



EMBRACING INCLUSION

An Introduction to Inclusion

Disabled People's Association, Singapore

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation, over a billion people in the world live with a disability, and between 110 million and 190 million adults have significant difficulties in functioning. Persons with disabilities are the world's largest minority group. Despite the recent strides made in disability rights, the majority of persons with disabilities do not have access to opportunities on an equal basis with other people. In order to truly disable the disability we must embrace inclusion.

DISABILITY AND TYPES

What is a disability?

A disability may be generally defined as the result of the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Persons with disabilities include those who have long term or intermittent physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments.

Disabilities affect people in different ways. Many people associate the term 'disability' with someone who is in a wheelchair, or who is visually or hearing impaired. Some may have the attitude that people with disabilities are different from themselves and therefore should be treated differently. This kind of stereotyping is in itself a form of discrimination.

People with disabilities come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colours, sex and cultures - just as we all do. The only thing that marks out a person with a disability is that they are unable to do certain things in the same way as the mainstream society. They may require some form of adaptation or accommodation to assist them to overcome obstacles in a particular environment, such as wheelchair access in a narrow office space. With regard to employment, having a disability does not mean that a person is unable to perform all the essential functions of a job and exceed the expectations of their employer.

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People with the same disability may have different needs. It is important to understand that what is appropriate for one person might not be appropriate for another person, even if they have the same disability.

Types of disability

In a society, we may find the following categories of disability:

Physical	Affects a person's mobility or dexterity
Intellectual	Affects a person's ability to learn
Psychiatric	Affects a person's thinking processes
Sensory	Affects a person's ability to hear or see
Neurological	Results in the loss of some bodily or mental functions

MODELS OF DISABILITY

There are a number of models of disability that have been defined over the last few years. The most frequently mentioned models are the 'medical', 'charity' and the 'social' models of disability.

The Medical model of disability views disability as a problem that resides in the disabled individual, rather than in the environment or with others. Viewing disability as a medical problem fosters the belief that those with disabilities are in need of fixing or a cure. Framing disability in this way leads to individualised treatment of those with disabilities, rather than standardised policies, which can result in marginalisation and alienation.

The Charity Model of disability sees people with disabilities as victims of their impairment. Depending on the disability, this model portrays the people with disabilities as being unable to walk, talk, see, learn, or work. Disability is seen as a deficit, and persons with disabilities are not able to help themselves and to lead an independent life. Their situation is tragic and they are assumed to be suffering as a result of their disability. The Charity Model depicts people with disabilities as victims of circumstance, deserving of pity and in need of help from those who are not disabled. Framing disability in terms of charity fosters the view that people with disabilities are in need of long term care and support, and it is a moral or social duty to provide that care.

The Social model of disability, in contrast to the previous two models, would see the environment as the disabling barrier. This model draws on the idea that it is society that disables people by designing everything to meet the needs of the majority of people who are not disabled. There is recognition within the social model that society can do a great deal to reduce, and ultimately remove, some of these disabling barriers, and that this task is the responsibility of society, rather than the person with disability

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THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is an international human rights treaty of the United Nations, intended to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. The CRPD and its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and was opened for signature on 30 March 2007. Countries who sign the Convention are required to promote, protect, and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities and ensure that they enjoy full equality under the law.

Singapore became a signatory of the Convention on the 30 November 2012, and ratified it on 18 August 2013. The Enabling Master plan 2012-2016 has been created in response to Singapore ratifying the CRPD. Singapore implements the CRPD through the Enabling Master plan 2012-2016.

The Enabling Master plan 2012-2016 seeks to build on the foundation laid by earlier disability-related initiatives for Singapore to strive towards an inclusive society. It sets out to address the needs of persons with disabilities as well as the needs of their caregivers by means of a series of policy recommendations for relevant government agencies to take action.

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Through individual and organisation-led initiatives, Singapore is building a culture that embraces and includes individuals with disabilities. We build this culture of acceptance and inclusion by educating people and raising awareness through disability awareness programmes.

INCLUSION

Frederick A. Miller and Judith H. Katz in their book, *The Inclusion Breakthrough: Unleashing the Real Power of Diversity* (2002) defined inclusion as: "...a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best."

Inclusion is the state of being included in all spheres of life without restrictions and limitations. It embraces the view that all individuals should be valued by society by ensuring that everyone can integrate and take part in all aspects of it. This can be done by removing the barriers that make it difficult for someone to enjoy that inherent right.

BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

A barrier is anything that gets in the way of people with disabilities participating in day-to-day activities, or taking part in opportunities that are available to the majority of people.

