

**The Map of
Meaning and Ageing:
A Handbook for Service
Providers**



Meaningful
Ageing
AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

For as long as I can remember I have asked, “What is the meaning of life?” I was brought up amongst people for whom this was a daily conversation. For half my life I thought I was strange in thinking about this, but it remained a passionate concern.

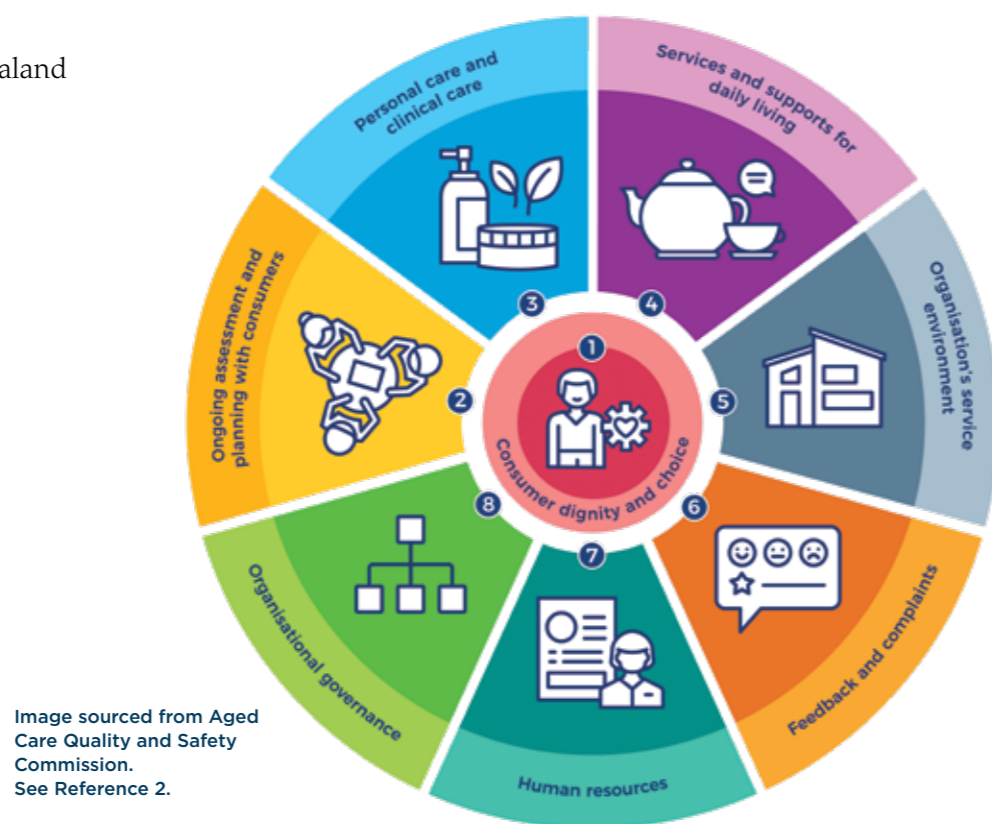
In 2000 I first came across the work of Marjolein Lips-Wiersma who had just published her PhD which was summed up in a simple diagram which came to be called, the Map of Meaning. I knew that this was work that I needed, and that the world needed. We began to work together, with our colleague Patricia Greenhough and the other pioneering practitioners who were part of the development of the Map. For twenty years we have increased our understanding of this simple and yet profound framework in many areas of human experience.

As I aged (I am now 72) I became aware of the way in which ageing people are so often seen as a burden on society, ignored, devalued, and exploited. I wanted to use the Map of Meaning as a way to engage with this large area of human experience. Meeting up with Ilsa Hampton and Meaningful Ageing Australia allowed me to spend nearly two years developing an initial application of the Map of Meaning to the experience of ageing.

The more work I did in this area, the more significant it became. I became more and more aware of my compatriots who still have so much to offer, and such a longing to contribute and yet who often find it impossible to find avenues to do this. Their communities are missing out on working with a powerfully resourced group of people. This book is an attempt to awaken us all to the need for meaning of each person as they age, and to have a better understanding of the ways this need can be met, and the benefit to all of us that could arise from this.

Lani Morris

Napier, New Zealand
25 July 2019



Standards for Spiritual Care

As you work through this handbook, you will become aware that the Map of Meaning is a useful framework for identifying and understanding what gives people their meaning, purpose and connectedness in life. Meaning, purpose and connectedness (with self, others, creativity, nature and Something Bigger/the sacred) forms the basis of an understanding spirituality and spiritual care and this may, or may not, include a religious faith.

Both the *National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care* and the Australian Government's 2018 Aged Care Quality Standards have an awareness that spiritual care is an essential part of the care for the whole person. The *National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care* state, “as spirituality is integral to quality of life and well-being, it should be accessible to all older people in a way that is meaningful to their beliefs, culture and circumstances. The identification of spiritual needs and offering of spiritual care is the responsibility of all care-givers and must be undertaken in ways that are appropriate to their role”.¹ The *National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care* encompass a whole-of-organisation approach, valuing relational care, and recognising that spiritual care is everyone's business. The Aged Care Quality Standards comprise eight standards which outline a consumer outcome, organisation statement and requirements for organisations to meet the Standards.²

Following is a brief overview of how The Map of Meaning can inform your work in relation to the Aged Care Quality Standards.

Standard 1: Consumer dignity and choice; identity, culture and diversity are valued, with care and services being culturally safe. This means that each person is able to exercise their own care choices, in consultation with family and friends, and to be able to communicate this to their care providers. This allows each person to be supported in enabling them to live the best life they can.

Standard 2: Ongoing assessment and planning with consumers; this allows the individual to express their needs, goals and preferences knowing that there are systems in place to record, deliver and re-evaluate these needs into the future.

Standard 3: Personal care and clinical care; as individuals go through various stages of

ageing and changing health conditions, their well-being and health is optimised through knowing what their meaning and purpose is, and how this may change and adapt in response to health and clinical changes.

Standard 4: Services and supports for daily living; individuals receive services and support that allows for independence, quality of life and emotional, spiritual and psychological well-being. This may allow for participation within their community, maintain personal and social relationships, as well as being able to do the things that interest them.

Standard 5: Organisation's service environment; the individual lives in an environment which is safe, clean and provides opportunities for interaction with others, both indoors and outside.

Standard 6: Feedback and complaints; the individual has the ability to provide feedback and complaints in the knowledge that appropriate action will be taken.

Standard 7: Human resources; the individual is confident that all staff members of the organisation are equipped in spiritual care, and will respect what gives their life meaning and purpose, including their identity, culture and diversity.

Standard 8: Organisational governance; the individual is confident that the organisation has in place the policies and procedures, with appropriate accountability structures, to support the ongoing support of spiritual choices, preferences and needs.

It can be seen that holistic, person-centred care touches all aspects of an organisation's commitment to the people they are supporting. The Map of Meaning provides an ideal way of engaging with individuals to discern what gives them meaning and purpose. These discoveries, and the action taken in response to them, will provide an organisation with the means to enhance their spiritual care in alignment with the Standards.

You may be interested in our downloadable resource called Mapping the National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care in Relation to the 2018 Aged Care Quality Standards.³ It can be accessed via our resources portal:

www.meaningfulageing.org.au

Introduction

Ageing may bring many joys; it also brings challenges. What remains constant is the human yearning for meaning. It is as vital to us as water. We want to reach the end of the day and feel we have used our time, talents and energy in ways we value. Our hunger for meaning is constant throughout our lives. It is part of what it means to *live* fully as a human being.

Age can affect people's ability to find meaning in their lives: loss of faculties, separation from family, illness and death of friends, moving into care homes, illness and approaching death can lead to depression and even suicide.⁴ At the same time, there is evidence that older people can be happier, and may have great inner resources to contribute to a rich experience of meaningfulness. Old age can be a time of fulfilment, peace, joy and gratitude for life.⁵

When our human need for meaningfulness is not met, is frustrated, or downplayed, people express their upset in ways that sound like complaining:

"No-one ever comes to see me. Everyone has forgotten me.";

"I'm just useless.";

"I can't see the point of getting dressed. I'll just have to get undressed at the end of the day."; and

"I can't hear what anyone is saying, there's no point in going to the lunch room."

