The background features a dark blue trapezoidal shape on the left side, which tapers towards the right. The rest of the background is filled with various shades of green, ranging from light lime green to dark forest green, arranged in overlapping, angular, geometric patterns that create a sense of depth and movement.

# Self Determination and Positive Psychology: A Model for Guidance of Practice for Support

# What is Positive Psychology?

# History of psychology

- ▶ According to Martin Seligman – Past president of APA:
- ▶ “...since WWII, psychology has become largely about healing. It concentrates on repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning. Such almost exclusive attention to pathology neglects the flourishing individual and the thriving community. True, our emphasis on assessing and healing damage has been important and had important victories. ...But these victories have come at considerable cost. When we became solely a healing profession, we forgot our larger mission: that of making the lives of all people better.”

# Contrast With Standard Psychology

- ▶ Approach in psychology has, since WW2, been focused on problems.
- ▶ Disease model that strives to heal damage
- ▶ Assumption that 'normal' is the goalpost.
- ▶ Strives to understand psychological functions (emotion, cognition) and cure deficits or excesses

# Standard vs Positive Psychology

- ▶ What treatments are best to live a normal life?
- ▶ How can we treat mental illness?

Vs

- ▶ What is the good life?
- ▶ What can we do to optimize well being?
- ▶ How can we flourish?

# Nick Walker – self-advocate

- ▶ If you reject the fundamental premises of the pathology paradigm, and accept the premises of the neurodiversity paradigm, then it turns out that you don't have a disorder at all.
- ▶ And it turns out that maybe you function exactly as you ought to function, and that you just live in a society that isn't sufficiently enlightened to effectively integrate people like you. And that maybe the troubles in your life have not been the result of any inherent wrongness in you. And that maybe everything you have heard about autism is open to question, and that your true potential is unknown and is yours to explore. And that maybe you are, in fact, a thing of beauty" (*Loud hands: autistic people, speaking*. (2012). Washington, DC: Autistic Press. p.237).

## Positive vs Normal

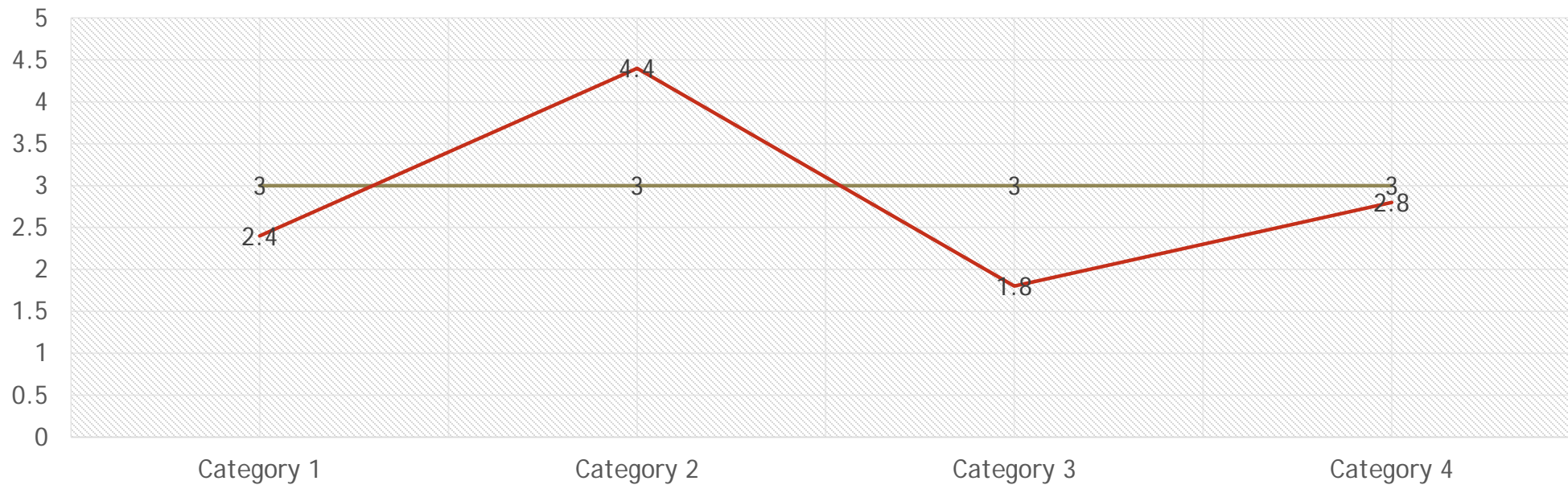
Traditionally, a label of disability or 'abnormal', meant a devaluing of the quality of the experience of the person with a disability. It was assumed that there was something 'wrong'.

