

Executive Summary

Fostering Social Inclusion & Community Engagement

Background

The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) wants the people they support to make friends. DDS also wants people to be active members in their communities. DDS wants to understand how to help people make and keep friends.



What is Social Inclusion? Social Inclusion means being involved *and* feeling like you belong in your community.

Methods

DDS asked the Center of Developmental Disabilities Evaluation and Research (CDDER) to bring people together to learn how people take part in their communities. The ten groups discussed ways to get people more connected to their friends and neighbors. The groups included self advocates, families, direct support professionals, provider and DDS staff. Groups were held across the state.

Themes

The most common things people said were:

- It is important to have friends
- People need to be safe when in their community
- Rules sometimes get in the way of people going out to do things in their community
- It is important to value all friendships, both people with and without disabilities
- Sometime people do not have the enough money to do what they would like to do
- People need more ways to get where they want to go, such as by bus, train or car
- Support staff are important in making friends, they arrange for inclusion, assist with inclusion, and provide communication and encouragement to the people they support.



How are people included in the community?

People are included through:

- Work and volunteering
- Matching friends programs, directly matching a person with an intellectual or developmental disability to a person without a disability
- Community and recreational programs, such as sports or clubs
- Training for staff, families and self advocates on how to help people connect more with other people in their community
- Matching staff with similar interests to the people they support
- Community based flexible supports (allows people with an intellectual or developmental disability to choose their own supports)
- Connecting people with others who like the same activities
- Providers who believe social inclusion is important



Some people get connected to their community through brothers and sisters and other family members. Other people join groups where everyone likes the same activity and meet every week or month. Sometimes parents or friends help a person learn how to make and keep new friends. Others use technology like Facebook to meet and talk with friends online.

Recommendations

Recommendations are presented to DDS for review and are suggestions only.



Focus on Person Centered Policies & Guidelines

Person centered planning should happen for everyone. The plan should include exploring a person's interests. Making friends and keeping friends should be part of a person's ISP if appropriate. Staffing should be flexible and open to different tasks.

Invest in Staff Development & Support Creativity with Support Resource

Staff are more than caregivers. Train staff on the community where they work and on how to make friends. Look at ways to include community groups in building friendships and new ways to pay for activities.

Share the Risk

Look at ways to build connections between self advocates, families and providers to share the responsibility of people in the community. Be careful not to limit activities due to fear.

Clarify Rules

Explain what DDS means by social inclusion. Make the rules more clear on giving medicine (medication administration) and for background checks on friends and volunteers. Be careful not to limit people's rights. Support people to have friendships including boyfriends and girlfriends.



Be Sensitive to Ways People with Disabilities get Left Out

Improve access to community-based flexible supports. Create relationships with the people in the community so that they welcome people with disabilities. It is also important to increase chances for people with IDD to take part in Unified Sports, Special Olympics and other programs for people with disabilities. Friendships with people with other disabilities are just as important as friendships with people without disabilities.

Funding

Focus funding to keep staff, improve training, and increase pay (if possible). Review the number of staff needed for coverage. Be sure that licensure and certification is valued. Look at ways to direct money to support inclusion by paying for cars/buses, technology (tablets), or fun activities.



Improve Transportation

Partner with the MBTA, to improve "The Ride" service approval for people with disabilities. Provide travel training for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Make the rules on the use of ride sharing (Uber) more clear.

Additional Recommendations

Don't be afraid to use technology to foster friendships. Share information with each other on what is working and new ideas to address challenges.

