

***COMMUNITY-CENTERED
CELEBRATIONS***

John J. McGee

What Are Community-Centered-Celebrations?

Community-centered celebrations are an on-going process of deepening and broadening a spirit of

companionship and community between supported persons and their circle of friends.

Community-centered celebrations come around once a year. They are a time to honor individuals within communities that we support, to reflect on our journey toward companionship and community, and to dream of what is yet to come. Each celebration honors a supported person.

The person's circle of friends joins together to dream about what is yet to come. They are for the individual who is part of the community. The center piece is to come together and talk about everyone's dreams for the individual and the communityC what might unfold in the future to help the person feel more deeply a sense of companionship and community.

The dreams come out of the needs and longings of the community and the person. They are a collective determination of what is good and just for the celebrated person and community. The circle reflects on its collective thoughts and feelings, all emerging out of how safe the person is to become, how engaged with others, how loved by others, and how loving toward others. Since many cannot speak or communicate with words or signs, the circle of friends plays an even more important role. Yet, whether the supported person communicates or not, the circle of friends enters into a collective decision-making process within a community context.

The process involves eight phases that actually occur throughout the year. The celebrations are the high point, but the process is on-going and call for a sense of deep and abiding friendship. The highpoint of the process involves a yearly celebration that asks, AWhere do we go from here? How much more deeply can we support the person in community? What are our dreams now? What is the community's dream now for the person? How can we support the person and the community even more?@ Of course, these questions cannot be answered unless the entire circle

has entered into an on-going process of *being with* the person. The celebrations are built on a feeling of companionship and community.

The celebration=s phases need to involve the entire circleC each playing different roles, but all united by a sense of companionship and community. The phases are not etched in concrete. The celebration itself is flexible and occurs in the momentC sometimes more deeply and orderly, sometimes not, sometimes with more participation on the person=s part, sometimes not, sometimes all on a singular occassion, sometimes not. Since many supported individuals are not accustomed to being honored or even enjoying themselves or others, the celebrations have to be very flexible.

Eight Phases	Process
◆ <i>Getting ready to dream</i>	◆ An on-going processC making sure that the person has a circle of friends with a deep commitment to companionship.
◆ <i>Dreaming</i>	◆ Happening during the yearly celebrationC imagining the most beautiful future possible.
◆ <i>Breaking down the dream</i>	◆ Looking at the possibilities of the dream for the coming year.
◆ <i>Grounding in the here-and-now</i>	◆ Taking the year=s dream and seeing what we can do right now.
◆ <i>Expanding the circle of support</i>	◆ Enrolling other individuals to help the circle of friends.
◆ <i>Strengthening the circle of friends</i>	◆ Making sure that the circle deepens its sense of community and dedication to the person.
◆ <i>Taking the first steps toward the collective dream</i>	◆ Describing what each member of the circle commits her/himself to in the near future.
◆ <i>Ending the celebration and moving on</i>	◆ Having a way to end the celebration in a joyful way and to ensure continuity and the fulfillment of all promises

Friends are there to support. All are equal for all are companions. Some can talk, and this makes the celebration easier; others cannot and this makes sharing more difficult. Some have other troubles that can make even a celebration hard. Some are sad and withdrawn, others are nervous and antsy. Whatever the person's condition, the celebrations are for all and to find ways to make dreams come true.

They are a time of joy, not recrimination. There is no room for coming down on anyone, nor for making anyone feel bossed. The person's circle of friends has to avoid several typical ways of doing things:

Avoid...	
◆	<i>Any sense of a typical meeting.</i> Things have to be done and reported, but not in the celebration.
◆	<i>Having program books, data, and evaluations around.</i> The focus is on companionship and community, not programming.
◆	<i>Directing the celebration and conversation toward the invited guests instead of the person.</i> No talking about the person, always directing everything toward the person.
◆	<i>Sitting distant from the Community.</i> Have the celebration arranged in such a way as to bring everyone physically and emotionally close.
◆	<i>Letting the Community flounder.</i> Have someone with whom the person feels safe next to the person and giving attention. If the person wanders away, someone should accompany him/her and continue to share the gist of the celebration.
◆	<i>Not having the supported person's favorite people there.</i> Be sure to have family members, boy/girlfriend, direct care givers at the celebration.
◆	<i>Thinking that professionals have the best ideas.</i> The opposite is true—those who most love the person likely have the clearest dreams.

An Example of a Celebration's Feeling

Elaine is in her living room, seated on the floor, her head resting lovingly on the legs of her favorite care giver, the care giver's hands stroking her hair as a mother would do to calm a

loved one. Elaine looks around the room at her friends. They are all seated around her like a rainbow showering warmth on the land. It is a time to talk about Elaine's joys, her sorrows, her dreams, and how to get there. Elaine does not talk with words. Her eyes and sounds speak books filled with "Yes, that is right!" or "No, I do not feel that way!" They speak of self-esteem, happiness, problems, and worries. Her circle of friends quickly become used to talking with her instead of about her. A good friend leads the circle with questions that draw out concrete pictures of Elaine and her future. Elaine looks with curiosity, agreement, or disagreement just like everyone in the circle. Slowly, a picture forms on the paper hanging on the living room wall. Her mother and father listen, share, and caution. The picture says, over the next year, Elaine will have more friends. She and her house mate will learn to love one another doing shares together, hugging and kissing one another, going into the community together, eating together. Elaine will feel better about her self lifting her head up with pride and a feeling of "I am somebody!" Some one slips in an old habit "What about data? What about the service plan?" "Ah," another says, "This is a time for celebration and friendship. We do not worry about what others want. We will figure this out some other time. This is a time for and about Elaine."

Community-centered-celebrations are a time to rejoice about the gifts and hopes of our friends, their dreams, and the ways that each person's circle of friends can offer support. A community-centered-celebration is a feast for honoring the individual and moving more closely toward shared dreams. It is only for those who love the person and are willing to deepen their friendship through concrete actions. It is a time to talk and share. It is for those to whom we want to show our love. It is a collective effort, sometimes easy and fun, sometimes hard and probing, but always a celebration among friends.

Community-centered-celebrations are not bureaucratic meetings, nor professional team meetings. They are not a time for reports, nor for data. They are not for those who do not wish to be there, nor for those whom the person has not invited. They have nothing to do with the dry goals and objectives of days gone by. They are not about things like money management or self-medication programs. They are about companionship and the deeper and broader formation of a sense of

community.

The professional's role can be important, but it is secondary to a feeling of companionship and community. This is not to downplay the need for professional's insight in their particular discipline. However, any such insight has to be filtered through the light of the person's life-story and a desire to deepen the person's sense of feeling safer and more loved. The psychiatrist could share the fears of the person that make his/her feeling safe more difficult and offer ways to overcome this. The speech therapist could share ways to help the person share feelings of loving others. The job coach could share her dreams about engaging the person more with fellow workers. All has to be channeled through the pillars of feeling safe, engaged, loved, and loving.

Our Way of Feeling

Companionship and community are different values than many are used to. The popular thing is talk about independence, skills, self-reliance, self-determination, and individual choice, and individual decision-making. Or, many focus on the accumulation of material goods— a better house, more money, and other such things. These values are fine, but secondary in community-centered celebrations. They do not energize the lost, abandoned, and lonely. They fail to free those whose hearts are broken. Those values do not mend broken hearts. They do not feel human emptiness. They might distract the person for a while, but fear and meaninglessness still linger at the bottom of the heart.

