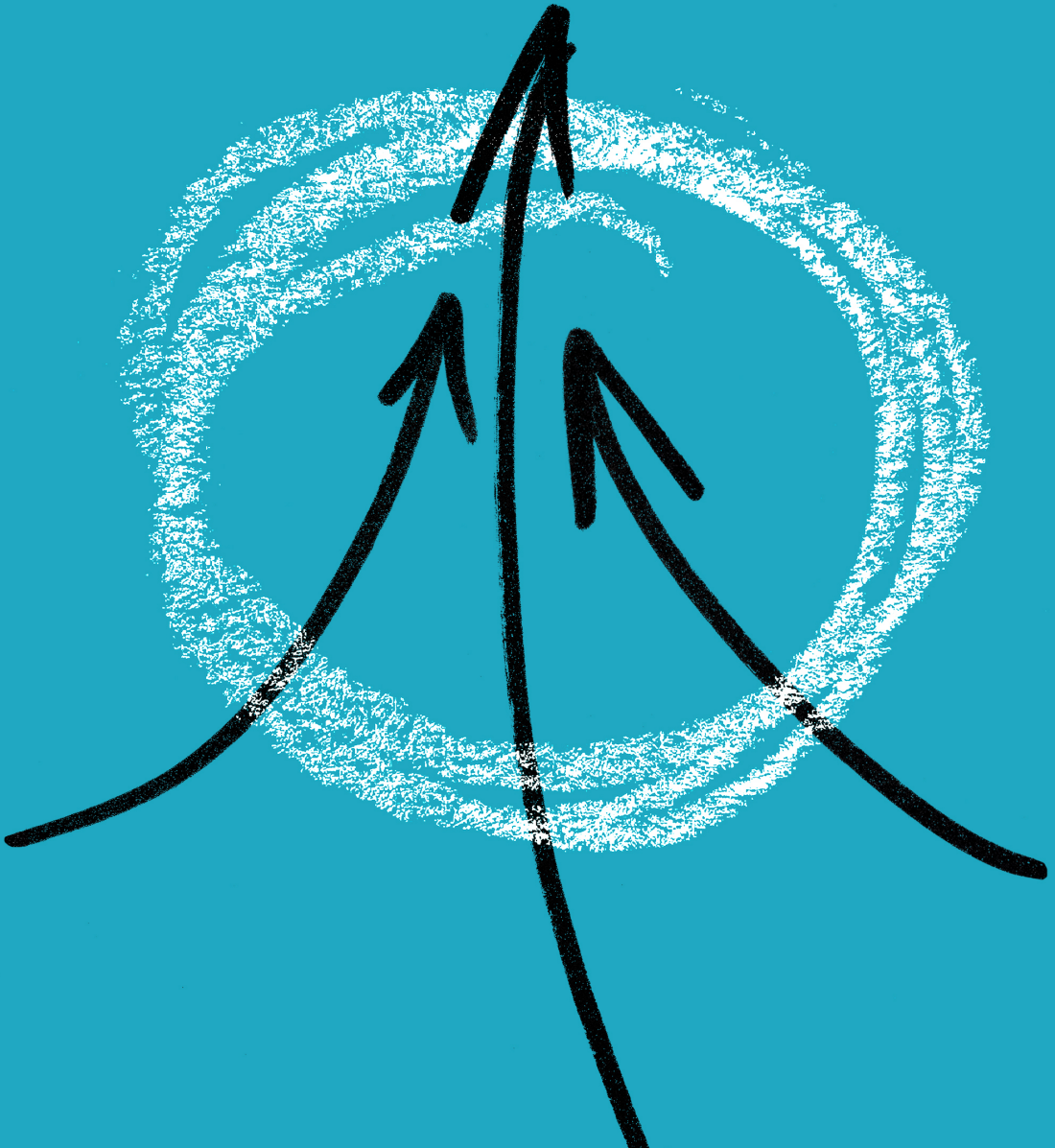


Drawn Together Through **VISUAL PRACTICE**

An Anthology Edited by
Brandy Agerbeck, Kelvy Bird, Sam Bradd & Jennifer Shepherd



This anthology contains exciting and varied contributions to the growing literature on visual language and its power to “draw us” together. The authors offer a wide range of experience, powerful illustrations and the core message that visual language enables us to learn, think, and grow in new ways – especially when considering the complex relationships that words alone can’t illuminate. *Drawn Together through Visual Practice* reflects the power of this field to help transform organizations and communities in life-affirming ways.

