journal).

Developing a sense of empathy and understanding of the lives of persons with developmental disabilities.

This is the first major responsibility of the Social Guide, and it is the foundation for the rest of the project. There are two primary ways to develop a greater sense of empathy and understanding:

1. Studying articles, books, and videos that address the lives of persons with disabilities.
2. Getting to know individuals with disabilities on a personal level by spending time with the person.

While getting to know an individual, Social Guides can ask themselves and think about a variety of questions to assist them in gaining a greater understanding of the life of the person. Some examples include:

- What have the person's life experiences been like?
 - What have been the important events and moments?
 - What have been the joys and sorrows?
 - Where have they lived and worked?
 - Who have been their friends?
 - How is the person's life different than a person of the same age who does not have a disability?
 - How would you feel if this was your life history?
- Who are the people in the person's life?
 - What are the roles of the people and how often do they see them?
 - Who are the people most important to them?
 - How do they spend time with people?
 - Are they with people who are not paid to be with them?
 - What are they getting from their relationships?
 - How are the relationships different from a person of the same age who does not have a disability?

Discovering the Capacities, Interests, and Needs of the Person

Discovering the capacities of the person is done in a variety of ways. Before the Social Guide is paired with a person, the Assistant Project Coordinator will complete the Initial Assessment Evaluation with the participant, which includes an interest survey. This will give the Social Guide a beginning point in discovering the interests, needs, and capacities of the person. It is very important to get to know the person on a social basis by spending time with him or her, going out to eat, going out for coffee, etc. This will also be a time of role modeling and learning what social cues a person may need.

Often the real person and their real needs are lost in a file of reports, observations, and assessments that primarily focus on the deficits and weaknesses of the person. We see the paperwork but not the person. Obviously, an important component of the Project is to look at the person in a new light. We do not want to see them as “clients” in a service system, but as a person who has a great deal to offer to the community. We can also do this by asking a variety of questions while getting to know the person (Amado, 1990).

- What are the person's interests, gifts, and capabilities?
 - List words or phrases that best describe the person.

- What does the individual do well?
- What does the person like to do?
- What are the person's positive qualities?
- Where does the person spend time and what activities do they do?
 - What are the person's favorite activities, people, etc.?
 - How often do they spend with their favorite people and doing their favorite activities?
 - How does the person decide what they do with their time?
 - Activities Interest Assessment can be completed with the person
 - Informal interviews with support staff can help answer this question
- What works and what doesn't work for the person?
 - Which situations are stressful?
 - What types of situations should be avoided?
 - What situations are optimal- small or large group?
 - What kind of environment is most comfortable?
- What assistance does the person need?
 - Describe, if any, the type of assistance that is needed

A great deal of this is done informally, but after a Social Guide gets to know the person a “community connecting strategy” session will take place. This “getting to know” period may take 4-6 weeks, depending on the individuals involved. This should not be seen as just another formal meeting. We do not want to even call it a meeting because of the connotation that goes with the word. This session should take place in an informal environment such as at a restaurant or at the person's home.

The Social Guide, the person, and a few key support people (chosen by individual) will meet to develop a connection strategy. A person's capacities, interests, and needs will be discussed and summarized (Please see appendix A-5 for “Strategy Notes” which may be used as a guideline for recording the strategies). A Relationship Map will be completed (See Appendix A-6) to look at a person's current relationship pattern (Amado, 1990). After the map is completed, the group will brainstorm on how to connect this person to the community considering three connection ideas:

- Getting re-connected with old friends
- Getting more involved with new friends
- Getting to know new friends

Somewhat of a detailed strategy will be mapped out in the mind of the Social Guide at the end of this gathering (See appendix A-7 for a detailed sample). For example, let's say that Susan loves to sew and is a very outgoing, friendly person. An ideal scenario might be to get Susan hooked up with a woman's sewing circle that meets on a regular basis. Susan would be introduced to the group and begin attending the meetings. She would make friends, ask people out for coffee, etc. and have these social pleasantries reciprocated by the members of the group. Relationships would ideally develop and blossom with a few of the members of the group and she would become a "regular" part of the group having a chance to share her talents, gifts and capacities. The goal would then be to pursue this scenario and make it a reality.

After the strategy session, the Social Guide will type up the connection strategy in some detail from the ideas mapped out in the session. This will be used as a guide for the community connection process.

