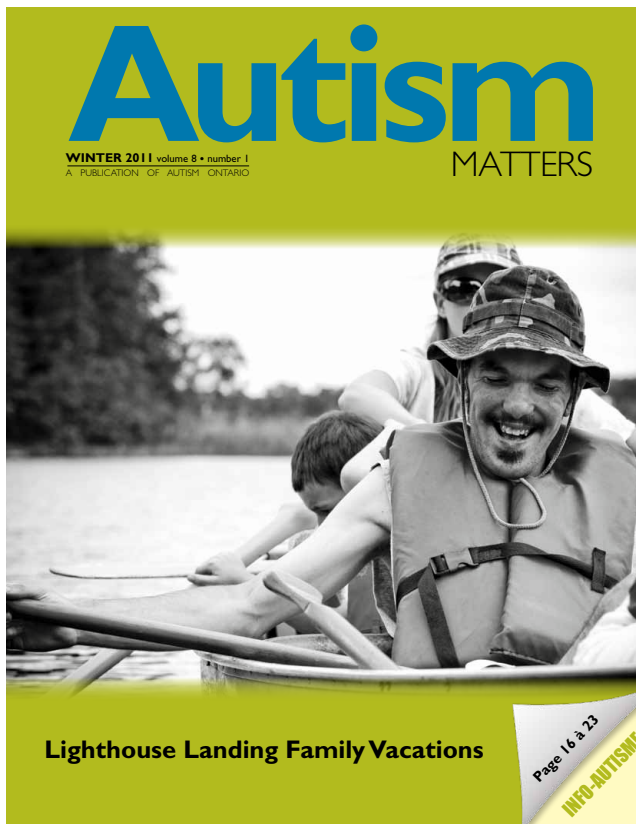


Independent Person Directed Planning

by Lee Steel

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Independent Person Directed Planning

DOES DEALING WITH PRESENT REALITIES TRUMP YOUR FUTURE PLANNING?

by Lee Steel

AS A PARENT of a child with ASD, I have been so busy with the day-to-day activities of parenting my son and his sister that I never seemed to have the time to widen my circle of support, let alone look toward the future. When I did glance in that direction, it appeared overwhelming and lonely. I was continually busy dealing with school issues, homework, managing emotions and teaching life skills.

Eric has always enjoyed school. It has been the source for social interactions with same-aged peers and it kept him busy every day of the week. Last year Eric graduated from high school, and creating a meaningful life after graduation was no longer in the future. It had arrived. I realized how much I needed to create a support circle not only for my son and his future but also for myself. Navigating the new terrain of adult supports felt somewhat similar to feelings I had years ago after receiving his diagnosis. Despite years of advocacy and all I had learned about ASD, here I was again feeling inexperienced and overwhelmed. It was time to build a wider circle of support around Eric and our family.

Enter PLAN Toronto and the process of Independent Person Directed Planning (IPDP). How I wish I had known the value of building these supports from a very early age! The first step in this process was to invite people

from various settings (family, teachers, friends) who know and care for Eric. So, on a sunny day last spring, 17 people came together to celebrate Eric and to vision a future that was focused on his strengths, gifts and his unique contributions. The opportunity to come together and to share in loving and positive ways about our son, was in itself an amazing experience. Connections and networking possibilities that would otherwise not have been made, sprang out of this time together. The process was sensitively facilitated by Susan Beayni from PLAN Toronto along with her colleagues, Jack Pearpoint and Lynda Kahn. The group had one focus in common, our love for Eric and to be part of his future.

There was so much excitement and happiness generated as together we visualized a future plan for Eric. We started with a manageable period of time – two years from now. Each individual that attended signed their name as a commitment that they would help Eric’s vision unfold. At the conclusion of the day, I know our son felt loved, honoured and supported. As his mother, I felt less alone in the planning and carrying out of future goals. Particularly poignant were my daughter’s closing comments: “I used to feel that if anything should happen to my mom and dad that the responsibility for Eric would fall on me. That used to



frighten and overwhelm me, although I never shared these feelings aloud before. After today, seeing all the people who also love and care for the future of my brother, I no longer feel afraid.”

I heartily recommend starting the process of Independent Person Directed Planning as early as you can in your child’s life. Creating a caring community can never start too soon. I have felt a lot of stress over the years because so many decisions and much of the advocacy work was left up to me. IPDP creates community not only for your child but also for the family. Susan Beayni and Jeff Dobbin at PLAN Toronto are sensitive, creative and caring people who understand and value the unique contribution that every individual offers. In January our group met again to discuss how our action plan has evolved. This is an ongoing process. Community is essential, and Independent Person Directed Planning is a way of creating a caring and supportive community with our children at its centre. ■