



# Friends: Connecting People with Disabilities and Community Members

## A Manual for Families

By Angela Novak Amado, Ph.D.

October 2019

© 2019 University of Minnesota Regents. All rights reserved.

Research and Training Center on Community Living, Institute on Community Integration (UCEDD), at the University of Minnesota

Author: Angela Novak Amado, Ph.D.

This document was funded in part by grant #H133B080005 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) awarded to the Research and Training Center on Community Living (RTC), Institute on Community Integration (ICI), University of Minnesota.

The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of NIDRR, RTC, ICI, or the University of Minnesota or their funding sources and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This document is available in alternate formats upon request.

For additional copies or alternate formats, please contact —

Web: [rtc.umn.edu/friends](http://rtc.umn.edu/friends)

Email: [rtc@umn.edu](mailto:rtc@umn.edu)

Phone: 612-624-6328

Recommended citation:

Amado, A.N. (2019) *Friends: Connecting people with disabilities and community members: A manual for families*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration.

## Table of Contents

This manual is written for... / p. i

Using this manual / p. ii

Introduction / p. iii

### 1. Why community relationships are important / p. 1

The context of services for people with disabilities / p. 2

*Relationship map / p. 3*

Reasons to support relationships with community members / p. 7

*What would it be like if you had no friends? / p. 7*

*What do you get from knowing people? / p. 11*

### 2. Some basics / p. 15

What “glasses” do you have on? / p. 16

Ways people make friends / p. 17

*How did you meet YOUR friends? / p. 17*

How do most people make friends? / p. 18

Types of relationships / p. 19

What is a friend? / p. 19

What about friendships with others who have disabilities? / p. 20

*Track your progress with the relationship map / p. 21*

### 3. Specific strategies / p. 25

Shared interests and gifts / p. 26

*Identify interests and gifts / p. 28*

Seven strategies to support relationships with community members / p. 29

*Who will Mary get to know there? / p. 31*

Strategy 1: Identify who would appreciate your family member’s gifts / p. 33

*What are Ken’s gifts? / p. 33*

*What are your family member’s gifts? / p. 35*

Strategy 2: Identify community places where people engage in one of your family member’s interests / p. 36

*Places where people engage in the person’s interests / p. 36*

Strategy 3: Who does your family member already know where the relationship can be strengthened and deepened? / p. 39

*Who is already there for your family member? / p. 40*

Strategy 4: Where you can find an interested person? / p. 41

*Where can we find someone to invite in? / p. 42*

Strategy 5: Identify associations and clubs / p. 44

*Where can your family member belong? / p. 46*

Strategy 6: Identify community places that are hospitable and welcoming / p. 47

*Places that would be welcoming / p. 48*

**Strategy 7: Where can your family member fit in just the way they are? / p. 49**

*What kind of job? / p. 50*

*Places where your family member would fit in just the way they are / p. 52*

**Selecting ideas to pursue / p. 53**

*The three best ideas to pursue / p. 53*

**4. Introductions, Asking, and Inviting / p. 55**

**Introductions, asking, and inviting / p. 56**

*What would a community member get from getting to know your family member? / p. 56*

**Becoming an asker or inviter / p. 57**

*What kind of person are you looking for? / p. 57*

*When you want to get to know someone better, what would you ask or invite them to do? / p. 58*

*What increases the chances of getting a "yes"? / p. 59*

*Look for yourself / p. 62*

*What will you say about your family member to the community member? / p. 63*

**5. Action Plans and Follow-up / p. 67**

*Your three best ideas for making requests / p. 68*

*Practice asking/inviting / p. 69*

*Action plan / p. 70*

**Continuing to follow-up / p. 71**

**Other tips on introducing, asking, inviting, and being in action / p. 72**

**6. Factors for success / p. 75**

**Skills for community connectors to have or develop / p. 76**

**On-going support to sustain and deepen a relationship after the initial connection / p. 79**

**Direct approaches to community / p. 80**

**7. Working with Agency Staff on Supporting Community Relationships / p. 81**

**Support from agency managers and supervisors / p. 82**

*What do community members think? / p. 84*

**Employment/day program roles for supporting social relationships / p. 88**

**8. Some final tips / p. 91**

**Necessary beliefs for success / p. 93**

**Resources / p. 95**

# This manual is written for...

---

## Parents

This manual is intended for family members of older children — those of transition age in the last few years of school or those of adult age who live at home. It is also for family members who have an adult child living in a group home or on their own.

Families of younger school-age children will also find many useful ideas here that can be applied in school or other situations for younger children. Here are two additional resources that will also be useful for families of younger children:

- *Connecting Students: A Guide for Thoughtful Friendship Facilitation for Educators and Families*, from the Peak Parent Center in Colorado: [www.peakparent.org](http://www.peakparent.org)
- Arc of Massachusetts toolkit, *Making Friends in School*: [thearcofmass.org/friendship](http://thearcofmass.org/friendship)

## Other family members

The terminology of “family members” is used throughout the manual because some of the effort may be undertaken by siblings or other family members, not just parents.

## Parents or other family members of individuals with disabilities who have paid staff

Some family members may have in-home support such as respite care or Personal Care Attendant (PCA) staff. (Note: this type of staff support is called by different terms in different states and countries.) Some family

members with disabilities may be living in their own apartment, group home or other situation, or attend a day program, sheltered workshop, recreation program, or other situation, in which there are paid staff. The ideas in this manual can also be carried out by staff, and content is included here for family members about how to make requests of support staff to also promote more social relationships.

Staff can also be directed to the staff version of this manual, available at [rtc.umn.edu/friends](http://rtc.umn.edu/friends)

The lessons contained in this manual have primarily been learned from supporting people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, but also have been utilized to support relationships for individuals with other disabilities, such as autism, physical disabilities, or mental health issues. Much of the learning has gone on with individuals with a wide range of disabilities, including many individuals who have been seen as quite challenging, such as those who don’t use words to communicate, those who have challenging behaviors, or those about whom people said they wouldn’t or couldn’t be friends with community members.

Much of the material has also been developed by listening and learning from others who are engaged in this work of having communities that value and include a wide variety of individuals, and from whom I continue to learn. Thanks to Beth Mount, John O’Brien, Tom Kohler, Kathy Bartholomew-Lorimer, and Michael Smull for some of the examples and ways of thinking represented here.

Please use what is useful to YOU!

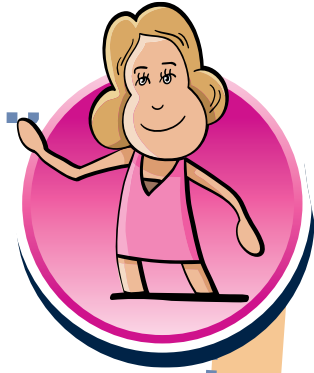
—Angela Novak Amado



Friendship is a thing most necessary to life, since without friends no one would choose to live, through possessed of all other advantages.



~ Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC), Greek philosopher



## Using this manual

- This manual is for assisting people with disabilities increase community membership and belonging and for promoting meaningful relationships with community members.
- This manual is for parents and other family members, especially when an older teen or adult is living with their family. A previous version of this manual was written for agency staff and is available at [rtc.umn.edu/friends](http://rtc.umn.edu/friends)
- In some families, the teen or adult child lives in a group home, a facility, in their own apartment, etc. Many young adults or adults who don't have a job or go to school also attend some kind of day program, workshop, or formal program. There is material also included in this manual that is useful for family members to speak to staff in any type of living, day program, work situation, recreation, or other type of program, to have the staff support their family member in having more relationships and friendships with community members.
- Although some material in this manual is also useful for younger children, for families of younger children we also recommend —
  - » *Connecting Students: A Guide for Thoughtful Friendship Facilitation for Educators and Families*, from the Peak Parent Center in Colorado: [www.peakparent.org](http://www.peakparent.org)
  - Arc of Massachusetts toolkit, *Making Friends in School*: [thearcofmass.org/friendship](http://thearcofmass.org/friendship)
- Many of the strategies in this manual were developed with people with a label of intellectual/developmental disabilities and/or autism, but the strategies are useful for anyone. Many of the examples of using the strategies are from direct experiences of family members.
- Not everything will be useful for everyone – use what is useful to YOU!
- A separate document is available that includes just the worksheets for those who wish to do the exercises with an individual, or for people who conduct trainings with family members.

# Introduction

---

For more than a hundred years, from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century, many people with disabilities were sent away to institutions. When a child with a disability was born, doctors often recommended that parents put their child in an institution and forget about them. Many families did not follow this advice, keeping their children at home. Beginning in the 1950s, parents began advocating for supports such as school programs that supported all children, and for adult day programs. Movements also began to transition people from institutions back to their communities.

As this “de-institutionalization” movement started, many noted that although people with disabilities were now IN the community, they were not OF the community. That is, although individuals with disabilities may have been physically living in the community, they had little sense of belonging to community life. Some “community” programs were small institutions, and people still belonged to “the system” rather than to “the community.” They were still seen as different, needing special places and services – and not seen as contributing community citizens.

As services have changed in the last 20-60 years, most individuals with disabilities do not face having to go to institutions. Yet, the design of the current disability services system often still results in people with a disability label being socially isolated from ordinary community members. While many schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and faith communities experience the physical presence of individuals with disabilities, there are still walls separating people socially. While people with disabilities may experience physical integration, they often do not experience social integration. Many participate only in “special” programs. Children may experience integrated school programs, yet face social isolation once they graduate.

From the perspective of community members, individuals with disabilities are often still seen as needing help only from specially trained staff or professionals. Often community members still see individuals with a disability label as “other,” rather than as fully part of the whole community. Community members may accept the physical presence of individuals with disabilities in their workplaces, congregations, and recreation centers, and think that is enough. Community mem-

bers may not have had an opportunity to recognize their role in social inclusion and in building an inclusive society.

In the late 1980s I began working with residential service and day program agencies that supported individuals with developmental disabilities to explore addressing this issue of increasing community relationships and belonging. We wondered if there were actions that staff could undertake or that agencies could do to bring people with disabilities and community members together in meaningful relationships. What roles could the service system play in encouraging more relationships and friendships between individuals with disabilities and other community members? What roles can ordinary citizens play in increasing the inclusiveness of their community? From the first “Friends” project in 1989 through to the present, the learning process continues.

A manual of compilation of more than 20 years of learning from agency staff, people who receive services, and community members who have befriended people is available at [rtc.umn.edu/friends](http://rtc.umn.edu/friends). That manual is primarily written from the perspective of working with agency staff, and the design of many of the exercises come from this “staff” approach. It is free, downloadable, and available for use by anyone. The exercises and strategies have been used not just by staff but by many others – parents, support coordinators, teachers, and people with disabilities – to support community relationships.

Recognizing that most individuals with disabilities live with their families rather than reside in formal services, in 2014 we began a project to see if the strategies used successfully with staff could also be used by family members who had an adult child with disabilities living at home with them. We found that the same strategies could definitely be used by families, and families often faced the same challenges as staff. Of course, there were also differences which families experience. With some families in the project, their child was living in a group home and the families supported the group home staff as well as pursuing their own strategies. This manual is a compilation of lessons learned from working with families in these various types of situations.

—Angela Novak Amado

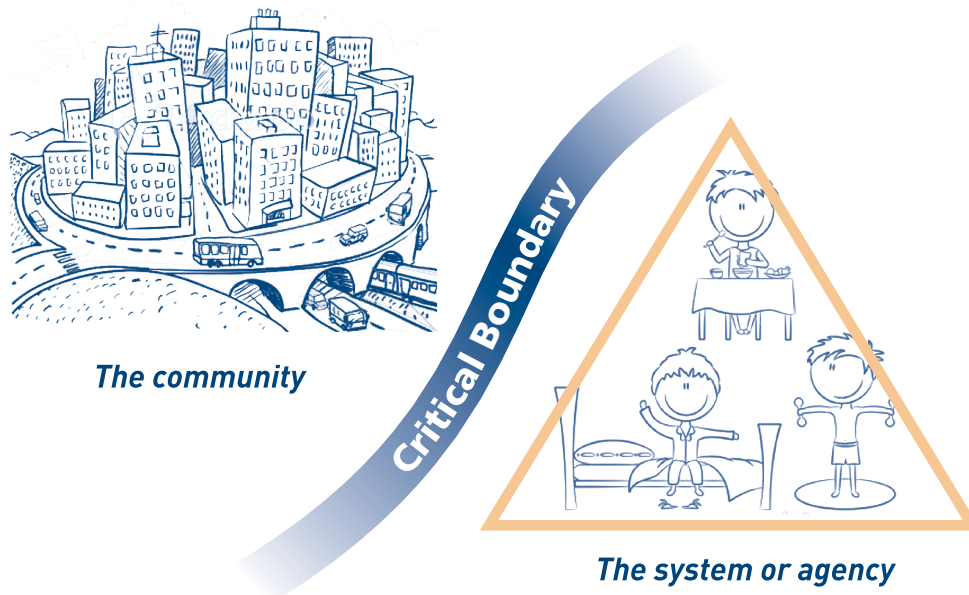
1.

## **Why community relationships are important**

This section presents larger-picture contexts and reasons for supporting community relationships for those with a disability label



# The context of services for people with disabilities



This diagram illustrates the situation of many people with disabilities. It is a conceptualization from John and Connie O'Brien, some of the original thinkers about what it means to be "person-centered" rather than "system-centered."

The triangle in the lower right corner is a symbol of "the system." It is a triangle because typically there is one person at the top of a hierarchical structure, and many people at the bottom. The triangle represents The System or The Agency, and everything that happens in an individual's life because of system or agency rules, funding streams, professional or staff decisions, etc. — everything that affects and shapes how people supported by an agency or a system receive that support. Many System and Agency decisions affect a person's life —

- Where they live,
- Who they live with,
- Where they work,
- Whether they get to go to a movie or not, etc.

The System or The Agency affects the quality of life of an individual inside the triangle in ways very different from those not subject to it. As one person expressed, "I'm in Service-Land – Get me out!"

The upper left in the diagram represents the Community. Often rules, timelines, and many other aspects of life are different in the Community. A staff person can

understand the differences between the triangle of The System and Community by looking at what they have to do on the job that they do NOT do when they are in their own home. Family members can see what happens at home versus how their child acts if they visit a group home or day program, or if they are around staff versus with family friends. The system world ("Service-Land") and the community world are typically two different worlds, almost like two science-fiction-like "parallel universes." One mother noticed that when her son moved into a group home, he became "more autistic."

Many people who receive services have some or most or all aspects of their life inside the triangle. The Critical Boundary is what separates the two worlds. It divides the world into "us" and "them." One of the tests of the strength of the Critical Boundary is: how do community members see the people who receive support? Do they see people with disabilities as fellow community members? Do they see people as belonging to themselves, or to "the system"?

Even people who live in a home in the community, or in their own apartment, or who have a community job, often face isolation and separation. People may also be congregated into "special" programs, such as recreation or church programs, segregated from others in their communities. While many true friendships may exist with some of their peers, often people in such

programs have no choice and insufficient opportunities to get to know members of the wider community.

One of the most important reasons to work on building bridges between community members and people with disabilities is to alter this structure, this current paradigm, to bring people together across this great boundary.

