

# Research Highlights

## Topic: Person-Centered Planning and Friendships

Turnbull, A.P., & Turnbull, H.R. (1996). Group Action Planning as a strategy for providing comprehensive family support. In L.K. Koegel, R.L. Koegel, & G. Dunlap (Eds.), *Community, school, family, and social inclusion through positive behavioral support: Including people with difficult behavior in the community* (pp. 99-114). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

### BOTTOM LINE

Creating an inclusive lifestyle for individuals with problem behavior can be overwhelming to families. Too often the service system fails to provide limited, much less comprehensive, support. Group Action Planning is a strategy that can be used to provide comprehensive support to individuals with problem behavior and their families. Group Action Planning is a person-centered planning process that brings together an individual with a disability, family, professionals, friends, and community members to create a lifestyle consistent with the preferences of the individual. Five key components of Group Action Planning are: inviting support, creating connections, envisioning great expectations, solving problems, and celebrating success. Comprehensive family support through Group Action Planning is discussed in this chapter, illustrated through the experiences of the authors and their son, JT, who has significant disabilities.

### TIPS

- Building a network of people committed to the individual with a disability in order to make the creation of an inclusive lifestyle more doable.
- Identify a group facilitator who has good communication and problem-solving skills.
- Engage in dynamic problem-solving by posing creative options and systematically identifying the pros and cons of each.
- Celebrate incremental success as well as major breakthroughs, in addition to celebrating special occasions related to all group members.

TIPS  
cont.

- Begin an action group network by inviting people to participate from all environments of the individual's life.
- Create connections by providing food and opportunities for socializing and holding meetings in people's homes rather than in professional settings.
- Share great expectations to enhance group members' motivation to "beat the odds" and achieve goals once thought unreachable.
- Create an atmosphere in which members have equal opportunities for participation.

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KEY FINDINGS

- Families of children with problem behavior often go to extraordinary lengths to create a reasonable lifestyle for their children, with limited or even no support from the service system. The responsibility families have to advocate for and coordinate the services that do exist is often overwhelming and never ending.
- Individuals with problem behavior often transition from high school to a segregated lifestyle.
  - ◆ After high school, JT transitioned into a segregated adult program which included segregated employment, housing, transportation, and recreation.
  - ◆ JT developed increasingly difficult behaviors. His parents decided to withdraw him from the segregated program and to do "whatever it takes" to provide JT with what he wanted in life.
- It took JT's parents 6 years to put into place the lifestyle changes that led to supported employment, supported living, use of public transportation, friends, and community participation. His new lifestyle led to positive changes in his behavior.
- The process they developed to create JT's inclusive lifestyle changes is called Group Action Planning. This process has five components: inviting support, creating connections, envisioning great expectations, solving problems, and celebrating success.
  - ◆ *Inviting support:* Families of individuals with disabilities often assume sole responsibility for the individual. Action Groups expand support to include people from across all environments in which the individual participates.
    - JT's action group began with his family, family friends, and guys JT knew from a campus fraternity. This group facilitated JT's move into his own home and helped him secure a community job. This led to including new group members from these environments.

## KEY FINDINGS

cont.

- ◆ *Creating connections:* Group Action Planning places strong emphasis on creating social and emotional connectedness among all group members, especially the person with the disability.
  - Many of JT’s action group meetings began with members stating something positive about JT which helped everyone get to know his strengths. The meetings enabled JT to enhance the relationships he was developing.
- ◆ *Envisioning Great Expectations:* It is essential in Group Action Planning for there to be great expectations for what the future might hold.
  - In JT’s action group, great expectations grew in ever-increasing circles. The inclusive life that JT had 7 years after beginning his group was far beyond what was envisioned when the group began.
- ◆ *Solving problems:* Action groups focus on creative problem solving which includes analyzing preferences, strengths and needs, brainstorming, evaluating options, selecting the preferred option, implementing a plan, and evaluating the plan outcomes.
  - Through creative problem solving, JT’s action group helped to design and implement a comprehensive behavior support program. Attending to all of the tasks in the behavior support plan was doable because all members of his action group shared the responsibility.
- ◆ *Celebrating success:* A key aspect of action groups is to make occasions for celebration in terms of affirming progress, encouraging and allowing gratitude, and having time to “party” rather than always be focused on problem solving.
  - JT’s action group celebrated with birthday parties for group members, potlucks, holiday parties and times for just having fun together.
- One of the most successful aspects of action groups is the feeling of group synergy—a powerful sense that the whole is truly greater than the sum of the parts.

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## RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- Blue-Banning, M., Turnbull, A.P., & Pereira, L. (2000). Group Action Planning as a support strategy for Hispanic families: Parent and professional perspectives. *Mental Retardation, 38*(2), 262-275.
- Turnbull, A.P., Blue-Banning, M.J., Anderson, E.L., Seaton, K.A., Turnbull, H.R., & Dinas, P.A. (1996). Enhancing self-determination through Group Action Planning: A holistic perspective. In D.J. Sands & M.L. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *Self-determining across the lifespan: Theory and practice* (pp. 237-257). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Turnbull, A. P., & Ruef, M. B. (1997). Family perspectives on inclusive lifestyle issues for individuals with problem behavior. *Exceptional Children, 63*, 211-227.
- Turnbull, A.P., Turbiville, V., & Schaffer, V. (1996). “Getting a shot at life” through Group Action Planning. *Zero to Three, 16*(6), 33-40.

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