



Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in School-age and Youth Programs

Assuring that every child is successful in their community setting is a challenge for providers and mentors but with the right training, support, preparation and attitude, it can be achieved. Accessing the technical assistance and training on inclusion of children and youth with special needs is critical to success. Resources are available and will be described in this article. First, let's look at what it means to be inclusive.

The Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood's position statement states: *"Inclusion as a value, supports the right of all children regardless of their diverse abilities, to participate actively in natural settings within their communities."*

"Inclusion" is characterized by a feeling of belonging, not by mere proximity, on which the earlier term "mainstreaming" focused. Inclusion is children and youth of all abilities learning, playing, and working together.

With successful inclusion, all children and youth are actively involved, physically accessing play and work locations, and have options from which they can choose personally. Inclusion is a process, not a placement. No one person is responsible to make it work; it takes group effort. There is not one perfect way. The inclusion process needs to be tailored to meet the needs of each person as well as the program.

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian-born social scientist writing in the 1920's, provides the basis for a theoretical background for inclusion. He believed that people learn through socially interacting with others who are more "expert" in a given ability or field of knowledge. Thus, he concluded, the greatest difficulties for children with special needs are created not by their particular special needs, but by isolation from typically developing peers. Children and youth with special needs should be in groups with same-age peers whenever possible.

Why Promote Inclusion?

Children and youth learn from each other. When they are exposed to inclusive environments starting at a young age, they learn acceptance of other people and that each person has unique abilities.

There are benefits of inclusion for children with or without disabilities.

Resources and Support

The Center for Inclusive Child Care's historical focus has been in training and supporting child care and school-age care providers. The original focus in 1994 was on early childhood programs; however, there was an identified need to modify curriculum and supports that would include school-age child care providers, which was implemented in 2003. There continues to be a great need of expanded support to school-age providers which has grown in to requests for support and technical assistance for other youth programs including older age groups of children up to age 18. The current program and supports provide

a foundation for a service delivery model and deliverables applicable to all age groups. Through collaboration and outreach with community youth programs, this system, including technical assistance, supports the assurance that children who are in need of specialized services and systems can be successfully included within community programs.

The CICC (Center for Inclusive Child Care) website contains several resources for school-age and youth providers including the updated School-Age Care Inclusion Manual and fact sheets from the Minneapolis Coordinating Board. In addition, we have Info Modules and Self-Studies for older children **including** Childhood Overweight and Obesity; The Impact and Implications and Anxiousness in Young Children and The Language of Disability. Please visit our website often as resources are being frequently added to meet the needs of these age groups.

The CICC continues to provide develop training and resources related to program support needs and youth diagnosis information to assure youth programs and providers have the information and support to serve youth with varied needs (e.g. challenging behaviors, ADHD, intake processes, Section 504 Information, Americans with Disabilities Act Information and resources.)

We are interested in any feedback, suggestions or new partnerships to support the continued development of resources and support.

www.inclusivechildcare.org

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