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Abstract:

“What does the Department of Neighborhoods do to encourage persons with developmental disabilities to get involved in neighborhood life?” That question prompted the beginning of a program called Involving All Neighbors. The program was used to explore different ways people could be welcomed and involved in their neighbourhood.

This series of stories and strategies from Seattle emerge from that program and describe examples of people with disability becoming involved in the life of the community to the benefit of all.

The stories are likely to be helpful for families who are seeking ideas about how their son or daughter could be included, for families wanting to provide guidance and ideas for those working to support their son or daughter and for professionals who are keen to support people with disability develop skills and pursue interests.

It may be helpful to read these stories in conjunction with The Art of Asking by Ric Thompson (File number: 11146)

Matt and Kathi: A Mother and Son Nurture Traditions of Neighborhood Hospitality



When Matt moved into his own home - an apartment two blocks down the street - his parents worried that he might get bored and lonely. Because of a neurological impairment, Matt regularly needs help organizing his day and planning what will happen during the week. When Matt moved, his mother Kathi began looking for ways to help Matt stay connected to his neighborhood and find new activities in which to get involved.

Kathi successfully applied for a small grant from a Catholic Community Services fund created for neighborhood projects that involve people with disabilities. Kathi saw the fund as an opportunity to find ways for Matt and Adam, a friend with disabilities and his next-door neighbor, to get more involved and meet new people. Kathi focused on their common interest in the outdoors.

A four-block walk from where Matt and Adam live is Ravenna Park. In this bit of wilderness in the middle of urban Seattle, large evergreen and conifer trees form a canopy over trails running alongside Ravenna Creek. Matt loves the park and says he feels like he is in the mountains when he is there. Kathi was introduced to the Ravenna Creek Alliance, a group that works to restore the creek's natural habitat.

Kathi thought Matt and Adam would enjoy being members of the Alliance. So, Kathi helped Matt and Adam make that crucial first connection by taking them to a Ravenna Creek Alliance work party and introducing them to other members. Kathi sought out friendly, like-minded people who would welcome Matt and Adam into the group and encourage their participation. At that first work party, Matt and Adam met Thomas. Thomas engaged Matt and Adam in conversation and they discovered that all three of them had volunteered in the Student Conservation Association when they were teens. When Thomas responded to the discovery by saying, "Oh, then of course you know how to do work in the park," Matt and Adam were no longer outsiders at that work party.

Kathi and Matt were eager to find other park activities. When the Alliance organized an Earth Day cleanup at the park, Matt and Kathi not only joined in, they invited neighbors and friends: 25 people showed up. They also participated in Neighborhood Cleanup Day at the park with neighbors removing blackberry vines choking the creek. Those two events had Matt hooked. He found out what else was going on in the park and jumped in whenever he could to plant trees or remove invasive holly or blackberry. Kathi helped Matt fit the park activities into his weekly schedule, and introduced him to people who could work alongside Matt until he understood what to do.





Shortly before Christmas, Matt's parents gave him the idea to host a holiday lunch at his home for family, friends, neighbors, and fellow Alliance members after cutting holly in the park. Together they planned the "Hollyday" lunch. His parents made a flyer and Matt passed it out to invite neighbors and friends. That Saturday morning Matt joined the group to cut holly in the park and his parents went to his apartment to greet any early arrivals. Matt's home was packed with people eating Kathi's soup and Matt's homemade brownies and drinking hot cider. This was the neighborhood place to be.

"I'm doing something for my community," says Matt. And he keeps doing. His experience working in the park gave Matt enthusiasm and confidence to find other ways to contribute to his neighborhood, such as delivering the Ravenna Bryant Neighborhood Association newsletter to his neighbors and walking a neighbor's dog.

One of Matt's proudest accomplishments was organizing his Block Watch summer party. The block where he grew up had an annual block party that Matt enjoyed. After his move, Matt realized his new block never had a party, so Matt went to the Block Watch captain and suggested they organize one. Adam, who usually doesn't like crowds, went to the party after repeated invitations and persistent encouragement from Matt.



Matt's is a story of connections and opportunities for involvement that relies on neighborly relationships nurtured over time. Kathi continues to help Matt find options for neighborhood involvement. It's a slow and thoughtful process to sort through the various neighborhood events, celebrations, and organizations, find the right fit, join in, and make connections with people. But over time, a sense of belonging feels real. It feels real for Matt.

Anne and Christina: Friends Hanging Out and Helping Out



Anne and Christina have known each other since preschool days. Although Anne is finishing her degree at Seattle University and Christina is working at the Little Anchor Childcare, they see each other almost every Saturday because they volunteer together at Children's Hospital. Anne calls it "a good way to hang out with each other every weekend. We hang out and help out at the same time."

