

Widening the Circle: Supporting people with disabilities in relationships



Sylva, Disability Partners, May 25, 2011, 10am to 4pm
Notes from group discussion

What do you want to get out of today?

- Team work and support
- Share my experiences as a person with a disability who dates to help people think differently about disability and sexuality
- Add to my toolbox so I can better support people
- Support my daughter
- Get direction
- More openly listen and support daughter's needs
- How can I help people we serve?
- I am here to learn; I am here to be an advocate
- Be a sponge
- Learn as much as possible and share back with the people I work with
- Learn about relationships, self, friendships, supporting people; have an open dialogue, people skills/ ways to connect, ways to support people in relationships

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Messages people with disabilities hear about relationships and sexuality

Old messages	New messages
You do not have feelings	You have feelings
You are a things	You are not a thing
You are not a person	You are a person
You can't make decisions	You can make decisions
You do not have options	You have options
You need protection	You can protect yourself
Your are not sexy	You are sexy
You are not credible	You are credible
You are not able	You are able
You are not complete	You are complete
It's not an option	It is an option
"You are not sexually active, right?"	"You are sexually active, right?"
You're not a valuable sexual person	You are a valuable sexual person

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What change do you want to see?

- Improvements to the Medicaid buy-in that don't require people living in poverty to give up so much of limited income
- We need individualized support (paid and unpaid) that is flexible to meet our unique needs
- Families and significant others should not be expected to provide ALL support
- Justice!
- We need better jobs in our community and opportunities and support to work from the "right" agency or person
- Education for job coaches to support us to get jobs we want
- Listen to us
- Information and resources about how to get my own home
- Realistic cost of living adjustments to disability and SSI benefits (things are getting more expensive)
- Unconditional love
- Earn money without losing benefits
- Getting married – address the marriage penalty, creative ways to live as a couple without signing away benefits

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What can we do to make changes/get what you want?

- Get involved in Special Olympics
- Hold decision makers accountable – use the media
- Communicate with people involved in this project using the project page and Monica’s FB pages and groups
- Integration
- Create a local and state ADAPT group (there are none in NC) to take legislative action
- Create opportunities for people to collect – support groups, social groups, karaoke night...
- Support people with disabilities to participate in volunteer opportunities, church activities, community activities
- Get rid of paperwork
- Listen
- Think outside the box
- Create opportunities for entrepreneurship and jobs for competitive pay
- Look at other models for employment – NOT JUST SHELTERED WORK
- Create/join a network of advocates to speak with a unified voice to make change (coalition building)

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What is one thing you can do differently after today?

- Organize more town hall meetings (to get people off the mountain)
- Attend more town hall meetings
- Follow up with Katherine's curriculum
- Give info using mail and other ways
- Explain info in ways that everyone can understand
- Connect to resources
- Start library of materials
- Bring people together to learn effective advocacy, peer support
- Explore electronic ways to meet (alternative to transportation barrier)
- Train staff about relationships and how to "grow the circle"
- Set boundaries
- Begin the process of finding opportunities and resources to own my own home
- Look into taking a class
- Be more self-sufficient
- Encourage natural supports; change attitudes
- Chain myself to a bus

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Resources shared during the meeting

- Facebook.com/monicajfoster
- Facebook/BUTTERFLYwheel
- Shelly Stephens, Disability Partners, sstephens@disabilitypartners.org
- www.wix.com/advocacys/saga
- lamamiracle.net
- Thesystemsucks.com

For more information about the North Carolina Relationships Initiative, visit our webpage: <http://www.hsri.org/project/north-carolina-relationships-initiative/overview/>

Questions? Contact Jaime Daignault at 503-924-3783 x 14 or jdaignault@hsri.org.

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