– *Juanita Brown PhD, Co-Founder, The World Cafe*

After 45 years of drawing on the wall it is extraordinary to see this field bloom in such rich and contributive ways. The authors are the cambium layer—advancing and shaping it with practice and questions—providing inspiration for all of us who are living into this emergent, hopeful, phenomenon.

– *David Sibbet, The Grove Consultants International*

The field of visual practice has long been nurtured by the quiet presence of artists devoted to listening and serving the groups with whom they work. It is high time that they turned and faced the room and shared the depth of artisanal practice and craft that underscores their devotion to the work. This collection is a stunning revelation of the heart of this practice. Whatever your role in group work, you will be made better by listening to these voices and stories of experience, sensitivity and careful attention.

– *Chris Corrigan, Art of Hosting and Harvest Moon Consulting*

A first-rate look at the new world of visual practice. I know from personal experience that capturing content and discussion in real time imagery can help create communal understanding and memory. The images give participants a shared visual vocabulary that help capture complex ideas and enable the move to new discoveries and innovations. The book is a delightful dive into understanding the background and development of this new teaching/art form. Enjoy.

– *Deborah Ancona, Seley Distinguished Professor of Management, Faculty Director of the MIT Leadership Center, MIT Sloan School of Management*

I've seen visual practice map ideas, refresh memories, and provoke insights in many meetings involving dozens of professionals from business, government, and education. So it's a special delight to discover this collection representing the art, craft, and inspiration of visual practice from multiple perspectives.

– *David N. Perkins, Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr., Research Professor of Teaching and Learning, Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Graphic facilitation is a powerful way for a group to come to know themselves and the work they want to do together. It is no wonder that it so quickly became a part of any good meeting, conference, or problem solving session! *Drawn Together* is a valuable book, timely and well thought through. It should be read and employed by all wanting to improve and accelerate the rate of change and innovation within an organization, executive team or community. The more diversity in the room, the more powerful visual imagery becomes.

– *Gail Taylor, Co-Founder of MG Taylor, Inc., Founder of Tomorrow Makers, Inc.*

At last! A compendium of stories, helpful approaches and mind sets that reflects the diversity, the richness of scope and the broad impact of the growing field of visual practice/visual language. Our visual practice not only encompasses 'making the invisible visible' and 'making the visible visual' through many artistic means, but also, it incorporates all the human elements of working together, listening, and inclusion that our world is crying for. The potential is unlimited. This is a must read for people who are looking for ways to make substantial change and impact in our world as a group or as an individual and who are looking for paths to go 'from my way to our way'.

– *Susan Kelly, Visual Practitioner*

Drawn Together offers me tools to reflect and improve on developing campaigns for Lush, and encourages personal reflection on my process. A tremendous job bringing together a picture of the evolving work and sharing best practices.

– *Carleen Pickard, Ethical Campaigns Specialist, Lush Handmade Cosmetics, North America*

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Sensemaking through Arts-Infused, Person-Centered Planning Processes

Aaron Johannes

Sensemaking has been a useful concept to bring to planning for people with (or without) disabilities, team building, and other projects. As a mode of being, it involves intentionally listening for clarifying questions and directions. From these, diverse groups create “future forming” plans and the skilled person-centered planning facilitator uses processes that can be (after years of practice) as light as a feather. Simple person-centered planning processes can be used by amateurs and professionals in the places where people live and life happens. Each event changes the world just a little and shapes a future that welcomes diversity.

I had no idea what I was getting into when I took the job with an organization that had made person-centered planning central to all its work. I’d heard about Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) as a planning tool, and it sounded great. The kinds of planning processes I was used to involved stacks of papers, forms to fill out, and a bunch of



professionals telling people how they could live. In contrast, the PATH process involved identifying the dream, locating what was “positive and possible” within a given timeframe, and then moving from what was happening now through a sequence of questions. These questions were: who might be involved, how everyone would stay strong enough to accomplish these goals, some first steps to take right away, and then a step-by-step action plan. It was simple, elegant, and visual—the whole thing was created in pictures and words. It invited participation and created spaces for dreaming in the lives of people who had not been allowed to make decisions, much less dream and hope for an enviable life.

