What Does Community Integration Look Like?

Active engagement in the form of **a *regular contribution* to and/or a recognizable presence *in an individual's community or neighborhood.*** Endless possibilities to connect to an event, group, business, or specific person, with real relationships being developed through repeated experiences with other citizens brought together by *common interests or shared passions*. A sense of expectation for contact and belonging pervades. If staff are present, they blend or fade over time rather than "hover and guard".

INTERACTIONS in neighborhood settings LARGELY BASED ON INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS and GIFTS THAT ONE SHARES WITH OTHER CITIZENS WITH THE SAME INTERESTS. Seen as a MEMBER as OPPOSED to mere PARTCIPANT.

As a result of the above, the person is now established as a true citizen and community

member, and may be exposed to other opportunities--through INVITATION by those who **know him or her well.** Often referred to as a *"friend"*, there is likely no presence of paid services necessary to secure this relationship.

A PERSON HAS ACTIVE OPTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM FOR LIFE ENHANCERS AND A DIVERSE NETWORK OF PERSONS TO INTERACT WITH, INDEPENDENT OF ANY PROVIDED BY SYSTEM SERVICES.

COMMUNITY LIFE ENGAGEMENT

What it is ✓

- Focused on individual outcomes
- Based on person-centered planning/ISP
- Offering meaningful opportunities that support personal interests
- Connecting individuals to the community 👍

What it is not ✗

- Focused on system outcomes
- Based on generalized programs
- Scheduling group activities without individual input or consideration of individual interests/outcomes
- Caregiving 👎

MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES

- Meaningful, non-work activities
- A say in scheduling of activities
- Knowledge of opportunities
- Freedom to move around
- Service location:
  - Around others
  - In inclusive settings

FOCUS ON

- Strengths of the person supported
- Areas of interest
- What is important to them
- Options available in your community
- Purpose of activity
- Building connections
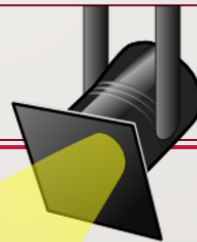
Community and Neighborhood FAQ's

<u>How do I begin the *process* of supporting a person to have engagement with their true community?</u>

It is important to note that this IS a process. Building relationships takes time and frequent, sustained contact with citizens and the places they gather at. As community connecting focuses on the assets, passions, talents, and gifts of a person, it is a crucial initial step to guarantee that we are very familiar with these. Talk with the person and their family, observe what they have in their rooms, what's on the refrigerator or coffee table, etc., as ways to begin to understand what really interests them. Ask if there is anything new that they would like to try. Gauge their personality as to how much time with others or away from home they desire. Ask if there are days or times when they most often find themselves wanting to be doing something or feel motivated to meet others. Speak with family members if they are available and discuss what they may know about the person and what they do. All of this "background" is vital in helping us get a clearer idea of what type of connection to our community best suits them at the present time. Without this person-specific and contemporary information, we would likely have no direction on where to look in a person's community for opportunities to become involved.

<u>How do I find people and places to connect with? Where do I start?</u>

 Utilizing technology, such as an initial Google search, will likely yield some initial results and is an easy way to identify places within a community when prompted with the right description – "ANIMAL SHELTERS in Mt. Healthy," or "COFFEE SHOPS in Blue Ash," or "VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES in Harrison," etc.   We can then actually visit those locations and see what possibilities are there that may match a person's interests, and if they were greeted in a friendly fashion. Additionally, we can try to identify someone who lives or works in that person's community- (neighbor, business owner, someone we may know) and ask for their recommendations. Default options such as the library, churches, community recreation centers, High School/College sports, plays, and other functions are typically present or nearby in every neighborhood. These are all reasonable and accessible places to start. Joining a formal or informal group is also a way to begin new relationships. Community Councils and Business Associations are perfect networking opportunities for professionals and neighborhood residents alike. Virtually every interest has a "club" associated with it! Joining a neighborhood-specific historical society, dog or cat welfare group, ceramic club, etc, are all great ways to meet others. Social media groups are plentiful as well, and all can provide possibilities to interact with other citizens.

<u>What elements are most important in determining if a person or place is "welcoming and hospitable"?</u>

Certainly, one can easily recognize the reception we receive when entering a new place for the first time or being introduced to a person we do not know. - Non-judgmental, accepting of diversity, "treat you well", praise for and appreciation of another's gifts are all indicators of a likely positive experience. Of course, from time to time, you may be met with resistance or find a person or place not to be as friendly as you had hoped. While that is unfortunate, simply move on to other possibilities. Do not be discouraged! There are "hidden gems" in EVERY neighborhood, we just need to discover these.

<u>What are some important points to keep in mind when you are out with another person looking for opportunities to engage?</u>

Your own behaviors and language used, friendliness, and listening to what the person or place is passionate about. With respect to the individual you are accompanying, DO NOT overtly portray yourself as a "staff" or "handler", but rather as a companion, friend, or interested citizen guide.

<u>Will this connection last? What happens if it doesn't?</u>

Maybe it will for a period of time. Possibly, it won't. We all change or lose interests, drop old things, and then… just look for new ones. No big deal. Relationships can last, though, and often provide the network to seek out new opportunities in and of themselves.

<u>What are some obstacles that may prevent a good connection for a citizen from occurring? How are these best overcome?</u>

 Transportation, money, a poor initial match (not knowing the person adequately enough), choosing an inconvenient or less than optimal time and day, seasonal changes, a less-than-encouraged or poorly matched support team, hesitant family/guardians, and fear, and

discomfort for all involved to try new things have all been voiced as potential obstacles. While each is legitimate, each has a solution as well!

Is "GETTING OUT" enough?

We often hear that a person "gets out" into their community regularly, often through life maintenance type trips such as going to the grocery store, bank, or restaurant. While this is certainly a start and is indeed better than never leaving their residence, true "belonging" and "engagement" typically require a little deeper connection in order to develop relationships with other citizens. To better accomplish this, just always be on the lookout for ways to contribute and groups to join. For example, instead of just taking a person to the local library, ask if the person would be interested in volunteering there based on their gifts and available options. In addition to just buying arts and crafts supplies at Michaels's, ask if the person would like to join others in a scheduled watercolor class. If someone loves going to the Zoo or the Taste of Blue Ash, inquire and investigate ahead of time if there are any ways to become more involved with that organization or event based on the skills and interests of the person. Relationships with people can only form by repeated contact with others, and so the more this is possible, the better the chance that networks, friends, and contacts beyond paid staff can develop. In short, this is what separates "activities" and "outings" from engagement with and connectedness to a group and its members.