

Journal on Developmental Disabilities
Le journal sur les handicaps du développement

Volume 10 Number 2

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Editorial Policy

The Journal on Developmental Disabilities is published twice yearly by the Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities (OADD). The Association has established the following objective for the journal:

To foster and promote thoughtful and critical dialogue about relevant issues in the field of developmental disabilities, including those broader social issues that impact on persons with developmental disabilities.

Content

Each issue features a selection of research, conceptual, informational, and editorial papers. An issue may have a central theme. Reviews of relevant books, movies, websites, software, and other resources are welcomed, as are letters to the editor. In this way we strive to collectively enrich our understanding of issues, encourage stimulating debate among those working in the field, and improve services.

Language

Submissions are invited in either French or English and, if accepted, will be printed in the language of submission with an abstract in the other language. Submissions must be free of any gender and ethnic bias. People-first language (e.g., persons with developmental disabilities) must be used throughout the manuscript (including figures and tables).

Editorial Process

Each submission will undergo a peer review by two or more reviewers (typically from the Board of Editors) with relevant expertise. The authors of the manuscripts will not be identified to the reviewers. The reviewers will recommend for or against publication and provide their reasons. Reviewers are asked to judge the manuscript on several criteria including its contribution to increasing our knowledge and clarity of communication. The reviewers are asked to write in a positive and constructive manner to help the authors improve their work, if necessary. All reviews are completed within two weeks using electronic communication

Final Decision

The Editor-in-Chief, or guest editor, reserves the final decision regarding publication of a submission. To promote the publication of theme issues, the Editor reserves the right to decide in which issue to publish the article if it has been accepted.

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Table of Contents

Editorial

Embracing Our Distinct Humanity
Cindy Blackstockvii

Rights for People with Developmental Disabilities

Human Rights and Disability: The International Context
Marcia Rioux and Anne Carbert1

Reaching One's Potential: A Discussion of Individual Human Rights
and People with Developmental Disabilities in Canada
Julie Rooke15

Human Rights and Persons with Intellectual Disabilities:
An Action-Research Approach for Community-Based Organizational
Self-Evaluation
*Dorothy M. Griffiths, Frances Owen, Leanne Gosse, Karen Stoner,
Christine Y. Tardif, Shelley Watson, Carol Sales,
and Barbara Vyrosto*25

Multi-Level Human Rights Training in an Association for
Community Living: First Steps Toward Systemic Change
*Frances Owen, Dorothy Griffiths, Karen Stoner, Leanne Gosse,
Shelley L. Watson, Christine Y. Tardif, Carol Sales,
and Barbara Vyrosto*43

Other Articles

Mothers with Intellectual Disabilities Who Do or Do Not Have
Custody of Their Children
Marjorie Aunos, Georgette Goupil and Maurice Feldman65

Availability and Delivery of Speech-Language Pathology Services
for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities in South-Eastern Ontario
Carol Freeman81

A Comparison of Staff-Resident Interactions With Adults With
Developmental Disabilities Moving From Institutional to
Community Living
*Joel Hundert, Nicole Walton-Allen, Shawn Vasdev,
Karen Cope and Jane Summers*93

Development of a Canadian Voluntary Population-Based Registry on
Down Syndrome: Preliminary Results (2000-2002)
*Naznin Virji-Babul, David Kisly, Anne Eichman,
and Vicky Duffield*113

Epilepsy and Developmental Disability Part I:
Developmental Disorders in Which Epilepsy May be Comorbid
*Vasan Persad, Miles D. Thompson, and Maire E. Percy*123

Epilepsy and Developmental Disability Part II:
Epilepsies in which Developmental and Psychiatric Disorders May
Be Comorbid
*Miles D. Thompson, Vasan Persad, Paul Hwang,
and Maire E. Percy*153

Editorial

Embracing Our Distinct Humanity

Cindy Blackstock

Marginalized. At risk. Vulnerable. These words are used liberally in both international and domestic human rights parlance to describe persons with developmental disabilities and other groups. They are used by well-intentioned peoples for several reasons, but an important one is to call attention to the pervasive violation of rights and to mobilize redress to ensure equal opportunity. Such usage, however, also has the unfortunate side effect of positioning our rights discourse as a special interest concern existing outside the mainstream public good, and of casting an unfortunate character of mediocrity and inability amongst our groups. This tension between identifying pervasive and persistent rights violations and the need to position our rights as the just embracing of the whole continuum of humanity has contributed, in part, to the slow walk toward establishing international treaty bodies that affirm and respect our respective rights.

As an Aboriginal rights advocate, I find the collection of works in this volume underscored the distinctness of the rights of persons with disabilities, whilst also describing themes that are familiar to the rights struggles of indigenous peoples. For example, the article by Rioux and Carbert describes efforts to build upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to enshrine rights of persons with disabilities in international treaty body instruments. Indigenous peoples, too, have sought similar protections in a treaty instrument known as the Draft Declaration on the Rights for Indigenous Peoples. Birthed in 1994, the first year of the United Nations Decade of Indigenous Peoples, negotiations on the Declaration began with a great spirit of hope and affirmation. This year - the closing year of the decade of hope - many indigenous peoples are expressing concern that only two of the forty-five articles in the draft United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have received provisional acceptance. The problem is that state parties often try to reign in language that would afford more enhanced rights to indigenous peoples than are currently available under domestic law.

As we continue our efforts to enshrine stronger rights protections in international law, Julie Rooke reminds us of the inertness of rights protections under domestic law. Rooke argues that the rights of minority populations, such as persons with disabilities, are often set aside in favour of

the rights, or conveniences, of the majority. It seems that many Canadians still think of accommodation as meaning that they may have to give up more than they would receive in return. If minority rights continue to be set against this imbalanced economy of sacrifice, progress in meeting the spirit of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms will be slow.

Giffiths and her colleagues highlight perhaps the most salient of the human rights conundrums: how to ensure that inalienable human rights, once enshrined in law, affirm and support the experience of those they are intended to protect. I recently attended a United Nations Day of Discussion on Indigenous Children in Geneva. It was a magical moment, being surrounded by indigenous peoples from around the world who, despite our vast cultural differences, shared a compelling vision of a better world for our children and youth. It was also a reminder that the human rights discourse is too often dominated by those of us who already have our basic needs met. Human rights advocates represent "marginalized" peoples, but we are often among the most privileged of those groups. Although our presence is necessary, our privilege should not be mistaken to represent the situation of most of our peoples. Back home in our communities, many people are too busy trying to stay alive and live with elemental dignity to be concerned about a meeting happening at the United Nations. So, too, with the men and women who participated in the Griffiths et al. research project. While some persons with disabilities are actively engaged in the important human rights discourse, participants in this study were engaged in a human rights struggle for the most basic of dignities - having time on their own and not having their belongings stolen.

Embracing the whole continuum of human experience just seems to be the right thing to do, and yet our collective human history has been one where subtraction is easier than addition in building our community of humanity. Along the way, we have developed polite parlance for peoples who are relegated to the status of what others call vulnerable, marginalized, and at risk. Such word usage suggests permanence, suggests weakness, and suggests no change. It needs to be replaced by use of the phrase: peoples whose rights are consistently violated. Not only is this a more accurate description, but also it compels a universal responsibility for redress whilst respecting the resilience and strengths of our peoples.

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