



# Promoting Relationships with Community Members: What are the Best Strategies?

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**rtc** on community living

INSTITUTE *on* COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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## WHAT ARE THE BEST STRATEGIES?

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was undertaken by the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, with staff and residents of Minnesota State Operated Community Services (MSOCS), building on two previous MSOCS projects about promoting relationships and friendships between individuals with disabilities and community members, and increasing community membership and valued social roles. These projects have involved training and efforts based in the values and principles of person-centered supports, which started with the “FACES” projects in the late 1990’s. While staff training to promote community relationships had been previously demonstrated to be successful (in the 2003-08 project; Amado, 2010), this project compared two different methods of promoting greater social inclusion: staff training versus an independent community builder who was not an agency staff person.

The project was a 4-year project, from 2009-2013, and started with 135 residents in 39 homes. Homes in the same geographic area were clustered in groups of 3, and randomly assigned to one of 3 conditions: control group, staff training, and community builder approach. In terms of the differences between the staff training and independent community builder approaches, the project demonstrated that there are strategies which can be successfully used by either staff or by independent community builders to promote relationships between individuals with I/DD and other community members. The overall number of relationships established was greater in the staff training efforts, partly because there was more consistent effort in these homes and more opportunities for reporting. That is, there were meetings held approximately quarterly over 3 years in the “staff training” homes. From 2 to 5 staff in each home engaged in community-building efforts, most of whom were full-time staff.

The “community builder” approach was utilized more inconsistently; the community builders were only part-time personnel who did not always live in the same geographic area as the participants. The most success anywhere in the project was experienced by the independent community builder who supported 10 individuals in three homes in her own geographic area - she was able to connect 100% of these individuals in individual friendships, with community groups, or in more valued social roles.

Clearly both avenues (staff training and independent community builder) can be used effectively. Independent community builders who have strong connections in their own community might be the most effective overall strategy, but more research in comparative studies such as this one would be needed.

Here are some examples of relationships established:

## **1. LOVE OF MUSIC**

A man who loves music is also blind, doesn't use words to communicate and who has a past reputation of being quite aggressive. The community connector found an organist at a local church who was willing to get to know him. He also becomes agitated being around a lot of people, so does not go to church services. The organist suggested he come over when she was practicing by herself on Thursdays at 1:30. She suggested that the first time he came to the church that she be playing the organ, so he would feel more comfortable. The organ was upstairs so he sat in a pew downstairs at the front of the church. Staff were amazed at his pleasant and calm behavior when she was playing. If she stopped playing he would begin to rock back and forth until the music started.

The organist also played the guitar and decided to go down and sit next to him. In the beginning she sat on the altar. Each week she would move closer and closer to him until she was able to sit next to him. Again, staff were amazed that he allowed her to sit close to him. After a couple of weeks she took his hand and he learned how to strum the guitar and she played the chords. He would sit with her on the organ bench, play with her guitar, and be completely calm. The staff had to re-arrange schedules to be able to make the schedule work. After the organist's practice schedule changed, these visits did not keep up but she came over to the group home to visit him and play the guitar with him.

## **2. JOINING THE JAYCEE'S**

Staff helped a young man join the Jaycee's in his local town. The Jaycee's are a community service organization(JC stands for the "Junior Chamber of Commerce) which also has many leadership training programs for people under age 40. This group is quite lively and active. The young man was completely included. One young lady took a particular liking to him, and also started being his running buddy.

## **3. A NEW FRIEND**

A presentation was made by the community builder at a local high school about the opportunities of befriending people with disabilities. One young man who volunteered befriended an older man who was blind, didn't use words to talk and would probably be classified as "profoundly" disabled. The young man would sit and talk with him and was quite committed to visiting him regularly. The staff in this home were all women, and let the young man know that after many years with the same staff, his was the only new voice that the older man had a chance to hear and the student was the only new person the older man had the opportunity to get to know. Also the young man enjoyed these visits so much that he asked a couple other friends from school to also visit two other residents in the home. So three students became good friends with three people in the group home. This continued for 2 years until the students left for college.

## **PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS:**

### **WHAT ARE THE BEST STRATEGIES?**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

While many individuals with disabilities experience physical inclusion in their community, social inclusion is often lacking. That is, individuals who live in group homes typically engage in activities in their communities, such as going out to eat, attending movies, and going shopping. However, their social relationships are often limited to others with disabilities and staff.

Proponents of fully inclusive communities have noted the frequent lack of relationships between individuals with disabilities and other community members. Efforts to increase such relationships have been proven successful in many different projects (e.g., Amado, 2010; Stancliffe, et al., 2013). However, studies of comparisons between different types of methods of increasing social inclusion have not been under-taken.

This study attempted to compare two methods of increasing social inclusion: the efforts of group home staff compared to the efforts of a community builder independent of the agency. It was hypothesized that the independent community builder would be the more successful approach.

#### **II. METHOD**

MSOCS supervisors were asked if they would like to have their home participate. Of the homes that were willing to participate, groups of 3 homes in the same geographic area were constituted. There were a total of 13 groups of 3 homes each formed. Within each group of 3 homes, each home was randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (1) control group; (2) staff training; and (3) independent community builder. Of the 13 groups that started, there were 11 groups of 3 homes that completed the 4 years of the project. Of the two groups which did not complete the study, one supervisor chose to stop his homes' participation about 2 years into the project, and one other home in another group of 3 did not complete surveys, so a full group analysis was not possible.

Condition 1 homes were the control group. Any results reported in this group were due to staff's efforts without any outside intervention.

Condition 2 homes were deemed "staff training" homes. In these homes, there was an introductory staff-training day led by a trainer experienced in connecting methods and strategies. These strategies are described in Amado, 2013 ([rtc.umn.edu/friends](http://rtc.umn.edu/friends)). Staff brain-stormed ideas and then met quarterly to review the approaches they had tried, the successes they were experiencing, the skills they were building, and overcoming the barriers they were encountering.

Condition 3 homes were deemed “independent community-builder” homes. In these homes an independent community-builder came to the home to meet an individual resident, discussed the individual’s interests with the staff, and independently pursued ideas for connecting that person.

The project started with 135 participants. Staff were asked to complete surveys annually that captured information on the activities and relationships of that person. In addition, data were collected at the staff training meetings and by the independent community builders. Over the course of the project, 14 participants passed away, 7 dropped out, and 2 moved to a non-project home or another agency. Data from 16 of the participants were not included in the data analysis because there was less than 3 years of data for them, resulting in survey data on a total of 119 participants at the end of the 4 years.

### III. RESULTS

We categorized outcomes and results in relationships and community connections for any participant into three main categories:

- (a) individual relationships/friendships with community members were established,
- (b) the person joined a community group or club (for non-disabled people), and
- (c) the person developed new socially valued roles in the community, such as a church greeter.

#### A. RESULTS IN THE STAFF TRAINING GROUP ( CONDITION 2)

Of 45 participants in this group, 26 (58%) made individual friends with community members, 3 (7%) joined community groups, and 10 (22%) had new social roles.

