



Working on the inside

by Kate Fulton



The Centre for Welfare Reform



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Foreword

by Judith North

Some 15 years ago I had what I now recognise to be an almost unique experience in my 30 year journey through human services. I met Kate for the first time when I interviewed her for a job. The experience was unique because the interview questions were pitched beyond her experience (that was clear from her body language) but what I discovered during the one hour relentless one way questioning that serves as a human services selection process was a woman who was unafraid to think, unafraid to search for solutions and unafraid to dig deep into her own experience to fashion them. That experience that day was unique because it was perhaps the only time I finished an interview so absolutely and fundamentally sure we'd found something and someone special that I couldn't wait to tell her. My conviction has never faltered since.

My certainty that Kate has something important to say, that Kate knows there is something important to see and that Kate commits herself to reflection and learning has been tested and retested and is never found wanting.

When searching for someone who might help a family through a nightmare of human services creation my thoughts always turn to Kate. When facing complex situations in provider services that are getting in the way of people getting real lives I pick up the phone. Every family, every person and every service I know that Kate's been invited to support sees what I saw on that day I first met her. A person with special insight, immense ability to make profound connection, determination to make a difference and commitment, someone who will hang on in until she can make enough sense of a way forward to offer that insight to others as a route map to a better future.

What's really important about **Working on the inside** is that what Kate is actually doing is sharing the product of deep and sustained reflection on an art. What you



have here is 'Granny's recipe' to a quality of connectedness and compassion that Kate barely recognises in herself. What you have here is a gift. The gift is her shared thinking, consideration and emotional leg work on an internal journey to find the keys to a better way for people served by human services.

If in doubt that's what Kate is offering I invite you to reflect on two things. If, like me, you have worked in services for a while I invite you to consider how often workers are asked to think about 'them', 'others', 'families', 'interventions', 'services' and 'processes' and how seldom they are called on to think truly and deeply about themselves. More likely your experience is like mine. You've read more than you care to about how we (paid professionals) should work with, deal with or treat 'them' (the people we support and families) without ever really being invited to understand that who we are and what we bring has a fundamental impact on the quality of what we do. Even less often are we offered something that encourages us to make a concerted attempt to do something about it. Someone had to break the mould. It's no surprise that Kate's first off the starting blocks to offer an alternative path.

As much as I want to tell you all of this and have you believe it, if I am true to what Kate's written, it's not really my testimony that counts. So I have left the last words to Katherine. Katherine is one of the bravest, focused, determined, fair and challenging parents I have ever had the privilege of working with. Faced with every parent's nightmare and watching her in a sustained state of desperation I suggested Kate work with her and her son. Kate drew deeply from the inside to help Katherine find a vision for an alternative future. Human services and service systems have still some way to go to realise the vision Kate and Katherine created together, however I remember the day that Katherine came to see a way out of the nightmare as one of hope and recovery of a life her and her son. These, last words, are hers...



by Katherine Simmons

In November 2009 mine and my sons, Kyle's, life changed forever. He had a brain haemorrhage at the age of 12 and our life became a living nightmare. The outside world was oblivious. From our nightmare I watched other people's every day lives operating normally. I looked at my life and believed no-one understood.

Through the journey since 2009 I've encountered people with empathy and kindness who didn't understand how to create a path for us that felt real or effective. That's been torture for Kyle and I. When you meet someone who shows simple understanding and who listens to what you need, want and why the relief is enormous. Discovering that someone would step in to the nightmare, take the time to look into the complexity, try to work with myself, Kyle and my family and look for solutions left me incredulous. I'd become so unprepared to meet someone with an open mind rather than bits of paper.

Since the accident I have had a vision that we will and can lead as normal a life as possible surrounded by people we trust. That makes me feel comfortable about others working with my son. Having people to share the burden of responsibility whose intention is his best interests makes all the difference. Kate came to help me when I was desperate. In our first meeting with her she gave me a sense of warmth, she put me at ease she made me feel different to other professionals whom I felt judged me, my family or our situation. Kate listened. She took it all in and made no rash suggestions. She just explored ideas and encouraged me to give as much input as possible. She gave me back hope that I could make good decisions for my son. She gave us a vision for our life beyond the nightmare. I have been working on it ever since.

I recommend that if you are someone who uses services you read this and never give up hope of finding someone who is willing to follow this path. My experience is it takes a lot of work and fighting to find them. This paper paves the way for workers to develop themselves, to offer what Kate offered me and my son. So, I ask workers and services to read, listen, and understand why Kate is telling you this. See the potential you have within yourself to make a difference to people's lives.



Introduction

I have worked alongside people and families for many years working in a variety of roles, including assisting people as a direct Support Worker, working as a Manager, a Social Worker, a Senior Manager and as a Development Consultant. Alongside these experiences my family have been in receipt of services and I have worked alongside others to navigate their way through the service system that is Social Services or Human Services.

In this time I have been on a continual quest to learn more, experience more and develop my practice to be the best resource I can be for people, families and my community. I have spent many years exploring and developing my own understanding of what inclusion means, what person centred means, what a genuine support network feels like and how to contribute to my community. Over the last 3 years my thinking has started to change. Extensive conversations and my emergent discoveries with people and families have led me to look in very different places.