This is equally true for those living with dementia, and other conditions that increase people's difficulties in doing the things that previously provided meaning.⁶

*"Because I have got this vascular dementia, I am not suddenly altering my ways, I am still X. I am still loving, caring and I still have feelings, like we talked about and I would like to think I haven't changed. It would be nice if a lot of people had more understanding and appreciate what we have got ..."*⁷

These familiar statements express a lack of meaning, or frustrated attempts to create meaningfulness.

Meaningful Ageing Australia recognises meaning as one of the three inter-related key components of spirituality which enrich our lives as we get older: meaning, purpose and connectedness. In 2014 an international consensus conference defined spirituality as "the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred."⁸

Engagement with The Map of Meaning begins with the simple question: "What was meaningful in the last week for you?" In the work and research of Lips-Wiersma and Morris, this has been asked of thousands of people in many parts of the world, in many occupations and at all stages of life.⁹ Their answers consistently fall into a simple, yet profound framework, which has allowed Lips-Wiersma and Morris to use it in a vast range of ways.¹⁰ This framework is known as The Map of Meaning.

Based on empirical research, The Map of Meaning was originally developed by Professor Marjolein Lips-Wiersma and it has been tested in the field over the past twenty years. It was further developed by Lips-Wiersma and Lani Morris. Its application to the context of ageing and service provision is the work of Lani Morris and Ilsa Hampton. The Map meets the needs of the mind for a rational sense-making tool, while intuitively feeling right. It helps us give words to the strong feelings that arise from our experience of meaningfulness, and loss of meaning.

The Map of Meaning aligns with the Australian National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care, and other resources offered by Meaningful Ageing Australia. It is a great tool for responding to the key requirements of the Australian Aged Care Quality Standards to ensure that each person's need for meaning is incorporated into the care on offer. Meaning is integral to spirituality, and the Map of Meaning gives us another way to help every person speak about what really

matters to them, whether or not they define that formally in terms of spirituality.

This handbook has been developed incorporating feedback from over one hundred people including those engaging in self-reflection on their own ageing as well as those supporting older people. Where we have quoted individuals, this has been done with their permission.

Who the Handbook is for

This handbook is a practical resource for service providers. It will assist you with service planning, client goal setting and planning meaningful engagement. It is designed for teams supporting older people, including those working in community and residential aged care. It will be especially useful for people planning meaningful engagement, activities, services and programs that contribute to quality of life.

It will be useful for:

- » Learning and development coordinators
- » Diversional therapists
- » Care coordinators
- » Assessors and planners
- » Case managers
- » Local managers
- » Spiritual care practitioners
- » Activities and lifestyle coordinators
- » Occupational therapists
- » Social workers
- » Wellbeing and social support workers

Staff in a wide range of roles can be engaged in some of the processes and activities described in the handbook, under the leadership of staff in other roles. The suggested activities are not definitive; you are sure to have ideas of your own. Before engaging in the activities in this handbook, it is highly recommended that you undertake introductory education in spiritual care, as a minimum. You may like to use Meaningful Ageing Australia's e-modules and/or arrange for a workshop.

If using the Map with older people, you also need to ensure you have other team members or external supports available should someone become highly distressed as a result of considering the place of meaning in their lives. It is important to give people these opportunities, which can bring joy and satisfaction, but can also uncover grief from life's losses.

Approaching the Map of Meaning

There are two key ingredients to using the Map successfully with others:

- » Use it for yourself.
- » Be prepared to truly listen.

As you read through this handbook you will find various opportunities for you to engage with the Map for yourself. These can be done alone, in pairs, or a team setting. We have also included templates throughout for you to copy or download from the Meaningful Ageing Australia resources portal. We have used symbols to help you navigate the text:



Pair/Group Opportunity



Template/Photocopy



Conversation



Professional Development



Watch



Tips/Hints



Write



Personal Reflection

Decide whether you want to write directly in the book, in a notepad, or on photocopies/printouts of the exercises. We have left space at the bottom of pages for you to write your own notes, observations and plans either for yourself or the people you are serving.

Understanding The Map of Meaning

In this section, we will explore and seek to understand the various 'components' that make up the Map of Meaning. Like any conceptual framework, the Map looks to understand and clarify a variety of common experiences and knowledge under simple, interactive headings, and then present it visually. A look at the visual Map may not be that useful without understanding the conceptual components, which will take a little bit of work.

The Map of Meaning is a result of the reflective process of many individuals. As such, the best way of understanding the Map is for you, too, to be reflective. As we go through this chapter, there will be plenty of opportunities for you to think about your own life and experiences. We recommend that you have a pen handy to write your thoughts, either on the page or in a separate notebook.

As mentioned previously, engaging with The Map of Meaning begins with the simple question: "What was meaningful in the last week for you?" Before we look at the Map, let's start with this question.



Take a moment to think about what has been most meaningful for you in the last week. Use it as a personal brainstorm; it's not a test. Just jot down everything that comes to mind.

It could be at work, at home, or in your community.

Once you have a few things on your list, consider another question or two to go a bit deeper. Ask yourself, "Why was that meaningful?" or, "What was it about that moment/action that felt meaningful for me?"

Now, have a look at the Map of Meaning illustration.



© Map of Meaningful Work, M. Lips-Wiersma & L. Morris

NOTES

There are three main ideas that make up the map:

1. **Dimensions:** these are the four coloured segments in the middle of the circle.
2. **Tensions:** these are the two arrows, one vertical and one horizontal.
3. **Context:** this is represented by the ring around the edge of the circle and the middle, marked Inspiration.

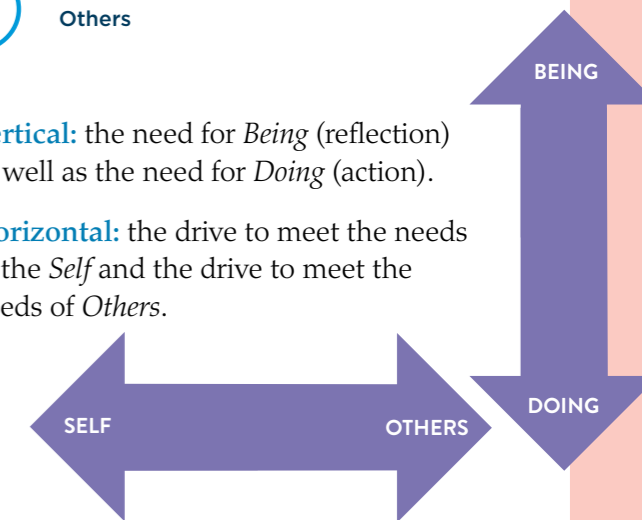
There are **four dimensions** to meaning. They are:



As on a road-map, you can see dimensions as representations of connections between places, and possible directions to take. With the Map of Meaning, dimensions represent our own meaningful connections to things; people, places, activities. They do not necessarily represent the journey to get there. They provide the directions to meaning. Unlike in real world navigation, it is possible to engage in activity which is located in multiple dimensions. For example, if you don't like to waste things, then working with a friend to turn recycled wood into toys for a charity to sell, may have a connection in all four dimensions.

Second, these four dimensions are held within **two tensions**:

- » **Vertical:** the need for *Being* (reflection) as well as the need for *Doing* (action).
- » **Horizontal:** the drive to meet the needs of the *Self* and the drive to meet the needs of *Others*.



