THE CRITICAL NEED FOR Training on Inclusion
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The Importance of Inclusive Organizations

Children with disabilities are among the world’s most stigmatized and excluded children.

Limited knowledge about disability and related negative attitudes can result in the marginalization of children with disabilities within their schools and communities (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011).

Society places a stigma on families with children with disabilities, making it difficult for some families to seek support within the community, especially families with limited income and resources (Algood et al., 2011).

Whether or not community child care and recreation programs are committed to including children with disabilities plays a large role in the lives of children and families. Many of the chronic health conditions children experience today
are associated with activity limitations and participation restrictions in their communities; limitations that can profoundly influence children’s lives (Halfon et al., 2012).

Professionals working with children and youth have a **responsibility to provide quality services and supports** to children with and without disabilities. Aside from the legal responsibilities outlined in the *Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)*, programs have an obligation to uphold the intention of the law so that all youth can meaningfully participate in their communities.

**Organizations cannot deny access to programs or exclude children based on their disability.** Instead, organizations must offer the same opportunities to all children in inclusive programs.

Inclusive programs are changing the way that staff members need to be prepared to serve children in child care and youth development programs.
Staff members are sometimes hesitant to include children with disabilities in their setting because they are afraid and feel inadequate to meet the child’s needs (Jinnah & Stoneman, 2008).

Fear and misunderstanding can lead to mistreatment of children with disabilities, and in some cases, abuse. Staff members need ways to understand children of all abilities and examples of how to accommodate different needs.

Each individual staff member has a role in facilitating access to quality inclusive programs. Training, ongoing educational opportunities, coaching and support from leadership can help staff recognize and take on their role in inclusive programs.

The research that looks at the effect of inclusion training on child care and youth development staff is encouraging.
When staff are trained to include children with and without disabilities, organizations are more likely to open their doors to children with varying abilities.

One study that gathered information from over 2,000 early childhood directors, teachers, and family child care providers found that disability-specific education was the biggest factor in predicting whether programs were inclusive (Essa et al., 2008). If the director, provider, or teacher had some disability or inclusion related training, the program was more likely to have children with disabilities enrolled. Factors such as adult to child ratios, level of education, amount of time in the field, salaries and fees did not predict inclusion.
Training Leads to Inclusion & Quality Programs

Staff training on inclusion has a large impact on the overall program and has shown several positive outcomes:

1. Staff with training are more likely to serve children with different abilities.

2. Staff with training are more comfortable and confident providing accommodations.

3. Staff with training and experience working with children with disabilities have more positive thoughts about inclusion.
Inclusive programs are generally higher quality programs.

Studies that measure program quality show that the quality of programs that enroll children with disabilities is as good as or slightly better than the quality of programs that do not enroll children with disabilities (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009).

A study that measured the quality of infant-toddler and preschool classroom environments found that quality improved after teachers completed an inclusion training program (Campbell et al., 2005). The same study also found that the perspective of the teachers changed after inclusion training. Initial stories the teachers wrote about a child with a disability had a tendency to describe the child in terms of challenges and limitations, while stories written after the training focused on the child’s strengths and interests.
Training Leads to Confident Staff & Positive Attitudes

In an exploratory study conducted by Kids Included Together (KIT), 612 child care and youth staff were surveyed to measure their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about serving children with and without disabilities. Findings from this study showed that staff who had received training on inclusion were more likely to feel comfortable providing accommodations in their program. Findings also revealed that staff who had received training on inclusion were more likely to modify program activities to accommodate all children in the program.

Many research studies ask questions before and after training on inclusion to see if the training changes staff attitudes. A study that compared over 1,200 child care providers’ attitudes before and after training found that feelings of competence in inclusion increased after specialized training.
Overall, all of the providers who participated in the trainings changed their attitudes and confidence toward inclusion; however, the more training a provider received, the larger the gains (Baker-Ericzen, Garnard Muggenborg & Shea, 2009).

Another study that measured the attitudes of 48 teachers before and after a 10-week training module on inclusion found that teachers’ attitudes were more positive towards inclusion at the end of the training (Male, 2011).

**What does attitude have to do with inclusion?**

Social attitudes have been identified as the major barrier to full participation and equality in society for people with disabilities (Higgins, 2010). Many elements of society are largely the way they are due to assumptions about the ability of people with disabilities to fully participate in community settings (Barclay, 2010). Few people without disabilities in larger society interact directly
with people with disabilities and rely instead on stereotypical views of disability (Wa Munyi, 2012).

**Values, beliefs and deep-rooted assumptions have to be supportive of inclusion in order for inclusion to happen** (Rix & Paige-Smith, 2010).

**What type of training is necessary?**

Research suggests that professionals need four types of knowledge and skills to work in an inclusive setting (Soodak, 2002):

- **Information** and access to state of the art knowledge on inclusion
- **Problem-solving skills** to develop solutions to challenges
- **Life management skills** to reduce stress and get support in challenging situations
- **Communication skills** to address individual and group needs
The skills required to work with children with disabilities are the same for working with all children.

Staff members need to know how to:

- Solve problems
- Manage stress
- Get help when they need it
- Talk to children and families in effective ways

In fact, these skills may already be a part of staff training in many agencies. The key to making sure that staff feel prepared and have an opportunity to succeed in an inclusive program is providing them with information and state of the art knowledge on inclusion.

Staff members need to know what inclusion means, how it relates to their job, and how they can adapt their practices to support children with a variety of abilities. Making sure staff are prepared for inclusion means creating a positive image of inclusive practice, using a family-centered approach, and building relationships with different agencies.
What is leadership’s responsibility?

Leadership is about having a strong core of beliefs and principles and doing the right thing (Bevel & Altrogge, 2010). Managers have a vital role in setting a positive and supportive tone in their agencies (Jenkinson, 2011).

**Good practice in youth programs requires that support for staff be implemented in a structured manner, with regular supervision and team development.**

Staff members need structured opportunities to gain information, practice skills, and problem-solve. Many staff will need additional information, support and time to learn. All staff members need the opportunity to reflect and understand their own perspective and that of their program community in relation to inclusion (Rix & Paige-Smith,
2010). Staff members who are able to consider the needs of individuals and reflect on the needs of both the group and individuals are more successful at using new strategies (Brownell et.al, 2006).

Managers and administrators have a responsibility to **extend the learning beyond the training room** with multiple opportunities to gain information and develop skills.
Staff training on inclusion: Why is it critical?

As a person in a leadership position, you may ask yourself why staff training on inclusion is critical.

In order to make a real commitment to serving all children and families, there must be an organizational shift in attitudes, beliefs and practices related to disability.

This requires education for every staff member in the organization. Inclusion training sets staff up for success and gives them the tools they need to problem-solve and ask for help. The alternative is staff burnout, negativity and poor judgment stemming from stereotypical views and a lack of knowledge.

Legally, organizations must make accommodations to include children with disabilities. Ethically, organizations must prepare their staff to support children of all abilities. Staff training on inclusion, critical from both a legal and ethical perspective, leads to high quality programming and skilled staff.
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