I am learning that to be the best resource we can be to ourselves, to our families and to the people and their families we walk alongside, is no mean feat! For too long the focus has been on our external experience – what questions we ask, what tools we use and what processes we follow. However over the last few years I have asked many groups of people who use services; families who have experience of human services and workers who are connected to services and community development – **what do YOU think it takes?**

I am curious about why, in any role I've had, there are colleagues who no matter what the policy, the current trend, the new technique and or the economic status – will find opportunities for people and families to be equal citizens and can see possibility in communities. In contrast to this group of people, I have also spent much of my time working alongside people who, given the same circumstances, can only see a barrier, a policy that prevents action or a behaviour or label that requires different, special segregated treatment.



I am curious about what exactly are the qualities, skills and motivation of those who make it work alongside people and families. I am discovering that the place to look is on the inside.



A call for compassion

Now is the time to begin questioning and exploring what we are learning about good support in human services. Recently, there have been a range of examples including *Winterbourne View Hospital* (Flynn, 2012) and *Death by Indifference* (Mencap, 2007) that call for compassion across all of our human service systems, the need for professional support to be coupled with human compassion.

Compassion is the humane quality of really understanding the suffering or experiences of others combined with the will to help.

Winterbourne View and Death by Indifference are sadly just two of the exposés that begs the question how those people who are paid to support others see themselves and those they serve. There are of course many reasons why these situations occur but we can learn a lot by looking at the value staff put on themselves and others.

Most recently the NHS have released *Compassion in Practice - The Vision and Strategy for Nursing* (DOH, 2012) that clearly acknowledges the need to raise the standard of care including the health and well-being of staff themselves, as well as patients.

The link between the values and behaviours that staff are shown by their employers, managers and peers and the way they in turn treat each other, including their patients and users of the service, is very clear. Ensuring staff feel valued, cared for and communicated with is essential.

Compassion in Practice, Department of Health, 2012

There are many approaches that work to build on staff morale and work to develop staff competence, confidence and compassion. Alongside values based recruitment, strength based supervision and person centred approaches, we are learning that there are other areas that we need to pay attention to, to best support those paid to support others.

It is important that we understand that this is not a new phenomena. We have a plethora of evidence, built up over many years. For instance Goffman teaches us to be aware and



mindful to the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of those paid to support others since it gives us a clear indication of their ability to support people well (Goffman, 1961). Indeed Goffman's study on people and their behaviour in institutions found that support staff developed their own set of institutional behaviours (ibid).

Now is the time for people, organisations and statutory services to act on this evidence and to begin working more deeply - beyond fancy paper work or organisational checklists. People, families and community leaders they have taught me what really makes a difference:

- Be present
- Check your intention
- Explore your beliefs
- Be positive
- See possibility
- Understand your impact

These approaches build personal resilience, compassion and capacity. They are simple ideas that collectively, if developed for yourself, can have a significant impact on your life, your relationships and your work. If you adopt these ideas within your teams we won't just improve outcomes, but develop happier people, families and communities.

The call for compassion is universal across all sectors and within our society. Ultimately compassion can only be felt and experienced personally, not taught via tools, manuals or prescriptions, it requires much deeper thought and experience than that. It requires your whole self; we are really working from the inside.

This is an inside job!



Two kinds of expertise

Many workers coming into Human Services are taught both formally and informally about a range of theories and practices that can affect people and communities. These may help us understand the impact of a range of circumstances that affect people's quality of life and connection to community life. These may be topics such as the effects of discrimination, the likely consequences of segregation and the devastating effects of loss of power and control.

However this level of expertise or knowledge in understanding **is not the same** as an expertise in understanding the person, their family and their own circumstances.

People and families themselves are the experts on their own lives and the solutions that will work for them in their own life and context.

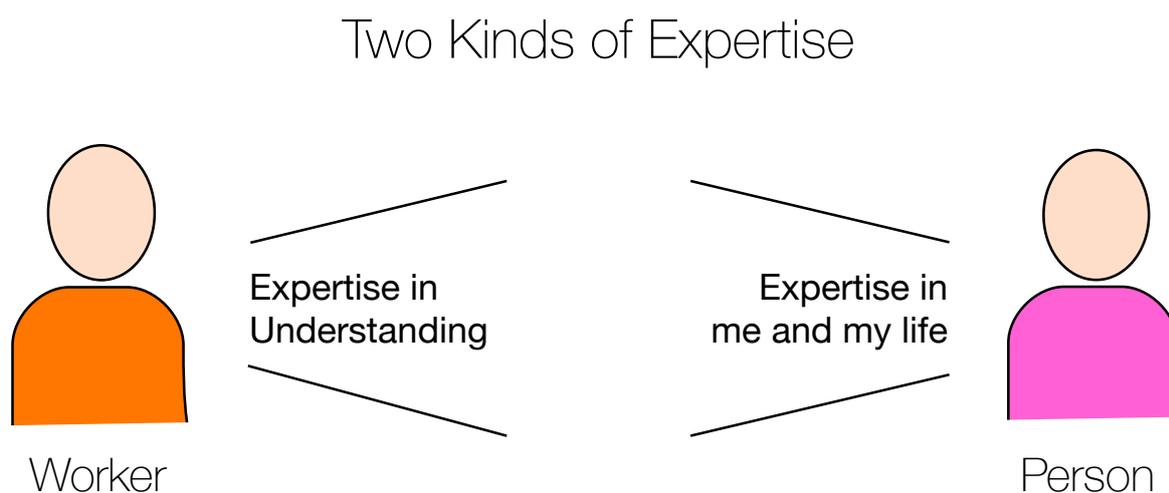


FIGURE 1. UNDERSTANDING EXPERTISE



Workers who think they know the answer or solution for the person, or they 'know what's best' can clearly undermine people and families own expertise. Working in a way that acknowledges people and families own expertise is the foundation of person centred working – respecting people's expertise about themselves and their lives.

