Person-Centered Thinking and Planning: Moving from Service Life to Community Life

Jeff Garrison-Tate: Let’s look at the community arrow moving from the service life to community life. Over here, you have the service life. In this world, it’s all about health and safety. There’s not anybody getting much that’s important to them. They don’t have relationships outside of paid staff. They don’t get to do a lot of what they want to do. They are controlled a whole lot based on their disability and based on the thinking that we’ve got to keep people safe. If we don’t keep them safe, something might happen. When everything is about safety and you’re not getting what’s important to you, usually people tell you. And sometimes they tell you with their behavior that they’re not getting what’s important to them. And with this some people say, “Well Jeff, you’re talking about an institutional setting.” Yeah, some people get caught and it’s all about health and safety, but it’s not just that. It can be a self-contained classroom. It can be a family’s home. It can be a group home where people live. It’s a real toxic environment where people aren’t getting what they want out of their lives. There are people that fall into this range a lot, particularly people that may be adults, and they’ve moved out, and they’re maybe getting services. So let’s take a look. Now, you’re cruising down this arrow and you get to a good paid life. That is not about having a job. That’s back to relationships. People are getting what’s important to and for them; they’re getting some of that. But their closest people are family and paid staff and they have few real connections. This is where somebody finds themselves where their only relationships are their family. And that’s not a bad thing. You know, you all have relationships with your family. But there are really no friends outside of that except their people that are paid to be in their lives. And being paid is not a bad thing. I want to ask you real quickly, now, who do you pay to be in your life? Who do you pay to be in your life?

Student: Doctor.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: There you go. Do you pay anybody to do your hair? Do you pay anybody to change the oil in your car? Do you pay anybody at Texas A&M every semester? The point I want to get at is that the people that you may pay to be in your life are they the same as your friends? No, probably not. And sometimes folks find themselves particularly here in the service life where their only relationships are paid. And they don’t have the friends out there. Again, this is not to say that people that are paying to work with people is a bad thing. What I like to say is when you’re the only person is in this person’s life who needs supports and you are paid to do that, you’re the last stop on the train for these folks. You’re the one that has to support them to move down this arrow. Alright and speaking of that we’re moving down now into community life and maybe this is where you guys are, where you have some to and for. There’s a balance you’re getting there. And you’re active, you have friends, you have a support network, and you’re included in community as you define it. This is probably where most people, particularly without disability labels are going to find themselves. Right? And so again, what are we doing, when I say we, people that support people in this work that we do, to get people down here? If this is where we are, what are we doing when we’re looking at supporting people with objectives, with goals, with vision to support them to
get them down there? People with disability labels often get stuck here. They have family. They may have people paid and they may have a couple friends. But getting down here where everybody wants is very difficult. I’ve always asked how many goals and objectives do we have to support people with disability labels or students that focus on building relationships? If this is where everybody else is, what are we doing? Are we stuck on “we’re going to teach them their hygiene this week?” That’s an important thing and you’ve got to have hygiene maybe to get into the community. But what are we doing? It’s not like you can write a goal that says, “Jimmy is going to have three friends in six months.” It is a process and it takes time.

Jeff Garrison-Tate: Well, I think the collaboration, and, partnership, and the listening, and learning, and negotiations are almost like conflict resolutions. So figure out how to really listen, and to be honest and respectful, and then develop a plan based on what the student is telling us they want, but at the same time be really honest. Say, “Hey this situation here, we’re not giving up on it, but let’s work together to do that.” So there’s that partnership, there’s that conflict resolution, there’s that equity in relationship going on, and it all comes back to the plans based on what that student really wants to do. Again, I think that the techniques of what works and what doesn’t work from each perspective and what needs to stay the same based on what we all learned and what needs to change. And what needs to change becomes and drives what that plan can be. If it needs to stay the same, then we don’t need to mess with it. So I think that that’s a very powerful technique, too. And I’ve said what it comes down to is what works for a student and what doesn’t work for them in the situation. Let’s get the teacher’s, let’s get the parent’s, let’s get the therapist’s ideas in this and then come to a resolution on what the next steps could be.