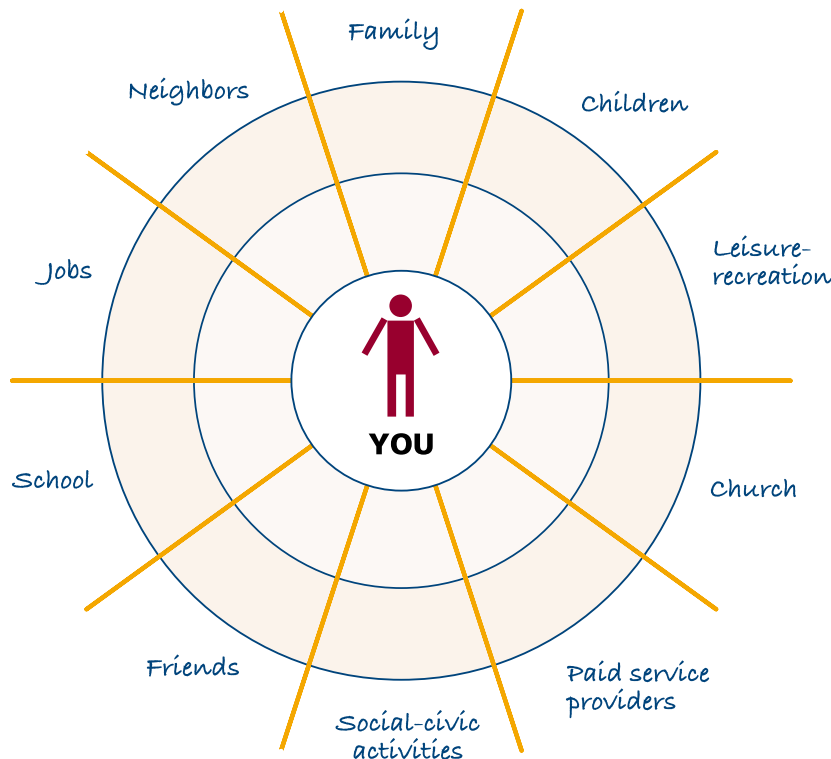
Many times family or staff recognize they are the only people in someone’s life, or they find it hard to think that there would be other people who would care about the person, or they have been frustrated in their attempts to find others. Believing that there are others out there who wish to get to know the person, who would relish the opportunity to befriend and come to love them, is a critical belief. What if it were a staff’s role to find more people to bring into the person’s life? What if this was one of the most important things that family members can do? To find more people to love the person?

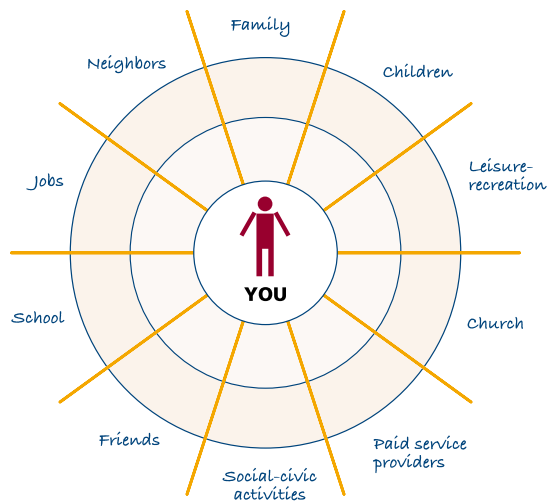
## Activity 1

### Relationship map

Here is another diagram that can show us a second context for why it is important to work on community connections. A Relationship Map is a way to diagram any person’s social network. Here’s how to fill it in —

- If you were doing a map for yourself, YOU are in the middle
- In the first, inner-most circle put the people you see the most frequently, love the most, are closest to
- In the next outer circle put people you associate with but know less well than the inner-most circle
- In the outer-most circle put people that are acquaintances, people you might know by name but not that well





The different titles of each section represent different life arenas through which you might know people. So “recreation-leisure” does not mean that you have recreation activities, but rather: Who do you know through that recreation? For example, if you’re on a softball team, who are the other team members, coaches, others you know?

The “Family” section represents not just your own family members, but others you know through your family – like friends of your sisters, etc.

Think about what YOUR map looks like, versus a map for your family member with disabilities.

Are there differences between YOUR map and the map of your family member with disabilities? What would be the differences in the Relationship Maps of average community members and the people with disabilities who live in your community?

You can write some of these differences here —

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

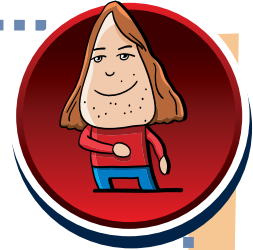
Here are some differences others have noted between their own Relationship Map and the map of a family member with disabilities —

- The “paid service providers” section is usually larger for people with disabilities.
  - » We all have people we pay to do service for us (like our car mechanic, hairdresser, barber, etc.) but for many people who receive services, this is a large proportion of their relationships.
- Average community members typically have relationships in many more “sections” or areas of the map than people with a disability label.
  - » A typical pattern for individuals with disabilities is people in only three sections: paid staff, other people with disabilities they live with or work with, and their family.
- The number of people on the map.
  - » The average community member typically has many more people on their map.
- The number of more intimate relationships
  - » The average community member usually has more people in the “inner-most” circle. While someone with a disability may have many “acquaintances” on the outer-most circle, often the number of people in the inner-most circle is limited.
- What other differences do you see?

## Tip

Using a Relationship Map to appreciate the nature of the social networks of individuals with disabilities gives us more reasons to work on relationships with community members.

- Can you be committed to expanding the number and quality of relationships in the social network of your family member?
- Can you be committed to bring the people on the outer circle “closer in”?
- Can you be committed to add more people who are there for the person just because they like that person?



“Friendship improves happiness and abates misery by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief.”

~ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC),  
Roman orator

# Reasons to support relationships with community members

In this section are eight specific reasons why it is important to support relationships with community members. While you may already believe or know it is important, you can use these reasons to talk to others about why to work on this and to gain support for your efforts.

## 1. Relationships are important to all of us

Our relationships define who we are, as a human being. We are social animals. Everything we know about or believe about ourselves and what's possible in our lives has come from our relationships with others.

There is also a significant amount of research that our relationships are our number one reason for happiness. If we are happy, or unhappy, we can look to our relationships.

Here is a quote from the psychologist David Myers, who wrote a book called *The Pursuit of Happiness*, about the reasons why people are happy or not —

“What comes up consistently at the top of the charts [for why people are happy] is not, as many might expect, success, youth, good looks or any of those enviable assets. The clear winner is relationships. Close ones. Followed by a happy marriage . . . Supportive intimate connections with other people seem tremendously important.”

## Activity 2

### ***What would it be like if you had no friends?***

Write in your responses to these two questions. Look for yourself before going onto the next page. Really get present to what would it be like if you had NO friends —

- **Really get present to: What would it be like if you had NO friends — How would you feel?**

---



---



---



---

- **What would you DO if you had NO friends?**

---



---



---



---

What others have said —

- How would I feel if I had no friends?
  - » Lonely
  - » Depressed
  - » Sad
  - » Alone
- What would I do if I had no friends?
  - » Turn anybody who was there into a friend
  - » Drink
  - » Sleep a lot
  - » Eat a lot
  - » Withdraw
  - » See what I can do to make friends — get more active



Many of us, if we had no friends, would do **SOME-THING**. For example, when we move to a new community we usually do something to meet new people there.

But, people with disabilities often have a history of few friends — so perhaps it's easy to understand why some people are reluctant to try new things or meet new people!

## 2. People with disabilities themselves express that relationships are important

People who receive services express in many ways that relationships are important to them, including that relationships with ordinary community members are important.

Most professionals who have worked in the field for many years, or older family members who have visited disability programs over many years, have had the following experience: walking into a place where there are a lot of people with a disability label in one place, like a large group home or sheltered workshop or institution. What happens within five minutes of walking in? You get surrounded by the people there. Some have called it “being swarmed.” If you are present to the experience, you can feel the hunger – the hunger for relating, the hunger for being with new people, the interest in you. You get asked, “What’s your name?” “Where are you from?” etc. etc. There is a message in this – people who receive services are often hungry for relationships with community members.

Does your family member hug people when they meet them for the first time? How many times have you been hugged – by a person with disabilities who just met you? Another message, another communication!

What does your family member do if they are not getting enough attention? Seek out attention from other people!

People who receive services are telling us something!

The national organization called the Council on Quality and Leadership has developed a system of determining quality of services based on determining outcomes in people’s lives. While conducting focus groups across the country about identifying life outcomes important to people who receive services (such as people living where they want to live, etc.), the focus group leaders were told over and over again by self-advocates and their families that relationships were one of the most important outcomes. And yet, while those providing services are concerned about skill training, physical safety and everything else, relationships are often the thing that gets the least amount of time and attention.

## 3. People with disabilities really do have very few friends

Research has shown over and over again that the percentage of ordinary community members in the social network of a person with disabilities is usually very low. The majority of relationships of an individual with a disability label are typically with family members, staff, and other people with disabilities. One study found that 60% of individuals in group homes had no friends who were community members. Several studies have found that for individuals who live with their family, their relationships are usually mediated through the family — that is, friends are friends of the family rather than friends of the individual.

## 4. Health and well-being

There is a great deal of medical research that shows if you’re socially isolated and alone, you are going to get sick and die sooner than if you are not. Social isolation is as great a mortality risk as smoking.

With all the attention in the disability field on people’s health, do you ever see a plan about someone’s health care that says “help the person have more friends”? Yet it’s something that is more likely to affect a person’s overall health in the long run, than many other things.

For example, one study found that a major factor affecting whether women recovered from breast cancer, and how quickly they recovered, depended on the size of the woman’s social network. If a woman had at least six others in her social network, she was more likely to recover from cancer and to recover more quickly. The size of her social network was as great a determinant of recovery as the severity of the cancer, and the gynecologist conducting the research said, “that is remarkable!”

## 5. More power, control, and safety

There is a great degree of social network research that shows that the size of your social network is correlated with how much power and control you have in life. A CEO of a major company has about 3,000 people in their social network. The President of the United States sends out 100,000 Christmas cards a year.

The more people in an individual’s social network who care about the person, the more say they can



have over how that person's life goes. Someone who is all alone, who has no one who deeply cares for them, often has little say over how their life goes, especially if they cannot communicate with words or have difficulty speaking up for themselves.

Many family members are acutely aware of the need to build the social network so their child can continue to be cared for and loved if something happens to the parents. People are more safe when there are loving, caring people watching out for what is happening in their life.

## 6. Reducing burnout

Let's say there are 10 people in the life an individual who receives services, and that the family member is one of those ten. Let's say the family member has 100 people in their social network. That means for that given individual, the family member is representing TEN people that they themselves have. That one family member has to do the work of TEN people for that individual.

There are individuals who turn to their parents or siblings for everything, who want everything from them. No wonder they do that – they have so few others!

There is a lot of research about "caregiver burn-out." Perhaps one of the most valuable things that family members can do is bring more people into the individual's life.

## 7. When relationships are supported, people change

When a person has people in their life who are valued by them, that they know care about them, there have been many examples of reduced "behavior problems," increased self-confidence, and other desirable changes.

## 8. Providing community members the opportunity to be contributed to

One of the most important reasons to work on relationships with community members is what community members receive by getting to know an individual with disabilities. Each person has many gifts to offer.

There are countless community members who have befriended individuals with disabilities who say something like, "I'm probably getting more out of this relationship than they are."

These are some quotes from community members who befriended people with disabilities in Kentucky, when they were asked what they were getting from the relationship —

- "She taught me a different kind of love."
- "I look forward to a lifetime of being her friend."
- "I'd miss spending time with Wayne if he didn't come to visit."
- "He lifts me up and makes my day."
- "It's people like Steven who make the world a better place."
- "It's a true blessing to get to know him."
- "It's life-giving for both of us."

An agency director had this to say —

- "Witnessing other people getting to know the people we support and befriending them is the best thing in our profession."

“A blessed thing it is for any man or woman to have a friend, one human soul whom we can trust utterly, who knows the best and worst of us, and who loves us in spite of all our faults.”

~ Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), English clergyman and writer

## Activity 3

### ***What do you get from knowing people?***

One of the most important perspectives to have in supporting greater social inclusion with community members is the “gifts” perspective. Much of a family’s or parent’s time in bringing up their child is often focused on deficits – what the child needs more training in, what skills they need to learn, what type of care they need, what’s “wrong” that needs to get better.

The “gifts” perspective recognizes that a person also has great things they offer.

Many family members report on the great and unique gifts which their child with disabilities brings to the whole family. People with disabilities make great contributions to us and to others.

**Think of your family member with disabilities.**

**What do you get from them? What do they give you? What do they give to the family? What do you see them give to others?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

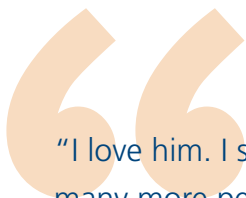
---

---

---

---

---



“I love him. I see my job as: how many more people can I find to love him?”

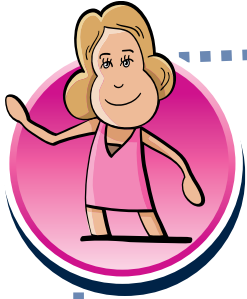
.....  
~ A direct support staff person

What others have said —

- Being reminded of what's really important in life
- Love
- Being loved unconditionally — no matter what I do, they still love me
- Making a difference in someone's life
- Seeing their accomplishments — brings me a sense of accomplishment
- They make me laugh
- Learning patience

“There is nothing better than a friend,  
unless it is a friend with chocolate.”

~ Linda Grayson, American children's book  
author



## Big Tip

Our beliefs are critical to how successful we will be in any endeavor.

There are several beliefs that are at the core of being successful in building relationships with community members. Here's one at the core.

Test yourself, look at yourself:

- Think about your family member with disabilities.
- Look at the gifts they give you: What do you get from knowing this person?

Then look at your belief:

- Do you believe that community members will also benefit from knowing this person?

If you have that belief, you will be more successful in building community connections for this person.



## 2.

### **Some basics**

This section has six areas addressing some basic contexts and principles

## What “glasses” do you have on?

---

What we see as “real” and what we see as “possible” are determined by what set of “glasses” we have on. If we have on blue glasses, the world looks blue. If we have on yellow glasses, the world looks yellow. However, when these glasses have been on for a long enough time, we often don’t know or have forgotten that we have on those blue or yellow glasses!

If you see your family member only or primarily as their disability, you will not see what they have to offer others. If you see community members as only unaccepting, you will not see the individual who extends the hand of hospitality and openness. Your success in building relationships depends on the glasses you have on.

Can you see your family member as their gifts, as what they have to offer?



“We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.”

---

~ Anais Nin (1903–1977), French-Cuban-American essayist

# Ways people make friends

In looking at how to support your family member in having more community relationships and friendships, it is useful to look at how most people, including you, make friends.

## Activity 4

### *How did you meet YOUR friends?*

Think of your friends. Where did you meet them?

---

---

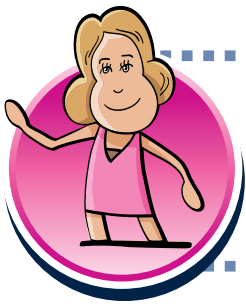
---

---

---

---

---



If you are doing this exercise with another person or in a group of people, you can compare what is similar in the many ways most people get to have friends.

