



Arc Guide to Person Centered Planning

Everyone, with or without a disability, wants to have choices, meaningful relationships, a purpose and places to go and belong in their lives! People are experts in what they want and what a “good life” means for them now and in the future. Person centered planning is a process that puts people with disabilities at the center, giving them the power to define the direction of their life.

For years, human and medical service systems have decided what supports are available. They controlled what supports look like and how they provide them to people with disabilities. If people wanted to receive these supports, they had to figure out how to make themselves fit and plan their lives around services. Services focused on people’s disability labels, instead of their strengths. Services focused on how to fix the person.

For these reasons, in the 1960s, people with disabilities started to speak out. They demanded more control over what their services looked like. They also wanted their supports in the community and at home. The idea of “self-determination” came from this movement. This means people with disabilities make things happen in their own lives, instead of other people doing things to or for them. They stand up for what they want, know how and when to ask for help. Person centered planning is a platform for self-determination: it gives people a space to say what they want and what they need from others to make their goals and dreams happen. This, at its core, is what person centered planning is all about.

What does it mean to be “person centered”?

To understand person centered planning and practices, it is important to define what it means to be person centered. When someone is person centered, it means s/he:

- believes the person is whole and has dreams, talents and skills to offer to the world
- looks for the good in the person and does his/her best to try and bring it out
- truly wants to know and understand the person with the disability
- is willing to push for the person’s goals that may seem difficult or impossible
- is flexible, creative and open to trying what might be possible



What is the difference between person-centered thinking and planning?

Person centered thinking is the same as being person centered. It is a belief and mindset that people are experts in what they want for their life and how they want to live it. Someone is person centered when s/he is interested in a person's gifts and how the person can share those with others. Person centered thinking goes beyond a person's disability label. It honors and respects the individual as a whole person who is valued.

Person centered planning is a process. The process includes a series of meetings with a facilitator. A facilitator is someone who is trained in person centered thinking, approaches and tools. During these meetings, the facilitator learns about the person "at the center"—the person with the disability. The process also involves the person's "network," which includes family, friends, co-workers, professionals and other important people in the person's life. This process can help people come up with a plan for next steps in areas where they want to grow more or feel stuck—like work, where they live, friendships, dating, school or hobbies.

What happens during the person centered planning meeting?

The person with the disability and his/her network gathers and a facilitator guides the discussion. There are different tools and styles that the facilitator, who guides the planning process, can use to gather important information from the person and the network. The person has the chance to share his/her dreams and what support s/he needs—which could be anything from help from family and friends to formal services. The network has the chance to say how they want to support the person. The network helps brainstorm ways to work around barriers and come up with new ideas for the person to try out. The facilitator pushes people to dream big and not limit themselves to what services or supports exist now.

How is person centered planning helpful?

There can be many positive results from person centered planning meetings. The person at the center often feels heard and supported during and after the meeting. The network usually learns new things about the person they did not know before. Everyone at the meeting commits to action steps they will do because they are excited, which helps move the person's dreams forward. Networks start important discussions about the person's future now, in a positive space with time to think, plan and discuss.



Misconceptions about person centered planning

Person centered planning is not:

- giving people everything they want—it's about a balance of what is *important to* (what motivates, inspires) and *important for* (matters of health and safety) the person
- a new way to have annual or team meetings or something new to call the exact same meeting process
- a sign that parents, providers or professionals who help the person are doing a bad job
- a process that never changes; as people grow and have new experiences, what they want for their lives and futures changes
- a required check box on a form
- something that is done “to” or “on” a person, like a therapy or an intervention the person is forced to do by a program or service
- something that everyone with a disability needs or is for only one kind of disability
- a “one size fits all” process

How does person centered planning fit with disability services?

Person centered planning is an important part of disability services in Minnesota and from the federal government. Unlike in the past, where state and federal agencies decided what was available, now these agencies must ask the people who use services what they want. These laws also list people with disabilities' rights. Examples include Minnesota's Olmstead Plan, the Positive Supports rule and Home & Community Based Services laws, like 245D.

Because person centered planning is a part of state and federal disability policy, people with disabilities now have more control. They have the right to decide the amount and kind of services they receive, where services happen and who provides them. Professionals must ask about a person's goals, dreams, and the people in his/her life who can help. Professionals then use this information to design and offer supports, and the person has the right to say yes or no. These disability laws also describe the process professionals and service providers must follow if they want to change or take a person's right away.



I am interested in person centered planning. How do I start the process?

Call The Arc for more information about person centered planning, if it is a good fit for you or a family member, and the options for how to pay for it. We can tell you how to get a list of agencies who do person centered planning and more about planning with us.

Resources

[Cornell University's Person Centered Planning Education site](#)

[MN Department of Human Services' Person Centered Practices](#)

[Positive Supports Minnesota's Understanding Minnesota Requirements](#)

[Minnesota's Olmstead Plan \(March 2019\)](#)

[A National Gateway to Self-Determination: What is Self-Determination and Why is it Important?](#)

For further information or advocacy services, contact The Arc Minnesota at 952-920-0855 or toll-free at 833.450.1494 or visit www.arcminnesota.org. (Please note: *This document is not legal advice, and should not be construed as such. Thus, no information herein should replace the sound advice of an attorney.*)

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