

Transcript for This is Your Life Podcast

LR: Hello. My name is Dr. Lisa Razzano. I'm here with Dr. Judith Cook, Director of the University of Illinois at Chicago Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Today, we'll be talking about the self-guided workbook called, *This is Your Life! Creating Your Self-Directed Life Plan*, which is available from the UIC Solutions Suite.

LR: Thanks for joining me today, Judith. Could you start by telling me a little bit about the workbook?

JC: I'll be happy to. *This is Your Life!* is designed to help people explore what they'd like to do with their lives and how to get started on building a better future. Some typical goals people work on include managing a mental health or medical condition, getting a job, going back to school, or making a friend. As they progress through the workbook, users learn about how to assess their needs, as well as resources and strengths they can put towards achieving a life goal. They figure out what steps they need to take to prepare for a goal, and identify all the tasks they'll need to accomplish to reach the goal. The workbook presents a step-by-step, user-friendly planning process that's designed to be low-stress and non-intimidating.

LR: Why would people in mental health recovery want to make a life plan?

JC: Many people in recovery don't feel in control of their lives. They may even feel like they have become their illness or diagnosis, and that other people don't see the unique and interesting things about them. The workbook is designed to help people start exploring how there really is more to life than their illness. They are encouraged to see that they can set a goal and reach it, even if they run into roadblocks.

LR: That sounds like something we all need in our lives. How does the guide work?

JC: It works by breaking the change process down into small, manageable steps. Workbook users are encouraged to take their time, and even to take a break if they start to feel overwhelmed. First, users figure out where they are in the change process in their lives in general. Next, they get ready to make and use their life plan. They gather their circle of support, which is a group of people they feel close to and can rely on for support and encouragement. Then, they think about what kind of changes they want to make and choose a specific life goal. Next, they make plans for the goal they have chosen, after which they decide things they can do to help them realize their goal. After that, they think about how to maintain the changes they've made and look to the future of leading a fulfilling life.

JC: A unique aspect of the workbook is its planning pages that allow users to record the tasks that need to be accomplished to reach a goal, and any obstacles to that goal. They also list the resources they'll need in order to make the goal a reality, a budget for any expenses that will be incurred, and target dates for the tasks they'll need to complete.

LR: Can you tell us more about what kinds of people might want to use the workbook?

JC: The workbook is for people in recovery from a mental illness or substance use disorder or for those who have found it hard to do certain things in life because of behavioral health issues. Other people have found the workbook to be useful, including people managing other disabilities and transition-aged youth in the year before graduation from high school or college.

LR: Since it's a self-guided workbook, do most people use it on their own?

JC: Yes, that's most common. But it also has been used successfully in groups at community mental health centers, residential and inpatient facilities, high schools, and peer-led programs. It can be used anywhere that a person or a group wants to work on setting feasible life goals, based on their desire to take charge of their life and readiness for change.

LR: Would you share with our listeners one of your favorite stories about how the workbook has been used?

JC: I'd be happy to. A peer advocate contacted us to tell us about how she used it with a woman who was transitioning from decades of residence in a nursing home to living in the community. The woman had concerns about what it would be like living on her own and what she would do with her spare time. Together, they used the workbook to help her set goals around building a circle of support for her move. Next, they identified how people in her circle could help her participate in social and leisure time activities that were inexpensive and fun. Once she pictured her strengths and resources, and knew she didn't have to go it alone, community living felt achievable and she began looking forward to it.

LR: That's a wonderful example of promoting recovery. Thank you, Judith. And thanks to all of you in our audience for listening today. We are pleased to offer *This is Your Life!* as part of our Solutions Suite to promote wellness and self-direction for people in recovery from mental health conditions.