**Go on to the next page**





# How do most people make friends?

- Most people say they met their friends through —
  - » Work
  - » School
  - » Church
  - » Through other friends
  - » Through a club or interest
- What do all these avenues have in common?
  1. First, almost all are **places where you see the same people over and over again**. There are “regulars.”  
 But just seeing the same people in the same place is often not enough. For example, as a consumer, we might often see the same waitress, or post office worker, or grocery store check-out person — but have you made friends with any of them? We may see the same audience members at a weekly summer concert series, but we often just say “hi.” Even if you see the same people over and over again, that’s often not enough in itself.
  2. The second element in common, in those places where most people make friends, such as school or work, is that there is **meaningful interaction, over and over again**. There are real chances to get to know each other.
  3. The third element about where most people make friends is that you don’t become friends with everyone at school or work.
- When you want to become better friends with people, what do you do?
  - » Usually you **ASK or INVITE** them to do something more.
  - » The people who are YOUR friends – what did you invite them to do when you first wanted to get to know them better? Or, if there was someone now you wanted to get to know better, what would you ask them to do?
    - Have coffee?
    - Have lunch?
    - Go fishing?
    - Come over?
    - Talk on the phone?
  - » We INVITE people to do more. We ASK people to get together, outside of that location such as the workplace.
  - » Becoming an “asker” or “inviter” is one of the most important skills to develop to become a community builder.

## Big tip

See the same people in the same places over time -- places where there’s chances for meaningful interactions, contribution and reciprocity!



## Big tip

Become an asker!  
 Become an inviter!



## Types of relationships

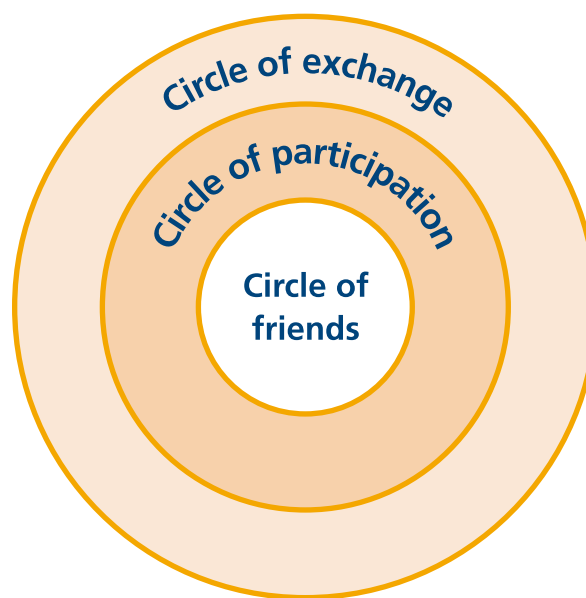
We can look at the depth and quality of relationships.

Apart from family, we could look at five categories of relationships —

- **Customer relationships** — some service people may be friendly toward an individual
- **Acquaintances** — For example, someone you see on the street or at church or in a class, that you say “hi” to, or know their name, or with whom you have a brief conversation
- **Places of community** — being a regular at a community place
- **Places of community membership and belonging** — having a sense of belonging, like a community organization or group
- **Friends** — people you do things with, for fun, people from whom we get support

Here is another example of a relationship map. You can use this to track progress in the number and quality of relationships.

When people are on the outer circle, what can we ask or invite them to do to move potential friends toward more inner circles?



## What is a friend?

Sometimes people ask, “What’s the definition of a friend?” Who counts as a “friend”?

Sociological research has defined “friend” in many different ways. The simplest way is that people are friends when both people say they are!

In encouraging people with disabilities and community members to come together, to get to know each other, and to possibly become friends, perhaps it is not that important that we worry about a strict definition of “friend” or whether someone can be “counted” as a “friend” or not. For many individuals with disabilities, even if a community member is an “acquaintance,” that is still a step up for that individual!

We can encourage a wide variety of relationships without being tied to a strict definition of the relationship. We can encourage more personal relationships with colleagues at work or fellow congregation members, deepen family or extended family relationships, connect people back to old friends, and take actions toward many types of relationships. And, we can encourage the “acquaintances” to get to know people better!

## What about friendships with others who have disabilities?

---

Nothing in this manual is intended to take away from or detract from the fact that many people with disabilities have genuine, real, loving, caring friendships with others with disabilities. Of course, if there are such friends who are important to the person, we should support those relationships.

Oftentimes, though, it is assumed that people with disabilities only want to be friends with others with disabilities. Or, it is assumed that they ARE friends with others with disabilities, simply because they live with them or work with them. Or, there are skill training or behavior programs about teaching people with disabilities to get along better with one another – when they don't really WANT to live with or work with or get along with other people with disabilities. Or it is assumed, for example, that there should be special programs for young adults who all have autism to socialize together. It is important to not impose these types of assumptions on anyone.

Examples of the concept that people with disabilities belong together abound. For example, in planning meetings a professional might ask someone, "Who do you want to live with? Who do you want to have be your room-mate?" And then assume that the answer will be another person with disabilities whom they know or who they previously lived with. Family members sometimes assume that their child should move into a group home. Perhaps instead the professional and family can be open to seeing that the person's wish might be to live with a family member or with a person who doesn't have disabilities.

Our focus here in this manual is on relationships between people with disabilities and community members, as it usually takes significantly different types of effort, energy, and activities to support those relationships. There are many segregated groups and programs in which people with disabilities can participate. "Service-Land" is designed to keep people with disabilities together. If we are going to "cross the river" to build relationships with community members, it takes doing things differently, different types of effort, and that is the focus here.



"We all need friends with whom we can speak of our deepest concerns, and who do not fear to speak the truth in love to us."

---

~ Margaret Guenther (1929–2016),  
American author

## Activity 5

### *Track your progress with the relationship map*

Let's look again at the "relationship" map diagram we looked at on page 3. There is also one on the next page. Again, here is how to fill it in —

- When doing a map for yourself, YOU are in the middle
- In the first, inner-most circle put the people you see the most frequently, love the most, are closest to
- In the next outer circle put people you associate with but know less well than the inner-most circle
- In the outer-most circle put people who are acquaintances, people you see frequently or you might know by name but not that well

The different titles of each section represent different life arenas through which you know people. So "recreation-leisure" does not mean that you have recreation activities, but rather: who do you know through that recreation? For example, if you're on a soft-ball team, who are the other team members, coaches, others you know?

In the "Family" section, put not just your own family members, but others you know through your family – like friends of your sisters, etc. You can also put extended family members.

You can use this map in two ways —

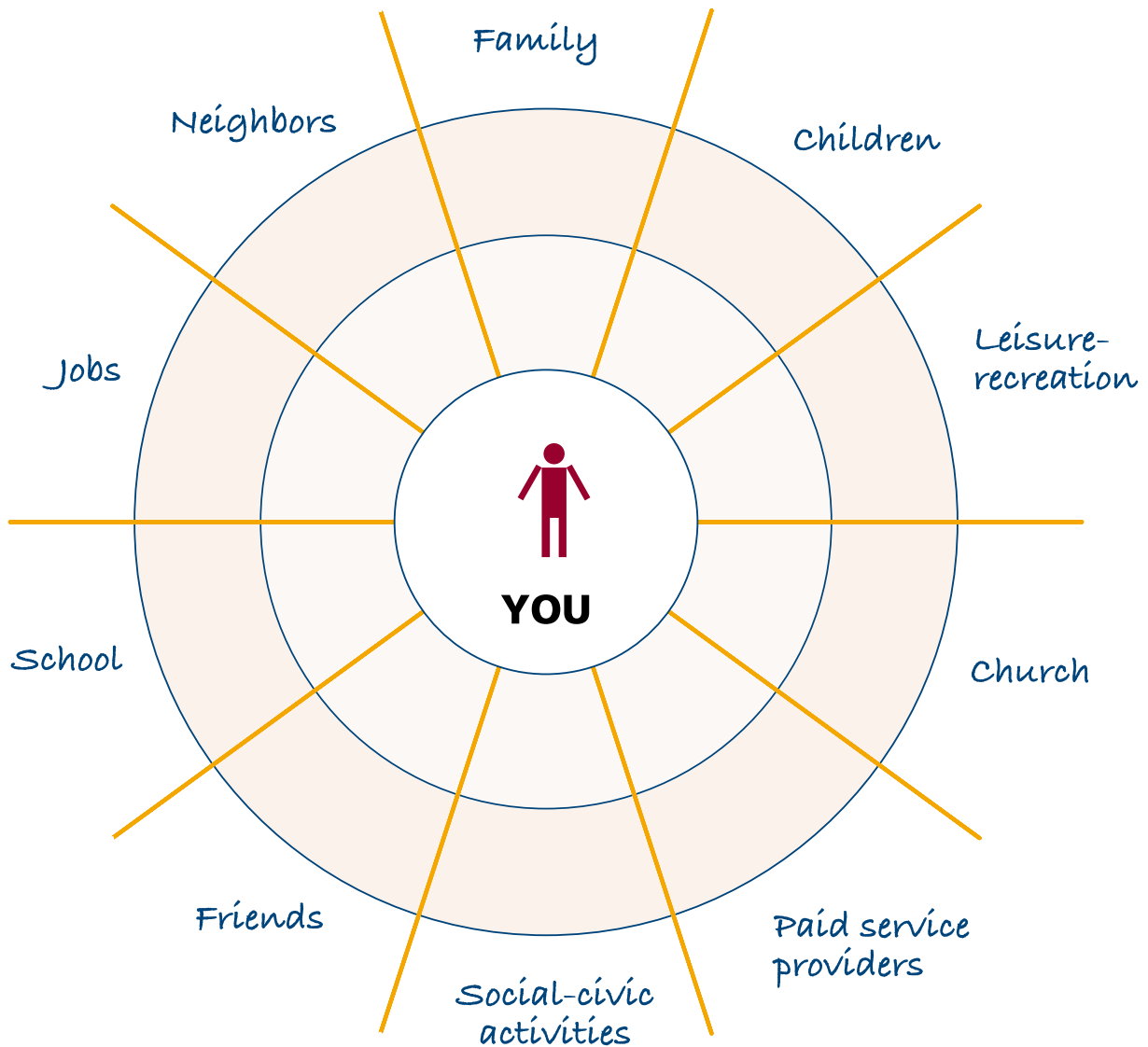
- **Have your family members and/or any others who may be supporting this effort each make a map for themselves** — By doing their own maps, they can identify their own acquaintances and friends who share interests with your family member with disabilities. Who do they know who likes cars, music, etc.?

In some small communities, you, your family members, and friends may know virtually everyone in town – so if your family member with disabilities is going to have a closer relationship with another community member, it will be someone you or they probably already know. Even in larger communities, the people in your extended network can be rich resources for potential relationships and information about link-ages to others.

- **Make a map with or for your family member with disabilities** — Notice the areas of relationships. For many people with disabilities, their social network is primarily family, paid staff, and other people with disabilities.

In some communities, there are some individuals with disabilities who “everyone knows.” For example, the person says hi to everyone, and lots of people in the community know their name and say hi to them. But if we examine these types of social networks more closely, we see that these others are usually on the outermost circle of this individual’s relationship map; they are, at best, acquaintances. A goal in this type of case would be: How can these people be moved into more inner circles? How can we deepen these relationships?

Regularly updating the map for or with your family member can help you see how you’re doing on supporting them in expanding the size and depth of their social network.





“Friends broaden our horizons. They serve as new models with whom we can identify. They allow us to be ourselves — and accept us that way. They enhance our self-esteem because they think we’re okay, because we matter to them. And because they matter to us — for various reasons, at various levels of intensity — they enrich the quality of our emotional life.”



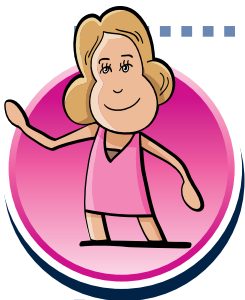
~ Judith Viorst (1931–), American novelist and newspaper columnist



# 3.

## Specific strategies

This section has specific methods to try!



To use the exercises in this section, select one person with disabilities for whom you would like to increase their relationships with community members and community belonging. If you have more than one family member with disabilities, work through the exercises uniquely for each one. Work through these exercises, brainstorming about that one person.



## Shared interests and gifts

One way everyone gets to know others is through shared interests and contributing our gifts, talents, and abilities. A starting point here is to identify a person's interests and gifts.

### Shared interests

Here's some ways to understand interests —

- Interests express the meaning in a person's life.
  - » What does the person find most meaningful? Baseball? Sewing? Children?
- Once you identify a person's interests, you can look for: Where are others who SHARE these interests?
  - » You can identify memberships and associations around particular interests. There are clubs and groups around all types of interests: hockey, pigs, scrapbooking, etc.
- Interests may not be easy to define — sometimes they are discovered and developed in action.
  - » Perhaps someone has not had a chance to try many new things — how can they be assisted to have new experiences and find new interests?
- Interests express the person's life calling. What is this person called to do?
  - » Examples of interests include: cribbage, coloring books, music, sports, dancing, theater, trivia, Japanese culture, etc.

“Life is partly what we make it, and partly what it is made by the friends we choose.”

~ Tennessee Williams (1911-1983), American playwright

### Contributing our gifts, talents and abilities

We can also look at the person's GIFTS. There are two types of gifts —

1. What are the person's GIFTS/SKILLS/TALENTS — things the person does well — that can be contributed to others? (There may be an overlap with interests.)
2. What are the GIFTS the person contributes to you and others, that community members would also appreciate receiving? What can be seen as a gift, even if it's not obvious?
  - Examples of gifts include unconditional love, making you laugh, and reminders of what's really important in life.
    - » When introduced to these ideas, one mother of a child who had a more severe level of disability found it eye-opening to see that her child could have friends in her life who were not family members or others with disabilities — she had never thought that before. She had not seen that her daughter had contributions to offer others who did not have disabilities.
    - » When some parents asked their friends to get to know their child better, here is what they reported —
      - One mother reported, “I have friends who say, ‘nice to meet you, nice to have a new friend – when are you guys coming again?’”
      - One son wanted to get to know friends of his father more. The dad asked his friends and was surprised by the positive responses he received; one of his friends said they were “humbled and honored” that the dad had asked him to be supportive of his son.
      - One potential friend, when asked, said, “I would love to spend time with her.”

## Examples of connecting based on interests and gifts

### Barry

Barry had quadriplegia, did not use words to communicate, was moved around in a very complicated wheelchair, and could scream quite loudly when he was excited or upset.

The staff who supported him tried on a perspective of: what if his screaming was a gift? Who would appreciate that gift?

Barry also happened to love watching people play games with balls, and loved the sound of a bouncing ball. One of his staff named Kim was walking through her community center one day and saw a group of semi-retired men playing volleyball. She thought this might be a group that could value Barry's gift for screaming!

They began taking Barry there every Thursday morning. At times Barry got so excited watching the team that it seemed he might almost launch himself out of his chair and onto the court.

The team really appreciated Barry's gift. A story in a local community magazine about Barry and the team had this to say, "Soon the Thursday ritual wasn't the same without Barry; whenever he couldn't make a game the team felt his absence. As one player put it, 'He cheers for everybody, not just for who's winning. If you're having a lousy day on the court, he still makes you feel good because he just loves to watch us play.'"