I would have my own PATH as part of my learning, to feel the vulnerability of the process. I invited over friends and with our desserts perched on our knees we sat and watched my life appear in simple graphics. The facilitators led us through the steps, listening for glimpses of the future, asking questions, inviting my friends and family to speak. At one point we had to pretend to be in a time machine and then “remember” how

we'd gotten to the successful places we had envisioned just half an hour before. In those memories sometimes I could hear the potential, and other times something in the plan didn't ring true: "No, that never happened." "Okay, then what did happen?"

A week later I was flying from mountain to mountain in northern British Columbia, meeting up with families, sharing great food and celebrations of their communities, and drawing their conversations on big sheets of paper, facilitated by a person-centered planning guru, Linda Perry. I'd aced art school—lots of awards, lots of scholarships, lots of coddling—but I'd never drawn in front of people like these: plumbers, miners, loggers, dads, moms, siblings, coming together after work and gathering to dream with someone with a disability who had captured their hearts.

Listening to the stories of a young nonverbal woman who had almost died, again and again, and used a wheelchair to get around in a mountaintop community, I was amazed at how well they knew her and how certain they were of her dreams and their shared dreams—and I was also just having fun drawing. When they talked about her going swimming, I drew David Hockney pools, and when they talked about her love of dressing up I went all Holbein. She was in a supported skiing group, so I got into portraying some Turner-esque slaloming. When it was done, everyone was thrilled—this graphic plan represented her (and those who cared about her) in a way that deficit-based, bureaucracy-centered planning never had.

Her grandfather came over as I packed up. "We appreciate this so much," he said. "That you would come here, into our home—and with our family and friends make her... dreams... come alive for us." He waved at the drawing. He sniffled. I beamed. I was good at this. I might have been waiting for this. He nodded and said, "Especially that you're willing to stand up in front of all these strangers—my goodness...." I shrugged, humbly. "I could never do this... I mean, just look at it—you can't even draw a real person and it was just so brave for you to try, in front of strangers!" I blinked. "It made us feel like we were part of it all as we watched! If you could really draw we would have just felt left out!"

I started laughing—I'd been surrounded by people who loved everything I did, for a long time, in classes and in galleries where my work hung behind glass, already judged by some curator as special and significant. But this was what I'd always wanted out of art and never been able to identify: a dialog. I was smitten in that unexpected moment. Twenty years later I can remember those first drawings exactly, and I continue to be just as fascinated by these planning processes.

Deborah Ancona of M.I.T. says that sensemaking “refers to how we structure the unknown so as to be able to act in it ... coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world; testing this map with others through data collection, action, and conversation; and then refining, or abandoning, the map depending on how credible it is” (2012). I work with various kinds of groups, visually mapping what's credible within constantly shifting dynamics, and their responses lead us towards different “truths” which become potential plans—does this look like what you want? Does this seem possible? Like something everyone can work on together? The graphic mirrors the dynamics of the people in the room, and plans rendered to their essential parts in simple graphics become the visualization of a changed world.

In another meeting, Brent, a young fellow with autism, is sitting at the center of a circle of about 20 people who care about him. He's got his family, some of their friends, people from his school, people who have supported him from every period of his life, including when he was a toddler, and they've all been invited in to dream of what his adulthood might be. I've been warned he hates meetings and he came in glowering at me, but now he's grinning, hugging, delighted to be here with people who love him and snacks he likes!