The following is a list of the different kinds of barriers:

Architectural and Physical Barriers	Found in buildings and spaces that stop people from using a service or going to an event (e.g. stairs, rough pavement or narrow pathways, poor lighting)
Information and Communication Barriers	Stop people from getting information. (e.g. small print, complicated websites)
Attitudinal Barriers	People think and make decisions about disability based on incorrect information (e.g. thinking that people with disabilities cannot work, thinking that it is too expensive to make places accessible)
Organisational Barriers	Policies, practices, or procedures that discriminate against people with disabilities. (e.g. hiring process that does not provide accommodations for people with disabilities)
Technological Barriers	Prevents access to information or services that can be remedied by means of assistive technology and adaptive

	devices.
Opportunity Barriers	Deny the opportunities for people with disabilities in different spheres of the social life. (e.g. denial of equal opportunities in education and employment).

BREAKING BARRIERS

Accessibility is a key enabler for people with disabilities to have more opportunities, with regard to social, cultural or economic participation. Creating a barrier-free environment for persons with disabilities is important. Public transport and infrastructure are the two main areas to be focussed. An accessible barrier-free environment allows people with disabilities to maintain essential links to friends, family and the wider community. The home, studying or working environment, places of entertainment and attractions should be modified for their easy access. The physical environment has to be conducive to the wellbeing of people with disabilities, and should enable them to participate in activities as an integral part of the community just like any other person. Providing support services for persons with disabilities, their families and caregivers is another aspect that needs consideration.

The most difficult barriers to overcome are barriers created by the attitudes of people towards people with disabilities. Whether born from ignorance, fear, misunderstanding or hate, these attitudes keep people from appreciating the full potential of a person with a disability. Public education and awareness programmes must emphasise the positive aspects of human potentials. Showcasing the successful stories of people with disabilities helps to reset the mind-sets. Awareness alone cannot produce the change. Channelling awareness into action is vital to change the negative attitudes, which will in turn contribute to breaking the remaining barriers to inclusion.

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The society must provide equal opportunities for people with disabilities to learn, earn and grow. Inclusive education helps to eliminate exclusion. Effective instructional programmes maximise the access to progress and development for individuals with disabilities. Building inclusive education systems will help to broaden the attitudes of people to embrace inclusion.

Creating enabling working environments for people with disabilities is another aspect that needs attention. Each person, be it with or without disabilities, has his or her own innate

talents and abilities. While there may be certain physical disabilities that affect one's ability to work, the power of technology can be harnessed to level the playing field for everyone. Assistive technology (AT) has helped people with disabilities overcome the challenges arising from their disabilities to integrate into society. Providing funding, credit schemes and tax benefits will help the employers to keep the recruitment cost low while people with disabilities can contribute to the workforce and earn a better living to support themselves.

Supporting entrepreneurship for people with disabilities who want to start their own businesses would be beneficial. This helps to increase their creativity and independence and may promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Providing adequate training to be employable in the sectors of their choice will equip them with necessary skills which will increase chances of their employability. There should be provisions to help them purchase special equipment, AT and acquire skills through efficient training programmes to be productive and independent. Engaging with business and public sector officials to build strategies to increase the workforce participation of people with disabilities will have a positive impact.

Information and communication technologies must be designed, developed and fabricated at the outset for accessibility and usability for people with disabilities.

The goal must be that any technology used in everyday settings by people without disabilities must also work for people with disabilities.

'Nothing about us without us' has been a slogan and integral message from the disability-rights movement for decades. This guiding principle highlights the need for people with disabilities to be brought into the process in such a way that they can directly influence decisions. This results in more inclusion of people with disabilities and also brings with it lasting changes.

In short, people with disabilities must have equal opportunity to benefit from the full range of mainstream communication, technology, infrastructure, products and services that are necessary to participate equally in employment, educational, recreational, social, political and other settings.

Finally, mobilising the legislations, policies and strategies can help bring down the common barriers (from the family, local communities and national government, through to the

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international community) by setting out clear set of areas of action and recommendations for governments, donors and the international community.

PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

People first language is used to speak appropriately and respectfully about an individual with a disability. It emphasises the person first and speaks about the disability after.

Examples of what you should say	Examples of what you should not say
People with disabilities, people with impairments	The handicapped, the disabled
People without disabilities, people without impairments	Normal, healthy, whole or typical people
Person who has a congenital disability or impairment	Person with a birth defect
Person who has (or has been diagnosed with)...	Person afflicted with, suffers from, a victim of...
Person who has Down syndrome	Downs person, mongoloid
Person who has (or has been diagnosed with) autism	The autistic
People who are blind, person who is visually impaired	The blind
Person diagnosed with a mental health condition	Crazy, insane, psycho, mentally ill, emotionally disturbed, demented
Person diagnosed with a cognitive disability or with an intellectual and developmental disability	Mentally retarded, retarded, slow, idiot, moron
Person who uses a wheelchair or a mobility chair	Handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.