Community-centered-celebrations are based on shared beliefs and these revolve around companionship and community. These are the fresh blood that can revive broken hearts. They center on finding ways to ensure that those whom we support feel personally and collectively safe, engaged, loved, and loving. The dreams that are shared in these celebrations arise out of these values, and everything that is shared is looked at through these. Indeed, independence itself cannot come to pass until companionship and community are well established. Self-determination and even decision-making depend upon these feelings.

Companionship and community swirl around this rainbow of key values-- safe, engaged, loved, and loving. All has to be discussed through these four feelings. A facilitator in the circle of

friends has to find ways to keep and deepen this focus. This is a difficult task because of how we have been trained to think and feelC individualism, independence, programs, activities, behavior problems, physical management, drugs. These have little to do with the formation of companionship and community.

Our focus is quite different. The circle's responsibility is to reflect on these new and even strange feelings, dream about them with the person, and then find ways to move toward them.

Core Feeling	What the Feeling Means
<p>◆ Safe</p> <p>◆ Engaged</p> <p>◆ Loved</p>	<p>◆ <i>I feel safe in my world... I feel comfortable with my supportive care givers at home and school/work... I feel relaxed and open to them... I respect my body, my emotions, and my thoughts... I can cry when I am sad and know that my circle will nurture me... I can go to anyone in my circle of friends and seek comfort when I am sad or a hug when I am happy... I can stay with my friends even when I am scared about something or come to them when I am terrified... I feel good being with my house mates and work mates...</i></p> <p>◆ <i>I have enough favorite people in my life and can do my chores, play games, and just be with them... I enjoy doing things together and helping others... I am eager to be with my house mates... I like eating with them, sharing time with them, having fun together, and just being with them... I like to be helped when there are things that I cannot do by myself... I feel loved by my supportive care givers, my family living and dead, my house and work mates... I have two or three best</i></p>

<p>◆ Loving</p>	<p><i>friends... I like being with many people because they make me feel good, proud, and full of life... ◆ I smile at and reach out to my friends.. I feel for others when they are hurting... I share what I have... I show acts of kindness toward others... I appreciate being helped when I need it and show it with a smile...</i></p>
------------------------	--

These four feelings are the rainbow that hovers over community-centered-celebrations. They are the bright colors that shower upon the person's circle of friends. They are the light that helps the circle dream about the person's future. They are the energy that nurtures dreams and the force that helps the circle move toward that dream for/with the Community. They are about making dreams come true through friends talking with friends.

A facilitator in the circle helps make concrete pictures of the circle's dreams of where the person will move toward a year from now and then dream about the steps that the circle will walk through to arrive at the dream's fulfillment

<p>The Facilitator Is...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Someone the circle of friends respects and feels safe with and loving towards. ◆ Some one able to bring together diverse individuals and make them be and feel community. ◆ Someone who enables the circle to go through the celebration's phases. ◆ Someone who helps professionals in the circle do their clinical duties outside the celebration and without detracting from a sense of companionship and community. ◆ Someone who is always expanding the circle with members from the broader community. ◆ Someone who helps the circle participate fully in the phases and keeps the focus on companionship and community. ◆ Someone who is not afraid of physical contact and can generate joy and contentment. ◆ Someone who ensures that the supported person is the focus.
-------------------------------------	---

This sounds easy, but problems abound because we have many old habits to deal with and many new ones to develop.

Old Habits Die Hard

One issue that needs to be dealt with is what to do about those who do not wish to celebrate as part of a circle of friends, but still want to participate. The first and central invitations come from the person being honored. This is often done with the help of her/his friends. Those who feel left out or even professionally miffed have to try harder to develop a sense of companionship with the person. In the meantime, they might have to do their professional obligations on their own outside the celebration. The celebration's facilitator, however, needs to make sure that minimal conflicts arise. This is a time for celebration. Those who seem to be left out need to be helped to feel safe and loved as well.

The celebrations themselves can easily fall into old habits unless we have a strong awareness of these and are willing to change. Because we are creatures of habit, we have a tendency to talk about problems and ways to settle them. Some might want to flaunt their professionalism. Some might become overly excited and even driven by data. Others might want to be clinical and aloof. We have many habits that we have to overcome:

Our Old Habits	Our New Habits
<p>◆ Professionalism</p>	<p>◆ Professional obligations are done somewhere else. Community-centered-celebrations are not a time for reports and data, but a time for rejoicing and dreaming</p> <p>◆ We come as friends to share, to discuss the future, and to focus on the Community as a Community not a client, not a problem, and not a consumer.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Goals, Objectives, and Data ◆ Psycho-Babble ◆ Aloofness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ We are relaxed and friendly toward all in the circle. We show our respect and affection to everyone. ◆ We put away our professional attire, attitude, and note books so we can be together as friends ◆ These celebrations are about dreams and dedication. If we have to summarize or translate our celebration for agency or governmental officials, we do it elsewhere. This stuff does not intrude into the celebration. ◆ We talk as friends talk. We break the habit of using words like client or consumer, programs and activities, behaviors and treatment plans. Our language has to be the language of friendship. ◆ We come as friends. We want to speak of and show warmth and love. We want to dream and plan for a deeper sense of companionship and community.
--	--

Even more important than our habits are our attitudes and values. Many hidden ways of thinking can make our celebrations just another meeting. Our attitudes and values are powerful forces in how we see ourselves and others as well as what we do. Community-centered-celebrations have to come out of very clear and shared values about companionship and community. These are more basic than any other values. Yet, we often just want to talk about independence and self-determination, AStand on your own two feet... You make the decision... People learn by consequences... He has to learn a lesson... She has to choose...@. Community-centered-celebrations are about the person and his/her circle of friends. They are not about individualism, but about interdependence.

They are a process in which friends come together to talk about and share thoughts and feelings about deepening companionship and community. Everyone is motivated by these. And, everyone

realizes that independence, self-determination, and choice are built on these. So, the celebrations are a process of dialogue and discernment. They are a process that involves collective decisions. They uplift and highlight the supported person's dreams and hopes, but do not stop there.

Collective Decision-Making

One issue that is hard to deal with is collective decision-makingC a process that honors and holds the supported person at the center, but involves a process of collective analysis, discernment, and action. The supported person is at the center just as the sun is at the center of our universe. Yet, the sun without its planets is empty. The person is at the center like a new born infant is at the center of a family. Yet, the infant is no one without a circle of loving ones. Community-centered-celebrations are about the supported person and with the supported person. But, they are not about self-determination or independence. They are about the formation of community.

They are a collective process that starts with the person and those closest to him/herC not those who are over the person, but the most loved by the person and most loving toward the person. In many instances, this means that the care givers who spend day-in and day-out with the person are the closest. Of course, the person's family is also centrally involved.

Collective discernment and decision-making is a serious duty of the person and his/her friends. The collective group has to generate the moral authority in itself to reflect on and move toward wise decisions. We assume that with the circle there is an abundance of goodness, talent, creativity, and skills. The shared sense of companionship and community is the foundation and energy for this. If based on these values, we then assume that the collective circle of friend has an abundance of gifts and insights. The collective answers in the search for the fulfillment of each person's dreams is within the group.

Centering Community-Centered Celebrations Around...
◆ Companionship C deepening and broadening the person's interdependence with and

Centering Community-Centered Celebrations Around...

among others, firming up feelings of being safe and loved in an ever-expanding circle in the home, at work or school, in the neighborhood, and in the community.

