



## Cultural Rights of Persons with Disabilities

December 3<sup>rd</sup> is the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons. This year's theme **Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Action in Development** recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities and the need for them to play an active and meaningful role in development for their community. To highlight the importance of this day and the year's theme, the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) is releasing a series of four themed fact sheets throughout the month of November reflecting the four pillars of rights necessary for true equity for Canadian with disabilities.

*Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in the scientific advancement and its benefits.<sup>1</sup>*

*Everyone has the right to rest and leisure.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Article 27, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<sup>2</sup> Article 24, United Nations Declaration of Human Rights

### Fact:

- ❖ **Culture** has been defined as sets of learned behaviors, **beliefs, attitudes, ideals, and values** characteristic of a particular society.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ It has been said that **Canadians share the belief** that we have a **responsibility** to each other; that we all have **something to contribute**; and everyone has the **right to participate**.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite these beliefs many Canadians with disabilities remain marginalized, excluded, and misrepresented throughout the cultural fabric of Canadian society.
- ❖ A recent Canadian survey of attitude towards persons with disabilities reports that **only 1 in 10** of those asked believe that persons with disabilities are “fully” included in society.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ **19%** of Canadians asked believe persons with disabilities still face a “great deal” of discrimination while **63%** recognize people with disabilities still face discrimination.<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ Cultural stereotypes of persons with disabilities continue to dominate cultural imaging of disability. Persistent **negative cultural stereotypes of persons with disabilities are a form of oppression** as they portray people with disabilities as powerless, dependant, pitiful, and deviant.
- ❖ **49%** of Canadians asked about barriers to participation for persons with disabilities cited prejudices and attitudes of individuals and society as a main barrier.<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ **75%** of those asked believe that in Canada it is either very or somewhat difficult for persons with disabilities to have opportunities for recreation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ember, C., & Ember, M. (1999) Cultural Anthropology. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada (2004) Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> Environics Research Group (2004) Canadian Attitudes Towards Disability Issues.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### Solutions:

- ❖ Progress for persons with disabilities must be grounded in the **principle of citizenship**, and for this citizenship to be meaningful it must be framed around self-determination and community.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ True **self-determination** reflects the reality that “*all* citizens desire to have choice and control in their lives, especially over the disability supports they require.”<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ A true **sense of community** encompasses the belief that “*all* human beings desire to belong and participate with others in families, neighborhoods, networks, and groups.”<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Real and valued citizenship, that promotes the principles of self-determination and community, reflects the ideals, values, beliefs, and attitudes of Canadian culture.
- ❖ **CAILC and ILRCs work with persons with disabilities**, their families, communities, and various levels of government to help **ensure the cultural rights of persons with disabilities become a reality**.

<sup>1</sup> Lord, Snow, & Dingwall (2005) Building a New Story: Transforming Disability Supports and Policies.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.