

Helping Families to Build an Inclusive Vision

This resource gives family groups the key ingredients to come together around a shared vision of inclusion.

An **inclusive vision for the future** is one where all people with an intellectual disability are fully included in their community at all stages of their life - from learning alongside students without disabilities in an inclusive school, to paid work in an inclusive workplace, to being included with neighbours and friends living in the community, and everything in between.

What big ideas can help form the basis of a family group's vision for the future?

Inclusion

Inclusion is the big idea that should guide all of the conversations about the future of people with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion should be the goal for families at different stages throughout the lives of their family members - from learning alongside students without disabilities in an inclusive school to working in an inclusive workplace to being included with neighbours and friends living in the community and everything in between.

Equality

A vision for inclusion is rooted in the idea of equality - including equal rights, equal access, and equity. In an inclusive world, all individuals must have the same possibilities as others in their community.

Diversity

Diversity is a key value that guides the vision and the advocacy of families - in an inclusive community, everyone's diversity is celebrated and society recognizes and appreciates the different contributions of every unique person. An inclusive world is one where everyone respects and appreciates all members of the community regardless of their particular characteristics, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, among others.

Belonging

An inclusive vision is rooted in the idea that everyone, including people with intellectual disabilities, belong in their family, in inclusive schools, in their community, in workplaces, and everywhere else without conditions. People with an intellectual disability have an equal right to be fully included in all spaces and feel a sense of belonging along with everyone else.

Breaking down barriers

Historically, support for people with disabilities has focused on improving the ability of the individual and addressing “limitations.” Rooted in a medical understanding of disability, often there may be a focus on “curing” an impairment through medical interventions or therapies instead of providing forms of support that will enable a person to be included in their community. An inclusive vision recognizes that individual people with disabilities do not need to be fixed - our systems and our communities do - and that with the right forms of support, everyone can be fully included.

The goal of breaking down barriers that prevent people with intellectual disabilities from being included and making our systems work for everyone and include everyone is a key principle of an inclusive vision. Some examples of these barriers might be:

- **Attitudinal barriers** - such as negative attitudes or stereotypes about disability that affects the way people with disabilities are treated
- **Cultural barriers** - such as cultural beliefs about disability that lead to stigma, like the belief that disability is caused by a curse
- **Environmental barriers** - such as buildings without ramps or other barriers in the physical environment that prevent people from fully participating
- **Political and legal barriers** - such as laws and rules that prevent people with disabilities from accessing their rights

Your turn: Helping Families to Build an Inclusive Vision

What other big ideas can help form the basis of a family group’s vision for the future?

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Some of the strategies that Inclusion International members use to build an inclusive vision include:

Using peer support to help build a vision

It can be difficult to imagine what inclusion looks like in practice, or for young families to imagine what an inclusive future might look like for their child or sibling. Families of older children or adults with intellectual disabilities can share their own experiences and examples of how they came to have a vision for inclusion and how they support and push for their family members to be fully included in their own lives. Hearing firsthand how other people with intellectual disabilities in their community are thriving and being included will help new families see the possibilities.

Hearing from self-advocates directly

Where family groups are connected with self-advocacy groups, hearing people with intellectual disabilities themselves speak about the future they want and about the impact of inclusion on their lives can be a powerful tool for helping families to build a vision of inclusion for their own family members.

Using the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to think about how it applies in our own lives

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in countries where it has been ratified is a standard that governments must meet and affirms the right to inclusion for people with disabilities, but it can also be used as a practical tool for families. With a facilitator, families can look through some of the articles that apply most clearly to their own lives - for example, Article 24 on inclusive education or Article 12 on legal capacity - and think through what they are doing to help their family members have their rights fulfilled.

For example, a discussion around Article 12 on legal capacity gives families a chance to think about if and how they are supporting their family members to make independent decisions about their lives, and how they could be giving better decision-making support to help them find their voice and make choices.

Challenging stereotypes and encouraging reflection

Supporting families to do some self-reflection can help families understand their expectations and think about how that impacts the potential of their family member with a disability. Facilitators can help family members to think through:

- Does the language I use promote negative myths and stereotypes about people with intellectual disabilities? See our **inclusive language guide**.
- What can I do to dismantle these stereotypes?
- Does my family member have a leading role in their own life?
- How am I supporting my family member(s) to fully participate in our community?
- Do I support my family member(s) to use their voice and be listened to?

Families and family groups should also recognize that unlearning and eliminating myths and stereotypes that have been learned from generation to generation about people with disabilities will take time! Thinking through these questions can help families think through if their actions match the vision for inclusion they are building, and generate some personal commitments to working towards inclusion.

Pushing back on conflicting ideas of what family groups should do

Historically, groups of families have often created what we now see as segregated spaces in response to the complete lack of services and other support for people with intellectual disabilities in the community at the time. As service providers denied their family members access to support, families began to create segregated places where their family members would be welcomed and not discriminated against based on their disability.

The family movement has since moved away from this approach and pushes for full access to inclusive services, but many new families prior to building their vision for inclusion still come to family groups seeking segregated services and spaces for their family members with an intellectual disability, not being aware of other better options. Family groups can push back on these ideas and reinforce the idea that the best option is always inclusive spaces in the community, being present in all of the same places where their peers are.

Once family groups have thought through how the principles of inclusion apply in their own lives and they have a collective vision for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, families can begin to think through how to harness this vision for their advocacy work to spread the message of inclusion.

To achieve full inclusion, it is a constant process and a responsibility shared by all. Everyone must commit to achieve the vision of inclusion, to ending negative attitudes and prejudices, and to valuing diversity - families must lead the way towards this vision.

Your turn: Helping Families to Build an Inclusive Vision

What other strategies can you think of that would work in your organisation?

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