

→ *Places in the community where the person can participate* are identified by the network.

These places and people are everywhere, but the challenge is to find real hospitality. The key to enhancing community connections is first identifying places and people that would understand and support the person's dream.

→ *Monitoring and sustainability* is the final component of the process of building a network.

Support networks, because of their ongoing nature, are in an ideal position to oversee how things are going with the person. However, governments and community agencies usually assume that monitoring of service quality needs to be formal and managed by a service system. Individuals and families with active support networks are teaching us that quality assurance is also about ongoing, informal, individualized attention.

Reflection

There are thousands of small groups across the country constructing social support with vulnerable citizens. They show us that families and communities can play a more significant role in safeguarding the quality of life of our fellow citizens. It is important to stress that social network interventions *do not* eliminate the demand for formal, paid support. Citizens with extensive support requirements continue to require both formal *and* informal support.

Those who believe in support networks as a mediating structure for social change stress that everyone in the social network can carry these attributes of caring into the wider world. In social science terms we might say that intentional support networks build social capital. Unlike economic capital, which involves money, social capital refers to trust, participation, and relationships.

Many people feel loneliness at the depths of their being. Isolation and rejection can have a devastating impact and leave people quite wounded. Building relationships and a network with someone can begin to soften the loneliness and begin to build trust. *Hospitality is the glue that makes this possible.* Networks and genuine hospitality take away some of the loneliness and can also begin to heal some of the wounds that people have experienced.

However, we must recognize that loneliness is part of the human condition and that it is natural that some loneliness may always remain. In a profound sense, support networks create hospitality so that loneliness can be accepted and even embraced. Meaningful relationships and participation in networks thereby enhance our compassion for ourselves and for others.

From John Lord and Peggy Hutchison, *Pathways to Inclusion: Building a New Story with People and Communities*. To be published in the spring of 2007.