

Leaning Into Community

Seeds planted

Sprouts growing

Ready for tending

An Investment of the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities

With heartfelt gratitude

We want to express appreciation to the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities for understanding and acknowledging the importance of community by funding this investment and to Council Staff Margaret Harkness in particular for her continued support of this work.

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Leaning Into Community

A review of our work and a call for change



“We believe everyone brings a gift, has a destiny, a calling and we assume there is a place that needs that gift”

Beth Mount

Traditional supports focus on perceived deficits and when we focus on a person’s gifts, skills and capacities, perceptions change. We know there’s something better than being fixed. We wanted to do better

with bringing people at the edges into the middle by invitation of their gifts. In 2016 and 2017 we accompanied 30 young adults across northwest Illinois as they explored valued social roles. During 2017-2018 we asked ourselves how we might use what we’ve learned to help continue moving forward. We found community leaders in three different regions and asked *“how together we might support more people to connect to community members outside the boundaries of disability services and find paths to:*

Valued Roles – How might we enhance people’s reputations in their communities and deepen our understanding of the ways people can contribute?

Promoting Choice- How might we support people to have more control and choice in life?

Supporting Contribution - How might we promote people’s development of their competencies and contribute their unique gifts?

This work is at the heart of person centered planning.

Our work reflects the work of John O’Brien and Herbert Lovett in “Finding a Way Toward Everyday Lives” **the term Person Centered Planning refers to a family of approaches to organizing and guiding community change in alliance with people with disabilities and their families and friends.** They also state each approach to Person Centered Planning has distinctive practices, but all share a common foundation of beliefs:

The person is at the focus of planning, and along with them, those who love the person are the primary authorities on the person's direction. Instead of making recommendations, we continually offered ideas and possible next steps in the spirit of partnership. We encouraged each other to move away from an expert mentality and lean in to a collaborative approach. The more we learned, the better it got!

The purpose of person centered planning is learning through shared action. Producing documentation of meetings, proposals, or budgets are only footprints. The path is made by people walking together. Each week community guides walked with, explored and planned next steps with each Protégé and the Protégé's family.

Person centered planning seems to change common patterns of community life by stimulating community hospitality and enlisting community members in assisting the focus people to define and to work toward a desirable future.



John O'Brien and Herbert Lovett go on to say *"In order to support the kinds of community changes necessary to improve people's chances for a desirable future, virtually all existing human service policies and agencies will have to change the ways they regard people, the ways they relate to communities, the ways they spend money, the ways they define staff roles and responsibilities and the ways they exercise authority."* Our work directly focused on this kind of change. We spent most of our time IN the community, not behind a desk. We were freed from many of the demands of bureaucracy and paperwork and worked to keep other distractions to a minimum. When recruiting guides, we didn't look for "disability professionals" Instead, we looked in community and found small business owners, hair stylists, church members and neighbors. We used everyday language to describe feelings and experiences. Again and again we were reminded for the need to be responsive, present and skilled listeners. We worked to be "opportunity seekers" and seize every chance to make connections for people, often within their own networks. Protégé's who found stronger connections had community guides or family members who made personal commitments to forge a partnership in making a dream, vision or goal into a reality by using their existing connections and making new ones.

We had the freedom to encourage families to begin where they were at, create a vision for the future with them as well as the community guides who would accompany them.

"Honest Person Centered Planning can only come from respect for the dignity and completeness of the focus person (Protégé)." For us, this came, at times in the form of waiting for the focus person to decide what they wanted to do next, based on ideas found. Helping each person take an ownership in their choices and the fruit of the consequences that followed took time and some serious conversations, but much learning and growth has begun. Being a partner means doing some of the work, but not any one person doing all of the work. Protégé's and families stretched to see what role they would play.

“Assisting people to define and pursue a desirable future tests one’s clarity, commitment, and courage. Person Centered Planning engages powerful emotional and ethical issues and calls for a sustained search for effective ways to deal with difficult barriers and conflicting demands. Those who treat Person Centered Planning simply as a technique and those who fail to provide for their own development and support will offer little benefit to the people they plan with.” We created numerous opportunities for ongoing learning and stretching with protege’s, families and community guides. We held monthly thinking groups, were available by phone and shared a collection of video and written resources that we made available to strengthen everyone’s learning and fortitude.



Sustainable culture change moves us to create a new narrative for the people we support. Our primary work involves shifting perceptions, expectations and support for all.

This was created to ignite an interest in helping people move away from the story of “client” or “consumer” and expand one’s role and reputation as an active “contributor” and “creator”. Our goal is to motivate us all consider taking action and move deeper into community. As with many things in life, this was a dynamic process and while we have worked hard to accurately reflect our experiences in this guide we discover with each person, their gifts, their community, necessary conditions for success, the key people in their life, and the people we have connected them to. Together we have created a rich web of connections that cannot be fully captured here.

This summary and call for change is divided into the following sections:

- Section 1: Steps in the Process
- Section 2: The Approach
- Section 3: What We Have Learned About Our Partners
- Section 4: Stories of Gifts Uncovered, Explored and Shared
- Section 5: Sprouts Beginning to Grow
- Section 6: What Else We’re Learning
- Section 7: Other Ways to Get to Know One Another
- Section 8: Now It’s Your Turn, Will Change Come on Your Watch?
- Section 9: Resources

SECTION 1: Steps in the Process

We began the process as we did in the first year: finding partners. The requirements of this partnership include:

- To be alive;
- To be interested and willing to explore community participation and contribution in partnership;
- To agree to share their stories of exploration and experiences as well as to allow us to respectfully share their stories with others.

The steps in the process include:

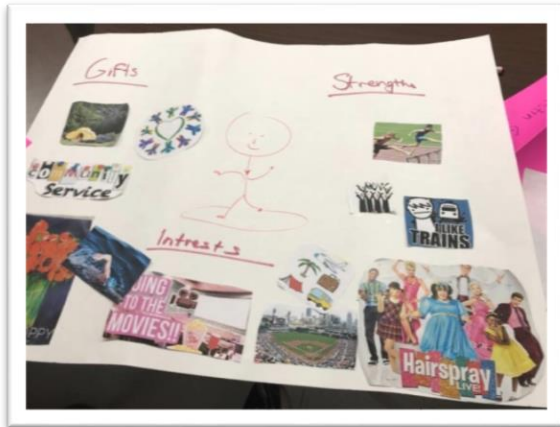
1. Introduction and supporting social roles and community life plan inventory
2. Family support circle cafes
3. Discovery
4. Expansion of community
5. Fading support and leaning in
6. Community life plan and social roles continuation

These steps are explained below:

STEP 1. Introduction and social roles/community life plan inventory

The Protégés and their Family Support Circle are introduced to the process and the steps we will follow to guide accompaniment. The Protégé with their Family Support Circle complete the life plan survey and the Supporting Social Roles Survey. We also discussed who else can be drawn upon to be a part of the Support Circle as the process proceeds. This is gentle work that requires respect, patience and openness and the ability to suspend judgment.

STEP 2: Family support circle cafes



Protégés and their Family Support Circle along with Community Guides attended an introductory circle meeting where they identify and share their gifts and interests and dreams. In continued monthly gatherings, we explore sweet places in the community where their gifts, interests and dreams may be pursued and where natural connections can be made.

Sweet Places are where:

- ♥ People gather by consent and choice (rather than by control)
- ♥ Relationships are based on affiliation and shared interest (rather than exchange)
- ♥ People are always identifying, inviting and mobilizing one another's gifts
- ♥ Culture expresses itself in the form of stories (rather than data)
- ♥ We hear people singing because they are making music (rather than consuming music)

We explored “mining the community,” where the community is examined and checked out - looking for “sweet places” and for places that click with the Protégé. Is it a Tai Chi or kickboxing establishment? Is it a gym or club with a variety of classes where the Protégé can “try out” different activities in learning what might be fun, interesting and welcoming? Maybe the library or City Hall could use an extra hand for meetings or events? Local restaurants and coffee shops often have events like Karaoke, poetry jams, or sharing drawings that can be investigated. This “mining” is all about finding out and noticing places and people where shared interests and passions can increase community connections.

