Support Network Development

A Facilitator's Guide

Innovative **LIFE** Options

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INTRODUCTION TO SUPPORT NETWORK DEVELOPMENT FOR FACILITATORS

This guide was created to open the door to meaningful conversations between facilitators and those they support in network development. The tools we have provided can help you in building sustainable support networks through strengthening communication, developing relationships and building a shared vision together. Our goal is to share ways that not only develop support networks, but keep networks motivated and thriving!

A support network is a group of people that a person chooses to assist in and be a part of their life. Support network members may be family members, friends, or acquaintances the person is developing a relationship with. Support networks can develop naturally, intentionally, or both ways. Sometimes, one way can lead to the other. Support networks are always unique and diverse based on who the person at the center is.

Relationships are the main goal of support networks. Some people do not have unpaid supports in their lives and true friendship is not experienced. Some people have great family involvement but few friendships. Many people experience life-long friendships because of the commitment of support network members. Support networks have shown to create positive outcomes for people such as expanded opportunities and increased self-esteem and self-worth.

Supported decision making is also an integral part of why support networks exist. Supported decision making is ensuring the person is informed and involved with making decisions about their life. It is woven through conversations, planning and action. Support networks provide a structure of people who know the person well, who care deeply, and who will take the time that the supported decision-making process needs. Support networks have also been shown to create opportunities for learning, growth, and valued social roles.

Support networks need to be developed and strengthened continuously. As such, support network development is a continuous effort. Every support network is different and will be developed and strengthened in different ways. There is no handbook or checklist for facilitating support networks. Approach support network development with the lens that it goes beyond simply bringing people to the table; it is an intentional process of nurturing relationships between people.

Although each network and your relationship with its members may be unique, support network development tends to have three stages:

EXPLORATION

DEVELOPMENT

SUSTAINABILITY

First Stage
EXPLORATION

Relationships need common ground, frequency, and time to develop.