- ◆ **Community**—deepening and broadening the person’s sense of being *in* and *of* the community, someone valued and valuing, loved and loving, the circle spiraling outward from home to community.
- ◆ **A Collective Decision-Making Process**—a circle of friends coming together to dream about the person’s future, celebrate their present, and feel for their past. The answers to the person’s dreams arise out of the group.

Phase One-- Getting Ready to Dream

Anyone who is invited to come to the celebration has to be regarded as a friend—someone who really knows the person and shows love, someone who visits with the person throughout the year as a friend, and someone who is willing to go the extra mile to support the person. Those who are invited should have to be ready to deepen their sense of companionship with the person and his/her supportive care givers.

The circle of friends are those whom the person invites to the celebration. It should include those whom the person truly likes and who really like the person—family members, neighbors, care givers, professionals dedicated to companionship with the person, and other friends. The circle’s facilitator or other members of the circle have to deal gently with the thorny issue of those who want to or insist on coming even though they are not really a part of the supported person’s circle of friends. The best strategy is to bring them into the circle long before the celebration by helping them get to know the person and to feel companionship with the person.

◆ **Getting Ready...**

- ◆ **♥ Prior to the celebration, each member of the circle needs to visit with the person and supportive care givers as a friend several times.**

◆ **Getting Ready...**

- ◆ ✍ **There should be written invitations to all who are invited with a personal touch added if the supported person cannot write a picture, a design, even a scribble as long as it is the person's. Send them out with an RSVP.**
- ◆ ⌚ **The invitations should tell the guests what to expect and how to prepare.**
- ◆ 🤝 **Select one or two members of the circle to be closest to the person to make sure she/he feels safe. Prepare them.**
- ◆ 🏠 **A small group should have a short meeting a few days beforehand to make sure that the celebration will go well and will focus on companionship and community.**

Every celebration needs a safe, warm place. There are many options. For those who live in fear, the home or parent's home is often the best place. There should be enough room for the guests to be comfortable. The physically closer the guests are and the more comfortable they are, the better. Many celebrations have guests seated in a circle or semi-circle with some on chairs and others seated on the floor. Other places include backyards, porches, parks, private rooms in restaurants, family homes, and meeting rooms.

Always remember that these events are celebrations, not meetings as we are accustomed to. Part of the place's warmth might involve special decorations, sharing food, and soft music. The place should be well arranged to bring people closely together. And, the friend who is going to facilitate the celebration with/for the person should have everything set up beforehand.

The facilitator is a crucial part of the circle. She/he has to envision how things are going to flow and make sure that everything runs smoothly.

◆ **The Facilitator Makes Sure That...**

◆	The Facilitator Makes Sure That...
◆	<i>Invitations are sent to friends.</i>
◆	<i>The Community and care givers are prepared.</i>
◆	<i>Key members of the circle talk about and plan for the celebration beforehand.</i>
◆	<i>Non-invited professional fulfill their roles outside of the celebration.</i>
◆	<i>If any professional attends out of perceived necessity, he/she is treated as a friend and is helped to respond as one.</i>
◆	<i>The room is warm, friendly, and set up for companionship</i>
◆	<i>The supported person has one or two true friends nearby to ensure comfort.</i>
◆	<i>Newsprint, paper, and pens are available for recording.</i>
◆	<i>Some one will be ready to help out in the facilitation process.</i>

Some things have to be avoided. The facilitator has to have enough assertiveness to guarantee that the celebration does not spiral downward into a typical meeting. The facilitator is a peace-maker and has to deal with a variety of realities, from very supportive to uncaring. He/she has to help all feel safe and loved in the process.

<i>Helping to Avoid...</i>	
◆	<i>Any professional aura, report giving, reading prepared statements,</i>
◆	<i>Not focusing on the person, her/his dreams, or a feeling of companionship and community,</i>
◆	<i>The use of program books & data, professional language, giving of assessments,</i>
◆	<i>Dress that does not make the person and care givers feel equal, and</i>
◆	<i>A them-us attitude C pitting professionals against care givers or everyone against the supported person.</i>

<i>Helping to Avoid...</i>

About Professional Stuff

In different places and cultures government and agencies require certain kinds of reporting, information, and formats for purposes of funding and monitoring. These things are fine, but should not intrude on community-centered-celebrations, nor on the life of the person. This stuff should be handled before or after the celebration. Even then, professionals have to look at everything through the lense of companionship and community. Perhaps a particular person has to have a special diet due to a diabetic condition. This information has to be dealt with through the prism of ensuring that the person deepens his/her sense of feeling safe and loved. The circle has to know the difference between being safe and feeling safe, being loved and feeling loved.

The facilitator plays a key role in what goes on before, during, and after the celebration. This is the hardest partC keeping the focus on the celebration, while also making sure that all governmental and agency bases are covered. Much of her/his work is behind the scenesC managing conflicts, gaining trust from those who look at things differently, finding creative ways to make reports, and making and enlisting new friends.

Some friends might even want to lord it over the circle with a mental health cultureC talking about diets, violence, drugs, segregated work, compliance, and other professional attitudes that distance the supported person from friendship. Any of these topics might have to be discussed, but not at the community-centered-celebration. The facilitator has to clue in participants beforehand and ensure that the celebration stays focused on companionship and community. If a special diet were necessary for a particular person due to health reasons, the facilitator has to guide the one concerned about this to look at the situation from the perspective of feeling safe and being safe. If a psychologist or psychiatrist is worried about drugs or behavioral challenges, they have to look at these questions from the perspective of feeling safe and loved. Everything

has to converge into the circle's discussion with feelings of companionship and community.

Behind the Scenes, What Do We Do About...

- ◆ **Diets** First ask if they are necessary or just middle-class impositions. If necessary deal with these questions so that the person feels safe and loved. If someone has diabetes and must not eat sweets, then the circle moves quickly to make sure that the person feels deeply safe and loved, increasing the probability that the person will do what his/her friend asks. The circle has to talk about options—non-sweetened foods and drinks—and make these readily available. The circle has to enlist a dietician who is a friend or deal with the problem behind the scenes. Also, recognize that the person's house is her/his home. There is no room for whimsical denial of food, drink, or smoking. The central question is to help the person be and feel safe. These issues will resolve themselves if companionship exists.
- ◆ **Violence** Do we not have to be trained in physical management? The simple answer is No!, the circle of friends has to move quickly into a deepened sense of companionship with the person. The circle has to enlist a psychologist who is a friend or deal with violence behind the scenes. The central issue with violence is to prevent it. Part of the celebration could involve a dialogue about what everyone will do accommodate the person instead of provoking violence of any sort.
- ◆ **Drugs** Make sure the person has a true mental illness and that any drugs are for this, not for behaviors. The circle has to insist on dignity for the person—no drooling, no shaking, no messed up gait. The circle has to enlist a psychiatrist who is a friend or deal with this behind the scenes. As with any other tool, the circle of friends has to always balance the need for drugs and their positive and negative effects.
- ◆ **Physical Illness** The circle should only look at physical ailments from the perspective of how safe and loved the person is and feels. Issues like stomach cramps, poor posture, lack of teeth, and constipation are very personal and should be handled privately by professionals just like anyone else does. The circle of friends simply has to have a collective understanding of how issues like these can twist a person's spirit and find ways to make the person be and feel safe. If a physician or nurse is a friend, he/she should participate in the circle—not to report medical problems, but to offer support in terms of companionship and community.
- ◆ **Communication Needs** The circle should care deeply about supporting the person's communication needs, especially focusing on describing how the person can express feeling safe, engaged, loved, and loving, or their opposites.
- ◆ **School or Work** The circle has to look beyond the home. Teachers and care givers from school and work should be part of the circle. When others do not quite fit into a

spirit of celebration, the circle has to guide them gently in the dream-process.

