



Families
Taking Action
for Inclusion

Inclusion
international |



Global Family Summit 2025

Outcome Report

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What is the Family Summit?

The Family Summit is an event hosted by Inclusion International's Families Taking Action for Inclusion programme.

It is a space for family members of people with intellectual disabilities - parents, siblings, people with intellectual disabilities who are parents themselves, and other people with family ties to people with intellectual disabilities come together to reflect on their experience as a family member, and how to advance the family movement.

On September 14, 2025, more than 90 family members from over 35 countries gathered in Sharjah, UAE, in advance of Inclusion International's 18th World Congress.

The 2025 Family Summit was member-led, co-hosted by Inclusion International's Families Discussion Group and Inclusion International's Siblings Working Group.

The Global Family Summit brought together participants to talk about the successes and challenges families are having in making their vision for inclusion a reality, the need for family leadership to nurture and sustain a vibrant family movement and the ways we can collaborate to strengthen and connect our networks around the world.

The Global Family Summit provided an opportunity to connect with other family members, exchange knowledge, and build solidarity. It provided insights into the current experiences of families and the strength of our networks.

What were the Family Summit's key messages?

The Global Family Summit highlighted how, in many ways, our movement has grown and evolved over time.

- How we understand "family" has evolved beyond parents to include siblings, extended family, and chosen family. It includes families where the parent is a person with intellectual disability. We know that having an inclusive intergenerational movement makes us stronger.
- How families connect is changing. Technology has created new ways to connect. Yet while opportunities to connect may be more accessible, the richness and values of personal connections cannot be replaced.
- What families connect on is changing. Families are wanting to make connections based on the age and life stage of our family member with an intellectual disability.
- When we connect has changed. Where our roots are in families coming together for peer support and solidarity, increasingly we see connection to the network as a result of crises when families need advice and support. We need to be intentional in seeking out and supporting young families who are beginning their inclusion journey.

As our movement evolves, we must make sure we are organising in ways that meet the moment.

What were the Family Summit's key messages?

Vision to Action

The power of families is at the heart of our movement. As families, our shared commitment to inclusion unites us. Our vision for inclusion, rooted in human rights and inclusive communities, drives us.

Together we seek to build communities where inclusion and a typical life is the expectation - not the exception. As families, our role is not just to provide "care" but to nurture and support our family members to thrive. The Summit explored how we turn our vision into action across the key issues of inclusive education, living in community, employment, good support, and how to strengthen and expand our support networks.

While we celebrate the stories and examples of global progress on building inclusive lives, families continue to face very real challenges:

- Persistent exclusion leaves families and communities with low expectations of what is possible.
- Families are often funnelled towards segregated options because that is where the only resources or supports are.
- In some countries there simply are no supports available.
- Conflicts and humanitarian crises compound challenges families are experiencing

What were the Family Summit's key messages?

These challenges impact the hopes and dreams of families. Families need support to shape their vision for inclusion based on what is possible – not what is available. Families reflected that they only know what they see and experience. Families need access to stories and examples of inclusion to see what can be possible.

"Vision doesn't just matter for our advocacy, it matters for how we as family members connect with each other. We as family members face very real challenges - families, and especially new families, need support to reflect on their fears and get support from their peers with a vision to understand that they can make inclusion a reality in their family's life."

Fauzia Mwita, Parent and Family Leader from Zanzibar

Families shared that we lead by example. Our decisions and choices help shape the pathways and possibilities for others. Families have an integral and necessary role as enablers and facilitators.

The discussion highlighted that one of the biggest fears families have is that their family member will be excluded, have no one to support them, or be taken advantage of. These fears can drive families to seek options that appear to provide safety and protection but are exclusionary. Families need support to confront these fears and solutions that address their concerns.

What were the Family Summit's key messages?

Across the key issues, we heard common messages about what is needed to help turn vision into action:

- There are inconsistent definitions of what inclusion is and the practices to support it.
- There is a need for opportunities to tap into the wealth of strategies, practices and successes that have happened around the world.
- Inclusion takes community:
 - Inclusion is an investment in community building: We know that values + belonging = inclusive communities.
 - Inclusion isn't an add-on, or extra. It is a basic human right.
 - Inclusion isn't built by services and resources, it's nurtured and sustained through connections to community.
- Inclusion takes partners:
 - We need to develop partners and allies for inclusion
 - We need for partners and platforms to amplify our voices.

Strengthening Family Networks

Throughout our history, our movement has been built by bringing families together. A noted strength at this Summit was the inclusion of and focus on the role of siblings. Siblings are engaged and eager to be part of our united family movement.

What were the Family Summit's key messages?

Siblings and parents each have a unique voice that gives us the opportunity to work together to find a balance that unites us as a cohesive family movement working for inclusion. There is an identified need to intentionally strengthen the engagement of siblings as leaders within families and within our movement.

The way families are connecting around the world is changing and evolving and so must our ways of connecting. Many families want to connect on thematic issues or based on age and stage of their loved one. Our networks are using digital platforms, social media, WhatsApp groups and other emerging technologies to connect with families. Moving forward, we need diverse methods and opportunities for families to connect.

Family support takes many forms. Participants talked about the importance of social groups who come together for solidarity, to exchange knowledge and hear success stories. Many groups use training to raise awareness about disability rights and inclusion, build capacity, and develop advocacy skills.

