

# DDRC

Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary

## **Developmental Disability – A New Perspective**

*The aim of this position paper is to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity, worth and equal rights of all people. All citizens, including those with disabilities, are part of their local communities and are recognized as having a rich contribution to make in the development and well being of the human community. Our vision is ‘everyone belongs’.*

*As a resource centre for inclusion, and an agency that has a rich history, we believe we have a responsibility to share information including providing a counter-balance to historic negative perceptions, which if left unchecked, serve as a risk not only to individuals with disabilities, but to the health and vitality of our community.*

The term *developmental disability* is a broad term that encompasses a variety of disabilities that may or may not include a physical disability or a cognitive impairment. A *developmental disability* is often diagnosed when a child does not attain certain developmental landmarks in functioning at expected ages. Developmental disabilities are permanent and begin at birth or during childhood. Some conditions include, but are not limited to, autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and a variety of others and combinations. A developmental disability is a condition, *not* a disease. The impact of the disability varies according to the individual, the disability, and the circumstances and support the individual receives.

Developmental disabilities have *always* been a part of the human condition. Their occurrence is universal, cutting across racial and gender lines. While clinical/medical definitions of developmental disabilities describe what a child may lack in terms of development or progress toward development, experience has increasingly demonstrated the enormous potential that exists for people with developmental disabilities to live full and fulfilling lives, to grow through opportunities to participate, contribute and connect with others in meaningful ways. Experience has also revealed the potential that exists for other community members when they open up and relate meaningfully with people with developmental disabilities.

People with developmental disabilities often find the community in which they live more disabling than the disability itself. Fortunately however, individuals are beginning to receive more community-based supports that enable them to gain skills, live more

independently in their community, obtain employment, have friends, and enjoy life. These supports in turn, allow the community to benefit from the presence and contributions of all citizens, including those with developmental disabilities.

**Key Messages:**

- The term *developmental disability* is a broad term that encompasses a variety of disabilities that may or may not include a physical disability or a cognitive impairment;
- A developmental disability is a condition, not a disease;
- Developmental disabilities have always been a part of the human condition;
- While clinical/medical definitions of developmental disabilities describe what a child may lack in terms of development or progress toward development, experience has increasingly demonstrated the enormous potential that exists for people with developmental disabilities to live full and fulfilling lives;
- Experience has also revealed the potential that exists for other community members when they open up and relate meaningfully with people with developmental disabilities;
- People with developmental disabilities often find the community in which they live more disabling than the disability itself. Fortunately however, individuals are beginning to receive more community-based supports that enable them to gain skills, live more independently in their community, obtain employment, have friends, and enjoy life.