Searching the Community for the Expressions and Manifestations of those Capacities.

The next step is to begin searching for the ideal scenario that was discussed in the strategy session. The Social Guide must begin by trying to find a "community web" where the manifestations of the person's capabilities can be expressed. Currently, the Project has a database of approximately 600 community groups located in Hamilton County. Types of groups included in this database include:

- Arts/Cultural
- Athletic
- Business
- Civic/Community Service
- Educational
- Environmental
- Fraternal
- Health Related
- International/Ethnic/Minority
- Political
- Professional
- Religious
- Social
- Women

There are three primary ways searching the community can be done:

1. The first thing to attempt to do is find a Bridge Builder who would already be well connected into a community group to act as the bridge to assist the Social Guide and the person with a disability into the group. An Alumni Association from a local university or another community oriented group could be used. It is always easier to enter a group when you know someone

already rather than entering a group "cold." The Project Coordinators can explain the purpose and vision of the project and explain the group member's role.

One of the Project Coordinators, Social Guide, and Bridge Builder may want to meet one-on-one before any introductions of the person with a disability are made to explain, in depth, the subtle but profound purposes of the Project and how they differ from other volunteer programs. Before the person is introduced to the group the triad may want to get together and have the member of the group (Bridge Builder) meet the person with the disability.

2. The second way to find the ideal scenario established in the strategy session would be what some people call "cold calling." This is done when a Bridge Builder cannot be located prior to introducing a person to a community group. There are really no right or wrong ways to approach this process. Just get started and work from there. (See appendix A-8 for some examples of generic groups which are found in most communities). There are community groups for almost any interest of a person. One person states that "everyone has a ticket out of isolation- the key is for someone to find the ticket and punch it" (O'Connell, 1988).

The best way to start is to simply start asking the people and community associations. You may be very surprised of how receptive people are in welcoming others into their circle. "Hospitality is not a heroic event, but a commonplace part of everyday life" (O'Connell, 1988). It is often not the hospitality of the community that presents an obstacle to community connecting. Instead, it is the attitude of the staff and other professionals associated with the project who have the belief that the community will not be accepting or open to people with disabilities (Amado, 1990).

The Social Guide can start by calling people they know, looking in the phone book, calling churches, newspapers, the Chamber of Commerce, and the local community chest services. "It is not a matter of designing programs but of creating visions, not of following protocols but fulfilling dreams"(O'Connell, 1988). Doors will open and networking will begin until a potential match and a potential Bridge Builder are found.

Once a potential Bridge Builder is located (often it is the group's leader), the Project Coordinators and/or Social Guide can explain the Project, the details about the person with the disability and try to set up the introductory meetings with the Social Guide and the Bridge Builder.

3. The third way to search the community for the group is to match the person with a group that shares their same interest, and then start going to the group. A pre-selected Bridge Builder is not designated at this time. As the Social Guide begins facilitating the development of relationships, a person in the group may take an interest in the person. A friendship or relationship may develop naturally. As the Social Guide observes this progression, he or she can begin exploring the potential for a Bridge Builder role to be fulfilled. Often times this happens naturally, but for the sake of the Project we formalize this by giving the person the name of Bridge Builder. It is important for the Social Guide to be vigilant and active in watching for a Bridge Builder role to be forming. He or she can then reinforce this role. Another situation which may occur is that a pre-selected Bridge Builder is designated, but another group member takes more of an interest in the person. In this case, there may be multiple Bridge Builders or new ones being developed. Again,

this often happens naturally, but we are just giving the person a title to make the concept more concrete. Wherever feasible, we want the relationships between the community members and the individual to be as natural as possible. As the Social Guides gain experience in community connecting they will realize there is an art to it, and they will gain a "feel" for how to best facilitate it.

Introducing the Person to the Community

Introducing a person with a disability is an art. When you speak with a pre-determined Bridge Builder, or members of an association, do not use jargon or give a "case history." Be honest. Tell the person you have a friend who has a disability and is interested in becoming involved with your group or getting to know you better if the person is an individual. Emphasize the common interests, such as the person and the group are both interested in sewing. Emphasize the strong qualities the person has to offer and any necessary needs the person may have. Ask if they would be willing to meet the person and see all the great qualities he or she has to offer.

Explain your role as the Social Guide- to assist the person in making more friends and getting out in the community more. You will have much more time to explain your role and the importance of community connection with the person as you assist in fostering relationships between the person and the community members.

