The Least Dangerous Assumption |eLearning (Transcript)

Hi everyone! Welcome here. My name is Natalie Giesbrecht and I work for Abilities Manitoba- thanks for tuning in to our e-learning video! Today we are going to explore the concept of the Least Dangerous Assumption, which was introduced to us by Anne Donellan in the 1980's and apply this concept to the supports we provide to adults with lived experiences of disability.

To begin, I want to provide the definition of what an assumption is; an assumption is an idea or a notion, that is accepted, without evidence. Often, we make assumptions based off information we have been given, a life experience in the past, or a general belief we may hold about someone, or something. There is a phenomenon known as the circle of belief; this circle of belief is based off assumptions that we as service providers may make about people, which can guide our supports and the opportunities we provide someone, or not provide. Let's use a real concrete example to break down the cycle- we believe a person cannot cook. So, no one supports them to cook. The person may fail when given the chance or the opportunity to cook and therefore, that assumption is reinforced. Unfortunately, people with lived experiences don't always get the support needed to break this cycle for themselves and ultimately, we are led to

believe that people cannot do something, and therefore are never supported to learn or to improve on that skill. Without proof or evidence, an assumption is only a thought or belief with no foundation. So, what are our options? Well, we need to work off of the belief or assumption that people CAN; we need to interrupt the cycle which puts people into a position of limited skills and capabilities. Anne stated that there are two general assumptions to consider, and we need to choose the least dangerous assumption which would put people into a position being capable to build skills, being capable to grow, and being capable to learn from mistakes. And so what do I mean by 'least dangerous' between the 2 general assumptions? Let me explain.

Let's explore the concept of a Growth Mindset versus a Fixed Mindset and apply the notion of the least dangerous assumption. If we do not have information about people's skills or capabilities we may inadvertently do for people. We may assume that people cannot do something and have no expectations of the person, out of the belief that people cannot learn, or grow or whatever it is they are working towards is so far out of reach. This is a fixed mindset- people are bound to their current skill set with no room for improvement. So, people never get the chance to try something new or increase their knowledge and we do not invest any time with the person in that area, nor do we offer resources. While

supports are likely caring, and friendly we do not challenge people or engage them and so people live a pretty stable life, a safe life. Now let's turn the tables-we assume someone can learn. When we work within a growth mindset, we believe people can try, we believe people can grow from mistakes or failures. There is dignity afforded to people when they take risks even in the failed attempts. We do not do for people, but rather with people. We set high expectations for people, we invest that time and energy and assist them to access resources; we experiment using the method of trial and error. Supports are still friendly and caring, but with the addition of placing value on the person, challenging the person to reach their goals and increase their skill sets. We support the person through the mistakes, or failures in order for the person to grow and learn.

Now which mindset would work towards an increased quality of life for people? Would any harm be done by having a growth mindset? None. That person has now been provided opportunity for rich experiences, diversity in their lives; people would have an enhanced self-image, confidence. Sometimes it stings when we don't reach a goal, or the mark we were hoping to get- or maybe we try something out and we realize "wow, that is not for me" which in turn shapes the person we are. It enables people to sharpen their strengths and acknowledge

their weaknesses. Therefore, the least dangerous assumption is seen as a pathway by which people are valued and respected – people are given the opportunity to learn what more is possible. And so would any harm be done by having a fixed mindset? That would be a strong yes. In choosing the latter, the belief that people are fixed in their skill sets will only deter them from experiencing their potential.

The journey of learning is lifelong, and unfortunately people with lived experience of disability often don't get the chance to embark on that journey. How many of you remember in school, often adults in your life would ask you "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The expectation is placed on you as a child that more is possible for you, and YOU get to choose that path. Unfortunately, we don't often hear people ask children or young adults with a disability that same question. With a growth mindset and making the assumption that people can, that will interrupt that circle of belief that so many people are stuck in; the circle of belief then becomes "people CAN, so people are supported to TRY, and people may fail... yet, the assumption that people can, is what is reinforced."

So I encourage you to challenge your current mindset and work towards a growth mindset- set high expectations for people. Push for change of our current

systemic barriers that people with lived experiences encounter daily when exploring the path of lifelong learning, secondary education, or even enhancing their daily skills and abilities. Believe that people can and want to learn and you will ultimately be a part of seeing first hand someone becoming the best version of themselves.

And that concludes our e-learning video on the concept of the least dangerous assumption. Thank you for joining and see you next time!