

Reinventing Quality Conference  
Baltimore, MD  
August 10-12, 2008

# Shedding Old Models

**David A. Losinno**  
[dlosinno@spininc.org](mailto:dlosinno@spininc.org)

**Judith R. Dotzman**  
[jdotzman@spininc.org](mailto:jdotzman@spininc.org)

# **Part One**

## **The Paradigm Shift**

The paradigm has been shifting since the late 60's on how society regards people with disabilities.

# Paradigm Shift

People with disabilities have gone from being:

- Institutionalized
- Segregated
- Dependent
- Isolated
- Normalized
- Ignored
- Cared for

**To**

- Community Based
- Integrated
- Independent
- Mainstreamed
- Having an everyday life
- Included
- Supported

outcomes still to be achieved:

- A drain on society
- Tolerated
- Irrelevant
- Contributing members
- Embraced
- Relevant

# **New Models**

The field of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities needs new service and support models to complete the paradigm shift.

# **A Connector Model**

Connector or Bridging Models link people with disabilities to necessary services, supports and opportunities within their communities over their lifetime.

# **A Connector Model**

The model employs an enabling concept to provide assistance first to families with children who have disabilities and then to the people themselves as they grow to maturity, independence and relevance in society.

# **A Connector Model**

Relevance is the sought after outcome of the connector or bridging models.

# **Relevance**

Relevance, for our purposes today is defined as “all members of a community who benefit from being a part of that community are also contributing members to that community”.

# Relevance

Models, albeit well intentioned, which foster, direction, protection, care, acceptance, happiness without the expectation of a significant contribution back to society by the recipient thwarts the person with disability from developing social capital.

Such a person will never be seen as relevant and indeed will never be relevant in society.

# **Bridge or Connector Agencies**

Bridge or connector agencies are as varied as the necessities to deal with complex modern life require.

There is not a set formula or requirements to be this or that or to do this or that. The agency must simply be convicted in its belief that people with disabilities are relevant and the agency must remain constant in their lives to assist as necessary.

# **A Connector Agency**

Special People In Northeast, Inc. has been steadily transforming to be a connector or bridging agency.

# **SPIN As A Connector Agency**

Over its 38 year history SPIN has introduced everyday concepts into the lives of people with disabilities in **ordinary** ways and has been recognized nationally as an innovative agency.

# SPIN As A Connector Agency

In the same time period SPIN introduced people with disabilities into the broader general community with varying degrees of acceptance until we discovered one basic element of community- **all members need to be contributing.**

One indicator of relevance in society is an individual's employment.

Individuals with significant disability who continue to be employed in segregated, sheltered employment workshops are not seen, are not valued, have no social capital, pay little if any taxes and cannot usually support themselves.

At SPIN the decision was made in the early nineties:

- to offer Community Integrated Employment opportunities as the service of preference
- to completely transform the agency's Adult Day Treatment facility (ADT) into a vibrant interactive Community Center for people with disability and those free of disability
- close the sheltered workshop

# **Workshop Closure Concerns**

The single greatest complaint related to closing the sheltered workshop was the loss of the “30 hour program”

# **Workshop Closure Concerns**

Second most voiced concern was the inability to see friends and to interact with “people like himself/herself”.

# **Workshop Closure Concerns**

And in third place the potential loss of SSI Payments and the Medicare/Medicaid benefits.

# **Workshop Closure Concerns**

After seventeen years Special People In Northeast, Inc. finally closed its sheltered workshop on June 30, 2007

**In 1990**

**SPIN had:**

150 sheltered employees

85 ADT participants  
Growing to 147 by 1996

0 CIE placements

0 Contacts with peers free of  
disability, except for paid staff

**By 2008**

0 sheltered employees

17 ADT participants  
108 shared slot participants  
59 residential participants

97 community integrated  
employees

80,000 community participants  
annually

# **Norcom Community Center**

## **(SPIN's answer to workshop closure concerns)**

At the Norcom Community Center, SPIN, as a Bridging agency, has connected and enhanced a vibrant community with an affordable, first class community center while enabling people with disabilities to fully share in that vibrant community.

