

Building the Road to Community in Difficult Times

Appreciating Our Strengths



An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry

v 2.0

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September 2012

Background

In February 2012, we met with five focus groups representing Self-Advocates, Family and Community Advocates, DDD Staff, Residential Services, and County and Employment Services. Across the focus groups people talked about a system at risk of being overly influenced by forces that work against a better alignment of practice with what it takes to assist people with developmental disabilities and their families to have a good life. These forces include...

- ... under-investment in some supports that would expand people's chances for a good life and relieve strain on them and their families
- ... a negative scan: focusing more on what is undone or done poorly and what is scarce and less on cultivating what is working and can be expanded
- ... impersonal communication: more attention to data and directions transmitted electronically and at web-based meetings; less face-to-face time and attention to learning from the stories of what makes life good for people and their families and meaningful for those who provide supports
- ... avoiding error, especially errors perceived by DSHS inspections and investigations, and complying with procedural requirements at the expense of inventing more effective ways to live up to the system's commitments
- ... more attention focused internally than on building opportunities for contributions to community (outside of working hours for those employed)
- ... greater attention and funding to accommodating the fears and concerns of RHC families than to understanding and investing in the support of the much larger group of families whose resilience makes the "no paid services" caseload possible
- ... limited progress on bridging continuing separations such as those between services that support employment and residential services and RHC staff and community services

... a sense that the system's locus of control is shifting: it seems that more and more of the developmental disabilities system is managed by decision makers outside the developmental disabilities system who may not have the same understanding and commitment to the values that have shaped the system since the late 1970's as those invested in the system do

As one response, we think it makes sense to ask people to invest in shared learning opportunities –including this exploration of Appreciative Inquiry, that grow from these principles...

- ... give people the chance to invest time outside their usual roles and agendas in thinking together about the best ways to support people with developmental disabilities to act as contributing citizens and the possibilities for making progress on issues involved in offering that support
- ... bring people together face-to-face in working groups that mix them across usual boundaries and roles (e.g. self-advocate/staff; family/field service worker; RCH staff/community service provider; residential/employment) and charge them with negotiating a shared understanding of what it takes to align a selected area of practice with what it take to support good lives
- ... encourage and support the growth of a network of people voluntarily committed to better alignment of practice and values that becomes a reference group for efforts to better align practice and values
- ... strongly encourage participants to adopt the perspective of the people who rely on services and supports and their families and orient themselves to those people's capacities
- ... give people a sense of connection to national and international development of better supports to self-direction and community inclusion
- ... facilitate a process for discovering opportunities for greater coherency between practice and values by strengthening peoples capacities to listen and observe, reflect on what they hear and

see, and identify new possibilities for constructive action

Based on what we learned from focus groups, we have identified some areas for inquiry into what is working now and how what is working now can grow stronger and more influential. Over time, it would be worthwhile to search for opportunities to learn from situations in which...

... new understanding of a person's impairments and effective technology and support practices lead to more relevant and powerful assistance in key areas such as communication, self-control and autonomy, or competent performance of paid jobs or other community roles of interest to the person

... community resources outside the developmental disabilities system are effectively mobilized both to benefit individuals and to address community issues like accessible and affordable housing

... there is particularly effective collaboration between employment supports and residential supports which results in both greater benefits from employment and more meaningful community life outside work

... situations in which community services have been particularly effective at helping people deal with difficulties and turn the corner toward better times, given that some people with developmental disabilities experience an up and down, bumpy path into and through community life,

... families and guardians have developed more positive expectations of life in community and have become actively engaged in the transition process and supportive of efforts to improve the chances that people will experience success as it is defined by the DDD Commitment Statement

