

'Putting music on'

'Putting music on': everyday leisure activities, choice-making and person-centred planning in a supported living scheme

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Accessible summary

- Essential Lifestyle Plans are a good way for people with learning disabilities and their support workers to tell people about things they like to do, such as listening to music.
- These plans also tell people about the things that they need, like what medicine they may need to take.
- Sometimes it is not easy to put the things we like to do at home into these plans because there are lots of things we do every day.
- People need to think carefully about how the things we choose to do at home can be put into Essential Lifestyle Plans that are written for us and with us.

Keywords

Person-centred planning; choice; leisure; music; learning disabilities; ethnography

Abstract

Person-centred planning, which commonly becomes formalised within services for people with learning disabilities through an Essential Lifestyle Plan (ELP), was intended to help place the choices of individuals at the forefront of service provision. However, beyond UK government policy rhetoric, scholars have raised issues regarding the capacity of person-centred planning to empower people with learning disabilities to make choices about various aspects of their lives. This article assesses these debates, paying attention to the relationship between ELPs and choices made in relation to leisure activities. In order to examine leisure activities and choice-making in depth, the article draws upon ethnographic research conducted with four adults living in a supported living scheme. It focuses upon their domestic musical activities, connecting data derived from participant-observation with the contents of ELPs.

This study found that person-centred planning underplayed processes involved with articulations of musical choice and also the peculiarities of the settings in which choices were made. It also found that leisure preferences expressed in ELPs did not effectively convey the richness and socio-cultural significance of everyday domestic musical activities within the supported living scheme. Person-centred planning should not be divorced from social context, relationships and differing degrees of dependency. Domestic leisure activities such as listening to music, while not necessarily ‘meaningful’ in the terms laid out in UK policy discourse, can become crucial resources for social bonding for people with learning disabilities. Thus, they should be considered carefully as part of a dynamic, socially situated, person-centred planning process.

Introduction

The promotion of choice and independence for people with learning disabilities has been at the heart of UK government policy discourse and practice since the publication of the influential White Paper, *Valuing People*, in 2001. *Valuing People* championed the notion of person-centred planning, accelerating the adoption of this approach within services. A later Department of Health document on *Personalisation Through Person Centred Planning* (2010) defined this approach as:

...a way of discovering what people want, the support they need and how they can get it. It is evidence-based practice that assists people in leading an independent and inclusive life. Person-centred planning is both an empowering philosophy and a set of tools for change, at an individual, a team and an organisational level. It shifts power from professionals to people who use services (DoH, 2010, p. 3)

Person-centred planning was an innovation originally developed by Beth Mount and others with the intention of examining how people with learning disabilities wanted to live and then placing their individual choices at the centre of service planning processes, rather than the perceptions of their needs that had been identified by those in the medical profession (Duffy, 2012, p. 113). There are a number of models for person-centred planning, including well known ones such as personal futures planning (Taylor and Taylor, 2013, p. 217). One common way in which person-centred planning becomes formalised within services for people with learning disabilities is through the construction of an Essential Lifestyle Plan (ELP). ELPs can take different forms but can be basically defined as ‘a description of how someone wants to live (what people appreciate about the person, what is important to them and how best to support them) and actions to move towards this’ (DoH, 2010, p. 14).

For the purposes of this article I will reflect upon the connections between ELPs and everyday domestic activities involving a group of four adults with learning disabilities who lived in a supported living scheme in the North-West of England. ELPs were a primary form of adopting person-centred planning in this setting and the staff team devised quite personalised documents for each individual living in the house. I worked as a support worker in this scheme between the years 2000 to 2006 and had an input into the development of ELPs. Also, as will be clarified below, I was given permission to conduct ethnographic research in this scheme during this period and paid particular attention to everyday domestic engagements with music. Although it was not the main aim of my research, this approach to ethnography partly enabled a consideration of how accounts of preferences for music within individuals’ ELPs connected with what happened during domestic practice.

Each ELP had different sections with headings such as ‘Essential/non-negotiable’; ‘Important’; ‘Enjoys/prefers’ and also descriptions of what constituted a ‘good day’ for the individual or a ‘bad day’. These were not static documents, but in some cases they changed over time to reflect changing personal circumstances.¹ The ELPs were written by experienced support workers and were based on observations of individuals’ routines, their expressions of choice as well as their healthcare needs. They were, therefore, valuable documents that were useful for staff members getting to know the person and also for the planning of support provision.

