

This video on people maps and the people in our lives came to me off of a presentation I did in Michigan at Northern Lakes Community Mental Health in Sept 2010.

Making/using a people map is one way we can see who is a part of our lives.

In Michigan, at least once a year; people who receive mental health services through a community mental health service provider are supposed to be asked who they want to invite to their person-centered planning meeting.

For many, (especially those who have a psychiatric diagnosis); it seems to be hard for us to remember not only who is in our lives, but who is in our life that we might want to invite to our person-centered planning meeting.

Using a people map is one way that we, you and I, people with a psychiatric diagnosis, can figure out not only who is in our lives but who we might want to invite to our person centered planning meeting.

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How I decided to talk about this subject was that Northern Lakes had asked me to present at a celebration called "Moving on Up."

The clock was ticking and I was still totally uninspired. I was having a real struggle to become inspired, so like the facebook junkie I am, I hopped onto my facebook wall to ask the question, “What 3 things most helped you to move on?”

The answers amazed me. 129 people responded in four days. Few said the words hopes, goals, dreams or desires.

Instead the top two answers were: Support and Knowledge.

When people said support, they often wrote an explanation that talked about how crucial other people believing in them, assisting them and just plain being there for them helped them get into and stay in a better recovery.

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One thing that is helpful to think about as we look at who the people are in our lives is whether the person is paid to be in our life.

We all want people in our lives who like us just because we are who we are. Who support us just because they like or love us. the technical term for people who hang around with us or who love us is, “natural supports”.

The people in the list labeled “Unpaid Supports” are considered natural supports.

I actually find the term natural supports kind of, well, strange. When I go up and ask anyone who is, well, what I consider typical or chronically normal--who is in their lives that is a “natural support”, they look at me like I have two heads as they laugh while coffee snorts out their nose.

For some reason they don't seem to have a need to know who is a part of their life, they just know who is there or not there.

They are able to just take for granted that people are there who are friends and family. That's not always been so true for me.

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Paid Supports are people who are paid to be a part of your life.

Some paid supports are great. I have one paid support who has been a part of my life for 11 years. Luckily she's really good or I would cry every time I pulled the money out of my pocket to pay her.

Some paid supports have not been so great. When I was in the community mental health system I was often assigned to my paid support and felt it was hard to switch if I felt they were not a good fit.

Now that I pay people out of my pocket I only pay when I like the support the paid person gives me.

And because I have to pay out of my pocket, I have been more than a tad motivated to make friends so I have more people around me that I don't have to pay to spend time with me.

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This is what my people map looks like.

I used to use words (you know, people's names) on my people map, but now I use pictures because the pictures are waayyyy more helpful to me. I am the one in the middle. The one wearing the sweatshirt that says "feisty and non-compliant".

When I am feeling down, afraid or depressed, often just seeing the faces of the people on my people map and knowing they are all there for me helps me feel better.

The people on my people map are all people that I have had experiences with outside of a treatment setting. Ann

Marie, Cheryl and I went blueberry picking together. Mary Beth and I went to Orlando. Melli, Ann Marie and I have been motorcycle riding together. Norm and I went to lunch last month.

When I look at my people map because there are pictures, I now automatically remember the good times I have had with them.

Making a people map with pictures is pretty easy now in the facebook age. If you are friends with someone, and they have their picture up, you can use one of their facebook profile pictures. Many of the pics on my people map are from their facebook profiles. If you have a copy of a people map, it can be easy to drag the photos from facebook onto your people map.

Whatever you choose to do, make the people map in a way that is most meaningful for you. If it's not meaningful to the the person who is using the people map, there is not reason to make or have or use a people map.

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How do you reach out to people to make friends so the natural supports on your people map can grow naturally to where you can rely more on the natural supports and less on the paid supports?

In my life it didn't happen all at once. In fact it happened fairly slowly for me. I have a hard time with anxiety and it can make it very hard to make friends. So for me it was one person at a time. A couple I knew a year or two ago that I wanted to become better friends with them but it was hard. I have to try hard to make friends.

Some of the people that I made friends with in the past are no longer on my people map. I am no longer as close to them as I once was.

And some people I wasn't very close to I have found I like them a lot more now than I did at first. I have become close to them.

That is pretty typical. Many of the people in our lives don't stay there forever. They become close to us and then something can happen. They might move away or have to go to work or something else might happen. This can depend not only upon what we need and can give them, but on what they need and can give us.

Sometimes we look at relationships with other people and try to lay blame on what went wrong, but sometimes I have found that it's just that our needs and wants changed as we both grew.

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When I first started out using a people map I didn't really have anyone I could put on it. It was pretty scary when I looked and realized there were very few people that weren't paid on my people map.

There are a lot of different people maps out. One doesn't have a section for us to put paid support staff in. It is often less scary for us to use that kind of a people map, but we might not then ever look at who is in our lives that is and isn't paid.

I know I wouldn't have ever realized that most of the people in my lie were paid if I hadn't had the kind of people map that divided it up that way.

I am not sure I would have grown as much as I have if I hadn't realized that having only people who were paid to spend time with me on my people map was something that I could fix if I wanted to.

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Then another thing started happening. I started filling my people map up with a lot of acquaintances. I had realized that I had no friends and didn't just want my people map to be filled with people who were paid to spend time with me so I put acquaintances all over my people map.

I was so ashamed and scared that there were no real relationships in my life that I would put anyone on my people map that i knew.

Someone I attended a meeting with once a month? Yeppers, I had a relationship with them so they went on my people map. Someone I saw on the bus once every six months that might or might not say hi to? On my people map they went.

Sometimes I still have to fight that urge to fill up the spaces today but I have found that there is great value in having a few special friends who I know would fight fiercely for me and that I would fight fiercely for.

When you see pictures on my people map-those are the people who I know are there for me and who will support me. I also will support them and be there for them.

The people who are in pictures on my people map are like that to me today. Will they still be there six months from now? I am not sure, but right now, they are there.

It's not easy to get to know me. Because of my severe anxiety things like counting off in meetings becomes agony for me so instead of my getting to know new people, I freeze up and can't think. It still happens today even when I somewhat know the people I am in a meeting with.

There are a lot of people who walk up to me and the first sentence is:

Marty, We need you or  
Marty, we need you to---

When I know that is coming I try to put myself next to people who are on my people map who are close to me., to try to defer some of the tension that I know will happen. I often choose to sit next to someone who is or could become someone who is on my people map.

Many of the people on my people map have very few demands on me. There is no one on there who just wants something from me.

It did take me quite a while to become able to move on to get to this point I did it by finding people I wanted to be friends with and then slowly learning how to make friends.

Learning how to be friends, to really connect with people and not just network with people has not been easy, but it has been rewarding.

It took a while but it really has been worth it. it's a life long process.

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I have found who I have become who I am and what I am able to do often has to do with what relationships I have in my life and the support I have from those relationships. For a long time I was told that I needed to be independent, but in reality, the world isn't independent. The people in the world are inter-dependent.

People are people. What that has come to mean to me is to look at and examine the relationships I have. Sometimes I can see that a relationship might not be worth the work it would take for me and the other person.

Sometimes I see that the relationship is just not a good fit for either of us.

And sometimes I see the relationship as being of very great value, and am willing to really work at it to see what might happen even if the other person isn't ready for the relationship yet.

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On this slide you can see a number of things I have had the opportunity to experience in the past couple of years. Each time I look happy, there is or was some kind of a relationship that was happening or I knew there would be friends to share the experience with at the end of that part of my journey.