

The International Journal for Direct Support Professionals

DAVE

By: Angie Nethercott

This month's journal article is going to be different than previous ones and has been very difficult to write, which is the reason for the delayed publication date. It is with great sadness that I share that Dave Hingsburger the founder and co-editor of this journal passed away on July 18. We had another article (coincidentally written by Dave) ready to be distributed on August 1, but I believe he will understand my decision to delay it a month and share this with you instead.

I met Dave 30 years ago when he interviewed me for a position with the Sexuality Clinic at Behaviour Management Services in Richmond Hill, shortly after I graduated from university. Dave had recently made the decision to go into private practice, and he and Joe were moving to the province of Quebec. I had applied for my 'dream' job and, after being told by my university academic advisor that I needed to expand my horizons, as I would never find a job working with people with intellectual disabilities in the area of sexuality, I was very nervous and highly motivated to get the job. I managed to make it through the interview and do well enough to get hired, and that began an incredible 30-year journey together with Dave as my mentor, co-author, co-presenter, co-editor, and – most importantly – my friend.

Editors: Dave Hingsburger, M.Ed.
Angie Nethercott, M.A., RP



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Mentor

During my first week on the job, Dave booked appointments over the course of two days with all the clients with whom he worked to introduce me to them. We drove together and, as the region we served was quite large, there was lots of time for him to tell me about each client, their referral reason, support needs, support team, and treatment goals. At every place we went, the support team and clients all told Dave how much they were going to miss him. By the end of those two days, my head was full of so much information, and I was terrified. There's no way I was ever going to come close to having the skills or knowledge or abilities that Dave had to do this job. These were very large shoes to fill.

Dave used to tell people in meetings or to conference audiences to whom we were presenting that, “They literally replaced me with half the person!” He meant it based on physical size, as he was almost a foot taller than me, but I was afraid it was also true of my abilities as a therapist. At the end of those two days, Dave met with me to hand over his client files. He handed me a stack of 12 file folders, and I was very surprised when I opened them to discover that there were only a few pieces of paper in each, summarizing what he had told me on the drive, and giving me their contact information and nothing else! “I’m not very good at contact notes and organizing files,” he said with a laugh. Well at least, that was one skill I had.

For the next few years, Dave would meet with me a few times a year, discuss cases, and drive with me to meet with clients or support teams where there were challenges. I learned so much on those drives; I’ve never met another therapist who had his ability to meet someone once, ask a few questions and be able to conceptualize the case in terms of the person’s strengths, areas of concern, and treatment focus.

Dave was also one of the most reinforcing people with whom I have ever worked. He was always generous with his compliments and praise about the work I was doing, even when I thought I could be doing better. However, even while focusing on the positive, he also constantly challenged himself and everyone else to think, do, and be better as professionals and human beings.

Dave always led through voice and action – speaking up for the rights of those with disabilities long before he came to use a wheelchair himself – and even inaction when it was called for, including his belief that we should never do work for our clients that they are capable of doing themselves. I have used that wisdom many times over the years when someone I support needs to advocate with their family or supports for something they want, or need, or have the same right to as everyone else. Dave advocated for many years to protect those with intellectual disabilities from abuse, working tirelessly to have government legislation implemented to achieve this goal, teaching abuse prevention skills to countless people in workshops, and educating direct support professionals about providing care to the people they support in a respectful manner that also includes boundaries, with the goal of protecting people from potential abuse.

