

# **Putting the Human Back Into Human Services**

Creating support based on the  
person versus the system

## **Person Centered Agency Design**

Many criticisms of “the system” and “services” reflect the failure of human services to meet the true, human needs of individuals who are dependent on that system. Many staff think or act like successfully meeting all policies and rules is more important than the quality of life of the individuals they serve. Individual’s needs are often only seen or understood inside bureaucratic definitions. Under the overweighed burden of rules and regulations, paper requirements, funding restrictions, and operating practices, the individual lives of people with disabilities are often sacrificed, and communities are cut off from the contributions of citizens with disabilities.

Many concerned and committed professionals are aware of these weaknesses, would prefer to operate services differently, but lack the structured methods to do so. Many factors make change difficult.

### **But...How Do We Do It?**

*In 1991, eight Minnesota agencies who believed in this direction began a structured journey toward discovering how a “person-centered agency” would be designed, and have been working on implementing that design. In a three-year project sponsored by the Human Services Research and Development Center (funded by the Bush Foundation and the Hugh J. Andersen Foundation), these eight residential and day program/supported employment agencies, both in rural and urban areas, have learned many valuable, useful, and concrete lessons. Many people’s lives have altered dramatically, and these agencies made significant changes without waiting for additional funding or changes in regulations. It was the first time that a group of such agencies have come together for this purpose, and the variety among the agencies and their different paths has also provided much information on the process of organizational change.*

The foundation for the Person-Centered Agency Design project was John O’Brien and Connie O’Brien’s “Framework for Accomplishment,” a five-day workshop/agency evaluation process which focused on three purposes for human services:

1. Supporting five “valued outcomes” in people’s lives
  - relationships with a wide variety of people
  - sharing community presence
  - contribution
  - valued social roles
  - real choice

2. helping people discover and realize their visions for their own lives, and
3. building and strengthening a community's inclusiveness

### **Training Opportunities Available**

#### Specific topics include:

1. The principles of "person-centered" agency design.
2. Specific strategies for achieving this design
3. Methods of person-centered planning.
4. Concrete ways to modify annual planning processes to be more person-centered.
5. The roles an agency should play in supporting people.
6. Long range planning for person-centered agency and system design

\*Other topics and concrete exercises can be designed upon request.