With positive psychology, the goal is to come as close as possible to well being and flourishing, rather than getting closer to "normal".

There is nothing inherent to the concept of well being that precludes a wide variety of experiences, including some of those currently thought of as abnormal.

# How We think about the Psyche - The Pathology Paradigm

Model of Psychological Pathology





# An Alternative View of the Psyche – the Neurodiversity Paradigm

Model of Psychological Health



# PERMA - Elements of Well-Being and Flourishing (Seligman's Theory)

- ▶ Positive Emotions (happiness, satisfaction, gratitude)
- ▶ Engagement (flow - losing yourself in the activity)
- ▶ Positive Relationships
- ▶ Meaning (serving a cause bigger than ourselves)
- ▶ Accomplishment - (competency)
  
- ▶ No one element defines well-being, but each contributes to it. Each element can be defined independently of the others and is pursued for its own sake (Seligman, M., Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being, 2011, Atria, New York).

# Examples of PERMA

- ▶ P – meditating, laughing with friends, watching a funny sitcom, laying in the sun staring at a piece of string, holding hands with mom on the couch, enjoying your slice of pizza
- ▶ E – drawing, swimming, spinning, pretend play, painting, writing, doing math or logic, building Lego, doing puzzles, sculpting, rock climbing, listening to jazz
- ▶ R – husband, wife, partner, friend, children, parents, family, neighbours, school and work friends, club friends (shared interests)
- ▶ M – working for peace, to elect a candidate, work at the foodbank, help a friend at school, visit your sick aunt, pet the dog, bring your sister some soup
- ▶ A – write a book, climb a mountain, finish a puzzle, finish your homework, cook a meal, hold a job, run a marathon, fix a flat tire, build a table, line up all your toys

# How can we use PERMA as a guide?

- ▶ The extent to which we embrace these PERMA elements is the extent to which our lives will flourish
- ▶ This will change some of the questions to ask when we are considering how to act in the best interests of someone.
- ▶ 'Well being' is contextualized within the person whereas 'normal' and 'appropriate' are contextualized within culture.
- ▶ With PERMA as a guide, we must start with the person and self-determination.

# Questions to ask in supported decision making

- ▶ How will this decision effect the person in terms of:
  - ▶ Positive emotional states - (increase/decrease)
  - ▶ Level of engagement in life - Is this something that will be engaging for the person?
  - ▶ Relationships? - is this something that will increase the number or depth of relationships with others?
  - ▶ Will this be seen as meaningful for the person?
  - ▶ Is this leading towards or interfering with a sense of accomplishment?

# Example: Social Domain

## Appropriateness vs Depth

- ▶ Where does the value in social relationships come from?
- ▶ Skills development Vs. relationship development
- ▶ Traditional focus has been on task analysis of social interaction rather than focus on perspective taking and understanding and sharing experience

## Example: Vocational Domain

- ▶ Will there be a sense of accomplishment/achievement?
- ▶ Will there be a sense of meaning?
- ▶ Will it facilitate positive relationships?
- ▶ Will the work be engaging for the person?

- ▶ Self determination cannot happen if we support only those decisions which appear to us to be beneficial for the person based on our cultural context of normal or “good” .
- ▶ If we begin with PERMA, we begin with the person rather than the culture to determine what would be beneficial, i.e., pleasurable, engaging, relationship developing, meaningful, and rewarding (accomplishment).



Pulling it together - Michelle Browning - Research shows 4 values that define a good support relationship: Equality, Knowledge, Respect, Trust

- ▶ Using Perma would assist in meeting these values -
- ▶ Equal - We start with the person rather than with norms - there is no measuring against norms - we are all equal
- ▶ Knowledge - knowing the person is required as a basis for decision making
- ▶ Respect - there is no room for judgements of what is pleasurable, what is engaging, etc.
- ▶ Trust - trust is required to adopt this approach in the first place over an approach that strives to help the person fit society's molds.