

# RELATIONSHIPS AND A SENSE OF BELONGING



## GOAL

Colorado state law defines maintaining relationships and fostering a sense of belonging (CRS 27-10.5-102-30-a) as service goals. Establishing and maintaining relationships is important to all of us. A study by Diener (1984) found that close friendships are associated with a sense of subjective well-being.

Friendships are the basis for the sense of belonging we all want to feel in our personal lives, in our homes, in our work places, and in the community. The Accreditation Council on Services for People With Disabilities (1992) stated that "Personal relationships bring variety and richness to the lives of many people. Friends can be a significant source of comfort and support during difficult times. They can bring us companionship and share our joy in the best of times." Many sources stated that you cannot force, require or ensure that someone has friends, but you can provide opportunities, remove barriers, and respect individual preferences.

Social relationships can be at many levels of closeness, from casual to intimate, including sexual intimacy. "People with disabilities, regardless of their need for support services, should have the choice and opportunity for developing close personal relationships.... People have the right to develop and express their sexuality in a socially appropriate manner." (Accreditation Council on Services for People With Disabilities, 1992)

According to the O'Brien's (1993), relationships are a key aspect of personal safety. They argue that states and agencies cannot keep people safe by simply visiting them annually as part of program quality surveys. Instead, they argue, there is a need for regular contact with neighbors, co-workers, friends and family so that problems affecting safety are identified quickly.

Some people with developmental disabilities are isolated socially and are lonely. One parent stated: "What concerns us most of all is that there will be no one in our daughter's life who wants to be with her...That she will be isolated, lonely and without friends...It is our friendships that will ensure that we are a part of the community rather than just being in the community" (Coloradans for Family Support, 1990). It is important that services provide opportunities for individuals to make meaningful relationships.

## PROGRESS TOWARDS GOAL

This section of the report will present information pertinent to answering the following questions:

- ❖ What kinds of friendships do adults in services have? For example, do they have friends other than their family or staff? Do they have close friends or 'best friends'?
- ❖ Are some service approaches more successful than others in providing opportunities for friendships and relationships?
- ❖ Do adults with developmental disabilities have the same opportunities to make friendships and a sense of community belonging as other adults in Colorado?
- ❖ Have outcomes related to friendships changed from 1993 to 2000?

## METHODOLOGY

The Core Indicators consumer survey form asks several questions that relate to friendship. These are found in several sections of the form, including the consumer interview portion and the decision-making and community activity sections. Data related to relationships that were already presented earlier within decision-making and community inclusion sections of this report are repeated here so that all information related to relationships may be viewed in one place.

## LIMITATIONS OF ANALYSES

Since the information presented in this section are drawn from the satisfaction, decision making, and community inclusion (activity) information, the limitations already stated for those sections apply here as well.

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## RESULTS

Figure 15 provides the percentage of adults by questions about their relationships with the overall results for all adults surveyed being noted in Column 7. This figure also makes comparisons by service approaches (Columns 1-3 and 4-6), comparisons to the Colorado general population (Column 8); and compares persons in services in 2000 to 1993 (Column 9). If differences observed are statistically significant based on the Chi Square test, then those significant levels are noted in Columns 3 and 6.

### OVERALL FINDINGS RELATED TO RELATIONSHIPS (See Figure 15, Column 7 and note that this figure spans two pages)

- ❖ Most consumers have friends (90% if all friends counted, 79% if staff or relatives are not included as friends). 76% have a close or best friend.

- ❖ Most consumers do not or rarely feel lonely (91%).
- ❖ Most consumers can see their friends or family when they want to (85-91%).
- ❖ Despite these encouraging findings, it should be noted that nearly 1 out of 10 consumers said they had no friends (10%) and were often lonely (9%). Almost 1 out of every 4 consumers (24%) did not have someone they would consider a close or best friend.
- ❖ Adults in the Colorado general population were more likely to respond positively to 17 of the 20 relationship factors than were adults with developmental disabilities served in Colorado. Most of these differences were large. (See Figure 15, Columns 7-8.)

**Figure 15: Relationships Compared by CCB Major Services, CCBs to RCs, and Adults in Services in 2000 to the General Population and to Adults in Services in 1993** (note that this table is continued to the next page)