Anne and Christina got the idea to volunteer at Children's Hospital when they took part in a Get Involved in Your Neighborhood workshop put on by Involving All Neighbors. The workshop was for persons with developmental disabilities who wanted to get involved in their neighborhood but didn't know how. Each participant came to the workshop with a friend to make the first steps of neighborhood involvement more comfortable and fun -the buddy system.

- Anne and Christina identified their common interests as children and books. They explored their neighborhood to find out what goes on there. Christina lives near Children's Hospital. From that realization it was a short jump to the idea of volunteering to read to children who were patients at the hospital.
- Christina and Anne called Children's Volunteer Office. They provided personal recommendations, interviewed with the volunteer coordinator, were tested for TB, went through a State Patrol check, and attended a two-hour orientation session. Anne and Christina were then ready to volunteer and were assigned messenger duty. For two hours every Saturday afternoon, they delivered specimens from the hospital wings to the lab, flowers and balloons to children, and wheelchairs to the greeter's desk. There were also special projects like making infant bracelets and labelling envelopes. They soon learned their way around the enormous hospital.
- Anne knew she would not be available to volunteer with Christina the following summer and wanted to find a replacement so Christina could continue to volunteer. One person she asked was leaving town for the summer, another was too busy. Anne happened to mention her disappointment to her friend Scott and out of the blue he said he would take her place. He began while Anne was still in town, and the two took turns volunteering with Christina. Christina was able to continue at Children's and made a new friend at the same time.
- When they showed up at the Get Involved in Your Neighborhood workshop, Anne and Christina had no idea what they were getting into. They couldn't see themselves working to restore streams or growing vegetables in community gardens like some other participants wanted to do. They stuck to activities they were interested in and they stuck close to home, and that made it possible to begin and keep going.



Strategy: Start with One Person

Any person can act in a way that sends a message of welcome or unwelcome. When someone stops to chat with a neighbor working in the garden or brings a small gift to someone who just moved into the neighborhood, people tend to feel welcomed to the neighborhood. Some people just naturally make these neighborly overtures. Other people need encouragement and possibly even some guidance on how to reach out to neighbors or to get involved in community activities. Some neighborhoods have traditions built around gestures of hospitality, and those traditions make it easier for neighbors to join in even if they aren't naturally outgoing.

Here are some ways to involve persons with developmental disabilities in your organization:

- **Take time to listen to each person.**

Remember: Listening begins with helping someone find his or her voice, regardless of whether or not there is speech.

- **Treat each person like a person, not like a person-with-a-disability.**

Remember: Talk to each person directly instead of through someone accompanying him or her.

Remember: Consider persons with developmental disabilities in terms of their gifts and capacities.

- **Pay attention to and respect each person's important and unique perspective, knowledge, and experience.**

Ask: How can we bring these ideas and perspectives into our neighborhood organization or project?

- **Look for each person's particular skills, interests, and strengths.**

Ask: What brought you here? What do you like to do? What skills do you have that you would like to contribute? What are your concerns? What are some of your challenges?

Remember: A person with disabilities can speak for him- or herself based on his or her own experiences, knowledge, and perceptions; a person with disabilities is not speaking on behalf of all persons with disabilities.

- **Find a role for everyone who is interested by matching his or her skills and interests to the needs of the organization or project.**

Remember: Think broadly; there are roles for everyone: for example, giving new perspectives and ideas, pouring coffee, bringing food, greeting people, taking minutes, stuffing and stamping envelopes, putting up flyers in the neighborhood, passing out information, calling people to remind them about a neighborhood event, or just being present. Encourage participation. Present opportunities to try something new.

- **Don't make assumptions about people.**

Remember: Ask, clarify, and give people choices.

Remember: Be direct about what you are asking someone to do, such as giving someone a ride to a meeting or helping put together a mailing.

- **Support each person's involvement.**

Remember: Each person will want and need a different kind of assistance, whether a word of encouragement, a problem-solving discussion (e.g., how to get to a meeting or how to proceed with a task), information, a reminder call about an event or meeting, or someone to act as a mentor until the person gains sufficient confidence or skills or both.

- **Find alternative ways to communicate.**

Remember: Language that is concrete and direct is most easily understood by most people. Sometimes it is helpful to paraphrase so that everyone understands. Create written materials that are easy for everyone to understand. Pictures and graphics are helpful.

- **If a task seems too complicated for someone, break it down into small steps.**

Remember: Work can be fun. Even the smallest successes are worth celebrating.

- **Make an extra effort to acknowledge each person's contribution.**

Remember: Nothing goes without saying. Everyone appreciates being appreciated.