Reports and Data

Supportive services have been dictated and formed by rules and regulations for years upon years. Many rules and regulations had their origin in goodnessC protecting people from harm and ensuring growth. Many individuals responsible for monitoring have managed to transcend an authoritarian approach, but some have gotten swallowed up in it. Over the years many rules have become means of control and dehumanization because they did not focus on the person. They focused on agencies and money. The person got lost in the paper.

The same holds true with data. Many homes display Aprogram books@ on shelves in the living room. Instead of a fireplace or a cozy kitchen table, we are immediately struck by the Abooks.@ Care givers are bent over kitchen tables doing their reports and filling in Ax-s@ and Ao-s@ just like in old time nurses stations. Many professionals are still enthralled by the Ascientific data@ that they feel is so necessary for Aprogram excellence and validation.@

Community-centered-celebrations have no room for this stuff. The circle has to be creative and bold. It is their wisdom that has to form the person=s future. Whatever reports and data that have to be done should be done to honor and uplift the person and the circle -of friends. This means that the facilitator has to do some things behind the scenesC filling out this form or that form. The facilitator will have to educate surveyors and other monitors in the circle=s values and direction. More importantly, the facilitator has to nurture creativity in the circle and free up care givers to give care rather than looking like the Nurse Ratchet=s of years gone by,

Data and reporting can be fair and just. The question is how do we support the person, free up care givers, and still meet the requirements of outsiders. Nothing says how we have to validate the goodness of what we do. We have a responsibility to assure government that what we are doing is good and just. The circle has to and has the power to come up with creative, discrete, and efficient ways to do this.

Doing Data and Reports

- ◆ **Be discrete.** Avoid the physical presence of data and program books in the house, classroom, or work place. These items are for guidance purposes, not for control.
- ◆ **Break old habits.** Avoid doing what has always been done. Write reports as a mother would write about her child, not as a hospital nurse would write about her patient. Create new forms and formats that fit the person instead of the agency.
- ◆ **Work in solidarity.** Unite the circle of friends before and after the celebration to make sure that all funding and regulatory bases are covered.
- ◆ **Educate.** Explain to outsiders what you are doing and why. Keep the focus on companionship and community. Do not expect that outsiders will understand. Explain, explain, explain!
- ◆ **Be creative.** Come up with new and simple ways to validate that you are doing what you promised. Look at issues like C doing checks weekly or monthly, keeping a daily journal, using video tape, taking pictures, monthly interviews of the circle about progress, quarterly summary journals.
- ◆ **Keep paper work out of the home.** The circle should look for ways to eliminate the need for care givers to take data.
- ◆ **Companionship and community.** Keep the focus on safe, engaged, loved, and loving.

Phase Two-- Dreaming

Community-centered celebrations are about collective dreams, and then breaking these down into the possible. They are a moment in time when friends come together with a friend in need in a spirit of openness and discernment C not to look at problems, but to dream about the future. At each celebration, those who love the person help him/her describe where he/she wants to be in the future C *dreams* about feeling safer in the world, more engaged with a broader circle of friends, more loved by more people, and more loving toward others.

Dreams are made of the circle of friends coming together, sitting in a circle in a place that is safe and comfortable for the person, and, with the help of a good friend, picturing the future.

<i>Picturing the Future</i>	Tips on How to Dream-Make
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Picture the person feeling safer with care givers, neighbors, work/school mates, people in the community, and family</i> ◆ <i>Pictures should revolve around four key words C safe, engaged, loved, and loving</i> ◆ <i>Pictures of feeling safe might look like C AI see Elaine running toward her three favorite care givers when she comes home from work... I see her sitting with her house mate eating supper... I see her smiling when she comes home from her family's home...@</i> ◆ <i>Pictures of feeling engaged might look like C AI see her playing games with her house mate... and serving her at meal time... I se her and her house mate cleaning the dishes together... I see her in supported work with a favorite care giver...@</i> ◆ <i>Pictures of feeling loved and loving might look like C AI see Elaine with her head held high, with a smile on her face, and slow movements... I see her kissing her care givers, house mate, mother and father...</i> ◆ <i>Dreams are pictures. When anyone actually dreams, we see concrete expressions of joy or fear, happiness or sorrow. We see faces, hands, and eyes. We feel movement. We hear voices. We can describe these when we awaken.</i> ◆ <i>Our dram-making has to be like our</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>The good friend asks each person to close his/her eyes and make a mental picture of where each sees the supported person a year or so from the present.</i> ◆ <i>The good friend is always near the supported person and directing all conversation toward the supported person. If he/she cannot communicate, the good friend is her/his voice.</i> ◆ <i>The good friend keeps summarizing the dialogue as a way to engrave the evolving dreams in everyone's heart.</i> ◆ <i>The good friend keeps delving more deeply and more concretely into what each person's dream-picture looks like.</i> ◆ <i>The good friend makes sure that thoughts and feelings are not left in vague and abstract words, but always presses for snapshots of what this or that means in relation to the person.</i> ◆ <i>The good friend makes sure no one worries about AYes, but...@ The dreams have to focus on what the circle of friends imagines as a safer, more engaged, and more loving world.</i> ◆ <i>The good friend makes sure that there is no talk about behaviors or problems at this point. The idea is to dream.</i> ◆ <i>The good friend keeps pushing for</i>

<p><i>most joyful actual dreams C AWhat do you see and hear?@ Should be the facilitator's most common question.</i></p>	<p><i>concrete dreams. If someone says, AI see her more trusting.@ the good friend probes for picture-meanings, AI tell me what you see in Elaine... What is she doing that says she is more trusting?@</i></p> <p>◆ <i>The good friend summarizes each dream-picture in writing and/or pictures</i></p>
---	--

Dream-making is a no-holds-barred process. There is no room for AThat is impossible!@. There is no place for complaining or criticizing. There is only room for looking into the future as a child would gaze at a rainbow and wish for...

Probing the Dream C Going Deeper

The collective group has to go as deeply and yet as concretely as possible. This is perhaps the hardest part of the celebration C not just accepting words and phrases, but probing deeply for concrete meanings. We are burdened with professional language that distances us from people and cuts off a sense of companionship and community. Our words are not necessarily incorrect, but distancing. They separate us from feelings and go toward Aprograms@, not hearts. We need to conquer the person's heart instead of worrying about managing nice and neat systems.

Probing more deeply is critical. When someone says, AShe needs more activities!@, this is program-talk. It may be true, but is not deep. Plus, it misleads the group to stay in program-talk. The facilitator has to keep pushing everyone to go deeper, AWhat do you see the person doing in these activities? Whom is she with? What is she saying? What do her eyes look like? What is she doing with her hands?@. The probing leads the group to picture the person and the collective dream in action. It forces concreteness and makes the dream real and personal.

Phase Three C Looking at Parts of the Dream for This Year

The dream is the circle's collective hopes for and with the person. After this, the group (not an I-

Team, but a We-Team) focuses on the possible over the next year. The *possible things* are goals that the circle determines that it can help happen over a year's time. The goals are not the agency's, but the collective group's. They come from the circle and are the circle's collective commitment to the person.

