

M.A.D. Adventures

(Mainstream's Accreditation Dream)

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

Dreams and goals

Our person-centred planning process has been the subject of much discussion of late. To be ready for accreditation, we've looked for ways to make it more effective and developed systems to better demonstrate outcomes.

Recently we've started an agency-wide conversation about what person-centred planning really is, in a philosophical sense. We have all sorts of tools and forms to get through the process. Now we need to ensure that everyone truly recognizes what an essential and powerful part of our Mainstream culture the process really is. A PowerPoint presentation is being developed to facilitate a conversation about what providing individualized support means in the daily context of the work that we do. The presentation, or the first half at least, was shown at the last Team Leader meeting and generated some good discussion and feedback. Down the road, we are planning to offer this training to all staff.

In the meantime, let us explore one of the themes that has arisen from some of the preliminary discussions: goals versus dreams. The word goal has long been used to describe anything that someone wants to do. A person's goal might be cooking, going on

vacation or learning how to take the bus. These are all great goals and, at Mainstream, we are quite good at helping people work on them.

A goal, however, has the potential to be much more than that. A goal can also be a stepping stone to much larger dreams. That is what the person-centred planning process is about. What are a person's dreams? Maybe someone wants to live independently someday. That's a great dream! It might not happen overnight but it's a vision that someone has about their future. That dream can be broken down into smaller steps, goals if you like, that help get closer to the dream. Cooking, laundry and money management can all be steps along the way to independence. It is a subtle difference but it is an important one. Learning how to cook for the sake of cooking is perfectly acceptable. Learning how to cook because you someday want to live on your own has a whole new level of significance attached to it. We all do better when we have a dream that we are working towards, no matter how challenging or farfetched it may seem to others.

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For everything there is a reason

This article was inspired by a brief conversation that took place after the Team Leader meeting. During that meeting, as we talked about person-centred planning, there were the usual jokes about "oh no, not ANOTHER form!". It's true, there have been plenty of new forms over the past few months. Some may be quite helpful, others may seem to be redundant or unnecessary. You can rest assured that no form, process or policy has been written or developed without good reason!

The A-TEAM tries to include as many people as possible in any decisions that are made. Documents and forms are brought to team meetings for feedback before they are finalized. In fact, a typical document goes back and forth many times between programs, accreditation and management before it gets final approval. Why? Well, beyond the obvious reasons of checking for spelling and formatting errors, we want everyone to feel that they have been part of the accreditation discussion and have had their voices heard.

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Dreams and Goals

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Helping people learn how to dream and then supporting those dreams, no matter what our personal reservations are, is what we are here to do. There are many stories of people at Mainstream who have surpassed all expectations, because they were given the opportunity to try. One story comes to mind of a person who was living in one of our 24-hour support homes. His dream was to live independently and he never let go of that dream. The road to get there was long and it would have been easy to give up along the way. Learning how to take the bus, cook, clean and all the countless other skills that are required when living independently would have overwhelmed anyone. By breaking the dream down into manageable steps (or goals) he got there. Each step along the way was a goal that had to be met but they all led back to the ultimate dream of “I want to live on my

own”. The power of the dream is what ultimately got him there!

Whether you’re working through the person-centred planning process or simply chatting over coffee, listen carefully. Dreams, big or small, first need to be heard. Then they need to be honoured, no matter how lofty they may seem. For it is only by reaching far beyond what we can see do we find out what we are truly capable of.

Reach high, for stars lie hidden in your soul. Dream deep, for every dream precedes the goal.”

Pamela Vaull Starr

For Everything There is a Reason

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Of course, not every form or policy goes through that much discussion outside of accreditation but that does not mean that it has not been through an exhaustive review. That may be small comfort as you learn about another form that has been added to the roster but you can rest assured that there is always an important reason for anything that is done. If that reason is not clear or if you have any questions, please ask. Hearing the reasons why something is being done often makes it easier to understand and to accept.

The Team Leader meeting was an opportunity to go through some of the new forms and processes to really get at why they are there. For example, we didn’t discuss how to complete the Quality of Life as much as why it should be completed. When the first “oh no, not ANOTHER form” was said, it was

met with “but there is a good reason for it!”

At the end of the meeting, one Team Leader said that it was reassuring to hear that message. She said that it showed we really care about the accreditation process and what we are trying to do. We aren’t just making up forms for our own amusement, we really want to find the best way to provide service.

We encourage people to ask questions. We use our accreditation newsletter, our meeting minutes and staff meeting updates to share information. If, at any point, there are still lingering questions about any new form or process being introduced, just ask. There truly is a good reason for it and we would be happy to share!