When we don't respect or acknowledge peoples own expertise we can quickly work in a way that is disempowering.

The shift in how we see our expertise and how we value the person and their families' expertise enables us to really work alongside people and families in a way that is meaningful and respectful. Indeed it is the start of working on the inside – understanding the expertise that we may hold and then valuing the expertise of the people and families we support.



Be present



Some time ago I came home from a busy day that had included: sharing the joy of people and families who had succeeded in securing the funding for their unique support network, sharing the pain of a young man who had experienced yet another episode of bullying and harassment from his neighbours and sharing in the puzzling complexity of a group of professionals deciding the best way to ration the resources that funded social care. What a day!

As I helped to prepare our dinner for the evening, I asked my partner John the question, ‘how was your day?’ John began his reply, as I busied myself with setting the table, noticing that we needed milk, observing that the kitchen floor needed cleaning, sparing some moments of reflection on the day and firming up my diary for tomorrow. Oh no, then remembering the difficult women I was due to meet tomorrow, who never seemed to be happy with our support, never quite good enough, a sense of dread became apparent in my stomach – I’m not looking forward to tomorrow, I thought. I was brought back to the moment when my partner said,

So what do you think of that then?

Snapping back to reality, I mentally froze and scratched around my brain and memory to find at least some scraps of the conversation that I had heard, but had not listened to.

I found I could see John talking – but still had no memory of what I had heard. I remembered asking John about his day, but then after that, I simply remember my own thoughtful journey in my own head.



He chose to summarise his conversation with a question that wouldn't be easy to avoid. **So what do you think about that then?** I couldn't possibly answer; I literally hadn't listened to a word he had said – literally not one word.

His frustration and pain was obvious as he told me that if I hadn't got the energy to listen to him, then why invite him to talk?

There is nothing new in this experience but for me the newness was a lasting awareness of what I now think of as the art of being present.

The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.

Buddha

I found that exploring the notion of being present, has led me to use a range of helpful techniques. But ultimately that moment when I became aware of my lack of presence was the starting point for this journey.

Being present means being aware and awake in each moment, not consumed by thoughts of other things, places, things to do or people to see and missing what is actually happening right in front of you. We must be present in our relationships. We must be present in our work. We must be present in our day to day life, at every moment.

Let the thoughts recede, to allow wisdom to emerge

Heather Simmons

Working on our ability to really be present is one of the best gifts I have given myself – it has opened up a new quality in my relationships and in my work. I must confess that I'm not perfect at it – but the sheer awareness and practice of quietening my internal chatter has literally changed my experiences and relationships.



To be present in the moment is the best gift I have given myself and my family.

In our work and in our relationships – our ability to slow down and quieten our internal noise can lead to better quality listening, leading to better outcomes for everyone. So many people find being present way more difficult than we credit – it's a fundamental starting point for a respectful relationship.

Awareness is the key – the awareness to stop, breathe and mentally prepare for the next conversation is the starting point. Techniques to develop our ability to observe our thoughts and still our chattering minds are rarely explored in teams or explored as a foundation of our work. Yet in my conversations with direct support workers and Social Workers it is these techniques to assist in being mentally present that are often most requested.

Taking a moment to concentrate on your own breathing can have some amazing results. There are simple ways to begin exploring presence including mindfulness or meditation – both are very useful practices. There are a plethora of guided meditations, some as short as 3 minutes - that when used regularly can help to develop the art of stillness.

Not only this but I have come across a range of examples of presence techniques that are being shared and explored with people who would otherwise be chemically or physically restrained. Teaching simple meditation or breathing exercises benefits staff and the people they support.



Check your intention



There is a growing body of research that demonstrates your intention is important; understanding what you are aiming for and what you intend the outcomes to be is powerful stuff. We have all had experiences of starting something new, like a new job and experienced the stress of working through the day when you know the actual tasks you are due to perform, but don't understand their relevance in the wider context. Too many support staff's job descriptions offer some level of task focused action, with little connection to its purpose or intention.

For example you are supporting someone to go to a drama class at a local amateur dramatic organisation. The tasks involved include supporting the person to: take out adequate cash, catch the right bus to the venue, learn lines and dance moves to contribute to the production, to help make tea for people at the break time and to get home safely. Clear tasks, however the intention behind all of these is to support the person to make friends, contribute as a friend and have a meaningful role in the group and potentially beyond the group into other areas of life.

The lack of focus on the bigger intention is one of the reasons that many supporters follow tasks and don't necessarily spot opportunities for connections or relationships outside the tasks themselves.

Getting clear on your intention and purpose by stating exactly what it is and telling others by announcing it publicly or creating a written pledge really helps. There are many examples of how public commitments can support people's actions from creating specific goals in next year's business plan, to developing an agreed set of intentions for your health and fitness. Many people have a job description and a set of daily tasks



to achieve in their role, however understanding the bigger picture of your intention is crucial. Asking questions like “**What is my purpose here?**” can really help to focus your intention.