The good friend who is facilitating the process quickly jumps into the rainbow and pulls out from the circle *What do we think is possible this year?*, always probing, challenging, and drawing out concrete pictures from the circle. The goals are what the circle imagines it will see a year from now. The facilitator has to help the circle enter into the concrete future, asking questions like, *AOK, we have a vision of where we want to go. Now let us see what the person's reality will look like a year or so from now!* It is important to *keep the circle in the future* with an attitude of *We are not here today, but we are here a year from now and looking back over the past year!* The circle is not seated on the floor and sofa right now, but is gathered together a year from now. And, the key question is, *What have we seen and felt in the last year?* It is back to the future time!

We are the future, be in it, and picture it. This takes a vivid imagination— an imagination that arises out of our moral beliefs about companionship and community. Our pictures of the person a year from now are a description of our moral imagination.

**Picturing the Future through Our Collective Imagination...
Questions to Ask...**

- ◆ *We are here in this same place a year from now.*
- ◆ *What do we see?*
- ◆ *What do we hear?*
- ◆ *What do we feel?*
- ◆ *Where do we see the person living, working, or going to school?*
- Who are the main people in the person's life? ◆ How do we see in the person?*
- ◆ *You say friendship. Tell me what that is. Who do you see? What do you see? @*

- ◆ ***AYou say happiness. Tell me what that is. What do you see?@***
- ◆ ***AYou say liking her care givers. Tell me what that is. What do you see?@***
- ◆ ***AYou say no hitting. Tell me what the person is doing instead. What do you see?@***
- ◆ ***AYou say not feeling miserable. Tell me what you see that says she does not feel like crap!@***
- ◆ ***AYou say independent. Tell me how this makes the person feel safer and more loved!@***
- ◆ ***AYou say making money and working. Tell me how that will make the person feel more engaged!@***

Phase FourC Grounding in the Here-and-Now

We have been to the future. Now we return to the present. The present is filled with questions, frustrations, problems, challenges, and even cynicism. We now go through another step in our process that looks at where we are at and what we can do to move toward the dream. We need to look around and see the person=s realityC what roadblocks stand in the way of our journey toward our dream.

We are going to take a journey toward a rainbow, but we have to know where we are starting at and what issues we have to resolve to start movingC resources, additional supports, and rules and regulations that might go contrary to the dream.. The facilitator has to ground the circle of friends. The best place to start is for the facilitator to summarize with the circle what the road blocks are.

Talk about Gearing Up for the Journey...	Questioning about Gearing up for the Journey...
◆ AElaine hates her house mate!@	◆ ATell me what you see! Who can we enlist to make her feel companionship?@
◆ AShe cries every time she comes	◆ ATell me how we can start to make

Talk about Gearing Up for the Journey...	Questioning about Gearing up for the Journey...
<p>back from her family=s home!@</p> <p>◆ AShe chooses to be a loner and just deal with staff!@</p> <p>◆ AShe wants to eat alone!@</p> <p>◆ AAgency policies make this journey impossible!@</p>	<p>her feel safe and loved in both places. Who can help right now?@</p> <p>◆ AWhat does that mean in terms of companionship and community?@</p> <p>◆ AWho can help her feel safe eating supper with her house mate?@</p> <p>◆ AWho can help review and interpret those policies so that they do not get in our way?@</p>

We have to be realistic as well as dreamers. We know that there are many barriers toward companionship and community. The facilitator has to probe the circle with questions that acknowledge reality, but move the circle toward moving beyond it.

Phase Five-- Deepening and Expanding the Circle of Support

Once grounded in reality, but also energized by the possible future, the facilitator helps the circle reflect on who can help the person move toward the dream from the here-and-now. The place to start is with the circle of friendsC the supported person her/himself and the circle, people already dedicated to supporting the Community. The facilitator draws out of the group personal and shared commitments, and then probes for others who might be enlisted in the circle.

The facilitator questions each member of the circle about how they will dedicate themselves to the dream=s fulfillmentC care givers, family members, neighbors, school teachers, supportive workers, community members. The theme is *All will do this...@* Yet, often more support is needed. Others likely will have to be enlisted. This part involves broadening the circle. The circle of friends has to identify and enlist a circle of support. This might include a psychiatrist, a physician, a minister, an acquaintance. Now there are two circles. The first is a circle of friends; the second is a circle of support that will be enrolled.

Circle of Friends and Circle of Support

- ◆ **The circle of friends**— those who help the Community feel safe and loved and dedicate themselves to personal commitments.
- ◆ **The circle of support**— those who are enrolled to support moving beyond the present. They are new individuals who are asked to make personal commitments over the next few months.
- ◆ **The supportive circle is enrolled** to help overcome barriers— the psychiatrist who regulates medications, the therapist who makes sure that the person is comfortable in her wheel chair, communicates with his language board, the nurse who monitors medications, the psychologist who promises to help care givers help the person feel safe and loved, the minister who promises to visit with the person once a week and talk about grief, the dentist who makes dentures.
- ◆ Sometimes the circle of friends is the same as those who support. Sometimes it is outsiders who are enrolled for a specific purpose. Sometimes the supportive people become friends, sometimes not. The important thing is to mobilize the needed help.

Phase Six-- Strengthening the Circle of Friends

To deepen their friendship with the person and among themselves, the circle of friends has to look at how they can make themselves stronger. The facilitator asks the group for ideas on what it needs to stay strong and become even stronger. The care givers might need help in becoming better at teaching the person to feel safe, engaged, loved, and loving. The psychologist might volunteer to visit the home and share the skills and values needed to do this. The support coordinator might need help in making sure that she/he can do the behind the scenes paper work. Another person might volunteer to do this. Someone might say, "Our psychiatrist hardly ever sees the supported person and, when he does, he just snows him with drugs." The psychologist might offer to help care givers meet with the psychiatrist two or three times so that the right information is shared. The group or part of the circle likely needs to set up times to come together to celebrate small breakthroughs or to make sure that everyone stays focused. Thought has to be given to the skills that are needed, the values that need to be deepened, and the seeking of necessary support.

Making Ourselves Smarter and Stronger...

- ◆ Talk about and list out what **skills** and **change strategies** the group needs to fulfill the dream
- ◆ Talk about what the circle needs to do to ensure that the circle of support **does what needs to be done.**
- ◆ Talk about ways to **periodically celebrate** moving toward the dream.

Phase Seven-- First Tiny Steps

Mighty oaks from tiny acorns do grow! Let us get real now! What are we going to do over the next three months? What will make the journey begin? Think about where the circle has dreamed for a second, and then plot a course for the first steps. The dreams are what government people would call goals; the first steps are what they would call objectives. A feeling of commitment, *All we will do this by such-an-such a date...* In this phase, we tell who is going to do what and when it will be done. These are commitments that the circle makes to the person.

These commitments are the proof in the pudding about companionship. They move us from talk to action. They validate friendship. They go way beyond what is ordinarily expected of professionals. We no longer talk about agency obligations, but personal commitments to an individual.

About the First Tiny Steps...