(a) Individual Relationships. Staff found the following sources for and types of friendships and/or ways of meeting friends for the individuals they support:

- Former staff members
- Former high school friends of residents
- Minister
- Neighbors
- At local churches
- Staff at other houses
- Staff members’ own friends/significant others/family members/connections, who were introduced to the residents
- Friend from the Jaycee’s
- Other residents’ family members
- Coffee with someone from church
- High school group coming over to play music
- Music group from Carlton College
- Senior Center

(b)Community Groups and Clubs. Staff reported the individuals joined the following groups, associations, or clubs:

- Sunday School class
- Bingo
- Senior Center
- Bible Study
- YMCA
- Softball team
- Bowling Alley
- Church kickball group
- Church community garden
- Jaycee's
- Humane Society
- Art junction at UDAC
- Church Social Group
- Stroke support group
- Lions' Club
- HIV group
- Fitness center member

(c)Social Roles. These were some of the community social roles which individuals developed:

- Church usher
- Church greeter and other church volunteering
- Volunteer at Feed My Starving Children
- Volunteer with Meals on Wheels
- Volunteer at food shelf
- Packing for Feed the Hungry
- Volunteer at Caring & Sharing Hands
- Volunteered with church Easter Egg Hunt
- Volunteer at the Humane Society
- Bell ringing for Salvation Army
- Volunteer at local zoo Halloween events
- Newspaper route/delivery
- Soup donations at church on Wednesday soup night during Lent

Twenty project individuals (44%) increased other types of contacts and associations with community members during the project, which are listed below. Examples include being a regular customer and knowing employees at restaurants or convenience stores, more contact with community members at local school sporting events, etc. Some of these additional contacts were for individuals who also experienced results in the other categories above.



“Other” connections included:

- Local Girl Scout groups
- Christmas carolers
- Local schools’ sporting events
- Employees at local restaurants, stores, etc.

Thirteen project individuals (29%) increased their level of physical (versus social) integration into the community since the start of the project. That is, the number of community places where they went increased, although they did not start new relationships with community members at those places.

Note that some of the results during the project (such as family contact) may have been continuing at the end of the project, but were simply not reported during the project completion interviews with each home.

**Project outcomes for project individuals in Condition 2 (N = 45)**

Project outcomes for project individuals in Condition 2 (StaffTraining) are shown in the following tables. Results reported at any time during the project period are shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the results at the end of the project -- what percentage of the outcomes reported in Table 1 were being sustained at the end of the project? Results are also show in Figures 1-6 in bar graph format.

**TABLE 1. Condition 2: Results reported at any time during the project period (Fall 2009-Fall 2012)**

Variable	N	%
<b>FRIENDSHIPS</b>		
a. At least one new community friend	26	58
b. Friendship prior to project, continued	2	4
c. Friendship prior to project, discontinued	1	2
<b>GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS</b>		
a. New member	3	7
b. Member prior to project, continued	2	4
c. Member prior to project, discontinued	0	0
<b>VALUED COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE</b>		
a. New social role	10	22
b. Social role prior to project, continued	4	9
c. Social role prior to project, discontinued	4	9
<b>CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>		
a. New contacts or connections	20	44
b. Contacts or connections prior to project, continued	4	9
c. Contacts or connections prior to project, decreased or lost	4	9
<b>PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION</b>		
a. Increased levels of physical/social integration	13	29
b. Physical/social integration prior to project, continued	0	0
c. Physical/social integration prior to project, decreased	0	0
<b>FAMILY CONTACT</b>		

a. Increased or improved family contact/relationship	14	31
b. Family contact/relationship prior to project, continued	3	7
c. Family contact/relationships, decreased or lost	0	0
TRIED SOMETHING/DIDN'T WORK		
a. Staff tried something and didn't work out	40	89
b. Staff had good ideas but did not try anything	10	22

**TABLE 2. Condition 2: Results reported at the end of the Project (Fall 2012) – Percentage of outcomes from Table 1 which were continuing at the end of the project**

Variable	N	%
FRIENDSHIPS		
d. At least one new community friend	15	58
e. Friendship prior to project, continued	1	50
f. Friendship prior to project, discontinued	1	100
GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS		
d. New member	3	100
e. Member prior to project, continued	0	0
f. Member prior to project, discontinued	0	0
VALUED COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE		
d. New social role	6	60
e. Social role prior to project, continued	1	25
f. Social role prior to project, discontinued	0	0
CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS		
d. New contacts or connections	26	130
e. Contacts or connections prior to project, continued	2	50
f. Contacts or connections prior to project, decreased or lost	4	100
PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION		
d. Increased levels of physical/social integration	12	92
e. Physical/social integration prior to project, continued	0	0
f. Physical/social integration prior to project, decreased	2	0
FAMILY CONTACT		
d. Increased or improved family contact/relationship	2	14
e. Family contact/relationship prior to project, continued	0	0
f. Family contact/relationships, decreased or lost	1	2

Figure 1. Percentage of Condition 2 project individuals with friendships during and at the end of the project (N = 45).

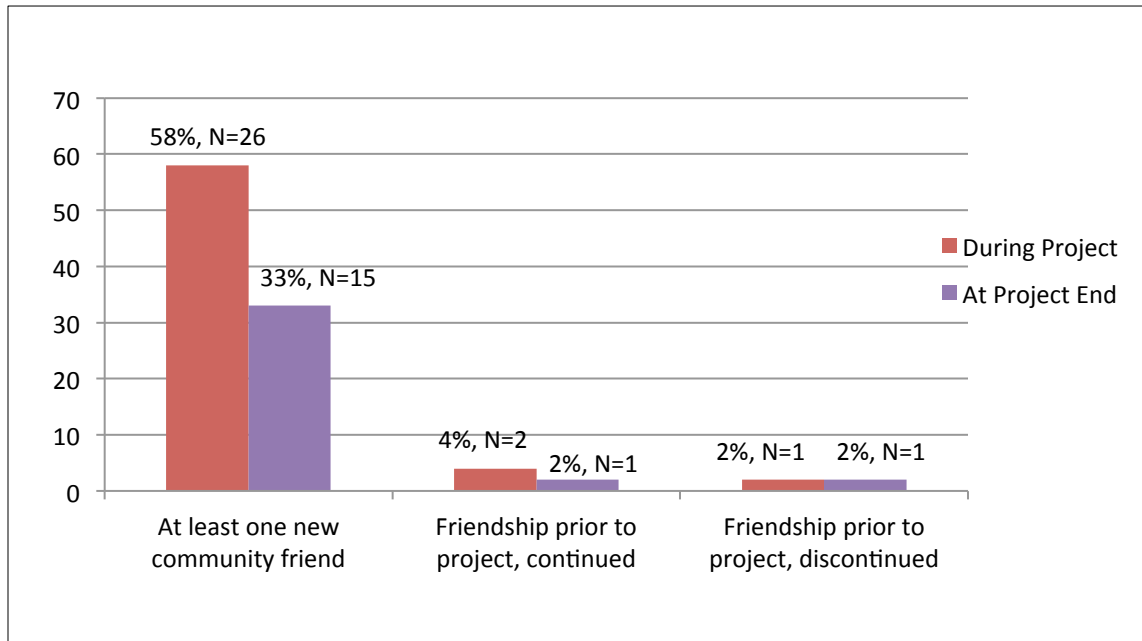


Figure 2. Percentage of Condition 2 project individuals with group/association/club memberships during and at the end of the project (N=45).

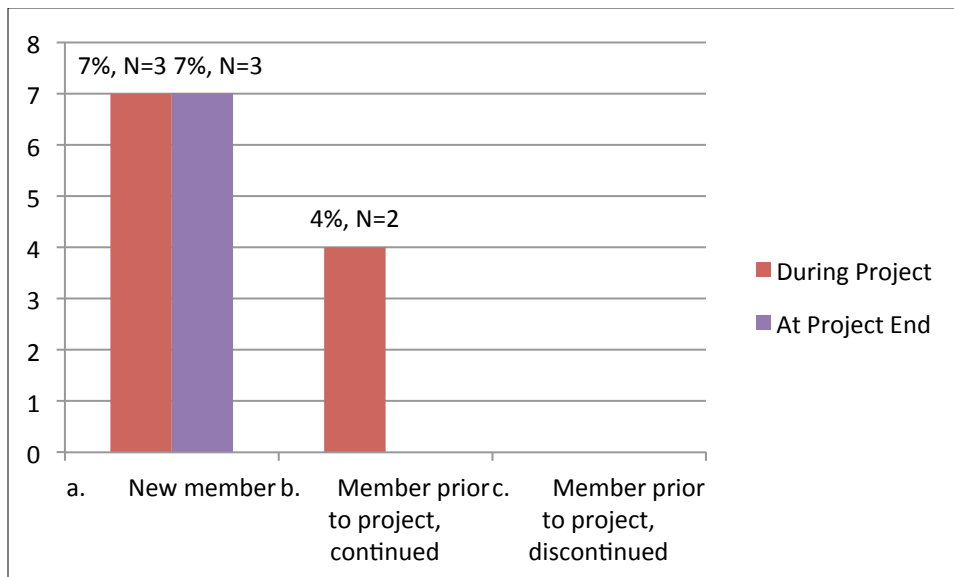


Figure 3. Percentage of Condition 2 project individuals with valued community social roles during and at the end of the project (N=45).

