

# Planning for a Meaningful Life in My Community

## For Families and Students

### What is a Meaningful Day?

Your quality of life can be measured by assessing your sense of purpose and belonging. When you need support from services, it is often forgotten that EVERYONE needs meaning in their life. That vision for how you spend each day is based on your interests. Everyone wants a life filled with people, activities, and events that make them feel valued and fulfilled.

Planning for a meaningful life means looking at the big picture, a full life, and not what programs you receive. It is a life driven by your values, hopes, dreams, choices, and aspirations, which can include the following major life goals:

- Self-care: Taking care of yourself physically and mentally.
- Learning: Developing new skills or creating something.
- Social connection: Spending time with friends, people you have things in common with, or welcoming community places.
- Employment: Working and contributing to the community.
- Safety and Security: Being safe in your community and developing skills to avoid abuse.

The term meaningful day has been adopted by many to describe programs they provide Monday to Friday, between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. For example, this is a description of a “meaningful day” program provided by an agency. Can you spot the differences between the description above and how this agency describes a “meaningful day?”

*XX Services provides fulfilling day programs for adults with developmental disabilities through customized, community-based day services. This includes social, recreational, and educational opportunities. XX Services are staffed at a 1 to 4 staff to individual ratio. Transportation for our meaningful day program is provided. Here is what a meaningful day might look like:*

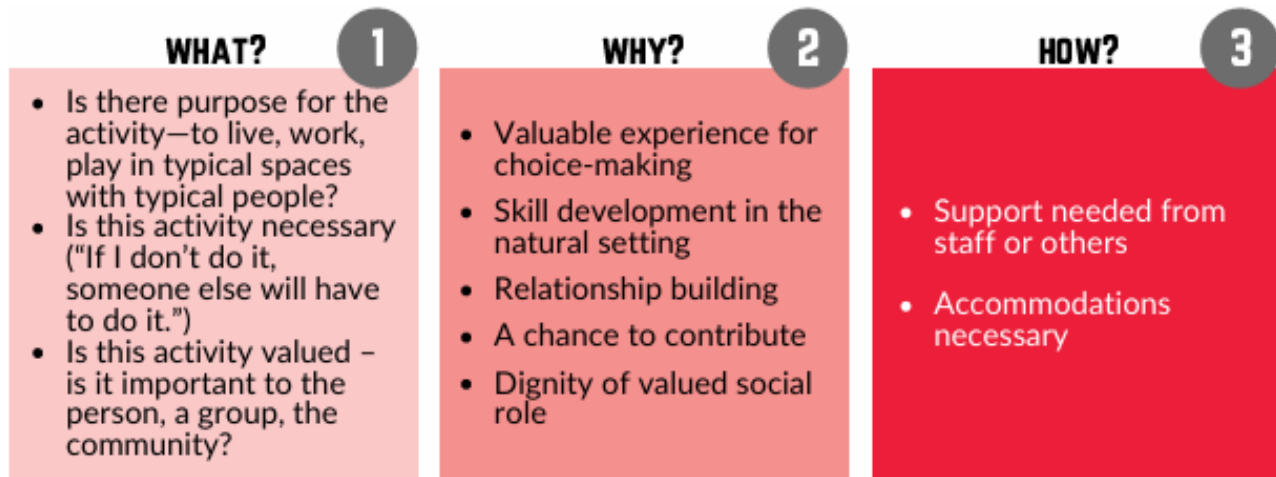
- Typically, Monday through Friday (no services on the weekend).
- Pick up from home between 7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
- Community-based activities and lunch between 9:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
- Drop off at home between 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.

Based on the description, it is unlikely that individual desires and interests are addressed in a 4-1 ratio for only 5 days a week. Why are supports unavailable on the weekend when many social and spiritual events happen? How can everyone's interests be addressed when the group must attend together?

To address each person's unique interests and needs, planning and support must be customized when adaptations are necessary for funding purposes. The program and available community spaces should not dictate how a person spends their time.

## What Comprises a Meaningful Day?

The activities that are included in your search for purpose and meaning depend on your preferences and goals. The Boggs Center at Rutgers recommends that you evaluate the things you do and the support you receive based on the following three questions.



It would be IMPOSSIBLE to outline all the possibilities. Below are some ideas for activities related to those areas mentioned above. It is NOT an all-inclusive list.

### Employment and Careers

- Working in the community with real pay and benefits!
- Job sampling to try out jobs and determine interests and support needs.
- Job shadowing and/or informational interviews to learn more about jobs and what they may offer.
- Attending university, college, or technical training.

### Learning

- Taking community college or university courses.
- Attending local groups that focus on photography, art development, etc.

### **Community Living**

- Shopping for groceries.
- Fixing nutritious meals.
- Exploring local social groups.
- Joining a local club of interest.

### **Safety and Security**

- Taking self-defense courses.
- Learning about general safety precautions at home and in the community.
- Learning about potential abuse and how to avoid it.

### **Personal and Social Relationships and Spirituality**

- Attending concerts, plays, dances, festivals, etc.
- Social media interactions.
- Attending church or other spiritual organizations; meditating.
- Spending time with family and friends.
- Volunteering in the community.
- Connecting with nature.

### **Healthy Living**

- Gym memberships, exercise, and fitness.
- Adaptive sports and participation in Special Olympics.
- Proper nutrition.

## **How to Plan for a Meaningful Day**

Planning a rich and full life can be challenging and should include the people and community you trust. It should focus on your vision of the future, connecting you to the greater community so you can live the life you choose. While you are still in school, it is important that you begin to “walk the walk” of your adult life and identify and establish support needs now and in the future. The Transition Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is an excellent tool for outlining your goals after leaving the education system. To make the most of it, you should be sure your plan includes:

- Exploring interests, both career and non-career.
- Learning about community living options and evaluating what would work for you.
- Developing your ideal for a full adult life.
- Trying out jobs in your community.

- Identifying your support needs in all areas of life, including healthy living, social connections, and safety.
- Understanding how to be self-determined and to advocate for those things you need to be successful.

If you receive Medicaid Waiver Services, you can take advantage of a planning framework called “Charting the LifeCourse.” It uses a series of tools to help you develop that future vision and design activities. More details on the LifeCourse Framework are available in the resources listed below. Although it was created for people with disabilities, this universally designed framework may be used by any person or family making a life plan, regardless of circumstances. With the support of your team, you will establish your long-term goals and establish activities that align in the following areas, and work to answer the questions:

- Daily life and employment: Where do you want to work?
- Community living: Where and how do you want to live?
- Safety and security: How will you stay safe?
- Social and spirituality: How do you want to develop and maintain relationships and how do you expect to express your faith or spirituality?
- Healthy living: How will you manage and access health care and stay well?
- Advocacy and engagement: How will you make choices, set goals, and continue driving your own life?

## Resources

- ✓ LifeCourse Library: [Exploring the Life Stages](#)
- ✓ Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development: [Training and Consultation](#)
- ✓ Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development: [Community Supports and Services for a Meaningful Life](#)
- ✓ Harvey, K. (2009). Positive Identity Development. NADD, New York. Held, M., & Tijerina, J. (2008). Living Life to the Fullest: How to Create and Implement Meaningful Lifestyles. (handout). Bloomington, IN.

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