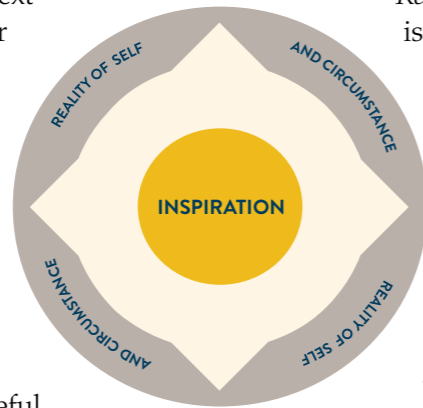
Being and *Self* are all about you and your internal sense of self. *Others* and *Doing* are all about your interactions with other people and the wider world. Our lives are a mix of all four elements, and at times we may be more focused on one or more elements at the expense of the others. This can result in experiencing the tensions quite extremely.

NOTES

Third, all these elements are played out in the overall **context** between inspiration and reality of self and circumstances.

Inspiration is the internal context of our lives and represents our beliefs, those things that we value and which inspire us to do the things we do, or want to do. Our own personal values provide the foundation for our inspiration and action throughout life. To gain a greater understanding of the Map of Meaning it may be useful to reflect on what our own personal values might be, and how they influence our lives.

Have a look at the list of values in the box below and see which ones you identify with. If there are any that you have thought of, but we have missed, make a note and reflect on those too.



Reality of Self and Circumstances is the external world that we live in. There are many different values and actions in the wider world that impact us, and which may not align with our own.

As we live our lives within these two realities, we are likely to be exposed to additional tensions.

The Map of Meaning provides a way of understanding the dynamics of these contexts, tensions and how our connections for meaning interact. It may also help us to identify those areas that we (currently) have no meaningful connections to, or it may help us to identify connections that we wish to pursue.

We will cover each aspect of the Map in the following section. There is a brief explanation of each dimension with an introduction to its sub-themes. Each one of these is illustrated with a comment so often heard from the older people we spoke to.



Having gone through this section, go back to the list you made at the start of the section. Is there anything you want to change or add? We will be returning to the list a few more times in the next section.

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Authenticity | Kindness |
| Compassion | Love |
| Co-operation | Loyalty |
| Courage | Optimism |
| Creativity | Patience |
| Enthusiasm | Perseverance |
| Humour | Positivity |
| Forgiveness | Practicality |
| Generosity | Relationship |
| Gratitude | Reliability |
| Honesty | Respect |
| Hope | Simplicity |
| Humility | Tolerance |
| Integrity | Trustworthiness |
| Justice | Wisdom |

NOTES

The Four Dimensions



Integrity with Self

We often talk about integrity along with authenticity. Sometimes we mistake it for “truthfulness”. What exactly is it? The Cambridge Dictionary defines integrity as, “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change”. It can be helpful to think of integrity as living in keeping with your values.

This dimension focuses us on the question of who we are becoming as a result of being engaged in our life. Do we become kinder, more self-aware, or the opposite? *Integrity with self* can be based on wanting to be a good person. Or, if you are a person of faith, it can mean developing the self that God wants us to be. For some, this might be about becoming the higher self within us. It points to the importance of our relationship with our self.

From older people we hear: “I have stopped worrying about what other people think of me. I am fine just the way I am.”

Within the need to develop and become ourselves, there are three main sub-themes, all of which involve self-awareness:

Moral development

“I hate the way they throw out so much good food. It really goes against my principles.”

Personal growth

“I guess one thing about getting old, I am certainly learning patience.”

Being true to self

“I don’t mind being in the home, but I have always had cats. I’m a cat person. But we can’t have any cats in here.”



Go back to your written list. Is there anything you have written down that connects with this dimension of Integrity with Self? If there is, put an ‘I’ in a circle next to the statement.

NOTES

U

Unity with Others

This dimension refers to the meaningfulness of being together with other human beings. At the heart of this dimension is the understanding that humanity is essentially one and that experiencing this sense of oneness can enrich our understanding of meaningfulness.

We can hear it in the delight of someone in retirement: "My wife and I now have all the time in the world to do things together. It is a time of real companionship."

Or the loss of this aspect of meaning: "I've lost my driver's licence and now I can't get to go to the clubs I used to go to. I feel it dreadfully."

There are three sub-themes in this dimension which all focus on being related to others:

Working together

"I go down to help out at the senior citizens' association, forget my troubles, crack a few jokes."

Shared values

"I always enjoy the prayer meeting, being with others who care about spiritual things."

Belonging

"The family moved me to be with them, but my husband is buried in our home town, and I seldom get to sit by his grave."

One aspect of *Unity with others* and ageing is how many of the people we love have died. We can hear it in this last quote above. There is such a need to remain in contact with all those we have loved, and people do. Most people still talk to the deceased, in their heads, sometimes out loud. They are a real presence in their lives.¹¹ It is an important part of understanding ageing to allow these conversations, to listen deeply to the meaning they express. Our connection with the generations is part of the richness of ageing.

"My life has not been wasted. I had you and you had your daughter, and I have passed life on, as my mother said to me. Now I look at my grandson, remembering my mother talking about my great grandfather, and think about my grandson's children stretching into the future."

Meaning is found in all of these connections.



Go back to your written list. Is there anything you have written down that connects with the dimension of Unity with Others? If there is, put an 'U' in a circle next to the statement.

NOTES

S

Service to Others

Serving others is about our need to contribute to the wellbeing of others, from helping an individual in the moment to making a difference in the wider world.

We can hear this when someone says, "It's lovely when I can listen to someone and know that they feel better just to have someone hear their story." Or, "I can't do a thing to help my family now, I feel a burden and I hate it."

The requirement to serve others is often part of people's faith and so it may be even harder when they cannot find a way to fulfil this.

Service to others can be expressed in a range of different ways, for example:

Making a difference

"Mrs. Smith loves it when I pop in each day, and I bring her my paper when I've finished with it, take in some flowers. Have a chat. I know it cheers her up."

Meeting the needs of humanity and the planet

"I've been a life-long member of the Forest and Bird Association. I can still write an email to the politicians, or help out at any fundraisers they are holding."



Go back to your written list. Is there anything you have written down that connects with this dimension of Service to Others? If there is, put an 'S' in a circle next to the statement.



NOTES

P

Expressing Full Potential

This dimension refers to the meaningfulness of sounding our own note in the universe. It is different from *Integrity with self* because it is active and outward directed, whereas the former is inward and reflective. At the heart of this dimension are the concepts that we are all unique, and that we are responsible for bringing our unique gifts and talents into the world.

We can hear it when someone says, "Well, I can still do a good job of chopping the wood and stacking it properly." Or, "I used to have such lovely handwriting. Now it goes all over the place and no-one can understand what I'm writing."

Expressing full potential can be seen in a range of different ways, for example:

Creating

"I just sit here and knit. I make up my own patterns now, which is fun. I am always interested to see how they turn out."

Achieving

"I've finally got the family history all sorted out and ready to be copied and sent out to everyone."

Influencing

"I can't keep up with everything that is going on in the home, let alone the world. I feel left behind and out of touch."

Legacy

Assisting someone to leave a spiritual or ethical will can help them enormously.

"Many report that ethical wills or letters are among the most meaningful possessions left to them by loved ones. Decades or even centuries later, ethical wills will often become treasured family heirlooms."¹²



Go back to your list. Is there anything you have written down that connects with this dimension of Expressing Full Potential? If there is, put an 'E' in a circle next to the statement.

NOTES

The Two Tensions

Meeting the needs of the four dimensions can set up tensions; too much focus on one can lead to a loss of balance, although balance can be found over the course of a lifetime. Meaning is found by working through **all** dimensions, and in addressing their fundamental tensions: one between *Being* and *Doing*, the other between *Self* and *Others*. One of the spiritual tasks of ageing is to come to terms with the losses that may prevent us from 'doing', for example.¹³

Being and Doing

The Map of Meaning encourages balance between our need to focus inward and reflect, and our need to act in the world. As we age, this may shift, or be expressed in different ways. By being aware of these tensions, we know what to listen for when engaging in enabling meaning in our own lives, and that of others.

Being

Being focuses on the need to ponder. It covers such things as silence, patience, taking our time, checking in with our bodies or thoughtful togetherness. It could include time of prayer or meditation. We can be, not only with our self, but also with others.