Questions Related to Relationships	Comparison of CCB Adult Services			Comparison of CCB and RC Services			Comparison to General Population & Time		
	Supp'ed Living Services (SLS)	Compr e- hensive Service s (Comp)	Stat. Signif. Level	CCB Adults (SLS + Comp)	RC Adults	Stat. Signif. Level	Adults in Service in 2000	Adults in Genera l Pop.	Adults in Service in 1993
	Col. 1	Col. 2	Col. 3	Col. 4	Col. 5	Col. 6	Col. 7	Col. 8	Col. 9
<b>FRIENDSHIPS</b>									
<b>Do you have friends you like to talk to or do things with?</b>							(CCB only)		
Yes, some are non-staff, non-family	78.4%	78.6%		78.5%	N/A*		78.5%	91.9%	66.2%
Yes, but all are staff or family	11.9%	11.8%		11.8%			11.8%	1.4%	4.4%
No	9.7%	9.6%		9.7%			9.7%	6.7%	29.4%
<b>Do you ever feel lonely, like you don't have anyone to talk to or to do things with?</b>							(CCB only)		
No, don't feel lonely	66.3%	56.2%		61.2%	N/A*		61.2%	89.1%	70.8%
Sometimes, rarely	24.3%	34.6%		29.5%			29.5%	2.1%	12.4%
Yes, often lonely	9.4%	9.2%		9.3%			9.3%	8.8%	16.8%
<b>Do you have any best friends? Someone you can talk to about private things?</b>							(CCB only)		
Yes	75.0%	77.0%		76.0%	N/A*		76.0%	88.4%	75.8%
No	25.0%	23.0%		24.0%			24.0%	11.6%	24.2%
<b>DECISION-MAKING</b>									
<b>Can you see your friends when you want to?</b>									
Yes, unassisted	86.6%	86.1%		86.3%	60.7%	.0001	85.1%	66.5%	48.6%
Yes, with assistance	9.4%	11.4%		10.5%	25.0%		11.1%	29.4%	36.0%
No, someone else chooses	4.0%	2.5%		3.2%	14.3%		3.8%	4.1%	15.4%
<b>Can you call or see your family when you want to see them?</b> (leaving out families who don't want contact)									
Yes, unassisted	95.1%	92.0%		93.0%	61.8%	.0001	90.6%	N/A*	N/A*
Yes, with assistance	2.4%	5.5%		4.6%	20.6%		5.8%		
No, someone else chooses	2.4%	2.4%		2.4%	17.6%		3.6%		

\* N/A = not available. Under the RC Adults Column 5, those results were unavailable as those questions were asked directly of consumers and too few RC consumers were able to respond due to their more significant disabilities. For Columns 8 and 9, these questions were not asked in that manner at those points in time or of that population.

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**Figure 15: Relationships Compared by CCB Major Services, CCBs to RCs, and Adults in Services in 2000 to the General Population and to Adults in Services in 1993** (this figure is continued from the previous page)

Questions Related to Relationships	Comparison of CCB Adult Services			Comparison of CCB and RC Services			Comparison to General Population & Time		
	Support ed Living Services (SLS)	Compre- hensive Services (Comp)	Stat. Signif. Level	CCB Adults (SLS + Comp)	RC Adults	Stat. Signif. Level	Adults in Service in 2000	Adults in Genera l Pop.	Adults in Service in 1993
	Col. 1	Col. 2	Col. 3	Col. 4	Col. 5	Col. 6	Col. 7	Col. 8	Col. 9
<b>COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES</b>									
<b>Social Interaction With Friends</b>									
Had friends over to visit at his/her home	26.2%	37.2%	.003	32.4%	9.1%	.002	30.9%	54.9%	36.4%
Visiting friends at their home or elsewhere	29.7%	33.6%		31.9%	2.3%	.0001	30.0%	66.6%	41.6%
Making calls to friends or others	37.1%	25.1%	.001	30.2%	2.3%	.0001	28.4%	83.9%	34.3%
Receiving calls from friends or others	37.8%	27.6%	.006	32.0%	6.8%	.0001	30.4%	90.1%	42.4%
Writing or dictating letters to friends or others	8.6%	4.4%	.03	6.2%	0.0%		5.8%	15.9%	6.4%
Receiving letters from friends or others	8.6%	4.4%	.03	6.2%	0.0%		5.8%	21.4%	7.4%
<b>Other Social Activities</b>									
Having parties or social affairs at his/her home	22.3%	30.9%	.015	27.2%	50.0%	.001	28.6%	13.5%	25.2%
Attending parties or social affairs outside home	30.4%	45.4%	.0001	38.8%	55.8%	.02	39.9%	52.3%	50.8%
Interacting socially with others living in same home	78.0%	80.1%		79.2%	63.6%	.02	78.1%	83.6%	85.2%
Going out on date with a girlfriend, boyfriend or spouse	9.5%	10.9%		10.3%	2.3%		9.8%	48.9%	12.4%
Socializing with co-workers or fellow students	48.2%	47.9%		48.0%	51.2%		48.2%	N/A*	N/A*
<b>Social Interaction With Relatives</b>									
Having family or relatives visit his/her home	64.1%	41.9%	.0001	51.5%	21.4%	.0001	49.7%	46.5%	42.5%
Visiting them at their home or elsewhere	56.0%	40.4%	.0001	47.2%	9.5%	.0001	44.9%	56.7%	39.6%
Making calls to family or relatives	40.9%	44.1%		42.7%	11.6%	.0001	40.8%	91.5%	43.1%
Receiving calls from family or relatives	47.7%	47.8%		47.7%	18.6%	.0001	45.9%	90.1%	42.4%
Writing or dictating letters to family or relatives	10.7%	8.5%		9.5%	4.8%		9.2%	27.6%	8.0%
Receiving letters from family or relatives	15.2%	19.0%		17.4%	10.0%		16.9%	38.7%	14.1%

### COMPARISONS OF SERVICE APPROACHES

(Refer to Figure 15, Columns 1-3)

The potential impact of the two major CCB service approaches on opportunities for friendships are compared in Columns 1 and 2. If the differences observed between these two service approaches (SLS and Comprehensive Services) are statistically significant based on the Chi Square test, then the significance level is noted in Column 3. The results of this comparison are discussed below (only statistically significant differences are noted).

