

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Person-centered planning when there are no real options

Sometimes the honest answer is that the county has nothing that fits. Person-centered planning does not require pretending otherwise. It requires writing the truth into the plan, in the team's own words, so the gap is documented instead of invisible, and so you are never the one blamed for a hole the system dug.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · HONEST PLANNING AS EVIDENCE

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REAL OPTIONS OFFERED

Zero appropriate day options existed for Sam in his county the year his program closed. His parents built the plan anyway. Not to invent options. To document the absence.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Document the gap



STEP 2

Build the honest plan



STEP 3

File it as evidence

What an honest plan documents

Assessed needs	Specific, functional, tied to the evaluation on file.
Options considered	Every provider or program actually contacted, by name.
Options rejected, and why	Waitlist, wrong support level, no capacity, distance.
Gap identified	Named plainly: "no appropriate option identified."
Interim measures	What is happening in the meantime, and its limits.
Family's stated concerns	In your words, attached or quoted directly.
Team's acknowledgment	Signed and dated, that the gap was identified by the team.
Review date	The next dated chance to re-document if nothing has changed.

A STORY WE KNOW

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When Sam's day program closed, his parents Corinne and her husband sat through a planning meeting where the team offered a general activity center forty minutes away with no staff trained for his support level. Corinne refused to let the plan read "family exploring options." She asked the team to write, in the plan itself, that no appropriate day program existed in their county for someone with Sam's needs. It took three meetings to get that exact sentence in writing. A year later, when their state legislature held hearings on day program funding, that one sentence, dated and signed by a treatment team, became the exhibit that a state representative read aloud.

THE HONEST SENTENCE OUTLIVED THE MEETING IT WAS WRITTEN IN

What matters, at a glance

The blank template problem

Most person-centered planning templates assume options exist to choose between. When they don't, the template has no honest box to check.

Naming the gap

Write the assessed need, what was searched, and what was found in plain language. "None available" is a valid, powerful entry.

The blame trap

Vague plans get quietly read later as "family had unrealistic expectations." Honest, specific plans cannot be reread that way.

Person-centered isn't magic

The HCBS Settings Rule requires the process to reflect the person's preferences, not that the system actually has to offer something adequate.

Review cadence

Plans are typically reviewed at least once a year. Each review is another dated opportunity to re-document a gap that hasn't closed.

Evidence, not despair

A documented gap becomes the exhibit in an appeal, a Recipient Rights complaint, or testimony to a legislative committee.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ Your family member's most recent functional assessment | ☐ A list of every provider actually contacted, with dates |
| ☐ A written request that the plan name the gap explicitly | ☐ A copy of the HCBS Settings Rule person-centered planning requirements |
| ☐ A folder for signed, dated plans going back at least three years | ☐ A one-paragraph summary ready to hand to a legislator or reporter |

YOUR MOVE

When the team's plan doesn't match reality, here is how you fix the document, not just the meeting

- ① List every option the team says was considered, by name.
- ② Confirm which were actually contacted and what they said.
- ③ Ask the team to write the specific gap sentence into the plan.
- ④ Request the signed and dated plan within ten business days.
- ⑤ File the plan in your documentation system alongside the assessment.
- ⑥ Re-raise the same sentence at every annual review until it changes.

A plan that admits the gap protects your family. A plan that hides it protects the system.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

ncapps.acl.gov · <https://ncapps.acl.gov/>

lifecoursetools.com · <https://www.lifecoursetools.com/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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