The team gave Barry a volleyball that said "Number One Fan" and also a sweatshirt that said the same. Three of the men also started having lunch with Barry after their games, to get to know him better.

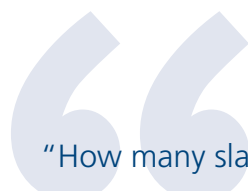
### Jason

Jason was a man with some mental health issues who liked to make up stories. Some people called them lies; some called them hallucinations. Where would this gift be valued? His supporters found a group for him to belong to: A local group of people who got together to do improvisation, just for fun. They really valued his gift for making up stories!

### Tina

Tina was a person who didn't speak, had temper tantrums, and who seemed to not be interested in very much. She was supported by an agency committed to finding places of community belonging for each person they supported. They used the approach of asking: "What is this person's calling? What are they called to do?" They finally decided Tina had two callings: to drink coffee and to smoke cigarettes!

What place of community belonging did they find? A local diner, where every afternoon a group of ladies got together to drink coffee and smoke cigarettes! They talked to the owner, and started bringing Tina there every afternoon. The women in the group, once they got to know Tina with the support of the agency's community connector, naturally included her.



"How many slams in an old screen door? Depends how loud you shut it. How many slices in a bread? Depends how thin you cut it. How much good inside a day? Depends how good you live 'em. How much love inside a friend? Depends how much you give 'em."



~ Shel Silverstein (1930–1999), American author

# Activity 6

## Identify interests and gifts

Pick one person for whom you would like to increase community connections. Work through these exercises about that one person.

Person \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Group members participating \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Interests	Gifts, skills, and talents: What does the person do well?	Gifts: What do you get from knowing this person? What do they give you?
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

“Wherever we are, it is our friends that make our world.”



~ Henry Drummond (1851-1897), Scottish scientist and writer

# Seven strategies to support relationships with community members

Here are seven basic strategies which others have found useful to support relationships with community members. They have been used in a wide variety of settings -- home, work, school, etc., with a wide variety of individuals in a wide variety of communities.

Some strategies will be more useful than others for any particular individual. They are all useful for brainstorming ideas.

There are three different groups in the seven strategies:

1. The first group of two strategies is focused on supporting connections through the person's interests and gifts.
2. The second group of two strategies is focused on supporting one-to-one connections and relationships.
3. The third group of three strategies is about supporting more group membership and belonging.



"It's the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter."

~ Marlene Dietrich (1901–1992),  
German-American actress and singer



If you work through these exercises, you can brainstorm many different ideas.

You don't have to select an idea right away. Have fun brainstorming first! A later section addresses how to select where to start.



## Big tip for success

A big focus in many service agencies is for individuals to participate in community activities. Yet, participating in activities is different than getting to know people.

Some of the most common community activities for people who receive services (and for many of us!) are going to restaurants, shopping, and movies. Yet, when was the last time you made a new friend at any of those places?

A big tip is to start shifting our focus, and shifting our thinking, from “activities” to “people.” The most important question we can start asking is –

Who are they going to get to know there?

Remember from an earlier section: Where will they see the same people, in the same place, over time? How will they get involved with others there, in meaningful ways?

# Activity 7

## Who will Mary get to know there?

Mary's interest is in music. When people think about community connections, a frequent thought is, "Oh, let's take her to a concert." BUT — who will she get to know there?

What might be better places to pursue her interest in music?

What are places where she will see the same people, in the same place, over time?

Where are the places where she can really get involved with others there?

Write your ideas —

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



"Time doesn't take away from friendship,  
nor does separation."



~ Tennessee Williams (1911–1983), American  
playwright, *Memoirs*

What others have said —

- Church choir
- Church choir practices
- High school bands/orchestras
- College orchestras/bands
- Radio station, where Mary can have a regular role such as volunteering
- Supporting a local rock band — being a member of their fan club
- Concert series, where Mary can volunteer and get to know other volunteers



“We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.”

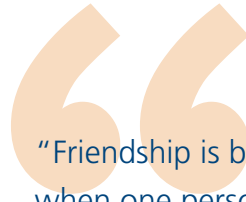
~ Anaïs Nin (1903–1977), French-Cuban-American essayist

# Strategy 1: Identify who would appreciate your family member's gifts

Look at the two lists of gifts you made in Activity 6 on p. 28.

- The gifts — skills, talents, abilities — what someone does well
- The gifts of what the person contributes to you, what someone gets from knowing them.

Think about — Where are the places and who are the people who would appreciate these gifts?



“Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: “What! You too? I thought I was the only one.”

~ C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), British author

## Activity 8

### What are Ken's gifts?

Ken was a student with quadriplegia who could not move. He was graduating from high school, and a facilitator got together his school friends to help look at what type of career would Ken have. What would he do with his life after he graduated?

The facilitator asked the students, “What does Ken do well?”

This was a hard question because Ken doesn't DO anything! He doesn't move!

Finally, one student said, “You know what Ken does well? He sits still really well!”

What kind of people would appreciate a gift for sitting still? What kind of job did they help Ken get? What are your guesses?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



You know who appreciates a gift for sitting still? Artists!

They helped Ken develop a career as an artist's model. Not only does he have a gift for sitting still, you can move his body into any position and it will stay there — that is a great gift for an artist!

He also became a "hand" model, since he has beautiful hands. One product which featured a photo of his hands was a calendar, with a mountain lake scene behind his hands — it was a calendar for a soap company.

Ken makes so much money as an artist's model and with residuals from various products like the calendars, he is not dependent on social welfare funding.

This, a guy who can't "DO" anything! What glasses did the people have on who supported him?

“

The better part of one's life consists of his friendships.”

.....

~ Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), 16th  
President of the United States

# Activity 9

## What are your family member's gifts?

You can reference what you wrote on Activity 6, p. 28

**Gifts:** What does your family member do well?  
Talents, abilities, skills?

**Gifts:** What do you and others receive from knowing  
your family member

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Who would appreciate receiving these gifts?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



“Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It’s not something you learn in school. But if you haven’t learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven’t learned anything.”



~ Muhammad Ali (1942–2016), American professional boxer

## Strategy 2: Identify community places where people engage in one of your family member's interests

Brainstorming ideas in this approach takes some discipline — don't think about your family member; just think about one of their INTERESTS. One interest at a time.

It helps to brainstorm with others, but you can also do it by yourself: For a particular interest, where are all the places where people engage in that interest?

Here's an example for the interest "cars" — What are the places where anybody does anything with cars?

- Auto repair body shops
- Auto parts dealer
- Service departments
- Auto inspection
- Auto rentals
- Performance racing
- Mechanics
- Parking lots-garages
- Auto magazines
- Used cars
- Car washes
- Auto stereos
- Race tracks
- Gas stations
- Tires

After you identify all the places where anyone does something with this interest, then look for: Who do I (we) know there? Does anyone I (we) know have a connection to someone connected to one of those places? Who do I (we) know to ask, who may know someone with a connection to one of these places?

You can make a relationship map — as in Activity 5 on p. 22. Who do YOU know with some of these interests? Who do you know who likes cars? Music? Etc.?

This is also an excellent strategy for developing possible job ideas for a person.

### Activity 10

## Places where people engage in the person's interests

Pick one interest from the list from Activity 6 on p. 28: \_\_\_\_\_

Places this interest is expressed

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Who does anyone know at any of these places?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



## A tip about volunteer work

One way to contribute to others is by volunteering. Some volunteering opportunities are great to get to know community members and some are not.

For example —

In some places, volunteering at recycling centers has gotten quite common for people with disabilities. At some major recycling plants, people from several different day programs/workshops for people with disabilities are congregating together, sometimes at the same time and day. Even if they are there on different days and times, while people are contributing, it is not a great opportunity to get to know community members!

Another place where some individuals volunteer is at humane societies. While this is great for those like dogs, to get to be with dogs, it is often not a great opportunity to get to know community members. At some shelters, there are hours and hours where there is only one staff person working.

Think about other places for volunteering for getting to know people —

- Where do the people in your community with the most valued social roles volunteer? The opera? Different charity balls?
- Remember the question: Who is the person going to get to know there?
- For example, for someone who likes dogs, maybe walking dogs for people in the neighborhood would be a better opportunity to get to know people than volunteering at a shelter. Or a Pet Adoption Group or Cat Rescue Society or other groups might also provide better opportunities.

Here are some examples in which parents helped their young adult child volunteer —

- Science Museum
- Children’s Museum
- Community Theater: performing, ushering
- Community Chamber Orchestra member
- Sunday school teaching assistant
- Helping with communion cups at church
- Weather-watcher
- Pet Adoption group



“Why did you do all this for me?” he asked. “I don’t deserve it. I’ve never done anything for you.”  
“You have been my friend,” replied Charlotte.  
“That in itself is a tremendous thing.”

~ E.B. White (1899–1985), American writer, *Charlotte’s Web*

## Strategy 3: Who does your family member already know where the relationship can be strengthened and deepened?

Most individuals with disabilities go to activities, events, and/or “outings” in the community. There may already be community members there who are friendly toward them or acquainted with them. As we saw on page 18, when any of us would like to get to know someone better, usually we ask them to do something like have coffee or lunch, or share in some other activity (go to a movie, fishing, etc.)

- What are the community locations the person visits now?
- Who are the community members there? Especially, who is most friendly? Who is acquainted already?

If you’ve gone with your family member to these community places, you may have noticed these community members. Or, you might not have noticed them, but now you can start putting on the glasses of looking for them!

You might not know their names, or have even paid attention. But you can start looking. Which people are friendly toward your family member? Who are the friendly, hospitable, outgoing, accepting people? Start to get to know them, or who they are!

If you have not gone with your family member to some of these regular community locations, perhaps they can tell you who they would like to get to know better, at a place that they go. Or, you can encourage your family member to start identifying these people, and/or to find out their names.

Then identify, what would make sense to ask them to do, to get to know each other better?

- What could you or your family member ask them to do?

Once you start to get to know who they are, you can figure out: What would make sense to ask or invite them to do, to get to know your family member better? To visit? To have coffee after church or on a break at work? Who should do the inviting — you, your family member, or someone else?

### Tim

Tim was a young man who lived with his parents and went to church with them. His mother asked who it was at church that he would like to get to know better. He could immediately say, it was the “guy with the vest and the long hair.” He said “I want to get to know that guy!” The parents knew this man’s name was Bert. The young man and his parents together figured out what would make sense to ask Bert to do. The parents suggested that their son ask Bert if he would like to have lunch with them after church one Sunday. They practiced what Tim would say to Bert. In addition, the parents figured that all of them having lunch together would also give the parents a chance to get to know Bert better.

### Steven

*An example of how staff can support relationships.*

Steven’s day program became very committed to relationships with community members. They supported many people who had quite complex needs, including Steven, who had quadriplegia, used a complicated wheelchair, and did not use words to communicate.

Because the staff was consistently working on relationships with community members, they started to pay more attention to noticing community members who were interested in the people they supported.

Steven’s staff Becky took him to the barber once a month. She noticed that even though Steven didn’t speak, the barber seemed quite interested in him. Becky asked the barber if he would be interested in getting to know Steven better, and have lunch once a month. The barber accepted, and they started having lunch.

Then the barber told Becky he wasn’t getting to know Steven well enough – that they needed to have lunch twice a month! This despite the fact that Steven doesn’t speak!

This barber received a Friendship Award from a state advocacy organization. When he accepted his award at their annual meeting, he was moved to tears regarding



## Strategy 4: Where you can find an interested person?

Get together with others, or by yourself, brainstorm: where could we find a person who might be interested in being this person's friend?

This is a very good strategy for everyone, but also particularly useful for people who are not necessarily out-going. For example, some individuals who have a diagnosis on "the autism spectrum" are quite social but some are not necessarily that social or apparently do not seem that interested in other people. Sometimes individuals with a mental health diagnosis are reluctant to meet new people. Other individuals with severe physical disabilities might be significantly home-bound, and are not necessarily going to go "out" in the community a lot. This strategy is also useful if your family member lives in a small or large group home or works in a large special program where the staffing pattern may be quite challenging; it may be difficult for one staff member in these programs to be able to take one individual out to meet people outside the home or facility.

In all these types of situations, as well as others, you can look at: where can we find someone to invite *in*? Or, where can we find someone who would be interested in meeting and connecting with a new person? Someone who might be interested in getting to know them and possibly befriending them?

Here are some ideas others have used —

- Who do you know who would like this person?
- Social ministry programs (for example, the "Befrienders" program is in 40 states; most congregations have some type of social ministry program)
- Formal volunteer programs such as "Best Buddies" (i.e., college, corporate, high school programs)
- Presentations at high schools and colleges (for example, service clubs, service learning programs, etc.)
- Presentations to community organizations
- Faith communities
  - » Who can come over to visit? Who can give the person a ride to church? Who can have lunch afterward?

### ■ Former staff

- » There are many staff who were very fond of individuals they supported, who promised to come back and visit. Many agencies have re-established these relationships and there are consistent visits from former staff with a person receiving support, where the two friends have coffee or take a walk once a week. One agency started an "alumni club" of their former staff, who continue to stay involved with individuals who they supported.
- » Most families know the former in-home staff or former staff from their child's school or day programs. Some parents have invited these former staff to re-connect. Some of these friends have had the person with disabilities stay overnight with them, or had them come over to visit for crafts or cooking something together.

### ■ Former school or neighborhood friends

For many families, this has been a very useful approach. Connecting with old school friends, through email or phone calls, has resulted in many re-connections and visits.

### ■ Family members of staff

- » If your family has in-home staff, or your family member lives in a group home or apartment, or has staff support in another situation, sometimes there is another family member of a staff person who has a special connection with that individual. That person can be supported to have their own relationship with the individual with disabilities, independent of the staff.
- » One caveat: would the staff's family member continue the relationship even if the staff person stopped working with the individual? If they would not, it is not necessarily the type of relationship to pursue.

### ■ Extended family

- » Sometimes other family members such as cousins, nieces, and nephews can be encouraged to get to know your family member better. One mother asked her sister's family to go out for a holiday celebration with the young

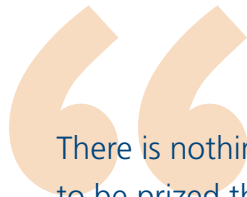






**Tip**

Look for relationships on a one-to-one basis. If your family member lives in a group situation, make sure you and other supporters are not looking for someone to come over to visit **EVERYONE** in that group. Just ask them to get to know your individual family member.



There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.

~ Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Italian theologian

## Strategy 5: Identify associations and clubs

There are associations, groups, and clubs all around us. The United States is a community group country! (And if you are reading this in another country, they are all around you, too!) There are groups not just based on interests, but all kinds of groups – cultural, political, social, men’s groups, women’s groups, religious groups, etc.

Groups and associations have been highly recommended as places for an individual with disabilities to join – since groups meet regularly, there are always activities around which people participate and get to know each other, and there are lots of opportunities to contribute and be contributed to. Most organizations also have some social element – whether it’s coffee beforehand

or afterwards, parties outside of meetings, etc.

There are two categories of clubs and associations, formal and informal.