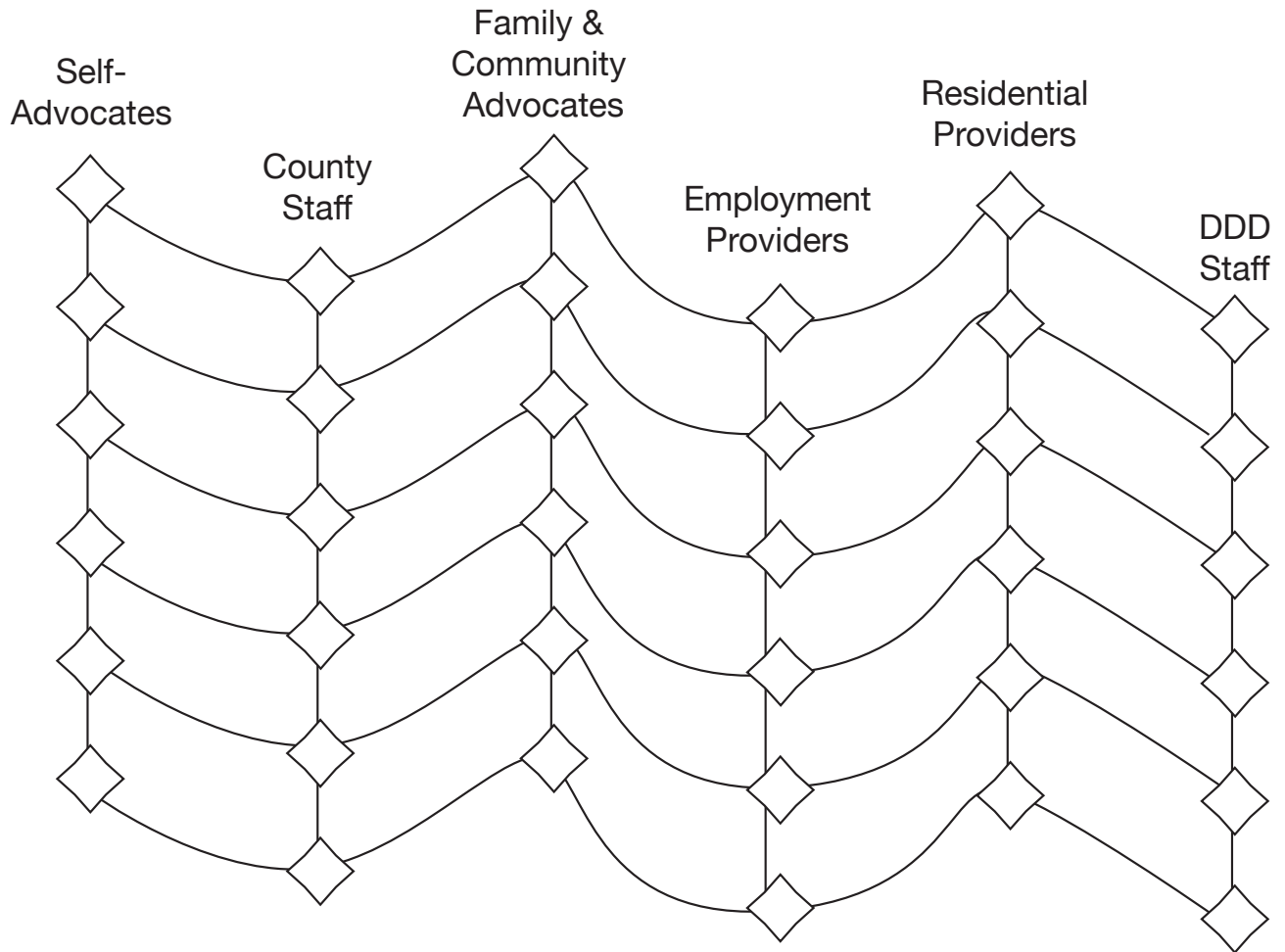
... transitions from RHC or nursing homes to community living have been particularly effective for all involved

... self-advocates make positive contributions to transitions from RHC's or nursing homes

... RHC staff have developed a deeper understanding of the positive possibilities in community services and applied their influence and relevant expertise in support of people's community life

... family networks are thriving and offering positive support

... people with developmental disabilities and their families feel well supported in self-direction and have developed valued social roles in community life which multiply resources available to the person



Each person and every organization working for better lives for people with developmental disabilities is part of a web of strengths. The connections among our strengths create what is good in our system. Because we have different strengths and interests we may see different things and value things differently, its good to make time to attend to strengthening the positive core of our common work.

Our Purpose

- ... Step back from daily demand, reflect on our strengths and consider how to make the best of them.
- ... Bring people face-to-face who may not usually have time to share what they value about their work and consult people with different points of view about how to build on their strengths
- ... Identify, learn from and build on what is working in our system
- ... Introduce Appreciative Inquiry, a way of identifying and strengthening the positive core of our organizations



Appreciative Inquiry is the study of what gives life, what energizes, what gives vitality to human endeavors, organizations, teams, people, relationships when we're at our best.

Appreciative Inquiry doesn't say that we're always at our best. It does say that if we want to learn and grow and make positive change in the world, the best way to do that is to study what works. Appreciative Inquiry says that the questions we ask make a difference and the more positive our questions the more positive the information that we learn and the change that we create.

The basic assumption is that what we come to believe as true, as real, as meaningful gets created in human interaction and in conversation. The questions we ask are fateful. Our questions determine what we find, what we learn, and what we create.

The times in my life I feel most energized and alive are...

The conditions that bring out my greatest strengths are...

When we truly engage in Appreciative Inquiry we ask questions, we listen deeply and we're open to learn what the other person believes and thinks and feels. As we interview people we will remember to quiet the positive or negative judgements and desires to tell our own story as they come into our minds.

