

# Understanding Another Person Better

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*The following questions provide one basis for clarifying and organising one's understanding of another person's history, situation, and needs. Keep these questions in mind as you get to know the person with a disability for whom you will be an advocate.*

- What relationship does this person have with her natural family? At present? Throughout his/her life?
- What set of roles does this person have in his community? How have these roles changed over the last few years?
- What connection does this person have to the cash economy? What is her income? What impact does her economic situation have on her life? Who are this person's friends? What sorts of things does she/he do with them? What relationships does this person have with people who don't have identified disabilities (e.g., neighbors, church members, co-workers, fellow learners, etc.)?
- What contributions does the person make to other people's lives?
- What are this person's greatest competencies? Which of the person's skills and attributes are needed and wanted by others?
- How do members of the public respond to this person? Is he/she vulnerable to any negative stereotypes? How does the person presently manage potentially stigmatising characteristics?
- What has this person's life experience been like? Where has he or she lived? What sorts of work has he or she done? Where was he/she at school and what sort of education has he/she had? What has her experiences prepared her for? Does the person seem to have missed any important life experiences?
- What future(s) does this person look forward to? What are his/her dreams and aspirations?
- What sort of decisions does the person make? Which values does the person seem to relate to in making decisions? What does the person enjoy doing? What does the person like doing least?
- How have professionals and others described the person's needs in the past and now? Which labels and explanations have been used and what consequences have these labels had for the person?
- What practical, everyday experiences follow from the person's particular developmental special needs? Which life situations pose the greatest challenge? How does the person manage his/her problems in living? What provides the most practical help?
- If a person is described by others who are important to his future with negative terms (such as "aggressive", "anti-social", "dangerous", "behaviour problem", "dependent", "low functioning", "unmotivated", etc.), try to specify their exact meaning: What would an outside observer see the person doing? How frequently does it happen? Under what conditions does it seem to happen? What consequences follow it?
- Identify the community settings (not services) the person uses regularly (daily, weekly, occasionally). Which of these places does the person go along, as part of a group of two or three, or as part of a larger group?
- Does the person have any significant problem using any of these places? What other community settings would it be in the person's interest to use, or to use more independently?
- What would it take to increase the number of community settings the person uses competently? (Consider changes in the person's skills, changes in available assistance negotiating changes in the setting, or changes in service patterns).