

Inclusion Takes Both Person-Centered and Community-Centered Work

ABCD's particular contribution to inclusion comes from its focus on the whole community rather than on individuals. Its goal is to grow the conviction that **there is no one we don't need** and develop meaningful action from this conviction. Through ABCD organizing, well-connected people build networks of connections into community life. The question for connector-leaders is, **how do we get everyday community members to be inclusive because they recognize that reaching out to everyone benefits the whole community?**

The social integration of labeled people matters for three reasons. Exclusion costs the labeled person the opportunity to be a productive community member. This deprives the community of whatever contributions the person might offer, and public resources that could be better used to support people to contribute as community members are tied up in keeping people on the edge of the community, dependent and un-productive.

Increasingly, foundations, research organizations, and policy makers recognize that there has to be a better way of responding to marginalized people than the current programs-for-clients model. Existing programs may provide specific kinds of necessary assistance, but they generally do not offer a bridge to productive citizenship. In fact, surrounding disconnected people with services that professionally define needs and then try to meet them can weaken people. The rising costs of defining people as needy and trying to comprehensively fill those needs with services can divert investment away from community member initiatives and toward programs. Intentional relationships, not service programs build bridges from the edge to the center of community life.

A community in which ABCD organizing is active allows human service agencies to expand from person-centered work to person-**and**-community centered work. A growing number of human service organizations are finding person-centered ways to build connections between individual labeled people and citizenship roles. If Phil is an artist with a developmental disability, then the people around him help Phil connect to local opportunities for artists. (To learn more about person-centered work, see John O'Brien & Beth Mount (2005).

Make a Difference: Person-Centered Direct Support. Toronto: Inclusion Press.)

ABCD organizing brings a community-centered dimension to complement this person-centered effort. It asks, how could we organize the whole community to provide many more opportunities for artists, including artists with disabilities? This question leads to many possibilities...

...organize a group of already successful artists to work together to develop more ways that aspiring new artists can develop and offer their gifts

...organize art buyers who appreciate outsider artists to expand the market for the work of artists who have come late to formal training

...shape a new market among congregations, disability rights organizations, neighborhood associations, and local small business associations who would buy art as an expression of their diverse self-interests.

