

## A SELF-DIRECTED LIFE

### Topic

This video introduces the concept of self-direction in a conversation between BJ Stasio and Carol Blessing. In its purest form, having a self-directed life means being in control of every aspect of your own life. It means no one else has the right to make decisions about how the person wants to live their life.

People with disabilities who rely on service systems, especially young people with disabilities returning from institutional to community settings, are often denied the opportunity to live a completely self-directed life. However, there are federally funded self-direction programs that offer individuals decision-making authority over certain services and support individuals to take responsibility for managing the services. Self-direction programs require that person-centered processes and assessments be used to direct a person-centered plan.

### Relevance of Topic to System-Involved Youth

- Having authority in your life is essential. Having no authority in your own life is dehumanizing.
- Self-directing your life helps to build a sense of personal responsibility.
- It can help to build a sense of social responsibility.
- It strengthens skills and reinforces strengths.
- It helps shape confidence and competence.

### Relevance to Youth with Disabilities

- Freedom from being controlled by others is a fundamental human right.
- A self-directed life means being able to make big and small decisions such as decisions about:
  - Who the important people are in your life
  - Working and volunteering/how to spend the day
  - Being part of and contributing to community
  - How, where and with whom to live

### Recommendations for Systems Change

- Listen without judgement.
- Structure opportunities that help people learn how to make choices and weigh the pros and cons of decisions.
- Recognize and build on the person's strengths and interests.
- Create an environment that respects, supports, and upholds a person's dignity and their right to make their own decisions about their life.
- Help people to envision positive futures for themselves and help them to move toward it.

### Questions to Consider

- Consider assisting the person to create or use a vision board, or some other creative expression, to help them envision a future they want to live in. When we can see it, we can do it!
- How much control is the young person given to decide the kind of support they want and need and the way in which they'd like support to be provided?



## Learn More

- [Self-Direction Making Your Own Decisions](#)
- [What is Self-Direction?](#)
- [Self-Directed Medicaid Service](#)

## Presenter Information

**BJ Stasio** is the President of the Board of Directors of the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS). He has been employed by the New York State Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (NYS OPWDD) for over 20 years, working on person-centered planning, voting issues, and self-determination training and education. Additionally, he has served on numerous boards in Western NY, and has a non-profit organization, Buffalo Racin', that gets people with disabilities involved in 5K races. BJ has represented the voices of self-advocates across New York State during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

**Carol Blessing** is a senior extension associate with the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University's ILR School where she leads systems impact projects aimed at supporting the full inclusion of people with disabilities in typical community life. She developed the landmark [Citizen-Centered Leadership online series](#), an international leadership development theory-to-practice program. Carol is the Training Coordinator for the Y-ReCONNECTS project, working closely with youth and professional Reentry Ambassadors who serve on country level teams.