Drawing upon ethnographic findings, this article will discuss the connections between ELPs, choice-making and everyday practice; paying attention to how leisure activities (and musical activities in particular) can effectively inform person-centred planning. A focus on instances of domestic music listening and performing will reveal them as rich socio-cultural practices that can become valuable resources to consider as part of ELPs. Yet, at the same time, this account will illustrate how such practices often elide straightforward incorporation within written ELPs; thus requiring a more flexible, dynamic approach to person-centred planning.

As well as examining the relationship between aspects of person-centred planning and support practice within everyday life, this article will also critically consider the notion of ‘leisure’ as it is defined in influential UK government policy documents. It will argue that such documents provide a somewhat narrow conceptualisation of leisure in the lives of adults with learning disabilities and that this downplays the roles that domestic leisure activities can have for enriching peoples’ lives and enhancing the relationships within supported living environments.

Essential Lifestyle Plans, Personalisation and Choice

¹ For example, one of the people I worked with had the sentence ‘I like to go in the garden whenever I feel like it, sometimes even when it is raining’ in the ‘important’ section of his plan. However, after an accident when he fell in the garden and sustained an injury, this section of his plan changed because he did not seem to be as confident when going out into the garden.

Despite its utility, various writers have identified a number of limitations with person-centred planning and the personalisation agenda more broadly. For instance, Simon Duffy notes that: ‘the UK Government’s widespread rhetorical support for personalisation goes hand in hand with a complete lack of attention to the fundamental features of the system which made these innovations [like person-centred planning] necessary’ (Duffy, 2012, p. 121). Consequently, some of the system-based issues that inspired the development of person-centred planning, such as the issue of the interests of service providers and commissioners taking precedence over those of the individuals with learning disabilities using the services, are arguably in many cases still proving to be problematic (Fyson and Cromby, 2013, p. 1168). For example, when I was working as a support worker even though ELPs were developed that treated residents’ interests seriously, fundamental decisions affecting their lives such as who they lived with were made largely without their consultation.

Restrictions on choice and on individuals’ agency – their ability to feel in control of their own lives – do not simply affect fundamental aspects of their lives. Rather, as Smyth and Bell (2006) and Hollomotz (2014) make clear, they can be experienced as an everyday phenomenon influencing more mundane choices regarding such things as diet and leisure activities. Hollomotz’s research indicates that although individuals using services are presented with choices in a way that coheres with the personalisation agenda, in practice these are often choices that are made from what she calls a ‘restricted *menu*’ (Hollomotz, 2014, p. 244)

Thus, the emphasis on choice and personalisation that pervades neo-liberal policy discourse can obscure the significance of the social and systemic contexts within which choices are operationalised and enacted. However, the emphasis on choice (and especially individual choice) can also mask difficult issues concerning peoples’ capacity to make choice. Drawing on existing research findings and their own extensive experience of working with people with learning disabilities, Fyson and Cromby argue that many, particularly those with more profound learning disabilities, lack the capacity to ‘make meaningful choices’ (Fyson and Cromby, 2013, p. 1167). Furthermore, Van Loon and Van Hove contend that the liberal concept of autonomy where ‘freedom of decision completely lies with the person who makes a choice in an individual, well considered and independent way’ is problematic, particularly when considering the lives of people with learning disabilities (Van Loon and Van Hove, 2001, p. 240). Similarly to Fyson and Cromby, they suggest that when examining choice-making amongst people with learning disabilities, we need to be aware that they may not always have the ‘competence, awareness and rational ability’ to be free to make choices (Van Loon and Van Hove, 2001, p. 240).

Consequently, these writers alert us to the need to think about how choices are made in practice and how social relations and our dependency on others inflect decision-making. While on a wide scale such issues are often neglected within neo-liberal ideology that ‘equates moral autonomy with the

capacity for self-care’ (Fyson and Cromby, 2013, p. 1165), they are issues that are particularly pertinent to an examination of the everyday lives of people with learning disabilities.

In this article choice-making will be considered in relation to domestic musical activities for two reasons. Firstly, there is evidence that listening to music is an important and accessible leisure activity for people with learning disabilities living in community based services (Reynolds, 2002; McConkey, 2005). Secondly, domestic musical activities are deceptively complex as they potentially involve different kinds of momentary choice-making such as impromptu dancing, foot-tapping, singing or humming. As will be explicated below, more than merely decisions about ‘putting music on’ or acts of ‘listening to music’, domestic musical practices often have this momentary (and sometimes spontaneous) dimension that can be significant on an individual and social level, but also difficult to adequately incorporate into planning documentation.