This is very different from a situation in which I ask you a question and I really want to see if you know the answer that I'm already thinking about. That's not inquiry, that's a setup. We will remember:

Appreciative means I want to know what you value about your work, what brings out your best at work and what you want more of in your work.

Inquiry means I care about what you say and I want to hear your story and your thinking. We want to inquire from a spirit of discovery.

We show our interest by the quality of our listening and by encouraging people to tell us more of the story. We want as much of people's stories and thinking as they are willing to share, so within the time we've agreed for the interview, we don't want to act as if we are in a hurry. Periods of silence often give people time to think a bit more deeply or remember something else that matters to them. Asking for more detail often encourages the person to tell an even more complete story. Try these encouraging questions when they fit...

...Can you tell me more?

...Why was that important to you?

...How did that affect you?

...What was your contribution?

...Who supported you? How?

...How has this experience changed you... changed your organization?

Thinking about the work you do, paid and unpaid, to make life better for people with developmental disabilities...

What would you describe as being a high point in your work life?

Without being too modest, what do you value most about yourself? your work? your organization?

What are the core factors that give life to your organization?

Without these the organization would lose its capacity to make life better for people with disabilities and their families

Describe your vision of the best possible future for your organization?

Keep time and use the whole time. Silence is ok.

Ask encouraging questions:

... Can you tell me more?

... Why was that important to you?

... How did that affect you?

... What was your contribution?

... Who supported you? How?

... How has this experience changed you... changed your organization?

Take brief notes; capture quotes and images that show what's most alive for the teller.

Stay in the spirit of appreciative discovery

Assumptions

What we give our attention to shapes our reality. Organizations* move in the direction of what they study.

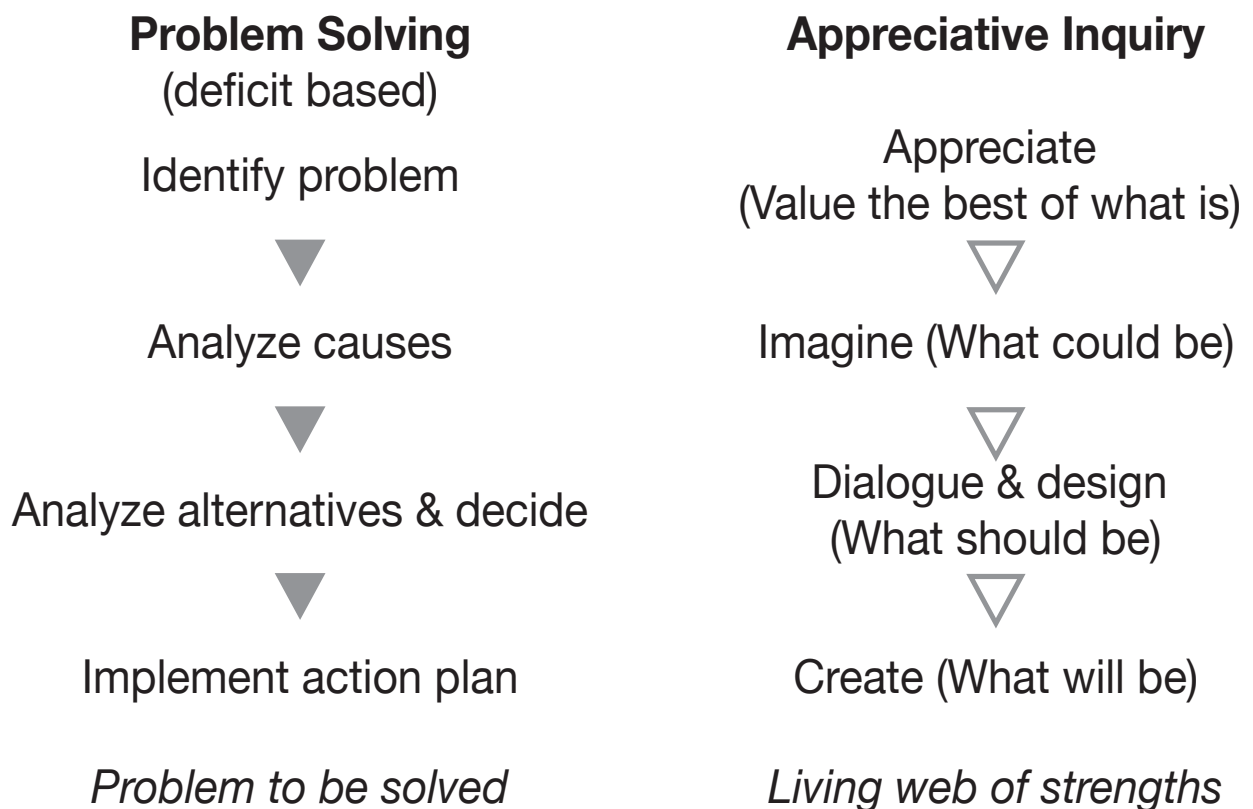
The questions we ask determine what we find. The way we ask and the words we use to ask the questions affects the system we are studying

In every system, **some things work & give life**. We can choose to identify and build on what the organization is like when it is at its best.