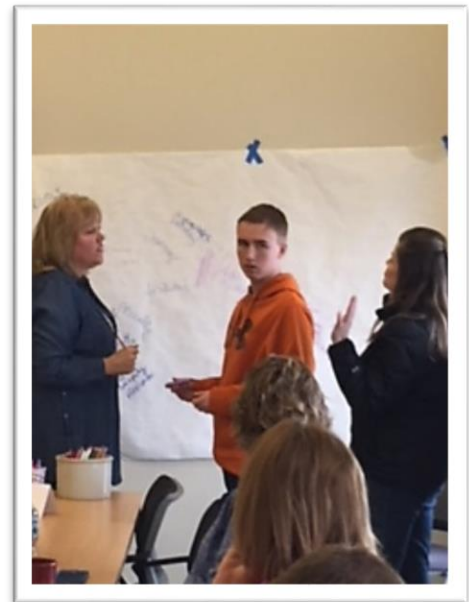


STEP 3. The Discovery Process

During this process, the Community Guide walks shoulder to shoulder with the Protégé and the people in their life to follow the threads of interest learned in the Circle Cafes and family meetings. All work together as a team guided by the philosophy that **we believe in possibility**. This begins with asking questions and listening for: who is this person? What would give their life richer meaning? This involves spending time together and more listening for “**when is the person most who they are?**” Meeting with the Protégé at their home, checking out their room, learning about what they like to do at home – do they have chores, how do they spend their time and asking **how** would they **like** to spend their time. Who is in the Protégé’s network – **who** do they know (and **who do those people know**) and **what** do they do when they are together. We follow the threads of the Protégé’s interests, learning about their network, making notes along the way. We consider how to provide supports (“just right” – only as much as is needed) for the community connections to lead to where he/she wants to go.

STEP 4: Expansion of Community

As we mined the community, we learned about the Protégé’s interests and desires and found out who was in their personal network. We looked for where the Protégé’s interests and gifts can be enjoyed and shared. Are there existing clubs, jobs, classes to participate in? Who in the Protégé’s network (or the guide’s or anyone in the workgroup) belongs to these groups, businesses or organizations? Is there an art club at a local art studio where the protégé can take a class and also help out either paid or volunteer? Does the church have a fellowship group where the protégé could contribute or a nursery that can use an extra person on Sundays and when classes are held? Does a new group need to be created such as a cooking club, a fishing club or a walking or bunco group? What is needed to make this happen and who else can help with this? The answer to what or how is often **WHO**. As the Protégé begins to have more experiences and connections, their story is shared at the Circle Café meetings.



STEP 5: Fading Support and Leaning In

The Community Guide partners with the Protégé and their family to figure what connections are needed. One key in this step is to notice when direct support can be faded to more natural supports in the experience. Less direct support provided in smaller amounts of time can assist the Protégé to connect more naturally. As the Protégé gets to know the people and the people get to know him/her better, the connection strengthens and a supportive role may develop.

WHAT will make the Protégé's connection the best it can be:

Extra time or breaks?

Space to move?

Do we need to provide schedules?

Adapt the physical environment?

Change the amount of work?

Always looking for ways the person can participate with fewer formalized supports -

Can the person be supported part of the time by a fellow employee or club member over time? In the most welcoming environment, each person pitches in to help someone new “learn the ropes,” be a part of the group/organization and become a valued member. The Community Guide is working to strengthen connections here and may assist the Protégé in sharing their story at community events which expands the trust network even more.

STEP 6: Community life Plans and Social Roles

The Protégé, their families and the Community Guide revisits the life plan, looking for changes in both what they have participated in, what they have learned about and what gives them energy. The experiences may have led them to change their minds about some things they wanted or opened up new ideas for them to pursue. Are there now other things they wish to add to the plan? People should always be able to change their plan as new experiences uncover new desires, goals and dreams. Have they met new people and expanded their network? The Supporting Social Roles may have also changed with new life experiences. What supports need to be found or strengthened to help make those changed plans become a reality?

SECTION 2: The Approach

Walking through the Steps in the Process, the philosophical foundation of our earlier work guided us through this period including teachings from Griffin Hammis & Associates, Tom Kohler, John O'Brien, Beth Mount and Tim Vogt (Starfire Council) as well as principles from The World Café to frame our Community Conversations. These concepts guided our thinking and actions as we approached partnerships with Protégés. We share these concepts with you to help form your work.

“Listen with Care, Find the Key and Connect to a Place” Beth Mount

Personal Discovery

As you begin partnership with people in this work, we offer these questions to guide you:

- Who is this person?
 - What do I know about him or her?
 - What else do I need to learn about him or her?
 - Who does he or she know?
 - What are his or her interests, strengths and talents?
 - Where is he or she at her best? (ideal conditions of community)
 - Where in the community do people with similar themes work, play, gather?
- Why am I doing this?
 - What am I learning about this person by doing this activity?
 - What does this activity lead to next?
 - What else do we need to learn or ask – think about people, locations, talents
- What would “getting it right” look like for this person?
 - What is important to him/her?
 - What would make the most difference in his/her life?
 - What are the person’s opportunities to enhance his/her life? What are the challenges or dilemmas?
 - What does she or he need to make this happen?

“Everyone can take their space, make their place, find their shape” Beth Mount

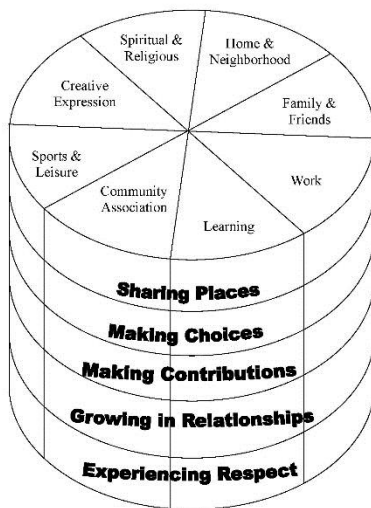
Supporting Valued Experiences and Valued Roles

John O’Brien identified valued experiences and roles that people play in the community. To support people to take their space, make their place and find their shape in the community, we need to think about uncovering what valued social roles they can play. Friend, family member, neighbor, citizen, athlete, partner, homeowner, worker, learner, artist are all examples of values social roles that people play.



Valued Social Roles

Valued roles all allow people to experience one or more of the five valued experiences below:



1. **Belonging** – in a diverse variety of relationships and memberships.

2. **Choosing** – what they want in everyday situations that reflect their higher purpose. Having the freedom and support, information and assistance to make the same choices that others of a similar age do and learning to make wiser choices over time. Being encouraged to use and strengthen voice regardless of mode of communication, clarify what matters to them, make thoughtful decisions and learn from experience.

3. **Contributing** – by discovering, developing and giving their gifts and investing their capacities and energy in pursuit that make a positive difference to other people.

There are gifts of being and gifts of doing: contributions can range from interested presence to capable performance. Contributions can be free, exchanged or earned pay.

4. **Sharing Ordinary Places** – and activities with other citizens, neighbors, classmates and co-workers. Sharing by living, working, learning and playing confidently in ordinary community settings.

5. **Being Respected** – as whole persons whose history, capacities and futures are worthy of attention and whose gifts engage them in valued social roles

Portals to a Good Life

We also learn from O'Brien that these valued social roles are Portals to a Good Life. As we walk with our partners, we explore what matters to them.

Spiritual and Religious

Recognized as a member and participates in service, study or social activities related to membership (member, parishioner, deacon, elder, prayer leader, usher, choir member, etc.)

Cultural Affiliations

Active participation within a relationship of shared group identity which can be traced historically between the present day and identifiable earlier group

Home and Neighborhood

Active in the work and activities of the household, perhaps with assistance or through participation strategies

Family and Friends

Expected to maintain contact with other family members, to participate when possible in family events and rituals, and to call on and be called on by other family members for emotional and practical support

As a friend, is expected to initiate and respond to invitations to share time and to exchange with the other person

Learning

Engages in study or teaching for a purpose

Study can be formal or informal and the purpose may be personal interest, research and exploration, skill development, social contact, or advancement toward some goal that is meaningful or useful to the person such as a qualification, certificate, degree or license.

Teaching can be formal or informal, paid or for other rewards.

Community Association

Joins formal or informal efforts for services, for mutual help, for political purposes, for the promotion of a cause, for the protection of members' interests, to celebrate a person, place or thing important to members or for enjoyment

Recognized by other members as one of them and will usually contribute in some active way to the association

Sports and Leisure

Participates in athletic or fitness activities, as workers who make events possible and as active fan

Creative Expression

Plays valued roles as creators, as workers who make art events possible and as publicly active supporter

Work

Performs a task in exchange for a wage or, as an owner, invests resources in the expectation of a return

Worker will interact productively and regularly with other people: customers, coworkers, supervisors, employees.