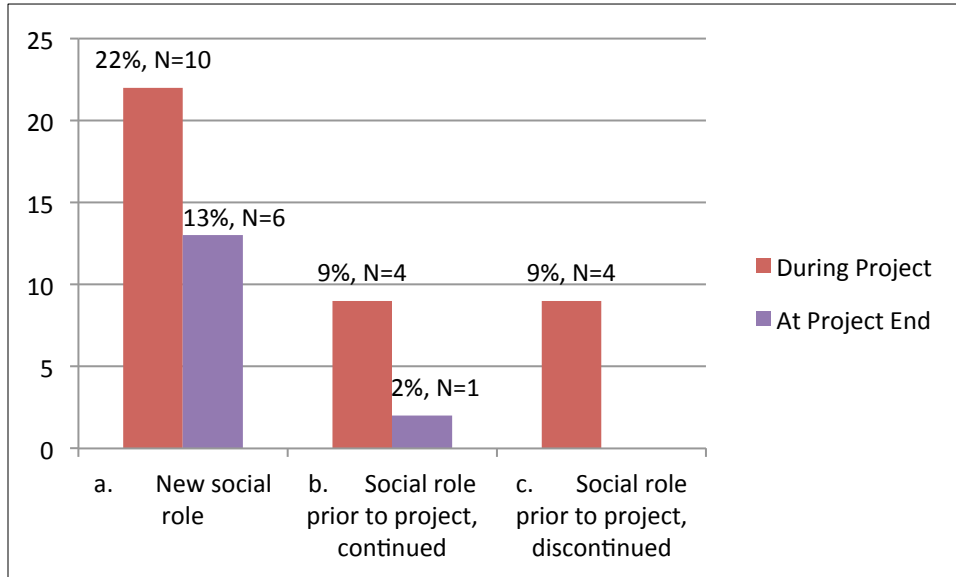


Figure 4. Percentage of Condition 2 project individuals with contacts/associations with community members during and at the end of the project (N=45).

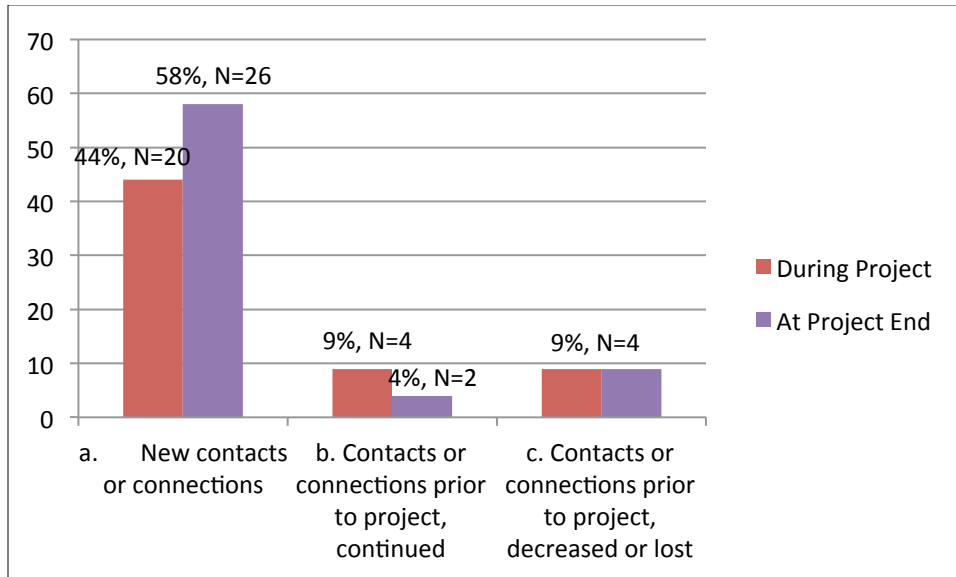


Figure 5. Percentage of Condition 2 project individuals with increased physical/social integration during and at the end of the project (N=45).

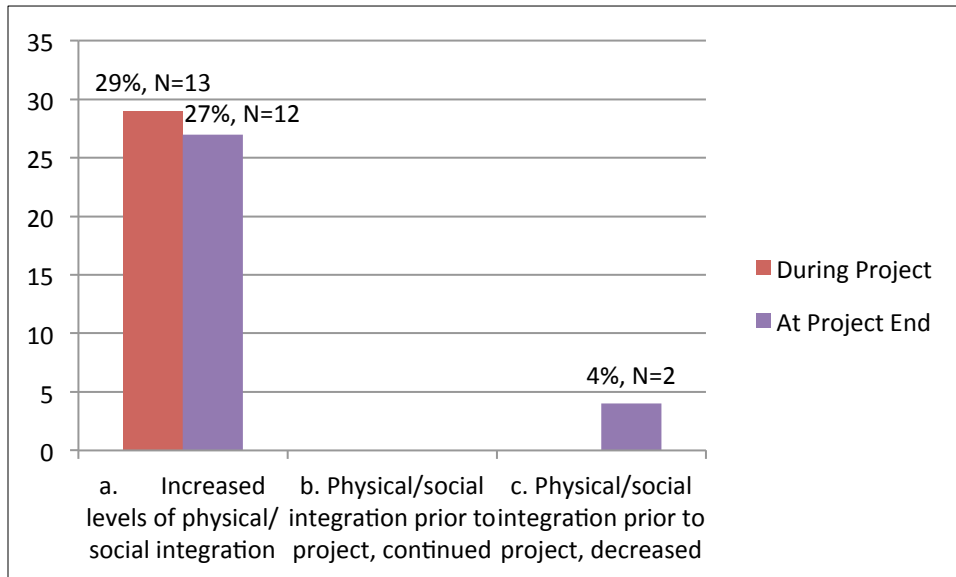
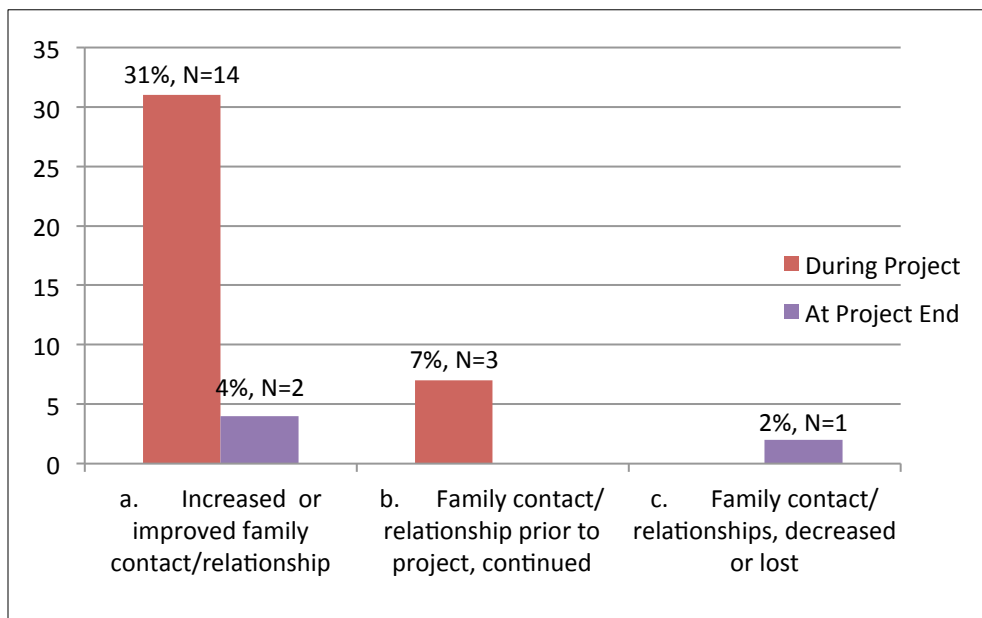


Figure 6. Percentage of Condition 2 project individuals with family contact during and at the end of the project (N=45).