He doesn't speak in ways we expect. He's decided to trade in his voice for a xylophone and now he plays songs. In the old days we might have ticked off “voluntary mutism” on a form and left it at that. He plays along with his boombox to three songs he's lined up to introduce this topic of planning his adult life, but when the second song is done, he suddenly shakes his head “no,” goes to the boombox, and then plays this Elvis Costello song, instead of whatever he had intended:

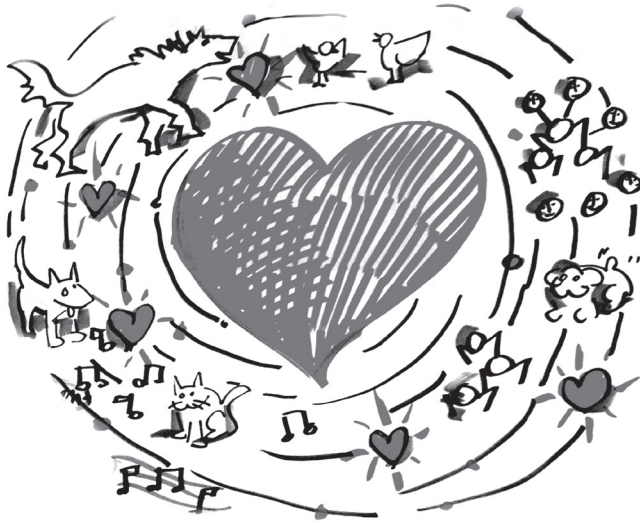
*Oh it's not easy to resist temptation
 Walking around looking like a figment of somebody else's imagination
 Taking ev'ry word she says just like an open invitation
 But the power of persuasion is no match for anticipation
 Like a finger running down a seam
 From a whisper to a scream
 So I whisper and I scream
 But don't get me wrong
 Please don't leave me waitin' too long
 Waitin' too long
 Waitin' too long
 Waitin' too long
 Hey
 Oh oh oh oh oh (Costello, 1981)*

He hits the keys with perfect timing and most of those who care about him have tears running down their faces. When he's done, his mom says, a little shakily, "Thank you for coming out to support 'Brent's Big Dream'—now I want you to meet Aaron." And I begin to draw...

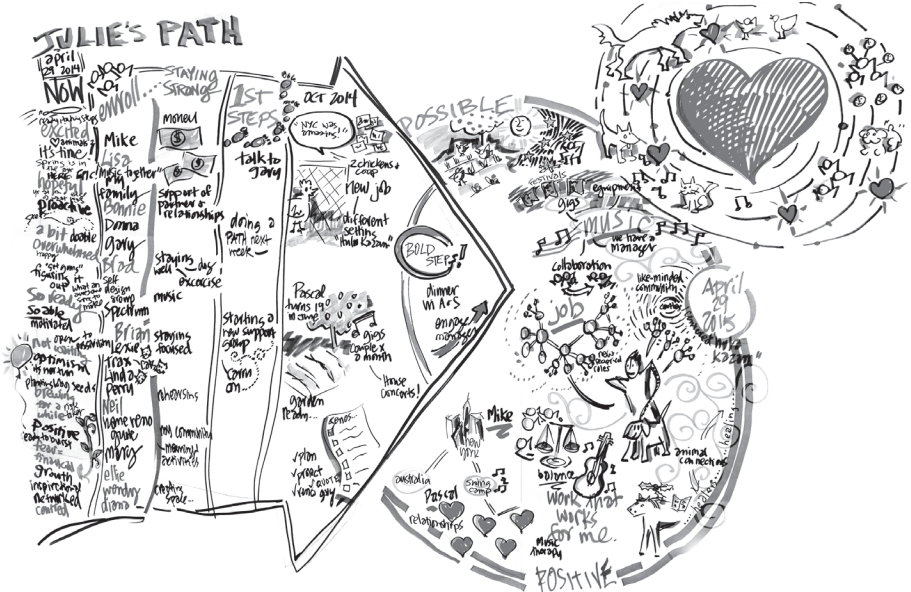
The "purpose-driven life" that they describe includes going to university, being part of his community, doing varied work, being with animals, and playing music. I sketch the life that is already partly happening, and also the part that hasn't yet been clear. As one mom said, "In this process we are creating the future we want by leaning into this vision as we create it."

