

# Asking the Right Questions

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## Background Questions

1. What have been the major milestones in this person's life? How have these life events influenced who this person is today?
2. To what extent has this person's life been dominated by congregated/ segregated programs? What impacts have congregated/ segregated programs had upon the person?
3. To what extent have influential figures in this person's life bought into common stereotypes about people with disabilities e.g. child, incompetent, nothing to offer etc.? What impacts stereotypes had upon the person?
4. To what extent have influential figures in this person's life held high or low expectations about this person's future? What impacts have expectations had upon the person?
5. What is this person's educational background? What have been the impacts of this person's education upon their current skills, self expectations and opportunities the future?
6. What volunteer/ employment roles has this person had in the past? What does the nature of these roles convey about perceptions of this person's capabilities and expectations other people have had about their future?
7. What valued roles has this person earned in the past (*as defined by societal perceptions versus the necessity of a role*)? How has the presence or absence of valued roles shaped who this person is today, self expectations and expectations of others?
8. What have been this person's most significant challenges? How have these challenges been addressed and what have been the impacts upon shaping who this person is today?
9. To what extent has this person had friends in their life from outside the disability community where reciprocal visits have occurred on a regular basis? What have been the impacts of the presence or absence of friends in this person's life?
10. What are the best and worst things that have ever happened to this person? How have these situations influenced who this person is today?

## Visioning Questions

1. What does this person enjoy doing?
2. What would it take to improve this person's quality of life?
3. What are this person's most significant challenges and what can be done to reduce their negative impacts?
4. What does a positive and ambitious future look like for this person?
5. To what extent does this person struggle in identifying what a positive future might look like? Why does this person struggle in being able to identify a positive future?

6. To what extent has this person been provided a wide variety of experience and exposure to realistic, positive roles within the community? If sufficient exposure has not occurred, how can this person be expected to make informed decisions about their future?
7. To what extent do services and/ or other people in this person's life attempt to manipulate them into '*choosing*' options that are devalued, familiar or easiest to provide? What can be done to ensure that this person is able to increase this person's confidence, ability to assert themselves and make informed decisions?
8. To what extent do other people in this person's life struggle in identifying what a positive future might look like for this person? Why do these struggles exist and what can be done to address each of these challenges?
9. What else is standing the way of achieving a positive and ambitious future for this person? What can be done to address each of these challenges?
10. Who are this person's best advocates? How can these people be best drawn upon to help influence others and help this person improve their overall quality of life within the community?

### **Advocacy Questions**

1. What specific types of issues/ situations in this person's life might require the additional support of advocates to bring about a positive end?
2. Who are this person's best allies and how can they be best drawn upon to bring about positive changes in this person's life?
3. Who are the people on the opposite end of each issue? What are the underlying concerns of people on the opposite end of the issue?
4. Are there any mediating actions/ solutions that can reduce concerns of either party and allow the situation to move forward?
5. Is there any common ground that can built upon to enhance relationships, build credibility and permit small steps forward to be negotiated?
6. What key questions can be posed that might permit people on the opposite end of the issue to reconsider their position on the issue or move closer to common ground?
7. What success stories can be shared or what people can brought into the situation to help alleviate fears of people on the opposite end of the issue?
8. What people in this person's life have the most credibility with those on the opposite end of the issue? How can alliances be formed with these people and how they be drawn upon to assist in advocating?
9. What approaches/ tools/ advocacy tactics will likely lead to the most positive outcome for this person in this specific situation?
10. Where the situation is more global, what other parties, organizations, media resources etc. can be brought into the situation to influence public opinion in a positive direction?

### **Employment & Volunteering Questions**

1. To what extent is social contribution presented as a choice versus societal expectation for this person?

2. To what extent do staff believe that this client is capable of being employed?
3. To what extent does this client hold valued employment roles? - *in terms of societal status versus necessity of role*
4. To what extent do the employment roles held by this client match what they would describe as being their dream job?
5. To what extent do clients of this service occupy a very narrow range of work roles? Why is this range so narrow?
6. To what extent do clients occupy devalued, stigmatizing or stereotypical work roles e.g. cleaning or recycling roles? What do people tell themselves or others to rationalize/ justify pursuing roles of this nature?
7. How long do clients tend to occupy devalued, stigmatized or stereotypical work roles once they have been placed into them? What do people tell themselves or others to rationalize/ justify not pursuing more valued options?
8. To what extent are volunteer and devalued employment roles pursued because they are the easier to obtain or because support staff hold low expectations about people with disabilities?
9. What volunteer roles exist that are atypical for volunteerism or for which most people would expect to be paid?
10. What messages does the nature of work and volunteer roles held by clients convey to the public about people with disabilities? Does the nature of these roles reinforce or tear down negative stereotypes about people with disabilities i.e. child, incompetent or lowly skilled, object of pity, economic burden etc.

### **Relationship Questions**

1. Who is in this person's life right now that is not there by virtue of being a family member, being paid, or being a client of the same service?
2. What are the impacts of having few or no friends outside of those listed in the preceding question? Consider the impacts of isolation upon self esteem, skills, opportunities for the future etc.
3. How vulnerable is this person to rejection and what factors contribute the most to social rejection/ avoidance?
4. What can be done to reduce or eliminate common reasons for which this person is rejected/ avoided?
5. What systemic barriers or service/ program practices contribute to this person being rejected, less approachable or difficult for people to form friendships with?
6. What is currently being done to actively facilitate and strengthen friendships?
7. How can networking through other people involved in this person's life be used to help open new opportunities and help this person develop more friendships?
8. What skills, interests and gifts does this person have that can be used as a basis for connecting and facilitating relationships with people in the community?

9. What specific environments related to each of this person's interests offer the best opportunity to see the same people over time and significant opportunity for interaction?
10. What additional approaches can be put in place to help this person develop more relationships and strengthen existing relationships in the community?

### **Staff, Client & Role Matching Questions**

1. What are this person's needs, aspirations and goals for the future?
2. What set of qualifications, interests and background would result in the best support for this person?
3. What connections would the ideal support staff already have in their life to best help this person in meeting their goals?
4. What staff gender would best be able to support this person with their goals? What would be the impacts of staff gender mismatches?
5. How old would the ideal support staff be to optimize opportunities for connecting this person within the community and achieve their goals? What are the likely impacts of noticeable age mismatches?
6. Is staff ethnicity important in helping this person achieve their goals? If so, what culture should staff be from and/ or what languages should they be able to speak?
7. What roles and/ or associations would be taboo or demeaning for this person to enter into based upon cultural and gender factors?
8. If this person shares support, to what extent is the other person of similar age and have similar interests/ goals?
9. If this person shares support, to what extent does the other person provide a positive role model and have significantly higher skills/ competencies from which this person can learn?
10. To what extent do the roles currently held by this person highlight their most positive attributes, cast them in a positive light and help to tear down negative stereotypes about people with disabilities?

### **Service Related Questions**

1. Are we living up to our mission in practice?
2. In what ways do we deviate from our stated mission?
3. What issues do we avoid or downplay because the work is harder to do?
4. In what ways do we provide services that benefit others more than clients?
5. Do we have different or lower standards for clients than ourselves?
6. What do we tell ourselves about our service that may hide, disguise or downplay underlying problems?
7. What do we do that is not of much importance to clients?
8. What messages does the way we provide service convey to the public about people with disabilities?
9. To what extent do we say, think or acquiesce to things that stigmatize or devalue clients?
10. Would I want to be a client of this service?