Making Space for Innovation and Hope
Lessons learned from creating capacity and sustainability in individualized supports in
New York State

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Lives of Distinction

Members of Learning Communities in NY State are increasing commitment to Individualized Supports by creating conditions that support Lives of Distinction. Lives of Distinction is an ideal that suggests that people with disabilities can thrive in community life when they are supported in a variety of valued roles resulting in community membership using individualized supports. Innovations in person-centered individualized supports demonstrate excellence in strengthening commitments such as the following:

1. Significant commitment to employment outcomes for people with disabilities, and consequent creative examples of customized employment.
2. Significant commitment to person-centered transition: Innovation in supporting full inclusion and employment experience in the last two years of high school and following graduation.
3. Successful examples of community service and community building and involvement of community members in co-creating good lives with people, and/or examples of encouraging people to think locally through “What’s within walking distance” design, and other creative means of investing in neighborhood and civic life.
4. Creative examples of supporting people who choose to live in their own homes with a variety of individualized supports including life sharing, natural supports, and technological supports.
5. Successful and sustainable, user friendly examples of self-directed supports, individualized budgets, brokerage supports, and increased commitments to the learning and support networks that sustain people who choose these options.
6. Examples of engaging parents as partners in co-creating futures for their children and participating in the design and implementation of innovation, i.e., The Big Tent.
7. Investments in self-advocacy groups that provide leadership and direction to professionals.
8. Creative investments to support direct support staff to be champions in the lives of people they support, i.e. Everyday Heroes
9. Commitment to develop leadership and team work at all levels of the organization, including involvement of families, self-advocates, and community members.
10. Significant commitment to change organizational structure, culture, and operations using Theory U methodology.
People involved in various learning communities 1. Go On a Journey together to create new realities...

The agencies involved in NY State learning communities create design teams to go “into the unknown” to search for what matters in the lives of people and their families and to find ways to create innovative individualized support prototypes. Prototypes include commitment to employment and downsizing, college campus programs, Self-Advocacy leadership, Everyday Heroes, community membership and involvement, creative arts, individualized living arrangements, shared living, and the creative use of family, private, public, and community resources. Learning communities support mutual development that strengthen innovation, person-centered work, and team building. Participants use Theory U style approaches to explore innovation and ultimately take the entire operating system to a new level.

While all learning communities differ, they share these six characteristics which they create together*: 

1. A network of people who share an interest in innovation and energize that network by orchestrating events; 
2. Learning Journeys that incorporate sense making time; 
3. ‘How we do it’ action learning events like Large Group Planning, Wheel Power, ABCD Community Building, Keys to Life, OCL Spirit Keepers, Everyday Heroes, Make a Difference, etc. that bring together stakeholders who co-create alternative futures; 
4. Workshops like Theory U; some form of intensive thinking about disability, citizenship, and society i.e. Deep Change Workshop with John O’Brien; work with Arawana Hayashi in Embodied Presencing. 
5. Mutual help and peer consulting; and 
6. Chances to reflect and harvest what people are learning, particularly through storytelling, art, music, action research, and learning histories.

*Much more information is available from the NYSACRA Learning History Part 2: Turning Points by John O’Brien, 2010

http://www.nysacra.org/nysacra/li/PhasellCurriculum_Materials.htm
2. Toward Lives of Distinction

Participants visit Innovation Sites to meet people reaching toward:

FOUR ASPIRATIONS OF INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENT

| WORK                                      | FRIENDS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am increasing my wage earning capacity via:</td>
<td>I am growing and deepening relationships with:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ a paid job.</td>
<td>☆ family, friends, and intimate partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ an internship or volunteer job where I am learning new skills.</td>
<td>☆ neighbors and neighborhood life, co-workers and colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ attending college or other education program and working on campus.</td>
<td>☆ associations, civic, and volunteer organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ my own small business.</td>
<td>☆ self-advocacy and support groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ a career in music, art, photography or other creative work.</td>
<td>☆ direct support professionals and human services allies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am developing my body, mind, and spirit via:</th>
<th>I live in my own home with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☆ physical fitness and nutrition.</td>
<td>☆ my family and supports as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ routine and reliable medical and dental care.</td>
<td>☆ a support circle and self-directed supports as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ psychological health and support to communicate.</td>
<td>☆ a roommate who shares my home and my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ spiritual life and restoration.</td>
<td>☆ someone who lives upstairs, next door, or in the neighborhood who provides support when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☆ other personal routines that are good for me.</td>
<td>☆ support staff who are present at all or most of the time.</td>
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Findings from the OMRDD/FAR Fund Collaborative and the NYSACRA Learning Institute, May 2010
3. Generate Capacity for Innovation by strengthening these eight commitments to innovation:

Learning circles will meet quarterly to develop skills and implementation strategies related to the eight aspects of the Innovation Generator.

