

“It is the policy of the State of Vermont that each citizen with a developmental disability shall have the following opportunities: (1) To live in a safe environment with respect and dignity. (2) To live with family or in a home of his or her choice. (3) To make choices which affect his or her life. (4) To attend neighborhood schools, be employed and participate in activities to the extent that this purpose is not construed to alter or extend rights or responsibility of federal laws relating to special education. (5) To have access to the community support and services that are available to other citizens.” Person Centered Thinking is listed as the first core value and principle of the Department of Disability, Aging & Independent Living: “1. Person-centered: We help people to make choices and to direct their own lives; pursuing their own choices, goals, aspirations and preferences.”

Benefit to Individuals - Being person centered means treating others with dignity and respect and empowering them to set and reach their own personal goals. A person-centered approach recognizes the right of individuals to make informed choices, and take responsibility for those choices and related risks. It builds on the strengths, gifts, talents, skills, and contributions of the individual and those who know and care about the individual. Families report that person centered thinking tools help them think about what is important to their son or daughter and assist them in formulating a plan to access supports and services. The skills also provide families with an effective way to communicate with professionals. Moreover, families report that a PCT approach enables them to gain the confidence needed to take initiative and have hope for the future.

Benefit to Organizations - When applied to an organizational setting, person-centered thinking becomes a process of building and sustaining an organizational culture rooted in principles of developing employees, encouraging engagement and making decisions that are aligned with values of respect, trust and partnership. If organizations provide a person-centered work environment, they can be more effective in how they support their employees. In turn, employees will be more likely to practice person centered thinking as they support individuals and families who receive services. Modeling person centered thinking strategies in daily managerial and organizational work increases the likelihood that new practices are incorporated as a way of doing business.

The Value of PCT Training Workshops - Person centered thinking training introduces seven PCT skills and tools to build capacity for person centered practices. These function as tools for information gathering, decision making and action planning. Tools are applicable in working with individuals as well as within organizations. Throughout this section, examples of these tools are shared, the first of which is important to / important for. This tool is a core concept of Person centered thinking. It is the basis for deeper understanding and a lens through which additional tools may be considered. These tools ensure that the perspective of the person served is at the center of the process.

The international standard for training the basics of PCT is a two-day interactive workshop where participants acquire basic person-centered thinking skills, such as:

- The importance of being listened to and the effects of having no positive control
- The role of daily rituals and routines
- How to discover what is important to people
- How to sort what is important for people from what is important to them
- How to respectfully address significant issues of health or safety while supporting choice
- How to develop goals that help people get more of what is important to them while addressing issues of health and safety

Day One: Participants are provided with instruction and ample practice in the processes and structures used to develop plans that support choice while addressing issues of health and safety. This day of activities relies on group work and discussion.

Day Two: Key principles of person centered thinking are covered through essential lifestyle planning. Participants develop their skills in person centered thinking through a series of guided exercises, done in pairs with a fellow participant. Through directed conversation, listening and sorting information, and writing down what they have learned about their partner, participants practice skills required when developing ELPs. At the end of the day participants have a first plan that they have done themselves. This training aligns with The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices.

The training in person centered thinking is recommended for all paid staff regardless of their role. It serves as a foundation for everyone who is involved in supporting people with significant disabilities. Implementation of person centered plans is more likely where staff have participated in this training. As person-centered planning continues to hold a prominent place in the federal Home & Community Based Services rules that are issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Vermont views this as an additional incentive for dissemination of Person Centered Thinking practices.

In Vermont, we have two goals in advancing Person-Centered Thinking throughout our system. The first goal is to build a permanent infrastructure of credentialed facilitators of Person Centered Thinking so that learning opportunities are available and accessible to all organizations and at all professional levels within the long term supports and services sector in the state. The second goal is to create a sustainable learning community for person centered practices. The core of the learning community will be certified workshop facilitators and Options Counselors. Short term objectives include monthly conference calls and mini-trainings with Support Development Associates Michael Smull and Tanya Richmond (Assistant Clinical Professor at the UNC Chapel Hill School of Social Work). Other networking opportunities will be created to support and sustain person centered practices in their organizations. Registered trainers will also have access to listserv and web site connections with the International Learning Community for Person Centered Practices.

Acknowledgements – This document includes content from the following sources:
BUILDING CAPACITY FOR PERSON CENTERED THINKING IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES: Person Centered Thinking Training Collaborative, California

Support Development Associates, Description of Two-Day Workshop

References to Person Centered Thinking tools are based on work developed by The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices. For more information, go to www.learningcommunity.us and www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

Wikipedia, Person Centered Thinking

Vermont, Agency on Human Services, Department of Disability, Aging & Independent Living