

M.A.D. Adventures

(Mainstream's Accreditation Dream)

How we do our work is as important as the work we do

Community and Belonging

Humans are social creatures who want to belong and feel included. We know it in our heart when we've found a place where we fit in; a place where we are acknowledged, appreciated and accepted just as we are.

A community is a network of people who regularly gather together for a common cause, be it a love of jazz, a religious belief or a desire to learn. The individuals who make up this network are often very different from one another but that doesn't really matter. The common cause is what brings everyone together and overrides all other differences. It helps to create a powerful connection between the members. Geographic, cultural, economic, linguistic, religious, age or intellectual differences take second place.

We all belong to a community. It might be a running group, a high school circle of friends, or even a weekly online Texas Hold'em game. Whatever it is, it is a place that feels comfortable and that accepts, acknowledges and appreciates us for who we are.

Individuals with disabilities are often marginalized because they are perceived as different. Traditionally, support was

focused on minimizing these differences in order to "fit in". The result was that many individuals were able to move into communities but not necessarily become part of them.

Al Condeluci is the CEO of United Cerebral Palsy/Community Living and Support Services of Pittsburg. He is a passionate believer in the importance of community inclusion and belonging. Al speaks about cultural shifting and how to support someone to become an accepted, appreciated and acknowledged member of a community. Rather than try to minimize differences, maximize on commonalities. In other words, find out what someone's passion is and the find others who share that passion. When a common cause brings people together, differences suddenly become less important.

*Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name,
and they're always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see,
our troubles are all the same
You wanna be where everybody knows
your name.*

Social Capital

It helps to know people. That's the simple concept behind Social Capital. Whether you are looking for a job, searching for a community group or needing emotional support, your friends, family and acquaintances can be indispensable. Knowing who to turn to for support, resources or information can mean the difference between getting by and getting ahead.

Social capital can be thought of as the collective value, or the depth and breadth, of relationships. In other words, how many relationships you have and how positive they are. When asked to compile lists of people we know, people we do things with and people we love, the average person names approximately 150 individuals. Individuals with disabilities typically list around 32 and most of those 32 are paid supports. Social isolation is one of the greatest challenges that individuals with disabilities face.

Our challenge: help individuals develop meaningful relationships.

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Al Condeluci, in his many articles on community, writes about the four steps to help someone increase their social capital.

Find their passion

Talk to the individual and find out what they love. What are their strengths and dreams? Do they love jazz music? Maybe they enjoy photography?

Find a community

Once you know a person's passion, find a community that shares that same passion. Maybe there's a local photography club or a jazz club.

Learn about the community

When do they meet? What special words do they use when they discuss photography, or jazz? What is their history? Who are the leaders? What are their rituals? Maybe everyone brings three new pictures to each photography meeting or they all meet for

coffee before going to the jazz club.

Find a gatekeeper

The gatekeeper is the most important part of the process. It is a person who is already part of the community and who can influence the other members. They act as the welcoming agent and they are able to bridge the gap by making introductions and by taking the new person under their wing.

Taking the time to get to know someone, their strengths and their interests can make all the difference. As Al Condeluci said: "You must be in community before you can be of community".



The 3Rs Project: Rights, Respect and Responsibility

Mainstream is going to be taking part in an exciting research project. Over the past seven years, Brock University and Community Living Welland Pelham have been working together to examine rights restrictions and to develop a human rights training program for individuals with a developmental disability. It is called the 3Rs Project and it is designed to teach staff as well as individuals with a developmental disability about human rights, respect and responsibility.

Rights restrictions happen to everyone at some point or another. Not being able to use the phone, choose what to eat, what to wear or what to do during the day are all examples of rights restrictions. Being able to recognize the restriction and handle it in a respectful and responsible manner is an important part of anyone's lifelong learning process. Being able to recognize when we're restricting someone else's rights is also an important lesson to learn.

The 3Rs project has developed a curriculum that uses role plays, video clips and an interactive board game. The topics of rights, respect and responsibility are taught to small groups of individuals over the course of several weeks. The goal is to help individuals recognize rights restrictions and well as learn respectful and responsible ways of addressing them. We will be working with 3Rs staff as they teach the program and will receive a copy of the curriculum to use in the future.

The 3Rs project is a groundbreaking program and taking part in it is a wonderful opportunity for Mainstream. Developing our own rights, respect and responsibility program will help us meet some of our accreditation goals but, more importantly, it will help improve the lives of the people we serve.