- ◆ ***The facilitator asks for commitments from each member of the circle for the next three months.***
 - ◆ ***These commitments might involve members of the circle or individuals in the supportive circle.***
- She/he keeps reminding the circle of the dream.***
- ◆ ***All commitments are based on the dream.***
 - ◆ ***The facilitator questions about anything or anyone who might block these first steps.***

- ◆ *The circle discusses ways to overcome these roadblocks.*
- ◆ *Personal commitments are listed with dates of completion.*
- ◆ *The facilitator tracks these.*

Phase EightC Ending the Community-Centered-Celebration

Within a few days everyone in the circle should have a copy of the community-centered celebration's outline from the dream to the first steps. It should be written in plain language and should also be presented to the person in a way that the person can understand and treasure. Since many individuals cannot read, it is important for care givers to have a clear and concrete summary of what the plan involves and review this often with the person. The facilitator has to help the circle be creative. Written words might be part of the outline, but it should not become stuck in this mode. Think about drawings, graphics, poems, and songs as a way to picture the outline.

Closing the community-centered celebration should involve a down-to-earth summary of what has been celebrated and each member of the circle should be asked to give a picture-phrase of where the person will be a year from now. At the end, the facilitator should ask each individual to reach out and thank all in the group. Also, the circle should not leave until it knows when and where it will meet again to review its progress.

Community-Centered Celebration Checklist

Each celebration will be a unique event. There is no one way to celebrate. Each individual and circle of friends are so different. Each reality is so unique. Three basic events have to happen to make a community-centered-celebration work well: touching base beforehand, the celebration itself, and what goes on afterwards.

Before	During	After
◆ <i>Dedicated members of the circle need to</i>	◆ <i>Arrange seating around the person</i>	◆ <i>Write personalized thank-you notes to all</i>

Before	During	After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>spend time with the person off and on throughout the year</i> ◆ <i>Encourage family attendance</i> ◆ <i>Make and send out personalized invitations</i> ◆ <i>Help the person buy a new outfit for the day</i> ◆ <i>Explain to the individual what will happen and why</i> ◆ <i>Make sure care givers are present</i> ◆ <i>Have a place where the person feels safe and make it festive</i> ◆ <i>Have food and drink available</i> ◆ <i>De-professionalize the gathering C dress and attitudes</i> ◆ <i>Invite only those who are friends</i> ◆ <i>Review and discuss any necessary or relevant reports before the celebration</i> ◆ <i>Prepare the person's favorite friends to be with the person</i> ◆ <i>Have a supportive option ready, if the person wants to roam around or wander off</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Have the person's favorite individuals sit nearest to make him/her feel safe and loved</i> ◆ <i>Touch the person a lot</i> ◆ <i>Talk to the person, not about the person</i> ◆ <i>Keep the atmosphere peaceful</i> ◆ <i>Honor the person a lot</i> ◆ <i>Come to the meeting only as a friend C empty-handed and with a warm heart</i> ◆ <i>Keep the focus on safe, engaged, loved, and loving</i> ◆ <i>Use a logical process such as C the dream, defining these in goals, grounding in the present, identifying people to enlist, finding ways to strengthen the circle, what to do over the next three months, what we will do right now, and commitments for the first steps</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>who participated</i> ◆ <i>The facilitator makes sure that everyone stays on track C phone calls, e-mail, small meetings, written journal</i> ◆ <i>The facilitator sends out a 3-month review of progress and barriers</i> ◆ <i>Various professionals translate the community-centered-plan into the language and format that will satisfy outsiders</i> ◆ <i>Everything should revolve around safe, engaged, loved, and loving</i>

The facilitator plays a key role throughout the process. The celebration itself is the high point of the process. The real work goes on before and after the celebration. Each member of the circle is a mentor, a leader, and an advocate. There are many bends in the road. The tasks are difficult.

Members have to be skilled at negotiation and conflict resolution. The central focus is always the supported person.

What Community-Centered-Plans Look Like

The following are two examples of what the written results of a community-centered-celebration look like. They are simple and to the point. They cover what two different community-s dreams consist of and what will be done right now. They are the results of two different circles coming together to celebrate. Read them, reflect on them. They fit the spirit of the community-centered celebrations that we have described. They do not follow each phase that we have described, but cover the feelings and information that is needed to make dreams come true.

Each is preceded by a life-story to help you understand what the person-s life has been like, how the focus has to be on companionship and community, and to give you an idea of how the facilitator has to ground the process deeply in our shared values.

Cecil-s Life-Story

Cecil is a young who has had a difficult life, but who now lives with companions in an apartment. He holds a job as a night watchman. He is in the process of learning companionship and community.

Cecil C a young man, appearing to be proud of himself, with many skills, burdened by faint memories of his early childhood, separation from his brother at the time of their adoptions, and further weighed down with the heavy memory of his brother-s death in a distant place. He is a young man with a loving and dedicated mother and father who participate in his life and worry about his happiness and his feeling of self-worth and hopeful of his one day sensing that he is deeply loved by them and others.

Cecil C a talkative man who tries hard to fit in, takes pride in a new found job as a night watchman, who dreams of having his own pick-up truck, and getting married. He is a young man whose wishes can outpace his present possibilities and who even talks about his dreams as if they were a current reality. He is articulate, humorous, and pleasant to be with.

*Cecil C who recently thought about and tried to hurt himself in a suicidal call for help C a cry for his yearning to be somebody, to feel *AI am somebody*, and to end his life-confusion. He is a young man struck by his perception of himself as *Adifferent*, yet tries to be somebody, to the*

point of making up a better reality through fantasy-stories. He enjoys his care givers and regards them as friends. He has known the street life in search of that elusive feeling of wanting to be somebody.

Cecil C a confused, but very lovable, young man who in his innocence and through his early years of abandonment and abuse actually astutely poses several insightful questions of existence in often unspoken words: 1) **life-meaning**: AWho am I? And, if I do not fit into what I see as a good reality of others my age who are leaving home, going to school, going steady, having a job, and having children, then I will create my own reality!@2) **Aloneness** C Although I have a very loving mother and father, I was abandoned as a small child and I lost my brother to distant and remote heaven. I feel lost in this world. I am trying hard to do everything that everyone wants, but I still feel alone.@3) **Choicelessness** C AYou all say that I should make decisions and I do, but I have no choice over the fact that I am scared!@4) **Death** C AI feel death, especially that of my brother. I have warned you that I want to die to end my confusion Please love me!@5) **Oppression** C AWhat you want of me I will try to do, but I am still empty in my heart. You might call what I do behavior problems. You are missing the point. I am empty and need to be filled with your love. You have to make me feel safe. You have to make me feel loving. Do what my mom said, Teach me to feel loved!@

Cecil C a young man whose early life-story of neglect, multiple foster homes, and the eventual death of his younger brother have left him anguished, confused, and without identity. He has shown anger in the past, a sense of panic, explosiveness, and depression, and even a desire to kill himself. These feelings have led him to seek refuge in alcohol and street drugs. He is seeking to define who he is in the best way that he can. This search for identity has resulted in him making up his own reality C what people call telling tales. These tales are not so much lies, but a wished for definition of himself, a search for an elusive meaning in his life and being, and somewhere between fantasy (the realm of a child) and delusion (the realm of meaninglessness and absurdity). His history of aggression toward self or others is an outward expression of this inner turmoil and confusion. Likewise, his past problems with not doing what he should do is an outward expression of not wanting to be controlled or bossed around that arises out of a lack of trust. It is a way of saying, AIf I cannot figure out who I am, don't you come down on me.@

Cecil C a young adult who is caught in the middle of trying figuring out who he is, what his role is on this earth, and where he is going. Adolescence is tough enough. For Cecil, it is harder since he does not have the foundation of self-esteem that most adolescents have. His very youth militates against him.