I believe that the reason intention is so powerful, is because your intentions inspire your actions and actions make a difference.

It is actions that make a difference to your life and others.

If you want to achieve something and are clear about it, you are more likely to behave in a way that gets you closer to that intention. We are learning that people who have a clear understanding of what they can offer people and families are often a far better resource. Equally supporting people and families to develop their own intentions can be a helpful and useful approach in supporting people to have self autonomy and control.

In our busy lives it is so valuable to spend some time thinking through your intentions. On a daily basis reminding yourself of your purpose here, in this moment, with this family will keep you focused and resourceful.

Teams and Supervisors can work together to explore intentions and purpose. A useful approach for working alongside people and families is to think through the following questions:

- What is our intention – what do we want to happen?
- So what does this teach us about our purpose in this person’s life?
- How does this inspire our actions?
- What does this mean for the tasks needed?
- What outcome will this create?

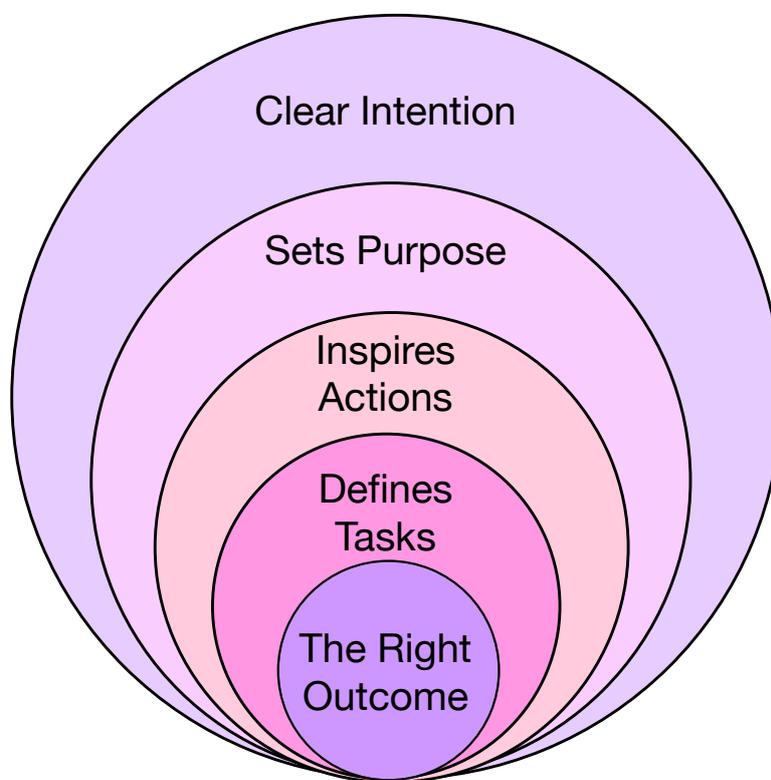


FIGURE 2. HOW INTENTIONS CREATE OUTCOMES

Supporting others' intentions

A more complex exploration of intention is understanding and clarifying whose intentions we are working to achieve. There can be a big difference between your intention and the person's or families you are supporting – getting clear on this is vital.

An example:

A common issue I explore with people is around safety and wellbeing. As a supporter my intention may be focused on supporting the person to be safe and well– which will obviously direct my approach and day to day actions – likely resulting in not taking too many risks and potentially avoiding new opportunities as the perceived risk is too high.

Ok – it’s a generalisation but even in its simplicity you can see how your intention directly affects your actions.

If however the person’s intention is to develop friendships and relationships – the actions will include unknown areas and maybe unknown venues etc which is likely to present greater risks.

Supporting the person to clarify their intention is so important in guiding and directing your purpose role and actions. This does not need to be grand and laborious – good conversation is the foundation to understanding what people hope to achieve.

Understanding the person’s intention will direct your purpose and role, which in turn will sharpen your actions and tasks leading to the right outcomes for the person.