I am drawing as fast as I can, trying to keep up with the accruing vision of his friends and family—a job, music school, friends, communication, safeguards, an apartment, a roommate. Three typical kids who have shared inclusive classrooms with him for most of his life have come tonight to propose that they share a place together. "Why not?" they ask. I am drawing apartments, parks, musical instruments, a dog—someone stops me. He doesn't like big dogs, only small dogs. I use a sticky label to cover up the big dog and draw a smaller one. Brent smiles and nods. He's been heard. Other corrections come fast and furious—the boys don't want to live on the tree-lined suburban street I've drawn them, they want to live downtown. The trees become street lamps and buildings. His parents frown a little, but stay brave. They'll get behind whatever he really wants and this is obviously it.

In how many situations are we given the gift of spending time talking about a kind of heartbeat life—music, people, connections, meaning? These are the kinds of icons I get to work with:



And when people have agreed that this kind of icon can represent them, we arrive at a PATH that looks something like this:



A year later, I run into Julie, who does not have a disability but has been stuck for a while, without clear aspirations. Since we last saw her, she's quit her job, she's created a different role in her community, she's got more animals, and she's part of two bands, both playing lots of gigs. As people do, she wants to report back on the progress of the vision we shared that day. We often are gifted with calls from people we've planned with to tell us where they are in these newly clarified plans.

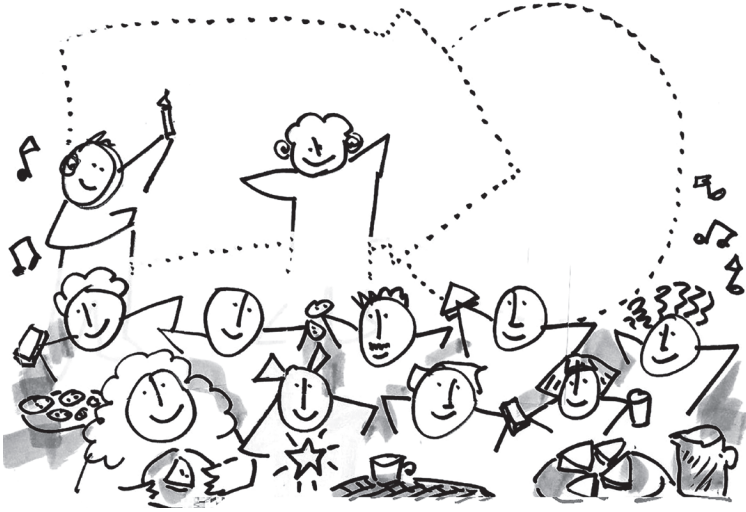
PATH was invented by Marsha Forrest, Jack Pearpoint, and John O'Brien in the 70s (Sanderson, 2000). As with many transformational discoveries for people with disabilities, PATH comes out of the work of Inclusion Press (www.inclusion.com). It was one of the early alternatives to the kind of planning that was happening in special education and services—planning driven by professionals, filling out pre-determined forms using “specialist” language embedded in rigid roles. The role families and folks with disabilities had been given was to passively attend as professionals worked through a number of domains by tallying up at what was problematic in each one. In comparison, PATH was a sequence of open ended questions that assumed everyone in the room—including the person with the disability—had input that mattered.

The originators of PATH wondered: What might happen if people were encouraged to dream? If there were ways to record their dreams which everyone could see and understand (no matter what their literacy levels) and ways to plan to get from where they were to where they wanted to be?

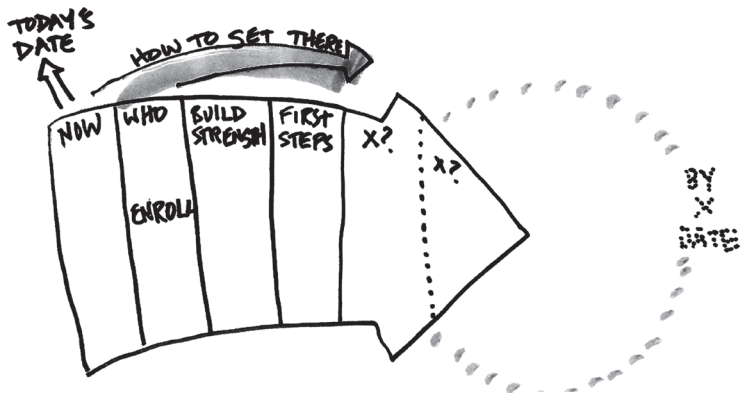
PATH is almost always co-facilitated with a graphic recorder and a facilitator and is designed to be a simple process that amateurs can use (amateurs—from *amat*, to love).