Methods

In order to examine these issues in more depth this article will utilise examples derived from the aforementioned ethnographic fieldwork that was conducted in a supported living scheme for four adults with varied learning disabilities and complex needs. John, Christine, Andrew and Charlotte were the residents living in the house and they became principal participants in the research project.² Ethical approval to conduct ethnographic research was obtained from both my employer and all residents in October 2000, with their next-of-kin acting as further ‘decision-making surrogates’ in order to try to ensure informed consent (Couser, 2004, p. 26).

The project primarily aimed to examine the roles and significance of music in the everyday domestic lives of the residents. In accordance with many studies of this nature, the aims remained broad whilst the researcher became gradually immersed in the cultural practices within the household.

Consequently, decisions about what was the most important phenomena to observe and record changed over time. There were various findings that emerged from this project relating to aspects such as the importance of momentary instances of domestic musical performing for the articulation of self-identity and personal memory (Hassan, 2010a; Hassan, 2010b) as well as the value of music as a flexible resource for facilitating social connections between residents and support staff (Hassan, 2008). Aspects of those findings will be discussed here as a way to examine further the complexities of issues related to choice-making. Although issues relating to choice-making and person-centred planning were not the central focus of the study, they became an area of interest particularly when the fieldwork began to examine how individuals within the house were able to access music that they liked. Furthermore, given that musical activity can be considered as a leisure activity that became a feature of the person-centred planning for a number of people living in the supported living scheme,

² Pseudonyms are used to refer to research participants throughout this article.

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the examples discussed below provide opportunities to scrutinise how such planning relates to socio-cultural practice.

The methodology employed during the study was, in certain respects, ethnographic in the traditional anthropological sense in that it was founded upon participant-observation. I was able to gather data by participating in many of the daily activities of the group I was studying, regularly observing behaviour in everyday situations and settings, as well as entering into conversations within those settings and situations (Burgess, 1984, p. 79). However, my role in the ethnographic field was paradoxical in that I was ostensibly both a support worker and a researcher. Thus, my fieldwork activities were to a large extent influenced by my responsibilities as a support worker. Although this had advantages in that it placed me regularly at close quarters with my participants, it had limitations because the direction of participant-observation remained dependent upon the course of events and my experiences during each working shift. Data derived from participant-observation was recorded in a field diary when I returned home at the end of each shift, in this diary I described a range of instances involving music – from the types of music that could be heard, to how the music was mediated and engaged with (if at all). Also conversations, interactions and performances relating to music (such as singing or dancing to a song being played on the radio, or discussions about a specific music video shown on TV) were detailed in this diary. Other contextual information such as descriptions of the domestic environment, including common sounds that could be heard alongside mediated popular music, was included in my field notes.

To complement data derived from participant-observation, interviews were conducted with three full-time staff members and the two female residents, Charlotte and Christine. As John found it difficult to have an extended conversation due to a speech impediment and limited vocabulary, his utterances and actions in relation to music were collected in a more informal manner through field notes. This was also the case with Andrew whose lack of speech necessitated careful attention to his actions, body language and facial expression when constructing field notes. Furthermore, a range of support workers completed entries in staff diaries that documented their observations of residents’ musical activities. Finally, upon completion of the main research project four out of the seven full-time support workers filled out qualitative questionnaires that gauged their responses to my findings.

Prior to the examination of ethnographic examples, it is necessary to examine the way that issues about leisure are discussed in relation to people with learning disabilities. Specifically I will focus on the way that the notion of ‘leisure’ is framed in UK policy discourse because this will enable an examination of how such discourse relates to the everyday musical practices that will be elucidated below.

‘Rational Recreation’? Leisure and adults with learning disabilities

As with the original *Valuing People* White Paper (2001), *Valuing People Now* (2009) reiterates that many people with learning disabilities find it difficult to use leisure services and engage in recreational activities. The discourse in this document frames leisure and recreation as phenomena that take place in specific kinds of public domain such as: ‘leisure centres, sports facilities, libraries, cinemas, restaurants and shopping centres’ (DoH, 2009, p. 105). Key recommendations in this document concern improving access to such facilities, with the Department of Health pledging that they will ‘explore how local leisure services can be made more accessible’ (DoH, 2009, p. 107).