Community-Centered Celebration for Cecil

Cecil and his core care givers and supportive staff sat in his living room to develop a community-centered plan. Cecil was relaxed and participatory. The group asked him to sketch a picture of his most beautiful dream. He proceeded to draw a picture of a fishing hole@ with himself alone in a boat. When asked what he saw in his picture he said, AFishing with a favorite friend... someone who is always there...@ And, then he said, AI see someone on the other side of the lake... Someone trusted...but then he disappears...@

Cecil described his dreamC someone with him whom he can always trust, yet deeply fearful that loss is always a short distance away. He yearns to have trusted and stable people around, yet is almost certain that they will disappear just as his natural parents did and just like brother did.

The collective group set forth the following goals and objectives with Cecil's full input and participation: As the dialogue unfolded, Cecil's dream unfoldedC how he sees himself 12 month from now.-- his own dream:

- ▶ *F*ishing a lot with his care giving companionsC *L*eon, *B*ernice, *D*ebbie, *I*rvin



- ▶ *F*eeling loved, especially by his *M*om and *D*ad
- ▶ *F*eeling like a nice *C*ommunity
- ▶ *T*alking about things with his companions
- ▶ *H*elping others
- ▶ *F*eeling at

**Cecil's Dream-- Have others see me as nice..
Have a steady girl friend... Fishing & hunting...
Love from companions and parents... Hanging
out... My jib...**

- peace*
- ▶ *H*aving friends
- ▶ *H*anging out with his companions
- ▶ *G*oing hunting with them
- ▶ *G*oing bowling with them
- ▶ *D*oing well on his job
- ▶ *H*aving four *R*ottweiler dogs
- ▶ *H*aving a car
- ▶ *P*articipating in self-advocacy
- ▶ *H*aving a steady girl friend, hopefully *T*abatha
- ▶ *H*is care givers telling him, *A* *Y*ou are nice!@

Cecil defined a dream in which he feels loved and loving, a world in which he feels safe, even when fear of loss looms on the nearby horizon. The sense of imminent loss and feeling unloved by himself and others are his two underlying needs. They must be addressed fully and constantly over the next year. His going hunting, fishing, and bowling are good vehicles for his companions to use to establish these feelings which are basically a sense of trust in world that has been untrustworthy. His companions have to spend their time going for his heart. He needs to be sheltered from failure. All his decisions should be win-win. He does not need to be taught a lesson-- no words of "You no better than that!" His problems are not in his head, but in his heart. With all his "Amacho" appearance and ways of interacting, he is utterly terrified and feels little self-esteem.

Collective Commitments from Cecil's Care Givers

The group talked about ways to help Cecil move toward his dream:

Cecil's Care Givers Commitments	
◆	<i>We won't let him get into trouble. We will make sure that we are with him. We will cut him a little slack for his sense of freedom and self-esteem, but will be ready to support him before he is about to fail or get into trouble. He does not need to learn from the school of hard knocks. His problems relate to sense of self-esteem, feeling safe in the world, and feeling loved.</i>
◆	<i>We won't let him feel that he has failed in anything from cleaning his room to hanging out. For example, his room is dirty. The issue is not "He likes it that way" or "He refuses to clean it." The challenge is for us to do things, like cleaning his room, with him. These daily chores become good excuses to talk to him about how proud everyone is of him so as to continuously uplift him.</i>
◆	<i>We will sit down with him many times for a few moments every day and talk about the good and beautiful things that he has done. In many ways, he is a baby in his feelings. He has never really connected to significant others due to his early childhood losses. Like a mother would whisper words of love and praise to her infant a 1,000 times a day so too will we, Cecil's care givers, uplift him a 1,000 times a day. Of course, he is a man and should be treated as one, but we need to understand that our real job is to make him feel like a loved and loving brother no more, no less.</i>
◆	<i>What if he gets into trouble? We will ask, "Why did I not prevent this?" We will get better at prevention. We will not spend much time or energy reviewing with Cecil the errors of his ways. We will spend time with him talking about how good he is.</i>

- ◆ *What if he refuses to do something? We will do it for him if necessary. If possible, we will do it with him. Remember we are teaching him that it is good to be with us. Through this sense of engagement, we are strengthening his love of self and love of others.*
- ◆ *We will do the things he likes to do: bowling, fishing, hunting, hanging out. We will use these special times to deepen his love of us, others, and self.*
- ◆ *We will stretch him a little bit. When it would be good for him to do something, but he doesn't want to, we will go ahead and start doing it. Then, we will find a way to entice him into being with us, not doing the particular thing, but being with us.*
- ▶ *If he gets sad or talks about killing himself, we will be exceptionally nurturing. We will keep telling him how good he is, hug him, and assure him that we are with him. There is no way to convince anyone to not kill self. There is only hope to give. And hope is in our relationship.*

Edgar's Community-Centered Celebration

Edgar's Life-Story

Our second story and celebration is about Edgar. His circle of friends prepared themselves before the celebration by talking about where Edgar had been a year earlier and where he needed to go in terms of companionship and community.

Edgar *C feels much better this year. He lives with several care givers whom he enjoys. He is less fearful than a year ago: approaching his care givers, reaching out to them, hugging them, expressing trust of them. His head wound, from years of trying to hurt himself, is healing. He seems more at peace. A healing head means a healing heart.*

Edgar *C A year ago he was disconnected from those around him: filled with fear of himself and others. A year later, he is more connected, has favorite care givers and is a bit more patient. He smiles and laughs more readily and sometimes seems to enjoy himself and others.*

Edgar-- *His major needs swirl around his being: 1) A more consistent sense of feeling safe: forming a feeling that he will not be abandoned by his parents or care givers, even in small things like knowing for sure that when someone whom he feels safe with is not around that there is still permanency in his relationships. He lives in a world wherein out of sight is out of mind... a feeling of never coming back... and of abandonment... @2) A start toward engagement: not just*

doing things that he wants to do, when he wants to do them..., but a feeling that it is good to be with his care givers, not just getting the newspaper for himself, ... sharing meals with his care givers, not just eating what he wants to eat by himself, moving from A1@to AWe@..., and 3) a deepening of loving others, reaching out on his own for receiving affection, not just giving it when he is asked for it.

***Edgar--** To get him to be more loving, patient, and tolerant, his care givers have to actually increase their physical contact with him C making his home A a house of a 1,000 hugs@. **More love by us will teach him to be more loving C more other-centered.** Ironically, he needs this more than ever. If we back off now, he will feel abandoned. He is not ready to do things on his own.*

***Edgar C** has made wonderful progress over the past year. His circle of friends is elated. This is the year to deepen his feelings of companionship and community-- not to back off and focus on independence. He suffers chronically from a deep sense of loss and entrapment. Now that he has a taste of trust, it must be strengthened and supported. If not, it will disappear and probably never re-emerge.*

Community Centered Celebration For Edgar

Edgar, his family, care givers and circle of friends gathered at his home to talk about his dreams for the next twelve months. The group sat in a large circle on the front lawn where Edgar is comfortable. Everyone joined hands as the facilitator welcomed Edgar's guests, focusing on each Community's dreams for Edgar a year from now. Throughout the celebration. Edgar gave and received hugs as his friends celebrated his triumphs and renewed their commitment to being part of his life.