Introductory Surveys

Each Protégé completed a Social Roles and Getting to Know Me Survey (see Resource Section 9). The Social Roles Survey provides information about the Protégé's social roles in the community and how they feel about the role and participation when we began partnering. Protégés also completed a "Getting to Know Me" Survey which gives an idea of the Protégé current activities, likes, interests, choices and people in his/her life. These surveys help the Community Guide to have a beginning understanding of the Protégé's community life.

Community Guide Resource Materials - a growing collection

Community Guides were provided with a collection of resources. We asked each Guide to familiarize themselves with the materials and weave in what was useful for each person and their journey. "Learning as you go" was the best approach rather than a formal training because each person and relationship follow a unique path. As the work unfolds and the relationship grows, many of the components of the resources would be visited again and again such as the Homework Planning Form, Learning Recap Feedback and Standing Community Guide Meeting Agenda. These resources are designed to provide a consistent framework to enable us to review what has been done, what has been learned, what has been successful and what needs to change to nurture the partnership. Others are developed for assistance at particular crossroads. For example, the weekly planner can help determine when and where things are happening in the Protégé's and family's life to organize and determine where new and expanding activities can fit and to assist in communication between the Protégé, family and Community Guide. The Digging Deeper Deeds helps the Community Guide to organize their learning for times when the Protégé's schedule changes or when there is a lapse in availability.

Remote Support – weekly check-in calls and video call support

The Community Guides and Protégés were located in various geographic regions, so it was not possible to meet in person on a regular basis. Community Guides set up weekly phone check-ins to assist in problem-solving and ongoing support. Another support provided to the Community Guides were video-calls which usually had specific topics and provided a forum for open celebration and problem-solving through any issues of concern. These were recorded so that Community Guides can view the call later if they could not attend the call when made and also review the discussion at a later time. On some of our calls, we had guest speakers from Starfire Council who graciously provided some of their lessons learned about partnerships, risk taking and what to do when something doesn't work out.

Protégé, Family and Community Guide Support Circle Café Meetings

We held a kick off meeting and six Café meetings in each locale. These face-to-face meetings provided opportunities for learning, reviewing actions, celebrating progress and continuous planning and partnership. As the months progressed, the Protégés, families and Community Guides began to assist each other in working together and learning from each other. At the final Café meeting, Protégés, supported by their Community Guides, practiced sharing their stories with each other in preparation for the Community Conversation. Protégés also revisited their life plans, set priorities and worked with a budget format to guide planning and spending (as several now have jobs and ideas about how they want to spend their money!)



Much of our conversations centered around ways to reflect, expand, deepen connections. So, we regularly asked:

Who are my people?

Who do I see every day?

Who do I see for fun on the weekends?

What organizations do I belong to?

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Who do I call on to share good news?

Who are people I miss, with whom I would like to get in touch with again?

Who are people I want to get to know better?

Who are the people paid to be in my life?

Community Conversations

Community Conversations were held in all three locations, inviting a wide variety of community members to learn about what Leaning into Community Together has been doing in the community and gather ideas about moving forward. The evenings highlighted the Protégés as they shared their stories of their experiences and goals for the future with attendees.



The community conversations were well attended and many ideas germinated and were harvested. In Effingham, a community member invited a Protégé to attend a Chamber of Commerce



meeting to share his story and pursue ideas for future work. (See Resource listing at end for harvested ideas from each community). In Rockford, Learning Labs are being planned. In Effingham, a community member offered to host a Parking lot Pop-up for late summer. In Waterloo/Columbia, a church is beginning to take the lead in moving this work forward.

SECTION 3: What We Have Learned About Our Partners

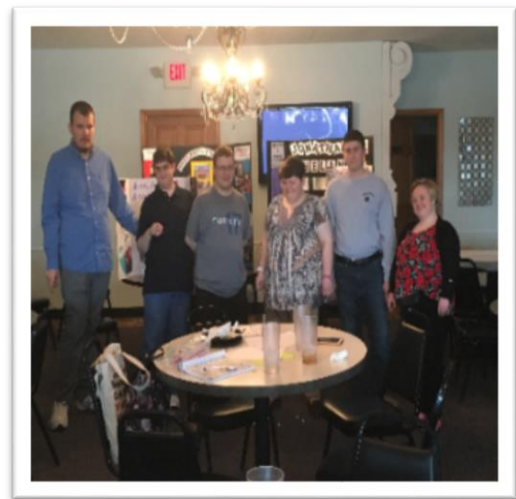
This year was filled with as many new beginnings as it was with messiness and confusion. We started our time together talking about new territory, but until we “dipped our toes” in, could we see the need to work through and past some of the disbelief that has worked its way into our hearts. This reparation will take time, for it took time to settle in to our culture. Some of it was here before we were born. Some of the culture of “other” came from words from people who were supposed to help us pursue good things in life. Teachers, neighbors, family, doctors, human service providers, the messages could feel like “there’s got to be a special place for him/her - over there.” At times it came merely from a look that felt like we should: not try quite so hard – after all, how far could he/she really go?”

We were all born “in.” We all need accompaniment, encouragement and respect. This takes time and is built on trust and relationship. We have only just begun working through and moving beyond the old story of weakness, devaluation, custodial care and introduce energized, delightful, hopeful, proud stories of place and purpose in the community.



Protégés and the people in their life

Almost everyone believes inclusion is a good and worthwhile pursuit - but taking steps can take some doing. For this reason we asked everyone involved to join in “cafe” sessions. These monthly gatherings were a way to talk through what they wanted to do, concerns and share connections. Some of the Protégés and family members grew close as time went on. Our Protégés all experienced a wide variety of community opportunities they had not engaged in before. Some struggled with taking a leap of hopefulness and how to continue the tending (as all relationships need tending) as time went on. Some were thrilled with what they learned about themselves from their experiences. All of them learned a better understanding of partnership that came in small, slow steps. Stefan, a seasoned Community Guide from Starfire said he’s gone down the wrong road many times, always left with something learned.



Community Guides - beautiful bridge builders

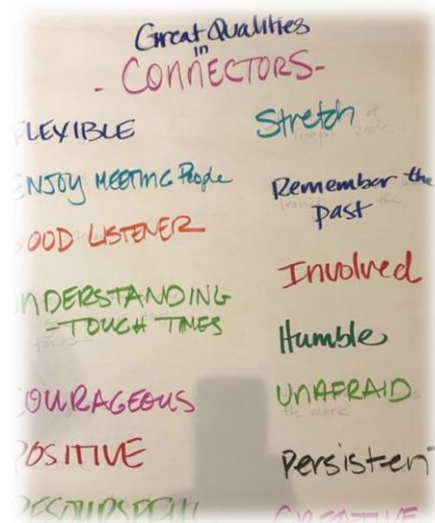


We wanted to change a culture from lowered to elevated expectations and encourage a practice of respectful, creative exploration. Supporting the Community Guides on their journey was energizing but often clunky. Some Community Guides had previous experiences that colored their approach. Partnering with families involved coordinating schedules, offering our own connections and believing this is happening in little pockets of the world and it will happen here too. Having Community Guides across a wide geographic area made it challenging for us to get everyone together. Our weekly check-ins with the Program Coordinators, video calls and the learnings from the monthly sessions helped. Learning from each other is key. A willingness to talk about, reflect and work through what was working well and what was not, was essential. We believe that Community Guides need a great deal of support in this process and a great deal

of encouragement. Weekly check-ins weren't required, those who took advantage of this support developed a greater relationships with the Protégés, their families and experienced a great deal of growth personally.

Community Partners - essential fellow travelers

We relied on community partners to help us gain a stronger sense of the community, meet those who were local connectors and invite others in. We looked to schools, agencies and small businesses to find those who believe in possibility who would walk along with us. We found a few great ones! As we began to expand the circle of involvement, there were some disappointments as well as great surprises. There are new partners stepping forward and taking the lead. We learned at times, to let go of things that weren't working and try something new. We learned we can't force friendship or legislate hopeful connections. Connections can be found in places where you'd least expect them. A bartender in southern Illinois became a great connector and was essential to one Protégé getting a job. A community partner in Effingham recruited community guides. Jamie Stang Ellis, small business owner in Effingham of Stang Arts, hired one of our Protégés on the spot when he came in to explore the business. "We are here to give everyone a chance. We all need to take a chance on each other. The world needs more open arms instead of closed doors," she said. During our monthly gatherings we learned that sharing social capital, (people in our personal networks) was more likely to produce fruit than filling out applications or showing up without someone who knows people. We missed a few opportunities along the way, but the lessons learned will remind us of how to go forward from here.