### Formal groups

Formal groups can range from Kiwanis to Rotary to Wednesday night prayer groups. In one neighborhood in Chicago, Kathy Bartholomew-Lorimer, a community-building project coordinator, did an inventory of all the groups and clubs — just in that one neighborhood! The list below which she compiled can give you some ideas of where to look in your own area.

### An Associational Map

*Prepared by John McKnight, Northwestern University Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, Illinois 60208*

*Artistic organizations:* choral, theatrical, writing

*Business organizations:* Chamber of Commerce, neighborhood business associations, trade groups

*Charitable groups:* Red Cross, Cancer Society, United Way

*Church groups:* service, prayer, maintenance, stewardship, acolytes, men’s, women’s, youth, seniors

*Civic events:* July 4th, art fair, Halloween

*Collectors’ groups:* stamp collectors, flower dryers, antiques

*Community support groups:* “friends” of the library, nursing home, hospital

*Elderly groups:* Senior citizens

*Ethnic associations:* Sons of Norway, Black Heritage Club, Hibernians

*Health and fitness groups:* bicycling, jogging, exercise

*Interest groups:* poodle owners, old car owners

*Local government:* town, township, electoral units, fire department, emergency units

*Local media:* radio, newspaper, local access cable TV

*Men’s groups:* cultural, political, social, educational, vocational

*Self-help groups:* Alcoholics Anonymous, Epilepsy self-help, La Leche League

*Neighborhood or block clubs:* crime watch, beautification, Christmas decorations

*Outdoor groups:* garden clubs, Audubon Society, conservation clubs

*Political organizations:* Democrats, Republicans, caucuses

*School groups:* printing club, PEA, child care

*Service clubs:* Kiwanis, Rotary, American Association of University Women

*Social cause groups:* peace, rights, advocacy, service

*Sports leagues:* bowling, swimming, baseball, fishing, volleyball

*Study groups:* literary clubs, bible study groups

*Veterans’ groups:* American Legion, Amvets, Veterans of Foreign Wars, their auxiliaries

*Women’s groups:* cultural, political, social, educational, vocational

*Youth groups:* 4H, Future Farmers, Scouts, YMCA

At most organizations' meetings, there is almost always an agenda item about "recruiting new members." Most groups are open to an individual with disabilities joining their group and do welcome them. What community organization would enjoy having your family member as a group member?

It is good to just have one person with disabilities join -- since you don't want to overwhelm the group and you really want the individual with disabilities to associate with the other group members.

If you are looking for clubs, groups, and associations, there are often several ways to find them —

- Often a local chamber of commerce or a city office (and/or their websites) will have a list of groups and clubs in town, or the local newspaper will.
- You can look up different community service organizations on the web (Kiwanis, Rotary, Moose, Elk, Sertoma, Boy/Girl Scouts, etc.) and find local chapters.
- You can also find groups listed on the signs into town, on local Adopt-A-Highway signs, etc. Sometimes at hotels there will be signs in meeting rooms such as "Kiwanis meets here 6:00 a.m. Wednesdays."
- There are websites such as [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) which provide many opportunities. On this site you can list an interest and a geographic area and find people getting together around that interest in your area. Or, you can also list an interest and geographic area to start a group.
- In congregations and in community centers, there are often many groups and volunteering opportunities.
- If you ask around your social network, usually you can find people who have spouses, relatives, or friends who belong to such groups and organizations, or are in one themselves.

## Informal groups

There are groups of people who get together informally, such as:

- A quilting group at a local community center
- Gardening groups at the local community gardens
- Young men who get together to play basketball on the street corner court every Saturday morning
- A group who plays cards in the nursing home
- A scrap-booking group

- A group of women who walk at lunchtime or after work a couple of times a week
- People interested in adult coloring books who get together at local coffee shops
- People who love trivia who have contests at local bars/restaurants
- Karaoke contests at local bars/clubs
- Fan clubs that meet in local bars, clubs, and restaurants such as fans of Irish music, a favorite band, etc.

To find these groups, ask around. Look in your local community centers, houses of worship, and community playgrounds, as well as other places!

Examples of connecting in formal and informal groups:

- One dad whose daughter liked to play cribbage found a local group through [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) who met every Monday night at a local bar/restaurant. He and his daughter started going, and the dad discovered that many of the people in the group were guys he had gone to high school with. The group was very friendly and welcoming to everyone, including a young boy who came with his mother. Players ranged in age from 10 years old to more than 60. They did not play for competition but rather for the love of the game, and enjoyed introducing new people to cribbage.
- One young lady with an autism label enjoyed all things Japanese. On [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com), she found many groups to get involved with, including Japanese anime fan clubs and the Japanese Geek Society. In the large city in which she lived, there was practically something almost every night she could go to, with others who loved Japanese culture.
- A young lady who loved sports was connected with the fan clubs of the local university's women's hockey and basketball teams. The groups sat together at games and also had social get-togethers.
- One mother got together with other families in her church and started a Friendship Club that met once a month. It was set up so that young adult leaders in their congregation planned activities for young people both with and without disabilities to engage together in fun activities like talent shows, folk-dancing, picnics, etc.

Activity 13

# Where can your family member belong?

Associations, clubs, and groups (formal and informal)

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

“A friend may be waiting  
behind a stranger’s face.”

~ Maya Angelou (1928–2014),  
American author and poet, *Letter  
to My Daughter*

## Strategy 6: Identify community places that are hospitable and welcoming

Some pioneers in community-building used this method. They started with these questions:

- For an individual who receives support, where do they live?
- Around that person's neighborhood, what kind of community businesses or centers of activity are there?
- Explore them. What are the places where when you walk in, it's a very friendly, welcoming, hospitable place? Where are the places where the owners or people who work there are interested in people? Where do the locals congregate?
- Does the individual feel comfortable there?
- What kind of role could the individual play there? In a pet shop, can they visit regularly and pet the animals? In a sporting goods store, can they help break down boxes? Is there some regular way the person can contribute and be involved?

People who have used this approach were most successful with —

- Local places — not big national chains
- Small, family-owned businesses
- Neighborhood groups and clubs

They looked to build interdependence over time and always used the rule — *one person, one environment*.

### Involving All Neighbors

The City of Seattle had a project in their Department of Neighborhoods called “Involving All Neighbors” (Carlson, 2000). This project was focused on involving everyone, including people with disabilities, in all the city's neighborhood initiatives. The staff person who was most familiar with disabilities worked directly alongside the other staff in the Department of Neighborhoods, toward ALL Seattle communities being inclusive of everyone.

One of their offerings was a two-day workshop to assist people in getting more connected. The first day was about identifying people's interests. Then each participant was given a disposable camera. They went around their neighborhood the next couple of weeks, went into a number of different places, and identified the friendly places — the places they felt comfortable and where the people were welcoming. Then the attendees came back for a second workshop day, brought their photos, and made neighborhood maps of those places and what they would like to do at those friendly places. Strategies were identified for them to become “regulars,” to be involved and have roles in those places.

Others have used this approach, without the formal workshops and cameras — just doing the exploration of their own neighborhoods.



### Big tip for success: One person, one environment

If a place is welcoming toward one person with disabilities, don't then have more people with disabilities join. It is THAT person's place, that community organization is welcoming of ONE person. A big group of individuals with disabilities becomes overwhelming. Even two people with disabilities creates a “them-ness” — both for the individuals with disabilities and for the rest of the community group.

# Activity 14

## Places that would be welcoming

Places that would be welcoming (for instance, in the person's neighborhood, etc.)




"A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow."



~ William Shakespeare (1564–1616), English playwright

## Strategy 7: Where can your family member fit in just the way they are?

Your family member may fit in anywhere, and this approach may not be particularly applicable for them. However, this is a particularly useful approach for people who have what is typically called “challenging behavior.”

The basic approach here is that you don’t have to fix or change the person.

Rather, where can they fit in, just the way they are?

Almost any behavior a person with disabilities engages in, someone without disabilities also does — at least in some environments.

### Fun exercise: Where would they fit in?

Where do people who do not have a disability label do the following things? Where is it okay and even valued to do these things?

- Kicking
- Biting
- Hitting
- Screaming
- Swearing
- Spitting

This approach is to think about where people would fit in — just the way they are.

“I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light.”

~ Helen Keller (1880 –1968), American author and political activist

### Jim

Jim was a young man who had an autism label, who banged himself on the head, and who did it so frequently that he wore a helmet. He was also rather muscular from all his head-banging.

He was moving from a segregated school to an integrated high school, and his parents wanted him to be part of the school life as much as possible. They asked for kids to volunteer to help figure out how Jim could be part of that.

They also asked at their church. Eventually about 50 kids volunteered to help figure out how Jim could be part of the school life.

They got together at a church basement on a Sunday night. The group facilitator first asked the kids how they felt about Jim — some of what he did was scary. Once the kids got past their initial reactions or impressions, they could look more at the whole of Jim and what was “neat” about him.

They got to a point of figuring out: okay, Jim banged his head, was muscular, and wore a helmet. Where are other kids like that? The answer: Football!

The kids thought, “Oh, he could be part of the football team!” Well, no, but they asked the varsity football coach and worked out that Jim could practice every day with the varsity football team after school. He could even do the exercise with the team where everyone jumps up and down and bangs their helmets! Jim fit right in, everyone was doing it, and no one was trying to stop him!

He started to have a different social role in the school, because now all the varsity football players knew him. Some kids also took him white-water rafting. He wasn’t banging his head at all, because he was too busy hanging on!



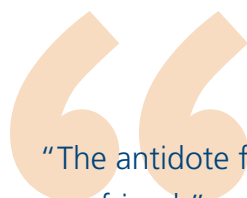
## Activity 15

### ***What kind of job?***

An agency in Maryland was committed to finding everyone a job, no matter what kind of behavior they had. One young man had a very high screechy voice quality, and was echolalic — so he repeated everything you said right after you, in a very high screechy voice. Most people could not stand to be around him for too long. The normal “human services” response would be to get him speech therapy, or to think he couldn’t get a job until he managed to reduce the echolalia. But no, this agency was committed they could find everyone a job.

What’s your guess about what they found for him?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



“The antidote for fifty enemies is one friend.”



~ Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC), Greek philosopher

What others have guessed —

- Working around deaf people
- Carnival barker
- Working with birds

Great guesses! What did they actually find? A job in a Chinese laundromat!

Most of the people who worked there spoke mainly Chinese. They didn't think his voice quality was irritating — they thought he only talked like that because he was from New York!



“Since there is nothing so well worth having as friends, never lose a chance to make them.”



~ Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540),  
Italian historian



## Selecting ideas to pursue

Out of all the ideas you brainstormed in the seven strategies section, which ideas are worth pursuing?

Here are four criteria to help select the best ideas to start with. You can balance them out to figure out which two or three places to start —

1. **How good an opportunity is it to get to know community members?** — This is probably the most important criterion!
2. **Your family member agrees/likes/is willing to try**
3. **Do-able** — The 7:00 a.m. Kiwanis meeting is not necessarily a great idea if your family member hates to get up early!
4. **Ease of welcome** — Do you or someone you know have a good connection there already? Do you know someone who is already involved, who can be the initial contact? If you don't know someone directly, do you know someone else to ask, who may know someone already connected?

Use Activity 17 worksheet to help you plan. What ideas are you going to pursue?



“Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend.”

~ Albert Camus (1913–1960), French Nobel Prize winning author

### Activity 17

## The three best ideas to pursue

Review all the ideas you generated in Strategies 1 through 7 (pp. 33-52). Pick your three best ideas.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

After you have selected your three best ideas, go on to Section 4!



When we first talked to each other I knew we would always be friends.

Our friendship has kept on growing

And I'll be here for you to the end.

You listen when I have a problem

And help dry the tears from my face.

You take away my sorrow

And put happiness in its place.

We can't forget the fun we've had

Laughing 'til our faces turn blue.

Talking of things only we find funny

People think we're insane —

If they only knew!

I guess this is my way of saying thanks

For catching me when I fall.

Thanks once again for being such a good friend

And being here with me through it all.



~ Rachel Ellis, American poet and fiction writer

**4.**

## **Introductions, asking, and inviting**

## Introductions, asking, and inviting

---

Probably the most important arena of activity is introducing people —

- What do you say to each person?
- What do you ask of the community member?
- What will you invite them to do?

Introducing can be a “make or break” skill.

### Activity 18

## ***What would a community member get from getting to know your family member?***

First, think about: What would a community member get from getting to know your family member?

---

---

---

---

---

What does your family member have to contribute? Why would a community member want to get to know them better?

---

---

---

# Becoming an asker or inviter

You probably met the people who are your friends at work, or school, or church, or a club, or through other friends. No matter where you met them, think back to when you wanted to get to know them better. What did you do? One of you ASKED or INVITED the other to do something! Whether that was having lunch or coffee, or talking on the phone, or going to a movie or fishing.

One of the most important elements in making community connections is being an ASKER and being an INVITER. That can be you, or your family member with disabilities, or someone who is supporting your efforts. There are many skills involved in becoming an “asker” or “inviter.”

## Activity 19

### ***What kind of person are you looking for?***

For your family member with disabilities who you are interested in connecting with more community members —

- What kind of community member are you looking for? What types of qualities are you looking for? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

- If it helps, you can also identify, who would NOT be the right person to ask? What types of qualities would be best to avoid? \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



## Activity 20

### **When you want to get to know someone better, what would you ask or invite them to do?**

Think back to the people who are your friends now, when you first started to get to know each other, what did you ask them, or what did they ask you, to do?

---

---

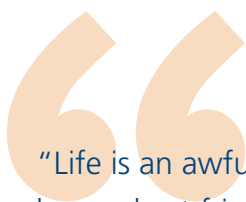
---

If you met someone now who you wanted to get to know better, what would you ask or invite them to do?

---

---

---



“Life is an awful, ugly place to not have a best friend.”



~ Sarah Dessen (1970–), American writer,  
*Someone Like You*

# Activity 21

## What increases the chances of getting a “yes”?

If someone asks you to do something you have never done before, what increases the likelihood of your saying “yes” to them? (For example, think about trying a new food, or bungee-jumping, or some other new endeavor.)

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

If someone asked you to meet someone new, what would increase the likelihood you would say “yes”? What would maximize getting to “Yes”? What is more likely to have you give a positive response?

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>



Ask other people about this and share your ideas with others! Learn what others see about what increases the chances of getting a “yes!”

What others have said —

- If I know what's in it for me
- If you come along
- If I know what's really involved
- If it's not a long-term commitment —  
if I just have the chance to try it first

“

There are good ships and wood ships,  
ships that sail the sea, but the best ships  
are friendships, may they always be!”

~ Irish proverb

## The Triangle of Fear

If we are going to change the dynamic of “system” and “community” separation (as portrayed in the “river” diagram on page 2, we often have to surmount the walls of separation between people with and without disabilities that have been built up over centuries. Part of what has built those walls is fear. Asking community members to get to know and/or befriend individuals with disabilities, asking individuals with disabilities to expand their social network, and expanding the role of family and staff as community connectors, all often mean doing something new, something that has not been done before. Trying out something new also often brings fears.

Here is a diagram (thanks to Beth Mount) that represents that all the parties involved may have fears.

### *Triangle of Fear*



# Activity 22

## Look for yourself

When connecting individuals with disabilities and community members, what are the fears of —

- The person with a disability?