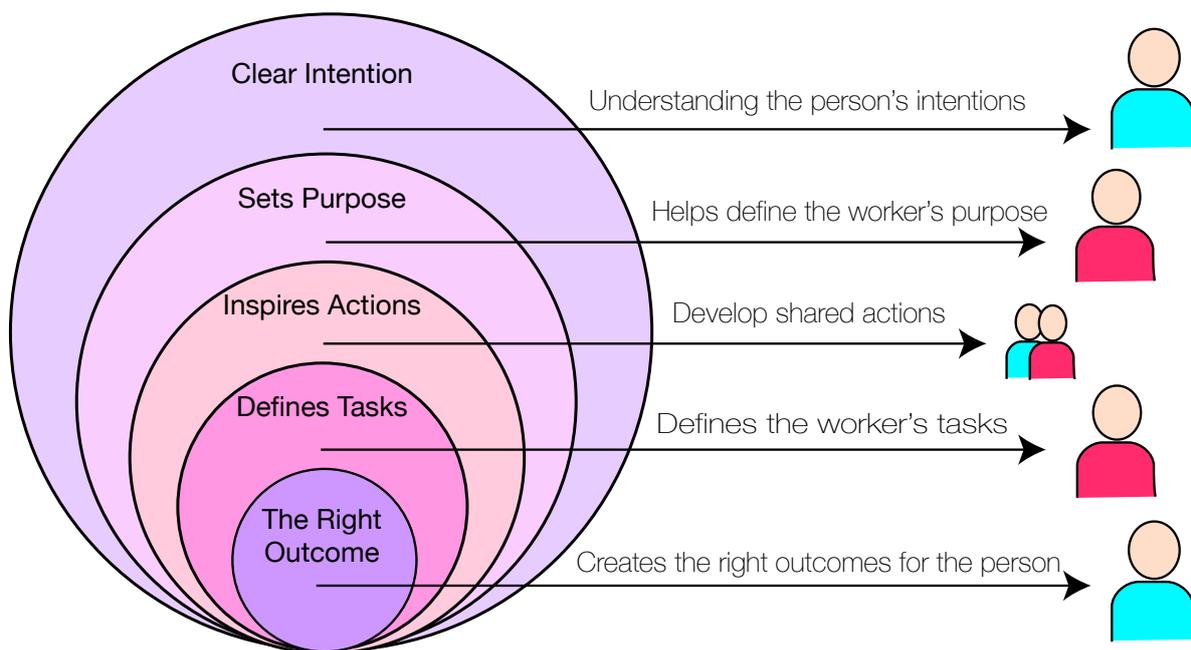
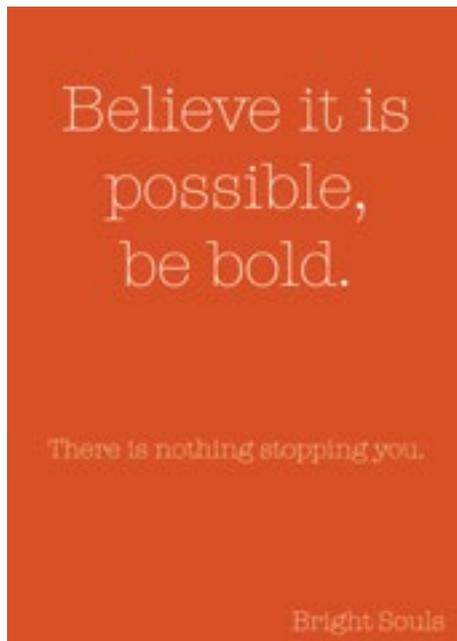


FIGURE 3. UNDERSTANDING INTENTIONS GUIDES OUR ACTIONS



Explore your beliefs



We know that our values and beliefs shape our lives and experiences, often confirming or reaffirming what we believe deep down. Our values are shaped by so many factors and are often deep ‘personal stories’ we tell ourselves to help make sense of the world.

This is fine, if those stories are helpful and relatively accurate. However some of them are not. Why do I need to understand my own beliefs? Seeing our beliefs and values in action can be hard to do on our own; however there are relatively simple ways to understand your own beliefs in surprising circumstances.

One of the best ways of understanding beliefs and how they really play out in your life is to notice how your judgements are formed. I often find myself day dreaming when standing in a supermarket queue, idly observing the other customers and looking into their shopping baskets. I can quickly develop my own story about who they are and what their lives are like. For example, if I see a young man with food for two and a bottle of wine I have created a story about the man and his romantic flare! Similarly if I see a middle aged women with some chocolates and cat food my mind goes off again. These stories reflect our own beliefs. This is possibly harmless when in a supermarket, but really important when we are working to connect to people at work or in our personal lives.

What if the stories we develop about the people we support are harmful or limit their lives. Maybe it is these stories, which we take as knoweldge, that tell us that people don't really want friends or meaningful things to do. May be it is these stories that tell us that some people don't have the same feelings as you. Perhaps when somoene doesn't use words we imagine they don't understand things like we do. Get the picture?

It is these beliefs that affect what we see

There is so much to learn and understand about the significance of our own beliefs that it is worth paying a little more attention to them. In our brains we have our very own Google search engine. The technical name is the Reticular Activating System (RAS) which acts in a similar way to a Google search engine. If you type a key word into Google it will search through hundreds and thousands of documents, webpages and data to find the most relevant information that best suits your key word.

Our RAS works in the same way. For example, when you are thinking about buying a particular car, you think about it, imagine yourself driving it, and then lo and behold, when you are out and about, you keep seeing that make and model of car - over and over again. This is your RAS taking your predominant thoughts as the instruction or key word and then looking outside of the mind, filtering all of the other information, to find evidence of what best suits the key word - in this case the car!

The RAS is a powerful and to date not a fully understood mechanism, however it adds a new level of complexity to the need to really understand your own beliefs, because not only do they impact on how we live our lives, they also impact what we see in our lives – our reality. Our values and beliefs really affect the outcome and quality of our experiences.



FIGURE 4. BELIEFS AFFECT REALITY



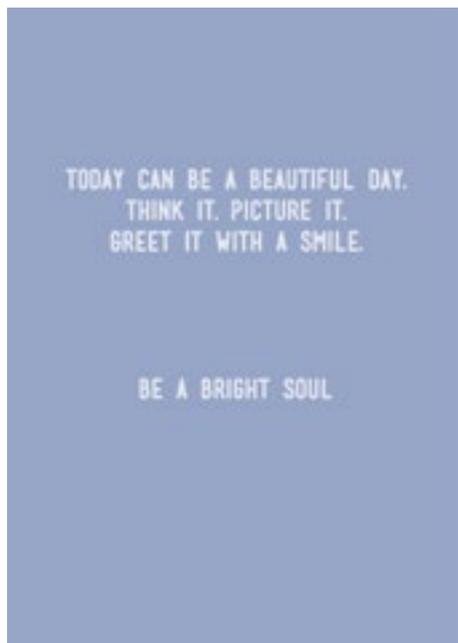
Understanding the power of belief is so important to how we support people. If our beliefs tell us that relationships and love are not important to people then we will develop support around the person that leaves little room for relationships and love. Everyday we see how limited aspirations or expectations define the reality of people's lives.

