

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

When 'community integration' becomes isolation

The progress note says twenty hours of community integration this month. The reality is twenty hours of sitting in a van outside a store while staff check their phones. Policy language and lived experience have quietly stopped meaning the same thing. Here is how to tell the difference and demand the real thing.

BY JIM PALASTY · 12 MIN READ · NAMING INTEGRATION THEATER

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SIGNS OF INTEGRATION THEATER

Five signs the hours on the timesheet aren't the hours your family member is actually living.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Watch, don't just read



STEP 2

Name the pattern



STEP 3

Demand meaningful hours

Integration theater checklist

Location variety	More than one destination across a typical week?
Chosen activity	Did the person pick the outing, in whole or in part?
Staff engagement	Was staff facilitating interaction, or supervising from a distance?
Named relationships	Any recurring person who recognizes them by name?
Time actually engaged	Minutes interacting versus minutes waiting or transiting.

A STORY WE KNOW



Marisol's son had "20 hours of community integration" on his monthly summary for two years running. She finally rode along, uninvited, on a Tuesday. He spent fourteen of those twenty hours that week in the back seat of the agency van while staff ran errands between clients. She brought the checklist to the next team meeting with dates and minutes logged herself. The agency didn't argue. They rebuilt his schedule around a bowling league he'd mentioned wanting to try for three years, and a barista at the coffee shop two blocks from his house now knows his order.

PRESENCE IN PUBLIC IS NOT THE SAME AS BELONGING TO IT

What matters, at a glance

Sign 1: parking lot hours

Time logged as "community outing" spent mostly in a parked vehicle. Present in the community. Not engaged with it.

Sign 2: staff-to-phone ratio

If staff attention is on a screen more than on facilitating interaction, the hour is supervision, not integration.

Sign 3: same location, every week

One store, one park, one drive-through, week after week, isn't community access. It's a route with no destination.

Sign 4: no names, no relationships

Real integration produces a barista who knows your name, a regular seat, a returning face. Isolation theater produces none of that after years.

Sign 5: zero chosen activities

If your family member never picked where the outing went, it's staff errands with a person along, not integration built around them.

The paperwork always looks fine

Every one of these signs can coexist with a perfectly compliant, fully billed, entirely legal progress note. That's the trap.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ The five-sign integration theater checklist | ☐ Dated notes from an unannounced observation |
| ☐ A list of activities your family member has expressed interest in | ☐ A written request for engagement-based goals in the plan |
| ☐ A 90-day re-check on the calendar | |

YOUR MOVE

When the hours are logged but the life isn't happening, here is what you do

- 1 Observe one unannounced outing and time the actual engagement.
- 2 Score it against the five-sign checklist and write down the result.
- 3 Bring the checklist and one specific date to the next plan meeting.
- 4 Request engagement goals be written into the plan, not just hours.
- 5 Ask your family member what they'd actually choose to do, and name it.
- 6 Re-observe in ninety days to confirm the change stuck.

A van with the radio on is not a community. Ask what actually happened inside the hours.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

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

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