Person-Centered Thinking and Planning: Overview

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Hi, welcome to this webcast on Person-Centered Thinking and Planning. For teachers, parents, and guardians seeking to help their students with and without disabilities implement a transition plan, we advise that you consider the incorporation of person-centered thinking practices. Person-centered thinking is a process that leads to the building of a person-centered plan.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: Well that is such a vast question because it is a planning process based on what the person wants in their life. And typically it happens with a group of people that know and care about the person to support them. It’s a process of really the person driving what they want out of their life. And it’s a plan. So there’s that piece to developing objectives and goals. One of the things that I think a lot of folks have learned is that the plan is the tip of the iceberg. If we’re not discovering what’s important to and for and what supports they need, then often the plans do not reflect what the person really wants or needs out of their life. And it’s not necessarily based on things on how they would define it.

Well, I’m going to be talking a lot about person-centered thinking. And person-centered thinking is not planning; it’s discovery of what’s important to and for people that leads to a plan. A lot of times, planning was done first. You create a beautiful plan, but nothing was underneath it to support what that person really wanted out of their life. So we’ll be looking at those skills today. And this is more of a description of person-centered thinking skills. It’s a way to support people rather than fix people. It works for humans, and I’m going to ask you guys to practice some of these skills. So it’s not about disability; it’s about all of us. And it’s about learning, and partnerships, and being accountable for what we’re doing together. And it affirms our belief that everyone can learn. Regardless of ability or disability, everyone can learn. So how do we support people to learn and to get a better life?

I want to make a little sense of this and then we’ll move on. This young lady’s name is Elizabeth Kate, and she moved to a new city, and she was in her last couple years of high school. She was a beautiful, wonderful fashionista, loved life, loved theater and everything. But when she moved, her only relationships were her family and people that were paid to be in her life. But the family knew a little bit about this process, and what they did is they worked with Elizabeth Kate to come up with what was important to her. They discovered theater, dance, entertainment, organizing, fashion were all important to her. And they thought, “Well, where can we support her to be in a place of the community that matches up to those things that are important to her?” And they found a small community theater in that town, and she began to volunteer there. She worked in the costume area where she would organize all the costumes. And then she started handing out programs, and she would go to every show. I may not have mentioned that Elizabeth Kate also has Down syndrome, and she also has a mental illness. And so looking at this again for somebody who has disability labels is how do we put them in proximity of what’s important to them? And then let things happen because as time went on, people began to see her as valuable, as a part of that theater community. They let her hand out programs, and she sat and watched the plays all the time. She got to know this guy named Denis, and he sat next to her all the time. They got to be friends, and he had kids in the plays all the time. Denis owned four hair salons in this city. He went up to Elizabeth Kate’s dad and said, “You think she may want to work at one
of my stores?” “I don’t know, ask her anyway.” She got a job there. Now this was not about getting Elizabeth Kate a job, although that was one of her goals. It was about finding a place where she could be seen as valuable and let other people see her through that. Most people get their jobs from relationships. So what happened was discovery of what’s important to, and she had things that were important for her like her medications. She didn’t know what was coming up. But if you see fashion, organizing, theater, dance, all of those things were important to her, how do we put someone in proximity of that and then let things happen?