



While some deliberate and formal processes might be helpful to get started, our writers describe how this can ease back over time to become more a way of thinking with regular top-ups and reviews rather than remaining highly formalised forever. As Debbie Naughton says, it is still there but it is in the background not the foreground. Julie Van Oosten also shares her experience of witnessing good things happening that weren't written in the formal plan but that wouldn't have happened without the planning. The fresh thinking stimulated by a creative planning process opens us all to see new possibilities.

When I was travelling in Canada last year, I was walking over a very steep bridge and towards the top there was a warning sign, saying "Limited Vision". While the risks are a bit different, I thought that we could do with similar warning signs when we are thinking about the lives and futures of the people with disability that we know and care about because our plans need to start with a vision of what we want and if that vision is too small or apologetic or limited then we run the risk of compromising the person's future. I find that having a group of people working on naming and writing the vision can help us all to be braver.

The word vision can be confusing. It can sound very grand or somehow mystical. However, just like on that bridge in Canada, it's about looking forward as much as we possibly can to see what's over the horizon and, to the extent that any of us can control what happens in life, being as ready as we can be for that.

Clarifying and articulating what is most valued and desired for now and into the future is a way to take some control over what will happen. Most people with disabilities or their parents that I meet already have a vision. For many, it was there before the disability but it may have been dented and diminished over time. Often it has not been written down or said out loud but people do usually know what they want if they can take the time to sit and reflect on that and reflect on what is valued for everyone else in their family and community. Writing this down or finding a way to share with others can help with carrying it out now or carrying it on in the future.

Josey McMahon and Kate Alcorn discuss sharing this with family and friends. They both talk about writing down two vision statements; one for the person, either written by themselves or by people who know them best, and then a vision statement to guide their family, friends and supporters in how to assist them.

The plan follows the vision because when we know what we want we can work out the steps to start making it happen. As the goals on that plan are achieved or partly achieved or as they are tried and found wanting then the plan will be modified and new plans made. This is what most of us do in life; the difference being that we may not always be so conscious or formal about it. In her article, Kate Alcorn, shares with us her journey over the past few years of setting a vision with family and friends, making plans and achieving them so she can now say with some authority 'My life has gotten real good' and her mother Carolyn can say that while there are challenges from time to time, this is worth it. Their vision of Kate living in her own place and forming an independent life in her community to the degree that she is able is definitely well under way.

Our writers offer many very practical suggestions on how to get started with planning. They recommend being quite intentional about planning and setting time aside; inviting others to be involved on a regular basis and engaging



someone to facilitate or assist with the conversation. There are a variety of planning tools available but whatever you use the basic premise is to start with a big vision, full of possibilities and then break it into small achievable steps. Julie Van Oosten cautions about only seeing the person through the lens of disability and missing the whole rich picture of who the person is. Obviously the particular needs that result from a person's disability need to be taken into account but we are suggesting that they are not addressed as the first or only needs that the person has.

The beauty of this process is that every plan is made to measure to suit the unique talents and skills, needs and desires of the person at the centre of the planning. Planning however is not an end in itself. It is a means to a good life for the people we know and care about and it can be a safeguard to ensuring that that good life can go on in the future.

**Margaret Rodgers**

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