You can learn about your beliefs and values by exploring some of the stories you tell yourself about the people you support, constantly checking the accuracy of these beliefs. Be prepared to be challenged – our beliefs and values are deep rooted. Our own Google RAS is formed over many years has viewed and it will reinforce early biases or confusions by only looking out for things which support its own prejudices.

Once you begin to check your beliefs then it may be necessary to let some beliefs go as they may not be accurate to who you are today or they may not serve you well in your roles or relationships. One simple way to do this is to find stories that help you see the better belief: people achieving, people being in love, people contributing. And then share those stories for you never know whose beliefs you may be able to influence for the better.



Be positive



Many people, families and workers talk about the need for supporters to have a positive attitude and a 'can do' approach. At one level this seems like such a simple notion, but we are learning that although simple, it does require some level of intention. In my conversations with people and families one of the qualities that always seemed to significantly contribute to good support was the level of optimism that a worker brought into a family's life.

This is not the same as being relentlessly positive, even when the person's reality is crumbling, (many would find this irritating), but it does mean gently and respectfully helping people know and understand that there is possibility and hope in the future and in themselves.

Human centred work is steeped in helping people, families and organisations identify their strengths to ultimately direct their actions and increase their wellbeing and sense of satisfaction. This is the very essence of person centred working; widening and acknowledging our sense of what strengths people possess and can bring to a particular situation or to any group.

To really understand this for ourselves, it is important that we consider how we cultivate a positive attitude in our own lives; which in turn will help us develop it in our work lives in a meaningful and genuine way.

One practical way to begin to develop a positive attitude is to develop an awareness of how we talk to ourselves and others. Many of us are often our own biggest critic, telling ourselves that we are not good enough or that we can't achieve. Challenging negative self talk has been proven to help change internal negative thoughts and feelings, which



in turn impacts on how you interact with the world. Developing our own sense of what we are good at and what we have to contribute are practical ways to develop a positive attitude.

How often do you help yourself or your loved ones explore and share their strengths, gifts and talents? Or are you more likely to share your weaknesses and failures with others – spreading negativity and developing a culture that bemoans imperfection and negativity.

We may not be able to change the day to day realities of our lives and what actually occurs in them; but we can change our response to these circumstances.

It takes as much effort to focus on the negative aspects of a situation as it does to focus on the positive.

This is a fundamental approach that is easily understood by people and families. Learning about what helps you focus on the positive is more than just a nice idea – it has huge psychological and physical benefits. There are numerous studies that have shown that a positive attitude can improve your stress levels, the health of your body or even how long you live!

Positive attitudes are one of the reasons that peer support networks and connections can have such a profound effect on people and families. Connecting with others who can share similar experiences is intrinsically positive. We can all have a role in helping people connect.

As we develop a positive attitude in our own lives so we can begin to explore how we develop positive teams in our work place. Building on Peterson and Seligman's Core Virtues, the following qualities when discussed and developed openly within a team can have a profound effect on their positive attitude and positive wellbeing (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

- **Our Understanding** - what we have learnt, experienced and understand
- **Courage and Integrity** - the ability to be brave when needed and act in accordance with our beliefs
- **Humanity and Compassion** - working to really understand life in another person's shoes



- **Justice and Citizenship** - an ability to stand up for what we believe is right and to promote people's opportunity to be equal citizens
- **Self Control and Forgiveness** - an awareness of ourselves that has the best impact on others and a willingness to forgive and move on
- **Humility and Gratitude** - an understanding of everyone's importance beyond your own and a gratefulness for our experiences

People and teams who acknowledge, develop and celebrate these strengths are likely to perform better and have a better sense of wellbeing. So positive attitudes can make a big difference for ourselves, our families and the people we are serving.

So what are you waiting for - Get positive!



See possibility



The ability to see possibility means being able to imagine positive things and opportunities for yourself and others, whilst not being defeated by the first negative thought or potential barrier that you see.

Many families value the contributions of people who have the ability to see possibility for themselves and those around them. **It is this vision of what's possible that drives them into action.**

I believe that seeing possibility is a skill that can be developed over time, like any new skill or behaviour. This is a skill that we will always need to be developing since the difficulty is that, no matter how clever or experienced we are, we only ever know what we know! So it can be difficult to see possibility in someone or in a situation if all of your experiences to date have told you that there is little hope in something.

So, for example, if you have only ever experienced people with disabilities living limited lives in institutions and with limited social networks, it can be hard to imagine the person living a married life, with children and employment. Imagining new possibilities alongside and on behalf of people requires us to challenge our beliefs and to look for positive examples of what other people have achieved and accomplished. But it is about going beyond what you already know, it's taking a leap of faith, having a belief in human possibility.

