



# Dreaming for Real: The Development of Partners for Inclusion

**Julia Fitzpatrick**  
INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT

## ABSTRACT

Partners for Inclusion aims to deliver person-centred support services, following its dream of providing individualised supports for people to have real lives as valued citizens in their communities. The article explores core principles and practical applications in getting the right relationships, and considers some challenges in developing organisational culture and structures which support and reinforce this.

---

**KEY WORDS:** PARTNERS FOR INCLUSION;  
INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT; PERSON-  
CENTRED; RELATIONSHIPS

---

Contact details: [juliafitzpatrick@bopenworld.com](mailto:juliafitzpatrick@bopenworld.com)

## Introduction

Partners for Inclusion provides individually tailored support to 45 people who live in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. It is founded on values of inclusion ([www.inclusion.com](http://www.inclusion.com)): that people with learning and/or mental health difficulties have the right to be fellow citizens leading ordinary lives, with equality of opportunity and the power to do so. This article explores how the organisation has developed its philosophy and culture into structures and practices that meet its aim of providing 'truly person-centred services'. It offers a practical demonstration that commissioners and providers can respond to emerging national policy for individualising support and achieving step-change in opportunities for and inclusion of disabled people (PMSU, 2005).

## Doing it differently

In the 1990s, most support providers involved in the long-stay hospital closure programme in Scotland followed models of housing and support which were finance-driven, resulting in 'six or eight packs or clusters'. Some were in packs of three or four. In 2000, the 'Help me out, let me in' team (Petch *et al*, 2000) reported to Scottish Homes that reprovisioning and resettlement had taken place against an uncertain policy background, with unclear assessments and little choice for individuals about where and with whom they lived. Social inclusion outcomes were mixed.

Certain individuals working in this environment thought that the approach was wrong, producing poor, limited, unequal and wasteful outcomes by requiring people to fit into a pre-determined service model. They dreamed of doing it differently, in particular using a:

*method of planning which encourages people to look beyond traditional services and to see how individual gifts and community relationships of the person can function in the final support design (Duffy, 2005).*

Using each other for inspiration and support, a few started new organisations to do this, challenging the preconceptions of existing models and demonstrating that individualised support is cost-effective. Others started the work of radically reshaping existing organisations.



The timing was right for emerging Scottish policy. *The Same as You? A review of services for people with learning disabilities* (Scottish Executive, 2000) acknowledged the rights of people with learning disabilities to have a full life, to be included and to be at the centre of decision-making. *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001) was the English parallel document, although its implementation and development of strategy have since differed.

### The birth of Partners for Inclusion

Doreen Kelly's vision of starting a new organisation, providing person-centred services for people needing support in Ayrshire, took shape in 1998 when she joined Simon Duffy (now at In Control) and Frances Brown at Inclusion Glasgow, with the objective of establishing a sister organisation. In 2000, a request to support two young brothers to leave residential school in Glasgow and return to their family area in Ayrshire was quickly followed by plans to close Merchiston Hospital, a long-stay institution in Renfrewshire, which provided the next key opportunity. In 2004, Partners for Inclusion became an independent company and Scottish registered charity.

Its services are focused in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire, in three main areas:

- helping people with learning difficulties to leave long-stay institutions or to find better-tailored services, for example if the service they have been receiving has not been working for them
- helping people with mental health problems who may have autism or Asperger's or may self-harm
- helping young people leave special schools.

Partners for Inclusion works with many people who in the past have been described as 'challenging', or who have a long history of being excluded and have not had a chance to live an ordinary life. Learning from what has not worked in other settings has informed key principles for the structure and work of the organisation, summarised in *Box 1*, below.

More and more organisations say they are 'person-centred', but making this a reality –

actually being it, living it, delivering it – is hard and challenging work. The challenge for Partners for Inclusion is and has been to develop an organisational life that fits and support its person-centred working with individuals, and not *vice versa*.

