

Social Roles

One of the most important aspects of our lives is the relationships we have with other people and our sense of belonging in our community. Assisting people we support to expand their social roles within their community offers opportunities to expand their social network, find their unique place in community, and assist in building a better community for everyone. Organizations should seek to intentionally build social roles for all the people they support.

Quality in Practice

Staff and Social Roles

- Assure that staff understands the meaning of social roles.
 - Ask each staff person to map his or her own social roles.
 - Ask staff to consider such things as: What community groups do they belong to? Where do they volunteer? Where are they known in their community?
 - Ask them to think about their spirituality, recreation, hobbies, passions, and learning experiences.
- Keep a list of staff's social roles and the places in which these roles are carried out.
- Support staff to expand their own social roles and share those stories widely.
- Celebrate awards, activism, and volunteer experiences that staff engages in outside of the organization.
- If possible, offer staff time or office support in their activities or encourage staff to involve someone supported by the organization to work on community efforts with them.

Social Roles and the people you support

- Actively explore the interests and desires of the people you support. Pay attention to behavioral cues as well as verbal statements. When do people seem the happiest? Where do they appear to be most comfortable? Think about where other people in the community who have the same interests and desires gather.
- Explore a variety of places and ways in which people might engage in the community. Subscribe to the community newspaper and use the community events listings to brainstorm ideas about things that are happening in the community.

- Support people to try a number of activities before settling on the things they enjoy the most. There are many ways to engage in interests:
 - an interest in the arts could translate into taking a ceramics class, or volunteering as an usher at the local community theatre, or participating in a community-wide beautification program by removing graffiti or painting a mural
 - an interest in the outdoors could translate into joining a walking or hiking club or volunteering at a local nature center or maintaining a plot in a community garden
- Provide support to people to successfully engage in those activities.
 - Have conversations with community members already engaged in the activity about involving a specific person in a specific activity and gather ideas about how best to support the person in that place and role.
 - Most people like to share their interests and are happy to welcome and support new members.
 - Make sure that the focus of the conversation is on the interests, strengths and gifts the person has to offer, rather than on their needs or disability labels.
 - Offer support that minimizes the disability issues and maximizes the person's gifts.

Social Roles (continued)

- Think about relationship building that expands beyond simply participating in the specific activity the person engages in.
 - Asking is the best way to help make things happen.
 - Support the person to invite another member of the group to get a cup of coffee after the event or suggest a group celebratory dinner at a local restaurant after a milestone of some sort has been met.
 - Support the person to send holiday cards to the people in their group or to host a holiday party at her home.
- If a person has a strong interest or passion for something that does not exist in the local community, think about how he might be supported to start a group.
 - Find other people in the community who might share his passion and begin a conversation about the issue and what might be done.
 - Support the person to take a leadership role in forming a volunteer or member group around that issue.
- Remember that our social roles change and evolve over time and assist staff to continually think about who the person is and what opportunity might be next for the person.
- One social role often leads to others – take advantage of people becoming known in their community and follow their lead.
- Adopt a philosophy that all people are needed in community and all people have something to offer and something to gain from engaging in a variety of social roles.