

# Helping Families Build a Vision for Inclusive Education

This resource shares key points that can help new families build their vision of inclusive education. It provides strategies that organisations and family groups can use to help unite family members in a community around the vision of inclusive education.

## What big ideas about inclusive education can help form the basis of a family group's vision?

### Inclusion

Every child has a right to access inclusive education. This idea should be the basis of all conversations about the future of people with intellectual disabilities - from learning alongside students without disabilities in an inclusive school to accessing the same extra-curricular activities.

Inclusive education is good for learners with disabilities and is also a strategy to strengthen the education system. Research evidence is clear that when teachers learn to teach students who learn in different ways and promote cooperation between students, everyone benefits.

### Equality

Full inclusion happens only when every learner - no matter their ability, gender, socio-economic, cultural or religious background or migration status - sees their equal rights and equal access recognised. In an inclusive education system, all individuals must have the same possibilities as others in their community and no one is left out of school.

### Diversity

Diversity is a key value that guides the vision and the advocacy of families for inclusive education. In an inclusive school/education system, everyone's diversity is celebrated and the different contributions of every unique person are recognised.

An inclusive school is one where everyone respects and appreciates all learners regardless of their particular characteristics, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, among others.

The Global Education Monitoring Report on Inclusion in Education says that "Education systems, which celebrate diversity and believe every person adds value, has potential and should be treated with dignity, enable all to learn not only the basics but the broader range of skills the world needs to build sustainable societies".

## Belonging

An inclusive school believes that all learners - including learners with intellectual disabilities - should be accepted and valued. Inclusive schools and inclusive education systems ensure that learners with intellectual disabilities are fully included and feel a strong sense of belonging along with everyone else.

## Breaking down barriers

The capacities of children and youth should not be considered a barrier to inclusive education, since education is a right regardless of what a person can or cannot do without support. Barriers are not due to an individual's characteristics or abilities, but are because the environment prevents people with impairments from participating and developing fully.

The main barriers to inclusion in education for learners with intellectual disabilities are linked to access, participation, permanence and progress<sup>19</sup>. By identifying each of these barriers, families can work together to break them down. Since many families have gone or are still going through this process, families can learn from each other and exchange on their strategies.

The goal for families is to break down barriers that prevent people with intellectual disabilities from being included in education. Making our education systems inclusive of everyone is a key principle.

For families who are thinking about inclusive education for the first time, these big ideas can be difficult to wrap their heads around - families hear messages from doctors, from teachers, from other professionals, and also from others in their community that might be telling them their child or sibling with an intellectual disability should attend segregated schools and not be included in the general schools with all children, or giving them low expectations for their family member's futures and learning achievements.

### Your turn: Helping Families to Build an Inclusive Vision

**What other big ideas matter for building a vision for inclusive education?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

<sup>19</sup>Tool: "Common barriers to inclusive education"

## Strategies for Inclusive Education Vision Building

Family organisations have a role to play in combating these negative stereotypes and ideas that families are exposed to, and helping them to see how inclusive education will be possible for their family members.

**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 inclusive education looks like in practice. For young families it can also be difficult to imagine what the impact on their child/family member with intellectual disability's life will be when they are deciding between an inclusive education school (where all children - with and without disabilities - learn together) or a segregated school or class (also called 'special school/class'). 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 inclusive education and how they supported and pushed for their family members to be fully included at school. Hearing first hand how other people with intellectual disabilities in their community are thriving and being included in education 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 inclusive education and about the impact of it on their lives can be a powerful tool for helping families to build a vision of inclusive education.

### 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 Article 24 on inclusive education and General Comment 4 and think through what they are doing to help their family members be fully included in education.

A discussion around Article 24 on inclusive education gives families a chance to think about if and how the school they have chosen for their child is really supporting their family member with disability to learn and progress and to be included in society.

### Challenging stereotypes

Families are often told by doctors, teachers and "special education experts" that their child or family member with intellectual disabilities should go to a specialised educational centre instead of the general mainstream school because they think they need a special education.

Supporting families to think about the importance of inclusive and quality education can help families understand the real potential of their child or family member with intellectual disabilities as well as the benefits that inclusion can have on their lives. When families embrace this vision of inclusive education, they can help the school and the entire community to become more inclusive.