1. **Increase Commitment**: Participants will work out personal and organizational commitments to the initiative and to the focus people who want to participate.
2. **Find Direction**: Everyone involved will become engaged in person-centered planning as a way to define and focus vision.
3. **Build a Circle**: Circle members will increase their capacity to function as effective teams, and they will expand their circles by building relationships to community members.
4. **Explore New Options**: Participants will go on learning journeys to visit innovative programs, community resources, and/or other people with disabilities/families who are working toward similar vision.
5. **Create Innovation Projects**: Champions will implement innovative supports on behalf of focus people. Ringleaders will implement prototypes that respond to Champions. Host Leadership members will grapple with organizational change needed to sustain.
6. **Build Direct Support Capacity**: We intend for up to half of the Champions in this initiative to be direct support staff, and so many of the interventions will be designed to engage and encourage the activism of those who provide direct support, and also to strengthen the organizational investments that sustain their commitment.
7. **Shape Organizational Capacity**: The entire initiative is designed to shape organizational capacity, and specific interventions will be structured to do so.
8. **Tell New Stories**: This initiative will begin with telling the stories of those who exemplify the outcomes we are reaching for, and it will conclude with telling new stories of belonging that emerge as a result.
4. Engage the U with Support of a Community Practice

Theory U is a SOCIAL change technology: Learning Circles create containers in which relationships deepen and members benefit from mutual support and the courage to invest in the discovery process. Design teams generate innovation using various combinations of person-centered planning, leadership, team development, and Theory U (a theoretical framework and practice developed by MIT scholar Otto Scharmer). Theory U is incorporated throughout all change projects as a guiding framework and applied process that leads to deep change.

As a change process, Theory U can be seen in three main parts—sensing, presencing and realizing. The sensing phase can be divided into first seeing clearly what is present and then sensing into what is observed. Literally, we are invited to use our sense perceptions rather than relying on past or second-hand information. We are asked to suspend our judgements, opinions, assumptions, and mental models, and to use our eyes and ears and the feeling of our bodies to sense into whatever the context is. We are asked to convene groups and to get out and talk to people—to pay attention in an unbiased way, to empathize with those we interview, to watch and to listen with full attention as we take learning journeys. We are asked to notice how our bodies feel and include this information as a vital part of our sensing process. One of the main tools for sensing is listening. Listening and dialogue practice is an application of feminine principle. Listening makes a space. It is holding an open, unbiased and caring space for another person to speak into. As we sit in a circle of in dialogue groups we are invited to listen into the centre of the space. The voice of collective wisdom emerges from the space of the whole. As change leaders we are invited to cultivate the capacity to engage in conversations from this place. My teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, called this the practice of spontaneous insight.

Anawana Hayashi, Feminine Principle and Theory U
Oxford Leadership Journal, Vol 1, Issue 2

Making Space for Innovation and Hope Learning Communities, 2010
Learn from the PRESENCING-IN-ACTION LAB for Global-Local Change Makers

Creating a field of inspired connections for actualizing a sustainable, just and generative society.

Co-initiating and Building Helping Relationships
- How do you create and sustain a helping relationship?
- How do you co-initiate complex multi-stakeholder projects?
- How can you map the boundary profile of your system?
- What is our theory of change?
- Tools and lessons learned in co-initiating, and facilitating complex multi-stakeholder projects

Co-sensing and Prototyping
- How do you create learning journeys and processes that allow for effective co-sensing of groups?
- How do you return from a co-sensing process and make sense of the experience?
- How do you map your learning and make it accessible to the whole group? What methods and tools help (Systems Thinking, Scenario Thinking, Constellation work, Café, Sculpting/modeling)?
- How do you move from sense making and brainstorming to prototyping?
- How do you do prototyping in the context of social sector and multi-stakeholder work?

Co-inspiring and Presencing
- How can we connect to the Source in the context of institutional complexity and downloading?
- How can we integrate mindfulness in everyday team and management practices?
- How can we connect to the deeper path of our professional and personal journeys—both individually and collectively?