People see & value different things & have different strengths; To build the web of strengths **look for higher ground**, not just common ground. Draw out the detail of words and images that express what is meaningful and gives strength.

People are more confident about the journey to the future when they mindfully **carry positive things from the past** along.

Organizations can be understood in different ways. If we understand our **organizations as living stories** that we tell and re-tell with our actions and our words, we have the chance to edit and revise the story to make it even richer and more full of life.



* "Organizations" can be as small as a person and their allies or as big as a whole service system. Make the boundaries clear as you begin to inquire.

What did our field make its focus of attention when integrated employment was not considered possible for all but the most able people with developmental disabilities? How was this focus maintained?

Appreciative Inquiry as a Method

The **4-D Process** begins by **Discovering** the organization or system of organizations at its best, moves to envision the future in a **Dream**. You then **Design** what it is that you want the organization to look like and move into **Destiny** or the realization of the dream and the design.

The first step is to **Identify the Positive Core**, that which gives life to the organization; that which expresses its unique identity, without which it would not be what it is.

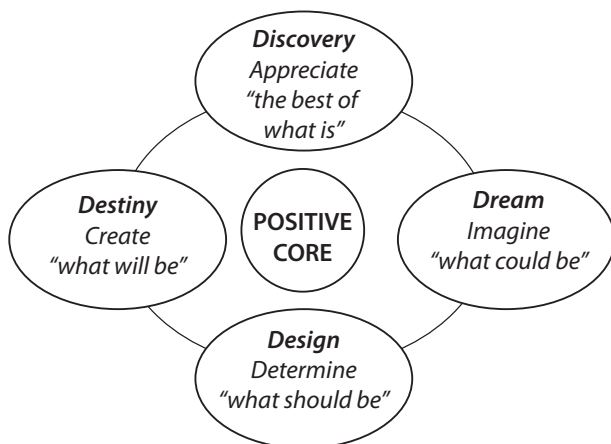
The next step is to choose life-giving **Topics** for questions. When we're choosing affirmative topics we go through what we like to call **the flip**, from a problem, to a focus on those things the problem points to that we value, those things that we want more of.

Discovery interviews focus on strengths, who are we at our best?

The second phase of the 4-D Cycle is **Dream**. Because the discovery phase, which precedes the dream, is a time for people to really know who they are, to explore their strengths and to get renewed, when they come into the dream phase, they are bolder and more courageous in what they envision.

The **Design** phase is an opportunity to ask very important questions about the design of the organization or the community. It is a time to say what we have learned about who we are at our best, what we envision for our future, and what kind of organization needs to be put in place in order to support us being our best and realizing our dreams. We do that through a process of crafting provocative propositions, also called Design Principles.

The fourth phase is **Destiny**, an extended time of moving into action toward the dreams.



The "4-D" Cycle

Try the flip

<p>High staff turnover loses continuity & costs a lot</p>	
<p>Families & self-advocates feel excluded from decision-making</p>	
<p>Collaboration between residential services & employment services is poor</p>	
<p>Staff feel overloaded with paperwork</p>	
<p>There is too little funding to provide what people need</p>	

What We Want More Of: One View

We are successful if people with developmental disabilities...