Mary O'Connell (1988) states that "the language of social services is sterile." She recommends when introducing people to tell that person's "story" and "the language used to tell these stories has to be alive with images: images like opening doors, breaking down walls, building bridges, and bringing those who are exiled home."

You may be surprised at the receptiveness you may encounter as illustrated in the following story (Amado, 1990).

Art has a real interest in history. A few miles outside of town the historical society has maintained a country general store that is open in the summer. The group thought Art would enjoy volunteering at the store, and Art agreed to give it a try.

The person who volunteered to call the woman in charge of coordinating volunteers made a long list of reasons why Art should be a volunteer. She was expecting some hesitation if not resistance.

When she made the call, the woman in charge said "yes" before the person had a chance to give her even one good reason.

Once the initial contact is made and the group or individuals are willing to meet the person, the introduction is the next step. First impressions are extremely important. Social Guides need to make sure the person maintains good hygiene and is dressed appropriately for the type of social function. An individual's support staff can be asked to assist in this area if the need arises. During the prior discussion with the community members, if one occurs, you will want to point out any unusual behaviors that may be odd at first or any needs the person may have. Only

point these out if they are necessary and always give assurance that you will be there to help the person adjust. Amado (1990) illustrates this point in the following example:

Patrick, who is 19 years old, has seizures. Sometimes he makes strange hand movements and he has a number of other unusual habits. A couple of other teenage boys were going to meet him and go bowling. His group debated a long time on what to tell the boys. Should they tell them nothing and just see how well they like Patrick? Or should they tell them everything Patrick might possibly do that might seem bizarre? The person who introduced them finally decided the other boys should know that it was possible that Patrick would have a seizure, and what the seizure might be like, and that they should be assured that the staff person would be there to manage things. The first time Patrick flicked his fingers in the air, she told the boys what that meant- that Patrick was having a good time.

Remember that first impressions and how you describe someone's reputation can assist or hinder the assimilation into a community network. The goal of the Project is to focus on the positives while being realistic about the needs.

Prepare the person you are guiding about what to expect and how to behave. This can be done by discussion and role playing. It may even help to drive by the building or go inside when no one is there so the person can become comfortable with the surroundings.

It is important that the Social Guide accompanies the person until the person and group feel comfortable (The fostering of relationships will be done by the Social Guide and, hopefully, the Bridge Builder during this time. This will be explained in more detail in the next section). If the person is being introduced to a group it may be better if they are introduced to the leader or a few of the members before being introduced to the entire group. This, however, will depend on the situation and the group. The Social Guide and/or Project Coordinators may also choose to speak to the entire group about the project and the person before any introductions are actually made to answer any questions. The Project Coordinator(s) will assist and facilitate this process as needed. Each situation will be different and as the Social Guides and Coordinators gain experience, they will know how to facilitate the introduction so it goes smoothly.

Here are some other tips about introductions (Amado, 1990- See appendix A-9 for more information on introductions):

1. Treat each person as an individual, and introduce people on an individual basis.
2. Avoid using jargon and initials (MR, CP).
3. Emphasize the characteristics the individual has in common with all people- we're all human beings.
4. Don't share information that points out the individual's weaknesses or problems unless it is necessary in that situation. Don't "gossip" about what's wrong or different about him or her. When this information must be shared, do it as positively as possible.
5. Do not exaggerate the individual's need for professional help.
6. Think carefully about the situations you choose to introduce individuals to the

experience community, and be sure you are providing enough support for the to be successful for all parties.

Supporting, encouraging, and facilitating the inclusion of the person in that community and the expression of their capacities. In essence, beginning the fostering of relationships with community members.

This final component is the cornerstone of the entire Project and is perhaps the most difficult to achieve. The mission of the Project will not be fulfilled unless this fostering of relationships is accomplished. The difficulty lies in the fact that no absolutes or strictly right or wrong approaches in achieving this mission exist. This section of the manual will give the reader suggestions and tips, but each situation will be different and what works with one individual may not work with another. Unfortunately, there is no universal template or recipe for fostering relationships. Some people think that “friendship is like sex. We always suspect there is some secret technique we don’t know about” (Pogrebin, 1987). Unfortunately, however, there are no easy techniques or quick fixes. It can be no other way because relationships are so diverse and dynamic.

