

Person Centered Approaches in Transition

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Person centred approaches offer us a different way of gathering information about children and young people, that can help learn together about what is important to the person, what they want for their future and what support they need. This is very different from typical assessments. It is a shared journey of learning to discover what Beth Mount calls the 'rich folklore of people'. In this paper we share a wide range of different person centered approaches, derived from different styles of person centered planning.

Choosing a person centred approach

It is important that anyone undertaking this kind of work with a child or young person should understand what it feels like. The best way to do this is to try it out for yourself first. Sharing personal information can be a very important, and is a great way to explain the process. When sharing this kind of information, however, it is clearly necessary to be sensitive to some of the contrasts that exist between different people's lives, and to consider the impact of showing a very full relationship map to someone who only has three or four paid staff in their life.

1) Personal Portfolios

When supporting someone else to create a personal portfolio we start from the premise that we all have gifts. This means that we all have a wealth of talent, skills, knowledge and unique personal qualities. In some of us, these gifts may be as yet untapped, unrecognised, hidden or ignored. It is the job of the facilitator to find clues to uncover these gifts

Beth Mount

We all record our own lives in different ways, for example:

- a memento box of objects that reflect important events, people or times in your life
- a photo album that documents your life from birth to present day
- researching and drawing your family tree
- scrap books of special times, such as holidays
- a video showing ordinary and special times in your life
- audio tapes of children learning to talk or other events
- a notice board or large clip frame with photos of important people or special times
- a diary.

The word 'portfolio' describes a collection of information about someone's life. Most people have employment or education portfolios, students complete portfolios of their work, and in employment many people have personal development plans that form part of their personal portfolio.

Person centred planning gathers a lot of different information about people, for example, their history, what they like to do, who they know, and where they go. This portfolio of information will reflect and illustrate the person's experiences and achievements, as well as her dreams and hopes for the future. When people are supported to record their own story it can give them more control over what they want to record and share, rather than having someone else describe their life. Individuals are encouraged to record and represent their information in a way that reflects their ideas and gifts. This could include photographs, audiotape, artwork, letters, certificates, videos, and objects – anything that expresses something about their life and who they are. The members of People First in Manchester have compiled descriptions of their lives using different media, called them personal portfolios and presented this way of working on a video.

Multimedia profiles are another way of recording and sharing personal information.

Portfolios such as these provide an invaluable source of information about an individual that is particularly useful when there is turnover in that person's support.

2) Relationships Circles

This person centred approach is useful:

- for finding out who could contribute to getting the person connected
- for identifying relationships that could be developed or strengthened
- for showing the balance of family, friends and paid workers in the person's life.

The deepening and expanding of relationships is fundamental to most of us. Judith Snow developed a simple way of illustrating the different relationships in a person's life.

Circle of Exchange – people in this circle will be those who are paid to be in the person's life: e.g. paid carers, other service providers, shopkeepers and postman etc.

Circle of Participation – people who share experiences and interests with the person: e.g. work colleagues, members of the same club or church.

Circle of Friendship – people who simply choose to spend time with the person and share the enjoyment of each other's company.

Circle of Intimacy – those closest to the person: close family, partners and loved friends.

Completing the relationship circle

The child or young person's name or photo should go in the middle of the inner circle.

She might want to represent people in the other circles by writing their names, inserting photos, or drawing pictures or symbols. If people are included who are no longer involved in the person's life then it might be useful to note how long they have been absent. Sometimes the map can only be done as a 'best guess' on behalf of the person along with someone who knows her well. It is important to remember that close relationships occur regardless of roles and responsibilities – people may have friendships with administrative, maintenance, and professional staff.

Questions to ask

- Who is most important in your life?
- Who else do you see often? (Family, neighbours, people at work or at the day centre, people you see in the evenings or weekends)
- Who do you celebrate special occasions with, e.g. Christmas or your birthday?
- Is there anyone you feel close to that you have not seen for a while?
- How often do you see each of the people you have mentioned?
- Do you see them by themselves or as part of a group?
- Who makes the arrangements to meet up?