Using People First Language eliminates prejudicial and hurtful descriptors. People First Language can move us in a new direction as it demonstrates good manners and respect, changing the way we see a person.

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

It is important to recognise that people with disabilities have skills and talents just like everyone else. Here are some guidelines for how one might approach and interact with people with disabilities:

- Treat people with disabilities with the respect and consideration you would have for anyone else.
- While interacting with persons with disabilities, the language we use must be polite, clear and respectful.
- Smile, relax, and keep calm when interacting with people with disabilities.
- Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- Look at the person, but do not stare. Introduce yourself and introduce anyone else present.
- Find a good way to communicate. A good start is to listen carefully.
- When in doubt, use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Do not make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has.
- Some disabilities are not visible. Take the time to get to know their needs.
- If you cannot understand what someone is saying, just politely ask again.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. Patience, optimism, and willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Ask before you offer to help — do not just jump in. People with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- If you are not sure what to do, ask the person, “How may I help you?”
- Do not touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Ask permission before touching a wheelchair or a piece of equipment.
- Be confident and reassuring. As with all, listen carefully and focus on meeting their needs.
- If the person appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- Do not leave them in the middle of a room. Guide them to a chair or a comfortable location.
- Do not walk away without saying good-bye to the person with a disability.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Inclusive practices refer to the policies, processes and programmes in place that help to nurture acceptance, respect and understanding amongst people so that a harmonious social life and environment can be cultivated. While developing strategies to make an organisation accessible and inclusive, three critical areas to be focussed on are the structure (infrastructure), the system (framework and standards) and the services (all kinds of service).

Adopting inclusive practices and customising them to suit particular requirements in the above mentioned areas would be advisable. Providing accessible documents and making websites accessible, availing AT in workplace, creating accessible environment and barrier-free infrastructure, providing reasonable accommodation, accessible lifts and toilets, setting up of disability support offices in organisations and educational institutions, providing captioning services and sign language interpreter, visual warning system for emergencies, books in an alternative format (audio or e-texts), audio or brailled lecture notes, hand-outs and texts, computer equipped to enlarge screen and images, are some examples of inclusive practices.

Awareness-raising is often the very first step in embracing inclusion. Inclusive practices follow and are the steps that need to be taken in order to realise inclusion. Individual organisations and companies may take different approaches to implement inclusive practices, which may in turn lead to variability in services provided to people with disabilities.

This lack of a unified path to inclusion is not a bad thing. It allows organisations and companies to tailor their inclusion journey to their situation, needs and timelines for realising their goals. It is important to remember that inclusive practices are a starting point from which to work progressively towards inclusion. By adopting inclusive practices, we are opening doors for people with disabilities to have the same opportunities as those without disabilities.

That does not mean that we will get it all right the first time or that the results will be immediate. Yet, that should not be taken as a sign of failure because inclusion is a journey and should be an ongoing, rather than a short-term, aspiration.

The concept of inclusion is constantly evolving and what is considered inclusive for a company with a particular employee with a disability might change once another person with a different disability is hired. As such inclusive practices should be intermittently re-evaluated in order to ensure that they are relevant to the organisation or company.

CONCLUSION

Inclusion is more than just getting people with and without disabilities to participate in the same activity. It is also crucial that we reach beyond the limits of our own network, into the greater community. In order for inclusive services to be successful, inclusion must be a value that is shared by all. With appropriate training and education on inclusion and disability awareness, we can ensure that society is able to provide services that embrace the value of inclusion. To value inclusion, one must start by valuing the individual and their right to be a part of society. See and appreciate the abilities and not the disability.

"Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

Albert Einstein

GLOSSARY

Accessibility is the degree to which a building or other structure provides access for (mainly physically) people with disabilities. In Singapore, this is determined primarily by regulation 36(2) of the Building Control Regulations. (Code on Accessibility in the built Environment 2013)

Advocacy is a process of supporting and enabling people to express their views, to access information and services, to find out about options and make informed decisions, and to secure their rights.

Assistive Technology is developed to assist people with disabilities. An example of assistive technology is voice screen-reading software for computers.

Diversity is recognising and valuing differences between individuals and groups of people. It is an important concept in terms of the integration of people with disabilities into society.

Inclusion addresses, first and foremost, the need for cultural transformation. It advocates that any person with a disability should be accommodated freely, openly and without pity, without restrictions or limitations of any kind. It also emphasises universal design for policy-oriented physical accessibility issues

Inclusive Practices comprise attitudes, approaches and strategies which ensure that persons with disability are not excluded or isolated from the society, and feel valued and confident that they will receive appropriate support to fulfil their potential.

