

# Learning Partner Guide

*The fact that people became heroes and sheroes can be accredited to their ability to identify and empathize with the “other”. These men and women could continue to live quite comfortably with their slow temperament but they chose not to. They made the decision to be conscious of the other – the homeless, the downtrodden and the oppressed. Heroism has nothing to do with skin color or social status. It is a state of mind a willingness to act for what is right and just.*

*Maya Angelou*

## The Learning Journey

Over the next 15 weeks you will embark on a “journey” designed to deepen your awareness of the principles and philosophies which form the foundation of person-centered practices in the context of citizenship, contribution and community inclusion. You will meet, through the rich video resource library, many of the pioneers of this work. You will be engaged in online forums and live discussions which are intended to create a safe space for your personal reflection and shared wisdom related to the subject matter of which the course is comprised. Your assignments are designed so that you will apply what you are learning and expand your learning experience.

## Learning Partners

While you are the primary learner (paid registrant) in this journey, you are required to invite a minimum of two key learning partners to assist you. Learning Partners are people who will assist you on your learning journey. This guide is designed to support that learning relationship.

### The Primary Learning Partner:

Your “primary learning partner” must be a person who uses disability services who is willing to work alongside of you as you learn to use the information and resources from the course. This might be someone who has yet to fully express themselves as a \*citizen and is looking for something different.

They should understand that by supporting your learning, they will be impacted as well by participating in the activities that are assigned throughout the course. Some of the assignments are sedentary in nature and can commence via a chat or focused attention. Others are more hands-on and will ask you both to engage in an experience together, such as complete a community map of the person’s local neighborhood.

If you are a person with a disability, then your learning partner should be someone who works directly with you from within the service system who is invested in exploring and discovering new ways of supporting you toward \*citizenship contribution.

\*What do we mean by citizen/citizenship?

*“All people are created equal. Which means that everyone is equally entitled to reach for their higher purpose. Second, in order to reach for higher purpose there must be equal opportunities to do so. Third, our work as citizens is not simply to receive but to give back; not just to reach for higher purpose, but to do so in a way that contributes to the greater good. Pursuing these ideas strengthens society and enriches culture for all of us”.* Beth Mount in John O’Brien and Carol Blessing. (2011). Conversations on Citizenship & Person-Centered Work, p. 23.

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **1. How do I decide who I should invite to be my primary learning partner?**

- You are entering into a relationship in which you are making an agreement to learn together. Invite someone who is willing to learn along side of you as you process and use the resources that are provided throughout the course.
- Important note: You are extending an invitation to someone who is experiencing life with a disability to help you in your learning. Historically, in this type of relationship, you have been seen as the expert. Be mindful of the fact that the person you are inviting into this learning journey with you is the expert in their own life and experiences. Depending on previous experiences that both of you have had, you both may need to realign your thinking to lay the foundation for a true partnership.
- The objective in this partnership is to shift the relationship to one that is reciprocal in nature. You as the learner are asking your partner to support you as you grow in your understanding of the concepts presented during the course. The learning partner living with disability should be open to learning about his or herself as well as supporting you. Ultimately, s/he and you will explore and discover the role of contributor that he or she can make of her gifts, potential and capacity within typical community settings.

### **2. Should I choose someone I already have a connection with or someone I don’t know well?**

- There are pros and cons to both scenarios. It is beneficial to enter into new learning with someone with whom trust, respect and a willingness to engage in partnership already exists. Having an established relationship may aid the process of identifying what material needs to be adapted – or brought in to the conversation. There is a risk in

doing so if you have not laid the foundation for a true partnership as outlined above. Be aware that you may bring preconceived notions to the table if you feel YOU know your learning partner and YOU know what is best for them. Those preconceived notions are a form of stereotyping – you will hear John O’Brien speak to this in one of the course video clips.