Begin with a dream: A PATH starts with the facilitation of the person's (or group's or project's) dream: what does it look like? If you could have anything—no holds barred—who would be there? Where would it be? What would surround it? How would it feel?

Looking back from a future time: The facilitator then moves to the “positive” and “possible” section. Sometimes we do a quick guided meditation about taking a time machine into the future and looking



back on what dreams we’ve accomplished in a given time (say, two years). While the dream section might have included things that seem impossible—someone who can only move one finger wants to work and be self-supporting—in this section things must be doable. Within two years what might be accomplished towards this dream? The person might “remember” (from their future time machine) that they got a part-time job. Questions to deepen this might include: Who would they be working with? What kinds of things might they be doing? Someone in the group remembers that their church needs someone to staple the newsletters each week—it only takes one finger... Possibilities accrue and each question, each detail, builds a picture of a desirable future.



NOW: We move down to the “NOW” section—how are things right now? What feelings are people having? For Brent’s family, speaking out of their knowledge of him, there was excitement about the future that felt even more “positive and possible” given the full house of all the people who responded to the invitation to his meeting – this act of planning for the future is in itself an act of creating that future by bringing these people together.

WHO: Social constructionist Kenneth Gergen writes,

... virtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationship... [and] there is no isolated self or fully private experience. Rather, we exist in a world of co-constitution. We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship; even in our most private moments we are never alone. (Gergen, 2009)

When I am teaching the idea of “theory” to college students I start here. The “theory” of capitalism is that we are individuals, alone, competitive, responsible only for ourselves; the theory of social constructionism as defined by Gergen and his colleagues is that we are each part of a network of relationships. A PATH is an opportunity to invite those others in, often for the first time, and welcome them to take roles in people’s lives. Person-centered planning activates our tribes.

Building strength: As we look at the emerging PATH graphic it becomes clear that a new picture of a possible future that matters is happening before our eyes. We are looking at real “positive and possible” change. Gergen has recently written about “future forming research” and this is a small domestic example of that larger idea.

Step by step: The first of these is “first steps”—what few things might we do in the next week or so that will lead us into this future? After this, things are broken down into manageable chunks—it might be four months, or six, or even a year. The idea is to create the milestones for the emerging plan, as if one is looking back from the viewpoint of having accomplished those goals.

In these sessions, which can be a few hours long, new relationships are formed, and old relationships are transformed. A new future is depicted,



and it is one that the person (with their network) can visualize with the help of graphics and facilitation.

What had seemed impossibly ambitious becomes, somehow, possible. A few years ago, Liz, a woman with Down syndrome learning to facilitate PATH in one of our workshops, ended up facilitating a PATH for me. I began talking about my work-life and she put up her hand and said, “Stop: Let’s come back work later if we need to.” So I started talking about holidays I hadn’t been able to take, art galleries and countries and cities I hadn’t been able to see yet... we never did talk about work. And, over the next 24 months I went to 11 different countries, took 18 holidays with people I loved (using up all my vacation time for the first time in decades) and saw thousands of works of art.

While it was my ambition to travel the world, in the PATHs of people with disabilities we realize that our assumptions of what our lives can be like—that we’re going to work and have jobs and relationships, for example—are not true for everyone. What we think of as a given wealth of choices is really a privilege. Thus, a PATH, for one person and their network, becomes an emancipatory action—part of a political movement that clarifies, on the wall of someone’s home, with people who care about them, that we might become more equal, in just a few steps. The insanity of supports that do not allow for choices about where people live, who they live with, where they spend their days, and who

supports them becomes evident, and radicalizing. PATH is part of a social transformation movement.

Sometimes I imagine all these wall-sized drawings layered over each other and coming together in a kind of infinite collage of possibilities that create a kind of chorus, demanding systems and governments to change and foster a transformed and welcoming world for us all.

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To learn more about PATH check out www.inclusion.com for books and tools.