"I do need my quiet time. After we've been out, I like to come back to my room and shut the door and just think about all that I've seen."

"I don't need to talk, but I like it when there are other people about."

Doing

Doing is about action; it focuses out into the world.

"I've always been a doer, and now there's so little I can do." Or, "Let me do that, I can still help!"

But some people are pleased to rest after a life of hard work. "I've worked hard looking after others all my life, now it's my time to be looked after."

Self and Others

This points to the ongoing challenge of meeting the needs of our self, while also meeting the needs of others. Keeping the balance between *Self* and *Others* is a universal and enduring theme in life:

Self

"I love closing the door and just being with God for a while."

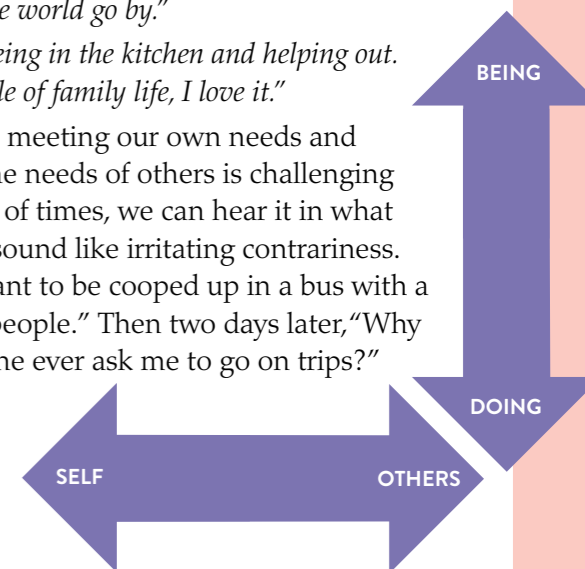
"I meditate for 30 minutes each morning and it sets me up for the day."

Others

"It makes me happy to just sit in a café and watch the world go by."

"I love being in the kitchen and helping out. The bustle of family life, I love it."

Given that meeting our own needs and meeting the needs of others is challenging at the best of times, we can hear it in what often can sound like irritating contrariness. "I don't want to be cooped up in a bus with a lot of old people." Then two days later, "Why does no-one ever ask me to go on trips?"



If you are using this handbook in a group, you might like to move in to pairs to discuss this.

NOTES

Inspiration and Reality of Self and Circumstances

Finally, our lives occur somewhere between inspiration and reality; between our hopes, ideals and visions for the future and the place in which we currently find ourselves. Both are present in conversations about meaningfulness.

Inspiration

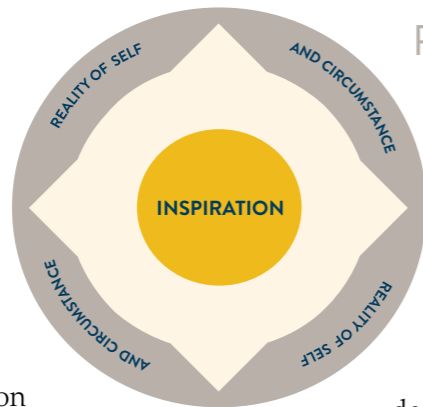
Meaningfulness is experienced when we feel aligned with some form of ideal. This could be from religious or philosophical sources, our relations with other people, strongly held principles, or deep connection with nature.

The experience of ageing, the challenges, the “horror stories” of friends, can create a crisis in faith leaving a person without a fundamental source of inspiration. Yet for others, faith increases and becomes invaluable.

“Faith lifts my spirit and encourages me to have positive attitudes and look forward to everyday life.”

The future may also look bleak, or frightening. Milestones, little things to look forward to can help provide daily inspiration.

“My grandson is having his twenty-first next month, and I have to stay alive till then.”



Reality of Self and Circumstances

We can't experience meaningfulness when we *pretend*, either about ourselves or our circumstances. This includes awareness that we are imperfect and live in an imperfect world. It refers to a desire for authenticity and truth, to be treated as an adult, and finding a way to be with the reality of life.

As we get older the reality of ourselves; our body, mind and abilities, have to be confronted. Pain, fatigue and memory loss can lead to depression and the hopes and dreams of youth can easily be replaced with dread of things “getting worse”.

“Well, the reality is that I've had a damn good life, and now I am stuck in here. I don't mind it too much, but sometimes I just wish I could die and get it over with.”

“Actually, I love the freedom of this time of my life. I can do what I like, when I like and please myself. It feels like a real blessing.”

People can be afraid of spending money, still saving for a rainy day. One son said to his Dad, “Dad, it's pouring down now. Please spend your money and have some fun.” While another child watches in horror as their parents' financial security (and possibly their own inheritance) gets spent on “useless stuff”.

NOTES



As you come to the end of this explanation of the Map of Meaning take a moment to reflect on how it sits with you.

Review your list of statements and the way it intersects with the ideas from the Map. To help yourself remember the dimensions, you might like to write your statements in order on a fresh page matching your phrases to the different quadrants. Some of them belong in more than one place.

- Where can you hear yourself, or those you know, in the comments?
- What difference does it make to you to recognise people's comments as expressions of experiencing meaning/lack of meaning?



If you are using this handbook in a group, you might like to move into pairs to discuss this.



NOTES

Going Deeper with the Map of Meaning

Use this section to further develop your understanding of the Map and the place of meaning in the lives of others.

Key Principles to Understand Meaning

Meaningfulness Comes and Goes

While the hunger for meaning is constant, meaning itself comes and goes. This is because a sense of meaning comes from meeting the needs of all the dimensions of meaning. We can be happy using our skills in ways that are morally aligned (*Integrity with self*) and make a difference (*Service to others*), but if we have no-one to share this with, (*Unity with others*) it can feel a little pointless. What gave us meaning yesterday – being alone in our room reading (*Being*) – can suddenly feel empty (not enough *Doing*). The Map of Meaning gives us a simple way to notice when we have lost a sense of meaning and then work out what we need to do.

“Some days I wake up full of energy, and then it’s easy to chat to the nurse and be cheerful and happy to go out and connect with others. I can push myself to make a bit of an effort. But when I’m tired I find this harder. Then I can wonder why I bother. Since I’ve had the Map of Meaning, I can look at what would make a difference and then make a small effort. But at least I know what to do to make things better.”

Are there times over the past week that meaningfulness suddenly disappeared, when just before life had felt quite meaningful? Note them here.

NOTES

Too Much Focus on One Part

If we focus too much on one dimension of meaningfulness we can also lose meaning. Imbalance can so easily be a result of trying to be “good”. For example, people brought up to care for others can burn out and become exhausted, or resentful. Others who have been taught to please, lose the ability to speak up when it matters.

“My aunt cared for a very difficult husband to the extent that she ‘lost herself’. Then because he had dementia, she felt as though she had lost him as a person and their emotional connection. When he finally did go into care, she lost his physical presence. Finally, he died and she lost the focus of caring for him entirely. After two years she has not recovered any sense of purpose.”

As we age we may have to confront life-long patterns of imbalance. As they say when you catch a plane, “Put on your own mask first.” We need to look after our self, even when it is difficult to do so for many reasons.

Table 1 below can help us to see the effects of too much focus on just one of the dimensions to meaning. As you read through it, notice if you are very strongly focused in just one dimension, or two.

Effects of Imbalance

Sometimes balance can be found in a day, for example, by going for a walk by oneself after a day with lots of people; and sometimes it is found over a life-time. “I’m enjoying doing absolutely nothing.” It is important to note that this enjoyment of space is different to someone who feels lonely and isolated.

Understanding the effects of imbalance on a person can help to support them to access a sense of meaning when they need it most. For example, having got used to living on their own, arriving in a care home can be an overwhelming experience of “Others”.

Yet, when alone in their room, they can suddenly feel lonely; it may be too much “Self”. Knowing this, we make sure we have something for them to settle into until they feel ready to face community life again.

A sense of “balance” is personal. Some people want a lot of time alone, while others want to be in the thick of things. The Map helps us understand our own dimensions of meaningfulness, as well as how to listen to and understand what other people find important.