**B. RESULTS FOR INDIVIDUALS IN HOMES WITH A COMMUNITY BUILDER (CONDITION 3)**

Again, we categorized the outcomes and results into three categories:

- (a) individual relationships/friendships with community members were established,
- (b) the person joined a community group or club (for non-disabled people), and
- (c) the person developed new socially valued roles in the community, such as a church greeter.

Of 46 participants in this condition, 8 (17%) made individual friends, 2 (4%) joined groups, and 2 (4%) had new social roles.

Community builders found the following sources for and types of friendships and/or ways of meeting friends for the individuals they support:

- Students from local high schools
- Community members
- At local churches
- YMCA
- Community builders' own friends/significant others/family members/connections, who were introduced to the residents

Community builders reported the individuals joined or continued their membership in the following groups/associations/ clubs, became connected with or regular participants at the following, or the community builder made efforts to connect individuals with the following:

- Community bowling team
- Local churches and groups
- Jewish organization
- Gold's Gym
- YMCA walking club
- Bible Study
- Golden Kiwanis
- YMCA
- Women of Today

These were some of the community social roles which individuals developed or continued:

- Church greeter and other church volunteering
- Volunteer at Humane Society
- Volunteer with Kindergarten class

Two project individuals (4%) maintained contacts or connections with community members that they had prior to the start of the project.

Eight project individuals (17%) increased their level of physical (versus social) integration into the community since the start of the project. That is, the number of community places where they went increased, although they did not start new relationships with community members at those places.

**Project outcomes for project individuals in Condition 3 (N = 46)**

Project outcomes for project individuals in Condition 3 are shown in the following tables. Results during the project period are shown in Table 3. Table 4 shows the results reported at the end of the project, and the percentage of the outcomes from Table 3 being sustained.

**TABLE 3. Condition 3: Results reported at any time during the project period (Fall 2009-Fall 2012)**

Variable	N	%
<b>FRIENDSHIPS</b>		
g. At least one new community friend	8	17
h. Friendship prior to project, continued	2	4
i. Friendship prior to project, discontinued	0	0
<b>GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS</b>		
g. New member	2	4
h. Member prior to project, continued	1	2
i. Member prior to project, discontinued	0	0
<b>VALUED COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE</b>		
g. New social role	2	4
h. Social role prior to project, continued	2	4
i. Social role prior to project, discontinued	4	9
<b>CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>		
g. New contacts or connections	0	0
h. Contacts or connections prior to project, continued	2	4
i. Contacts or connections prior to project, decreased or lost	0	0
<b>PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION</b>		
g. Increased levels of physical/social integration	8	17
h. Physical/social integration prior to project, continued	2	4
i. Physical/social integration prior to project, decreased	0	0
<b>FAMILY CONTACT</b>		
g. Increased or improved family contact/relationship	1	2
h. Family contact/relationship prior to project, continued	0	0
i. Family contact/relationships, decreased or lost	0	0
<b>TRIED SOMETHING/DIDN'T WORK</b>		
c. Staff tried something and didn't work out	6	13
d. Staff had good ideas but did not try anything	7	15

**TABLE 4. Condition 3: Results reported at the end of the Project (Fall 2012) – Percentage of Table 3 outcomes and results being sustained at project end**

Variable	N	%
<b>FRIENDSHIPS</b>		
j. At least one new community friend	5	63
k. Friendship prior to project, continued	0	0
l. Friendship prior to project, discontinued	3	0
<b>GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS</b>		
j. New member	0	0
k. Member prior to project, continued	3	100
l. Member prior to project, discontinued	1	2
<b>VALUED COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE</b>		
j. New social role	0	0
k. Social role prior to project, continued	1	50
l. Social role prior to project, discontinued	1	25
<b>CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>		
j. New contacts or connections	1	2
k. Contacts or connections prior to project, continued	0	0
l. Contacts or connections prior to project, decreased or lost	0	0
<b>PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION</b>		
j. Increased levels of physical/social integration	0	0
k. Physical/social integration prior to project, continued	4	100
l. Physical/social integration prior to project, decreased	1	2
<b>FAMILY CONTACT</b>		
j. Increased or improved family contact/relationship	0	0
k. Family contact/relationship prior to project, continued	4	9
l. Family contact/relationships, decreased or lost	0	0

\*NOTE: Responses were obtained from only 5 homes in Condition 3 at the very end of the project.

## **B. SUMMARY OF COMPLETION INTERVIEWS WITH CONDITION 2 AND 3 GROUP HOMES**

Staff from participating group homes completed project completion interviews at the end of the project in the Fall of 2012. Thirteen homes in Condition 2 and five homes in Condition 3 completed these completion interviews. Staff were asked to report reasons for successes and barriers to success concerning community/social inclusion for the project individuals.

### **1. WHAT STAFF REPORTED AS REASONS FOR SUCCESS**

Examples of reasons for success which Condition 2 homes reported, include:

- Staff persistence
- New staff
- Staff generating new/good ideas



- Community interest
- Community acceptance
- Individual's level of functioning
- Individual's sense of connection
- Individual's prior connections in the community

The sources of the reported successes and barriers were categorized into three categories: staff, community, and individual.

**TABLE 5. Sources of successes related to staff, to community, and to project individuals in Condition 2 homes, as reported in completion interviews. (N=33 responses)**

Source of Success	N	%
Staff	22	67
Community	5	15
Individual	6	18

Examples of reported successes from Condition 3 homes include:

- Staff supportive of the project
- Staff looked for new opportunities for inclusion/friendships
- Friends came to visit and interacted with the project individuals, which hadn't happened before

**TABLE 6. Sources of successes related to staff, to community, and to project individuals in Condition 3 homes, as reported in completion interviews (N=5 responses)**

Source of Success	N	%
Staff	4	80
Community	1	20
Individual	0	0

## 2. WHAT STAFF REPORTED AS BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Examples of reported barriers from Condition 2 homes include:

- Staff turnover
- Accessibility
- Limited staff hours and funding
- Limited opportunities in rural communities
- Individuals who don't use words to communicate
- Behaviors of project individuals
- Comfort level of the project individuals
- Staff need more training

**TABLE 7. Sources of barriers related to staff, to community, and to project individuals in Condition 2 homes, as reported in completion interviews. (N=55 responses)**

Source of Barrier	N	%
Staff	29	53
Community	8	14
Individual	18	33

Examples of reported barriers from Condition 3 homes include:

- Staffing
- Individuals' health issues
- Individuals' elderly age
- Individuals' trust issues

**TABLE 8. Sources of barriers related to staff, to community, and to project individuals in Condition 3 homes, as reported in completion interviews. (N=4 responses)**

Source of Barrier	N	%
Staff	1	25
Community	0	0
Individual	3	75

It can be seen that the majority of reasons for success were attributed to staff effort, while the biggest barriers were attributed to the individuals with disabilities.