Co-Presenter

For anyone who has ever had the privilege of hearing Dave present a lecture, plenary session, or a workshop, you know he was one of the most engaging speakers you will ever have the privilege to hear. He was a master storyteller and had a way of presenting a story that held people spellbound. His stories all had a way of using our emotions to illustrate a very important point he was trying to teach people. Over and over, he brought audiences to tears either from laughter or sadness. I had the privilege of presenting with Dave on a number of different stages and quickly learned to always present before him and never after, as all presenters pale in comparison to him. Dave had such a gift for finding just the right story to illustrate an innovative concept and make it accessible to everyone. And he wasn’t afraid to stand up and say something controversial, even knowing he would receive negative feedback as a result. When Dave first began telling audiences that people with intellectual disabilities are sexual beings and

have the right to be sexual, there were many who disagreed, and some were very vocal about it, sending him emails, making comments in his blog, or calling him. Dave did not let that deter him from continuing to get his message across in presentations, in his writing, and in educational materials he created, such as the Hand Made Love and Finger Tips DVDs.

Co-Editor

Almost 10 years ago, Dave and I were having dinner together in a restaurant after having done a presentation together, and he told me about an idea he had for a newsletter for direct support professionals. Initially, the articles were distributed only within Vita Community Living Services where he was the clinical director, but he had a vision of having them circulated across the province of Ontario. I told Dave I was very interested in becoming involved in this venture, and we began strategizing about how we would be able to disseminate it across the province and where we would find authors. Our goal at that point was to come up with enough articles to do this for a year. It wasn't long, however, before the subscription requests began coming in, and the articles were being distributed not only across the province but across Canada, the US, and the UK. The newsletter evolved into a journal and, as we became able to translate the articles into first French, and then Spanish, our readership and distribution grew to 134 countries, reaching thousands of people.

Dave and I never determined an end date for the journal. We decided we would continue it for as long as we had authors and interesting subject matter to share. And for as long as we both had an interest in working on it. Even with all the awards and accolades Dave received over the years, he often told me that the journal was one of the things he was most proud of in his career.

Friend

I have been very privileged to call Dave and his husband Joe my friends for almost 30 years now. We have shared many meals and many cups of tea together and caused more than one head to turn in our direction in a restaurant to see what all the noise was about as we joked and laughed until the tears ran down our faces. It is the kind of friendship where you can go months without seeing one another and pick up exactly where you left off the next time you get together.

I learned much from Dave about disability and accessibility, not only for the people we support but for all people with disabilities. Because of his advocacy and the power of his spoken and written words, Dave touched the lives of many - many who don't even know their lives were made better because of his advocacy through phone calls, letters, and conversations he had with store managers, companies, agencies, etc. to recognize the rights and accessibility needs of those with disabilities of any type.

A few additional words that come to mind when I think of Dave are: passionate, changemaker, visionary, and leader. I miss him greatly; I continue to have to stop myself from picking up the phone or emailing him to ask for advice or a resource, or to share a funny story.

Dave spoke and wrote so many profound words over the years, I wanted to close with a few of them published almost a year ago in volume 9 issue 9 of the journal: "On the day that this journal is mailed out, I will retire from my position as Director of Clinical Services at Vita ... But, I

realize I can never retire from my responsibility to the people who I have served, who have been in relationship to me in one way or another, who have given me the opportunity to make a living, enabling me to buy groceries and pay rent. I owe allegiance to those whose goals for community living seem simple, yet who face so many attitudinal barriers along the way. They can count on my allyship; I recognize their value and will ensure that through me, my words, and my actions. So will others.”

These words sum up better than anything I can say how Dave lived his life – in service to others. To his family, his friends, his coworkers, and to those with disabilities. On behalf of myself and the countless others whose lives you touched, thank you.

About the author

Angie Nethercott, M.A., RP is a Registered Psychotherapist who has worked with the North Network Regional Clinical Services at Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca for the past 13 years, specializing in the area of sexuality and persons with Intellectual Disabilities and Dual Diagnosis. Prior to her current position, Angie worked for the Centre for Behaviour Health Sciences at Mackenzie Health for 17 years as a Behaviour Consultant and Coordinator of the Sexuality Clinic, providing assessment and treatment to children and adults with Intellectual Disabilities and Dual Diagnosis who engage in sexually concerning and abusive behaviours.

Answers to FAQ's about the journal

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