Using a connector model NCC provides continuing life learning and educational opportunities, adult socialization activities, a fitness center, theatre, games room, cafeteria, and meeting rooms. It fosters individualized scheduled programming to permit employment, job seeking time and/or volunteerism. The individual has maximum choice, is self directed and participates in a totally inclusive environment.

# Part Two:

## The Norcom Community Center

The Norcom Community Center a brief history...

- 1971 Conceived as a community based facility in support of PA's de-institutionalization of its State centers
- 1976 Designed as a sheltered workshop
- 1982 Constructed as a sheltered workshop for 250 workers which never happened
- 1984 Opened as an Adult Day Treatment facility (ADT) known as the ADDS program (Adult Day Developmental Services)
- 1991 ADDS program became a mini-institution nestled within a vibrant community which labeled it "the place for the retarded"
- 1992 The epiphany occurred. Morphing of an ADT center began. How SPIN shed the old model
- 2008 Still becoming

# **The Norcom Community Center**

The Norcom Community Center is a story of transformation. It involved a mind shift for:

- Service recipients & families
- Staff (union)
- Management
- Board
- Funders
- Licensing
- The Bank
- The general community

# **The Norcom Community Center**

The transformation took a functionally obsolete concept that was dying and pushed it forward into an **uncertain** future.

The Credo:

Ray Monk the pop psychologist of the 70's said it best:

**“If you believe it, you will see it”**

# The Norcom Community Center

## The Transformation Steps

- Establish a need for change
- Articulate a vision
- Valorize the believers, ignore the “nay sayers” and win over the fence sitters
- Develop a philosophical basis
- Put time on your side (think in terms of years and a continual evolution)
- Involve all stakeholders
- Evaluate and react=keep the good, out with the bad
- Keep dreaming

# The Norcom Community Center

The Norcom Community Center today, – fourteen years later, is:



# Norcom Community Center

*a gathering place for the whole community*



**a contribution from people  
with disabilities to their  
general community.**



a general community which embraces, interacts with, enjoys activities now shared with people who have disabilities



a bridge where everyone is free to make individual choices



*it is a connector of people, with educational opportunities, life learning, social, recreational, healthy life style activities, community functions, civic responsibilities, social contacts*



**It is a connector of people, with educational opportunities, life learning, social, recreational, healthy life style activities, community functions, civic responsibilities, social contacts**





*a place to amass  
tremendous social  
capital; a place of  
relevance in the  
community*

# **The Norcom Community Center**

## **The Outcomes**

- 80,000 people, free of disabilities, enjoying the Norcom Community Center annually (not an unduplicated count)
- 400 + people with disabilities enjoying the activities at the Norcom Center (this is an unduplicated count)
- 30% are using the center as a connector model bridging their personal outcomes

# **The Norcom Community Center**

## **The Outcomes**

- 850 annual members of the Norcom Community Center participating in full center activities
- 106 Silver Sneakers members participating in health/wellness activities of the center
- Last year there were 520+ Community events including socials, wedding celebrations, tea parties, health fairs, picnics, business meetings, workshops, civic meetings, voting activities, a mayoral forum, legislative events and holiday activities as well as community theatre

# **The Norcom Community Center**

## **The Outcomes**

- Three colleges and universities use the center for community classroom space
- Community recreation features team practice sessions, pee wee soccer, yoga, aerobics and silver sneakers. Participants span the age range from pre-schoolers to senior citizens; the vocational spectrum from student and trainees to retirees, they cover all levels of socioeconomic status, and come from all walks of life.
- Over 30 Intern/Practicum students grow and develop personal and professional skills and competencies in their specific fields of study.

# Challenges

- Family members fear independence for their loved ones
- People with disabilities still are not free to self-determine their own lives
- Opportunities for interaction still falls short of bonding in a social capital sense
- Funding sources preach one thing and pay for another

