

The inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities into all aspects of the community is a basic right of the individual and the responsibility of the driving forces behind service delivery. Increasingly, service providers are implementing programs and initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion. However, this raises the question of whether or not these programs are successful in achieving social inclusion.

Achievement of this vision by service providers is evaluated in part by business planning and related performance measurement processes such as certification standards [i.e., Creating Excellence Together (CET)]. However, each of these information sources provides only a particular glimpse into how the work of service providers facilitates inclusive living for individuals with developmental disabilities.

In the Fall of 2005, the Alberta Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program (PDD) and The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRRI) established a working group to begin the groundwork for developing an inclusion profile measurement tool and accompanying process(es) that focus specifically on the achievement of inclusion.

The first task for the working group was to review the academic literature on community inclusion and community capacity and examine the key aspects of the PDD vision statement in order to develop a working definition of community inclusion specific to the project. For this purpose, the concept of inclusion is defined as:

Inclusion is when a person has social interactions and relationships with a variety of people other than paid staff, and these are viewed as mutually beneficial and meaningful.

In a review of the academic literature on community inclusion and community capacity and by looking at the individual, organizational, and societal levels, such as relationships, community involvement, education, employment, housing, social resources, laws, legislation, and policies and the way they function to promote social inclusion, the working group identified nine domains of community life. Within these nine domains, a set of inclusion indicators were developed and delineated by a set of category parameters.

Nine Domains of Community Inclusion

Arts and Leisure: Hobby or wellness activities pursued by an individual out of personal interest or enjoyment. These activities do not lead to accreditation, formal degree, diploma, or other formally accepted certification.

Education (formal and informal): Formal education is defined as education received from a traditional postsecondary tertiary institution such as a university or a college, while informal education refers to education received from community organizations or other institutions in the community other than universities and colleges.

Employment (self-employment): Performing a task, producing a product or providing a service for remuneration. Included in the employment domain is the subdomain of self-employment, which includes those who identify themselves as such for tax purposes.

Housing: Incorporates the physical structure in terms of location, affordability, and accessibility, as well as the social structure, which refers to whether or not the individual dwells alone, and the social relationship with neighbours.

Transportation: Public transit service that is both physically accessible and affordable by individuals on a fixed income. Accessible transportation entails providing a service that is easy to access and use, and which users are comfortable with.

Relationships: Involves interactions (both face-to-face and non-face-to-face) with others who are not family members, paid staff, or others with developmental disabilities.

Volunteerism: Refers to unpaid tasks in which the participant takes part in that results in some benefit to the community.

Key Points

- The vision of inclusive lives is described by PDD as people with developmental disabilities: (1) living and participating in communities as full citizens; (2) having control and choice in the activities of their lives; and (3) participating with other citizens in ordinary life activities of working, socializing, and conducting daily affairs.
- In order to be socially included in community life, people need to first be physically present in the same environments as other citizens.
- Nine domains of community inclusion have been identified. These include: arts and leisure, education (formal and informal), employment (self-employment), housing, transportation, relationships, and volunteerism.

Indicators of Inclusion

The set of indicators of inclusion created were separated into two main categories delineated by a set of parameters that run across all domains.

Category 1: Physical and/or policy structures that support inclusion

In order to be socially included in community life, people need to first be physically present in the same environments as other citizens. Physical presence in and of itself is not inclusion, but supports the concept of inclusion by ensuring such things as having the opportunity to be in the same locations as others, being responsive to any physical accommodations that may be needed, and having policy that speaks to valuing diversity. This category does not directly measure inclusion; rather it measures the opportunity for inclusion. Parameters within this category include:

Accessibility: This parameter refers to whether the facility is physically accessible. This includes the building itself (e.g., wheelchair accessibility, ramps, etc.) as well as rooms and facilities inside the building (e.g., library, workstations, desks, etc.). Accessibility also includes the consideration of affordability.

Physical Presence: This parameter refers to whether the individual participates in the same environment as other individuals in a similar capacity, or if the individual is physically segregated from others performing similar tasks.

Equality: This parameter refers to whether the individual is given similar opportunities to participate in an activity. It looks at standards for participation as well as rewards received after participation, and considers whether individuals with disabilities are accepted based on similar standards as other participants, and if their work is similarly rewarded.

Policy: This parameter refers to any organizational level standards that encourage inclusion. It encompasses looking at whether the organization has a policy that supports the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, together with whether the organization has programming, curriculum, or procedures that can accommodate individuals with developmental disabilities.

To view a version of the indicators of inclusion profile tool, please refer to the Research section of the VRI website, www.vvri.org.

References

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Category 2: Primary indicators that relate to the social dimension of inclusive life

Social inclusion looks closely at the social relationships which individuals with developmental disabilities establish in each of the nine domains. These indicators provide a sense of how accepted individuals are by their peers, and whether a relationship is merely collegial or a real friendship. Parameters within this category include:

Mutuality: This parameter refers to whether individuals with disabilities have relationships which are mutual with others, reciprocal, and which exist outside of the domain in question.

Expectations: This parameter speaks to inclusion in activities by emphasizing that participation is meaningful, with expectations placed on the individual's level of performance.

The working group determined that common indicators of inclusion should appear across each of the category parameters. For instance, accessibility indicators would appear in each of the domains and often only wording changes are required to specifically focus an accessibility indicator towards a specific domain (e.g., Individual can access the entire facility, including desks, stations, and equipment; Individual has barrier-free housing). The one exception to this is within the Social Inclusion category. A new domain was included that spoke specifically to relationships that people would have with friends independent of any relationships they may have in other domains. This domain was included to recognize the valuable contribution that friendships make towards inclusive living. For the purpose of this inclusion profile tool, the relationship domain does not include family members, paid staff, or other individuals with developmental disabilities. It was thought that in order to get a sense of inclusion in the community, it was necessary to separate relationships of obligation (family members and paid staff) and relationships with similar individuals (individuals with developmental disabilities) from relationships that are entered into because of a mutual desire with others who are not similar.

Conclusion

Developing indicators to measure inclusion was the first phase in determining the degree to which individuals with developmental disabilities are included in Alberta. The second phase involves developing parameters for conducting a pilot study. The information acquired from this phase then can be applied to a third phase: implementation.

Publisher's note:

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