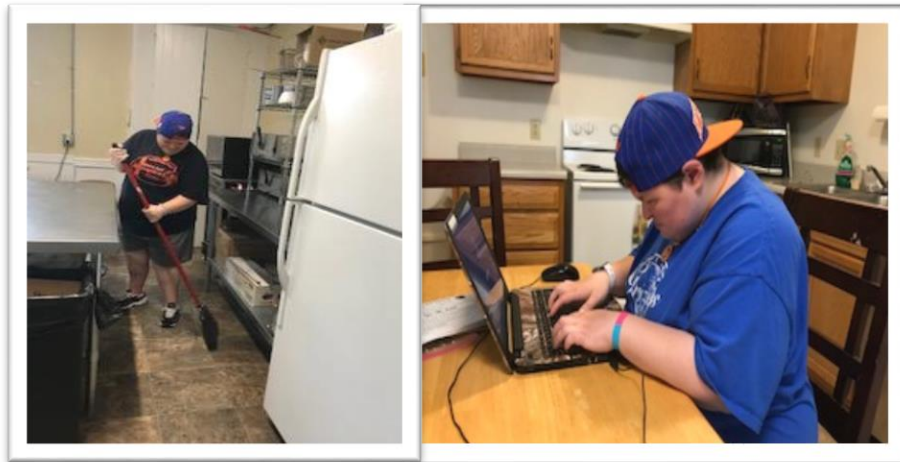


SECTION 4: Stories of Gifts Uncovered, Explored and Shared

We had the privilege of walking and learning together with these young adults. As each week went by, gifts, capacities and interests unfolded and guided us all to the next best step in making connections, finding their space and taking their place for increasing valued roles in the community.

Sarah: Thoughtful, determined, hardworking, and a heart for others

Sarah came over to meet our little group to see what we were talking about and she decided to stick around—we're so glad she did. A young woman with many gifts, a few of them: gentle and kind, hardworking,



friendly, and a great listener. She's been wanting to find paid work for some time so we looked around for places where we knew people and had work she would enjoy doing. We heard from a few people that the Fish stand in Millstadt was a place where good people worked and was known to be a place where people seemed to gather to catch up with one another no matter the season. She's been there for a few months and is loving it. Sherry, one of the owners said she appreciates her hard work and reliability. Sarah would really like to learn more about working a cash register – She is planning to connect with local business owner of Philomena & Bo. Sarah explored more time on her own in walking around to a few local businesses from own from her apartment. She bought a computer with her own money and is working on expanding her reading abilities. It seems Sarah has many missions. Sherry, the owner of Ott's said this about Sarah's work ethic: I regularly use Sarah as an example of what a good work ethic looks like, we appreciate Sarah so much."

Brendan:

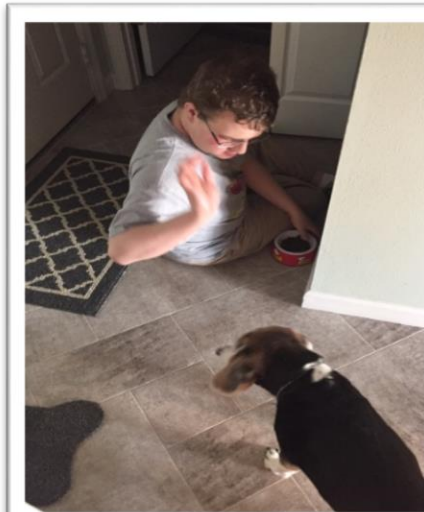
**Sharp, witty,
honest, recent
high school
graduate**



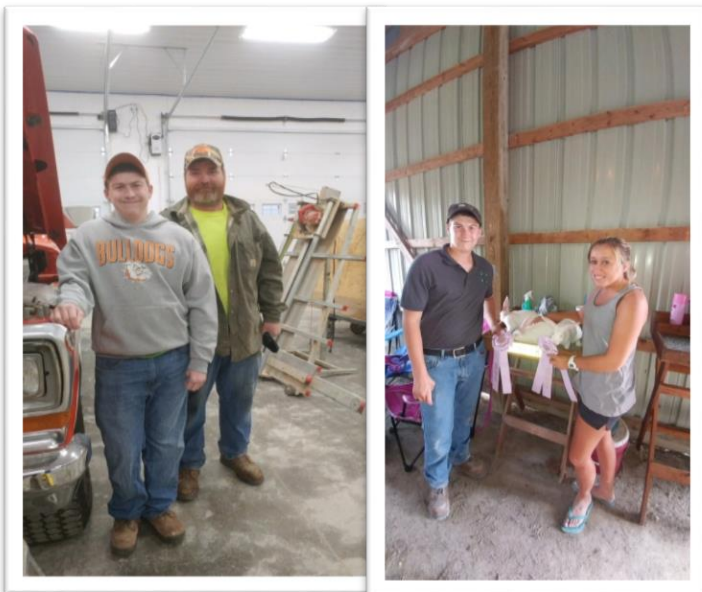
Brendan enjoys all things Cardinals, time with family, cooking, the outdoors and driving kabotas. Brendan is known by everyone as one of the town's most dedicated Cardinal fan. While being a Cardinal fan is important, he was wondering what other gifts and interests he might pursue. He explored the idea of a dessert competition with a youth group, working at an accounting office, working at a microbrewery, volunteering at City Hall, and taking the lead with more independence at home. All those things had some benefits, but he remembered his time at a horse barn and got back in touch with them to see if they needed help. With his experience of riding a Kubota (ATV) and helping out with feeding, cleaning up, and supplying the chickens with bedding, he was offered an opportunity to work at the horse barn hauling anything and everything that needs hauling. "I like riding the Kubota and feeding the chickens the best," said Brendan.

Jonathan:

**Fellow with a flare
for dogs and creative
character drawing**



Jonathan set out with Claire, his Guide to find places where animals might need some help. Over the year they found a few places but nothing seemed to fit quite right, so they began working on a few things that might make everyday life more interesting for Jonathan. Creating his own after school schedule, doing some grocery shopping for himself and his family and texting his mom updates were just a few ways he worked on growing. Jonathan began an exercise routine and even taught his brother a few new things. Future plans may include doing some grocery shopping for seniors who need a little helping hand.



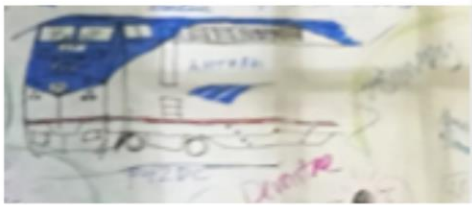
Devin: Pheasant-hunter, farmer, giver, family man

Devin has a strong commitment to family, farming and serving his neighbors. He's a hard working young man who has a long history with 4H and known for raising rabbits. He is generous with his talents of fixing things and working on farms and has been helping other farmers with projects no matter the season. He has been working on getting his driver's license and with a little help, got a job at Rural King. Devin is a generous, diligent man of strong character.



Devontae: Bold artist eager to make change in the world

Devontae is friendly, and has a wicked sense of humor. Most of all, he loves his family. When we first met he talked a lot about wrestling and also being a motivational speaker. He looked into a few things and continues to look into public speaking. He has great memories of his grandmother hosting family gatherings and sharing meals. He has always enjoyed cooking so he decided to offer a cooking club once a month. He took a leadership role there and with the help of his mom he promoted, invited and coordinated much of the work involved. He also had the opportunity to have a regional chef come and share some of his expertise on various cooking techniques. People of all ages and walks of life came to be inspired to cook more of their own food, learn new recipes and share meals together. Recently, he met with Chief of Staff at the City of Rockford to talk about ways to offer more to fellowship and learning to young adults in our area. There's also been talk of starting a small business. Stay tuned to what Devontae will do next.