... are healthy and safe

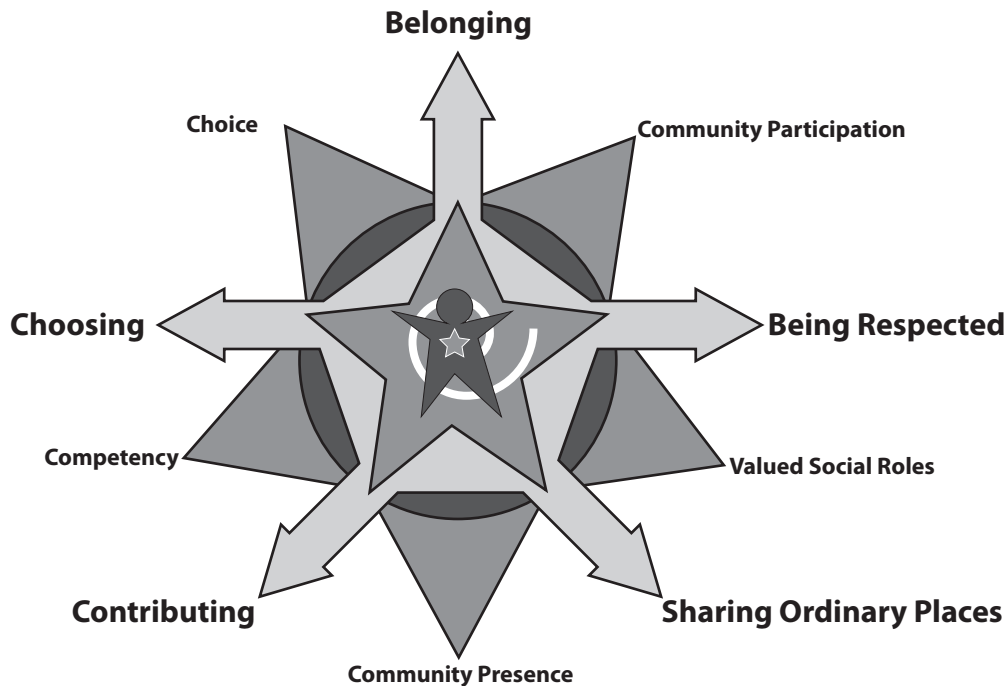
... have choices in their lives and services

... experience respect, everyday relationships, competence

... are involved in their communities

–DDD Commitment Statement

What We Want More Of: Another View



All citizens have better life chances, and everyone's world grows more interesting, when communities offer rich opportunities for people to have these **five valued experiences**:

Belonging in a diverse variety of relationships and memberships.

Being respected as whole persons whose history, capacities and futures are worthy of attention and whose gifts engage them in valued social roles.

Sharing ordinary places and activities with other citizens, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers. Living, working, learning, and playing confidently in ordinary community settings.

Contributing by discovering, developing, and giving their gifts and investing their capacities and energy in pursuits that make a positive difference to other people. There are gifts of being and gifts of doing: contributions can include interested presence as well as capable performance. Contributions may be freely exchanged or earn pay.

Choosing what they want in everyday situations in ways that reflect their highest purpose. Having the freedom, support, information, and assistance to make the same choices as others of a similar age and learning to make wiser choices over time. Being encouraged to use and strengthen voice regardless of mode of communication, clarify what really matters, make thoughtful decisions, and learn from experience.

Service workers who want to assist people with disabilities to get or keep out of the box have to build alliances that are strong enough and plans that are imaginative enough to energize creative action that opens pathways for people's energy, capacities, and gifts to flow into community life. They continue to improve the quality of their answers to the questions that define five accomplishments.

How can we assist people to make and sustain connections, memberships and friendships? Service workers make a difference when they listen deeply and act thoughtfully to provide exactly what a person needs to build a bridge to community participation.

How do we enhance people's reputation? Respect comes to those who play recognizable and valued parts in everyday life. Service workers make a difference when they support people to identify and take up social roles that express their interests and provide needed assistance with negotiating the accommodations they need to be successful and so encourage **valued social roles**.

How do we increase people's active involvement in the life of our communities? Service workers make a difference when they assist people to make the most of the ordinary community settings that attract their interest and energy. This increases **community presence**.

How do we assist people to develop and invest their gifts and capacities? Service workers make a difference when they focus on what each person can bring to others and bring imagination and technical competence to designing and delivering the help each person needs to develop competency.

How do we increase choice and control in their lives? Service workers make a difference when they honor people's rights and responsibilities and offer what works to promote their **autonomy**.

Discovering The Positive Core – 1

Thinking about your organization...

Share the most memorable parts of an organizational high point. A time when your organization accomplished something that you are really proud of. Include the challenges your organization faced and how they were met, as well as what you accomplished together.

Keep time and use the whole time. Silence is ok.

Ask encouraging questions:

... Can you tell me more?

... Why was that important to you?

... How did that affect you?

... What was your contribution?

... Who supported you? How?

... How has this experience changed you... changed your organization?

Take brief notes; capture quotes and images that show what's most alive for the teller.

Stay in the spirit of appreciative discovery

When do people feel most connected to your organization and most energized and able to act constructively? Share an example.

Reflect on the root causes of success when your organization engages and energizes people to make a real difference to people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Assuming your organization will change in the future, what are those best qualities –signature strengths, distinctive capacities, assets– that you would want to keep or build on, even as you move into a new and changing future?

Describe your vision of the best possible future for your organization.

Discovering The Positive Core – 2

Reflecting on what came up for you as you responded to the inquiry questions, make and share a poster with images and words that express what gives life to your organization when your organization is at its best and the conditions that bring out your organization's best.

Share your poster with people who will help you make your image of the positive core even stronger by asking clarifying questions and offering their thoughts and responses to what you have shown in the poster. Others can make suggestions, but the poster is yours. Make any additions you choose.