The emphasis on access is articulated within an overall discourse on leisure that represents it as rather functional. People with learning disabilities, especially those with more ‘complex needs’ need to be supported to find a ‘*meaningful* programme of vocational, social, leisure or learning activities’, while a further ‘challenge is how to provide *meaningful* learning opportunities for people...who want to re-enter adult education in later life or take up learning programmes for recreation only’ (DoH, 2009, pp.106-107, emphasis added). Implicit in this document, then, is the notion that certain types of leisure are legitimate and meaningful, whereas other popular forms of leisure activity (for instance, going to nightclubs, pubs or music festivals) are seemingly less so.³ Ironically, therefore, contemporary policy discourse on leisure for people with learning disabilities conveys a definition that coheres with the Victorian notion of ‘rational recreation’. It seems that people should be ‘directed towards...acceptable activities’ that are ‘‘improving’ forms of recreation’ provided under the paternalistic umbrella of local authorities and central government (Clarke and Critcher, 1985, pp. 64-65).

Given that inequality of access to public leisure facilities has been a long running problem for people with disabilities in general, the policy emphasis on promoting access is valuable (Barnes et al., 1999). Yet, the focus on access to public leisure activities can serve to obfuscate the serious scrutiny of activities that take place in the home. Frances Reynolds’ survey of 34 managers of community-based homes for people with learning disabilities indicated that, out of all creative leisure opportunities, listening to music was the most accessible activity for service users (Reynolds, 2002, p. 66). Similarly Roy McConkey’s research has suggested that domestic leisure activities such as watching television and listening to music are: ‘the most commonly reported pastimes of people with learning disabilities’ (McConkey, 2005, p. 483). Domestic leisure activities, such as listening to music, take on added significance for people with learning disabilities. Some of the major reasons for this are indeed physical, social and institutional barriers to accessing outside leisure facilities that have been identified by academics, policy-makers and campaign groups (Barnes et al., 1999; Beart et al., 2001; DoH, 2001; Stay Up Late Campaign [online], 2012). However, the existence of such barriers and

³ The phrase ‘meaningful activities’ also features in Jim Mansell’s government commissioned report on the lives of adults with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities and is again associated with leisure activities and educational opportunities (Mansell, 2010, p. 29).

efforts to remove or alleviate them should not obviate the need for in-depth analysis of domestic leisure activities. In some academic literature on leisure activities for people with learning disabilities there is the assumption that activities such as watching television and listening to music are ‘passive and solitary in nature’ and therefore the implication is that these activities are not worthy of study in their own right (Buttimer and Tierney, 2005, p. 26; Magee, 2002). As will be explicated below, such assumptions are unhelpful and obscure the insights that domestic leisure activities can provide into significant socio-cultural practices that reveal how choice-making and person-centred planning is enacted in practice.

Domestic leisure in practice: musical activities and choice-making

Within the supported living scheme where the aforementioned ethnographic research was conducted, preferences for domestic musical activities were a prevalent feature in all residents’ ELPs. For instance, under the heading ‘Things I enjoy and like’ John’s plan featured the following points:

- ‘I enjoy spending time in my room listening to the *Songs of Praise* CD whilst dusting’
- ‘I like watching *Songs of Praise* on Sundays with Christine. We both enjoy singing along to the hymns, sometimes I will have a short dance to the music’

While under the heading ‘Enjoys/Prefers’ Christine’s ELP featured:

- ‘Watching musical films. My favourite is *Sound of Music*’
- ‘Watching and singing along to *Songs of Praise* on Sundays’

This sort of presentation of person-centred planning was instructive for support workers and helped to convey that musical activities were not only enjoyable for individuals, but that in some cases they were shared with other residents.

Yet, as will now be made clear, this type of person-centred planning underplays the processes involved with articulations of musical choice and also the peculiarities of the settings in which choices are made. Firstly, when considering expression of choice it is important to note that the majority of residents were reliant upon support staff to operate musical hardware, albeit to different degrees. For instance, although Andrew spent the vast majority of every day sat in a chair next to the stereo system in the kitchen area, he demonstrated little ability to open the stereo cabinet and operate the system. He had not learned how to indicate that he wanted to listen to music in the same way that he could express other preferences (for instance, if he wanted another drink of tea he would bring his mug to support staff, often with a smile on his face). Instead, as has been examined in more depth in previous work, support staff gauged whether Andrew was enjoying listening to music by taking into account his body language, facial expressions, physical actions and movements (Hassan, 2008). Yet due to his lack of speech there would have been occasions when Andrew would not have been able to

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adequately express his preferences regarding the music being played through the stereo system or television. Indeed, there may have been occasions when he wanted to listen to certain kinds of music but had no means of communicating this.