The fantastic thing about being human is that we all live with a level of uncertainty about ourselves and in our relationships with others - all the time. This does not mean we don't pay attention to helping people be safe, but we must also be willing



to try new and interesting things. Sometimes these efforts pay off, sometimes they don't. However this is the essence of creativity – the use of imagination to try something new.

Creative approaches require the confidence to embrace the lack of certainty and to reach out for possibility.

Lacking certainty can be scary - so we must be guided by a strong vision of what's possible if we want to explore our options.

One of the easiest ways to start working on seeing possibility is to begin with yourself: thinking about what's possible for you and your life, daring to dream beyond what's safe and known. Imagine if life was perfect – **what would that look like?**

Visualisation is the process of creating a mental picture of a scene of an imagined scenario: so dreaming about something and seeing it in your mind. Visualisation can be a powerful technique to inspire your actions. When you see something, it makes the possibility of achieving it much more possible and tangible.

Visualising comes easily to some and requires more practice for others. Practising visualising yourself lying on a beach or in a field are simple ways to get started.

However imagining yourself achieving something that is a dream: competing a degree or running a marathon, takes visualising one step further.

Visualisation enables you to see possibility and when you share this with others, it helps others to 'see' or imagine that possibility too. Imagining someone with lots of friends, in a relationship or achieving that impossible dream – are all ways to help others and yourself to see possibility.

Many people who are supported, rely on their supporters' or team's ability to imagine possibility for and on behalf of them, particularly if they are unable to express their own thoughts and views. This skill is so important in our role in assisting people and families.



We will all know people who have the ability to see and nurture possibility in others and to inspire people to act in accordance with this vision or image. These people are leaders.

Leaders who can help people see what's possible and act in that direction.

Leadership is often confused with management. However management is a role that anyone can acquire but leadership is a skill and quality that relies completely on the art of seeing possibility.

Some of the best leaders I have encountered are people and families who have shared their image of the possibility of a good future and inspired and supported others to act in a way that gets them closer to it.

We can all be leaders by developing and sharing our images of possibility for ourselves and those we support.



Understand your impact



There are so many theories relating to how we as individual people can affect others without even talking to each other. For some people it's all about talking and speech, when for others it's all about body language. Many people believe it's about physical energy and for others it's about a spiritual connection. I'm not too sure, however I do know that we do affect the people around us in both positive and negative ways.

We will all know people who seem to carry positive energy with them or 'light up a room' as the saying goes. Their presence brings some level of happiness, joy or positivity even when a word is not spoken. I know so many people who don't use words to communicate who possess such talents. When we think of those people, we know their impact is real – we see it and we feel it.

Similarly we will all know those people who can do the exact opposite. Those people who can bring the mood in a room down, those who seem to be happiest when carrying negativity wherever they go. Many people report working alongside colleagues who have such tendencies and almost always report this as one of the hardest approaches to work alongside, and one of the hardest to manage and supervise. They remind me of real life Dementors – J K Rowling's fictional characters whose role is to suck happiness and positivity out of the young hopeful wizards (Rowling, 1999).

Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling every happy memory will be sucked out of you.

Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban, J K Rowling, 1999



Families report a link between the level of negativity of the **worker** and the level of results or outcomes achieved. The more positive the **worker** the more likely they are to achieve the desired outcomes for people and families.

A significant factor in considering your own impact is to explore your own level of self regulation: your ability to manage and use your emotions positively and negatively. A bad day at home can very easily ‘rub off’ onto your colleagues, families and the people you support.

As all human beings are different with different views, opinions and behaviours, then self regulation is a vital skill in all aspects of our lives.

One of the difficulties in understanding your own impact, is that it’s a little like trying to cut your own hair – you have difficulty seeing round the back! To understand our own impact we really do need other people to help us. This is where 360 degree supervisions, the chance for team members, colleagues and the people or families we support to give you feedback on your role, contribution and attitude, can really make a difference. How often do we create a space that encourages a safe arena that enables us to support and hear feedback about our own impact?

One of the most effective starting points for understanding your own impact is to introduce it into our conversations, team meetings and supervision processes, particularly seeking views and opinions from the people and families who receive your support. Ask for feedback and listen to learn. Our impact can make or break the effectiveness of any support we may offer.



Ideas in action

There are a range of small intentional actions that individuals, teams and organisations can do, to develop these skills and attributes.

| Individual Actions Skills and Approaches | Things to try and develop for yourself and your colleagues |
|--|---|
| Exploring expertise | <p>Explore how you value and draw on people and families expertise in your day to day practice and within your work place.</p> <p>Explore how you support and enable the person to be and act as the expert</p> |
| Being present | <p>Practice simple breathing techniques and ways to relax</p> <p>Explore mindfulness and meditation techniques</p> <p>Take moments of your day to be really present and take time to notice when you're not</p> |
| Understanding your intention | <p>Describe your own intentions – the bigger picture that you want to achieve</p> <p>Look at your week and the activities you support people to participate in – are you clear about the overall intention?</p> <p>Explore with people and families their intentions – what is their purpose?</p> <p>What does this mean for you and your role?</p> |
| Understanding your beliefs | <p>Explore the stories you tell yourself about the people you are connected to including your colleagues</p> <p>Does the team have a team story about who you are as team – what you are supporting people to achieve?</p> |



| Individual Actions Skills and Approaches | Things to try and develop for yourself and your colleagues |
|--|---|
| Positive attitude | <p>Understand the things that help you be positive and make sure this is included in your day</p> <p>Begin to challenge your own negative self talk and replace it with at least one positive comment</p> <p>Look for the positive qualities and attributes in others</p> |
| Seeing possibility | <p>Begin dreaming for yourself – what would an ideal life look like for you? What small steps can you take to get you closer to that image?</p> <p>Dream with and alongside the people you are connected to – what would a fantastic life look like for them – what small steps could you take to get closer to it?</p> |
| Understanding your own impact | <p>Begin by asking for feedback from people you trust – do my emotions impact on others?</p> <p>Ask for feedback from colleagues, people and families</p> <p>Reflect on your week to explore how the way you were feeling may have impacted on your work</p> |