- It is possible to enter into the learning journey with someone you do not currently have a relationship with and build it as you go, providing the individual understands and agrees to the relationship. Note: Fifteen weeks passes quickly and you will be delving into activities with your learning partner quickly. If you choose this direction be sure to build time up front to establish a level of relationship that allows for mutual sharing of information.
- Ultimately the criteria for you to choose to invite should be based on:
  - Assurance that the person understands what they are being offered and invited to do.
  - Assurance that person is willing and able to make an agreement to learn together and to that end comes with something\* that they hope might be attended to through the process.
    - \*This might be:
      - Someone who wants something in their life that services have yet to succeed in supporting them toward, or fully understanding
      - Someone with whom you want to deepen your existing relationship/get to know better
      - Someone whose potential has laid dormant or undiscovered

### **3. When should I start meeting with my primary learning partner?**

- While a semester seems like a long time, it actually passes quite quickly. You will be delving into activities with your learning partner early in the semester. The sooner you establish a routine for meeting consistently – the better chances you have of fully experiencing and applying all of what you will learn about in the course. We recommend that you establish the routine and start meeting before the course starts.
- Starting early before your partnership assignments begin will allow you to establish a level relationship that allows for mutual sharing of information. Each opportunity for exploration and discovery in building partner-based relationship strengthens the learning for both of you. Suggestions for engaging with people around these objectives might include things like: getting to know each other’s neighborhoods, sharing childhood stories, seeking mutual interest in music, TV, hobbies, etc.

#### **4. What will I use for topics when I meet with my primary learning partner?**

- In some instances – your weekly class assignment will have a specific task for completion – or topic suggested for discussion
  - *Profile of a Citizen*: is a great starting point-you will be given access to this early in the course
    - Complete this activity in parts vs. all at once.
    - You and your learning partner can decide which pieces are relevant
- In other instances you will have flexibility
  - Have a topic or question prepared in advance
    - Something from the week’s work that is relevant to your learning partner or that will deepen your own learning/understanding or awareness
  - Use the One Page Profile
    - Found in the library – it is an easy tool for discovering yourself and for your learning partner to discover themselves
  - A highly recommended reading and a great resource:
    - Simon Duffy (2003) *Keys to Citizenship: A guide to getting good support for people with learning disabilities*. Birkenhead, UK: Paradigm Consultancy & Development Agency Ltd.
    - Pick the topics that are relevant for discussion with your learning partner
    - You will be adapting the information or selecting learning topics and activities based on the individual that agreed to be your learning partner.

#### **5. Be guided in your learning by your learning partner’s choices:**

- Many of the activities/topics presented through the course are designed to be completed with the learning partner. These activities/topics are “guides” in helping to discover: gifts; capacities; connections; what is working and not working; who is important to them in making decisions; and opportunities to show up as a citizen. Notice the use of the word “guide”. Adapt the questions and topics as needed
- Most people enjoy the tasks and questions. It is very powerful to hear from others what they admire about you and areas that are your gifts– vs. what they feel you need to work on. However if your learning partner does not want you to talk to other people about some of the topics – be respectful of that.

## 6. Be true to the relationship: Break the model: “staff” vs. “receiver of service”

*“As providers of service – should hold ourselves responsible for mastering the relationship skills and ideas necessary to do our work well. We have a choice to identify and empathize rather than to set ourselves apart from and above”.*

John O’Brien & Beth and Mount (2005) *Make a Difference: a Guidebook for Person Centered Direct\_Support*. Toronto, Ontario: Inclusion Press

- Allow yourself to be vulnerable. Expect that you will share of yourself – in the same way that your learning partner is sharing of them self with you - as you go through the activities and topics.
  - It is a humbling experience to put yourself in the position of sharing, out loud, what is important to you and what works and doesn’t work for you.
  - It becomes more of a dialogue vs. an interview
- One of the best parts of this learning experience is that we come to know ourselves in a much clearer way. We say that first and foremost, this work is an “inside job.” Being open to vulnerability (aka not knowing) is a gift to the relationship that you are building with your learning partner. If you already knew what to do, where to go and how to get there, there would not be much learning to share.
- Some previous course participants have reported that the primary learning partner appears to be more focused on the social aspect that occurs when meeting together. Time for the social aspect of an established relationship is important. It is rare that anyone who is truly connected to another person gets right down to business without first sharing and updating each other. Having said that, time in the course with all the resources at your finger tips is short. To stay on track it may be helpful to start your meetings with an intention; a reminder of why you have committed to the learning journey together and a quick summary of what you are exploring together that day and why.