Nonetheless, staff members were often confident that Andrew was enjoying music, for instance in an interview his key worker discussed how she would gauge his facial expression when music was playing: ‘when it [music] has been turned up I have done it a bit more because I’ve got smiles so I’ve turned it up *even* more and got more smiles’ (interview with Nicky, November 2005). This kind of dynamic situation-based decision-making illustrates some of the limitations with rigid definitions of liberal autonomy and ‘choice’ discussed earlier (Van Loon and Van Hove, 2001, p. 240). Nicky was making choices on Andrew’s behalf based upon his facial expression. This type of decision-making seemed to facilitate moments of social connection between the two of them, yet it would be inadequate to define this kind of activity as involving Andrew’s ‘freely made’ choice because it would have been difficult for her to know definitively whether the louder volume was the only source of Andrew’s increased pleasure.

When discussing residents’ expressions of musical preference, another support worker discussed how individuals had different capabilities when demonstrating agency. In response to a question about who controls access to music, Mel indicated that: ‘[in the kitchen] obviously with Andrew’s radio it’s the staff, but if Charlotte wants a CD on she’ll put the CD on’. She then went on to explain that:

I’m sure that Andrew doesn’t mind, I’m sure Andrew listens to all kinds of music. On the telly it can be anybody requesting to watch a programme. John sometimes asks to put music on and Charlotte asks to put music on. Very rarely Christine asks for music [in the lounge], sat in her chair she very rarely asks for music. And when they’re in each of their own individual bedrooms they just say ‘can I have a CD on’ or ‘can I put music on’ or just put it on anyway. Charlotte will just put it on anyway because she actually can, John will ask staff because he can’t just put it on and Christine will tend to ask staff because she can’t put her music on. (Interview with Mel, April 2004)

Mel’s discussion is really interesting here because it demonstrates the way that agency – which involves the ability individuals have to express choice – was contingent in several ways within this particular supported living scheme. Access to music listening was partly dependent on staff support, but this clearly varied according to the competence of the individuals. Furthermore, agency was related to domestic space. Within bedrooms in particular, perhaps because they were in spaces that they interpreted as their own, Mel perceived that residents were more inclined to request music. Yet access was still largely mediated by support staff.

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Incorporating these contextual factors into person-centred planning is challenging. For instance, it was indicated above that it was written into John’s ELP that he enjoyed and liked listening to music in his room. However, in practice access to this leisure activity was strongly mediated by staff support. John consistently requested music, especially during different stages of his morning routine. For example when he was sat at the dining table waiting for his breakfast he would often urge me or other support staff to ‘put music on’. Sometimes John would request specific artists he liked such as Boney M or Jim Reeves when talking to me. As with many other aspects of his daily life such as washing, dressing, making drinks and cooking, John relied upon support staff to facilitate his music reception. Although, in accordance with his ELP, staff attempted to promote John’s independence, if left to operate his stereo system on his own he struggled. If I guided his hand and told him where the ‘on’ switch was he could eventually press this button. Playing a CD was much more difficult though because the buttons on his hi-fi were smaller for ‘play’ and ‘stop’ and John had difficulty with the fine motor skills required to successfully press them. Furthermore, he could not read so he found it difficult to understand which button corresponded with the different functions. These examples illustrate that notions like ‘listening to music’ or ‘putting music on’, while they can be incorporated into ELPs; they were far from self-evident in this supported living scheme. Residents’ access to music was heavily contingent upon support staff who often acted as facilitators to the mediation of music. Yet also the interview data above indicates that individuals’ willingness to express musical preferences varied according to domestic context, for instance Mel’s comments indicate that residents were more likely to do so within the private space of their bedrooms.