Judy, Melanie, and the Phinney Neighborhood Association: Gaining Confidence Together



Judy was getting really bored with her job sorting nuts and bolts for an aerospace company. The agency she worked for employed only people with developmental disabilities. Often there was nothing for her to do. Judy was ready for a change.

Judy was shy and her mother wanted Judy to have experiences that would build her confidence and allow her to meet new people. Judy's mother learned about Melanie, a Community Guide at the University of Washington who is paid to help adults with disabilities pursue their goals. Judy's mother invited Melanie to their house to talk about Judy's interest in doing office work somewhere in the neighborhood.

As a Phinney resident, Melanie knew about the Phinney Neighborhood Association (PNA). She knew that neighbors came to the PNA to take a myriad of classes, check out tools from the tool bank, look at art exhibits, and drop their children off at the daycare center.

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Melanie approached Chardell, the volunteer coordinator at the PNA. She told Chardell about Judy and her interest in volunteering. Melanie described what kind of help Judy would need and offered to help the PNA structure a volunteer job for Judy, on the premise that in time Judy would no longer need her assistance. Melanie assured Chardell that she would be available to Judy and the PNA as long as she was needed. The PNA had been looking for opportunities to expand their pool of volunteers to reflect the diversity in Phinney Ridge. Chardell and her co-worker Mary Lee welcomed Judy into their pool of volunteers.

With its various activities and large membership, the PNA has a wide range of things for volunteers to do, including many tasks that don't require reading. Melanie helped Chardell and Mary Lee find things to do that Judy would be good at. Judy was able to assemble community information. She stamped flyers to notify members to renew their membership. She folded announcements and letters, and stuffed and stamped the envelopes. After a few months Chardell and Mary Lee knew Judy well enough to figure out for themselves what else Judy would be good at doing.



Judy learned to ride the bus to the Phinney Neighborhood Association in stages. At first she was so shy, she wouldn't even pull the stop cord when Melanie told her it was time. After a while Judy started not only to pull the cord but she also went out of her way to sit in a seat on her own, apart from Melanie. Judy began to recognize landmarks indicating when to pull the cord and get off. After Judy seemed to have learned the stops, Melanie followed the bus in her car, unknown to Judy, to make sure Judy got off at the right stop. Sometimes Judy didn't get off at the right bus stop because she decided to keep riding the bus. Melanie or Judy's mother would call Metro Transit, Metro would call the driver, and the driver would tell them where Judy was. Judy enjoyed the added adventure. She was always proud of being able to ride the bus on her own. And Judy's mother, even if she didn't enjoy the "adventure" quite so much, was willing to live with it for the sake of Judy gaining more confidence and independence.

As Judy became more comfortable with Chardell and Mary Lee, Melanie gave less support to the PNA. To make more room for Chardell and Judy to interact with each other, Melanie started to arrive at the PNA later than Judy or go to a different part of the office. In time, Melanie came less often and didn't stay as long. Chardell and Mary Lee got to know Judy's mom and talked to her instead of Melanie about how the bus trips were going and about Judy's volunteer schedule.





On the first day of Judy's volunteer job at the PNA she was so shy she almost wouldn't go into the office. When she did go in she wouldn't speak to or look at anyone. Now Judy comes by herself, smiles and waves at people in the office, and talks about what's going on in her life. Her co-workers have learned that she can be mischievous and,



when necessary, quietly but firmly assertive. The people at the PNA feel that Judy, with her smile and warm heart, has enriched their lives and hope she feels the same about them.

After two years, Judy still volunteers once a week at the PNA. She wouldn't miss it. With the confidence gained by volunteering at the PNA, Judy landed a job at The Gap. But even with full-time work, she finds

[Strategy: Start with a Neighborhood Organization](#)

People in neighborhoods build a sense of community when they create a variety of formal and informal associations. These associations allow neighbors to get to know each other, discuss issues, solve problems, and share common interests and activities. They can be informal groups based on common interests such as reading and discussing books, gardening, walking, or sports. People with common interests gather at the neighborhood coffee shop, in someone's kitchen, or at the basketball court at the local park.

Other associations focus on issues that the neighborhood cares about such as art, the environment, land use, economic development, transportation, or public safety. Some associations meet monthly to discuss whatever issues currently face the neighborhood's residential or business communities. Some neighborhood groups come together for specific purposes and then disband when they accomplish their goal, such as organizing an event or building a playground. Some of the organizations that help compose a community are public institutions such as schools, libraries, community centers, parks, and social service agencies. Any and all of these organizations are opportunities for inclusion.