---

---

- Their family?

---

---

- Community members?

---

---

- Staff or other supporters?

---

---

- You personally!?

---

---

What would help each party get past their fears?

---

---

What would help someone be more willing or more likely to say “yes”?

---

---

What would help someone go outside their current comfort zone?

---

---

# Activity 23

## ***What will you say about your family member to the community member?***

Here are some situations to think about what you will say about your family member —

- If the community member has not met your family member yet, what would you say about them?

---



---



---

- If you have not had a conversation with the community member beforehand about your family member, what would you say about them upon their first meeting?

---



---



---

- If your family member can speak for themselves, what would they say or what would you suggest or recommend they say?

---



---



---

- If it is someone who already knows your family member, what would you or your family member say?

---



---



---

- If a community member were going to befriend this person, what would they have to know? What would be good for them to know?

---



---



---

Real-life examples of things that are good for a community friend to know —

**Kay**

After spending time with you (playing tennis, having lunch, etc.) when it is getting to be time to leave, Kay will start swearing. That is Kay’s way of expressing wanting to keep spending time with you. It will help if you talk about the next time you are going to get together.

**Mabel**

Mabel will always ask you or even beg you to buy her things — you don’t have to. Just tell her no.

**John**

When John is in a place that is too loud, he gets very stressed. It will be a good time to leave and go to a quieter place.



**What if a community member thinks they are a volunteer?**

If the community member asks about “volunteering” — about being a volunteer for the person, what would you say? How would you explain that you are not looking for a formal volunteer relationship, but more for companionship and friendship?

Here are some interesting examples (not that these necessarily apply to your family member, but great to work through, if they do apply, or if you want to help others connect).

- What would you tell a community member about getting to know an individual who —
  - » Will seem like they are not interested in you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - » Does not use words to communicate? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - » Hits? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - » Takes off their clothes? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - » Screams? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

With some individuals with disabilities, a community member might need to be a very special or particularly understanding or empathetic person if they are going to befriend your family member. How would you let the community member know that? What would you say?

Here's a sample —

\_\_\_\_\_ *needs a very special person to be their friend.*

*That person will need to be* \_\_\_\_\_

*That person will need to understand* \_\_\_\_\_

*and that* \_\_\_\_\_





**5.**

## **Action plans and follow-up**

# Activity 24

## ***Your three best ideas for making requests***

Go back to your three best ideas on page 53. Think about what would you ask the community member for in each of these three situations.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 25

### ***Practice asking/inviting***

**Go to the three ideas you had on p. 53, Activity 17, and p. 68, Activity 24. What will be your invitation in each of these cases? For example, how would you invite a community member to go out for lunch?**

You can practice with someone, or have your family member practice their own invitation. Have another person pretend to be the community member who you want to invite. (For example, your family member could practice talking with you as if you are the community member they are inviting.) Practice asking them to lunch, or for something else. Talk (or have your family member talk) as if you are talking to that community member. Get feedback on how it sounds! The more you practice, the more effective you or your family member will get!

#### ***Tim***

Tim was a young man who lived with his parents and went to church with them. His mother asked who at church that he would like to get to know better. He immediately said the “guy with the vest and the long hair; I want to get to know that guy!” The parents knew this man’s name was Bert. The young man and his parents together figured out what would make sense to ask Bert to do. The parents suggested that their son ask Bert if he would like to have lunch with them after church one Sunday. They practiced what Tim would say to Bert. In addition, the parents figured that all of them having lunch together would also give the parents a chance to get to know Bert better.

“My friends are my estate.”

~ Emily Dickinson (1830–1886),  
American poet

# Activity 26

## Action plan

After you review all the ideas you generated in Strategies 1 through 7 (pp. 33-52), and picked your three best ideas on p. 53, Activity 17, and p. 68, Activity 24, make an action plan.

**What will be done?**

**Who will do it?**

**By when?**

<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

**How will you follow-up to stay in action?**

---

---

---

**By when and with whom?**

---

---

---

## Continuing to follow-up

Once you have tried out the ideas you developed in your Action Plan (Activity 26, p. 70) you will probably need to keep working at this. Relationships take time to develop. Not every idea you have will probably work out.

Review the ideas you tried —

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What did you learn?

For example, what did you see about extending invitations? Is there a better way to do it next time?

Did you identify the right person to ask? Who else should be asked?

If that particular place didn't work out, where else can you try?

Don't get discouraged! Who else, where else can you try?

Who would be a better person to do the asking?

Go back to your lists of ideas on pp. 33–53 and see what might be a better approach next time.

### After the initial connection

If something is going well, don't assume it will always continue to be so.

Find out what is working or not working for your family member.

Find out what is working or not working for the community member or group.

How much support is still needed?

How can the relationship deepen and expand?

- For example, if your family member has joined a club or group, is there a particular individual who can be invited to spend more time with them individually?
- Example: A young man who joined the Jaycees organization loved to run. Another group member also loved to run, and the two became regular weekly running partners.

If personnel change (for example, the president of the Elks), what do new people need to know?

## Other tips on introducing, asking, inviting, and being in action

### Seize the chance

Start putting on the “community” glasses. What we see in the world is determined by what kind of glasses we have on. When you start looking for community opportunities, you start to see people differently. You start to see places you’ve passed by a million times, differently.

Seize the opportunities that present themselves.

Sometimes when an individual with disabilities is walking around in the community, they will say hi to someone they know, or someone they know says hi to them. Do they know each other’s names? Do you know how they know each other?

Sometimes the community member will say something like, “We should get together sometime.” Okay, great — get their phone number and email (or make sure your family member does)! Pursue more information: What makes sense to do together? When does it make sense to get together? How will they contact each other?

### “Case the joint”

It would be a bit too hopeful (or crazy?) to think you could go someplace for the first time, see a community member, and ask them to become someone’s friend.

- With a group or place —
  - » Sometimes it’s important to first go to a community place or group and get to know the situation.
  - » Check out the people there. Is this a fitting group for your family member?
  - » As appropriate, bring your family member. See how they like it. How do they respond?
- With one community member —
  - » If you are connecting someone with just one community member, get to know that community member a bit first, if you don’t know them already. Schmooze.
  - » What would make the most sense to ask of the community member, or invite them to do? Chat, get to know them, THEN see what makes sense to ask of them or invite them to do, as a first step.

### Be intentional

Sometimes it takes being really intentional. Here is an example —

#### *Maribeth*

Maribeth had been pursuing these ideas for a while, looking for community members to connect with a person with disabilities she supported. One day she expressed how she just got really determined. Georganne was the person she supported and was taking to church. Maribeth said, “I was on a mission that day.”

She was committed that day to find someone else in church to befriend Georganne. Maribeth DID find someone — another woman named Carol who had often said hello to Georganne. Maribeth asked Carol if she would like to come over and visit Georganne and get to know her better. Carol said “yes” and came over regularly to visit.

### Be courageous

One mother who found a friend for her family member expressed it this way: “I got up my nerve.”

Another mother expressed discovering the power and necessity of invitation and the courage it takes. She had extended several invitations and was excited about the positive replies she had received: “I ASKED! I went out of my comfort zone ...”

What would it take for YOU to “get up your nerve” or go outside your “comfort zone”? Why would you do that?

### Accompany your family member

There are some individuals with disabilities who can be completely independent in their relationships with community members. Sometimes, however, although we think some individuals can be independent, they might need some particular support in learning to be a friend. Here are some areas in which they might need support —

- **Reciprocity** — Are they keeping up their “end” of the relationship: are they sending cards, paying for their own lunch or occasionally buying their friend’s

lunch, or other such forms of reciprocity? What makes sense?

- **Not being taken advantage of or mistreated** — Some individuals do need support when the community members who have “befriended” them try to take advantage of them or mistreat them in some way. It’s useful to talk about what makes a good friend and what does not, with your family member. It’s okay to accompany them to get to know the community member yourself.
- **“Appropriate” behaviors** — Some individuals call too frequently or make too many requests. All types of issues may arise. How are both the individual and the community member being supported? How are you finding out if it’s working for the community member?

While many individuals can be independent in their community relationships, there are some individuals who may ALWAYS need support if they are going to be with a community member.

In these situations, the community member can be supported to understand the individual, to get to know them better as a person, to see what they contribute.

In some of these cases, the community member and the individual may need some or a great deal of support initially. It will be important for supporters to provide what each party needs initially and then to gradually back off. However, it is a delicate balance. Sometimes parents or staff think it is okay to back off without being sensitive to what information or support the community member continues to need.

## What about confidentiality?

If you have staff support or your family member lives or works in a situation with staff, a question that agency staff sometimes ask when dealing with introducing people with disabilities to community members is, “What about confidentiality?” or “What about data privacy?”

In fact, some agency staff’s initial reaction is “I can’t do this – because of confidentiality.” Or “I can’t do this, because of HIPAA” referring to the U.S. federal law that addresses data privacy. (Note: Many countries have similar requirements.)

Here’s the response!

“Confidentiality” does not mean you can’t talk about people with disabilities. It means you cannot talk about people without permission.

In undertaking this work of community connecting,

if this is an issue for staff, you do want to discuss this with them and/or with the supervisors at the agency supporting your family member. If you as a family member are the guardian, you can let staff know what is okay to talk about. If the person with disabilities can speak for themselves, they should discuss how they want to be introduced or what they want to say about themselves. If there is an interdisciplinary team, including a case manager or support coordinator, the whole team can agree on the issue of introductions.

Is there anything the guardian does NOT want said about the person?

Is there anything the person does not want to be said about themselves?

The guardian and/or team can assist in developing how to introduce the person, including what to say about them (as discussed above in the section on “What Will You Say About Your Family Member?” on p. 63, Activity 23).

While formal services and agencies often devote a tremendous amount of attention on following HIPAA rules regarding confidentiality, there are other government rules just as or even more important, that also need attention. Virtually all human services in the U.S. are funded by public funds such as Medicaid (Medical Assistance). Medicaid and other state and federal rules governing services for people with disabilities all require —

- Promoting natural supports
- Community integration
- Community participation

When THOSE rules are followed — of promoting “community integration” — that means we MUST talk to community members! Finding ways to promote rather than hinder introductions is important.

If this is an issue with staff, the provider agency, or with the interdisciplinary team, here are some examples of how some agencies have addressed this issue of ensuring that people are introduced to others, with the person’s and their guardian’s permission:

- At annual meetings, the release of information form names specific community members the person has befriended or will be introduced to
- On the list of names on the release of information forms regarding who has permission to have information about the person, there is also an item for “other community friends”
- Asking the guardian and/or the interdisciplinary



team for verbal permission to talk about the person and to introduce them in a specific community situation or to a community member

- Addressing the issue in the “Risk Management Plan” or other type of agency document that addresses the person’s vulnerabilities

## What about our volunteer rules?

### ***Does the community member need a background check?***

It is very important to distinguish between a “volunteer” and a “friend.”

A volunteer is someone with a formal agreement, usually with a start and ending time — such as a one-year commitment. In many human services agencies, the volunteer fulfills functions the staff would have to do. Usually for volunteers there are specific training requirements, background checks, and other formal paperwork requirements.

There’s nothing wrong with volunteers — they are important!

A friend is very different than a volunteer. A friend is someone who fulfills companionship and friendship roles. They do not have a formal starting and ending time to their commitment. They do not need background checks or a formal training program.

If you are working with a staff person or agency, you can be aware of the fact that some agencies try to turn “friends” into “volunteers.” It is important to maintain the separation between these two types of relationships.

While a “friend” does not have to go through a formal training program, it is important to provide them the information and support they need about the specific individual they are getting to know and/or befriending, your family member.

For some individuals who receive formal agency support, the agency may also need the guardian’s permission for a community friend or other family member to take the individual out, independent of staff.



“Some people go to priests, others to poetry —  
I to my friends.”

~ Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), British author

# 6.

## Factors for success

This section has some important skills and ideas for being successful in building community relationships.

# Skills for community connectors to have or develop

Being a great community connector or “bridge-builder” involves many skills. Like any new job or role we undertake, sometimes we have natural skills and sometimes there are many new skills to develop. Some people are “naturals” and some people have to learn a great deal. Like many areas regarding supports for people with disabilities, in which we need to learn many new things, usually anyone who is committed to community connections has to learn new skills.

Here are some of the skills involved —

## See the person as their gifts and what they have to contribute

The disability system is founded on the identification of what is “wrong” with people, what they need to improve or change. Individuals are only in the services system because their “disability” has been measured or identified. Despite that fact, each individual is still a whole person who also has gifts to offer. It takes a specific skill to see the individual as what they have to offer, what they have to contribute – for example, a great big smile, having your thinking challenged, a big heart, the opportunity to learn patience, making you laugh, love and joy. The story of Barry above on page 27 also reflects how even “screaming” can be seen as a gift!

## Examples from families

- One mother reported, “I have friends who say, ‘Nice to meet you; nice to have a new friend. When are you guys coming again?’”
- One son wanted to get to know friends of his father more. The dad asked his friends and was surprised by the positive responses he received; one of his friends said they were “humbled and honored” that the dad had asked him to be supportive of his son.
- One potential friend, when asked, said, “I would love to spend time with her.”

## Examples from staff

### Claus

Claus used a wheelchair and had very few spoken words. The words he did have were hard to understand. His staff felt Claus had not really had many chances in his life to explore his interests, so they decided to explore and try out some things. Two staff really liked to play pool, so they took him to their favorite bar.

They learned many things about Claus that night. One thing they learned is that even though his language is very hard to understand, he could get “whiskey coke” across to the bartender very well! They also learned that he got everyone in the whole place involved in their pool game that night, especially a table of three women who were right next to them.

When they left that night, the bartender said to the two women who had brought him, “When are you bringing him back? Everyone who was here tonight had a better time, because he was here.”

### Missy

Missy lives in a small town in southern Minnesota. She uses a wheelchair and uses only a few phrases when she speaks. When her agency started working on friendships with community members, there were staff who said, “How can Missy be anyone’s friend? She doesn’t really talk. She doesn’t really interact. How can she be anyone’s friend?” But there were others who looked at what Missy had to offer. They had on a different set of glasses. They saw Missy’s beautiful smile, and that she cried very easily – she was rather emotional. They saw that she had a lot of love to offer. They just needed to find someone to receive all the love that Missy had to offer.

Missy also liked children. The idea came up to have her be a Big Sister in the Big Sister, Little Sister program in town. Her supporters helped Missy apply to be a Big Sister. The community agency PRO (“People Reaching Out”) that ran the program went through something about deciding whether they were going to accept Missy’s application or not. They did decide to accept it.

PRO was having an after-school event one day, with a lot of little girls there.

A staff person took Missy there, wanting to see if any of the girls particularly responded to her. When they got there, Missy was tired and she started to cry. Two girls immediately came over to her and told her, “That’s okay.” They made vase planters on Missy’s wheelchair tray and played Yahtzee with her. The PRO staff matched Missy up with one of these girls, Jenny.

Jenny and Missy would go swimming about once a week. Jenny invited Missy to her Girl Scout Bridge Crossing (a ceremony going from one part of Girl Scouts to another), and she introduced Missy to all her family and friends. They exchanged Christmas gifts and birthday gifts.