Strengthening The Positive Core

Brainstorm: What might we do to make the positive core of our work even stronger?

Individual actions...

Changes to our practices...

Changes to the way we are organized...

Other ways...

Identifying Topics for Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry positively influences an organization by engaging as many people as possible in sharing their experiences and thoughts about life giving topics: sources of what is or could become strongest and most meaningful in the organization when it is at its best. Life giving topics become the focus of Appreciative Inquiry Interviews that involve as many people connected to the organization as possible in discovery. The more people who go on from being interviewed to interviewing someone else, the stronger the effect of Appreciative Inquiry.

A good topic...

...is affirmative: stated in a way that energizes people by focusing their thoughts on strengths, real achievements and genuine hopes for a desirable future

...moves the conversation in the direction we want the whole system to go: have potential to shift attention to what is inspiring

...opens the way for us to discover more about what we really want to learn; follows our genuine curiosity

Assumptions

- What we give our attention to shapes our reality. Organizations move in the direction of what they study.
- The questions we ask determine what we find. The way we ask and the words we use to ask the questions affects the system we are studying
- In every system, some things work & give life.
- People see & value different things & have different strengths; To build the web of strengths, look for higher ground, not just common ground.
- People are more confident about the journey to the future when they carry positive things from the past along.

Better Life Topics

A common main topic is taking action with people with developmental disabilities and their allies that results in a better life. Such actions call for creativity, stretch us out of the boxes we may not have even known we were in, call for experimentation, learning and collaboration, and engage us in dealing actively with risk rather than trying to avoid risk. These are some of the better life topics that give life and meaning to our work when we are at our best in offering assistance:

- Joining with the people we assist to take action that breaks through a limiting belief about a person's capacity and raises expectations to new heights
- Supporting people to participate in community life in contributing roles (employment, civic and neighborhood roles), especially when they contribute in new roles that provide expanded opportunities
- Creating practical new ways for people to be in control their lives and direct the assistance we provide
- Sticking with and learning from people as we struggle with situations that challenge our ability to do what we believe is right

System Strengthening Topics

Listening sessions in February identified several areas in which gathering stories and accounts of necessary conditions will strengthen the whole DD system. These include inquiring about situations where...

- ... community resources have been mobilized by and for a person
- ... relationships with people’s families are especially good and result in real growth into a better life
- ... people have particularly effective guardians
- ... technology and support practices make a big positive difference
- ... there is effective collaboration between residential and employment supports
- ... people have had good support to deal with difficult times; even threats to their staying in their community
- ... transitions from RHC or nursing home have been good
- ... RHC staff have developed a good understanding of community supports & contribute their expertise
- ... self-advocates make an important contribution to RHC or nursing home transitions
- ... people and families feel well supported in self-direction

If people in your organization have especially positive experiences to share about any of these themes, consider including them in your interviews

Inquiry into life giving topics begins with stories of positive personal experience. Here are some examples of topics and related experiences identified by participants in a previous workshop.

Life Giving Topic	Ask for a story of personal experience of...
A stronger self-advocacy movement: commitment, participation, growth	Making a contribution that strengthens you as a self-advocate & makes things better for others Feeling really good about coming to a self-advocacy group meeting.
Investing in Direct Support Workers	Feeling recognized for supporting a person’s move toward a more meaningful life Feeling valued Restructuring or other organizational change to increase direct support effectiveness & retention Creating opportunities for personal development & more rewarding careers

Life Giving Topic	Ask for a story of personal experience of...
Promoting naturally supportive relationships: person-to-person & family-to-family	Connecting people & families in a mutually supportive way Self-advocates helping students move from school to good jobs Developing a network of people who support you and advocate for you in addition to staff; specific example of how this has made a positive difference
Thriving networks of families providing positive support	Time when family-to-family support has made an especially positive difference
Making a meaningful community life after leaving an RHC or nursing home	The positive high point(s) of a transition to community life The engagement of community resources in transition that have made a meaningful difference to the person's life Self-advocate involvement in helping people move into the community
Mobilizing community resources	Collaboration with families and people from other community agencies that promotes meaningful lives Community contributions of time, talent, & treasure that positively impact a person's life Community engagement in developing accessible & affordable housing for people with DD
Holding core values in times of adversity	Finding a positive solution when it seemed like what we value would be compromised
Deeper, broader understanding of what makes for a meaningful life	Discovering something that has been particularly important to your understanding of a meaningful life
Meaningful days (both work and...)	A favorite day, one that gave you a deep sense of satisfaction
Personally tailored supports for people with unique needs, including good jobs	Creatively adapting & adjusting your way of assisting a person to support their uniqueness in a very positive way Supporting someone with complex needs in successful employment (especially full time jobs) Successfully moving from AFH or group living to own home Developing creative residential supports Incorporating effective behavioral supports

