



Inclusion of People with Disabilities

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Inclusion of people with disabilities in the mainstream of society is the right thing to do – morally, socially and legally. Inclusion is about supporting people with disabilities in realizing the opportunities, rights and freedoms other citizens of Louisiana and the United States enjoy every day. The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council supports the rights of all people, including those with the most severe challenges, to live in their own homes and to learn, work, and play in their own communities.

Segregation harms people by devaluing them and taking away their basic right to freedom. Inclusion is not an issue of people losing the ability to choose, it is an issue of securing and supporting the equality of opportunity. All people are created equal, are inherently valuable and have basic human rights. Separate is not equal. In ruling fifty-seven years ago that segregation is unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*,¹ the Supreme Court determined that segregation has a detrimental effect upon the minority group. The Congress of the United States recognized this, and in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) stated,

“historically, society has tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities, and, despite some improvements, such forms of discrimination against individuals with disabilities continue to be a serious and pervasive social problem; individuals with disabilities... have been... subjected to a history of purposeful unequal treatment, and relegated to a position of political powerlessness in our society, based on characteristics that are beyond the control of such individuals and resulting from stereotypic assumptions not truly indicative of the individual ability of such individuals to participate in, and contribute to, society;” and, “the continuing existence of unfair and unnecessary discrimination and prejudice denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis and to pursue those opportunities for which our free society is justifiably famous.” “...the Nation's proper goals regarding individuals with disabilities are to assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for such individuals.”²

People with disabilities face stigma and segregation. Stigmatization generalizes misconceptions and labels people with disabilities as incapable and different - not fully “us.” Segregation multiplies and spreads the stigmatizing impact of disability. Exclusion of people with disabilities from informal networks of association and mentorship that are so critical to educational and career advancement impairs the opportunities of people with developmental disabilities to develop their talents. If segregation and stigmatization are the problems, then inclusion is the solution.³

By inclusion, we mean the joint participation on terms of equality of people with and without disabilities in all settings: educational, employment, and social. When people focus on achieving common goals with peers, they have reasons to get to know people



as individuals instead of relying on stereotypes.⁴ Inclusion is not only a solution it is also part of the democratic ideal. To enjoy democratic legitimacy, in which people from different walks of life exchange their views about the problems they face, their interests, values, conflicts, hopes and fears, requires inclusiveness.

Segregation deprives individuals of the benefits and freedoms afforded by participating in community life. Inclusion affords countless reciprocal and loving relationships and offers Louisiana communities the gifts and talents of thousands of our citizens. People with the most challenging needs can and do live successfully in their homes and participate in the life of the community throughout Louisiana and all over the country with appropriate, individualized supports. The Council supports the full inclusion of people with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disability, in all facets of community life - where they live, learn, work, and play - so they are free to experience life and pursue happiness and meaningful relationships.

References:

¹ Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

² Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C.A. § 12101 et seq.

³ Anderson, E.S. (2004). Racial Integration as a Compelling Interest. Constitutional Commentary, Vol. 21:13.

⁴ Reskin, B.F. (2000). The Proximate Causes of Employment Discrimination, 29 Contemporary Sociology, 319. 321-322.