Once the circles are complete, it will be possible to look together at any themes or patterns in the relationships. Are, for example, most of the people paid staff or other people with disabilities? How close is the person's family? Does the person have any contact with neighbours or local people?

3) Gifts

This person centred approach is useful:

- for showing what the person enjoys, is good at, and can contribute to
- for identifying things that the person may want to do more often
- for starting to think about the kinds of people the person gets on well with.

Our gifts are what make us attractive to the other people we meet. Beyond being simply our interests or abilities they are the parts of us that other people warm to – the parts of us that make people want to spend time with us: our personal Velcro.

Gifts can be anything from a warm smile or cheeky sense of humour, to a concern for others, courage, or honesty.

To be successful in making our communities more inclusive we need to believe that every individual has gifts to offer other people, indeed that the community as

a whole will benefit from including everyone. Some of the people we support undoubtedly make it hard for us to see their gifts sometimes, but many with disabilities have been let down all their lives and may find it difficult to trust and open themselves to new people as a result. They may think themselves unlovable and adopt behaviour that asks others to verify that. Getting to know people, and being trusted enough to see their gifts takes time.

We often need other people to help us to think about what our gifts might be. Here are some questions that Michael Smull uses to ask others about gifts and contributions:

- What do others like and admire about Nazeem?
- Why do people choose to spend time with Nazeem?
- What have the people who like and admire Nazeem learned from her?
- How has Nazeem made a difference in their lives? What has she contributed?
- Where else may these contributions be appreciated in the community?

4) Skills and Interests

This person centred approach is useful:

- for showing what the person enjoys or has a passion for
- for showing what talents the person has and the things they are good at
- for showing what the person can contribute
- for identifying things that the person may want to do more often
- for identifying the places, people and activities that make the person happy.

There is an obvious crossover between this person centred approach and the 'Gifts' approach. An interest or a passion for something is also a gift because it creates the possibility for a connection with other people, an opportunity for work or an interest to explore at college. It is important to differentiate between the two, so that the less tangible gifts do not get ignored, but it is not necessary to spend lots of time trying to decide precisely what is an interest and what is a gift. The most important thing is that everything is recorded. Many people have existing hobbies and interests, some of which may be hidden to the casual observer.

Questions to ask about interests

- What hobbies or activities make you excited and enthusiastic?
- In what ways do you like to help other people?
- Do you have interests that you used to pursue and would like to try again?
- What makes a good day for you?

Describing a good day from morning to evening might reveal interests or hobbies that have never been formalised or even identified.

For example, if I describe what makes a good day for me from the time I get up in the morning, one essential component is that I get to sing very loudly to chart music in the car on the way to work. This probably would never come up if you asked me what my hobbies are, but it is a very important part of who I am and helps me start the day in a positive frame of mind. If I was thinking about making connections for myself, I might start by trying to build on my love of singing in the car or my love of chart music.

5) Hopes and Dreams

This person centred approach is useful:

- for finding the direction that the person wants her life to go in
- for inspiring
- for bringing people together around a common purpose
- for getting a sense of what makes the person tick – what motivates her.

People dream in different ways. For people who are deprived and oppressed, the dream may be very small and simple – to have some peace and quiet, to be able to come and go.

Some people access their dream by thinking about what they would do if they won the Lottery or if they were told they only had six months to live. Their dreams might be about traveling or visiting people, studying, changing career or living in a particular place. Some people's dreams are more about a state of mind or about their spirit.

For other people their 'dream' is to have what is important to them in day-to-day life and focusing on what is important to them now may, therefore, be more significant than trying to identify dreams for the future. Sometimes you have to get a life before you can find your dream. This is particularly true for people who are ill or in crisis.