## 7. Should you set a fixed time or be flexible with meeting with your primary learning partner?

Decide what works best for your learning partner. We have heard pros and cons of both methods. You can be flexible – but hold the expectation that you will meet regularly

- Most people work out a weekly expectation to meet. You will find it hard to keep up with all the activities and discussion topics, and thus benefit from them, if you aren't attempting to meet weekly.
- On the other hand, if you find that your partner does not keep to the schedule, recognize it as concrete feedback that something is not working and use this as an opportunity to renegotiate agreements and understanding about meeting.

**8. What happens to the learning partner relationship when the course is over?**

- For many course participants, the relationship doesn't end. Both parties continue to connect and check in with each other, but not always at the same frequency.
- When the course concludes, consider sharing some thoughts with your learning partner:
  - i. What you have learned as a result of the learning partnership
  - ii. What you will be doing differently in your work
  - iii. How your time with them has impacted your learning journey
  - iv. Ask for their feedback on any impacts for them

## **The Secondary Learning Partner**

**1. How do I decide who I should invite to be my secondary learning partner?**

Your secondary learning partner should be someone with whom you can engage in conversation about what you are learning – preferably it is someone who may be a mentor for you or a guide as you go. This partner is typically thought of as someone who has some level of organizational influence (macro) and who is familiar with the system in which you work, although it does not necessarily always work out that way. Some course participants have chosen a secondary learning partner whose influence is in providing direct support to individuals using disability services (micro) .

This person agrees to support you throughout the course by keeping abreast of the core content/major points that you are learning and helping you to process them internally and in practice. Often people need to bounce ideas off someone or need support in thinking about how to do things differently.

If you choose to work with someone at the macro level you are selecting them and asking for support from someone who will understand what you are facing as you organize your local community of practice (*see The Butterfly Effect on page 8 for a description of what we mean by*

*community of practice*). Ideally, she or he will be able to assist you in navigating your system and networks. Your invitation to this person to share in the learning should be based on his or her ability to provide encouragement, advice and support to you as you go along. Some course participants may require assistance in addressing barriers or challenges to fully engage in the journey and assignments. For example: balancing your work schedule with engagement in this course. Or they may need to be supported in doing things differently than they have been done before. This person may also “spread the word” about what you are doing to broaden your reach and open up channels for communication and starting new conversations.

At the micro level you are asking for co-support and active engagement for the learning journey that you and your primary learning partner have embarked on.

## **2. How often do I meet with my secondary learning partner?**

The frequency in which course participants meet with their secondary learning partner varies. Talk with your secondary partner and come up with a schedule that works for both of you. Be open to connecting – in a mode that works for both of you – as often as needed. Emails, phone and in person conversations are all appropriate.

Generally, the more often you are in contact with your partner, the deeper the conversation grows and the more likely action will occur. This practice is a good way to keep the learning alive.

## **3. What will I discuss with my secondary Learning Partner?**

- You will want an ally to help you respond to any obstacles you may encounter as you apply what you are learning to your work in the field.
- You will want to share your insights, new awareness’s and examples of growth for both you and your primary learning partner.
- You may want to get their insight if you get stuck in your thinking on how to approach something.
- You will want to share the broader concepts you are learning in each module.

## **4. Should I ever bring both Learning Partners together?**

You may find it beneficial that the three of you come together a couple of times over the course of the 15 weeks. Again – it is different for each learning relationship. Your primary learning partner must be comfortable with the collective gathering(s) and understand the purpose.

Ideally, both partners should be at the core with you, whenever possible, should you coordinate local community of practice gatherings. Your shared facilitation/involvement around relevant topics and issues will elevate the work of CCLD and the leadership role your partners are taking in it.