However, the Social Guides can still be prepared and have a plan. It becomes somewhat of a paradox, because the plan continually needs to be altered since the change in relationships is so ubiquitous. Ernie Pancsofar (1995) captures this conceptual paradox by saying you must have a plan but should not always follow it and you can be prepared even though you do not know exactly what you are going to say or do. Improvisation and going with the moment are the key. The Social Guides will need to use their own intuition, innovation, and experience in assisting people in forging relationships.

Amado (1990) states that “there is no recipe for turning a casual acquaintance into a true friendship.” Oftentimes, when we meet someone it just “clicks” and friendships begin to develop, almost like magic. Other times, friendships grow more slowly and steadily over time as people get to know each other better. Unfortunately, we cannot perform or program magical friendships for people with disabilities nor are we asking for the Social Guides to perform an act of magic. What we are asking and what we can do, however, is to assist people in meeting as many people as possible who share a common interest, support those connections, and then promote on every occasion the development of a relationship (Amado, 1990). In other words, we can increase the odds that a friendship will develop through the process of community connecting.

Before specific tips and suggestions are given, four main themes concerning relationships must first be explored (Amado, 1990).

Themes of Relationships

Time: The first issue that impacts a relationship is time. All relationships take some amount of time to develop. Usually, the more time people spend with each other the higher the chance a relationship will begin to develop. For example, oftentimes friendships are forged at work because people spend a significant amount of time with the people on their job. Thus, the amount of time and the quality of time a person spends with another is going to impact the

development of a relationship between those two individuals. Obviously, then, it is important for the person with a disability to spend significant amounts of time with others in a variety of relationship building activities to optimize the building of relationships.

Intensity: The second issue that impacts a relationship is the intensity, or the amount of “meaning” attributed to a relationship. Some relationships have more meaning and have more importance than others. People usually have a variety of relationships that fall all along the continuum of intensity. The most concentration needs to be on the relationships that have the potential for the most meaning to an individual.

Intimacy: The third issue involves a level of trust. Intimacy and the sharing of confidences develops over time as individuals get to know each other. It is going to take time for individuals to develop any kind of “intimate” relationship.

Reciprocity: The final component involves the exchange of services between people. Individuals both give and receive a variety of things in a relationship including companionship, fun, emotional support, practical support, and the sharing of major parts of life and work. It is important that both individuals in the relationship reciprocate these things so the relationship does not become one-sided with one always giving and the other always receiving. The Social Guide and Bridge Builder need to assist the person with a disability in reciprocating this exchange of services.

The Embodiment of Relationships

The embodiment of relationships can be defined as the “particular ways people physically enact friendship, which differs from person to person and from relationship to relationship” (O’Brien & O’Brien, 1993). People may embody a friendship in many different ways including watching movies together, making music together, talking, exchanging the news of daily life, participating in a sport or hobby together, writing letters back and forth, or going out to eat once a week together. The ways are infinite. As stated throughout this manual, the job of the Social Guide and Bridge Builder is to assist the person in finding a viable way for this embodiment of friendships.

The Social Guide needs to create or find situations to bring out the skills individuals already have within themselves. The primary goal is not to teach something new. Although obviously learning will take place, it should not be the main priority. Often residential programs do not engage in “community connecting” because they feel the individual does not possess the appropriate social and interpersonal skills for the community. As a result, formal social education programs and plans are often developed for individuals until someone arbitrarily decides they are ready for more community involvement. Unfortunately, that day often never comes and they are involved in those formal education programs for years while the social isolation continues to exist.

Social skills programs, in and of themselves are not wrong, but the best way to learn about being a friend is by being one. Amado (1990) states that “learning social skills without having any social relationships is like reading the bicycle ‘Rules of the Road’ without ever getting on a bike. Just as you can’t learn how to ride a bike without actually getting on one, no one can learn how to

get along with other people without having relationships.” Formal social skills programs need to be a supplement to “community connecting.” Spending time with people in the community is the best way to learn how to interact in a social environment, and community members are the best teachers. This principle of natural learning environments decreases the problem of generalizing from one environment to another, and increases the overall quality of learning (Holden, 1993).

Challenges to the Embodiment of Relationships

The challenges to the embodiment of relationships primarily fall into two realms: external and personal. Both of these will be discussed and possible solutions to those challenges will be explored.

