



A Guide to Personal Networks
LIFETIME NETWORKS
OTTAWA



Our Dream - “that no one be left alone”

**A GUIDE TO
PERSONAL NETWORKS**

*An introduction and orientation
to developing supports for
people with disabilities*

LIFETIME NETWORKS OTTAWA

INTRODUCTION

As Parents we are only too aware of how overpowering the responsibility of care for a child with a disability can be. This feeling becomes particularly acute as we get older and our sons and daughters become adults themselves.

At times it seems the anxiety and worry will never end. Many of us are preoccupied with the question: “Who will look after our son or daughter with the same persistence and determination after we are gone?” The answer of course is simple . . . “no one!”

Nonetheless, many of us have taken advantage of programs and services offered by government and community agencies, or we have turned to extended family members for support.

Lifetime Networks Ottawa offers another option – the development of PERSONAL NETWORKS. Personal networks compliment existing supports. LNO believes the best guarantee of a safe and secure future for a person with a disability is the number of caring friends actively involved in their lives. This document has been prepared to answer many questions the LNO receives about PERSONAL NETWORKS.

WHAT IS A PERSONAL NETWORK?

A PERSONAL NETWORK is a group of people who make a long-term commitment to assist a person with a disability lead a meaningful and enriched life. The members of the PERSONAL NETWORK work together to help the individual with a disability realize his or her dreams or goals.

They carry out functions that are difficult for the person with a disability to carry out on their own. For some this will mean getting practical assistance with housing, employment and recreation. For others, it will mean developing closer ties to neighbours and community.

PERSONAL NETWORKS developed by LNO includes brothers, sisters, family, friends, neighbours, church members and co-workers. Occasionally a professional service provider is involved.

While the LNO facilitator is paid, typically the people involved in the PERSONAL NETWORKS are not paid to be there. Rather their involvement is based on caring, friendship, love and commitment to work together on behalf of the person with a disability.

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Personal networks continue after parents die. They are critical to ensuring trust monies are spent in the best interest of the person with a disability.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PERSONAL NETWORKS

The concept of personal support networks was developed in 1980 by Judith Snow and Marsha Forest in Toronto. A small group of people who became known as the “Joshua Committee” committed themselves to breaking down any walls that prevented Judith from leading a full and active life in the community. At that time, Judith was living in an institution and on the brink of death. She uses a wheelchair and needs an attendant to meet all her physical needs. This group of caring people are still active today. They have supported Judith in dealing with bureaucrats, politicians, professionals and service providers. Meeting regularly, they have responded to any and all obstacles in Judith’s path from housing, employment, recreation, medical care to marriage.

Since then, networks have surfaced all over Canada and the United States. They are called by various names: Circles of Support, Circles of Friends, Support Networks or Joshua Committees; but they are still dedicated to the same aim . . . supporting people who are disabled and assisting them to live an active enriched life in the community.

HOW IS A PERSONAL NETWORK ESTABLISHED?

Building a personal network with LNO is a three step process. These steps are like signposts on a trail. They let you know where you are at certain points and where you can go next. How the trail is followed past these markers, which turns are taken and resting spots found is individual and distinct for each family LNO serves.

Step I: Exploration

This period of ten hours is a time of exploration between the family and an LNO facilitator. Most of the time is spent in individual meetings. It is used to get to know the current activities, relationships and capacities of the person with a disability as well as his or her gifts and wishes for the future. It is also a time when the family and facilitator can assess their long term compatibility and LNO’s ability to meet the family’s needs. At the end of this period, the facilitator provides the family with a set of goals, a time line of activities to establish a network and a list of potential network members. Based on this, the family considers if it wishes to embark on Step II: Formation.

Step II: Formation

The formation period of thirty hours is a time of group development. The focus is on recruitment of network members and group meetings. The family can expect to have three or four network meetings over four to six months plus regular contact with their facilitator.

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The LNO facilitator helps in extending invitations. At each meeting a strategy and commitment to action is obtained to proceed on the achievement of the goals.

During this time the commitment and strength of the network will be assessed and long term members identified. Some networks are self sufficient at this point and others require continued development and recruitment. A second time line is prepared for the family outlining the next six months' activities.

Step III: Maintenance

Once a network is formed, the family can ensure its continuation by means of a service contract. A service contract between LNO and the family details the family's expectations of LNO and precisely documents information concerning their son's or daughter's needs and wishes. Maintenance activities will vary from network to network, but all will include regular, planned contact between the facilitator, the focus person and members of the network. LNO will ensure the personal network meets regularly and is large enough to continuously provide support.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT PERSONAL NETWORKS

ACCOMPLISH ON BEHALF OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Clarify eligibility for government programs by meeting with officials;
- Advise on expenditure of trust monies;
- Prevent abuse;
- Monitor medical care;
- Help people join in church choirs or take on other active, volunteer positions in the community;
- Assist people in developing and enhancing their clothing wardrobe;
- Permit family members to take holidays worry-free;
- Help people find housing;
- Enroll people in cultural, recreational and sports programs e.g. golf, art/dance classes;
- Facilitate families who have drifted apart to reconnect with their relative who has a disability;
- Apply their ideas and connections to the community to the dreams and aspirations of the person with a disability;
- Find jobs and arrange job supports;
- Assist people in acquiring the furniture they need to move into their own apartment;
- Share rides to important events.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF PERSONAL NETWORKS?

Personal Networks alone cannot work miracles on issues affecting people with disabilities. As parents we know the danger of assuming that any program or new “ideas” will fix everything. Personal Networks are not easy. In fact they are hard work. It takes time to see results. Change, any change, does not happen overnight and the same can be said for Personal Networks.

Personal Networks cannot solve the isolation of people with disabilities. While they are excellent vehicles for combating the disease of loneliness, unless the family works cooperatively and allows the members of the Personal Networks to make their contribution, the isolation will remain.

Personal Networks cannot replace families. LNO believes families are the foundation of healthy Personal Networks. Without the active support and participation of family members, Personal Networks are harder to develop and maintain. Personal Networks augment family involvement.

Personal Networks cannot replace human services. Personal Networks provide a bridge to the formal service system by working cooperatively with professionals.

WHO NEEDS A PERSONAL NETWORK?

PERSONAL NETWORKS have proven to be effective:

If you are elderly parents who are wondering who will replace your continuous dedication to the quality of life of your son or daughter with a disability;

If you are seeking more active involvement by your other children, aunts, uncles, or cousins in your relative’s life;

If you are wondering how to let go;

If your son or daughter is moving to the community from an institution or from the family home;

If you could use more help and advocacy in areas of housing, employment and recreation;

If you would like to see your son or daughter with more friends and acquaintances;

If members of your family have died, become ill or moved away.

WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?

In Ottawa – call THE NETWORK BUILDERS!

That's LIFETIME NETWORKS OTTAWA (LNO)

LNO can be reached by:

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