Table 1

<p> Integrity with Self Too <i>much</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Passivity » Navel gazing, it’s all about ‘me’ » Not putting our insights into practice » Not letting insights drive our creativity and achievement » Ignoring the needs of others <p>Too <i>little</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Being washed away by others » Neglecting our own moral compass » Neglecting our own identity 	<p> Unity with Others Too <i>much</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Abandoning responsibility for developing our unique voice and contribution » Conforming even when it goes against what is important to us » Losing sight of who we are » Pleasing others, and then be resentful <p>Too <i>little</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Losing affinity and connection with others » Permanently rebelling because we can’t fit in » Never getting the support that would allow us to contribute more fully
<p> Expressing Full Potential Too <i>much</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Intense drive for personal success, anguish when we fail, or can no longer be “successful” » Disregard for others » Living in a world of our own and failing to contribute our gifts <p>Too <i>little</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Stifled self-expression » Inability to contribute our unique view » Failure to use and develop our unique talents » Becoming passive or even a victim in situations 	<p> Service to Others Too <i>much</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Martyrdom » Exhaustion and burnout » Or as Oscar Wilde so memorably put it, “She lives for others, you can tell them by their hunted expression.” <p>Too <i>little</i> focus on this can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Inability to give » Not recognising the opportunity to contribute



Think about where you sit in relation to the table above. Is this a life pattern, or the result of your current circumstances?



Which dimensions are more meaningful to you?



There are some significant things to understand about imbalance. One is that when meaning is lost from one dimension, it tends to go from all of them. The loss of a friend is more than just a loss of unity, it can be a loss of a way to serve others. "I just used to sit beside her and hold her hand but I know it made a difference." It can be the destruction of *Expressing full potential*. "I could always make her laugh", and of *Integrity with self*: "She was the only one I could be myself with. I have to be so damn polite with everyone else".

Sudden blindness can mean that a person can't play bridge any longer and with that goes: *Expressing full potential, Unity with others, Service to others* if they collected other people to take them to the game. Each loss can have a much more significant impact on meaning than it may appear.

Understanding this can help us be much more compassionate with ourselves and with others, and also more skilled, when the time is right, to offer something else with a much greater understanding.

It also helps us to understand the shifts in people's behaviour. Someone who seems very happy being alone may suddenly get fed up and say, "I'm sick of being alone."

Why do we never have any group activities?" With the Map it is easier to hold back the reply, "Because you said you never wanted to be shut up in a room doing craft work with a whole lot of old people."

And instead say, "Well there is a tour going out this afternoon and I am sure we can find you a place."

While the different dimensions of meaning can impact each other negatively as we have seen above, they can also strengthen each other. After living alone many people find going to an aged care or retirement home much more enjoyable than they thought they would. "I should have done this years ago. There's so much to do, and I've made such good friends."

There can be opportunities for re-balancing through small, daily acts. If we can see that we have been selfish, can we find ways to help others? If we have always been independent, can we learn to let others have the satisfaction of making a difference to us? If we have been a giver, can we learn to receive? If we have been a doer, can we learn to slow down in order to reflect and listen to others? So much meaning comes from the small daily adjustments we can make when we understand what we need to experience meaningfulness.

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As you read, think about how you might engage the older people you serve in these explorations. Refer to the final section of this handbook for our suggestions.

Each Person finds Meaning in their Own Way

One key finding of Lips-Wiersma and Morris' work with the Map of Meaning is that while the framework is shared, each person finds meaning in their own way. Therefore, while this handbook is to help people understand what contributes to meaningful ageing, it is essential that we understand that it is up to each person to find their own answers. A person who is happy sitting alone in the garden may find this solitude deeply meaningful and be grateful to be left to appreciate it and not be hustled into a group activity by someone who has more extrovert preferences. Older people have had a lifetime of living, finding and losing meaning and being themselves. Let them do it their way, even while suggesting new possibilities for them.

Whatever a person's faith, culture or ethnicity, we find there are fundamental dimensions of meaning that are shared, even as they are culturally influenced. Many cultures have a strong focus on *Others*, while some have a strong focus on *Self*. Some understand *Being*, while others are driven by *Doing*.



Thinking about this principle, become aware of some ways that you find meaning that are different from people in your family, or from your friends, or people who do not share your cultural background. Where can you see that you share sources of meaning, even though the people you share it with are very different?

Often the most powerful way of working with the Map is to use it as an **inner frame of reference**, to shape the way you approach things, which is why we have included so many questions and exercises.

And, because of this, please realise that all the exercises in this handbook were developed by another person. If you can imagine a better way of doing an exercise, or want to invent an entirely new one, please feel free to go ahead. And then let us know. We would love to hear about them!



Stay aware as you go through this handbook; can you already feel yourself inventing new ways to use the Map?



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When we understand the dimensions of what makes life meaningful, we can be more responsible for, and creative in, generating meaning. A lot of us do this unconsciously, recognising that we need to get up and go out, meet up with some people, do something for someone else to balance a morning spent at home reading. But with the Map as a guide we can be more consciously aware of making choices that will give our life meaning, especially when things become more challenging. This helps us to build a strong inner place in which to dwell, a sense of permanence where we can stand firm in relation to the things that challenge and frighten us.

Over the years, we have observed that some people grasp and immediately engage the Map. They may want to put it somewhere where it becomes a daily reminder such as on the wall, as a screen saver, or to have a copy in their diary. One activities officer says, "I believe it can really make a difference if people can see it. I would love to see a copy in each resident's room, so that they can remember to use it, and people who are in the room with them can also remember to use it. We have a copy on the notice board and that keeps it alive for us."

Our experience is that the more you use it for yourself, the more it becomes part of your thinking and the easier it is to draw on it in your work and life.



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Using the Map in the Context of Aged Care

Following are some prompts to assist your thinking about each of the dimensions. Later in this section we have included some practical exercises to further support your planning.

Integrity with Self

Feeling at peace with ourselves comes from self knowledge, continuing to grow as a person, being concerned with who we are becoming.

Find a way to help people to talk about the happy and unhappy experiences in their lives, including current ones. The loss of old friends, or of a new friend just made; separation from family; sudden loss of faculties; fears of what lies ahead. All of these are hard to bear, but part of our ongoing opportunity to learn and grow. Despite the stereotypes of older people, we keep learning and growing up to the last moments of life. The time accessing support services can be part of that.

Some ideas to consider might include:

- » a journaling workshop, or a "picture-a-day" journal with a few words in it;
- » a prayer meeting;
- » a chance to reflect in structured ways on the lessons learned in life;
- » asking people about their values, and how they still live them, in the changing circumstances of their life. Spiritual reminiscence is an important opportunity to engage and reflect.¹⁴

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Unity with Others

There are many ways that people can experience a sense of connection and belonging.

For example, in day centres or residential care, singing together may engage some people. There may be places where people can sit in small groups away from others, or where there are a couple of jigsaws on the go. Some may find *Unity with others* through being able to keep an eye on the world outside. It helps them feel connected to the larger world.

"My mother hated having meals with other residents because her hearing was poor and they did not speak clearly. She also got bored with the repetitive conversations. She much preferred to have her meals in her room. But she loved it that her room overlooked where the nursing and care staff had morning and afternoon tea, and beyond that the road where she could see traffic and people walking. 'I love feeling part of it all,' she said."

Look at ways to keep connection with the world for people. Meaningful Ageing Australia's *Intergenerational Reminiscence*¹⁵ program provides a way to connect older high school students meaningfully with people accessing aged care services.

Have a look at the routines of visitors, if the person has any. Perhaps they can be asked to come on different days, so that each day has a little bit of unity. Spiritual care volunteers may have a role here, and/or spiritual care practitioners.¹⁶

"It's so very important – having contact with my family. It brightens up my whole day. You become another person because you're able to chat about things that interest you. It makes your world come alive again."

"I really like some of the health care workers. We just clicked right from the beginning. I hate drinking water, so one brings me in lemonade and as she pours it says, 'Your bubbles, madam,' and we both laugh. I love the teasing and joking."

