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# SRV MATTERS 13

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## Personalism

### Personalism as an addition or alternative to paid formal services

This edition speaks to what ordinary citizens might do ourselves, in unpaid roles to assist people. It introduces the concept of 'Personalism'.

Personalism most often exists when everyday-people provide the helping. It highlights people-helping-people, showing an obligation to each other.

First of all, this approach recognises that services and service systems have limits. For example, it is not uncommon to notice a mismatch between what people need and what is on offer in the service system, such as

- I was hungry and you said 'get food assistance'.
- I was lonely and you said 'listen to podcasts'.
- I was homeless and you said 'there is a shelter down the street', or similar.

Further, personalism is a good alternative when there is too much bureaucratisation in services, when decision makers are increasingly a long way up the hierarchy from the people, and when the workplace encourages 'professional distance' in relationships.

A major assumption of Wolfensberger's is to reject the idea that governments should do

everything. For example, in Sweden the belief is that whatever is needed should be provided by a government funded service. This excludes what informal unpaid helpers such as family and neighbours might provide.

There is a clarification to be made. Personalism sits outside of SRV Theory. However, in using Personalism and taking personal social responsibility in one's approach, one can use SRV in one's strategies of support.

Wolfensberger and Thomas identified those parts of Personalism relevant to human services (including unpaid informal helping), grouping them into four principles:

1. The dignity of each person as a human is more important than policies and system rules.

While this is a statement drawing on values, SRV themes engage our values through a deep understanding of the impacts of devaluation. It follows then that all helping actions should increase rather than diminish someone's dignity.

2. Address issues at the lowest social and technical level. This means using the principle of 'Subsidiarity': think 'small before big', for example, small services before big services.




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### SRV Ideas: Personal Responses

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# SRV MATTERS 13

## Personalism - cont.

Think local before state. Think informal unpaid responses before formal paid services. This leads to being clear about the value of using small and informal responses like help from families or neighbours.

3. Human do better through interdependence. Individuals can flourish if human beings are understood to be social by nature, that is, that freely given relationships with others are vital.

4. Taking Personal Social Responsibility is a moral responsibility taken by an individual but which benefits others in society – this point is expanded below.

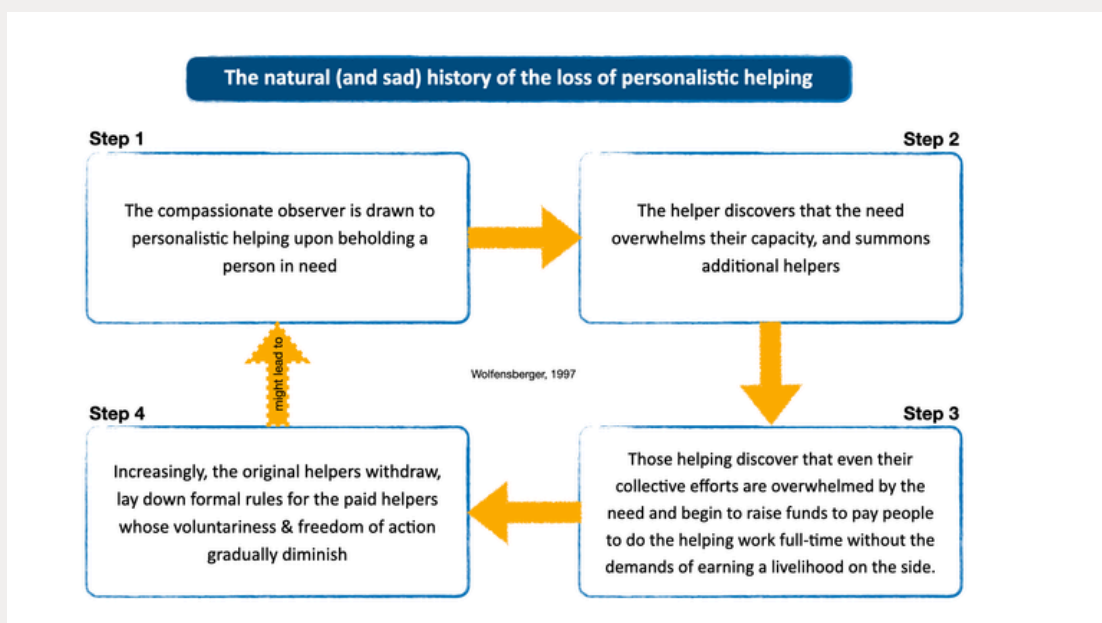
Note that there are challenges in using Personalism as it requires each of us to take personal social responsibility, and not see the government or paid services as the ‘only’ answer.

‘Taking personal social responsibility’ is another example of a values statement. It is critical though for trying to work in personalistic ways. Personalism speaks to an obligation to do what is right; in this case, that which gives dignity and access to other aspects of the good things in life in the lives of people with a

devalued status.

How might we have seen outpourings of personalistic responses? It is seen in Individuals assisting people completely informally, as friends – no services, no funding. It is seen in help-giving by family members and by neighbours. It is seen in help-giving by work colleagues and team mates. It is also seen in Social Advocacies – advocacy responses are either by individuals as in the previous point, or, if funded, they are programs that stand alongside the vulnerable individual even when funding withdrawal is threatened. These include Citizen Advocacy, Individual Advocacy, Self-Advocacy, and Systems Advocacy. An unpaid voluntary Circles of Support is an example of a funded service inviting the participation of an ordinary community member to step into the life of a voluntary individual.

The next three editions will focus on Individual Advocacy, Citizen Advocacy, and how the SRV theme of ‘Interpersonal Identification’ might influence Board members.



## SRV Ideas: Personal Responses