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**“Inclusion is not a place; instead it is a lifestyle in which a person is an active participant in his or her own life, rather than a passive observer and the recipient of decisions someone else had made.”**

(Renzaglia, A., Karvonen, M., Dragow, E. & Stoxen, C.C., 2003)

The concept of inclusion is based on the philosophy that everyone belongs and has an important role in the community, and the belief that diversity is an asset which enables us to learn from one another (Renzaglia et al., 2003). Inclusion is a lifelong goal founded on the idea of normalization and the principles of equality, human rights, and quality of life. It implies accessibility to places, equipment, ideas, and people, with the ultimate goal of creating environments that are open to all. Inclusion promotes quality of life by a) empowering individuals to have control over their own lives; b) providing individuals with the opportunity to select lives of their choosing; and c) helping individuals speak up and advocate on their own behalf (Renzaglia et al., 2003).

In this *Rehabilitation Review* the concept of inclusion will be explored within the context of quality of life domains, looking specifically at the areas of relationships, employment, education, and community involvement. Indicators of inclusion within these quality of life domains can be used as a guide to determine whether an individual is truly included (or truly feels included) in his or her community.

### Relationships

A friend is a person with whom you have a significant, mutual relationship—someone you want to spend time and experiences with. When looking at friendships between peers with and without disabilities, Green, Schleien, Mactavish & Benepe (1995) identified several indicators that can positively impact the building of these relationships. These include:

- the extent to which the person with a disability is a part of the larger circle of friendship of the person without a disability;
- whether individuals report “having fun” during these interactions;
- whether or not persons are able to share aspects of their daily life;
  - being able to experience and share major life events together;
  - the level of satisfaction the individuals report with their friendship;
  - whether they view each other as equal partners in the relationship;
  - sharing common interests, activities, and values;
  - recognizing and acknowledging the gifts and benefits the other brings to the relationship;
  - having feelings of security, trust, and respect for the other;
  - open verbal communication, as well as the ability to communicate non-verbally; and
  - receiving and giving high levels of support and help to the other. It is important that both individuals feel they are benefiting from the relationship.

### Key Points

- Community inclusion is linked with the concept of quality of life, since being included often influences one’s quality of life.
- Indicators of inclusion within quality of life domains can be used as a guide in determining whether an individual is truly included (or truly feels included) in his or her community.
- Key indicators of inclusion are:
  - reciprocity in relationships;
  - feeling of being valued in the workplace;
  - participating in similar community events as people without disabilities; and
  - receiving individualized support and assistance in age-appropriate post-secondary environments.

### Employment

Wehman (2003) found that when looking at workplace inclusion, levels of job satisfaction and job success are linked with the work environment and relationships with co-workers. Following from this, he states that “friendships play an integral role in the quality of one’s working life as evidenced by reports that work performance, job retention, and job satisfaction are related to an employee’s participation in social relationships with coworkers” (p. 132). Therefore, it should be expected that measures of job satisfaction, job performance, job retention, and job success can be used as indicators of inclusion, defined by social relationships with co-workers, as these are concepts that are associated with one another.

Additional indicators of inclusion in the workplace include the following:

- ensuring that all employees are equipped with the skills to be successful (Renzaglia et al., 2003);
- individuals have well-defined duties and responsibilities (Pearson et al., 2002);
- receiving a similar wage as their colleagues without disabilities;
- reported feelings of job satisfaction, contentment, and safety; and
- active involvement, which is identified by employees engaging in social activities outside of the workplace (Wehman, 2003).

### Community involvement

Community involvement includes access to, and participation in, a variety of activities that one enjoys, including sports, religious or cultural events, volunteering, and various other activities. Persons with developmental disabilities should be allowed to decide how they spend their time. It is important to note that physical accessibility and physical integration alone do not ensure that individuals with disabilities will feel welcome and accommodated.

Schleien, Ray & Green (1997) suggest some objective indicators of community involvement. These include:

- how persons with disabilities are viewed by their peers without disabilities;
- how much of the environment persons with disabilities share with their peers without disabilities; and
- how often persons with and without disabilities participate in similar activities.

Additionally, Baker (2000) investigated the extent to which community involvement in leisure activities by persons with disabilities was affected by having a staff member present. Results showed that users in the staff control group (i.e., those who used facilities while accompanied by staff) accessed community facilities less frequently, accessed a smaller range of facilities, and were less likely to access facilities without staff. This suggests that the type of

contact individuals with disabilities have with those with whom they spend their leisure time is an indicator of community involvement.

### Education

In order to provide an inclusive setting for education, institutions providing educational opportunities for adults should meet a number of requirements that are flexible in responding to individual student needs. Some of these practices and indicators of inclusion are:

- a mission statement that reflects the values and beliefs of inclusion, which also represent the views of the community involved;
- physical access and access to resources such as a computer lab, library or the classroom are all important for persons with developmental disabilities to remain on track with their peers (Pitt & Curtin, 2004);
- extracurricular activities and a social life;
- a collaborative learning environment with the participation of teachers, school support staff, parents, and most importantly the person with a disability;
- the provision of a learning support assistant by the college/university (Mirfin-Veitch, 2003);
- an age-appropriate learning environment to equip the individuals with skills needed for the outside world (Pitt & Caplan, 2004);
- person-centred planning focusing on the needs of the individual (Mirfin-Veitch, 2003); and
- transition planning which includes a focus on continuing education (Mirfin-Veitch, 2003).

### Conclusion

Quality of life domains provide a context for identifying individual indicators of community inclusion. Whether or not an individual truly feels included in his or her community is dependent on their participation beyond physically being included in an activity, school, work or relationship. There must be a reciprocity that makes it possible for the individual to be involved in the community in a meaningful way.

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