David:

**Visionary, guitarist,
train enthusiast,
artiste and
singer**

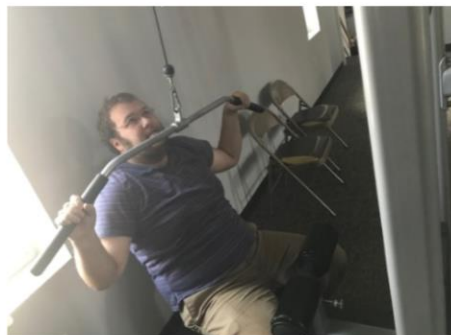
David has a wide array of gifts. David has been looking for ways to meet new people, and hopefully, a girlfriend. Last year he spent time looking into things relating to art and music in Galena and Dubuque. He met up

with a bunch of locals for the “Last Tuesday” dinner and jams at the Cornerstone bar as well as the “First Tuesday” breakfast at one of the founder’s home. Homemade food, impromptu singing and guitar playing seemed to be one of the sweetest places this side of the Mississippi. In the new year, he connected with some college students where he showed them his favorite karaoke bar, and went to a few café’s, bowling and roller skating. His drawing is an important form of expression and he recently had his work featured in an exhibit in Dubuque. What’s next for David is what he will discover – it may involve creating a collection of his work and putting it into a book.

**Karl: Gentle,
persistent,
reliable, singer,
kind, with great
stick-to-it-
iveness**

Karl moved back to his hometown in the middle of our time

together so it made sense to take a look at what was good in town since he was gone and look for places where he can give his gifts. He met up with leaders at the community college, the town mayor, a visitors bureau employee, volunteered at community dinners considered the idea of working at a library, the grocery store, joined the square dancing group, church choir and hymns and brews. Karl developed a work out log, tried out a tai chi class and made some stronger connections with family. Karl met Cassady through some connections at the local community college and they’ve been doing things in town together. Next year he’s considering volunteering at the food pantry. Karl said, “Having a job would be a fine thing to do.”



Kat: Artist, karaoke singer, caring, disarming, and knows well what she likes



Kat is a young woman who enjoys comic books, superheroes and animals. When you meet her you notice right away her honesty and joy in everything she does. We talked about exploring art cooperatives, pet shops working at a restaurant or a pet shop and other art related events. With the help of her connections as well as her mom's she decided a fire hydrant painting party would be a fun event gathering people together and beautifying some local fire hydrants. Kat was involved in the design, promotion and the after party. It was a great event for everyone who came. The city offered the high school fire hydrants which was a nice bonus as Kat was graduating from there this year. A colorful legacy she left for her fellow students!

PJ: Playful and sweet performer, athlete, budding magician, rapper, adventurous worker

PJ is a budding performer, magician, and playful character. He wanted to earn money so we introduced him to some people who needed yard work done and gave that a try. He also added a few chores at home to help with his family whom he loves very much. We tried some job sampling at a local skate shop, cafe and an ice cream shop. He's met a lot of people and it's been a treat to be part of these connections. It's been a lot of fun trying out different things with PJ to grow the beautiful gifts he already has.



Katie: Generous, joyful leader, and baking entrepreneur



Katie has a heart for making a difference in people's lives. She gave much of her time this year volunteering at school, at a food pantry and making cupcakes for fundraisers. She started her own toy drive and is considering inviting others to join in this effort next year. She taught a local girl scouts

troop to decorate their own cupcakes and is thinking about making her own recipe book. She was asked to pair up with a local painter at a paint class. "I loved making t-shirts for my cupcake business this year and visiting bakers to learn what kind of baking they do."

Jenny: Passionate teacher and searcher for what's good in the world

world

When I first met Jenny, she quickly told me she wanted "help more people in the world see that people with disabilities could do many important things in the world." She also wanted to be more independent in her apartment and so we connected with a friend who helped

people with visual impairments organize their homes in this way and they went to work on it. Next, Jenny was looking for tools and devices to make daily life easier



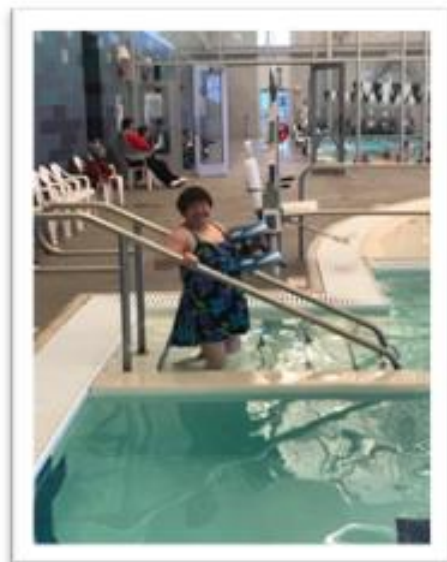
so we attended a technology conference where she gathered great ideas and met an acquaintance whom they discovered had mutual friends and she joined the Blind Advisory Council. I connected her to a principal at a school who needed someone to help read to students and we explored the idea of spending time with the children regularly. Jenny ended up volunteering at a church office and she's really enjoying her time there. I also connected her to a group of musicians who needed a booking agent and this may be something she looks into in the years to come.

Shane: Energetic, hardworking, kickboxing enthusiast

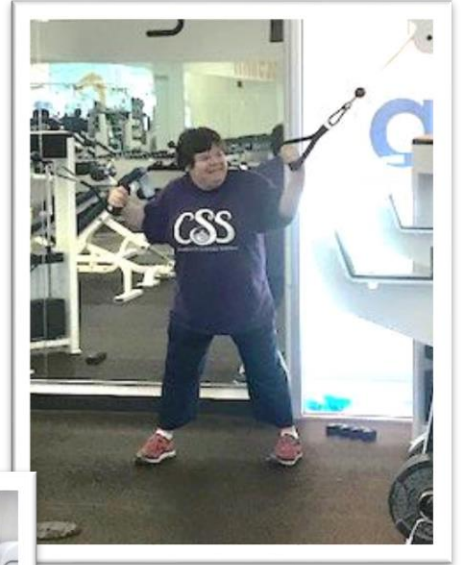


Fitness is very important to Shane – he especially wanted to learn more about boxing and kickboxing – we were able to introduce him to Chad Hawkins at EpLegends where he was encouraged to join a class. He did, loved it and has been attending weekly and getting to know some of the other members. He realizes he will need to have a job to keep up this endeavor and has a goal to work part time with at EpLegends.

Jaime: Encouraging, high energy, and a big heart for children



Jaime is a fun loving young woman who loves to socialize, swim and be a part of a group. Her Community Guide introduced her to a water aerobics class at the local gym. There was someone at the class that she already knows and another person who attended the Community Conversation who loves water aerobics too and offered to make sure she had a ride to classes. Jaime is a regular member of the group now and she hopes to take other classes at the gym.



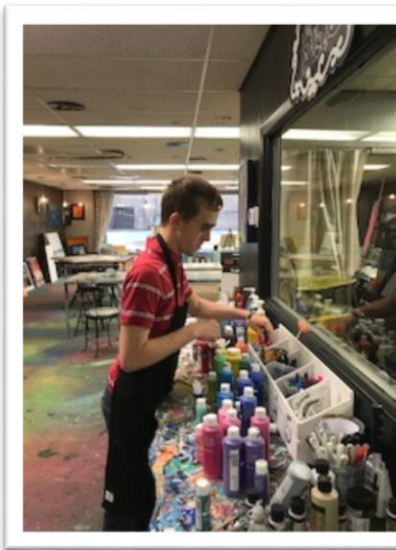
Adam:
Techy, great
listener,
music lover

Adam explored many different interests this year, including museums, the library and church group events. One of the things he is considering is starting his own business digitizing pictures and recordings. We are looking for the right community connection to make this happen.

Logan:

**Curious, charming,
history buff, a natural
public speaker**

Logan sampled a variety of community places this year, thinking carefully about what type of place he would like to work and what kind of work he wants to do. He wants a quiet and clean place to work and would like to be with adults rather than small children. He is a history buff and spent time at the local library and the historical museum. Since he is still in school, he decided at this time, he would try volunteering at the library.



Bryce:

**Ambitious, strong,
jovial**

Bryce made it known from the start he enjoys working outdoors and doing heavy work. He had a lot of plans for his life and he knew he needed money. Bryce is no stranger to hard work and is always on the lookout for more ways to earn money. His

Community Guide introduced him to a local art shop where they always need extra hands and he was immediately hired! He recently got his driver's license but for now, plans to ride his bicycle to work.

SECTION 5: A Few More Sprouts Beginning to Grow



Rendering the design: Image enhancement and valued social roles are intimately intertwined. How someone looks, how they spend their time, where they are, who they are with, what their schedules and routines look like, and how they communicate with others are all considerations when thinking about image enhancement. A few people found ways to remind themselves to spruce up their appearance each day. Everyone worked on great ways to introduce themselves or someone they care about with what they have to offer.