#### Box 1: KEY PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERS FOR INCLUSION

<b>Individual services:</b>	Every service for every person is uniquely tailored and designed only for them
<b>Right relationships:</b>	Finding the right people and getting the relationships right with partners is essential – people supported, families, staff, professionals
<b>Real lives:</b>	Homes, families, jobs, relationships – all real, right and meaningful for the person
<b>People are people:</b>	Different and equal, with individual gifts, strengths, weaknesses and needs
<b>Stick with people:</b>	Listen, change and 'keep going till we get it right'
<b>Stay small and local:</b>	Keep connected, stay flexible and focus on people's needs not organisational needs
<b>Flat structure, trained and supported staff:</b>	Minimises organisational complexity and control, facilitates creativity and autonomy
<b>Value for money:</b>	Honest and transparent, working towards budgets controlled by person/family/staff teams where this makes sense



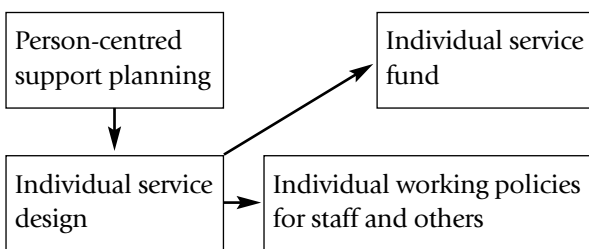
In 2004, an independent evaluation (Diversity Matters, 2004) using the Five Dimensions Approach (Black & Smith, 2003) found it:

*an excellent example of an organisation offering individually tailored support. It is visionary, knowledgeable and thoughtful, unique of its kind, and has been designed and structured considerably to suit the people it supports.*

It confirmed the implementation of elements in applying the principles and identified areas that needed to be protected, developed or improved.

### Individual services: real lives

*'Partners for Inclusion describes the dreams for individuals that their families have had and not thought possible...'* (mother of person supported)



Partners for Inclusion supports 45 people with 45 different types of service. Everyone is supported to live in their own home, or with their family. Its person-centred planning process (O'Brien & O'Brien, 1997) brings people together, gathering information about what kind of life would make sense for the person and what would not, reflecting his or her gender, age and culture. It looks to strengthen, establish and integrate natural supports within communities.

It looks at and plans for each aspect of the person's life – in fine detail. Working with people who have been institutionalised or who have limited communication skills means making use of the wide range of people who know and care about a person. These may be unexpected people. It could be the person who made the tea in the hospital

café. In many methods of support planning this information gets lost, or is not considered and valued. Anyone who has a relationship with the person is invited to add details, which are translated into the service that will support the person with what they want to achieve and are recorded in the individual service design.

*'We ask individuals and families what they want and it's our job to go and find it... and generally people don't ask for unbelievable things...'*  
(Doreen Kelly)

### Right and real relationships

#### Looking for the 'click'

*'Usually someone will remember one person who worked well with or really understands the person, so we'll find out more about that person's qualities, but we'll also say "so where is she now, and does she want a job?"'*

The organisation focuses on finding the right people and getting the relationships right at many different levels. These are some of the practical ways they do this.

- During the planning and service design processes, time is invested in finding out what kinds of people are needed to work successfully with the person.
- Staff are recruited for qualities, not qualifications, to match the needs, personality and interests of the person they support and the life they want to lead.
- The organisation facilitates and advises on process, but the individuals or their families make the selection.
- In 80% of cases a good match is made; staff build strong relationships and stay with the person. Occasionally relationships just don't work out; sometimes people like each other but just can't work together. If the match is wrong, there is no blame.



- Detailed individual working policies set out how those involved will make the relationships work, ensuring consistency. The partnership approach means that other people – including external professionals – also need to sign up to and follow the working policies, understanding the role they play in keeping relationships right.
- If something is not working well, this approach gives a base for working out why and developing a response.

As a new organisation, Partners for Inclusion was able to develop contractual terms and conditions to support its approach. This is an area it continues to refine, trying to improve staff terms and conditions to get a better fit between need for work–life balance and security of income, and the person’s need for a flexible and responsive support services.

### Sticking with people

The organisational ethos is ‘Keep trying till we get it right’, and there is strong appreciation that many of the people supported have ‘hurts’ or ‘wounds’ (Wolfensberger, 1975) from their past life or experience of services. The evaluation pointed out that staff are not naïve about people’s reputations, but the service design and ways of relating to the person are not overshadowed; staff treat people as people, with individual gifts, strengths, weaknesses and needs.

The principle of ‘sticking with’ people is applied by extensive planning, unpicking where ‘reputations’ have come from, matching staff to the person, working at understanding and listening to how individuals are communicating and responding. This is good practice, but it reflects an underlying desire to redress and address previous rejection and service failure.

