

# ENGAGEMENT

*"The vehicle for empowerment is each person's circle of friends. The less the person is engaged, the more necessary it is to create structure and support a circle of friends. Human engagement involves the gradual unfolding of a sense of active participation as a companion with others and as a member of a community. It is a feeling becoming an active participant in community life. It is not self-centered, but a shared feeling of we are somebody because we are together and we are forming a better community. It's initial expression is found in the simple act of reaching out to others and drawing others into one's life."*

- John McGee, *Self-Determination and Engagement*

## 5 Key elements of enhancing tools of engagement

- 1 Meaning.** People want to be a part of something useful, valuable, and bigger than themselves. How do we help people see that what they do makes a difference for others, for the community and world around them?
- 2 Expectations.** When people know what is really expected, they work with less stress and higher confidence and productivity. Do your team members know what you expect of them? When is the last time you have engaged with them in a conversation of this nature?
- 3 Belief.** People want to be around people who believe in them. We will do our best work when we know that those around us want the best for us and believe we can achieve the best. Do you believe in the capacity and potential of the people around you? If so, do they know? If not, why not? Do the people, whom you support, hear your belief in them? In what ways do you show/tell them?
- 4 Freedom.** We are talking about human beings here, not robots (most) people don't want to be robots. Even in the most regulated and procedure-driven task, there is room for freedom and personal choices. Are we equipping people to be able to make their own choices? How do we engage people to live?
- 5 Relationships.** Human beings want to feel connected to other people - Does the environment allow for and promote the development of strong relationships? Do people feel a personal connection to you? How do help others engage in relationships around them?

## Read through the story below. As a team, highlight the following areas:

- What are you concerned about?
- What are you pleased about?
- As a support coming in to serve Luke, what would you do to try and engage with him?
- What would you attempt to do to help him to expand his circle of friends and engage with the world around him?

*Luke sits alone in his darkened apartment. The curtains are drawn. The mood is as dreary as his apartment. He sits alone in his automatic wheelchair. His dirty laundry is piled at the rear of his chair. His face is sad, his shirt is stained with food, and his red hair falls every which way. Matthew and I came to his door and rang the bell. He opened the door and greeted us with momentary enthusiasm that sliced through the dreary space he called home. "He wants his independence," Matthew had told me before we entered. I did not know what independence meant—to live by yourself on your own with your network of friends or to live a lonely life punctuated by periodic lamentations of "I want my independence. I want to make all my choices. I have the right. I want the largest big screen television in the world and then I will be happy! If you don't let me have this, I will call recipient rights!"*

*We entered his house, more a tomb than a home of the living. Its darkness spoke a thousand words. Its musty, cold air wove its way through the air like a dark, damp, chilling embrace. Luke seemed to think, "I have my freedom. Now I have everything." Yet he sat there alone with an empty face, eyes hungering for affection, and a wounded heart that he alone could not mend. He knew his rights. He had his autonomy. He was on his own, but very, much alone.*

*"Let's go for a walk around the apartment complex," I asked. He did not seem to want to. He had not been out much during the three weeks he had lived in freedom. With some persuasion, he moved his machine-driven wheelchair through the narrow door and hall. We were soon in the bright summer sun moving across the broken asphalt parking lot. We headed for the pool as Luke wove in and out of the passing cars and up and down the broken curbs. Luke talked about his right to live alone but with a demanding tone devoid of joy or even meaning. Luke was a shy young man, articulate with his palsied speech that took a while to understand. He gradually became more content as he started to feel safe with us and respected by us. His eyes took on a glimmer of contentment. He was with possible friends.*

*But, the walk ended all too soon for Luke. He rolled into his dark apartment. We hugged and said good-bye. The door swung shut. Luke was alone again. We left wondering what is freedom? It certainly must be more than being on your own, but alone. A house is made of bricks: a home is made of love. Freedom must be more than independence. It must be connectedness with others.*