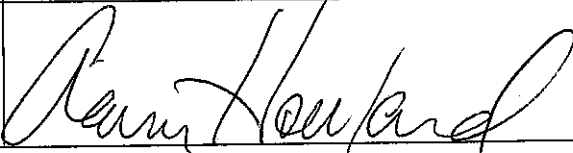


Catholic Charities Disabilities Services
Agency Guideline

Guideline Category	Residential
Guideline Title	Development of Natural Supports
Regulations	
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Value Statement Regarding Natural Support Goal Planning

During the process of planning for services, residential staff will consider the presence of natural supports for each individual both in terms of their existence as well the desire of the individual to develop natural supports. This discernment will be documented in either the planning materials or by some other fashion in the individual's record, and, if desired, strategies for developing natural supports for the individual will be added to the individual's goal planning.

Introduction

Relatively few people, even those who live on their own, are totally self-sufficient. Most people rely on a variety of supports which occur naturally in every community. Each community and neighborhood has individuals, organizations, and institutions where people go to seek advice, information and assistance. These natural supports are the personal associations and relationships that we all typically develop in the community and include family, friends and acquaintances with whom we share similar interests.

There is no single method for developing a system of natural supports. It is a matter of placing the individuals we support in a position where they are allowed, encouraged and supported to develop associations and relationships. It requires perseverance and energy. Natural supports must evolve. Not two natural supports will ever be alike. Each will be unique in what it has to offer and how it is developed. These individuals will need assistance in building and maintaining their unique system of natural supports.

For our services to be truly person-centered, individuals need to be able to exercise choice. However, before they can exercise true choice, they need to be exposed to a variety of experiences so that they can truly choose what it is that they want to do. One of the best ways to do this is to help individuals develop natural supports.

Definitions

Natural supports are personal associations and relationships typically developed in the community that enhance the quality and security of life for people, including, but not limited to, family relationships; friendships reflecting the diversity of the community; associations with co-workers; and associations developed through participation in clubs, organizations and other civic activities.

“Natural supports are sources of support that come directly from people and communities rather than being provided through formal paid forms of support.” (Kendrick)

The Challenge

One of the most fundamental elements of our lives are meaningful relationships with others. When the people we support are marginalized in our society, these relationships can occur less frequently, and when bureaucracies, service systems and professional become involved in people’s lives, this can often reduce the opportunity for naturally occurring relationships to be present. The prevalence of paid support in individual’s lives can leave people with disabilities at heightened risk of social isolation. This in turn would suggest an increased risk of not having a full and meaningful life. Simply put, people with disabilities often have lives which are filled with people being paid for what they do, and can be lacking people who are friends.

General Considerations

We assume most people want to live happy and comfortable lives. To achieve the lifestyle they prefer, people rely on some kind of support system or network.

Individually or in a group, people use natural supports to sustain relationships based on mutual interests. Persons constituting the natural support network of an individual do not teach skills or facilitate a learning environment, they just nurture and support. In so doing, the skills and competencies of the individual may be enhanced.

Inclusive living means life in the community and not the use of options that are segregated.

Natural supports can occur independently, or can be crafted and supported intentionally by others.

Natural supports can have a purpose or role, or quite simply be for the sake of the relationship.

Relationships are dynamic and individuals may move from becoming more or less intimate in one's life or having different roles in their life.

It is often through activity with others—groups, shared passions, schools, even workplaces—that new relationships are formed. Hence, individuals having valued roles that create opportunities for contribution, sharing and belonging is vital for nurturing these relationships.

Helping Individuals to Develop Natural Supports

There is no single method or easy answer for developing a system of natural supports. It's a matter of supporting and assisting individuals to be in a position to develop relationships, developing strategies to bridge the gap between the opportunities for, and development of, natural supports.

Start with what people do have rather than what they don't, and include their passions, interests and dreams.

In order to find viable channels of networks and resources, we must know the individual and his or her interests, likes, and dislikes.

Communication is vital to knowing the individual as it enables the individual to identify his or her needs, wants and desires.

Exploring questions like these with the person may help you to better understand the person:

When is the person at their happiest?

What does the person keep coming back to talk, want or enjoy?

What motivates the person?

What kinds of people is the person drawn to?

What generates energy in the person?

What satisfies them?

The most fundamental way to develop good connections, friendships and relationships is to get involved in the community and meet people. This can be done by:

Participating in community activities and projects

Joining clubs and groups

Volunteering

Socializing with one's family and neighbors

Development of natural supports can be slow and tedious, thus requiring persistence.

Tips

Focus on a specific neighborhood. Help the individual learn about the neighborhood, and the people who are part of the local community.

Find out about organizations and associations that exist in the neighborhood.

Develop allies within the group, social club and community. These are the people willing to go to bat for the individual. They will be the ones who persuade others to open doors and recognize the contributions the individual has to offer.

Pay attention to natural cues.

Stand alongside the individual and alongside community members as well. Be a regular person rather than the professional.

Support building is rarely ever over.