

THE OBLIGATIONS OF BEING A SUPPORT BROKER

6/25/98

People with developmental disabilities need committed, capable allies if they are going to overcome the barriers imposed by widespread prejudice and discrimination. It is important for a support broker to be committed to becoming one such an ally. Becoming someone's ally doesn't necessarily mean becoming their close friend or endorsing everything they do or want. From the point of view of the support broker, whose primary role is to help people obtain what they want, it means being willing to be involved in a constructive way in helping a person discover and move toward a desirable personal future.

Obligations to the Person

One way to clarify this essential relationship for us as support brokers is to name the obligations we accept in relation to the person we assist. We acknowledge that in order to assist you effectively we must earn your trust and the distinction of being your ally by ...

- treating you with respect and listening carefully to you so that we can keep getting to know you better;
- learning with you about the kind, amount, and style of assistance you need to live successfully in your home and your community;
- learning with you about your interests and preferences and helping you identify the kind of support that will offer you a safe, decent base for your participation in community life;
- working with you, and your family and friends, to identify ways to obtain the assistance you need;
- recognizing the social, financial, and personal barriers to the kind of life you want and assisting you to identify ways to overcome them;
- understanding the vulnerabilities to your well being that result from your disability and your personal history and carefully negotiating safeguards with you that balance risk and safety in a responsible way;
- using our knowledge and experience to help you be flexible and creative with all the resources available to you to respond as your interests, preferences, and needs change;
- keeping responsibilities clear so that, in every area in which we work together, you and we know what you will contribute, what your family and friends will contribute, what others in your community (including agencies providing service or support to you) will contribute, and what assistance and support we will contribute;
- minimizing our intrusion into your life by periodically checking to make sure we are not doing unnecessary things or doing necessary things in intrusive ways;
- sticking with you in difficult times;
- learning from our mistakes;
- following through on our commitments to you and not making promises to you that we can't keep.

We recognize that social, legal, and service developments open many new possibilities for people with developmental disabilities and we accept responsibility to ...

- provide you with information;
- invite and encourage you to try new experiences;
- invite and encourage you to widen your circle of friends and contacts;
- hold high expectations for the quality of your life as a full citizen and community member;
- stretch our own awareness of possibilities by actively seeking contacts with people involved in building up our communities and with people who are developing more effective and practical ways to assist people with disabilities.

We realize that you may disagree with us or be dissatisfied with our assistance to you and we accept responsibility to ...

- negotiate openly with you in search of mutually satisfying outcomes;
- try new ways to assist you and then check to see if the new approach has good results;
- work hard to understand your communications about the adequacy and acceptability of our assistance, especially when you can express yourself better through your behavior than in words;
- assist you to explore other sources of assistance if you want to do that.

Obligations to the Person's Family and Friends

We acknowledge your importance to the person we assist. We want to invite and encourage your active support for a positive future for the person we assist; we do not in any way seek to replace you in the person's life. We recognize that you may disagree with us or be dissatisfied with the support we provide; thus, we accept responsibility to ...

- respond to your concerns about the person's safety and well being;
- negotiate openly with you in search of mutually satisfying outcomes.

We realize that you and the person we assist may have different, perhaps even conflicting, ideas about what is possible and desirable for the person; in the event of these differences we agree ...

- to uphold the importance of mutually respectful relationships among family members;
- to assist you to negotiate a satisfactory resolution to the conflict, if our help is acceptable to the person we assist and to you;
- if the conflict is serious and we cannot resolve it, we will maintain respectful contact with all parties but honor the choice of the person we assist.

We believe that our work in assisting you to create the future you want depends upon inviting and assisting others within our community to do what the human services system cannot do alone: help create satisfying lives and fulfilling community relationships.

Adapted by Dennis Harkins. Comments, edits or thoughts about this draft are encouraged, and may be sent to 5826 Bartlett Lane, Madison, WI 53711, or via e-mail to dwharks@aol.com