Edgar's Dream

Debbie asked each Community to describe their dream for Edgar in the next year. **Edgar** began by saying that he would like to live in Montreat-- a beautiful area surrounded by trees, creeks, and the peace that mountains give. **Larry's** hope was that Edgar would be free of fear and would be willing and able to embrace new people and new experiences. John asked Larry to explain what that would mean, how it would look on a daily basis. Larry said he'd like to see Edgar get up in the morning, shower, fix breakfast with his companions and get ready for work, all without anxiety. Larry wants Edgar to enjoy life.

Anthony looks forward to a day when Edgar will not greet him with "How long can you stay?" but will be content to just hang out, sit in the front yard and gaze at the stars and teach Anthony about trains.

Edgar again stated that he would like to live in Montreat. John asked him to describe how it would be there. Edgar said there would be snow and rain and creeks and lakes in the mountains. John said he could imagine Edgar walking there, hand in hand with a friend, occasionally giving each other hugs, being together on God's earth.

Nate's wish for Edgar is that he learn to not worry about time. Nate would like to spend time with him just talking about plans in their lives, financial strategies, trips they've taken, buying new cars.

Edgar repeated his dream:

C Living in the mountains, near a creek



C In peace, with friends around

C Feeling safe

C Feeling companionship

C In a house with arches

Marge hopes that in the next year Edgar will find a friend to share his home and companions with, someone he can talk to about feelings.

Debbie's dream for Edgar is that he have serenity and more connections, that he feels like he is valuable. That he will learn to be with anyone who offers him safety and value and who will talk about things that come from his heart.

Mom wants Edgar to smile more often and not be bored, to share things with others that they like to do whether its growing flowers or working on cars. She wishes him peace and joy.

John hopes for peace in Edgar's heart. John explained to Edgar that these dreams from people who care about him are like Polaroid pictures of the coming year.

Dad said that Edgar has come so far in the past year he hopes he will reach out more, his feelings are there and need to come out. He'd` like to see him do more like go sailing and back to church and Sunday school.

John asked Edgar and the group to define peace for Edgar. Happiness inside, slow, no worry, calm.

Kevin said that one year from now he would like to come into the house and see Edgar watching TV, using the remote, not worrying about which channel to watch, just changing as he wanted to.

Marge drew a picture of the collective vision for Edgar in 1999, with snow capped mountains, Shooky Creek, a cabin and trees and a heart shaped sun. **Edgar** asked that arches be added to the house and that it be a castle. **John** made the changes.

John told a story to summarize everyone's vision for Edgar...

I t's a year from now and E dgar, now 35 and one eighth years old, is standing by a creek, with beautiful trees, surrounded by loving care givers, connected to Mom & Dad who have given 30 years of their lives to keeping him safe...E dgar wanted to know the name of the creek and J ohn suggested he name it S hooky Creek. E dgar laughed and agreed... E dgar is standing by that creek with a big cup of caffeine-free, classic Coca Cola and there is peace in his heart...

Moving Toward the Dream

The facilitator then asked the circle to break these dreams down into what would happen over the next three months:

John explained that now we have a vision for Edgar we have to talk about how to get there.

Debbie asked everyone to imagine and describe something they'd like to see Edgar doing in three months.

Larry sees him going to work daily, understanding the value that comes from work.

Nate imagines Edgar at the mall, flirting with a cashier...if she's pretty... and then coming out to the van to show his purchases to his companions. .

Anthony sees him comfortable with old and new companions, accepting change as it comes and doing everyday things like sharing yo-yo tricks.

Kevin describes a game of spades or Monopoly at the kitchen table with Edgar waiting for his turn, accepting losses without being upset and just having fun .

Debbie pictures Edgar enjoying new favorite places, going to the beach, mountains and to picnics in the park, as well as his favorite railroad crossings.

Edgar wants more companions, **John** said that was a good plan, keep what you have and add on.

Dad hopes for more visitors, for Edgar to get up in the morning and work on his computer, play games with his companions or write letters to his niece, telling her how he feels.

Debbie said that Edgar told her he would love to treat his niece and nephew to McDonald's and **Edgar** agreed.

Mom sees him enjoying more opportunities, such as trying a musical instrument or helping others. She hopes he will begin doing things for his companions.

Debbie wants no violence, she wants Edgar to feel like there is no need to hurt himself or others.

The facilitator congratulated Edgar and his circle for collectively making a sense of community. Edgar is so much better than he was this time last year that the temptation is to draw back. In fact he needs support even more now that he is approaching another plateau...we all need to make it very clear that when you are with me partner, you are safe. We can make too much of decision making...we still need to make them for Edgar to keep the pressure off him.

What Can We Commit To Over The Next 3 Months?

The circle then questioned themselves as to how each would help Edgar move toward his dream:

Debbie asked everyone to commit to something very practical that they can do over the next three months to help Edgar move towards his dream.

Nate will read him a story and help him to really think about its meaning...he will also tell him 50 times a day "You are the Greatest!"

Larry will concentrate on helping Edgar on his job.

Anthony will work on understanding Edgar better.

Liliana will write him letters and send a photo.

Kevin will work on building trust, he wants Edgar to know that he will never let him down.

Lynn will visit him as often as she can.

Dad will improve his computer skills as he teaches Edgar.

Mom will communicate with Larry and Edgar about his schedule.

Debbie will keep their connection strong despite her schedule, even if it has to be with frequent phone calls.

John resolved that there would be no visible data collection in Edgar's home. Whoever has to do it will spend time with Edgar then figure out how to do the paperwork somewhere else.

The circle made a collective commitment to deepen his sense of companionship by:

Collective Commitments...	
◆	<i>We will make his house a house of a 1,000 hugs.</i>
◆	<i>When doing things that he wants to do, we will sneak in momentary little things that care givers want to do... AL e-s do this, just for a second...@ I f he refuses, we will do a tiny portion of the Awhatever® for a split secondC not expecting him to do it with us.. E ven if he waits for us for just a moment, that is stretching.</i>
◆	<i>We will have him feel that he is in charge and making decisions, but, whenever he is confused or scared, we will make them for him, make them win-win, or just go ahead give him the structure he needs.</i>
◆	<i>We will keep the focus on doing things with us, not on decision-making. E ngagement comes before decision-making. We will not make decision-making the primary focus. We will make engagement the primary focusC E dgar learning that it is good to be with us, and doing things with us. Doing things for others comes after these feelings.</i>
◆	<i>We keep our focus on the here-and-now. We will listen to his complaints or his demands, be nurturing, but immediately return to the moment. That is all we can handle. That is all he can</i>

handle.

Ending the Celebration

Everyone told Edgar what they appreciate and love most about him and then gave him a hug which he returned in every case, sometimes asking for one or two more. The circle told him about his:

*Sense of humor... Honesty... Saying AH! ... Being a Special Son .. Directions.
Smile ... Heart ... Laugh*

Everyone took turns explaining what they appreciate about John and Peggy Garret, Edgar's parents.

Their love for their son ... trust in care givers.. always coming when they are called...sharing their insight..communicating.

Mom related that she and her husband had seen Edgar as he was treated in the institution and that this group is different because they all keep coming back to be with Edgar. **John** suggested that the circle of friends reconvene in three months to update Edgar's dream.

Last Words

Now it your turn. Do the celebrations in your own way. Yet, try to go in the direction of companionship and community. Be a risk-taker. Be creative. Be an advocate. Keep the focus on the Community's feelings of being safe, engaged, loved, and loving.

If we can do this, our hope is that each encounter with the people whom we support will not only bring joy and peace to them, but also to ourselves. All will become more in the process.