Service to Others

In the context of ageing and especially aged care it can come as quite a surprise to start a conversation with

older people about service to others. Ageing does not mean that we are incapable of service to others and in fact it is a vital part of our humanity. There is a direct link between service and having a sense of purpose. This can become challenging if people are experiencing frailty. Refer to Meaningful Ageing Australia's 'Frailty' and Spiritual Care Short Guide¹⁷ for more information.

- » There could be a group that connects with a national knitting project, or fundraisers, a craft course (*Expressing full potential*) can also include a focus on objects that others may love to have.
- » Talking to older people about the sort of ways they like to contribute may lead to many new initiatives.

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- » For people with a faith, it may also be expressed through prayer, either individually or in groups.
- » Engaging with people who are younger to share experiences can be framed as helping others. Refer to Meaningful Ageing Australia's *Intergenerational Reminiscence* for more information.
- » Exploring how the person's legacy is being expressed can fit here.¹⁸

What would happen if you expressed an expectation that each person contributes? A number of residential care homes are now using Montessori or household models in order to ensure that each person is contributing to the daily routines of the house. For example, setting tables and light cleaning duties. *Service to others* is vital to our spirituality and is in tension with the "hotel services" approach of some aged care.

Expressing Full Potential

This can come from many activities such as access to writing classes, painting classes, creativity classes, craft and handy work classes, gardening, games, and sports.

In the case of residential aged care, *Expressing full potential* may mean supporting a person in the home or group to lead sessions for others or helping someone who has had a stroke to nonetheless create objects that satisfy them. It can also mean engaging someone in helping out in the garden, or managing the library, or participating in some way that relates to their interests and is within their capabilities.

For example:

- » Helping people to learn new skills that they *can* do.
- » Use their great listening skills to listen to others.
- » Giving advice on topics they are confident with.
- » Giving them occupations that they can use their skills to accomplish.
- » Collage of a life or moment in time.
- » Working with loved ones to capture stories or using Meaningful Ageing's *Intergenerational Reminiscence* program.
- » Inviting them to share their significant life achievements.¹⁹

Full potential does not need to be full of busyness. Some people are perfectly content spending time on their own and their occupation may be reflecting on their life. Arising from this may be elements of unfinished business that the person can be supported to attend to, such as relationships that need healing. This may require some specialist counselling or spiritual care involvement.

"One carer has a lovely voice, so we make sure that she can always join in whenever we have a sing-song. The residents love it and she loves to get the chance to share her voice in a very relaxed environment. 'I'm far too shy to sing in public, but I love doing it here.'"

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Inspiration

When we talk about *Inspiration* in relation to meaning we are talking about the deep well of spiritual nourishment that in itself makes life meaningful to people, "My whole life is an attempt to do God's will", as well as what inspires them about a particular possibility, "I'm so excited that we can go out to the sea for a morning. I love the sea."

It focuses us on what gives us hope, or something to look forward to.

Inspiration means including everyone:

- » People who have doubts.
- » Are questioning.
- » Have a faith.
- » Have their own unique set of beliefs.
- » Are atheists.



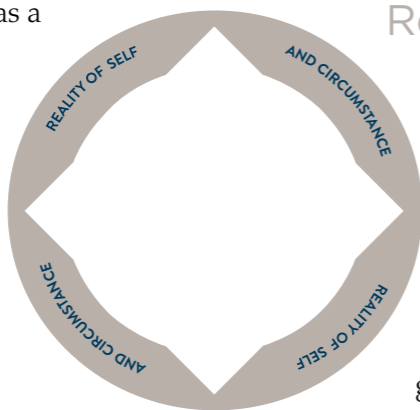
Ask yourself these questions:

- What activities do we have that find and support those personal sources of inner nurture?
- Can there be a place in each room for a quote or picture that the person finds inspirational?
- Can a skilled volunteer ask, "What has brought you the most strength in your life?" Listen to the answer, and share what has brought them inspiration.
- Can there be a place where people put up what inspires them this week?

Meaningful Ageing Australia has a number of resources that help to explore what matters most to people, which gets to the heart of their inspiration. Our ConnecTo Tool²⁰ is one example.

"I pray to God that He will help me ... and He helps me, He never says no ... I only need to wait and see, for God has surely a divine purpose for me and the world."

"I simply want to be the best person I can be. To be a force for good in the world each day. To love people as best I can."



Reality

"For the aged person death is no longer a general, abstract fate: it is a personal event, an event that is near at hand." – Simone de Beauvoir²¹

Reality can be challenging. If we accept getting older, we often lose our former concerns with looking good, being successful, and deepen into more enduring and more satisfying concerns. We can find it easier to laugh at ourselves and our circumstances. This doesn't mean that we avoid the harder emotions, but can act as a leavening agent to balance them.

Dealing with the reality of our ageing is usually a process. Lewis Richmond, in *Ageing as a Spiritual Practice*, provides some useful advice and reflective processes that speak to this.²² For some people, it is a lightning bolt moment, whereas for others it comes gradually. Inviting honest reflection on each person's experience of ageing, their hopes and fears, is an important part of helping people adjust.



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Practical Exercises and Planning Activities

In this section, we provide some practical examples to help you use the Map of Meaning with others. It is organised into the following approaches:

- 4.1 Listening for meaning.
- 4.2 Speaking about what is meaningful.
- 4.3 Collage – using images that speak.
- 4.4 Meaningful activities.



There is an enlarged version of the Map for you to copy in Appendix I or print from our resources portal.

4.1 Listening for Meaning

Listening is one of the biggest gifts we can give, and listening for meaning can be powerful. It helps us keep meaning in sight even when a person has lost it for themselves.

"No-one ever comes to see me."

You can hear in this loss of family, loss of partner, loss of friends, loss of belonging, loss of *Unity with others*. Sometimes nothing can be done. This is the reality for this person. But we can listen with heartfelt compassion.

As you become familiar with the dimensions of meaning in the Map through this handbook, it becomes easier to *hear* people's words as expressions about what is meaningful to them, and where meaning is missing.

As we noted earlier, so often meaning gets talked about in ways that sound like a litany of complaints. Trying to cheer someone up when what they are really talking about is that their life seems meaningless, can be hard work. This is because we are not tuning in to what they are really saying.

Our experience is that when people are deeply listened to they often move to a place where they cheer themselves up.

"An old friend who had considerable pain in her last years would complain about it and end up with 'Old age is a bugger!' Then she laughed and said, 'Oh well.' In that 'Oh well', she accepted the reality of her situation and having had a good moan, went on to talk about other things that were more cheering to all of us."

Being seen for our whole self is a healing experience. Listening from the Map of Meaning can help us to listen with our whole self, to the whole experience of the person who is talking to us. This quality of listening honours the speaker as a person who is a fellow searcher for meaning. As we age, especially in cultures which seem to regard ageing as a failure, and older people as irrelevant or a burden, being witnessed as a person searching for meaning is vital.

NOTES

Exercise 1: Awareness of Meaning



Duration: 10-20 minutes

To practice becoming aware of how much people talk about what is meaningful, and where meaning is missing.

Preparation:

1. Print out a copy of the Map of Meaning from the Meaningful Ageing resources portal, or copy from the back of this book, and if you are not sure about them, copy the explanation of the dimensions from page 5 in this handbook.
2. Read the quote below and notice what this person is telling you about what is meaningful to them.
3. Note down where these things fit on the Map of Meaning.

“My life would be miserable if there were no senior citizens’ centres. I like to come to the centre and help serve coffee or tea. I can practice remembering people’s names and talk to them when they are in line. I’m also good at remembering what is going on in their lives, and that helps us all to feel like part of a community. When I know that someone is going through a hard time, I just say a little prayer for them as well. It isn’t easy getting older.”

Reflect on what you notice/discuss with your partner.