- ❖ The CCB major program (SLS or Comprehensive services) had no impact on the likelihood of adults with developmental disabilities to have friends, to have a best friend, or to feel lonely. However, while Comprehensive setting size is not shown on the figure above, that factor was

examined and adults living in group homes (4 or more persons) were more likely to have friends (88%) than were adults living in individualized settings (3 or fewer persons - 76%) and this difference was statistically significant (.03). The likelihood of being lonely or having best friends was not impacted by the Comprehensive Services setting size.

- ❖ Adults receiving CCB Comprehensive Services were more likely to have friends over to visit, have parties at home, and attend parties outside the home, than were adults receiving CCB SLS services.
- ❖ Adults receiving SLS services from CCBs were more likely to make and receive call from friends, write or receive letter from friends, and have

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family or relatives over to visit and/or to visit them.

### COMPARISONS OF CCB and RC SERVICE SYSTEM APPROACHES (Refer to Figure 15, Columns 4-6)

Relationship indicators for adults receiving services are compared by community service system (CCB, Column 4) and state-operated service system (RC, Column 5) with the statistical significance level, if any, based on the Chi Square test noted in Column 6. The results are summarized below.

- ❖ Adults receiving support through RCs were more likely to have or attend parties than were adults served through CCBs.
- ❖ Adults receiving services through CCBs were more likely than were adults in RCs to be able to see their friends and family when they wanted to; to have friends over to visit or to visit those friends, to receive or make calls to friends, to interact socially with others in their home, to have family or relatives over to visit or to go visit them, and to make or receive calls from family or relatives. The differences observed for family visits may be due partially to the fact that there are only three RC locations in the state. This means that many RC consumers are distant from their families making family visits less frequent and more difficult to accomplish.

### GENERAL POPULATION COMPARISON (Figure 15, Columns 7 and 8 and also see Figure 16)

The relationship levels of adults in the Colorado general population provide a benchmark for the relationship levels of adults receiving service. Tests of statistical significance could not be applied to this comparison and so in that absence, only differences exceeding 5% are noted. The findings are summarized below.

- ❖ For 17 of the 20 factors (related to relationships and social activities) for which comparable information was available, adults in the Colorado general population were more likely to have positive responses to questions about relationships. Many of these differences were very large (see Figure 16).
- ❖ Looking solely at social activities, adults receiving services participate in fewer social activities than do other adults in the Colorado general population (see Columns 7-8 of Figure 15 and see Figure 16). These differences exceeded 5% for 14 of the 16 social activities studied. Adults in the general population are more likely to have social activities including visiting with friends and relatives, calling or receiving calls from friends and relatives, corresponding with friends and relatives, and going on dates than are adults receiving services. For example, adults in the general population are twice as likely to receive calls from or to make calls to friends as adults receiving services.
- ❖ However, adults receiving supports were more likely to see their friends when they want to and to have parties at home than were adults in the Colorado general population.



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*“People are safer the more others care enough about their safety and well being to keep a close eye on their situation ... Many people with developmental disabilities are more vulnerable exactly because they lack opportunities and assistance to make and keep good relationships.”*

*O’Brien and O’Brien,  
Assistance with Integrity, 1993*

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### CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS FROM 1993 to 2000 (Compare Columns 7 and 9 on Figure 15 and also see Figure 16.)

While statistical significance tests were not possible, an assumption was made that a change of 5% or greater was significant. Given that assumption, the following changes in the relationships of adults from 1993 to 2000 can be noted.

- ❖ There was an increase for relationships indicators from 1993 to 2000 in the following five areas: having friends who are non staff/family or having any kind of friend, being able to see friends when they want to, having parties at home, and having relatives visit their home.
- ❖ There was a decrease in the following five indicators of relationships from 1993 to 2000: visiting the homes of friends, making calls or receiving calls from friends, interacting socially

with others living in the same home, and attending parties outside the home.

- ❖ While the likelihood of sometimes feeling lonely increased from 1993 to 2000, the likelihood of often being lonely was almost cut in half as it dropped from 17% in 1993 to 9% in 2000, which is the same level as was reported by the Colorado general population. However, those reporting that they never feel lonely dropped from 1993 to 2000.
- ❖ Figure 16 depicts some key relationship indicators and compares them for 1993, 2000 and for the general population.

*“...we have a need for belonging, love, and most of us find it among friends, family, lovers, spouses, community groups.”*

*Norman Kunc, A Need for Belonging, TASH Newsletter, 1992*



**Figure 16: Comparison of Relationships for Adults in Services in 1993 and 2000 to Adults in the Colorado General Population**