Often people use symbols when they dream. Sally dreamed about becoming a doctor. For her this symbolised being respected and knowing more about the way the body works. Another man we planned with talked about becoming Superman. The school staff thought this dream was drug related. In fact, when we explored it with him, he simply wanted to help people. Dreaming can be emotional both for the individual and for those supporting them. Sometimes it is hard to face up to what we haven't done and maybe never

Here are some questions to help people think about their hopes and dreams:

- In an ideal world, what would life look like for you? What would you be doing? Who is there? What does it sound, look, smell, and feel like?
- Take a moment and think about what gives direction to your life? What pulls you? What calls out to you? Describe the images, colours, smells, sounds, and feelings that give direction to your life.

- What kinds of relationships do you want in your life?
- Where do you dream of living?
- Are there adventures or experiences that you seek? Places that you would like to visit? New things that you have never tried?

When you are stuck

Some people may need help to develop their ideas about what they want. One way is to get people together in a small discussion group, using pictures, magazines and photos. Skills for People, a self-advocacy group based in Newcastle runs a course for self-advocates called 'Reach for the Stars' which does this.

In one school teachers introduced the idea of the 'Wishing Tree'. They used a model of a tree and made cardboard leaves to hang off the branches. Children were encouraged to write their dreams on the leaves and then hang them on the tree. Having this visual aid not only made it easier for people to think of things but also made it more fun. A lot of dreams were identified, some large and some small, that people could then plan to act upon.

Exposure to new options and possibilities can also encourage people to desire a better situation. Conferences, meetings, discussions, and trips to other communities to learn about new options can have a significant impact on the development of a personal dream.

'When people desire something different for themselves, it is almost always because they have heard of a better situation from someone else.' Beth Mount

6) How to Provide Good Support

This person centred approach is useful:

- for identifying exactly what good support means for the person
- for describing in detail what people who support the person must do
- for seeing what support someone may need to participate in community opportunities, college or at work
- for discovering what motivates the person
- for examining ways in which the person might be supported to become more independent.

This person centred approach describes in detail what support an individual wants or needs as well as what works for and motivates her. The 'how to provide good support' approach does not include things that the person can do for themselves. This approach should address any important health issues that need to be considered. Where there are issues of health that are sensitive and/or very

personal, a judgment needs to be made about who needs to know the information and in what detail.

One way of recording this is to put items under two headings: 'what works' and 'what does not work' for the person. The 'what works' section may include how the person likes to be treated, what kinds of people she gets on with best, or what motivates her, for example praise and encouragement, rewards, small steps, celebrations, listening.

The 'what does not work' section may include the situations that frustrate or frighten her, when her energy levels are lowest, or when she gets bored or miserable.

To be successful in supporting a person means helping her to have more of what works for her and less of what doesn't. Very often a key part of supporting someone to make choices for their future lies in understanding the way that that person communicates.

A communication chart can be drawn up to enable new people to understand the individual better.

7) Communication Chart

This person centred approach is useful . . .

- for exploring peoples' different perceptions about how the person communicates
- for explaining exactly how the person communicates with us.

Many people either do not use words to talk or use few words. This person centred approach is vital to developing an understanding about the individual. It needs to be completed very early in the development of a transition plan. Start it with the people who know the person best and then check it out with others.

In getting to know a person who does not use words to communicate, it is vital to find out how they communicate and to be aware of subtleties that are easily missed. It is important to find out who knows the person well and who is able to read the slight changes that can tell so much about how she is feeling.

Listening to someone who does not use words means finding out:

- What are the person's mood indicators – how do we know if she is happy, sad, bored or angry, frustrated or excited in different settings, at different times. How do we gauge likes and dislikes?
- How does the person indicate choice or preference?
- How does the person use eye contact?
- What do other facial expressions mean? Are they obvious, like smiling, or something easier to miss?

- Do they use different vocal tones?
- When does the person fidget and when does she pay attention?
- What does her posture mean?