### **3. CHANGES THAT HAPPENED TO INCREASE COMMUNITY CONNECTING**

Staff were also asked if any structures had been changed in the group home to accommodate greater community/social inclusion over the course of the project, that were related to more successful connections. The identified changes made within the group homes were categorized into three categories: staff actions, manager actions, and external circumstances.

Examples of changes reported from Condition 2 homes include:

- Staff being out in the community more
- Staff asking people
- New team of younger staff
- Moving into a nicer home
- Managers changed scheduling to allow individuals to attend activities
- Managers scheduling more staff
- Introducing the individuals to people in the community
- Personal staff mindsets changed

**TABLE 9. Sources of positive results related to changes: staff actions, manager actions, or external circumstances in Condition 2 homes, as reported in completion interviews (N=17 responses)**

Source of Change	N	% of all responses
Staff Actions	12	70
Manager Actions	3	18
External Circumstances	2	12

Examples of changes reported from Condition 3 homes include:

- Managers adjusting the schedule to enhance and increase community experiences
- Managers discussing project and community/social inclusion at staff meetings
- Managers posting or scheduling activities/visits on staff's schedule
- New/helpful staff

**TABLE 10. Sources of positive results related to changes: staff actions, manager actions, or external circumstances in Condition 3 homes, as reported in completion interviews (N= 7 responses)**

Source of Change	N	% of all responses
Staff Actions	0	0
Manager Actions	6	86
External Circumstances	1	14

#### 4. WHAT STAFF LEARNED AS A RESULT OF PROJECT PARTICIPATION

In addition, staff from Condition 2 homes reported on what they had learned over the course of the project, which was categorized into three categories:

- (a) staff actions/attitude (i.e. persistence, pushing/asking people, learning how to navigate individuals' behaviors in the community),
- (b) manager actions (i.e. planning activities and arranging transportation in advance, being more pushy with staff), and
- (c) community actions/attitude (i.e. some community members willing/not willing).

**TABLE 11. What staff in Condition 2 homes learned about causing increased community connections, as reported in completion interviews (N=18 responses)**

Source of Learning	N	% of all responses
Staff Actions/Attitude	12	67
Manager Actions	5	28
Community Actions/Attitude	1	5

### C. COMPARISON BETWEEN GROUP 2 and 3 STRATEGIES

The tables below compare project outcomes between Condition 2 and Condition 3 homes. There were 45 project individuals that participated in Condition 2 and 46 project individuals that participated in Condition 3. The community-builder role in Condition 3 was inconsistent across homes, with less time in many homes than the staff meetings held in Condition 2. In addition, some homes in Condition 3 had minimal effort devoted by a community builder, especially those that were not in the geographic area where the community builder lived. There were many more meetings and opportunities for staff in Condition 2 to report results.

The community builders in Condition 3 did report encountering some barriers or difficulties in working with the staff in those homes. For example, one Community Builder put significant effort toward assisting one young lady to join the Women of Today community organization. There were challenges in scheduling, but when it was finally worked out for the community builder to take the young lady to go to an organization meeting, the staff cancelled that day because they said the woman was having behavioral issues and shouldn't be "rewarded" with going out.

There are many examples of good individual outcomes and results, but insufficient information to statistically demonstrate the relative effectiveness of the two different interventions. In addition, there were relationships with community members established in the Control Group 1 homes, but no information was obtained about the strategies that were being used in those homes to connect people .

**TABLE 12. Comparison of Conditions 2 and 3 results: Results reported at any time during the project period (Fall 2009-Fall 2012)**

Variable	Condition 2		Condition 3	
	N	%	N	%
<b>FRIENDSHIPS</b>				
m. At least one new community friend	26	58	8	17
n. Friendship prior to project, continued	2	4	2	4
o. Friendship prior to project, discontinued	1	2	0	0
<b>GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS</b>				
m. New member	3	7	2	4
n. Member prior to project, continued	2	4	1	2
o. Member prior to project, discontinued	0	0	0	0
<b>VALUED COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE</b>				
m. New social role	10	22	2	4
n. Social role prior to project, continued	4	9	2	4
o. Social role prior to project, discontinued	4	9	4	9
<b>CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>				
m. New contacts or connections	20	44	0	0
n. Contacts or connections prior to project, continued	4	9	2	4
o. Contacts or connections prior to project, decreased or lost	4	9	0	0
<b>PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION</b>				
m. Increased levels of physical/social integration	13	29	8	17

n. Physical/social integration prior to project, continued	0	0	2	4
o. Physical/social integration prior to project, decreased	0	0	0	0
FAMILY CONTACT				
m. Increased or improved family contact/relationship	14	31	1	2
n. Family contact/relationship prior to project, continued	3	7	0	0
o. Family contact/relationships, decreased or lost	0	0	0	0
TRIED SOMETHING/DIDN'T WORK				
e. Staff tried something and didn't work out	40	89	6	13
f. Staff had good ideas but did not try anything	10	22	7	15

**TABLE 13. Comparison of Conditions 2 and 3: Results reported at the end of the Project (Fall 2012)**

Variable	Condition 2		Condition 3	
	N	%	N	%
FRIENDSHIPS				
p. At least one new community friend	15	58	5	63
q. Friendship prior to project, continued	1	50	0	0
r. Friendship prior to project, discontinued	1	100	3	0
GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS				
p. New member	3	100	0	0
q. Member prior to project, continued	0	0	3	100
r. Member prior to project, discontinued	0	0	1	2
VALUED COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE				
p. New social role	6	60	0	0
q. Social role prior to project, continued	1	25	1	50
r. Social role prior to project, discontinued	0	0	1	25
CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS				
p. New contacts or connections	26	130	1	2
q. Contacts or connections prior to project, continued	2	50	0	0
r. Contacts or connections prior to project, decreased or lost	4	100	0	0
PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION				
p. Increased levels of physical/social integration	12	92	0	0
q. Physical/social integration prior to project, continued	0	0	4	100
r. Physical/social integration prior to project, decreased	2	0	1	2
FAMILY CONTACT				
p. Increased or improved family contact/relationship	2	14	0	0
q. Family contact/relationship prior to project, continued	0	0	4	9
r. Family contact/relationships, decreased or lost	1	0	0	0

Table 14 shows the types of places and people that were attempted, in both groups. The relationships and connections that did end up being established, per results reported above, varied. In the Condition 2 (Staff Training) group consisted primarily of former staff and people who the current staff were directly related to, such as their family members and friends. The independent Community Builders in Condition 3 established relationships from a wider and broader range in the community, including high

school students, church organists, other community members, and community organizations such as Kiwanis.

**TABLE 14. Comparison of Conditions 2 and 3: Places tried for new relationships and/or connections for project individuals during and at the end of the project.**

Source of Relationship and/or Connection	Condition 2		Condition 3	
	N	%	N	%
Family of Staff/Community Builder	23	51	1	2
Friend of Staff/Community Builder	10	22	0	0
Former Staff	8	18	0	0
Community Builder	0	0	1	2
Neighbors	14	31	0	0
Church	26	58	4	9
Community Member	0	0	4	9
Community group/organization	49	109	10	22
Volunteer	12	27	2	4
Local Schools' Sporting Events	10	22	0	0
High School Student	0	0	3	7
Family of Project Individual	16	36	6	13

### 1. FREQUENCY OF VISITS

The frequency of visits with new community friends was not formally recorded throughout the project; however, the community organizers and staff of the group homes in Condition 3 reported more frequent visits between project individuals and new community friends than the staff from the group homes reported in Condition 2.