## **What are the anticipated impacts of taking this journey on me and on my learning partners?**

There are likely to be many impacts of your effort throughout the learning experience. Some of these will be surprises that show up when you least expect them. Other impacts can be anticipated if you “start with the end in mind” around one key objective for each of you.

- Objective for you: learn, understand and skillfully apply authentic person-centered practices in the context of citizenship, contribution and community inclusion with and on behalf of individuals living with disability;
- Objective for your primary learning partner: explore, discover and find meaningful purpose for the gifts that they bring to the world – a clear path to community contribution is opened as a result of your work together;
- Objective for your secondary learning partner: raised awareness, understanding and skill in engaging leadership potential, practicing innovation that leads to change and expanding leadership capacity in staff/colleagues within and perhaps beyond the system.

## **As you walk together in the learning journey ....**

- Ask:
  - How do we build on what’s working?
  - What are we learning?
- Reflect:
  - What am I learning about myself?
  - What am I learning about my learning partner?
  - What am I learning about the unintended impact of my good intentions?

John O’Brien & Beth and Mount (2005) *Make a Difference: a Guidebook for Person Centered Direct\_Support*. Toronto, Ontario: Inclusion Press

## **The Butterfly Effect- Creating a Learning Community or Community of Practice:**

A community of practice is a gathering of people engaged in work, internal (personal) or external (actions) around a driving theme. The course, by design, creates a community of practice amongst all participants. The discussion during the “class” time and in the online forums provides a platform for personal reflection on topics, engagement with others, and sharing and hearing perspectives that may resonate with your own thoughts or challenge you to think differently. We are a diverse group that bring many different life experiences to the conversation.

While this is not a requirement of the course, you are encouraged to include as many people as you like in a local community of practice of your own. We hope that you consider enhancing your learning experience by gathering others to engage in conversation about the concepts you are learning.

Some platforms for creating your own local community of practice include:

- Conversations at the lunch table
- Hosting a regularly scheduled monthly gatherings
- Bring the topics into your department/team meetings
- Post a question on poster paper in an area of your work that many have access to.

You can use the topics discussed in the course, use questions posted in the forums, use questions posted in the personal learning journey, use articles posted in the CCLDS FB page - or search YouTube for a video clip on a topic that resonates with you.

Remember, it is about creating a safe space for conversation, which means people should feel they can speak freely without judgment. It doesn't mean you agree on all points of view, but you are engaging in a respectful dialogue that strives to understand each other— engaging others to share their thoughts.

***“If you want to change the culture, change the conversation”***

Jamie Showkier (2008) *Authentic Conversations: Moving from Manipulation to Truth and Commitment*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc

## **“You Are the One You’ve Been Waiting For”**

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does”.* Margaret Mead

We want to congratulate you and thank you for making the commitment to engage in this learning journey. It is our hope that as you develop a deeper understanding of the principles embedded in citizenship, person centered thinking and inclusion practices, that your actions will be reflective of these principles. As you engage in this journey never hesitate to ask questions, provide feedback, or solicit advice about the ‘next right step’ in the journey. The CCLD director and the CCLD learning partners are all there as resources for you throughout your journey.

Embrace the journey, be open to what unfolds and let this poem set your intention:

### A Hopi Elder Speaks

"You have been telling the people that this is the Eleventh Hour, now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour. And there are things to be considered . . .

Where are you living?  
What are you doing?  
What are your relationships?  
Are you in right relation?  
Where is your water?  
Know your garden.  
It is time to speak your Truth.  
Create your community.  
Be good to each other.  
And do not look outside yourself for the leader."

Then he clasped his hands together, smiled, and said, "This could be a good time!"

"There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are torn apart and will suffer greatly.

"Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above water. And I say, see who is in there

with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, Least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.

"The time for the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

"We are the ones we've been waiting for."

-- attributed to an unnamed Hopi elder

Hopi Nation  
Oraibi, Arizona

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvHMe3F411E>