Did you notice that:

- “I like to help....” is an expression of **Service to others**.
- “I can practice remembering” is **Expressing full potential**? As is “I am good at remembering.”
- “Helps us all feel part of a community” is **Unity with others**.
- “Say a little prayer for them” is **Service to others**, and also **Inspiration**.
- “It isn’t easy getting older” is a comment on the **Reality** of ageing.



If you are in a workshop, get into pairs and take turns in reading it out to each other.



Exercise 2: Review of an Encounter



Duration: 15-30 minutes

Think about a recent situation with an older person. Using the Map, write down some key words, phrases and actions that you can remember. What can you now see they were saying about meaning?

Example:

A woman working with a man who has dementia reports how she used it to listen to him. “I did not use the Map of Meaning directly, but used it to identify where there might be gaps. He was happy with his relationships and his sense of unity with others, he could still do things he liked doing and was happy with his beliefs and who he was. But the area where he was unhappy was in Service to others. ‘I don’t know how I can be helpful to anyone now and that upsets me.’ So I suggested that he write about his experience of dementia and that I would make sure this got to doctors and carers dealing

with dementia. So he did, and I did and now he tells people how he is contributing to helping people understand the needs of people with dementia.”



If you are doing these exercises with another person, you can share your stories.

Over the next weeks we recommend that you practice listening for meaning in all the conversations you have. And notice what difference this makes to you and to the person to whom you are listening.

Report back to colleagues as part of handover or team meetings.



4.2 Speaking about Meaning

It can be challenging to talk about meaning when we aren't used to it.

- » How do we raise conversations about meaning?
- » How do we do this in ways that are appropriate and allow for expressions of faith, a range of religions, agnostics or atheists?



Exercise 3: Bringing Meaning In



Duration: 30-60 minutes

To practice explicitly bringing meaning into the conversation.

With another person – a friend, partner, colleague, a parent, child, client – put a copy of the Map in a place (on the table, the couch or the wall) where you can both see it.

Take your time, go through each of the elements of the Map and with the other person decide on a time frame, such as the past week/month/year. Then have a conversation using this starter questions:

- Thinking about *Integrity with self*, what have been some of your most rewarding experiences in the past?
- Thinking about *Unity with others*, what have been some of your most rewarding experiences in the past?

- Thinking about *Service to others*, what have been some of your most rewarding experiences in the past?
- Thinking about *Expressing full potential*, what have been some of your most rewarding experiences in the past?
- What has been part of your *Reality* during this period?
- What has supported you, been your *Inspiration* during this period?

Notice, and discuss what it is like to have this conversation. Think about how you could use these questions in conversation with people, or how you might like to go through the whole exercise with someone.



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4.3 Collage: Images that Speak

Many people are hesitant to speak about meaning, as if it is too abstract and difficult to speak about. One of the most effective ways to translate conversations about meaning into something relevant is to create images of what matters to each person and speak about these. For many people this is fun to do and once people start they can be hard to stop! See below for a template to support this process. Depending on the physical abilities of your group, it could be over one and half hours, or a series of shorter sessions covering one dimension each time.



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Exercise 4: Using Collage to Explore Meaning



Duration: 60-90 minutes

This is a great exercise to do for yourself, with older people, with a friend, or with family members. See Appendix II for an example collage.

Preparation Checklist

- **Images:** We suggest you begin by cutting out photos from a range of magazines: fashion, house and garden, fishing, cars, sports, travel. Ensure that they are culturally appropriate for your group, and inclusive too. The key thing is to have a wide range of images available. We recommend cutting the images out first. Or, ask others to cut them out for you – such as the older people who will ultimately use them. You can also have glitter, stickers, feathers, leaves, dried flowers, and other visually rich things if you can find them, want to collect them, have the budget and/or they are appropriate for your group.
- **Background paper:** You need a largeish sheet of paper to act as the background for the collage. This can be the size of a flip chart if people can manage it and want it, down to four A4 sheets taped together, or just a single A4 sheet. The paper can be white or coloured. If you have the materials, and the time, you can let people paint a background first.
- **Glue sticks**
- **Scissors**
- **Pencils and coloured pens:** One pencil per person and plenty of coloured pens – suggested 30 per 10 people.
- **A visible copy of the Map of Meaning:** Make sure that there is a clear version of the Map of Meaning visible. This can be on a whiteboard, or a screen, or as a one page handout that they can refer to (see Appendix I).
- **A prepared collage as an example:** Ideally a collage of your own, or someone else's that you can share and talk briefly about. See Appendix II for an example.

Instructions

If the group has not previously seen the Map, begin by asking people the question:

What has been meaningful for you in the last week?

Talk them through the different elements of the Map. Then, go through these instructions:

Using the Map of Meaning as a reference, create your own version of the Map. This is one I/a friend/ previous participant made (shared with permission). This is why these images are important.

Continued

Explain the example collage you have prepared.

Now, it's your turn. If you want to, draw on your paper the key areas of the Map. Then find images that represent what makes your life meaningful. Glue them into the right places, where they make sense to you. This is your Map of Meaning.

Allow time for people to work on their collage. People may talk and often they get very involved with what they are doing. If they seem stuck, it helps to spend some time with them talking and looking through images until they find what works for them. Sometimes they prefer to make their own images.

Debrief in pairs



People finish at very different times. It works well to pair them up as they complete their map. Find a way and place where they can talk to each other and share their Maps. Remind people that they only need to share what they feel comfortable sharing. You can suggest that they ask questions about the other person's map, but be aware that this is very privileged and to be sensitive.

People take turns and share in pairs, then swap them to another partner as others finish.

Mostly people find the images help them to put words to what really matters to them. People love sharing their own map, and listening to and looking at other people's maps. We recommend leaving plenty of time for this to happen. This gives time for the people who are doing very detailed maps to get theirs finished. Make sure everyone gets a chance to share.

Group debrief



When everyone has finished their map, depending on the size of the group, you can invite general sharing about their map, or just talk about the experience of creating it.



4.4 Meaningful Activities

When you understand the Map of Meaning you can use all the dimensions to develop a meaningful activity for individuals and groups, and/or to review your existing program. The type of activity you can do will be impacted by the reality of both your circumstances, and the people you are supporting.

Developing Meaningful Activities



Preparation:

Find out what a person or group is good at doing, and what they like doing.

Find some examples of inspiring projects which people with these skills are involved in, locally and globally. There are some fabulous stories on the internet. Perhaps you could play one or two and use this as the basis for discussion. Included here are search terms for four of our favourites. Video links can be found in the reference section. The links were correct at the time of writing:

ICU grandpa

- The man who sings You are My Sunshine while cuddling premature babies (Search: ICU Grandpa)
- Unley Legend Noreen Bray: singer, librarian and Scrabble buff (Search: Unley Legend Noreen Bray)
- The man who keeps making furniture (Search: ABC The Old Man and the Wood)
- The woman taking water aerobics classes at 90 (Search: BBC Aqua Aerobics Teacher)

Once you have inspired yourself or others with these, you can focus in one of three ways. The following pages give examples of these three options:

- » Option 1: Developing an individual's meaningful activity with existing skills;
- » Option 2: Identifying an individual's 'invisible' skills; or
- » Option 3: Using the questions with a group.



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Option 1: Identifying Existing and Invisible Skills to Develop a Meaningful Activity

Throughout life, all people acquire a wide range of skills that can help create meaning for them. Some are obvious, visible skills based on observable activities and experience; others are invisible, requiring consideration of how a skill can be applied to a new situation.

Existing skills

A former journalist, Reg Barlow, has brought all his previous, professional experience to the aged care setting he now finds himself in. Despite a range of health challenges, he is committed to producing the quarterly newsletter for the centre where he lives. He has also been following, and reporting on, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety hearings.²³

The Men's Shed movement helps men (and women if they are interested) in community projects including building playgrounds and toys, repairing old bikes, or making garden equipment. At the same time they offer a chance to instruct others in skills you have, while learning new skills from other members.²⁴

Invisible skills

In the story of the Travelling Hairdressers, a recently widowed woman who accompanied a hairdresser in regional and remote Australia discovers that what is most needed by women in the outback is another woman to talk to. She discovers the value of her ability to listen.

