

Building Community

March 23, 2021

Pathlight Group



Presentation Outline and Goals

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Project Overview

- Our Goal: Each participant will get to explore their interests and begin to make connections in the community. These connections would lead to more development of interests and even more connections in the community.
- We hoped to shift people from being 'of the community' to 'in the community'.

Project Implementation

- Our initial focus for 3 participants:
- One individual would connect with colleges to promote learning in the area of disability
- The second and third individuals would explore their interest
- We had to regroup after two of these 3 individuals dropped out of the project. We realized our focus needed to be exposure to these ideas and building more of a group to participate in this project.

Project Implementation (cont.)

- We hosted an event to share our ideas and goals of increased participation in the community and to gauge interest in individuals who might want to participate.
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- Eight individuals and their families signed up to participant.
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- Through the process of planning the event and talking with attendees, we realized it would be important for each person involved to have a second identified person who really understood the participant and their profile to help with ongoing support and implementation.

Our Process

- The survey
- Interviews with participants and their families
- More research and development of ideas around the importance of a gatekeeper. The community someone is accessing is just as important as the individual trying access it.

Project Outcomes

Our Project is in Different Places with 3 Participants

- One adult participant is exploring the right fit for the interest area chosen and so is still in the discovery stage.
- The other adult participant is now involved in a dance class independently with drop off and pick up. Relationships are still being developed and is further along in the discovery stage.
- The younger child is now immersed in several different ongoing activities which have proven to be good ongoing opportunities for him to build relationships. Religious education classes provided connections and led to an opportunity for him to participate in the Christmas pageant.

What We Learned

- The importance of a gatekeeper
- Cannot control unexpected life events and need to work through them or pause efforts until resolved (which may be a long time).
- Individuals need to be in a place where they have interest and are ready to build relationships.
- Make sure person assisting with discovery of interests and doing the pre-work of locating group/potential gatekeeper has existing knowledge of the person. Many times this may be a family member but could and maybe should be someone supporting the person who knows them well enough to understand things to be aware of (especially for an adult).

What we Learned (cont.)

- Be flexible. If one group doesn't work, work to find another one that may be a better fit.
- Expectations of completing any particular part in the process in a specific timeframe aren't helpful.
- This effort could be lengthy, perhaps several months or even years but is worth the effort.
- Forward progress of any kind is good.
- Shifting thinking to incorporate social capital and relationship building into all efforts is where efforts should be concentrated. Not done in isolation.

What we Learned (cont.)

Unexpected Victories

- It has created opportunity to have better programmatic discussions for future growth.
- Enhances the way our programs can work in conjunction with one another rather than separate.
- It has become evident that this work is not done in isolation but should be woven into all programming, yet there still needs to be some dedicated effort within programming.

What We Learned (cont.)

Resources

- We can look at programming and relationship building throughout all our programs.
- Develop a way to log community mapping information that already is known to the different programs.
- Presentation in public community space where different community providers can learn tips and strategies they could easily incorporate into their programming that would be more universal and welcoming.
- Consider cross programmatic approach.
- Provide more staff positions to programming so these efforts can become more integrated since this requires more ability to work on an individual basis with people.

If We Knew Then What We Know Now

Recommendations for others trying to do similar work

- Look at it from a building relationships perspective and make this thinking your guide.
- Understand the process and that it is never really done.
- Need a real effort to map communities to learn of existing resources and responsiveness but understand each person will have different areas of interest. This is not cookie cutter.
- Celebrate previous experiences, but then keep building and refining if this is desired.
- Remember the person you are assisting is the center of the process. Take their lead.
- Remember this work takes time and no matter how small the gain, it is success to be built on and learned from.
- Brainstorm transportation options
- Consider need for autonomy and independence. Pre-work to consider acceptable level of risk when considering the how and where.

How Can We Sustain These Efforts?

- We will continue to be a resource point for the three participants as desired and needed. This will only enhance our knowledge and build our community mapping capacity.
- We will keep this mindset when working with all families so connections made empower them to continue to build more.
- Charting the LifeCourse-using these tools to help with the planning process
- Since our Pathlight mission states that we ‘partner with people with disabilities to create opportunities and build relationships throughout their lives’, our most current and future strategies across the organization reflect this cross programmatic approach of developing services.

Closing Thoughts

- This is hard work but if you can shift to a relationship building mindset instead getting folks into community activities, it makes the process make more sense.
- This should be considered a long term shift in perspective. This won't be a quick fix solution to someone feeling isolated.
- Shifting mindset takes an individual's team and the community to be on board.
- This work takes time and is ongoing.
- The individual must be the center of the process.



Remember the importance of sticking with it!

Thank you for all that you do!



Questions and contact info



- Websites
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