The first external challenge is that many individuals have difficulty getting to places where they can develop friendships (O’Brien and O’Brien, 1993). Most individuals with developmental disabilities are pedestrians and have to rely on public transportation systems or on others to drive them to their destination. The Social Guide must be aware of this when searching the community for groups and associations and must try to find groups and places that the person can have access to without much difficulty (i.e. on a bus line). If an activity or outing is planned by the group and it is not on a bus line, the Social Guide may want to brainstorm with the person’s support staff on alternative modes of transportation.

A second external challenge is that many people with developmental disabilities have little disposable income (O’Brien and O’Brien, 1993). If the activities of the groups are expensive, it may pose a financial hurdle that must be overcome. One way to deal with this problem if it occurs is to inform support staff as soon as possible of any upcoming activities so the person can begin to save for them. Another source of funding which may be available includes a limited last resort budget provided for in the ODDPC’s grant. Communicate these concerns to the Project Coordinator and other sources of funding can be investigated.

Many personal challenges that may need to be overcome in the process of attempting connections to the community also exist. The person with a disability often lacks experience with making friends or has had some negative experiences with reaching out to others. As a result the person lacks confidence. He or she may need a great deal of support, encouragement, and time to break out of this pattern. The Social Guide needs to be cognizant of this need for reassurance and try to meet this need.

A second pattern which may have developed is one where the individuals have been hurt or rejected by others numerous times and, for self-protection, may have built a “wall” around themselves. They may push people away because they do not want to get hurt again. One woman described it in this manner: “I know my parents love me and only did what they thought was best. But they put me in the institution when I was only a very little girl. For a long, long time I cried and cried because I missed them so much. Then I stopped crying. I think about this, but I still have my prickly shell. Knowing about it doesn’t make it go away” (O’Brien and O’Brien, 1993).

A third challenge to overcome is that the individuals may be comfortable with their present relationships and activities because they are afraid to reach out (O’Brien and O’Brien, 1993). They may want to make more friendships and get more involved in the community, but the fear of

it is holding them back. Again, a great amount of support and encouragement may be necessary to assist the person in working through their feelings. Change is frightening and the support of the Social Guide and all individuals in the person's life is critical.

Insert Cartoon

Specific Ideas for Supporting Individuals in the Development of Relationships

Once the "community connection" strategy is developed in the connection strategy session and the person is introduced to the community group, the job of the Social Guide and, subsequently, the Bridge Builder is to assist the person in developing relationships with the group members. This support is vital for the success of the Project. Just as we would not teach a person how to swim by throwing him or her into deep water, we would not throw a person with a disability into community life without providing supports to maximize success (Holden, 1993). The following cartoon illustrates the importance of supports.

Insert Cartoon

Supports are defined as "procedures and activities which prevent people from falling, hold people in position, or make people capable of bearing or withstanding" (Holden, 1993). Supports for community inclusion are like "flotation devices or life preservers that are used to teach someone to swim or to guard against danger when he/ she is in water over his/her head. Supports for inclusion are activities that make the experience a positive one for all concerned" (Holden, 1993).

As mentioned earlier, improvisation is the key, but here are some specific suggestions that may help.

Modeling

It is important that the Social Guide model the appropriate behaviors in social situations. This includes such things as greeting new people, making conversations, asking questions, wearing appropriate attire, and arriving on time. Modeling is a powerful way to demonstrate appropriate interpersonal relationship skills. Here are some conditions that will increase modeling's effectiveness as a learning pedagogy (Holden, 1993):

- When the relationship between the teacher and the learner is friendly and positive, the learner is likely to attend more closely, watch more carefully, and practice the modeled behavior more often. We are more likely to imitate people we like and value than people we dislike. Our relationship is the most powerful agent of influence on another person. No teaching technique or strategy can take the place of the power of a positive relationship.
- It is more likely that the desired learning will take place when the model is aware of being a model. Models tend to behave more consistently and more distinctly when they are conscious of demonstrating something.
- When the learner is paying attention to the model, learning is more likely to take place. Sometimes we have to get the learner's attention before we begin a demonstration.
- Generally, the simpler the activity and the more frequently it occurs, the more easily and quickly learning will take place.
- Learners who are uncertain about how to act, because a situation is new and unfamiliar, are more likely to rely on more experienced models for examples of how to act.