Through connections with our networks, we are supporting families to be agents of change in their family member's life and in their communities. These advocacy efforts make change not just for their family member but lasting change for others - and then leaders in our movement emerge from these efforts, bringing the voice of families to local, national and global advocacy levels.

What were the Family Summit's key messages?

The Summit identified that nurturing family leadership requires a commitment and an organized approach. Family leadership needs to be a priority and approached across our efforts with intentionality.

The strength of our network is directly connected to the strength of families. In order to maintain a vibrant movement for inclusion we need a strong network. A network that is actively identifying and nurturing future leaders; with a steadfast vision for inclusion that reflects the diversity of our movement.

Lastly, the Global Family Summit reflected that we know our movement cannot do it alone. Our network needs partners and allies. Inclusion happens in our communities. We need our community allies to be part of building this. This includes working in partnership with self-advocates. The self-advocacy movement has been growing, and self-advocates and families now share the stage and co-lead on advocacy about inclusion. Recognising that families and self-advocates prioritise the same issues and can support each other and have a stronger voice by working in tandem is a hallmark of the inclusion network's approach to advocacy, and effective collaboration between families and self-advocates is essential to continue moving our shared vision forward.

“Inclusion International is a united network of self-advocates and families working together for inclusion. A strong self-advocacy voice and family voice complement and reinforce each other.”

Sue Swenson, Parent and President of Inclusion International

Action Points for Strengthening Family Leadership

The Global Family Summit identified the following as key areas and potential actions to support families and strengthen family leadership:

1 Strengthen Families through Connection

To work together as a network to strengthen family leadership, we must:

- Build on the power of families. Leadership emerges through investments in families, and requires a family leadership plan.
- Connect our global knowledge and expertise to influence change.
- Strengthen the understanding of what good support is (for families and for people with intellectual disabilities).
- Provide opportunities for families to connect - through digital platforms, social media, online communities, peer support groups, conferences (virtual, in-person, hybrid), and other platforms.
- Focus on policy that supports families, including by influencing the global care and support agenda, supporting members to understand and use social protection measures, and sharing examples of policies that help support families.

These actions occur jointly at the global level through our global network, and at the local and national level through our members.

Action Points for Strengthening Family Leadership

2 Build Partners for Inclusion

To build partnerships for inclusion, we must:

- Look for allyship with other equality and justice seeking groups, like the women's movement, the LGBTQ+ community, racialized communities, and other groups.
- Connect with typical community groups to build allies for inclusion. This includes groups like Rotary, mainstream education advocates, recreation clubs, and others.
- Build partnerships to promote inclusion and inclusive practices, including outside of the civil society space - for example, partnering with international/trans-national corporations to both illustrate and advance inclusive employment.

3 Deliver Progressive Rights-Based Training

We need to ensure communities have access to a variety of training.

This training should be on topics ranging from our thematic areas to awareness raising to human rights and advocacy to strategies for inclusion. This training should be for a variety of audiences - families, professionals, and allies; and in multiple formats (workshops, seminars, webinars, in-service, etc.).

Action Points for Strengthening Family Leadership

4 Sibling Engagement

To move forward as a multi-generational family movement, we need to:

- Ensure our family support efforts should focus on the family as a whole, not just parents.
- Provide support to facilitate discussions between families and siblings where differences arise.
 - Families expressed concerns that they didn't want to place the responsibility of support on siblings whereas siblings expressed embracing the role.
 - Siblings expressed concerns that parents are more risk adverse and that as siblings their strategies and ideas may be more age appropriate and aligned with what other youth of similar ages are doing.
 - Guidance and models of typical family life so that siblings have space and opportunities to develop typical sibling relationships.
- Provide opportunities for siblings to connect with each other.

Action Points for Strengthening Family Leadership

5 Share Technical Knowledge

We need to ensure that family leaders have the tools and the knowledge they need, and can learn from families who have successfully delivered on inclusion in their communities.

Some examples of how the family movement can do this include:

- Creating a resource hub where knowledge can be gathered, curated and made easily accessible.
- Developing, share and promote what we mean by inclusion and examples of inclusive practices in each key area.
- Sharing successful and enabling strategies for inclusion in each key area and stories/examples of inclusion in action.
- Sharing information on the practices that have not been effective to prevent repeating efforts we have learned do not lead to inclusive outcomes.



Looking Ahead

Inclusion cannot be built one issue or one family at a time. Families that are well supported have a steadfast vision; inclusion in school establishes expectations of inclusion after school – in employment and our communities; a valued life in community perpetuates belonging; connections to a network fosters family leadership. Inclusive outcomes in one area reinforces inclusive outcomes in all areas.

We recognise the vast differences from region-to region, country-to-country and acknowledge that many families have limited opportunities to put their vision for inclusion into action. This serves to strengthen our resolve that as a movement for inclusion, change isn't just for our family member but for all people with intellectual disabilities and their families around the world.

We need to share the rich knowledge in our networks. We all stand on the shoulders of the families that came before us and we need to ensure that we are building on the history of change, knowledge, and experience, so that no one feels they are starting from scratch.

Our stories and our experiences help foster hope for families. Examples of inclusive communities and inclusive practices provide pathways to inclusion. Our connections to each other and the movement for inclusion make us strong.