Mainstreaming Disability describes a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of people with disabilities an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that people with disabilities benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve disability equality. This requires that all measures, programmes, services and practices are assessed to determine their impact on the participation of people with disabilities, instead of simply assuming their neutrality. This does not exclude, however, the need for specific policies and programmes, or for positive discrimination measures addressed particularly to persons with disabilities.

People-First Language aims to avoid perceived and subconscious dehumanization when talking with or about people with disabilities. The basic idea is to impose a sentence structure that names the person first and the condition second, for example "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people" thus acknowledging the person before the disability, and shifting the focus away from the condition.

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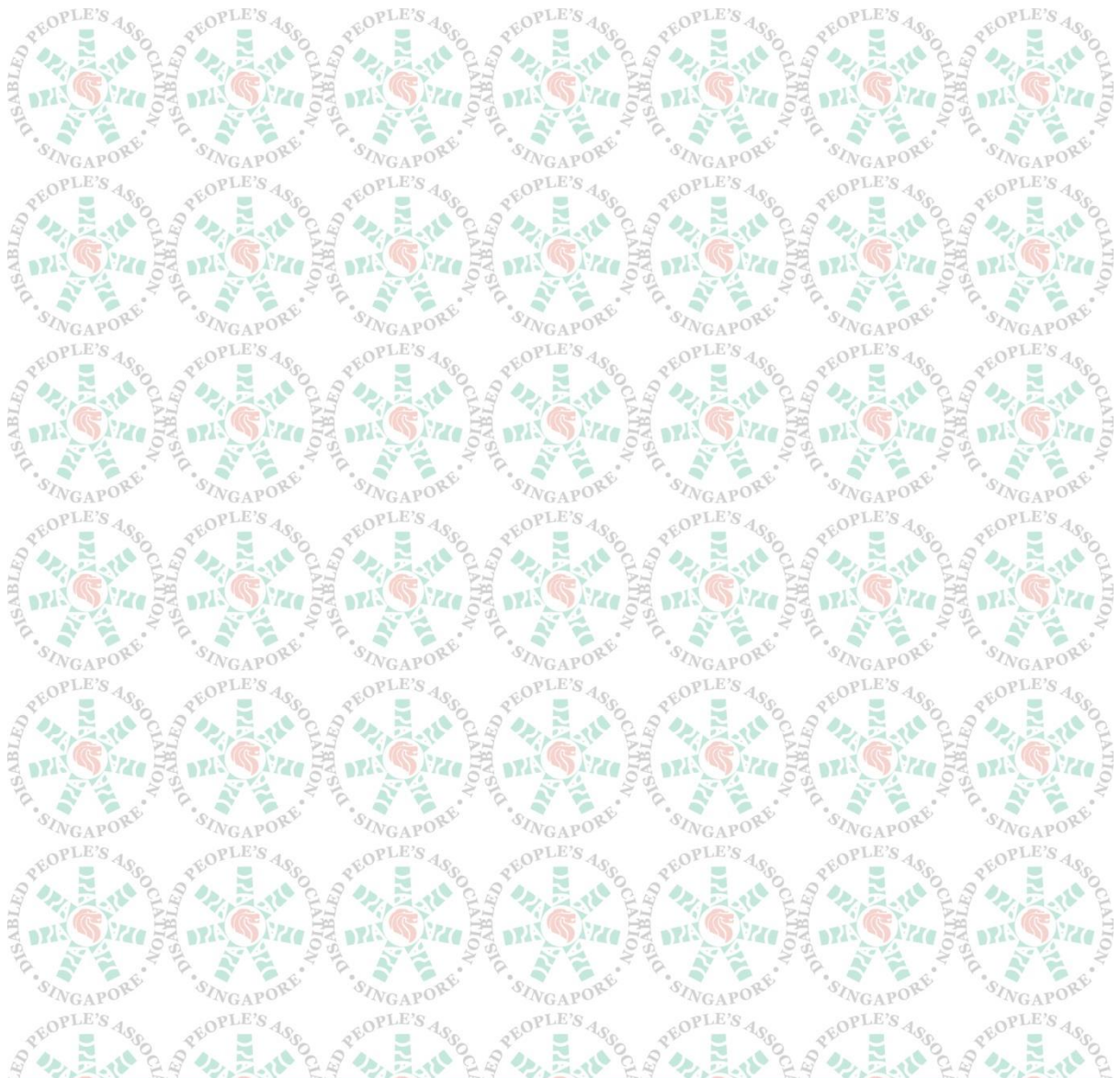
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