On Jenny’s ninth birthday, they went to Burger King for her birthday. When they came into the Burger King, Jenny pushed Missy’s wheelchair next to a table of boys. The boys got up and left. Jenny looked right at Missy and said, “It’s their loss.”

After one year of knowing each other, Jenny and Missy were having lunch one day with Missy’s main staff person Deb. Jenny asked Deb if Missy was handicapped.

Deb was surprised, because Missy and Jenny had known each other for a year at this point.

Deb asked Jenny why she was asking. Jenny said, “Because my friends are telling me that she is handicapped, and I need to know.” So then Deb explained what Missy can’t do, like walk, and that is her handicap.

When Missy’s two-year agreement as a Big Sister was up, Jenny’s mother asked that their relationship continue.

When Jenny was 14 years old, she and Missy presented at a conference about their friendship. In her presentation, Jenny said that being friends with Missy is one of the most important things that has ever happened to her in her life, and one of the best things that has ever happened to her. She said now all her friends want to have a friend who is handicapped. Someone in the audience asked Jenny for her advice on helping more people be friends. Jenny replied, “All you have to do is tell people to reach out; that’s all they have to do.”

They stayed connected over many years. In her late twenties when Jenny was getting married, it was important to her to have Missy be part of her wedding. With support, Missy managed the guest sign-in book.

## Have creative ideas and see opportunities rather than limits

All of us get “set in our ways” of what we see as “the truth” or “what’s so.” We can see our communities and towns or our family members or our jobs or our agencies as their limitations, without realizing that is a limiting perspective! What we “see” is based on what set of “glasses” we have on.

Once you put on the “community” glasses, you can go down the same street you have gone down thousands of times – and suddenly see a new place where your family member could have a job or you can suddenly see a club they could join. You might suddenly realize a long-time friend of yours could also be a great friend for your family member.

## Look for “people” rather than “activities”

When we talk about participating in the “community,” the response of most people is to think about “activities.” Individuals who receive services have “outings” or “community goals” or “activities” — usually connected to a place, like a restaurant or shopping.

- One of the keys to being successful as a community connector is to start asking the question, “But who are they going to get to know there?” It takes looking for PEOPLE rather than ACTIVITIES.
- Review the exercise on pp. 31–32, Activity 7, about Mary and her interest in music.

## Seek out resources

- Once you have an idea, do you know where to find that resource?
- Do you know how to find a congregation that would include someone who is deaf?
- Do you know how to find a walking club?
- Where would you look?
- Who would you ask?

Often you might think it is only up to you, as an individual. But finding resources takes networking – everyone around us has contacts. Who do you know, who knows . . . ?

The World Wide Web is rich with information, and usually the information on a website is a good place to start. However, it usually takes some legwork to track down more information. For example, you can find web information on the congregations that have services for people with hearing impairments, but which

will be the right one? You can find a local chapter of a service organization such as the Elks listed, but who is the right person to contact? What times are their meetings? It almost always involves picking up the phone, emailing, and going to visit places and people directly.

## Find the “right” person

At any group or organization, and at any place of employment, how will you find the “right” person? What would you look for? Who would you seek out?

Not everyone in a community organization, for instance, will necessarily be friendly to an individual. Who are the formal or informal “leaders” – who can assist the person get acclimated to everyone, who can be the bridge-builder themselves?

For your family member, what qualities would you look for in a community member who would get to know them? (See p. 57, Activity 19)

Another useful resource about finding the right person in a community group is a book called *Transition to Retirement* (Stancliffe, Wilson, Gambin, Bigby, & Balandin, 2013). While written for those helping older individuals connect, the advice from this Australian project about finding mentors within community groups and organizations is excellent for anyone.

## Become an asker or an inviter

Becoming an asker or an inviter takes a few things —

- Identifying the right person to ask
- Courage
- Going beyond one’s comfort zone
- Assisting others to go beyond their comfort zone

Becoming connected often means trying something new — that does take stepping beyond our current comfort zone, and empowering others to step beyond theirs!

## Be sensitive to both parties

Sometimes an individual with disabilities is taken to a community group, or a community member is willing to come over to visit, and the supporters just go along expecting or thinking that everything is fine. Or someone comes over to visit once, but then does not come again. There is a whole arena of skills involved in talking to community members about their experiences in getting to know someone. How are they feeling about it? What are the breakdowns? What are they uncomfortable about?

The individual with disabilities may also be uncomfortable or experience breakdowns. Especially when an individual has limited verbal communication, it takes sensitivity to appreciate their experiences.

How can both people, both ends of the relationship, be supported to get to know each other?

Sometimes the supporter “backs off” too soon for the community member, or for the individual with disabilities. Even if you or another support person has “backed off,” it is good to keep checking in periodically to see how things are going.

## Be persistent

Oftentimes a community connector will call an organization, a house of worship, or another community entity and if no one calls back, they will stop.

In contrast, one community builder tracked the actual number of phone calls she made to try to find a more personal connection at a church that a person with disabilities attended. Just to connect this one person to a church friend took 20 calls.

To connect one person who had a passion for fire engines and firemen, it took his supporters trying four different fire stations until they found the “right” one.

Community-building takes persistence!

## Develop a “community” sense, different than human services

We are very well-trained to focus on the person with disabilities. When in the community, the family member or staff person is usually focused on the person being supported.

But — what are the community members thinking? How are they seeing things?

Sometimes we think community members are unwelcoming or unfriendly, but we don’t really know what they are thinking or how they are reacting. We have to ask!

If your family member lives with you, and you go to different places with them, they can probably be seen as an individual for themselves. However, if your family member lives, works, or recreates in a group situation with others with disabilities, they may be experiencing a “group” phenomenon. Activity 27 on p. 84 is an exercise about understanding what happens for community members if your family member goes to community places in small or large groups with others with a disability label.

## Ongoing support to sustain and deepen a relationship after the initial connection

If we look at our own relationships, we know they go up and down over time. “Stuff happens.” As in some of our relationships, it might be that an excellent connection has been made for your family member, but then it “falls apart.” Energy, attention, and effort is often needed to sustain and deepen a relationship.

### ■ Manage how much effort will be needed to sustain the relationship or connection

- » For example, does the individual with disabilities have a ride to the association meeting this week? Who is scheduling the next get-together? When something is cancelled because of weather or someone being sick, who is scheduling the next time?

### ■ Look for ways to deepen the relationship-

Perhaps your family member is volunteering once a week at a preschool or a nursing home. How can the relationship with a particular person be deepened? Can they visit with just one person?

- » Within a group or club, is a particular member more interested? Can they have lunch or come over for dinner?

### ■ Support reciprocity

- » There are physical expressions of reciprocity, such as birthday cards, bringing a dish for potluck, etc.
- » But there are also ways to discuss and deepen the understanding of what your family member gives to the relationship. Especially if they are someone who does not use words to communicate, or is difficult to get to know, it is important to discuss what the community member is getting from the relationship. How are they understanding the individual as a person? What gifts do they receive from knowing them?

### ■ Remember that change in support will affect the effort

- » If you or someone else has been key in sustaining a relationship, how will the relationship be sustained without you or that

other person? What information should be passed on?

- » This is especially applicable if the agency that supports your family member experiences a high degree of staff turnover. Change in personnel at the community entity, or with anyone else who has been supporting the relationship, is also important to recognize.

### ■ Remember that not every connection will continue to work out. Where else/who else can we try?

- » Sometimes it's important to recognize that it is time to move on. While every good effort may have been made to have something work, it just isn't the right match. Then brainstorm: Who else/where else can we try?

“I get by with a little help from my friends.”

~ John Lennon (1940–1980),  
British musician

## Direct approaches to community

Does your community share your vision for an inclusive community? What would happen if key community leaders and/or community entities themselves were approached? Can there be more community-wide efforts established?

You may have access to, or know others who have access to, groups or entities in the larger community. You may be a community or political activist, or personally know others who are. You may want to or have an interest in sharing these ideas with others in the larger community.

Some communities have Community Member Forums. There is an article listed in the resource section at the end of this manual about these forums (Amado & Victorian-Blaney, 2000). There are many other ways to bring people together and enlist their support and commitment to their community being inclusive of and valuing all people. Several states have had Community Engagement events, which have been described by Erik Carter and his colleagues (see the Carter and Swedeen references in the Resources section).

Here are some ideas —

- Is there already some initiative going on in your town, congregation, business, etc.?
  - » For example, is there a “diversity initiative” in your town or workplace, or a “social ministry” group in your congregation, with whom you can connect?
- Who are the town members who “know everybody” and “know what’s going on”? How can you involve them in your efforts?
- Who can you join with to have Community Member Forums or Community Engagement events? To make community-wide invitations to join? (See Amado and Victorian-Blaney, 2000, and the Carter and Swedeen resources in the Resources section).
- One approach is to have the citizens at a Community Member Forum meet particular individuals with disabilities and hear about their interests. What opportunities do the citizens know about for the individual to pursue their interests and connect with others?
- Ask the community members you know to ask others who they know to get involved. Who would be good candidates for getting involved in

these efforts? Ask them who they know who has a particular interest (e.g., polka music, tractors, gardening, etc.) that you know can be shared with a person with a disability label who has the same interest.

- What associations/clubs (based on people’s interests) do the community members know about? What clubs do they belong to? Who can they approach?
- Get a list of associations and clubs in town from such groups as the Chamber of Commerce, etc. Sometimes these lists are on the town’s website.
- Approach associations about having an individual join.
- Ask ministers and key congregation people to initiate efforts within faith communities. Is there a ministerial or other religious association you can present to?
- Sometimes when community members are invited to participate, they say something like, “Oh, I don’t have time to come to a meeting, but let me know what I can do.” Great! Ask them to get involved on a one-to-one basis with someone with whom they share interests.

“Life is nothing without friendship.”

~ Cicero (106 BC–43 BC), Roman philosopher

**7.**

**Working with agency  
staff on supporting  
community  
relationships**



## Support from agency managers and supervisors

If you as a parent or other family member have in-home staff, if your family member lives independently or somewhere else where they have staff support, if they have an employment or day program with staff, or in any other situation where there is staff support, there are many avenues you can pursue to have support in community-building from the staff or agency. This section is about obtaining such support.

Managers and supervisors are critical to successful community-building. Here are some tips for eliciting support from and to provide agency supervisors and managers. There is also another manual written specifically to help agency staff and that has additional information ([www.rtc.umn.edu/friends](http://www.rtc.umn.edu/friends)). That manual is free and down-loadable.

### Do it yourself

It is hard to ask staff to learn to talk to community members without having engaged in it yourself. One thing you can do is explore relationships with community members yourself, for your family member. What do you see for yourself? What new skills are required of you? What learning is there to share with staff?

### Make it a priority — do “different” not “more”

Everyone’s “to-do” list is too long. Staff and agencies (and families!) can’t add “helping people have friends” as one more item on a to-do list that is already too long.

Given that agency schedules and structures are already set up, doing community connecting work often means making it a priority. After all, relationships are a priority for all human beings. Prioritizing community building often means the agency must shift around some other staff responsibilities, tasks, or schedules.

Probably most individuals with disabilities who are being supported have community “activities” they are already doing. So sometimes making relationship-building a priority does not mean doing “more” but doing something “different.” With the community activity time already scheduled, how can that be rearranged so that it can be an activity where the individual is more likely to connect to community members? Instead of going to a concert, can they connect with

a community choir? If people are already going to the library, how can relationships with other community members there be promoted? Remember – switch the focus from “activities” to “who are they going to get to know there?” And, how can relationships be encouraged with the people who are there, in the community activities?

### Schedule staff time

To make these efforts a priority, schedule staff time to undertake them.

For example, when her daughter moved into a group home, one mother made sure that staff time was allocated to take her daughter to a once-a-month Friendship Club at the church which the daughter had attended her whole life.

### Focus on one person at a time

A key factor in community success is applying the rule of “one person, one environment.” That is, if a club or place is welcoming of one individual, don’t then bring everyone else there.

See p. 84, Activity 27, for an exercise to help understand the importance of connecting one person at a time, and understanding the impact on individuals who receive services and on community members when people are only seen in groups as “one of them.”

Often when several individuals are supported, such as in a group home or day program, there needs to be some changes with the schedule to be able to structure one staff member taking one individual somewhere.

How can staff time be scheduled to support one staff member taking one person to a certain place?

How can an individualized effort be supported for your family member?

Some agencies have structured their community building efforts by having each staff member pick ONE person with disabilities to focus on. Or, a unit or household picked just one individual to start with. Then staff time was organized to make sure effort was spent on researching opportunities, making phone calls, surfing the web for information, and exploring different opportunities. The staff schedule was rearranged to take

an individual to different places to see if one of those places was a good fit.

Here are some ways that agencies have structured this one-to-one time. You can share these ideas and strategies with the agency supporting your family member.

- Each staff member focuses on connecting one individual who receives support. All the staff together restructure the schedule so that each staff person has a given number of hours in a week or month to do the legwork involved in exploring connections for their chosen individual.
- The program coordinator does the connecting work and establishes the community relationship or connection which he/she then turns over to the direct support staff.
- The program coordinator/director comes in to do the work a direct support staff member would do, freeing up connecting time for direct support staff. (This also provides the program coordinator a chance to see what is really happening on a day-to-day basis in the program.)
- Accountabilities of all agency staff are rearranged to free up one staff member as a community connector. That connector establishes relationships and connections (for example, pursuing ideas for 5-10 different individuals at a time) and then turns the connections over to other staff.
- The agency gets additional funding or a grant for a community connector position. A grant is usually for a limited time, but new structures within the program or agency can be established in that time-frame, which the agency can then continue when the grant ends.

## Activity 27

### ***What do community members think?***

Imagine your family member lives in a group home with four residents. One of the residents, Amy, is interested in the library, and there is only one staff member working on a given day. The staff decides to take everyone to the library.

**When this group of four residents and the staff walk into the library, what does the librarian think? What do the other patrons think? How do they respond?**

---

---

---

**Suppose Amy would like to get to know the librarian better. How does the librarian respond to this group of four?**

---

---

---

**At the same time, what's happening with the other three residents, especially if they are not interested in the library? What do they think? How do they respond?**

---

---

---



“Community is the sense that one is part of a readily-available, mutually-supportive, network of relationships.”



~ John O'Brien, one of the founders of Person-Centered Planning

What others have said —

- For the community members, they are afraid, or back off.
  - » It's too much!
  - » The librarian might think you want her to befriend the whole group.
  - » She can't "see" Amy — only the whole group.
- For the group of four residents, there's safety in numbers.
  - » The person not interested in the library will start acting up.
  - » "Why does Amy get all the attention from the librarian? I want attention, too."

It doesn't work — for either the community members OR any of the individuals with disabilities!

Note: This same phenomenon can also happen with only three residents — or even just two!

If your family member gets support in any type of group situation (living, working, recreating, etc.), you can address this issue with the staff. It takes effort to figure out how to just have one-to-one time — which will work better for your family member AND for the community members to get to know them as their own person!



### Tip

Look for relationships on a one-to-one basis. It just works better for your family member and for the community members.

## Who can be invited in?

Scheduling one-to-one time at community locations can be challenging. Sometimes when we think of “community,” we only think of going OUT – as if “community” is a place, rather than people. Whether this is challenging or not, another good avenue to explore in expanding relationships is finding community members who can come over to visit. Then it’s a matter of inviting people IN.