### 2. FAMILY CONTACT

From time to time, during project meetings and activities, staff mentioned changes in family contact. In Condition 2 homes, fourteen project individuals (31%) increased family contact since project implementation. Three project individuals (7%) in Condition 2 and four in Condition 3 (9%) maintained family contact since project implementation. No project individuals were reported to have decreased family contact during the project, although one Condition 2 person was reported to have decreased family contact at the end of the project. Staff made more comments about this topic in Condition 2 meetings than in Condition 3. In addition, during the project and during project completion interviews staff were not always asked about continuing family contact, so it is possible that more family contact was being maintained or had decreased at the end of the project than was reported.

**TABLE 15. Conditions 2 and 3: Family contact reported during the project period**

FAMILY CONTACT	Condition 2 (n= 45)		Condition 3 (n = 46)	
	N	%	N	%
a. Increased or improved family contact/relationship	14	31	0	0
b. Family contact/relationship prior to project, continued	3	7	4	9
c. Family contact/relationships, decreased or lost	0	0	0	0

**3. SOURCES OF SUCCESS/BARRIERS**

The following tables compare the sources of successes/barriers from Condition 2 and Condition 3 homes that were reported during the project completion interviews discussed above. Thirteen homes in Condition 2 and five homes in Condition 3 completed these completion interviews.

**TABLE 16. Comparison of Conditions 2 and 3: Percentage of successes related to staff, to community, and to project individuals, as reported in completion interviews**

Source of Success	Condition 2		Condition 3	
	N	%	N	%
Staff	22	67	4	80
Community	5	15	1	20
Individual	6	18	0	0

**TABLE 17. Comparison of Conditions 2 and 3: Percentage of barriers related to staff, to community, and to project individuals, as reported in completion interviews**

Source of Barrier	Condition 2		Condition 3	
	N	%	N	%
Staff	29	53	1	25
Community	8	14	0	0
Individual	18	33	3	75

**E. STAFF MEETINGS AND TURNOVER**

Two factors were hypothesized to affect project success -- staff attendance at project meetings and staff turnover.

Attendance at Project Meetings

It was hypothesized that one factor that would affect community relationships for project individuals in Condition 2 homes was the number of meetings with group home staff and attendance at those quarterly meetings. That is, it was hypothesized that if staff from a given group home had more

meetings and/or more staff attended more meetings, the individuals from that home were more likely to have a positive result by the end of the project.

However, this was not found to be the case. The number of staff meetings over 3 years was not statistically correlated with positive results for the individuals in that home. There are likely many possible reasons. For example, more CRS/lead worker commitment or staff initiative may have taken precedence over the number of meetings in a given home, resulting in more results with fewer meetings. Alternatively, individuals in a particular home may have been quite challenging, and although the staff met numerous times and tried different things, their efforts were not as successful as homes in which residents had fewer challenges. There may be several other reasons.

**TABLE 18. Condition 2 Homes: Staff Meetings, Attendance, and Project Outcomes**

**(Note: from time to time weather or other factors meant that meetings were held by conference call rather than in-person)**

Home	# of In-person Meetings	# of Meetings over the phone	Total # of Meetings	Average # of Staff in Attendance	# of New Connections (During and at End of Project)		
					New community friend	Joined community group or organization	Gained new social role
7 <sup>th</sup>	7	0	7	2.4	3	0	0
19 <sup>th</sup>	7	0	7	5.4	4	0	2
Ableman	7	1	8	4.8	1	0	0
Fir	6	3	9	3.1	5	0	4
Forest Lake	7	0	7	6.9	2	0	0
Greenhouse	8	0	8	2.6	4	3	1
Jefferson	6	2	8	3.75	6	0	1
Prestwick	10	0	10	3.4	8	0	1
Terrace	7	0	7	2.3	4	0	0
West Marble	4	0	4	6.25	4	0	0
Woodcrest	7	2	9	3.6	4	2	5
Zodiac	9	0	9	7.3	3	0	3

Staff Turnover

There was a great deal of turnover in group home staff over the course of the project, which may have affected successful community connections for the project individuals. Out of 39 homes and 78 lead staff positions – either lead worker or supervisor -- there were a total of 53 turnovers in new staff members.



**TABLE 19. Turnover in Supervisor and Lead Worker positions in all project homes during the project.**

	Overall	CRS	Lead Worker	None
N	53	34	19	5
% turnover	68%	87%	49%	13%

**IV. SUMMARY OF SUPERVISOR SURVEYS**

CRS’s (Community Residential Supervisors) and lead workers completed surveys annually about attitudes toward overall project efforts, and their perceptions of both facilitating factors and barriers about efforts to connect project individuals with community members. If a CRS supervised more than one home, survey responses were recorded for each home that a CRS supervised. There were 76 surveys recorded in year 1 of the project, 47 surveys in year 2, 71 surveys in year 3, and 66 surveys in year 4 for a total of 260 surveys recorded over all 4 years. All of the analyses and tables below include the recorded survey responses from staff across all 4 years of the project, in all 3 conditions. Noting the high degree of turnover in the section above, not all surveys were completed by the same individual over the course of the 4 years – whoever was in the position of CRS or lead worker completed the survey that year.

As reflected in Table 20 below, staff reported lack of staff time to support participants in these goals as the major barrier to promoting friendships with community members.

**TABLE 20. Supervisor/Lead Worker Surveys: Barriers to Meeting Goals on Promoting Friendships with Community Members. (N ≈ 257)**

Barrier	A lot		A little		Not at all	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Participant’s lack of money	44	17%	131	51%	84	32%
2. Participant’s problems with transport	12	5%	86	33%	160	62%
3. Participant’s reluctance to try new things	59	23%	121	47%	75	29%
4. Participant’s ill health	46	18%	124	48%	89	34%
5. Location of participant’s home	15	6%	52	20%	191	74%
6. Lack of staff time to support participant in these goals	81	32%	116	45%	60	23%
7. Failure of agency to give staff time to plan and implement	34	13%	83	33%	138	54%
8. Low priority	10	4%	90	35%	155	61%
9. Support staff not doing what they are supposed to do	11	4%	107	42%	139	54%
10. Support staff reluctance to try new things	20	8%	147	57%	92	36%
11. Lack of suitably trained staff to support friendship-building for the	9	3%	86	33%	164	63%

<b>participant</b>						
<b>12. Lack of accessible activities in the community</b>	14	5%	117	45%	128	49%
<b>13. Reluctance of people in the community to give time and support</b>	39	15%	145	56%	73	28%
<b>14. Health problems of other people in the home</b>	38	15%	106	41%	114	44%
<b>15. Behavior problems of other people in the home</b>	44	17%	128	50%	83	33%
<b>16. Attitude of people in local community</b>	12	5%	148	57%	98	38%
<b>17. Unrealistic goals set</b>	11	4%	114	45%	129	51%
<b>18. Goals did not reflect what participant really wants</b>	23	9%	98	39%	128	51%

Survey respondents were asked what they thought were the three main benefits of efforts to promote friendships and connections with community members for the people who receive services. Table 21 below lists the responses indicated from the CRS's and leads. Making new friends/meeting new people was reported as the most common benefit (N=105; 29%), with self-worth, happiness and being part of community a close second (N=100, 27%).

**TABLE 21. Supervisor/Lead Worker Surveys: Main Benefits of Promoting Friendships and Connections.**  
(N=364)

<b>Main Benefits</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Making new friends/meeting new people	105	29%
New/more activities out in the community	43	12%
Self-worth/part of community/happiness	100	27%
Staff	0	0%
People remember them/people aren't afraid of them/exposure	23	6%
Quality of life	49	13%
Other	44	12%

Survey respondents were also asked what they thought were the three main problems in trying to implement these efforts for specific individuals. Table 22 below lists the responses indicated from the CRS's and leads, with staffing (general and time) being the most common response (N=76; 22%).