Domestic leisure in practice: everyday musical performing and social connections

While the above examples illustrate how statements of individual preference documented in ELPs can potentially belie the individual’s dependency on others to facilitate music reception, there were numerous instances of musical activity that would not comfortably fit into ELPs for other reasons. Music mediated through the TV or stereo system facilitated momentary musical performing that fostered social bonding and togetherness between residents or between residents and staff (Hassan, 2010a). This was something that was implied in the earlier example when one of the support workers, Nicky, discussed how louder music had elicited ‘more smiles’ from Andrew in certain situations. She went on to explain with some pride how she had been able to involve him in musical interactions in different ways. Although Andrew’s specific impairments (he is on the autistic spectrum, has a lack of speech and learning disabilities) would often become manifest in the way he would isolate himself in the kitchen away from other residents and in the way he became anxious when individuals came too close to his personal space, Nicky discussed how he could still become involved in musical activities that are part of social situations. She indicated that sometimes in the kitchen area: ‘Charlotte seems to

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'float around' dancing [...] and the staff are happy and they like waltzing past him. So he [Andrew] does get involved [with musical activity] and we do...ask him to stand up and see if he wants to dance. If he doesn't he sits back down and walks away; if he stays standing or comes near me then I'll help him to carry on [dancing].' Nicky described this dancing as follows: 'I jiggled around a bit and held his hand and after about five minutes he sat down' (Interview with Nicky, November 2005).

Such activity can also involve important social interactions between residents. For example, consider the following field diary entry that depicts John and Charlotte engaging in spontaneous musical performing together while John was on his way to the bathroom one morning:

As he was making his way from the kitchen into the adjoining lounge area, 'Brown girl in the ring' came on the stereo. John began singing along with the opening chorus. At that moment Charlotte also began walking into the lounge area carrying a Tupperware tub full of bird seed [to feed her budgie]. She almost immediately began singing along with John and smiling. Charlotte also began shaking the tub, using it as a musical instrument whilst she sang. John stopped walking and began to bob his head up and down and smile. Laughing and saying "come on John" Charlotte began to dance up the corridor in a conga type fashion leading the way for John to go to the bathroom. I went behind John guiding him down the hallway until we reached the bathroom. (Field notes, 4.12.02)

In this instance, initially inspired by 'Brown girl in the ring' (1978), John's singing encouraged Charlotte to engage in dancing and singing. Their collective musical performing projected a strong sense of fun and joviality during what would have otherwise been a mundane everyday event. Hence such performing could become a powerful resource for the development of these two individuals' social relationship. Although they were quite different people both in terms of personality and communication skills, in this instance they participated in musical performing on an equal footing and this helped to strengthen their friendship.

Conclusions

Services for people with learning disabilities are laden with an abundance of written documentation. Whilst such documentation is pivotal to the organisation of supported living schemes, it cannot be expected to account for the variegated lived experiences of the person it is depicting. For instance, the musical activities and experiences discussed above cannot be easily distilled into a written account, especially into some sort of care plan that has to be clear and concise enough for support workers and residents to read. Furthermore, although individual musical preferences can be outlined in ELPs, these text-centred resources are inadequate for conveying the richness of musical activities. This is, of course, an obvious point and one that people working with such plans would surely recognise. However, the examples discussed above raise questions about the person-centred planning process in several ways. They indicate how planning cannot be divorced from social context, relationships and differing degrees of dependency. People in supported living schemes often articulate choices in front

of others. Relationships with fellow residents or with support staff will influence such choice-making. John asked me to put on Boney M while he was at the breakfast table because he and I previously discovered our mutual appreciation of their music. If another member of staff was there he may not have expressed his choice in the same way or may not have asked for music at all. Choice-making, then, is dynamic and socially contingent.

Furthermore, leisure activities such as engaging with music do not always constitute ‘rational recreation’ but that does not mean they are not valuable. Domestic music listening can rarely be simply defined as passive. It is, as the last example illustrated, an activity that can afford spontaneity and social bonding. In the context of a supported living scheme for four adults with different backgrounds who had to live together these aspects are fundamental.

Taking the factors mentioned above into consideration, it is evident that person-centred planning in services for people with learning disabilities both has to be flexible and to acknowledge its limitations. As Plimley indicates, strategies for constructing service plans need to be creative and incorporate a variety of methods (Plimley, 2007 p. 210). These could even include some of those methods utilised during this study such as observations of everyday activities and the recording of residents’ and staff members’ oral testimonies. In any case, such person-centred plans should be ‘evolving documents’ that take into account the multiple and shifting life trajectories of the individuals they are attempting to depict (Thurman, Jones and Tarleton, 2005 p. 88). Moreover, the roles of such plans should not be over-emphasised at the expense of the day-to-day practices of support staff. Encouraging staff discussions and reflexive thinking regarding ways of understanding residents’ actions and experiences that (where possible) may incorporate residents’ views could also be a productive working practice (Forbat, 2006 p. 25). This article has revealed that a consideration of the roles of musical activity (for instance, in aiding communication or enhancing moods) should also be part of these dialogues.

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