

CRU's President's Report

It is relatively easy to claim a person-centred approach to the people that are served. Many people believe that being person- or family-centred is about the nature of their everyday interactions with people. For example, there is a great deal of attention paid to language used to address people, and to according people respect. Whilst these are important elements, true person-centredness goes beneath the surface of these interactions to the heart of the relationship. It is about who is placed at the centre of each interaction and who is placed at the margins. In other words it is about asking 'in whose interest' that something is really being done. There is a substantial paradigm shift in the concepts of power and control. People are no longer being 'done to' by the expert approach, but instead become the centre – the heart – of the service they receive.

It is entirely possible that at a surface level people might treat each other with genuine respect, but at the heart level of the relationship one person exerts power over the other. This is fundamentally where person-centred practice risks being misinterpreted. Professionals may interact in a manner that might be seen to be respectful or pleasant or even friendly, yet their work may actually be driven by much deeper concern over agency issues, program issues or even self-interest, such as the need to feel good or to be viewed positively by those around them, rather than being solely driven by the welfare of those whom they are supposed to be serving.

As the articles in [this edition of CRUcial Times](#) demonstrate, person-centredness is based on trust that emulates from a deep understanding of each person or family in the relationship. This deep understanding of the person does not occur overnight. Usually our deepest or most meaningful relationships develop over many months or years of getting to know each other. This is not only in an intimate sense but even our friendships and meaningful acquaintances may develop this way. It may even develop with one's motor mechanic!

It is this deep understanding which enables us to see what a person values in life and what is unimportant, to imagine what someone might need in life to make it rewarding and satisfying, and to appreciate what is missing in the other person's life and how it might be fulfilled. Person-centredness requires us to imagine a different version of 'service' that is not simply about being nice or being friendly or according respect. It is about locating people in the centre of our relationships and listening to them differently and deeply. Subsequently, the *service* ultimately becomes more accountable to those it serves.

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