**TABLE 22. Supervisor/Lead Workers Surveys: Main Problems in Implementing Efforts to Promote Friendships. (N=349)**

Main Problems	N	%
Staffing (general & time)	76	22%
Money/budget	58	17%
Client not willing/feel pressured	45	13%
Finding appropriate setting	8	2%
Staff attitude/commitment	22	6%
Staff turnover	3	1%
Community acceptance/interest	46	13%
Other	76	22%
Doesn't use words to communicate	20	6%
Behaviors	29	8%
Health/medical concerns	19	5%

Survey respondents were asked questions concerning their personal views on promoting friendship between people who receive services and community members, as shown in Table 23. The most common personal views on promoting friendships, with which these respondents agreed, included:

Question 1: “I understand what is meant by promoting friendships with community members”

(99% of respondents gave this item a 4 or 5 rating on a 5-point scale of agreement, which was the most highly rated item on this scale.)

Question 8: “Everyone has the right to be fully involved in society”

(94% rated this item with a 4 or 5.)

Question 10: “Everyone has their own strengths”

(98% rated this item with a 4 or 5).

**TABLE 23. Supervisor/Lead Worker Surveys: Personal Views on Promoting Friendships. (N ≈ 255)**

Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Not sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>1. I understand what is meant by promoting friendships with community members</b>	125	49%	128	50%	1	0%	0	0%	3	1%
<b>2. I believe that promoting friendships with community members works</b>	71	28%	127	49%	54	21%	4	2%	1	0%
<b>3. I will fight to get efforts to promote friendship with community members working in this agency</b>	53	21%	114	46%	56	23%	13	5%	12	5%
<b>4. I will carry on trying to make efforts to promote</b>	64	25%	168	66%	19	7%	2	1%	2	1%

friendships work even when things go wrong											
5. You sometimes have to take risks to make things better	83	32%	158	61%	15	6%	0	0%	1	0%	
6. You have to be creative and come up with unusual solutions at times	112	44%	143	56%	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%	
7. Everyone has something to offer the community	103	41%	120	48%	21	8%	6	2%	2	1%	
8. Everyone has the right to be fully involved in society	119	47%	119	47%	10	4%	4	2%	2	1%	
9. Everyone can communicate	90	36%	136	54%	18	7%	4	2%	3	1%	
10. Everyone has their own strengths	116	45%	137	53%	3	1%	0	0%	1	0%	
11. Everyone can contribute to society in some way	106	41%	121	47%	27	11%	2	1%	1	0%	
12. The community has something to offer everyone	88	34%	126	49%	34	13%	8	3%	1	0%	
13. Promoting friendships with community members is just another “fad” or “fashion”	5	2%	14	5%	31	12%	127	50%	78	31%	
14. Promoting friendships with community members can work for people with very limited communication	51	20%	174	68%	29	11%	2	1%	1	0%	
15. Promoting friendship with community members will improve the lives of people who use services	77	30%	155	61%	20	8%	1	0%	2	1%	

In addition, survey respondents were asked what they saw as the main organizational barriers to promoting friendships with community members. As shown in Table 24 below, the major organizational barriers were seen as (1) lack of funding; and (2) lack of staff that are trained and committed to these efforts. The items which were least likely to be seen as barriers by respondents were lack of commitment by the agency and agency reluctance to try new ways of working.

**TABLE 24. Supervisor/Lead Worker Surveys: Organizational Barriers to Promoting Friendship with Community Members. (N ≈ 248)**

Organizational Barrier	A lot		A little		Not at all	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Lack of commitment by agency	7	3%	83	33%	164	65%
2. Lack of commitment by other agencies	11	4%	101	40%	142	56%
3. Lack of funding	95	37%	111	44%	49	19%
4. Lack of training for staff	23	9%	101	40%	129	51%
5. Agency reluctance to try new ways of working	9	4%	64	25%	179	71%
6. Lack of staff who are trained and committed to these efforts	42	16%	100	39%	113	44%
7. Lack of ongoing support for these efforts	20	8%	117	46%	117	46%
8. Lack of cooperation between different agencies	13	5%	82	33%	153	62%

Survey respondents were also asked to list the three most serious barriers to efforts to promote friendship with community members within their agency and three things their agency does that most

supports promoting friendships with community members. Tables 25 and 26 below list the indicated responses about barriers and support, respectively, as reported by the CRS's and lead workers. Money/budget/time/staffing (N=204; 42 %) was seen as the most serious barrier, whereas training/ideas (N=124; 29%) was seen as the most common type of agency support for promoting friendships.

**TABLE 25. Supervisor/Lead Worker Surveys: Most Serious Barriers to Promoting Friendships. (N=484)**

<b>Most Serious Barriers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Staff Attitude	42	9%
Money/budget/time/staffing	204	42%
Community resistance/availability	36	7%
Individual's willingness to participate	32	7%
Health/medical	41	8%
Behavioral Issues	27	6%
Not using words to communication	10	2%
Other (i.e.....)	92	19%

**TABLE 26. Supervisor/Lead Worker Surveys: Agency support for promoting friendships. (N=428)**

<b>Supportive Efforts</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Transportation	19	4%
Training/Ideas	124	29%
Encourage it/priority	113	26%
Provide time	25	6%
Money (staffing & outings)	52	12%
Social capital focus	8	2%
Other (i.e.....)	87	20%

The CRS's and lead workers who filled out the surveys did reflect a high degree of commitment to the values of the project, as reflected in Table 27. Important questions about personal attitudes toward project efforts included:

Question 4: "I am dedicated to implementing these efforts in this agency"

(80% of respondents gave this item a 5 or 6 rating on a 6-point scale of agreement.)

Question 8: "I feel it is my duty to help this agency implement these efforts"

(81% rated this item with 5 or 6.)

Question 11: "It is my personal responsibility to help this agency successfully implement these efforts"

(78% rated it 5 or 6.)

Question 14: “I am happy to implement these efforts to the extent that it improves the lives of people with disabilities”

(90% rated it 5 or 6; it was the most highly rated item on this scale)

**TABLE 27. Feelings about Project Implementation.** (N ≈ 228)

Item	Strongly Agree										Strongly Disagree	
	6		5		4		3		2		1	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. I will give my best efforts to promoting friendships if I know it will be seen by the ‘right people’ in the agency	15	7%	18	8%	27	13%	6	3%	45	21%	102	48%
2. Sometimes I wish this agency would not bother with promoting friendship	3	1%	2	1%	14	6%	6	3%	67	30%	134	59%
3. I support efforts to promote friendships if they work	62	29%	74	35%	40	19%	4	2%	16	8%	17	8%
4. I am dedicated to implementing these efforts in this agency	91	39%	97	41%	44	19%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%
5. I will get most involved if I’ll receive recognition or reward for it	1	0%	10	4%	9	4%	7	3%	61	26%	151	63%
6. I get angry when I think about this agency implementing these efforts	4	2%	1	0%	1	0%	2	1%	51	22%	177	75%
7. I will reserve judgment until I’ve seen more action	10	5%	25	12%	34	16%	11	5%	44	20%	93	43%
8. I feel it is my duty to help this agency implement these efforts	91	38%	104	43%	40	17%	4	2%	1	0%	0	0%
9. I feel trapped into implementing these efforts here	1	0%	8	4%	23	11%	7	3%	59	27%	120	55%
10. If these efforts do not work in this agency they should be discontinued	9	4%	10	4%	16	7%	7	3%	86	37%	105	45%
11. It is my personal responsibility to help this agency successfully implement these efforts	79	33%	106	45%	44	19%	2	1%	1	0%	4	2%
12. I will put effort into implementing these efforts to the extent that I get something in return for it	4	2%	17	7%	8	3%	5	2%	59	26%	136	59%
13. Implementing these efforts in this agency will make no difference	2	1%	3	1%	12	5%	6	3%	70	31%	130	58%
14. I am happy to implement these efforts to the extent that it improves the lives of people with disabilities	134	54%	89	36%	22	9%	1	0%	0	0%	3	1%
15. I get upset when people in this agency say bad things about promoting friendship	48	23%	53	26%	61	29%	5	2%	22	11%	18	9%

Note that the returned surveys were filled out by staff and supervisors who were likely the most involved in project efforts. The staff and supervisors who were committed to the values and goals of the project were likely the most successful.

