

# Natural Supports: an integral part of a good life for anyone; -the what, why and how!

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## Learning Objectives



- **What** are natural supports and how to build them into one's own life or for someone you are supporting.
- **Why** natural supports are essential to a good life, in particular for those in transition from one living situation to another, such as older adults, or people with I/DD moving from a group home into an apartment;
- **How** natural supports can complement more formal supports to help ensure a good and more secure life

# What are Natural Supports?



“Natural supports refer to the support and assistance that naturally flows from the

associations and relationships typically developed in natural environments such as the family, school, work and community. These relationships and the support and assistance they offer, maintain and enhance the quality and security of life for people with disabilities.”

- Dee Blose

## More About Natural Supports



- Natural supports are the relationships that occur in everyday life
- Natural supports are an approach, not a service
- Formal supports and natural supports can complement each other

## Examples of Natural Supports

- Natural Supports can be a “Who”
  - Friends
  - Family
  - Neighbors
  - Community embers
  - Co-Workers
  - Church members
  - Volunteers
  - Peers & others
- Natural Supports can be a “What”
  - Family events
  - Holiday celebrations
  - Community events
  - Recreation activities
  - Social events
  - School time & activities
  - Volunteer experiences

## Ways to Build Natural Supports



- Participate in community activities and projects
- Join groups and clubs
- Socialize with family and neighbors
- Explore work opportunities
- Attend places of worship and faith based activities
- Volunteer

## Helping Others Strengthen their Natural Supports

- Listen to help others discover and express their interests and talents
- Learn about what individuals are already involved in and explore ways of strengthening these connections
- Make a list of community resources that fit their interests
- Help individuals explore their communities
- Encourage attendance at social and community activities

## Comment from a spouse...

*I had no idea our world had become so small. I won't admit this to hardly anyone, but I needed people in my life. My husband as my caregiver needed people in his life other than me.*



## Why are natural supports so critically important?



- Formal supports may = safety, medical services, therapies, personal-care, & skill-building but:
  - Are not intended primarily to connect people to the community; in fact can be isolating
  - Are not primarily for relationship-building
  - Often do not promote maximum independence
- **Natural supports can bridge the gap**

# How do natural supports bridge the gap?

## 1. Relationships :

- Can help people create their own Good Life
  - Get where THEY want to go
  - Be less reliant on paid support
- Essential for the many people who have NO formal supports
  - Registry of unmet needs
  - Services lost due to funding cuts or change in eligibility



# Specific ways to build a life rich in natural supports

## 1. PEOPLE:

- Who does Jeffrey know? Friends, family..  
.....start there & invite others
  - Informal social gatherings help people get acquainted
  
- But Mary doesn't have anyone in her life:
  - Where to start?
  - *What is Mary interested in?*



# Shared interests build bonds



# Specific ways to build a life rich in natural supports

## 1. PEOPLE, continued:

- From existing friends & family, or new friends with shared interests-

Build an informal network or a more formalized Network\*

- \*Lifetime Connections at [www.fifnc.org](http://www.fifnc.org)



# What are ways to build a life rich in natural supports?

## 1. PEOPLE, continued:

- Besides through shared interests, people become a **link to needed goods and services:**



## Specific ways to build a life rich in natural supports

2. Get people living in least segregated setting possible
  - Communities offer more chance encounters & opportunities





## North Street neighborhood Suvya and Janie







## Person by person community grows



## Specific ways to build a life rich in natural supports

3. Be aware of specific needs that *could* be met by smart technology as a substitute for formal support:

- Cleaning
- Safety gadgets and fob opener doors
- ECHO and other voice activated devices
- Pill reminders
- Phones and phone apps
- Dogs and other animals
- Debit cards

# Smart Technology and Apartment Living



## Summary of how to access natural supports:



1. Seek existing **people** or create new networks of people
2. Default to **community** living to greatest extent possible
3. Utilize smart **technology** to minimize unnecessary and isolating formal services and to maximize independence
4. Look around at **regular community places** where people gather
5. Be aware of wishes of family from LOI or other information
6. Engage the person themselves to lead the process

Some hybrid formal/informal resources for NC folks with I/DD include:

1. Community Guides; parent support groups
2. Advocacy orgs and Centers for Independent Living
3. First In Families of NC (moving/other assistance; I&R, future planning resources; NCSibs)
4. ThinkCollege.org (post-secondary education)
5. Financial Stability (Upwards training)
6. Future Planning

## Some hybrid formal/informal resources for NC older adults include:

- SHIP counselors, ombudsman, certified options counselors
- Friends & Family Supported “Caregiver Teams”
- *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* (6 week class)
- *Chronic Disease Self Management, Matter of Balance*, other Evidence-based programming
- *Helping Caregivers Plan for and Use Respite* e-learning modules available to all in attendance today
- Psychologists, counselors, financial planners, elder law attorneys, alternative therapies,
- Suggest to identify their own “quarterback”









## Contact Information

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