Naming gifts...changing perceptions: “We had many moments where we were able to listen for gifts and paint them on a wall. This was perhaps one of the best workgroups. When the experiences of their life were written in life giving ways – the meaning became more alive. “

Getting the lay of the land: Families and providers in north and south suburbs invited us to a day of thinking about the people we’ve been partnering with and how they might weave some of what we’re learning into their neighborhoods.

Growing our sphere of influence in conversations with leaders of larger organizations who are asking to learn more about ways we might work together.

A young event planner contacted us to talk about ways to offer a class on event planning to the broader community with a specific invitation to people who might want to be part of it.

We made the papers and television in Rockford and rich connections continue to grow.

Nurturing seedlings: a large school district, a suburban agency providing traditional services and an international organization contacted us to talk about ways to work together in various ways. Two faith based organizations are meeting with us to find ways to make deeper connections with all people who come to church.

Cultivating the soil: Traditionally, through disability services and programs, much of the work is done for the individual. We are learning to nurture and support the protégé’s ability to take the lead by making their own phone calls, create their own flyers, and check in with other people via email, text or in person. The stronger their relationships, the greater their confidence.

Sharing our bounty: A young man who started a cooking club invited a handful of high school students to learn the art of making a complete dinner from start to finish.

Grow! Grow! Grow! Mentoring others along the way about the joy of our work: We spent time sharing our work with many people and groups across the state: Parent groups, agencies, churches and schools. One particular person was eager to bring this work to her organization and she had this to say about our time together:

“Wendy, we have the same drive to provide meaningful days for people with I/DD. While I am making small steps forward, your wisdom and your “faith in the process” continues to re-fuel me. I’m grateful for your passion & boundless energy for this work, and consider you not only someone I can count on as a resource, but a friend. You have shared your connections with so many others who have been “living” this life & leading the way toward an inclusive/meaningful future for so many people. While I call on you, read what you send, watch the videos you share, there are so many more people with whom I do hope will be able to benefit from your passion and wisdom.

Looking forward to continue forging ahead with you and hope that you’re able to help many more people with I/DD live more meaningful lives. It does begin with being open to learning. People don’t know what they don’t know. One person at a time is imperative to the lives of people with disabilities. Thank you for all you do.”

Debbie Harris, Director of Adult Programs at Keshet



We are mentoring Pam, a parent of two adults who dream about moving out of their traditional group homes. Wendy’s deep knowledge of the CILA process has been key to supporting Pam, who is also an ISSA worker, is thinking about ways to weave traditional supports into a hopeful framework for them.

Ripple effects



Encouraging teachers to believe in possibility: Chelsea Adair, one of our cherished community partners attended most the monthly work groups and was continually willing to lend a hand, share a connection, or make an introduction. Her help made the learning and journey for everyone in Columbia/Waterloo better.

Chelsea said, “after spending so much time with the families this year I have come away with a better understanding of what families are up against and creative ways to write transition plans. The need to grow social capital is something we can work on together.”

Chelsea, you were instrumental in helping us all in so many ways, we thank you so much for partnering with us.

SECTION 6: What Else We’re Learning

Together we are stronger - Each month in our Circle Cafés, we met as a group to talk about the month before, learn a little from others doing similar work and then we planned for the weeks ahead. Ideas and offerings among the Protégés and their families were shared along the way. We had a community leader in Waterloo who joined us each month and uncovered many surprising connections that supported us to expand the networks. Linda, a parent said “I benefited greatly from our time with the group; it reminded me of the connections I had when we lived in Minnesota. I hope we can continue to get together.”

Our stories inspire and spark us to action! We’ve learned the critical importance of supporting the protégé to share their experiences with the community – for their own pride and growth, and also to support the community to understand and appreciate people’s gifts, skills and capacity. The finale was a great way to share the adventures of the year with the group they’ve spent time with to prepare for sharing with the larger group at the Community Conversations in Rockford, Effingham and Columbia. A small business owner said “I learned that Brendan has a lot to give.” One of the community leaders said she hadn’t spent time with the Protégés since the beginning of the year and was “struck at new level of confidence and ability” to tell their stories.

Sharing gifts and opportunities to grow our gifts is as important as telling others when something has been bothering them. Sarah, who is starting her first paid job, told us “I am ready to start TODAY.” My friend works at a job where she doesn’t get to keep her paychecks. She likes working everyday but she isn’t getting paid and that’s not good.”

Karl began letting his parents know he was leaving to go into town by writing a note. He also began talking with family on the phone to share what’s been happening in his life.

At the finale, Protégés and their families gave some parting “one word impressions:” Courage, love, kindness, believe, challenge, thankful, growing, future, dedication” were all words offered up by families and Protégés.

Creating loving, respectful space – Some families we walked with were both excited and fearful at the same time. We learned that hope is difficult for people whose previous experiences created the need to be protective. The history of wounds ran deep and it was hard to move too quickly. We planted seeds where we could and extended

offerings to continue to talk and work through things in years to come. Some were ready to peel back a few more layers as their son or daughter showed them what was possible and we celebrated their adventure!

Greg, Karl's Dad: "When we first began we wondered "what is she asking us to do?" Maybe she doesn't know Karl. We kept going and Karl was always excited to get together with Wendy. One step led to another and we know we're in a much better place than when we started. Taking steps and peeling back the layers helped us to think about what is possible. I've got hope I didn't have

before, about how far Karl can actually go."

Angie, PJ's Mother: "At first I was confused: "What am I going to have to do?" But after I saw

PJ jump in the car with Wendy time and again and learned what PJ was doing at the skate shop, and Meg's café I got really excited!



Community Guides benefited from nurturing support – When we looked for Community Guides we were seeking people who were creative, enjoyed meeting new people, flexible, had an understanding of people who have gone through tough times, willing

to go outside their comfort zone, had a hopeful perspective for the future, is involved in the community and open to new learning. We knew we were asking a lot! Using their own social connections was necessary and it was a new idea for many. In some ways it seemed natural and in others, a stretch. Helping people make connections are involved establishing trust networks, spending time with contacts before making specific requests on behalf of a person; engaging with different groups; becoming part of associational life of the community. Find other like-minded groups that talk about building community. In some cases, religious organizations such as churches were a good resource. Find listings of community events and show up and get to know people at places such as the local library, civic groups and associations. Start small, with time and patience allowing the work. When a Guide wasn't familiar with a group, finding an ally helps make the connections. They needed to be responsive, present and skilled.

Along similar lines, Guides had disappointments when great ideas fell through or weren't embraced. Monthly calls were offered as a way to share experiences and think about ways to work through, in and around the hard times. Starfire Council, one of our greatest mentors, generated some questions we also grappled with.

Q???

What do I do if I get stuck

How do I know if I'm stuck?
 How do I know if I'm in the way?
 When do I LET GO of an idea/connection?
 Good Times to make the ask? Deeper?
 I did a project... NOW WHAT?
 How DO I SET stretch goals that are POSSIBLE?
 Where DO I FIND PEOPLE? VALUED ROLES?
 How DO I Recover from a LOSS? friend/role
 How DO I Agree to DISagree w/ families?
 When DO my own Boundaries come into PLAY?
 What I do when I can't be everything to everyone?
 How DO I MANAGE ALL THESE SCHEDULES?
 How DO I REIMAGINE Goals so they FIT IN my 3hr. span?
 How DO I ENCOURAGE families to get INVOLVED?
 How TO WORK w/ FAMILIES (OR PPL w/o FAMILIES) w/ who
 WHO can fill Role of family if NEEDED? (aren't aligned)
 How DO I BUILD A CIRCLE OF SUPPORT? (as needed)
 How DO I Communicate w/ BIZ's to ask for VGR

Here are just a few:

How do I know if I'm stuck?

How do I know if I'm in the way?

When do I let go of an idea/connection?

When is good time to make "the ask"? Go deeper?

How do I set stretch goals that are possible?

Where do I find people? Valued Roles?

How do I recover from a loss? Friend/role

How do I agree to disagree w/families?

When do my own boundaries come into play?

What I do when I can't be everything to everyone?

How do I manage all these schedules?

How do I reimagine goals so to fit in 3 hours/week?

How do I encourage families to get involved?

Who can fill the role of family if needed?

How do I work with families who aren't aligned?

How do I build a circle of support (as needed)?

How do I communicate with businesses to ask about Valued Social Roles or invite new people to meet with us?

