

BUILDING A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

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1. THE CLIFF

- **Many families have neither realistic nor workable plans** for the future, when their children become adults.
- **Presumption is often incompetence** rather than competence.
- **Segregated environments are limited in the services and supports they can provide.**
- **The adult system does not know about and, in many cases, care about children** – not because of insensitivity but it is still dealing with waiting lists of 5 to 10 years ago.

2. LOW EXPECTATIONS OR NO EXPECTATIONS

- **For too long people have not been taught to advocate for their own rights.**
- **Parents and family members have become convinced over time** that in many cases limitations outnumber strengths that leads to the lowest common denominator and virtually no high expectations.
- **Often there is a prescriptive approach that is based on a set curriculum** with “a priori” goals and objectives that must be achieved in order for the person to move on.
- **Many kids and young adults spend their lives in “sorta” inclusion** where there may be some inclusion offered at lunch in gym, music or art classes.
- **Additional reduction includes rich teacher–student ratios,** nurturing teachers. and supportive environment.

3. AFTER THE CLIFF

- **The fact is that kids separated from their peers** and from an inclusive environment are kept in “separate but equal” reality.
- **If there has been no transition planning,** no life experience building or inclusive contacts made during school years, then these families and adults with disabilities are essentially starting over again at Ground Zero.

- **Many families simply do not grasp that after reaching adulthood, there is no entitlement left**, no due process, and no right to services. If qualified, their sons or daughters will be eligible for Medicaid, SSI, and a waiting list.
- **Unless before adulthood they have been introduced to and integrated into an inclusive setting**, if they do get into the system, many young adults with disabilities will go into a sheltered workshop, skill building centers, or other segregated programs where the continuum will start all over.
- **The research shows that the longer someone stays in these environments**, after 6 weeks the more likely it is they are to remain forever.

Is this the best we can do? Certainly not!!!!

4. GETTING A LIFE NOT A PROGRAM

- **The most important element of a child's education must be typical, inclusive and repetitive.**
- **Kids learn from kids - modeling takes place not only in the classroom** but also in the schoolyard, after school, and with typical peers throughout the course of the day.
- **It is a very fair question** to ask any teacher, principal or school system, "Can you please tell me how the skills that you're teaching my son or daughter today is going to help them when they graduate? (Job, friends, community, etc.)"
- **The highest IQ in the world will not help if the young adult has low EQ** (emotional quotient). The only way to develop these skills is to practice, practice, practice!
- **It takes an ongoing series of frequent, repetitive, and continuous BICE** (bumping into community experiences) for this to take hold.
- **For every person with a disability, there is likely to be a person in the community would care about them, if they knew them.** However, for some people it may take 1,000 contacts for them to meet such a person. If a person goes into community twice a week it could take 5 to 10 years!!!
- **This is not about presenting discouragement or interference with an individual's right to choose other people with disabilities as best friends.** This does not extend to paid staff who can be advocates or champions, but the fact is friends are not paid.

- **What we are seeking to do is to increase a person's circle of contacts** so that if he/she chooses a best friend who is another person with a disability, it will be because of choice and not convenience.

5. THE REAL WORK

- **The goal should be for a person with a disability to bump into 5 new people a day.** The outcome is not to measure necessarily whether the experience is positive or negative, but simply to increase the number of contacts.
- **This will give the opportunity for practice, practice practice.** The law of averages says that the more people you meet the more likely it is that you meet somebody that you will click with, who will like you and may become, if not just an acquaintance, possibly, a friend.
- **The world works on connections.** The more connections someone has, the more likely it is that he/she will get employment, friendship, and be able to contribute to his/her community which is one of the ultimate responsibilities and goals of citizenship.

**Falling off the cliff is not inevitable.
If we build bridges of opportunities and inclusion,
our schools, then our communities
and workplaces will be richer places.**

**People with disabilities can then cross the bridge
with confidence to a bright future.**