Any changes in how the individual engages or presents are important both for transition and informing the planning process.

There are many ways of recording the information gathered at this stage and often support from a Speech and Language Therapist, who is creative and experienced, will help a group to think through how best to make this information 'individual friendly' and accessible. These ways may involve photodiaries, drawings, graphics and objects. Often it is necessary to try different ways of recording before the most accessible is found. One way is the communication chart used in essential lifestyle planning. The communication chart is designed to support people who do not use words or have difficulty in communicating with words, to talk. It is also useful for people who do use words but whose speech is more difficult for others to understand.

The communication chart has four headings.

- What is happening – describes the circumstances.
- (Person's name) does – describes what the person does in terms that are clear to a reader who has not seen it (a picture or even a video recording may be preferred for e.g., a facial expression).
- We think it means – describes the meaning that people think is behind the behaviour (it is not uncommon for there to be more than one meaning for a single behaviour – all meanings should be listed).
- And we should – describes what those who provide support are to do in response to what the person is saying with their behaviour (the responses under this heading give a careful reviewer a great deal of insight into how the person is perceived and supported.)

It is easiest to complete the communication chart by starting from the two inside columns first (when ... does, we think it means) and then working out to the two outside columns (what is happening, and we should). The most important thing to remember when compiling a communication chart is that the emphasis is on the appropriate response from those supporting the person, rather than on changing the behaviour

The communication chart may never be finished. It should be an ongoing process of recording and review and it can be used as a logbook with the aim of understanding and supporting the person in the best way possible.

8) History

A 'history' or past experiences person centred approach is useful:

- to keep in touch with the person's history
- to identify the landmark or milestone events in the person's life?
- to trace themes through a person's life story
- to identify experiences that must not be repeated
- to celebrate achievements
- to identify opportunities and positive experiences that can be built on
- to identify people or activities from the past that have gone missing and which the person might want to reintroduce.

9) Fears and Nightmares

A fears and nightmares person centred approach is useful:

- to identify experiences to avoid at all cost
- to identify places to avoid
- to identify types of people to avoid
- for people to name their fears, especially if there is conflict over what is the right way forward for a person.

10) How I Spend My Time

This approach is useful:

- for identifying the activities that the person is already involved in that may be a starting point for transition
- for understanding more about the person's preferences so that they can be expanded upon.

This approach records the places that the individual goes during the day, week and year. Over a time span of this length it manages to cover both regular and occasional activities. It also lists of all the activities and places a person is involved in. It might also be helpful to record to what extent the person participates in the activities and who else is involved.

Questions to ask

- Where do you go during the week?
- Where do you go in the evenings and at weekends?
- Who do you go with? (Alone? With family? With other students?)
- Who makes the arrangements for the activity (e.g. who books the bowling alley, looks out bus times etc.)?
- Do you meet and get to know other people at these places or activities?
- Which of the activities do you enjoy the most?

LOOKING FOR PATTERNS AND THEMES

Once enough information has been gathered from the various person centred approaches it might be useful to spend some time reflecting on what has been collated.

It might be possible to identify patterns or themes, which could help point to a way forward for transition

Questions to ask

- What are the gifts and interests to appreciate and build on?
- What support and routines do we need to consider?
- What environments and places work best for her?
- Are there times of the day that work best for her?
- What is the person already doing that she would like to do more of?
- What would take her closer to her hopes and dreams?
- How much time does she spend doing things in groups and how much time alone or with one other person?
- Could any of the activities be adapted to create opportunities for meeting and getting to know other people?

This paper has described how person centred planning represents a way of learning about each other through listening to the person, spending time together, and listening to others who know the person well. Different person centred approaches from Personal Futures Planning, essential lifestyle planning, and good practice generally have been offered as ways to get started in learning together with the individual. Information from these approaches can be creatively presented as a portfolio for the person providing clues that help begin the process of transition from school to adult life, and developing person centred planning within schools.