

OPPI Section Name: Community Living, Employment, and Engagement

Overarching Principle: *People with disabilities are better off when they live in and are engaged in their communities. Communities are better off when people with disabilities belong to them. All people with disabilities should be supported to live, work, and become meaningful members of their communities and serve in the same valued roles as people who do not have disabilities.*

Why should organizations focus on this? When organizations work to ensure that people with disabilities meaningfully belong in their communities, they are improving the lives of people with disabilities themselves, as well as the members of their communities with whom they are connected. Communities are strengthened when people with disabilities are part of them, and disability service sector organizations often act as catalysts and barriers to inclusion. Further, because people with disabilities have the right to access and be supported in their chosen communities, organizations that prioritize inclusion are likely to adhere to current regulations.

Indicators in the Assessment <i>Our organization ensures and/or works to promote that...</i>	What the research says
The active engagement and full participation of people in communities that are made up of people with and without disabilities.	People with disabilities feel better supported and have more self-determination when they are included in their communities (Woodman et al., 2014).
All adults with disabilities work in integrated jobs that respond to their interests and pay prevailing wages.	Adults with disabilities want integrated employment outside of sheltered workshops (Migliore et al., 2006). Competitive integrated employment has been shown to benefit people with disabilities economically, psychologically, and physically (Taylor et al., 2022).
All people live, work, recreate, worship (if they choose), and receive services in their communities.	People with disabilities living in community settings participate more in community leisure activities, community groups, and competitive employment than people living in segregated settings (Verdonschot et al., 2009).
People with disabilities do not have to earn access to inclusive, individualized community supports, nor do we make people go back to more structured services or settings if they struggle in inclusive and community environments.	People with all types and scopes of disabilities can be integrated into communities with intentional efforts that may include targeted training for staff and people being supported, phased exposure, simplifying accountability systems, and realigning goals to enable community-based living (Thorn et al., 2008). Increased collaboration between school systems and adult services will also aid the successful transition to community living (Certo et al., 2009).

Decisions about where people live or spend their days are not made in order to fill slots/openings or in any manner that fails to support people’s expressed choices.	Engagement in meaningful activities has been correlated with greater life satisfaction (Goldberg et al., 2008).
Relationship building and community connections are seen as primary to the quality of life and are a main focus of our work with/ on behalf of people with disabilities.	Social participation, social membership, and community connectedness have been shown to contribute to increased life satisfaction and a greater quality of life in people with disabilities (Levasseur et al., 2009; Yeung & Towers, 2013)
People with disabilities spend significant time, as they choose, with people who are not family members or paid to support them.	Friendship has been shown to predict improved outcomes and quality of life in multiple areas (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018).

Where to Start

1. Many people with disabilities have not had the same opportunity to build relationships, connections, and networks as people without disabilities. Train people who work in your organization to become connectors or find opportunities to help people build their social networks
2. Take inventory of your organization’s practices and services. Identify ways that your agency provides services or promotes practices that disconnect people from their community through segregated living and working, special programs, etc. Once these practices are identified, you’ll know what needs to change.
3. Find examples of people with disabilities belonging so that when someone says ‘the community is not ready for people with disabilities’ you can share examples of when people have been included and have meaningfully contributed to their chosen communities.