### Layered relationships and community connections

*‘A real friend means not just having a support worker.’*

Many people left institutions with few people in their lives, sometimes no-one. Partners for Inclusion is clear that support workers are not expected to be the person’s friend or companion. They are paid to support people to have a full life, to get out and about in the community and to find ways for the person to connect with people not paid to be in their life. However, when people start with few connections, the organisation recognises that a by-product of the approach of closely matching support staff to the interests and personality of the person supported is that sometimes real friendships develop naturally. In some organisations such duality of roles is actively discouraged. Here it is not actively encouraged, but if it happens then it is supported. The organisation ensures that potential dangers – people becoming isolated from other natural supports, abusive relationships – are tempered with very thorough, tailored, risk assessment. A comprehensive friendship policy sets out the protections and procedures for ensuring that the person and the others involved are kept healthy and safe.

Where a staff member becomes a friend, the positive impact is that people then make further connections – like most of us, finding opportunities to meet new people through friends of friends. This was an area investigated at evaluation, which concluded that where friendships had developed naturally, the different roles are well understood by those involved and enhance the quality of support.

However, as Doreen Kelly pointed out:

*it’s easy for support to isolate people, to set up handmaidens around a person but they’re not included in their communities.*

She believes that Partners for Inclusion can do more to spot and pursue opportunities for natural connections and relationships.



### Real life: real jobs

Some of the people supported have real jobs, in ordinary workplaces, making a contribution that is valued by the employer. However, there are barriers – in the job markets, in employers' understanding of the capacity and contribution a person can make, in the benefits system, in people's own expectations. It is an area of real life where Partners for Inclusion has identified a need for more focus, creating a new post of employment development co-ordinator to develop the capacity of the people it supports and their potential employers.

### Better than good

Relationships with external partners are also integral to making it work. Partners for Inclusion works with five local authorities, and acknowledges some variation in the quality of the working relationships. One local authority service commissioner (Partners for Inclusion video) comments that a good and honest working relationship between the organisation and the authority is essential to achieve services that are 'better than good, that really suit people'. However, further extension of Partners for Inclusion's approach may also require change to wider systems thinking about resource allocation for care (Duffy, 2005).

### A considered organisational structure and culture

Getting the right relationships and community connections and supporting them is essential to, but only part of, the bigger dream: real lives. Achieving this needs an organisation with structures and attitudes which support a move of power and control in planning, organising and paying for support out to the person and those closest to them. Partners for Inclusion's organisational structure, culture and financial management arrangements are closely linked, and it works at reflecting on and exploring its roles, tools and mechanisms for decision-making and power-sharing, aware of the potential for them to support or to undermine its vision.

### Flat structure – autonomous, responsible staff teams

Each person supported has, and selects, their own staff team to work in partnership with them. The partnership extends beyond paid staff to include contributions from others such as family members or professionals. Decisions are made as close to the person as possible, and what's appropriate will differ according to each person.

A service manager is responsible for the overall design and development of the service for up to six people. They too are matched to the person as far as possible, drawing on particular skills or interests of value to the individual. The service manager expects to know the person, their family and their team very well. The service managers are part of the central management team which also includes the director and deputy director, finance, training and administrative support. All these people play crucial supporting roles.

### Getting better at supporting and developing staff

Partners for Inclusion is learning that, to be truly person-centred in the support it gives to people, it has to think the same way about the support it gives to staff. The evaluation showed that staff had:

*an open approach to finding the right balance between safety and autonomy.*

However, it is a challenge to support independent staff teams while also ensuring that they reflect the organisational culture and can contribute to development.

The evaluation team suggested that staff development should include:

- support to develop confidence about taking risks and staying safe
- more information and knowledge about budgets and funding so staff can negotiate and be creative in meeting the person's needs
- support to take and use power responsibly
- time to reflect in teams on their own gifts, strengths, weaknesses and needs, and how they



want to develop the person-centred service and each other.

The strength of the organisational culture and the individual working policies approach means that there is a good base for development.

### Budgets are for the people supported

Partners for Inclusion thinks about money differently from many other providers. It starts from a philosophy that each person should have their own individual service fund and that in principle it is **the person's** money. Most of it pays for their day-to-day support, some pays for their service management, some for the central and additional support that they and their staff team receive. The aim is a flexible and responsive service which does not require regular contract renegotiation to respond to people's changing needs, and which provides the person – as well as the local authority – with value for money.