(Search ABC Outback Hairdressers)

Working through the Map of Meaning can also help people identify skills that they have not thought of as useful to others.



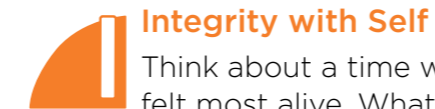
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One-on-one conversation



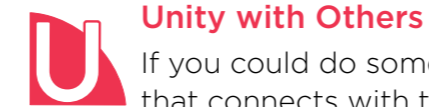
Duration: 30-60 minutes

This exercise can be done to identify both existing and invisible skills. It can be used to discover both types at the same time, or it can be repeated by focusing on one skill, and then the other. Have a copy of the Map of Meaning with you and use this as a framework for the following questions:



Integrity with Self

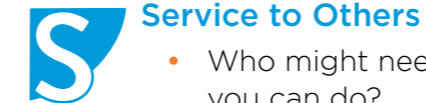
Think about a time when you felt most alive. What were you doing? How does this relate to your present circumstance?



Unity with Others

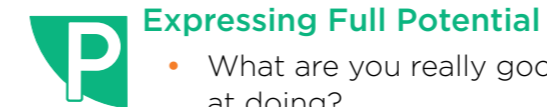
If you could do something that connects with this feeling:

- Is there a group you might like to do this with?
- Who could support you in this?



Service to Others

- Who might need what you can do?
- Who would you most like to help?



Expressing Full Potential

- What are you really good at doing?
- What do you most enjoy doing?
- Are there things you would like to learn to do?



Reality

- What limitations do we need to manage?

Inspiration

- What inspires you when thinking about doing these things?

NOTES

Option 2: Using the questions in a group

As with Option 1, you might find and show some examples of groups doing interesting and inspiring things to get people's creativity going. Below is a search term to find a video about Men's Sheds.

Men's Sheds



Men's Sheds: (Search: Defining Mateship Mens Shed)

You might have your own favourite stories, perhaps from within the group.



Duration: 30-60 minutes

Have a copy of the Map of Meaning with you and use this as a framework for the questions. We suggest starting with Service to others, as it often leads to Inspiration and the other dimensions.

S Service to Others

- What needs are there in our community that we want to respond to?
- What most upsets us, and what could we do to improve the situation?

I Integrity with Self

- How important to us is it to make this difference in our community?

U Unity with Others

- Is there any group already involved in this?
- Could we learn with them, work with them?
- Who knows someone who could help us?

P Expressing Full Potential

- What skills do we have that would help us make a difference to this situation?
- Who can do what?
- What would we need to learn to do?



Reality

- What limitations do we need to manage?

Inspiration

- Most community groups start because someone felt strongly about something and decided to take action about it, and involved others in it.

Reviewing Planned Activities and Routines

Now that you are familiar with the Map of Meaning, you can use it to review the nature of the programs of which you are a part to ensure that what you offer is purposeful and connects with each person's need for meaning. Following are some examples of how engagement with the Map can have a positive impact.

Example 1: Crafts Reborn



Bev, the activities officer at a day centre, continually offered very simple handicrafts activities

which did not interest some of the more creative participants. By going through the Map's questions she realised that she herself was bored by her work. She thought about this and made some changes.

U Unity with Others

Bev started by asking the group what could they do as a community. They came up with the idea of making a calendar for the coming year. Suddenly there was a point to the work they were doing. Together they were making something that they could give to family members and friends.

P Expressing Full Potential

Each person took responsibility for one month. Unexpectedly, they had to think about what they could do, given the reality of stiff fingers and poor sight. They were helped by the activities officer, Bev, who was now really involved, inviting in a local artist to teach some new techniques.

I Integrity with Self

In their part of the calendar each person wrote or talked about what this month had meant to them. The picture in some way illustrated this.

S Service to Others

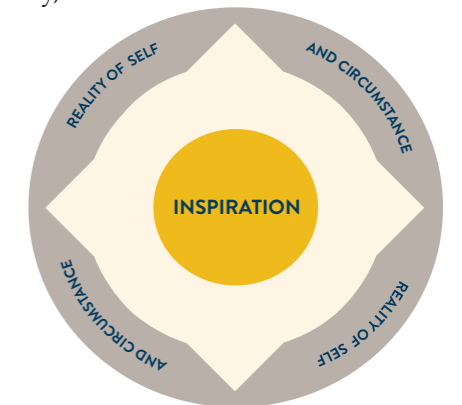
The whole project moved from being a way to fill in time, to being a gift to give others.

Inspiration

The project inspired everyone working and volunteering at the centre. They were pleased to be able to check in with how it was progressing, offering advice about how to get it printed, using it as a fundraiser, and being delighted to talk with others about what happened in their organisation.

Reality

All of this was done acknowledging and working with the realities of people's capability, involvement and budget constraints.



NOTES

Example 2: Meal Times Transformed



Meal times in residential care homes can be challenging as some people can't hear, repeat the same stories, can't speak clearly, or perhaps there is a lot of noise around such as trolleys and trays. Below is an example of using the Map to review what was happening at meal times.

I Integrity with Self

People were asked to talk about what they had done in their lives that they were most proud of, and why.

U Unity with Others

They asked a family member to volunteer to sit at the table once a week. Their job was to help people interact with each other.

P Expressing Full Potential

They asked people at the table about the highlights of their working lives, skills they had developed, what they were proud of achieving. The conversation needed a bit of support, but it still led to a much richer exchange than usual.

S Service to Others

People were asked what they felt they had contributed during their lives. One woman said, "Well, I look back at three generations and not a bad person amongst them all." This led into a discussion of how so much of what we do can appear insignificant, but adds to the well-being of our society and country. Another man said, "I built the town. I had a brick making factory and most of the town is built with my bricks."



Why Not Try?

See **Me. Know Me. Conversation Starters** or the **Conversation Cards** which provide prompts to get the conversation going. Access from www.seemeknowme.org.au



NOTES

Example 3: Taking Action on the News



At the daily session of reading the news, the activities officer realised that people could write a letter in response when there was news that people felt strongly about.



As a group they were supported to write to the council:

- » complimenting them on new flower beds; and
- » requesting a pedestrian crossing at a tricky corner.

They also wrote to the relevant government department:

- » to suggest improvements to aged care legislation.

This helped people feel that they were still contributing.

NOTES

Review your Current Activities Program Template



Have a look at your current activities program and ask yourself the questions below. It can be useful to do this with a colleague, or your team. Be honest - you will find things to celebrate and things to change.



How does this activity plan:

1. Support individuals in expressing their full potential?

2. Support people creating unity with others, their way?

3. Help people make a contribution to others?

4. Acknowledge each person's concern with who they are becoming as a result of getting older, and of needing aged care?

5. Nourish inspiration for each person?

6. Help people adjust to their changing reality in ways that honour their individual search for meaning?

Conclusion

By engaging with this Handbook, you have been:

- » Getting to know, understand and use the Map of Meaning personally
- » Considered how the Map of Meaning can be used for staff development and training
- » Considered how the Map of Meaning can be used with older people

It is always useful to engage in some feedback and evaluation, and we would suggest that you offer the opportunity to staff, trainers and the older people you are supporting. It doesn't have to be complicated, but should seek to know some of the following:

- » What were the emerging ideas that were valuable?
 - What worked well?
 - What didn't work?

- » What were the experiences and reactions of the staff in response to:
 - Those activities aimed at them
 - Those activities they could use with older people
- » What were the experiences and reactions of older people to the activities and the Map of Meaning as a framework for thinking about their lives?
- » What activities would people like to repeat?
- » What suggestions do they have to improve on the activities?

Make sure you have a look at our resources portal for the many other materials we have to help you with high quality spiritual care. Do get in touch if you need further assistance.

We are always interested in your feedback. Please send your experiences and comments to us: admin@meaningfulage.org.au.



NOTES

Appendix I: The Map of Meaning



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Appendix II: Example of a Collage



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