Mentoring

It is important for the Social Guide to take on the role of mentor. The community connection process will be most effective if the Social Guide invests him/herself in the person he or she is guiding. Jack Canfield, author of "How to Build your Self-Esteem" compares a mentor to a prospector searching for gold. The prospector works diligently and invests himself totally in the pursuit of the gold. The Social Guide also needs to work diligently and commit him/herself to finding a community connection for the individual. They are impacting the life of another person in an extremely profound way. It is integral that the Social Guide realizes that agencies, schools, and churches do not impact others in a profound way, rather it is the individuals inside those agencies, schools, and churches that make the difference. The following are some tips in mentoring others:

- Get to know the real person, the person behind the files and reports
- Attach high value to the person
- Believe the person has something wonderful to offer

- Remember the little daily things that show you care can be more important than big one-time events
- Help the person see a positive future for their lives
- Commit yourself to the person

Encouraging and Assisting Reciprocity

As discussed in the Relationship Themes section, the exchange of social activities or reciprocity is a vital part of building relationships. If only one person in a relationship is doing the giving and not getting anything in return, the relationship will probably not last very long. The Social Guide needs to encourage and/or assist the individual in reciprocating in the relationship. This may include encouraging the individual to shake hands, introduce themselves, hold a conversation, ask appropriate questions, invite group members out for coffee or other activities, give appropriate compliments, listen to others, bring refreshments to the meeting when appropriate (let the person's support staff know if a person needs to bring refreshments, etc.), giving cards or gifts when appropriate such as Christmas cards, Birthday cards, or Thank You cards, and offering a variety of types of assistance when appropriate (this will depend on the type of situation and group). The key is to assist the person in being an active, contributing member of the group and the relationships among the group.

Using Social Prosthetic Devices

Social prosthetic devices are those things that can assist individuals in making a social contact or demonstrate a common interest with another person. It can be looked at as a social "ice breaker" that doesn't involve verbal communication (Ernie Pancsofar, 1995). Examples may include shirts or jackets with sports team logos, hats, patches, books, or anything that may show a common interest and start a conversation. For example, if someone wears a shirt that says "I Love Soccer" it will automatically catch the attention of anyone in the group who likes soccer. A common interest is found and a relationship can start to be developed around that common interest. Ernie Pancsofar (1995) gives a wonderful example of the power of a social prosthetic device. One man with a physical disability who used a wheel chair was on a college campus when another person noticed a Harley Davidson insignia on the back of his wheel chair. The two started talking about motorcycles and their love for Harley's. It turned out that the one man had a Harley with a side car and asked the man in the wheel chair if he wanted to go for a ride. Instantaneously, a relationship began to be formed. This probably would not have happened if the one man did not notice the Harley Davidson insignia.

80/20 Rule

The 80/20 rule is a rule that has been proven to be successful and effective in a great variety of business and professional arenas. Simply stated, 80% of your time should be spent with those individuals and companies which are the most interested or have the potential to bring the greatest profit. The remaining 20% of your time should be spent on trying to create new business

or get new customers. In other words, do not waste your time searching for new avenues of business growth, but instead spend the time with the companies that will benefit you the most.

This principle can also be used in this Project. The Social Guide should not try to assist the individual in building relationships with all members of the group. Instead, he or she should spend the majority of the time facilitating relationship building with a few people who show the most interest and those relationships that have the greatest potential for growth and interpersonal satisfaction.

Companion lists

It may be helpful if the Social Guide assists the person in creating a companion list (See appendix A-10) of all the people in the group. Often the group leader can provide a list with phone numbers and addresses of the members. It may even include the birthdays of the members. Information can be added to the list as the individual begins developing relationships. Examples of items which someone could add would be birthdays, the person's interests, or even favorite foods. Using the 80/20 principle, the relationships which show the most interest and satisfaction for both parties should be pursued strongest. These individuals can be highlighted in some manner on the companion list.

From the information on the lists, the Social Guide can assist the individual in practicing things to say or questions to ask. The Guide can also assist in planning activities and inviting the person out according to shared interests. The person can also write letters or call on appropriate occasions. All of these activities have the potential and may lend themselves to building quality relationships.

Time and Involvement

In order to optimize the chances that a relationship will develop, it is important that the individual spends some significant time with others in the group. The more involved the person is and the more amount of time spent, the greater the chances that a relationship will begin to bloom. One guiding principle is to try to focus on relationship building activities wherein individuals can interact and participate rather than other types of activities.