Final thoughts



Ideas and thoughts about personal development are not new, indeed the Master of Leadership theory Steven Covey taught us the 7 habits of highly effective people, which fundamentally aim to understand our own potential and the potential of others.

Over the last 10 years there has been a growing trend in developing mechanical answers to support human connections.

The social care sector is full of checklists, templates, tools and planning processes that aim to help people and families explore who they are, develop direction and create an understanding in how they are supported and connected to their local communities. There is clearly evidence that these approaches when adopted one person at a time, work for many people.

However the difficulty with mechanical solutions is that they need human interpretation of context, emotion and understanding – all of which is so much more than simply following a mechanical process. These approaches can quickly turn into organisational processes that people go through with little thought or meaning. It's similar to a yearly car MOT – unfortunately many people and families undergo an annual person centred plan which is far from person centred.

Person centred planning and similar approaches are a collection of questions that help people think about what really matters in someone's life, imagine possibility and generate actions to move in that direction (O'Brien and Lyle O'Brien, 2002). These approaches aim to recognise individuality, humanity and difference. However, in promoting these approaches, it is very easy to begin to treat an individual as if they were part of an organisational requirement – completed irrespective of how and if this works for the person – the exact opposite of being person centred.



Clearly a balancing act needs to be struck between protecting the integrity of an approach that works to think alongside one person at a time, with using a routine of questions or templates. If not we will lose sight of human individuality and gain yet another system requirement - this time called being 'person centred' - making it more palatable but just as ineffective.

Our engagement in people's lives is often conditional, sometimes as a result of being paid or because of a statutory requirement, so the need to acknowledge the person and families' expertise is significant. It is this expertise that will help us to really know what support will be useful to this person and this family at this time.

There is no blue print for how to sit alongside people and families and be a useful resource. There are however ways of being that can help or hinder.

Working alongside people and families requires a level of humility to understand that there are often no clear answers. There is a space in which exploration and inquiry can help people be themselves and create their own direction, if we are willing to sit alongside people and not take over. This usually feels uncertain, but offers so much opportunity.

'Creative approaches require the confidence to lack certainty.'

We have to develop better skills in listening, understanding our purpose and our impact on people's lives; rather than simply grabbing the next mechanical answer and turning its wheels. It's about bringing your whole self to the work, being inside the theories and approaches, not externalising them.

Working on the inside is a collection of skills or attributes that can be developed by **everyone**, they are not exclusive to the cleverest, the best facilitators or the most knowledgeable – they are human experiences that affect our lives and with some thought in adopting them and developing them they can have a profound impact on our lives and those we support. **Working on the inside** is a collection of ideas that are steeped in the beautiful reality and complexity of being involved in people and families lives. The attitudes and personal characteristics that make a difference can **really** make a difference.

Now is the time to begin working at a deeper level for ourselves and for others, really working on the inside. This paper invites you to try it.



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Relationships and connections to our communities open up our vulnerabilities and create opportunities - the real foundation of our work. Thank you Carl.



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Kate led on some of the first self directed support initiatives in the UK and continues to explore and support approaches that create real outcomes for people and supports change in our welfare systems and communities. Over the last few years Kate has worked in partnership with people and families to explore approaches that assist everyone to better understand themselves and their impact on others. The work has led to a deeper understanding of what we bring to our relationships, interactions and our role in supporting inclusion.

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Bright Souls

Bright Souls provide coaching, mentoring, training and consultancy to individuals and organisations to create change in their lives, businesses and communities. Bright Souls believe that people are the experts of their own lives and with thoughtful assistance people can direct their lives in the right direction to achieve anything.

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As part of the team that created Circles, MAPS and PATH, a major theme is to share our ongoing learning about processes that will assist individuals, families, organizations and agencies to create futures where 'all belong' as contributing citizens in community. These practices and others we have developed, are 'generic' - for people of all ages, all issues large and small – for anyone & everyone. They respond to 'life' issues we all face. They are intentionally not diagnosis specific.

The Press relies on the talent and inspiration of many, but none more than John O'Brien, one of our key collaborators and principal authors, backed by the spirit of Marsha Forest (our co-founder who passed away in 2000). Today, Lynda, Cathy and Jack carry on the vision, and the commitment to create equity and justice for all.

www.inclusion.com

Open Future Learning

Open Future Learning is a multi-media platform for online learning. Its founder Ben Drew has filmed many of the leading thinkers and practitioners working with people with disabilities, and his innovative system for learning provides inspiration and practical advice.

Open Future Learning has just published a new module developed with the author Kate Fulton to explore the ideas set out in this paper. Visit their website for more information about the **Working on the inside** module.

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