Most of the people supported by Partners for Inclusion have very high support needs, and in previous settings have attracted a bagful of 'challenging' labels which have tended to accrue along their services journey. These tend to lead to a commissioner's expectation that at least 2:1 (or more) support is required, with consequent costs. In every situation, after a short time of being supported by Partners for Inclusion, the ratio has reduced to 1:1 support.

*'Ordinary life is scary if you've had 35 years of being a 'patient''*

For example, John has spent most of his life in hospital. When stressed he harms him and others – cutting and stabbing. This and other behaviour can put him and the community at risk if **not managed properly**. Partners for Inclusion supports John with an average 60 hours of support a week, at a cost of £58,000 per annum. The design of the service has been individualised as described earlier in this article. A key element is that the level of support is not the same from

week to week; it is arranged flexibly to respond to how John is feeling so that, for example, he can be supported to take regular breaks away to reduce his stress.

The most likely alternative support service would be in a specialist medium secure environment, at an estimated annual cost of £120,000–150,000.

The approach to funding readily accommodates people purchasing services with a direct payment (*Figure 2*, opposite). Partners for Inclusion's treatment of contract payments emulates direct payments and is in keeping with In Control's proposed approach in England ([www.selfdirectedsupport.org](http://www.selfdirectedsupport.org)). At the moment not all contracts are individualised, but where the only contractual arrangement possible is a block contract, Partners for Inclusion internally allocates it to an individual service fund. Block contracts are therefore managed in such a way that individuals maintain the choice and ability easily to transfer to direct payments or change support provider.

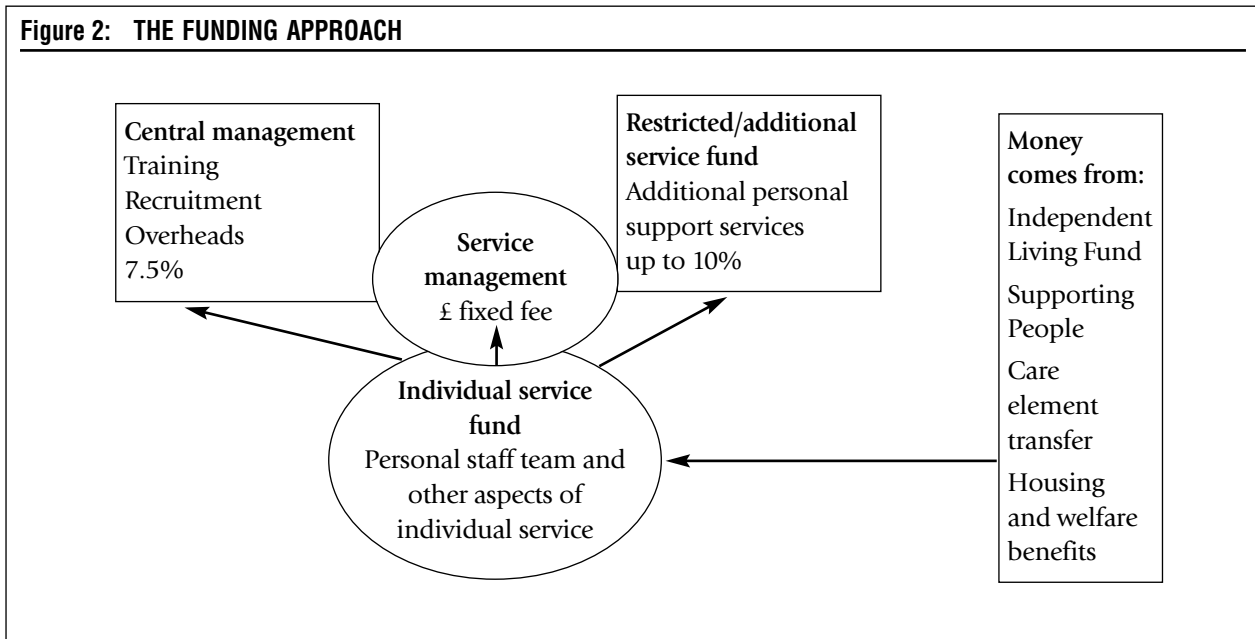
### Staying small and local

The organisation, drawing on staff experience in other organisations, has capped the number of people it will support at 45. This makes it possible for the most senior members of staff, including the director, to know each person, and to know whether the service provided is true to the person. It also believes that staying small is necessary to keep the energy invested in the journey for the people they support, beyond having a real place to live into having real lives and real jobs. Similarly, the local area of operation is seen as keeping the organisation grounded in the communities and culture in which the people it supports live.