Life Giving Topic	Ask for a story of personal experience of...
Respectful & effective decision making support	Benefiting from the contribution of an exemplary guardian who has personal knowledge, a strong well informed voice, & respect for people’s competence & preferences. Effective supports to guardian decision making Arrangements other than legal guardianship that inform & support a person’s decision making
Highest quality direct support	A high point in the experience of receiving or offering direct support An ideal job description, matching support exactly to a particular person
Best use of assistive technology	Collaboration with a person & those with expert knowledge of technology that resulted in much better communication or ability to act
Inclusion in contributing roles	Support to successful inclusion through which a person makes a positive contribution Becoming & being an active member of a group that shares common interests
Active Voice: Speaking powerfully to those who decide about budgets & exercising the right to vote and be heard by representatives People with disabilities exercising leadership in defining organizational vision & mission	Exercising effective political voice (registering & voting; enlisting & supporting others; lobbying in Olympia) People with disabilities influence on service organization mission & vision
Greater choice & control	Speaking up (or listening to someone who takes the risk to speak up) & getting a positive change made Supporting staff to help people explore & exercise choices Self-advocates helping to develop their own service plans that are organized around positive ideas of a meaningful day, including deciding how staff are to help with daily tasks
Finding meaning in life by pursuing passions & interests	Assisting someone to discover a passion or interest & ways to pursue it
Collaboration between employment & residential service providers	A time when collaboration might have been difficult but could hardly have been more effective in making a person’s life better Learning from another agency in a way that informed & inspired you & clarified your values

Use this worksheet to identify two or three topics that will focus people’s thinking on what gives your organization life and the capacity to protect and strengthen the positive core. For each topic, identify the experience you want to ask people to reflect on.

Life Giving Topic	Ask for experiences of high points in this area

Drafting an Interview Guide

1. Introduce the interview with by telling the person why you want to listen to their experience and thoughts and what will happen to what you hear. Key points to make:

- These interviews are to gain a deeper understanding of what makes our organization strong so we can make it even stronger. Many times we talk about what isn't working well; this time we'll look at things from a different angle.
- What you say will be put together with what we hear from other people to identify specific ways we can build on our strengths.
- This interview will explore your experiences in these areas (briefly identify life giving topics).
- There are no right or wrong answers.

Your notes for an introduction

2. Being the interview with questions that invite the person to reflect on the positive core of their work.

Thinking about the paid & unpaid work you do to make life better for people with developmental disabilities...

What would you describe as being a high point in your work life?

Without being too modest, what do you value most about yourself? your work? your organization?

What are the core factors that give life to your organization?

Without these the organization would lose its capacity to make life better for people with disabilities & their families

Describe your vision of the best possible future for your organization

There is a sample interview guide on the next page. Others are available at <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/toolsQuestions.cfm>

The University of Kentucky Children's Hospital "Nursing Excellence - The UK Way"

Thank you for participating in this interview. I am an interviewer for this nursing project. We are inquiring and learning more about "Nursing Excellence - The UK Way." Nurses and related staff will be interviewed directly to collect the "best-case" stories on which to build the future. Your input will be an important contribution to generate meaningful ideas and actions.

Many times in the interviews, we ask questions about things that aren't working well so that we can fix them. This time we are going to approach things from a different angle. We are going to find out about your experiences of success so that we can find ways to create more of those types of experiences at UK Hospital and UK Children's Hospital.

Over the next few months, we will interview as many nurses as possible. We also will interview others who have a stake in quality nursing care. When the interviews are complete, everyone's input will be synthesized to identify qualities of nursing care that make UK Nurses unique. With those qualities as a foundation, we will create specific future steps to build on our strengths.

During our interview, we will be exploring your experiences in five areas: (List topics below)

1. Art of Nursing
2. The UK Quilt of Teamwork
3. UK Magnet Nursing
4. Celebrate life as UK Nurses
5. Humor-s-A Vital Sign of Life

I want you to listen like you have never listened before. The following series of questions will be very thought-provoking. Please listen carefully to each question and allow yourself time to think about your answer. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

1. What were your initial hopes and dreams when you first joined the UK Hospital?

2. What has been your most positive experience since you've been here?

3. Without being humble, explain what you value most about:

- Yourself?
- The people you work with?
- Your department?
- Your work?

Topic One: Art of nursing

Nursing care is an art at its very best. What we do with our minds, hearts, and hands is truly beautiful. We paint with brush strokes of compassion, weave tapestries of comfort, and sculpt an environment of caring beyond technology for our patients, their families, and often for one another. At UK, this is the art of nursing.

Question 1: What does the art of nursing mean to you? Describe a time when you or someone else demonstrated the art of nursing.