Those who welcomed opportunities to ask questions and grow in their learning received a richer fulfillment in their work. In addition to monthly meetings and weekly reflection and problem-solving phone calls, resource materials included videos and focused articles specific to "mining the community," making introduction and customized employment.

Mary, a Community Guide and college student from Loras college reflected on the year: "When I first learned about this work it sounded unique because until now, I've only had opportunities to spend time with people who had disabilities living in group situations. When I heard this was way to develop an authentic relationship with one person I was eager to be part of it. My biggest surprise was how much I enjoyed finding ways to connect David to things he enjoyed doing. I'd say coordinating schedules with what David wanted to do and my college schedule, was challenging, but as I learned more solutions through calls with Wendy, as well as the learning materials, it became easier. David is a loving, gentle guy and I enjoyed seeing him grow. I enjoyed introducing him to my college friends. We had a lot of great moments, I remember one in particular when we went roller skating and were dancing to a great song and fell down together! We got back up and kept on going. I appreciated the weekly talks with Wendy. She took an interest in my life so it made it easier for me to talk about what was confusing or difficult as each week unfolded. The first time I met her, she drove all the way to Dubuque to introduce me and my friends to David. That really gave me a sense of how important this work was. David's vision is to find a girlfriend. We weren't able to make that kind of connection happen, but, I'm hopeful David will keep on searching and eventually find someone to share his life with. If I were to be doing this work long term and have an opportunity for deeper preparation time, I would like to learn more about how to integrate with family, understand what partnership means in this day to day work and learn to be more comfortable with finding ways to reach out to friends and community people."

Claire, a Community Guide and student at St. Louis University looked back on the year: “I enjoyed being a part of helping the Protégés have new experiences and meeting new people. They all learned new skills and became more independent in different ways. My mind was opened to new possibilities and I liked being a part of the circle cafe’s and seeing everyone’s learning and growing optimism. I think we all learned new language about inclusion and we gained more effective communication skills in working together on issues. I’m sharing so much of what I learned this year with fellow students and professors. I do have to say It was hard when we experienced some rejection with community connections. We worked really hard and then everything changed and seeing that work not end up where we wanted was disappointing for all of us. I know that the exploring can be the biggest part of the learning, so I know the effort wasn’t wasted, but it was difficult nonetheless. If I were doing this long term, I’d like to have been able to connect more with other community guides in person, have a more formal understanding with the families of the time commitment and an appreciation for what the partnership would look like, and have a more formalized structure during the circle cafe’s. I would like to attend some of the conferences Wendy has been a part such as the Toronto Summer Institute or Starfish Council.

Jessica, from Human Support Services joined us to help Sarah at her new job. We connected with Jessica toward the end of the year, but she had this to say about our work: “your knowledge, drive, energy and ability to connect and focus on strengths of others has been so positive and helpful to me and to the organization I work for! Your guidance has helped me envision a more inclusive connected environment for people I serve. We are beginning to see the suggestions you provided materialize into quality experiences, contributions and meaningful time. We are taking the groundwork you’ve laid to reach more people by helping them recognize their gifts and pursue their dreams.

This work never ends - Danyetta Najoil (Starfire Council) reminds us “Our work is not intended to be an end point, but rather a doorway, or a bridge.”

We must encourage the people we accompany to keep asking: “Who are my people? Who do I see for fun on a Friday night? Who do I call on to share good new? Who are people I used to see that I miss and would like to get in touch with again? Who are people I admire that I’d like to get to know better?

Permission - People in the community at times seemed hesitant to get to know someone who appears different from them. Community Guides did well to encourage new connections by making introductions based on gifts, strengths and capacities. We also were forgiving if they didn’t get it perfectly right, we assured them all was well. Our intention was for all to feel comfortable and not shy away for fear of doing the wrong thing. Another thing we noticed was, at times, parents felt the need to ask for permission for their son or daughter to be welcomed as a volunteer. We gently worked through the framework, recognizing the old pattern in ourselves as well.

Introductions - How we introduce people plays a big role in the outcome of the relationship. It turns out, first impressions matter to people with disabilities too! What words are we using and how are we introducing people we want to be connected? Start with positive attributes and shared interests.

It’s not the destination - One of the things we have had the opportunity to do is to introduce and or support the idea of enjoying or accomplishing an event in and of itself. In other words, after going out and exploring, or filling out an application, or volunteering, doing this for the sheer joy of it without having a “treat” afterward. Exploration and experiences are enjoyable on their own merits.

“Just Right” Level of Support - We gave much thought to providing support only as much as is necessary – “Just Right”. Even if a support person is needed, we invite informal unpaid supports if at all possible. We encourage paid people to be “out of the picture” as much as possible making space for freely chosen relationship. While all this takes time and with creative commitment and willingness to try and try again, we know that this is possible for ALL.

Brendan had a long time connection at City Hall where his uncle had been mayor years ago. He decided he wanted to try helping out in the office so he began doing what was needed to get the weekly Council meeting materials together and distributing them. With the right workspace set up, he was able to start and finish all on his own.

Sharing a little update about the Cardinals, weather or other current events. Developing a quick support narratives fact page helped keep ideas organized. A blank and completed form is included in Resources.

Devontae wanted to take the lead on his cooking club. This meant scheduling the date, inviting people and coordinating who would bring what items as well as contacting the featured chef. On, the day of the gathering, announcing and blessing the meal was needed. Sharing the fun on Facebook to promote for future cooking clubs could also be done. This was a lot of work and talking it out and figuring out ways to delegate was a way to bring everyone together to share in the work.



SECTION 7: Other Ways to Get to Know One Another

Inviting People In: We wanted to find a way to help people build power and connection from the inside out. We wanted to create a space for people to get to know one another in a comfortable way. We wanted to invite people in who might be feeling a little vulnerable about asking someone to join in. So, we decided to host a few dinner parties. Inviting people to share in food and fellowship is a good way to get to know people better.

In planning a get together to meet new people, think about who you might enjoy inviting over coffee and dessert or appetizers (nothing fancy is needed). Think about stories you'd like to share about what's good in the world and what we'd like to see more of. Then, make some new connections and plan to get together again, and encourage everyone to bring someone new. There's no need to have anyone RSVP or plan an elaborate menu. Whoever shows up are the people who were needed, and whatever food is brought is enjoyed. Some of the stories and connections we shared included great books read, being an "extra" in a film, finding a good barber for haircuts, being generous with lonely people, adopting "Finch birds" and how to care for them, interesting places to find free art galleries, helping a friend move, good ways to get smells out of a house, and recipes for chemical free sunscreen. All these delightful topics in less than a few hours. There truly is an abundance of interesting things to learn about in the world.

Pop Up Labs: So much of our work has been influenced by John McKnight. Some of the great questions for those who want to grow community have been posed:

What gifts were you born with?

What skills have you developed over time?

What gifts would you be willing to teach?

A local college student contacted us to find ways to do something good in her community. We shared our desire for ALL people to give of themselves and share what they know. A “pop up” lab is a free, informal gathering of people who want to learn about interesting topics, taught by locals, in their neighborhood, on all sorts of topics. Some topics might include: Bicycle repair, free art galleries, sushi making, sign language, fashion and style; carpentry, gardening, bee keeping, laughter yoga, what happens at a toastmasters club, photography, quilting, gluten free cooking, pottery, bagpipes, gratitude journaling, civil war reenactment, herb farming, hiking clubs, vermicomposting, choir, playing the ukulele, poetry, the possibilities are endless. She decided it was something she wanted to be a part of, so she’s hosting one with us in July.

If you’d like to create to this kind of joyful project, here are a few things to consider:

- **Who can teach?** Anyone can teach if they’re passionate about something and want to share it with people.
- **How long does it take?** Anywhere from 1 – 3 hours seems to work best. Start with food and leave time for conversation and networking.
- **Who can come?** Anyone! It’s informal so people of all ages and abilities are welcome.

General steps to Creating a “Pop Up” Lab



Invite three or four people who might like to share their passion for about 15 minutes. Choose a date that works approximately 3 months in advance. Find a location: Someone’s house, a church or a community meeting space can be great places to meet. Create a fun flyer and/or event page on Facebook. Invite people and encourage others to invite people. Ask a few people if they’d like to bring some food and drink to share. The idea of the “Pop Up” Lab was inspired from the good people of Starfire Council of Cincinnati. Ask someone to facilitate the evening: Welcome guests, help make connections, talk about future events. Ask someone to gather names of people interested in future gatherings.

