



Taking a Look at Shared Home/Shared Life  
Noal Presley, RHD-Missouri

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My Background



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Purpose of this Presentation

- Provide a **brief** introduction to a unique service model called companion approach
- Discuss similarities and differences between other support approaches
- Discuss benefits and challenges to the companion approach

What else would you like to learn?

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**Resources for Human Development, Inc.**

- Established in 1970 in Philadelphia, PA
- Not-For-Profit
- 160 Programs in 14 States
- 4000 staff; 28,000 served
- Values Based Organization
- RHD-Missouri- St Louis
  - Companion Approach
  - Art Studios/Day Program

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### RHD-MO Driving Principles

FOCUS ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- Relationships with people supported and those supporting them
- Relationships with families
- Relationships with partner agencies/funders
- Investing time on the front end matching lifestyles of people supported and those supporting them

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### RHD-MO Driving Principles

NURTURING A CULTURE OF RESPECT, TRUST, AND PARTNERSHIP AMONG ALL STAKEHOLDERS

- Open communication
- All stakeholders involved in decision making
- Commitment to a greater good (doing things for no other reason than it is the right thing to do)

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**RHD-MO Driving Principles**

REAL COMMITMENT TO THOSE PROVIDING SUPPORT

- Understanding that the people we support will only be as happy, healthy and safe as those doing the supporting
- Gathering input from staff and acting on what is learned
- Being responsive and attentive to direct support staff

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**RHD-MO Driving Principles**

EMBRACING THE "IMPORTANT" THINGS

- Director maintaining at least one close relationship with a person supported and their family
- Management staff leading by example
- C+ on paperwork is a passing grade only if you score an A+ on quality of life
- Keeping a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere
- Define mission, values, principles and use them to measure agency's success
- Crap to Value ratio

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**RHD-MO Driving Principles**

DESIGNING SUPPORTS AROUND EACH PERSON WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF HEALTHY AND SAFE

- Embracing what is learned through team building and person centered planning efforts
- Doing what makes sense
- Everything is negotiable as long as it is legal, healthy, and safe (healthy and safe is defined individually)

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### How it works...

- A person with a disability lives with and shares a home with a paid support person called a "Companion"
- Companions are paid a salary + free room/board
- The home is leased or owned by the person supported
- Companions have structured time off (48 hours each weekend, and M-F during the day)
- Weekend relief staff are paid a daily stipend
- Each home is designed uniquely depending on the needs of the person supported and the needs of the companion

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### Who can benefit from the Companion Approach?

- The companion approach works for more people than it doesn't.
- The companion approach has proven successful for people with varying physical, intellectual, and behavioral challenges.




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### Companion Vs. Host Family

There are two main differences...

- **Ownership and control over home**  
The host family approach involves a person with a disability moving into the home of the host family. In contrast, the companion approach requires the person with a disability (or legal representative) to be listed on the lease and/or mortgage.
- **Salaried employee vs. Contract/Hourly**  
Because the person with a disability has primary control of the home (by being listed on the lease/mortgage), the "companion exemption" of DOL Wage and Hour regulations allow agencies to pay companions a salary rather than an hourly wage.

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### Shift Model Advantages

- Easier to recruit staff
- Sometimes makes sense...
  - Medically Fragile
  - Behavioral (significant and severe behavioral issues that persist over long periods of time)
  - Ongoing erratic sleeping patterns
  - Intense oversight (1:1 Line of Sight- 24 hours per day)

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### Shift Model Barriers/Challenges

- Expensive on System
- Expensive for Agencies (high overtime costs)
- Intrusive
- High Turn-over
- Sometimes more is not better

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### Shift Model Barriers/Challenges Cont.

- Inconsistent provision of supports
- Difficult and expensive to provide adequate supervision
- Lack of staff accountability
- Difficult to support true sense of home

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## Companion Approach Advantages

- Cost effective
- Low turn-over
- Promotes real sense of home/control
- Promotes development of trusting, respectful relationships
- Management has fewer people to train, mentor, etc. (Thus, less expensive)
- Increased accountability and consistency of supports
- Low rates of abuse and neglect
- Overall satisfaction of people supported, their families, and the people providing support

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## Companion Model Challenges

- Can be difficult to recruit staff
- Very difficult on individual when Companions change
- Providing coverage with Companion needs time away

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## Important Management and Philosophical Considerations

- Expectations of companions are vastly different than those of shift staff, and management of those expectations requires a different approach.
  - Having friends and family over
  - Running personal errands
  - Significant others
  - Overnight guests
  - What companions do with time off

*NOTE: The "rules" for the companion must be defined on the front end with individuals and families, and discussed with the companion prior to acceptance of the position so that everyone is clear about those expectations.*

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## Important Management and Philosophical Considerations

- Companion homes cannot be managed and supervised in the same manner as shift homes.
  - Respect the home and the routines and rituals that exist within the home.
  - They are roommates; not client and staff
  - Roommates, without regard to disability, are sometimes at odds with each other. Let them sort through it when possible.
  - You cannot bail at the first sign of trouble.

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## Important Management and Philosophical Considerations

Successful	Not Successful
Leading	Directing
Supporting	Managing
Nurturing	Supervising
Coaching	Controlling

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## Important Management and Philosophical Considerations

### Model Fidelity

**The companion approach works best when:**

- It is the preferred singular model for an agency
- Or
- The agency has completely separate management structures and practices in place for the companion approach than other models of support

***It is impossible to run companion homes with the same management approach that is utilized in shift homes!!!***

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Important considerations for families that are considering the companion approach...

- Respecting the management of the home
- Recognition of shared home/shared life

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For more information

- If you are an individual or family member (or case manager on behalf of an individual) that may have interest in the companion approach

Or

- You are an agency that is interested in learning how to bring this unique support approach to your individuals

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