## **V. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY MEMBER SURVEYS**

Three community members from Condition 3 completed surveys about their experience befriending an individual in the group home.

Some of the personal benefits reported by the community members included:

- seeing the person's positive reaction
- feelings of importance to have individuals as friends
- having another friend
- someone to do something with and have fun doing it
- looking forward to seeing the individual and doing something with them
- enjoying the same interests

Benefits for the individual with disabilities befriended reported by the community members included:

- enjoyment
- entertainment
- time away from the group home
- someone besides staff to relax and have fun with

Out of nine responses reported by these 3 respondents which pertained to concerns, barriers, or issues reported by the community members, four of the responses (45%) were related to characteristics of the project individual (i.e. communication skills, behaviors, health issues), two of the responses (22%) were related to the community member (i.e. lack of strategies or techniques to cope with the individual's behaviors and knowing how to react and communicate), and three of the responses (33%) were related to external circumstances (i.e. the weather, illness, initial unfamiliarity).

## **VI. DIFFICULTIES IN RESEARCHING THIS TOPIC**

The results of this study reflect the challenges in three distinct and important areas when undertaking to impact social inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

### **1. "Measuring" Degree of Social Inclusion**

The first challenge is in the arena of measuring social inclusion and measuring the degree of change in efforts to impact such inclusion. Measurement of results can take many different forms. For example, some researchers have had staff record the number of interactions between a group home resident and community member which were at least 15 minutes long, whether that interaction was on the phone or in person. Studies of interactions of the general population, including elementary and high school

students, have often relied on self-report based on people answering such questions as “who are your friends.”

This study used two methods for gathering information about the number and type of relationships in an individual’s life. The first method was a survey which was filled out annually over 4 years. The primary survey respondents were the direct support staff or home supervisor, although occasionally there was also input from the person with disabilities. The second method was reports at periodic meetings with staff.

The survey format presented several issues regarding reliability of information, including the fact that the people who filled out the surveys differed from year to year (based on staff changes in the home, or staff changes in responsibility for a particular individual). Often it was difficult to determine if the community member named in one question on the survey was the same community member mentioned in a second question later on in the survey, or if the community member named in a given year was the same individual named in a previous year. For example, some respondents used a first name when referring to a community member, some used initials, and some simply said the role, such as “staff friend.” So it was difficult to determine if the same community member was being referred to, or if it was a different community member. In addition, gathering this information once a year reflects dependency on the respondent’s memory, or knowledge of that respondent that a community member had come over or called. If a respondent was answering based only on the current time of the year, when the survey was being filled out, then a community member who had visited 2 months ago may or may not have been recorded. The respondents were not asked to report their answers based on an accumulation of data, for example, the number of visits collected in a staff log. So if a weekend staff knew of a community member visiting, that information would not necessarily have been conveyed to the weekday staff who was filling out the survey.

Staff report at meetings reflected this variability of knowledge among all the staff in one home. For example, there were numerous staff meetings, when the staff were all together, in which one staff shared that a particular community member had visited, and other staff had not known that.

Information gathered from staff meetings was also not reliable for reflecting the variability between the groups. For example, Condition 2 (Staff training) homes had more meetings than either of the other groups, so homes in that group had more opportunity to report any results in this area.

## 2. Measuring “Friendship”

The second question which this study reflects is the challenge of determining what constitutes “friendship.” This is an oft-asked question: who is a friend, who do you consider a friend, how do you measure it? What is it dependent on? While studies of non-disabled adults and students use self-report, determination is more difficult with individuals with IDD who cannot report for themselves. How is the nature of friendship counted -- for example, what is the frequency of visits to the person in their home, how often do the two talk on the phone, if they exchange emails, or do they participate in an activity outside the home. The survey only asked for staff report that the relationship existed, without any objective measure. There was variability and challenge in “counting.” For example, if a whole family



comes over to visit 4 individuals in a group home, are they friends with all the 4 individuals in that home? “Friendship” is a challenging and difficult phenomenon to measure. Non-disabled people report people as friends that they have not physically seen in a number of years; people report others as friends that they have not even met, but with whom they have only exchanged emails, phone calls or have as “facebook” friends.

### 3. Impacting Organizational Culture for Social Inclusion

The third challenge this study reflects is that of the significant effort required to impact social inclusion of individuals who live primarily socially isolated lives. In this study, there were several unique, wonderful, and touching examples of friendships and relationships established between some individuals and non-disabled community members, as described above.

However, in this study there were challenges in comparing the whole group, for example comparing results from everyone in Condition 2 or 3. Within each group, there was wide variability in the level of commitment to this effort. For example, within the staff training group (Condition 2), the number of meetings held with staff ranged from 4 to 10; this wide variability also reflected the range of opportunities which staff had to report results. In the Community Builder group (Condition 3), the community builder who was working with homes within their own community established many relationships, while other community builders working with more distant homes established none. In addition, there was a range of skill and expertise among the three different community builders. A single subject research design (comparing a few individuals before and after) would have shown different results. Alternatively, if meetings had been held every month with all homes, there likely would have been different results.

As the supervisors comments indicated about organizational barriers, this particular project was not aimed at developing an organizational culture or agency-wide shift toward promoting more social inclusion. Numerous other issues would have to be addressed in that type of project, and a different effort would have to be involved, for example, involvement of all homes and/or all supervisors and managers.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This project demonstrated that there are strategies which can be used by either staff or by independent community builders to promote relationships between individuals with I/DD and other community members. This project was intended to compare the differences between the staff training and independent community builder approaches. The overall number of relationships established were greater in the staff training efforts, partly because there was more consistent effort in these homes and more opportunities for reporting. That is, there were meetings held approximately quarterly over 3 years in the “staff training” homes. From 2 to 5 staff in each home gave effort to project activities, most of whom were full-time staff.

The “community builder” approach was utilized more inconsistently. There were 3 different community builders, each of whom worked only part-time. One community builder supported people in three

homes in the geographic area in which she lived. Of the 10 individuals in these homes which were participating in the project, the community builder established relationships for 100% of these individuals. The other 2 community builders did not live in the same geographic area of their homes and were far less successful and applied effort less consistently. Of all the homes, the community builder who supported 3 homes in her own area had the most overall positive results for the highest percentage of individuals connected overall, among any approach.

While the project definitely increased relationships and community belonging for many individuals, there was inconsistency in the capacity to compare the two methods of staff training and independent community builder. Clearly both approaches can be used effectively. In addition, individuals in the “control group” homes also experienced increased community relationships, though the sources of those results were not identified. Independent community builders who have strong connections in their own community might be the most effective overall strategy, but more research in comparative studies such as this one would be needed.

A larger contextual point is the impact of these efforts on the social network of any given individual with developmental disabilities. For someone whose social network has for years consisted primarily of staff and other people with disabilities, bringing even one community member into an individual’s life is a potentially major and important different in the life of that person. It is clear in many of these homes that these efforts on the part of staff required a major shift in their standard routines, and that for many of the individuals these efforts were worth it.

## REFERENCES

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