An association is only as strong as the people who participate. Everyone in the neighborhood has something valuable to contribute to a group that will make it that much stronger.

What Makes Neighborhood Organizations Inclusive?

Persons with developmental disabilities and their families, neighborhood activists, and neighborhood organization leaders say that inclusion happens when:

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- The neighborhood organization welcomes everyone and actively seeks to involve neighbors. Inclusion happens when it is a core belief and mission of the organization.
- Both the organization's leaders and its members are involved in inclusion efforts, and are knowledgeable about and committed to inclusion. Inclusion is everyone's responsibility. Inclusion happens when leadership roles and responsibilities are shared to enhance learning and commitment.
- Time and effort are put into recruiting and assisting persons with disabilities. Inclusion requires action, resourcefulness, and hanging in there over time.
- Family interests and concerns are included. Inclusion happens when friends and family are involved.
- Neighborhood organizations get the help they need, whether in the form of financial support, encouragement, training, or problem solving. Inclusion means giving concrete help to organizations in ways that make sense to them.
- People who have been excluded provide their presence, experience, and knowledge to develop more inclusive places. Inclusion means people show up and give of their talents.
- Personal relationships are developed. Inclusion happens when people make friends and care about each other.
- Inclusion happens because people want to make it happen.

Archie and the Creation of Charlestown Park



Archie loves to garden. The garden in his small rental home in the Delridge neighborhood is full of plants. Archie's interest goes beyond his own yard, though. He participates in work parties cleaning up a creek that flows in a wooded ravine near his home. He also helps some of his neighbors prune their trees and weed their gardens. Archie is also the president of the West Seattle chapter of People First, an advocacy organization for people with disabilities.

The advisor for Archie's People First organization suggested that a nearby property owned by the Seattle Water Department had the potential to become a park. Archie and the other members of the group were excited by the possibility. The property had fantastic views of downtown Seattle and the Cascade mountains, and Archie and his friends began to imagine the beautiful new park they could create with their neighbors.

With their advisor's help, Archie and his group secured a Neighborhood Matching Fund grant to design the neighborhood park. Then they organized a neighborhood meeting to start the design work. They found a meeting place in a neighborhood church, posted flyers about the meeting, and doorbelled to make sure everyone in the neighborhood was invited to participate. Two months and several meetings later, the People First group and their neighbors had created a design for the park.



As the park was constructed, Archie and his group were able to take pride in the fact that it had come about because of their efforts. They were a little disappointed that there was not enough money to include all the public art features they had dreamed of, but on the whole were delighted with the new park. And as the park was designed and built, they saw themselves grow into a central and vital neighborhood organization that had started a project to unite their neighbors.

time to volunteer at this neighborhood place.

Strategy: [Start with a Neighborhood Project](#)

With Seattle's Neighborhood Matching Fund program, we've learned that projects - identified, planned, and carried out by neighbors - are excellent vehicles for getting people involved in neighborhood life. It's amazing to see how a simple project like planting street trees gets neighbors out of their homes and working side by side to make the neighborhood greener.

Projects also serve another purpose. They can result in creating community places where neighbors can meet and greet each other and find out what's going on in the neighborhood. These places take us past our own doorways into the shared life of community. A gathering place can be a bench, strategically placed at a spot well suited for neighborly conversation. Or it can be a playground full of accessible equipment that draws kids and parents from all over the neighborhood who are likely to interact because they're at the same place doing the same thing.

Using the Neighborhood Matching Fund, several groups have put their creativity to the test. Involving many neighbors, including people with disabilities, in the design of the project has resulted in community spaces that are welcoming and accessible to everyone in the neighborhood.

- A short-term project with tangible results is a good way to get involved and benefit the neighborhood.
- A neighborhood may want a particular project or some feature of it but still lack enough people willing to do the work to make it happen. It works best to find neighbors who commit to working on the project before a project gets started.

- Often there may be unknown or inexperienced community organizations with resources to mobilize on behalf of the community. Given ideas and resources, these organizations can accomplish impressive results in the community and gain recognition. These organizations may get better results by creating partnerships with more experienced community organizations.
- Almost never will every neighbor agree on how a project is best accomplished and how it should end up. But, always, it's important to consider everyone's input and suggestions and to work toward consensus. Respecting everyone's opinion and sharing decision-making power is essential to building community. When a project includes diverse interests, many people will be willing to work to help create it, and the entire neighborhood will benefit.
- Building a neighborhood place that relies on the interests and work of all neighbors creates the opportunity to bring together people of diverse backgrounds. Working together on a project develops relationships and the finished place in turn is a place where neighbors will continue to see each other to maintain these relationships and the entire neighborhood benefits.

