

### **Training/Retreat with Direct Support Staff**

Working with a provider agency, lead a half-day or full-day retreat for direct support staff. Purpose is to provide an opportunity for frontline folks to step out of their jobs, have a chance for reflection, renewal, and discussion with others who do similar type of work. May or may not utilize discussion papers below.

### **Conversation/reflection with direct support staff using discussion papers on a variety of topics**

This can be from 2 hours up to a full day. Typically this would be just with direct support staff, either from one provider or more. However, discussions are sometimes arranged to have management staff present. Papers include:

- *10 Things I'd Like to Tell My Employer*

This paper prompts discussion about what frontline staff feel is important for their employer (e.g. agency, supervisor, etc) to know. Typically, direct support staff are not asked for input as often as middle or upper management. If your employer asked you what you think or how you feel about your job, what would you say? This works best if there are either no or very few management staff present, however the content of the discussion is shared with management and ideally a follow-up conversation is held with everyone present.

- *Bringing Who We Are to What We Do*

This discussion paper asks, "Who are you, in addition to being a personal assistant for someone with a disability?" We all have gifts, talents, interests, and dreams. The purpose of this discussion is for folks to get to know each other a little better. What do you do when you are not working? What makes you tick? What do you bring to your work? This discussion can be either with just direct support workers, or a mixture of people being supported, managers, and direct support staff.

- *When Are You Going to Get a Real Job?*

This paper leads to a discussion of how the work of providing support to people with disabilities is seen by others. Many direct support workers have the experience of being asked the question that is the title of the paper. The work is often held in low regard and seen as "temporary" by others. The discussion usually centers around, "How do others see my work, and how do I see my work?" Staff who are making a long-term commitment to their work find this especially worthwhile.

- *Direct Support Staff as Bridge Builders*

In this paper, staff are invited to consider ways that they can play a role in bridging relationships between a person they support and someone else in the community. This is not a "how-to" about inclusion or relationship building, but rather a series of suggestions, ideas, and questions to encourage people to think more intentionally about relationships and how time is spent together.

- *Whose Life Is It, Anyway?*

This is a paper about power struggles in relationships between people being supported and frontline staff. Where is the power in these relationships? Who, if anyone, is in charge? What does it mean to have power *with* someone rather than power *over* them? How can we support someone whose life has been controlled by others to take control? What happens when my job description seems to contradict the wishes of the person I support? These are some of the questions that arise in discussions of this paper.

- *What'd I Say?*

This paper on language that staff use with and in reference to people with disabilities is another discussion-starter. Language is powerful, and is often left out of training curricula for support workers. The words we use can build people up or wear people down. Let's talk about it.

### **Shoulder to Shoulder: Celebrating the Important Work of Direct Support Workers**

This is the title of a talk I originally gave in 2003 at the Full Lives Conference in Anchorage. Published in AAMR's journal *Mental Retardation*, August 2004. This is about what direct support staff are saying, and the importance of hearing it. It is about communication, supporting staff, and valuing who each staff person is and the job they do. This can be as short as an hour or up to 3 hours, best with mix of folks including direct support workers.

### **Doing Our Best Work**

What do we really mean by "best practice" and "quality supports"? What do these look like when we consider people with disabilities and those who do the important work of supporting them *one at a time*? This presentation covers 10 important ingredients of excellent direct support, taking a good look at how we can measure when we are at our best.

### **Community Building: The Importance of Meaningful Relationships**

This is designed for those who want to delve deeper into the "community" part of the work, and focuses on how an organization makes and keeps a commitment to it. Why relationships are important, why community building is hard, and strategies for building more meaningful lives. Real stories are shared, and not just "success" stories. Can be as little as one hour or as long as a day; usually ½ day.

### **Self-Determination, Providers, and Organizational Change**

I have consulted with providers on the principles of self-determination and how a provider agency adapts and grows with changes brought about by the self-determination movement. Also, using the example of Options in Community Living, a supported living provider in Wisconsin, I have worked with providers on changing organizational structure to more effectively and intentionally support people with disabilities.