SECTION 8: Now it’s your turn

Being a part of community is a choice. We offer you this summary in the hope it will help you move forward with us. *“As a parent, I know how easy it can be to get caught up in the system, and feel like the world isn’t a welcoming place. It turns out that this isn’t true. Now, we try to weigh out the dangers involved in spending less time focusing on disability services and clients of a system and more time focusing on being citizens of a community. All of this takes effort and sometimes some emotional risks. I try to remind myself that my comfort level isn’t more important than my son’s loneliness.”*

I hope you will “lean in” with us. If you do, you may wish to ask yourself:

➤ What do I need to let go of?

What needs to grow?

➤ What will happen if I don’t try?

Who can help with this?



What gives you hope?" Do what you can to live in that place. – Nancy Brown

Is change going to come on your watch?

Relying on systems, agencies and pre-designed supports is often thought of as the only way. It is “a way” and can be tempting to buy into as “it’s all done.” However, not only are those services in adult systems underfunded and restrictive (and also not required in any way to be provided as they are for children with disabilities during school years), reliance on those pre-designed experiences seriously limit people to what is within the boundaries of that organization and system.

Building inclusive communities is less straightforward and less certain by its very nature. It requires collaboration, creativity and open-ended inquiry where discovering what is right for this person by listening deeply to his gifts and reflecting on responses reveals all possibilities. How can we help someone who might happen to have a disability move toward a desirable future of endless possibilities as part of the ordinary community? A more desirable life is achieved through fulfilling valued roles of their choosing.

For those who don’t know us, we are a small gathering of people sprinkled across the state who believe finding ways to show up in ordinary spaces is the way to finding values roles, meeting interesting people, having an interesting life and in truth, real wealth.

This last year in northwest Illinois, Effingham and Columbia/Waterloo we got together and walked together to find out what is possible if we take a little risk and experience a little discomfort and confusion. This past year we planted seeds and watched some beautiful hearts and minds grow.

In the places we found open hearts and minds, we found hopefulness, delight, and richness. We also found that most of the community is a welcoming, hopeful place.

This summary is what we, together with fifteen Protégés and their families, a few community partners and a bunch of behind the scenes mentors and encouragers helped us to: lean into community.

It's been said we often don't know, what we don't know.

It's true for me. I didn't know anything about anything relating to supporting someone with a disability 24 years ago. The years doing what we thought was right while our son was in school, then homeschooling, connecting my son to real community connections, becoming a PATH facilitator and trainer, partnering with families to create circles of support, being part of a team closing a State Operated Developmental Center, becoming a CILA provider, and starting a small organization to connect others to community, all these things, some of them deeply sad and unjust experiences, have been gifts to me. Even more, the people who offered to guide, shape and kick me in the pants have all been gifts to me. But I had to be open to learning and willing to use what I learned. (Wendy Partridge)

When I open myself up to noticing a person's gifts, interests and capabilities and to offering support in strengthening community competence, a vision of endless possibilities can become more than a vision. It can happen. It may not be easy but **it will be worth it.**

We are sharing what we've learned and want to hear what you think and what you'd like to see more of in your world. We want to spend some time sharing reflections of our work and hearing your wisdom and what you would add. We want to hear what's missing and find out who wants to join us in planting, sowing and harvesting some more. We deeply hope you will consider joining us in finding ways to show up in the regular, ordinary, beloved community.

Will you join us in seeking answers to complicated and yet simple questions, inviting those on the edges IN, and celebrating the sweet places If you've got a group of people, big or small who want to talk about this for a while, we want to meet with you.

No prerequisites, requirements, or assessments. Come as you are.



"Life is complicated, wonderful, grievous, painful, joyous and messy. Story-making is the only power that is contained entirely within the boundaries of our flickering moments. We choose, we decide, we create, and we destine meaning. We can, must and will tell a story about the people we love and the journey we are sharing with them. We have a choice - we can choose tragedy or we can choose joy." (Dr. Bill Thomas)

Who is ready to take what we've learned and grow their community to include everyone?

If you'd like to move away from isolation and move toward connection by being a noticer, inviter and connector, we want to talk to you.

What can you do to choose joy?

Some things you might do right away to move this effort forward (thanks to the community members who attended the Community Conversations for these offerings):

Invite someone you see who is on the edges, in. Ask them to join you in a community effort or project (i.e. beautifying main street, church choir, community garden, recycling group, yoga class) and when there, make positive introductions (using their gifts) to make connections.

Think about fun and relaxing ways you can grow your inclusive community. Start monthly coffees, potlucks, or margarita clubs. Invite people who are on the margins, into a welcoming space.

Gather a few community leaders to make a trip to one of the many Starfire community conversations – thought leaders in finding beautiful ways to build inclusive communities. Then, share what you learned.

Create a club - Club ideas to join or create: Fishing, hymns and brews, drumming circle, cooking, poetry, storytelling, vision planning, bunco, book, swimming, adult coloring, game, knitting, card making, biking, hiking, bird watching/nature, laughter yoga – invite people to share their gifts. It doesn't have to be too formal or stuffy or fancy. Think of things that don't require anyone's permission or money or an agenda.

Invite someone to new activities – if you're doing something (throwing a Frisbee, singing in a choir, biking, swimming, going to the pub) invite someone along.

Networking/brainstorming – Meet with a few connectors or potential connectors around lunch, dinner, cocktail hour. Contact Wendy to learn a quick and amazing 5 minute brainstorm technique.

Farmers markets or “buy local” gatherings – talk to business owners and organizations there – Chances are good that community is important to them and they'd like to tell their story. Ask if they need help at the markets.

Host a group for dinner and conversation – A leader in the Kiwanis has been thinking about doing this hopeful way to bring people together. Maybe a few of us could tell our stories of what we have learned? Ask who wants to do it next.

Talk to people – in line at the grocery store, at coffee and donuts at church,



people who seem open and welcoming. Contact Wendy for ideas such as FORM (family, occupation, recreation, meaning).

Invite and offer transportation to someone to something you are going to.

Find a practical way to help someone in their small business.



Let us know what you will do and when. Let us know what you did and how it went. How can we help this joy grow? Email us and/or post on Possibility of People Facebook page. You might spark more change in someone else.

In the next three months, I will:

In the next six months, I will:

In the next month, I will:

Name _____ **Date** _____

What I did:

SECTION 9: Resources

Below are just a few things we used to help us in our work. If you'd like copies and or to talk through any of them, feel free to contact Wendy at wendykpartridge@gmail.com

Templates:

Supporting Social Roles Survey

Getting to Know Me Survey

Homework Plan

Daily Planning Sheet

Standing Meeting Agenda

Community Life Plan

Budget Form

Ledger Form

Pop-up Lab Template/Checklist

Support Work Plan Template

Other possible resources:

20 things you can do when you know someone's gift

People in my Life

Simple acts to build inclusive community

Support Narrative: great questions summarizing when/how assistance may be needed

Community Conversations Harvests:

Effingham

Waterloo/Columbia

Rockford

Our learning never ends - below are ways to keep growing

Websites:

- www.neighbours-international.com
- www.lifeworks-sd.com
- www.openfutureslearning.com
- www.conversationsmatter.com
- www.Griffin-hammis.com
- www.inclusionpress.com
- www.starfirecouncil.com

Youtube videos:

- Beth Mount TED Talk: Beautiful Justice
- Tim Vogt: Business as “Unusual”
- Dave Pitonyak: Being Needed by the Pack
- John McKnight youtube videos
- Starfire family stories videos

Books:

- 101 Ways to Make Friends, Aaron Johannes and Susan Stanfield, Spectrum Press, Vancouver, BC
- Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community, Tom Kohler and Susan Earl, Inclusion Press, Toronto, ON
- Intentional Teaming, Beth Gallagher and Kirk Hinkleman, Inclusion Press, Toronto, ON
- Flourish, Karin Melberg Schwier, Copestone, Saskatoon, SK
- One Candle Power, Cathy Ludlum, Inclusion Press, Toronto, ON
- Pathfinders, John O’Brien and Beth Mount, Inclusion Press

Learning:

- Toronto Summer Institute Every July for over two decades
- Open Futures Learning – Rich online learning for direct support and also modules for side by side learning with people with disabilities and supports

Articles:

- SSR: Supporting Social Roles, John O’Brien and www.inclusion.com/ssr.pdf
- Dignity of Risk, www.disabilityrightswa.org/advocacy-news/what-dignity-risk-means-me
- Creating What I know about Community, Dave and Faye Wetherow, www.communityworks.info