

Imagine what things would be like if the majority of people in your life were paid to be there.

What if 90 percent of your conversations were with those people?

Only a few words that you spoke each week would be with your family or friends. All other conversations would be on a pay-to-play basis.

Image that.

Unfortunately, this is the societal reality for many people with developmental disabilities.

At the Union County Board of Developmental Disabilities (UCBDD), we often talk about our efforts to see the individuals we serve live, work and interact in the communities in which they live. However, we just as often say, we are *not there* yet.

As long as people are paid to support people with developmental disabilities, we have more work to do. In fact, at UCBDD we are inspired to change this reality.

In order to accomplish this, we need to ask ourselves two questions:

- 1) What is the definition of a community; and
- 2) What does it mean to be part of a community?

Of course, different people will have different perspectives on the definition of a community. But I think it's safe to describe a community as a group of people living in the same place or having common characteristics or interests. The community becomes whole when there is a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

Being part of a community is just that, being part of it. That means working in the community, making friends with co-workers, neighbors, and those with similar interests. It means walking down the street to the store and your neighbors greet you by name. It means earning a reasonable wage, in order to pay for vacations, bills, and the particular brand of toothpaste you like.

And, perhaps most importantly, it means the majority of people in an individual's life are not paid to be there.

In January, the UCBDD began implementing its new strategic plan. The most important aspect to remember about this strategic plan is that it is all about change. Over the next three years, we will strategically do business differently, focusing our efforts on innovation, natural supports and community involvement to support people with disabilities.

As an organization, UCBDD plans to think differently about how we support people. For example, many people receive supports through social service agencies in Union County, but what if we included unlikely partners in the discussion, such as the Central Ohio Youth Center or the Union County Engineer's Department?

We might get new ideas and unconventional ways to support people with disabilities, and people might build new relationships as part of their community. What if we were able to facilitate people meeting some of their needs through the Union County Neighbor to Neighbor program?

Wouldn't it be nice if we were facilitating relationships between members of our community that could last a lifetime, rather than creating paid relationships that exist as long as the paycheck arrives?

What if we were able to engage groups like The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition to provide opportunities to be enjoyed by those with

and without disabilities simultaneously? We might actually see all that we have in common, rather than defining someone by their disability.

This is exactly what we plan to do.

If we can help those with disabilities develop relationships and connections in more natural ways, they will live fuller, more meaningful lives as members of their community.