Breaking Bread

A social activity that often promotes relationships is eating together, also known as "breaking bread" together. People are often the most comfortable and relaxed when eating, and there is something inherent in sitting down together for a meal that promotes intimacy. Eating together is also very conducive to conversation which opens up many areas of a person's life that may not be opened in other activities.

The Social Guide can assist the person in asking others out for meals or can invite them to share a meal. Hopefully, this will, in turn, be reciprocated back to the person.

Educating and Encouraging Group Members

An important component that may greatly contribute to the success of the Project is the education and encouragement of the group members, especially the Bridge Builder since he or she will carry on the work of the Social Guide. If the Social Guide can get the group members behind the philosophy of the project and heighten their awareness to the social isolation of individuals with disabilities, it will greatly increase the chances of success. When people believe in a cause and can envision the benefits they can “change the world.” Change begins with one person who imparts their vision onto others.

Again, apply the 80/20 principle to the group members who are most responsive. Education can be done by explaining the Project in greater detail, lending them articles and videos if they show an interest, and taking every opportunity to discuss the tremendous benefit the Project could have on the lives of the people involved. Encourage the group members and thank them when they begin to show a commitment to the individual that is being guided out of social isolation. Verbally expressing thanks and thank you cards are appropriate.

Educating Support Staff

It is important for the Social Guide to educate the individual’s support staff so they can be cognizant and assist with the community connections. This is especially important after the Social Guide fades out. The support staff may need to assist with such things as transportation, communication, and other practical matters as it relates to the community group. The Social Guide needs to keep the support staff informed throughout the connection process and provide them with ways they can assist in the process. The Project Coordinators may also want to educate the support staff. Depending on the receptiveness of the staff, the Coordinators can provide a formal training or keep it more informal (Please see Appendix A-11 for the ways organizations can enhance or hinder community connections).

Fading out and Following Up

After relationships are beginning to develop, the Social Guide will begin to fade out as the need for support decreases. The Social Guide has to find a balance because he or she does not want to fade out too soon but, at the same time, does not want to make the person too dependent on his/her support. At first the Social Guide will probably be going with the person to act as a support system, but after several weeks or months, the Guide may want to begin giving less physical support. He or she can still provide emotional support and follow-up by continuing to talk with the person and the group members to see how everything is going. The Social Guide may have to come back and resume a greater level of support if the need arises after fading out for a period. Each situation is different and all parties involved will have to experiment to see what works best. Keep in mind the overriding goal is for the community members to take over the support and inclusion of the person in their social circle.

The Detailed Responsibilities of the Bridge Builder

As discussed previously, the Bridge Builder will already be a part of the community group or association that the individual with the disability wants to join. The Bridge Builder may enter the connecting process at the point where the Social Guide makes the initial contact with the community group to explain the Project, or he/she may come at a later time.

The responsibilities of the Bridge Builder are similar to those of the Social Guide. The primary mission of the Bridge Builder is to assist with the introduction of relationships with members of the community group. To some extent they need to understand the strengths and capacities of the individual. They will learn this through getting to know the person and from conversations with the Social Guide. There will be no formal educational process such as reading the articles and viewing the videos unless the Bridge Builder strongly expresses that desire and interest.

Through informal conversations with the Bridge Builder and the community group, the Social Guide, with assistance from the Project Coordinator if needed, will explain the strategies for supporting individuals and fostering relationships. This informal education will take place over an extended period of time (time will vary) with the goal of the Bridge Builder and other members of the group informally supporting the person in their inclusion and participation in the community group without the assistance of the Social Guide. This type of support will vary for each person but may only include giving the person a call to remind them about a meeting, helping to arrange transportation, encouraging them to participate, or assisting in other practical ways. Over time the natural functioning and synergy of the group will take over this support.

Additional Training Resources

Additional training resources on community connecting are included in the Appendices (Please see Appendix A-12 for a Reading list and Appendix 13 for Training Videos Question Sheets).

Conclusion and Challenge

This manual is concluded with several quotations to inspire the reader.

“Invest your life in people. Your return will be much greater”- source unknown

“A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature”- Ralph Waldo Emerson

“No less a masterpiece is the person who helps us make friends”- Stephen Newton

“Each one, teach one.”- African Proverb

“Two can accomplish twice as much as one, for the results can be much better. If the one falls, the other pulls him up; but if a man falls when he is alone he is in trouble... And one standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer..”- Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

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