

Positive Trends in the Field of Disabilities

Rud and Ann Turnbull

Ann: I think one of the most positive trends is a greater emphasis on inclusion in communities, in job settings, in schools, in preschools, in everyday activities in churches and synagogues and mosques, and in all different types of community organizations. The more that people with disabilities are familiar and out in the public and living next door and going to school in the same classroom, the less fear there will be and the more positive regard. I think that is really wonderful. I also see that our son, JT, has a life now that he never could have had in the past because of the availability of Medicaid funding going directly to the individual as contrasted to an agency. I think the individual control of funds by adults with significant disabilities is a very positive trend.

Rud: The other thing that is happening positively is that disability policy is no longer separate and apart from policy having to do with housing, transportation, education, health, and general welfare. Disability issues and policy issues have mainstreamed, if you will, into other issues, and that makes it possible for the disability community to connect to people who are older, have different kinds of claims. I think that is positive, we are no longer so exceptionalistic. We are far more included in policy issues, not just in life, in policy issues. I would like to have the disability community more prominently represented in debates about the Human Genome Project. There is an awful lot of talk these days about the effects of DNA and mapping and the human genome on other people than those who have disabilities. One of the efforts that we are making here at the Beach Center is to have the voice of persons with disabilities included in discussions on the legal, ethical, and social issues coming out of the Human Genome Project. I think that is where I would like to have particular emphasis, one of many, but that is an important one.

Ann: I think that if there is one thing that I can pinpoint in this, it would be to implant in all of us who have worked in the disability field a burning desire for excellence. There just seems to not be enough implementation of best practice and people with a sense of urgency, that time really does make a difference, and that people with disabilities deserve the best they can provide on a day-in day-out basis.

Rud: Part of that partnership and that commitment to excellence derives from a sense of empathy. I call it the empathetic reciprocity, the ability of a provider to stand in the shoes of a parent or person with disability, and the ability of that parent or person with disability to see where that provider is, the professional. To bridge that gap one has to be able to stand in another person's shoes, empathetic reciprocity. The other thing that is important is the development of a trusting, trustworthy relationship between the two. One of the real issues that we have in America today is the absence of trust in our institutions and in the professions that represent various institutions. If we can't build trust one on one, how can we build it on social basis? That is a huge challenge.

Beach Center on Disability

The University of Kansas

1200 Sunnyside Avenue, 3136 Haworth Hall • Lawrence, Kansas 66045

Telephone: 785.864.7600 • TTY: 785.864.3434

www.beachcenter.org