Question 2: Imagine the perfect painting of nursing at UK. What does it look like? Where do you picture yourself in it?

Topic Two: Nursing, the common thread that unites a patchwork of disciplines into a quilt of teamwork

Question 1: Tell me about a time when you accomplished more than expected by working together as a team. What was it about the team that made it work?

Question 2: What three wishes do you have for fostering teamwork and collaboration at UK?

etc

3. Explore each of the life giving topics you have chosen. Follow this sequence for each one.

A. First, and most important, ask for a narrative story about a personal experience that helps you and the person you are interviewing see the best of the past. *Tell me about a time when...*

B. Then ask questions that focus attention on the conditions that made the positive story possible. These may be qualities and capacities of the person and family assisted, other staff, the organization, the person you are interviewing themselves.

C. Finally, ask about the future. *What do you value in this story? What do you want to be able to do more of in the future because of this story?*

Your notes for an introduction to each theme and A B C questions to explore the theme.

Test the AI Interview

The best way to test your interview guide is to take these two steps:

One. Read one or more interview guides from other appreciative inquiries to see how they are constructed and make revisions. The point is not to make yours just like the examples but to get some ideas for making your interview stronger. One example will be found on page 26. Many more at <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/toolsQuestions.cfm>

Two. Ask a trusted colleague to give you an hour or so to experience the interview and give you suggestions, then revise. If you make big changes, test your guide again.

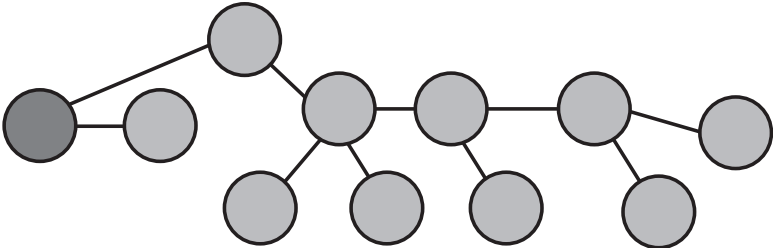
When using the interview guide generates the kind of positive conversation you want to have about your work at its best, reach out and interview other people, encouraging them to join the process by interviewing another person after they have been interviewed.

Make a written guide for the interview so others can join in.

Interview and Gather What You have Discovered

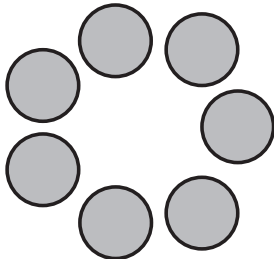
The more people who are involved in both interviewing and being interviewed the better. At the end of each interview, ask the person if they would like to ask someone else the AI questions. If they say yes, give them a copy of the guide and the advice about good interviews on the following pages.

After you have conducted a number of interviews, gather those who have listened and share what you have discovered. Then you will be ready to make plans.



Test & revise your questions

Interview & involve more interviewers



Gather and explore:
What did we learn?
How can we strengthen the positive core of our work

Principles for Good interviews

- Create transparency and trust about the purpose and the process of the interview.
- Suspend your voice of judgment to see the situation through the eyes of the person you are with. What matters at this point is not whether you agree or approve but that you learn what the other person sees, feels and thinks.
- Access your ignorance –open your mind: As the conversation unfolds, pay attention to and trust the questions that occur to you; don't be afraid to ask simple questions or questions you think may reveal a lack of some basic knowledge.
- Access your appreciative listening –open your heart. Connect to the other person with your mind and heart wide open; thoroughly appreciate the story that you hear unfolding; put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Access your generative listening: Try to focus on the best future possibility for your interviewee and the situation at hand. Be open to insight: new ways to understand what the situation calls for.
- Respect the power of presence and silence: One of the most effective ways to learn is to be fully present with the other person and not to interrupt moments of silence

Interview Process

Share a clear statement of your purpose with the person you have invited to help with your inquiry. We are here to learn from this person's experience of what works and gives life to our system when it is at its best in supporting people with developmental disabilities and their families to live good lives.

Agree on a place to meet that will support good listening. Allow about an hour.

Bring note-taking materials.

Arrive in time to relax, review the questions you want to ask and the principles above. Imagine the best possible result of the time you have with this person, for the other person and for you.

During the interview, listen deeply, take notes, follow the principles. Notice distractions –your voice of judgement, a desire to offer advice or disagree, a feeling of defensiveness– and bring your attention back to listening for the other's experience. Take some time immediately after the interview to reflect and write down your immediate impressions:

... What struck me most? (capture specific quotes & stories)

... What surprised me? (capture specific quotes & stories)

... What touched me? (capture specific quotes & stories)

... Is there anything I need to follow-up on?

Send the person you learned with a thank you.