Co-evolving and Institutionalizing
- How do you envision, inspire, orchestrate, and nudge along the birth of the new system while still operating in the midst of the old?
- How do we sustain and scale the transformation?
- How do you scale up from prototyping and piloting?
- How do you institutionalize supporting infrastructures for ecosystem-wide collaboration and innovation across boundaries?

Visit: http://www.presencing.com
Try Things--An Example:

See with fresh eyes and sense from the field; Using Theory U in the Board development of a five year plan for Job Path, NYC:

Discovery arises from deep LISTENING: We engaged in conversations with almost 200 people to sense what is emerging in Job Path’s field and to discover and clarify collective wisdom regarding what is Job Path’s most important work for the next five years.

Visit: www.jobpathnyc.org/

Download: Lives of Distinction; Creating a Life Path Using Individualized Supports
Conclusion: A quick look at learning circles:

Learning circles function to develop adaptive and innovative responses to complex issues. Learning circles engage the people who live with the problem and have the greatest stake in creating new options. Members of learning circles are exploring the frontier of possibility and innovation, and in doing so they try things and invent new solutions. In person-centered work, the heart of a learning circle is always a small group of people with disabilities and their family or caregivers located in a specific community who will benefit from the innovation. Elements of success demonstrated via the Learning Institute, the FAR Fund, the Bronx Innovation Project and other successful learning circles include the following:

- Agency commitment to one if not all of the Four Aspirations of Individualized Supports Development, with or without new allocations to innovation.
- Support for the direct involvement of people with disabilities and their families, and commitment to take direction for innovation from learning about the people and their communities.
- The development of a personal circle of support and application of good tools such as person-centered planning, individualized budgets, and funding streams that support implementation.
- The formation of a change team, and regular participation by members of the team in learning activities, learning journeys, personal development, and leading innovation.
- The allocation of a committed ringleader to the network. The ringleader holds the space of the circle, generates agendas and learning experiences, provides feedback and insight to the group, and is invested in the development of each person and team.
- The commitment of administrative allies in both the agency and the DDSO.
- Access to teachers and mentors: exposure to others who can stretch the aspirations of each person, learning circle, and organization.
- Investment in direct support professional learning networks and development.
- The support of a network: a Community of Practice of committed change teams who are connected through face to face learning activities and electronic support.
- Wider connections to others including other learning circles, MIT and the Presencing Institute Community, and similar projects in other states and countries that provide effective models for both incremental and massive change.

Examples of Learning Communities in New York State

The FAR Fund Projects in Collaboration with Job Path:

- **Job Path
- *Shield
- Life’s WORC
- IAHD
- *AHRC
- *Lifespire
- District 75
- SE Bronx Community Center

NYSACRA Learning Institute Innovation Sites:

- *Job Path
- Rensselaer ARC
- *OCL
- Syracuse CSS
- Another Step
- *Westchester ARC
- *Center for Family Supports
- *AHRC

Customized employment, Community Supports, Lives of Distinction
Individualized residential options, Keys to Life, organizational learning
Shared living, Syracuse college program
Self-determination, family learning circles
Inclusive days
Supported employment, downsizing day services, self-advocacy
Individualized residential, family support, CSS,
College programs, the Big Tent, ISS, Wish Fulfilling Justice
 Providers involved in the NYSACRA Institute: Round One

- People, Inc.
- The Resource Center
- LDA
- *Aspire
- *Family Capped
- Catholic Charities
- Family Services of Westchester
- *TLS
- East End
- *Shield
- **Job Path
- Sinergia

Hudson Valley Providers involved in the NYSACRA Institute: Round Two

- *IAHD
- Goodwill
- Columbia County ARC
- Westchester ARC
- *Orange County ARC
- *Ulster Green ARC
- New Horizons
- Inspire
- Crystal Run
- New Hope
- Yedei Chesed

OCL Spirit Keepers Shared Living Initiative:

- *OCL
- Arise/Oswego
- Geneseec ARC
- Orange County ARC
- Ulster Green ARC
- Oswego ARC
- New Horizons
- *Resource Center
- *Catholic Charities
- *Aspire

Next Generation Bronx: Bronx DDSO

- Leake and Watts
- *AHRC
- Catholic Guardian Society
- *Center for Family Support
- Institute for Community Living
- Services for the Underserved
- Social Action Center
- Bronx DDSO
- *IAHD
- SE Bronx Community Services

*An astrick indicates that the organization is involved in more than one learning circle