

Foreword

By Stanley Greenberg

Suppose—just suppose—that a potential employer had learned in school that people with disabilities have the same hopes, the same dreams and many of the same needs as people who are non-disabled. Suppose the employer had learned that with training and reasonable accommodation, a disabled applicant can perform the same job with the same competence as her/his non-disabled co-worker.

Suppose we learned as children, that it would be possible for people with disabilities to go almost anywhere their non-disabled friends and relatives went if public buildings, houses, schools and sports facilities were designed with that in mind. Suppose non-disabled children learned in school that disabled parents raise children, use computers, go to concerts, take vacations, and experience sadness just like they do.

Suppose children learned in school that people with disabilities have the same civil rights to a secret ballot, to protection under the law, and to the same due process in court as do non-disabled citizens. Would life for both disabled and non-disabled people be different? The members of the Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) believe so and we took it upon ourselves to do something about it.

We believe that if children were educated concerning the employability of people with disabilities, the seventy percent unemployment rate among disabled people willing and able to work would be dramatically lower. We believe that it would not be necessary to advocate with such intensity for the building of accessible public buildings. We believe that the ongoing advocacy effort to procure and then protect the civil rights of people with disabilities would not be such a continuous struggle.

Thanks to a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the US Department of Education, the Vermont SILC contracted with Jill Crawford Hurt, a disability policy expert, to develop a curriculum to be used in public schools to educate non-disabled students about the reality of disability and people with disabilities. This tool makes it possible for the general classroom teacher to provide non-disabled students with real life experience and hands-on learning. A variety of proven educational tools are utilized to bring disability issues to life and to develop an understanding of its reality in the minds and hearts of the student. When appropriate, both children and adults with disabilities are included in the education process.

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