

How to Recognize That the “Deficits” of People Labeled Disabled are Actually Assets”

In 1998, Judith Snow, a Faculty member of the ABCD Institute, told us that we were mistaken if we identified people labeled disabled as having unique needs or deficits. Instead, she said that these so called “deficits” or “special needs” were actually assets.

She then wrote the following list of assets and benefits that are uniquely contributed by labeled people.

Gifts and Assets That People Who Are Vulnerable to Rejection Commonly Bring to Community

By Judith Snow

Hospitality

- Making people feel happy
- Listening
- Providing a home, (to the personal assistant)

Grounding

- Slowing people down, reorienting people to time and place
- Helping people appreciate simple things
- Helping people appreciate their own abilities

Skill-building

- Pushing people to be better problem solvers
- Causing people to try things they've never done before
- Causing people to research things they never encountered before

Networking

- Reaching out to people and breaking down barriers
- Asking questions that everyone else is too shy to ask
- Bringing people together who otherwise would never meet

Economic

- Providing jobs to people who want supplemental income, like artists
- Providing jobs to people who need to work odd schedules like homemakers
- Providing jobs to people who otherwise have few or no marketable skills

Emotional/Spiritual

- Often very forgiving
- Often loving and inspiring love
- Offering opportunities to do something that clearly makes a difference
- Reorienting values from successes to relationships

Individuals have unique gifts and they may not have all of the above common gifts. Nevertheless people often privately mention receiving these gifts after getting to know someone labeled disabled. Imagine if we went public about them and intentionally built these gifts into everyday life.