### Organisational culture

*We found that being principled, passionate and practical [were key themes]... evident at different levels in the organisation and... key individuals show leadership.* (evaluation report)

It is worth looking at what kind of organisational culture underpins Partners for Inclusion's mission



to achieve ‘truly person-centred services’. The features which Partners for Inclusion’s senior managers, and in some measure the evaluators, identify include:

- **passion about people** and their right to a real life
- **irreverence** about bureaucracy with **constant reflection** that the bureaucratic needs of the organisation do not get in the way of services which make sense for people supported and do not undermine a person’s autonomy
- **honest and direct communication** – working to create and maintain a culture where the giving and receiving of honest feedback are commonplace
- formal and informal processes support this, encouraging **reflection, questioning and challenge of self and others** in a context of **valued, trusting and supportive relationships**
- **no rigid rules or policies**: any centrally developed policy on a topic such as health and safety or equal opportunities can, and should be, locally applied and varied, following team-level risk assessment to keep individuals safe and secure without affecting or restricting their life.

Processes are in place which continually reinforce values and principles; they encourage staff to think and question themselves, their relationships and their organisation from the language used, to behaviour, to ideas about what it means to be person-centred, and modelling their belief that people have a right to a real life. Partners for Inclusion recognises that it needs to strengthen this further, finding new and more ways of involving staff and others in understanding, promoting and developing the organisation’s values, vision and policies. It plans to do this by cascading the training and reflection meetings and away days to all staff.

### **Dreaming for real: making it mainstream**

While committed to staying small, Partners for Inclusion’s dream of real lives for people who need support is not limited to 45 people. It is a member of and supported by a federation of small, values-based organisations in Scotland called ALTRUM (‘to foster’ in Gaelic), which promotes the growth of supported living and person-centred approaches, develops members and nurtures new organisations. One illustration of their joint work is the development of a higher education certificate



(HEC) in person-centred approaches to social care, which has just received a Scottish Training Award at the National Training Awards.

In Scotland, to some extent small organisations are driving the change towards individualisation. It is noticeable that in England national policy and programmes are exploring the 'whole systems' changes needed to mainstream the ideas and processes for self-directed support ([www.in-control.org.uk](http://www.in-control.org.uk)). This needs service providers like Partners for Inclusion that demonstrate the art of the possible.

*'People have challenged us. Now it's time for us to challenge them – at the right pace, and in the right places. We need to challenge ourselves to support people who get support to move up a gear.'* (June Jeffrey, Deputy Director)

#### Further information

Doreen Kelly, Director  
Partners for Inclusion  
West Kirk  
84 Portland Street  
Kilmarnock, KA3 1AA  
Tel: 01563825555  
Email: [Doreen.Kelly@partnersforinclusion.org](mailto:Doreen.Kelly@partnersforinclusion.org)

#### Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the assistance of Doreen Kelly, Partners for Inclusion, in compiling this article, and ideas from Simon Duffy, In Control, and Andy Smith, Diversity Matters

#### References

- Black P & Smith A (2003) *The Five Dimensions of Person-Centredness*. Edinburgh: Diversity Matters.
- Department of Health (2001) *Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disabilities for the 21st century*. London: Stationery Office.
- Diversity Matters (2004) *Discovering the Right Relationships: An evaluation of the first three years of Partners for Inclusion*. Partners for Inclusion.
- Duffy S (2004) *Individualised services*. Discussion paper. In Control. [www.in-control.org.uk](http://www.in-control.org.uk).
- Duffy S (2005) Individual budgets: transforming the allocation of resources for care. *Journal of Integrated Care* 13 (1).
- O'Brien J & O'Brien C (Eds) (1997) *A Little Book of Person-Centred Planning*. Inclusion Press.
- Petch A, Rosengard A, Naumann L & Dean J (2000) *'Help me out, let me in': Re provisioning, resettlement and the scope for social inclusion in Scotland*. A report to Scottish Homes. Nuffield Centre for Community Care Studies. University of Glasgow.
- Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*. [www.strategy.gov.uk](http://www.strategy.gov.uk).
- Scottish Executive (2000) *The Same as You? A review of services for people with learning difficulties*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.
- Wolfensberger W (1975) *The Origin and Nature of our Institutional Models*. Syracuse, New York: Human Policy Press.