One mother whose daughter lived in a group home provided the staff a list of the daughter’s former friends from school. She had the staff plan a monthly tea in which her daughter invited one friend a month over for tea.

This is also a great approach if your family member has physical or health issues that make it difficult to leave home.

## Goals and reports

What kind of annual plan or program goals does the individual have? Many types of formal goals about community life are “activity” goals – like going shopping once a week. Or they are “skill” goals – like learning to make a purchase or order in a restaurant.

Are there any “relationship” goals for the individual? For example —

- “Jesse will have the opportunity to try out three different community organizations to see which he would like to join.”
- “Jesse will have a new friend at the Y.”

Having goals focused more on relationships is one way for programs to switch the focus from “activities” to “people.” In some organizations, having a specific annual plan or program goal means staff will spend effort on it.

Can current “activity” goals be more focused on relationships? The mother who had the staff plan a monthly tea for her daughter with her old friends from school, made sure this was in her daughter’s plan.

Besides the annual planning meetings, you can determine what is happening by looking at what types of information are being captured in the agency reports. Agencies keep track of information in program books, staff schedules, progress notes, leisure notes, community activity logs, etc. Different agencies have found different ways to keep plans in existence. In one home, the specific ideas and activities were posted on the

bulletin board, and the supervisor checked on progress every week. In another home, it was written into the monthly staff schedule.

You can see if you can check yourself, in your family member’s records, or ask the supervisor to check in those types of logs and let you know what is really happening. You can find out how often the supervisor reviews what is happening. Do the planned activities and get-togethers actually happen? Do staff find out what happens with the community members? The plans and programs for your family member should be scheduled, as well as any feedback or information on “what happened.” Identify what is really happening and what seems most effective for ensuring that plans materialize.

You can discuss both successes and breakdowns with individual staff members or at meetings. Do staff remember what they committed to do? Are they reluctant? If there’s too much else to do (“there’s a lot going on”), what can everyone figure out together about how to make these connecting priorities work, or make them more of a priority?

## Overall agency structure

Does the agency build structures for successful community-connecting work for your family member and others they support? For example, staff need to get together to share ideas and resources, and to brainstorm. You can help with this when you visit the program or attend a meeting.

If you have in-home staff, or if a single staff member supports your family member during the day or at work, you can also apply some of these ideas directly.

Some examples from agencies successful in community-building include —

- **Expectations of staff/job descriptions**

The agencies that have experienced some of the biggest successes in building relationships with community members are ones in which it has been defined as an expectation of staff that they will be community connectors. These agencies have often incorporated this expectation into staff job descriptions. Some agencies have also changed their interview process, and what types of people they hire.

As a family member, you can encourage support agencies to expand their scope, starting with your expectations of them for your family member!

### ■ A “learning” atmosphere

A staff member cannot work on community-building in isolation. Agencies’ conversations, priorities, and activities can change toward more community relationships and friendships within any particular program.

A “Learning Community” is a group that acknowledges it is learning together.

Members don’t already know how to do things. They are exploring, trying things out, seeing what works. There might be failures, but what was learned from those failures? It is an atmosphere in which it is okay to try things out. The learning community goes on over time.

Are staff meetings a place where people share what they are learning and experiencing, including both successes and barriers? When things are not working out, are staff contributing to each other? Are people supported through ups and downs, brainstorming, and expanding and growing in their learning and skills?

Are even small steps acknowledged? Everyone is learning new skills, and usually in situations that are new or where they might be uncomfortable. Positive acknowledgement goes a long way.

Are successes shared throughout the whole agency, such as photos, stories, videos? Is everyone being helped to learn and expand?

### ■ Opportunities to practice

Do the staff have opportunities to practice? For example —

- » Practice talking to community members.
- » Practice introducing a person.
- » Practice asking or inviting a specific community member or asking/inviting at a specific community place.
- » Are the staff encouraging each other?

### ■ Are the selected places/activities/people fun for the staff member also?

Sometimes a place or activity is not a good fit for the staff member who is taking the individual there. Is there another place or activity they can take your family member? Or, is there a different staff person who can support them?

For example, a resident in one group home liked to swim. However, many of the staff were immigrants who came from a culture where they had never learned to swim. The supervisor needed to

identify which staff people did know how to swim and could take the person, and had to schedule that staff person for that swim time, instead of just whoever was “on” the schedule.

### ■ Support flexibility and the spirit of community

Some staff and agencies have turned community building work into a “friendship program.” They ask community members to join a project or program. However, we want to support inclusive communities and relationships as the natural and normal way of life, not as special or unique “programs.”

Community operates in different ways and on different schedules than human services agencies. For an association or group meeting, for instance, sometimes meeting locations are changed at the last minute or a meeting is cancelled, but often this information is sent out by email. Not all individuals with disabilities have their own email account! In a group home, sometimes not all staff have access to the home’s email. One of the biggest challenges reported by community organizations and groups about having an individual with disabilities be a member is simply communication. Many different staff members, and not knowing who to connect with in a group home at a given time, have presented challenges for some community organizations who want to include someone as a member. You can make sure the necessary information and support is being provided for your family member’s connections.

# Employment/day program roles for supporting social relationships

---

Agencies that provide employment and/or day program support can also support relationships with community members. There are three avenues that some such agencies have pursued —

## 1. Work — supported or competitive employment

When the individual with disabilities has a job, is anything needed to support relationships with co-workers?

Are there reciprocity issues – for example, potluck lunches? Should the individual bring a dish to that?

Is the person with disabilities engaged in the “social times” at work like coffee breaks and lunchtime?

Are there social events other workers go to outside of work hours, that the individual can be involved in (e.g., happy hours, picnics, etc.)?

How can social relationships be deepened with co-workers?

## 2. Day program staff — link to all of community life

Some programs responsible for people’s “day program” hours have established flexible schedules for their staff to support the person in evening and weekend hours as well. For example, if an individual is interested in gardening, and there is a gardening group which meets in the evening, the day program staff will take the individual there. Through this avenue of establishing community social networks, they have developed jobs for people.

## 3. Day-time programs

Some day programs have made specific commitments to find community places and people to connect the individuals they support. They structure their staff time for these connecting opportunities. For example, there are many community groups and organizations that meet during the day.

A day program in Columbus, Ohio supported many individuals with severe levels of impairment about whom it was felt they were not good candidates for a paid job. However, the agency wanted the individuals they supported to have a meaningful role in community life. At the same time, they only supported people during day-time hours. The staff thought: most people in town worked during the day. So, if the people they supported were not going to have jobs, where could they meet community members during the day?

The staff brought some creative thinking to it. They thought, “well, not everyone in our community works during the day. What do the people do during the day, who don’t work during those hours?” The staff researched that. They found six categories of activity that community members who did not work during the day, engaged in during day-time hours. They are on the next page.

The staff started working one by one to support individuals to find a meaningful role in these types of settings.

## What do people who don't work do during the day? Where can people connect during the day?

### Personal business

- Grocery stores
- Drug stores
- Shopping malls
- Nursery stores
- Department stores
- Specialty stores
- Hardware stores
- Outdoor markets
- Yard sales
- Craft supply stores
- Laundromats
- Gas stations
- Post office
- Banks
- Beauty/barber shops

### Leisure/recreation

- Fast food restaurants
- Cafeterias
- Restaurants
- Dairy and yogurt bars
- City, county, and state parks
- Nature trails
- Cinemas and theaters
- Ballet, symphony, and pop/rock concerts
- Fairs and seasonal events
- Tours and trips (boat, train, bus)
- Amusement parks
- Sporting events and games
- Museums and conservatories
- Zoos and farms
- Miniature golf
- Video arcade
- Bowling

### Hobbies

- Art appreciation
- Fishing
- Crafts
- Photography/ scrapbooks
- Nature walks
- Collecting (antiques, baseball cards, etc.)
- Pets (pet stores, shelters)

### Club/organization activities

- Senior citizens
- Sororities
- Fraternities
- Church
- Political organizations
- Service/social organizations

### Volunteerism

- Hospitals
- Universities
- Public library
- Public administration (city, county, federal)
- Elected officials' offices
- Park programs
- Animal shelters
- Free stores
- Churches

### Continuing education

- Personal development
- Fitness (swimming, walking)
- Art classes
- Craft classes
- Make-up classes



"I count myself in nothing else so happy  
As in a soul rememb'ring my good friends."



~ William Shakespeare (1564–1616), English poet and playwright





8.

## Some final tips

“Many people will walk in and out of your life but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.”

~ Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), U.S. First Lady, diplomat, human rights activist



### Tips for success

- See the person as their interests and gifts
- Seek out relationships rather than activities.  
Who can my family member get to know there?
- Introduce one-to-one
- Become an “asker” or an “inviter” – “It never hurts to ask”
- Apply the rule: one person, one environment



“The best mirror is an old friend.”



~ George Herbert (1593–1633),  
English poet

# Necessary beliefs for success

Whether you will be successful or not rests to a large extent on what you BELIEVE.

Here are three beliefs for you to wrestle with —

1. **Valuing and personal appreciation of the individual with disabilities** — Do you value and appreciate the gifts and strengths of your family member? Do you think they have a lot to offer? Do you think they would be a good friend? How would a community member benefit from getting to know them? If you don't have this belief, you are probably not going to be successful in assisting them to have community relationships.
2. **Faith and trust in finding interested community members** — Do you believe you can find community members who would be interested in getting to know your family member? It won't necessarily be everyone in your community. But do you believe you can find at least ONE person – no matter how small your town?
3. **Belief in the importance of community building for everyone** — Do you believe that supporting community relationships is important for everyone —
  - » Your family member
  - » You
  - » The community members

If you don't have these beliefs, you probably won't make the effort to prioritize this!

“A good friend is a connection to life — a tie to the past, a road to the future, the key to sanity in a totally insane world.”

~ Lois Wyse (1926–2007), American advertising executive



# Resources

- Amado, A.N. (2013) *Friends: Connecting people with disabilities and community members*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Research and Training Center on Community Living. [rtc.umn.edu/friends](http://rtc.umn.edu/friends)
- Amado, Angela N. (1990) *Friends: A manual for connecting persons with disabilities and community members*. St. Paul, MN: Human Services Research and Development Center. Available at: [www.mncdd.org/extra/publications/friends.pdf](http://www.mncdd.org/extra/publications/friends.pdf)
- Amado, Angela N. (1993) *Friendship and community connections between people with and without developmental disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Available from: [www.amazon.com/used-books](http://www.amazon.com/used-books)
- Amado, A.N., & Victorian-Blaney, J. (May, 2000). Requesting inclusion from the community – the necessity of asking. *TASH Newsletter*, May, pp. 15-17.
- Amado, A.N. & Walker, P. (2009, June) Welcoming brother knights. *Columbia (Knights of Columbus)*, 89 (6), p. 15.
- Asante, Shafik. (1997) *When spider webs unite: Challenging articles and essays on community, diversity, and inclusion*. Toronto, Ontario: Inclusion Press.
- Beach Center on Families and Disability (1997). *Amistad: Stories of Hispanic children with disabilities and their friendships*. Lawrence, Kansas: Beach Center on Families and Disability.
- Bogdan, Robert & Taylor, Steven J. (2001) Building stronger communities for all: Thoughts about community participation for people with developmental disabilities. In A. Tymchuk, K.C. Lakin & R. Luckason (Eds). *The forgotten generation: The status and challenges of adults with mild cognitive limitations*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Carlson, Carolyn. (2000). *Involving all neighbors: Building inclusive communities in Seattle*. Seattle Department of Neighborhoods.
- Carter, Erik. (2007) *Including people with disabilities in faith communities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes
- Carter, E.W., Blustein, C.L., Rowan, J.L., & Harvey, S. (2014). Changing the conversation: Engaging local communities in new discussions about competitive employment. *TASH Connections*, 40(1), Spring, pp. 8-14. [www.tash.org](http://www.tash.org)
- Carter, E.W., Owens, L., Swedeen, B., Trainer, A.A., Thompson, C., Ditchman, N. & Cole, O. (2009) Conversations that matter: Engaging communities to expand employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, July/August, 41(6), pp. 38-46.
- G. Allan Roeher Institute. (1990) *Making friends: Developing relationships between people with disabilities and other members of the community*. Toronto, ON: G. Allan Roeher Institute.
- Gretz, Sharon. (1992) Citizen participation: Connecting people to associational life. In Schwartz, David B. *Crossing the river: Creating a conceptual revolution in community and disability*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Brooks.
- Gretz, Sharon & Ploof, Dianna. (1999) *The common thread: A collection of writings about friendships, relationships, and community life*. Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council.
- Harlan, Jane, Todd, Jennie & Holtz, Peggy. (2001) *A guide to building community membership for older adults with disabilities*. St. Augustine, FL: Training Resource Network, Inc.
- James, Aaron & Stanfield, Susan (2011) *101 Ways to make friends: Ideas and conversation starters for people with disabilities and their supporters*. Vancouver, B.C.: Spectrum Society for Community Living.
- Kohler, Tom & Earle, Susan (2004) *Waddie Welcome and the beloved community*. Savannah, GA: Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy.
- Kretzmann, John P. & McKnight, John L. (1993) *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs & Policy Research, Northwestern University.
- Lutfiyya, Zana Marie. (2007) "A feeling of being connected": Friendships between people with and without learning difficulties. *Disability, Handicap, & Society*, 6(3), 233-245.
- McKnight, J. (1995) *The careles society: Community and its counterfeits*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Mills, Lisa & Messinger, Gary (2005) *Sharing community: Strategies, tips and lessons learned from experiences of community building at Options*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.

O'Brien, John & Lyle O'Brien, Connie. (1997) *Members of each other: Building community in company with people with developmental disabilities*. Toronto ON: Inclusion Press.

Schaffner, C.B. & Buswell, B (1992) *Connecting students: A guide to thoughtful friendship facilitation for educators & families*. Colorado Springs, CO: Peak Parent Center.

Schwartz, D. (1997) *Who cares: Rediscovering community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Stancliffe, R., Wilson, N., Gambin, N., Bigby, C., & Balandin, S. (2013) *Transition to retirement: A guide to inclusive practice*. Sydney, Australia: Sydney University Press.

Strully, J.L. & Bartholomew-Lorimer, K. (1988) Social integration and friendship. In S.M. Pueschel (Ed.) *The young person with down syndrome: Transition from adolescence to adulthood*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes

Sweeden, B., Cooney, M., Moss, C., & Carter, E.W. (2011) *Launching inclusive efforts through community conversations: A practical guide for families, service providers, and communities*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Waisman Center.

Walker, Pam. (1992) From community presence to sense of place: Community experiences of adults with developmental disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24(1), 23-32.

Many resources are also available through:

- Capacity Works: [www.capacityworks.com](http://www.capacityworks.com)
- Inclusion Press: [inclusion.com](http://inclusion.com)
- Quality Supports: [qualitysupports.umn.edu](http://qualitysupports.umn.edu)
  - » Topic: Active Engagement in Community Life
- Arc of Massachusetts Tool Kits: <http://thearcof-mass.org/friendships>



“Never leave a friend behind. Friends are all we have to get us through this life — and they are the only things from this world that we could hope to see in the next.”



~ Dean Koontz (1945–) American author, *Fear Nothing*