

# ONE COMMUNITY THROUGH FAMILY LEADERSHIP

## Contributors

to this newsletter are parents who have children with developmental disabilities and participated in a year long series of meetings and workshops focused on Community Inclusion. The series was facilitated by Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center and The SCILS Group in Los Angeles, California.

Parents are sharing their common values about their role as parents, what natural supports are to them and strategies used to include their children at home and in their communities. The statements you will read are parents' perspectives on developing a long term vision for their children.

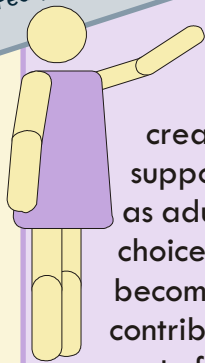
Families have created activities using natural supports to help their children today start moving toward an independent life as an adult living in the community of their choice.



## Building Blocks of Inclusion



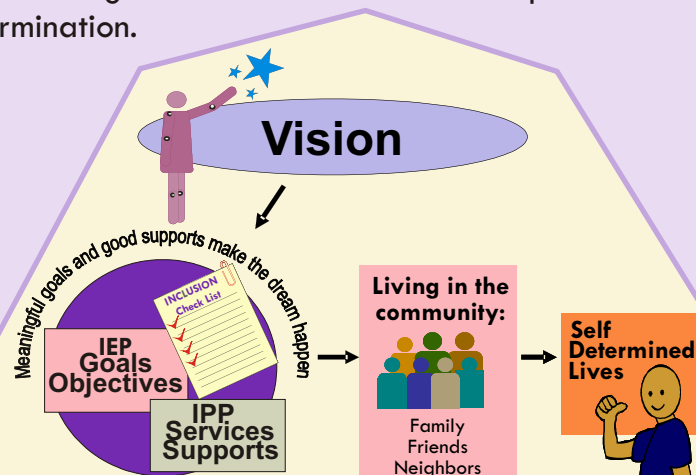
"Inclusion is about learning to live WITH one another. Inclusion means 'being with!'"  
Marsha Forest and Jack Pearpoint (1993)



## Building the Dream

Building the dream of ONE COMMUNITY happens one step at a time having our children included as equal members of our neighborhoods and communities. The journey is personal and unique to each family. It starts with creating a family vision for our children and then supporting them to create their own self-directed future as adults. We believe teaching our children how to make choices and being independent starts with us, as parents, becoming partners in our own communities; reaching out, contributing, being neighbors, joining school groups and most of all believing in our children and their abilities.

Our dream encourages our children to participate in all aspects of the community. As parents, we need to form partnerships with other families, build positive relationships with schools, collaborate with service providers and get to know our neighbors. Together, we can advocate for personal choice, self-determination, and social and economic justice for all our children. To conclude, we believe our children can live productive lives with meaningful relationships. We, as parents, can make a difference by being active members of our own communities, reaching out to families in need, and disseminating information about inclusive practices and self-determination.



# CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

We are partners in **developing inclusive opportunities** for our children and family to be part of our neighborhood. We believe that joining groups and associations we can help enrich our lives, provide opportunities for our children and allow our friends and neighbors to get to know our family as we get to learn more about them.

We are partners in **creating new environments** and opportunities that foster acceptance and inclusion for all people. We see our responsibility as parents to provide supports that allow our children to lead dignified lives with quality experiences, meaningful relationships and opportunities for participation in typical activities with peers.

We are partners with our **schools** by working with school staff and other parents to ensure an open accepting learning environment. We believe children learn best when they are side-by-side with their typical peers. We work towards creating experiences at school that encourage inclusion and diversity during recreation, lunch and elective times. We volunteer with other parents to improve our schools for all children and join leadership groups and associations.

For us, inclusion starts at home with our family, and extends to our neighborhood, schools, places of worship and the broader community.

We are partners with **service agencies and providers** by applying at home what our children are learning in specialized classes. We communicate our long term goals and ask for help in finding ways to incorporate approaches and skills in everyday living. We want our children to participate in activities that positively enhance their life at home and in the community.

We are partners with **parents** of typical children when we seek out opportunities to join other families in participating in community programs and enjoy the benefits of our neighborhoods. We try new experiences together with others and build friendships with families. Most importantly, we take time to plan and organize so our children feel safe and at ease. We help other parents who have children with developmental disabilities by being tutors, mentors and part of their circle of support.

# COMMUNITY INCLUSION:



We believe community inclusion is about any child or adult being

a member of their immediate neighborhood, participating in their community and sharing in the rights and responsibilities of being a member of society. Our children have the right to participate in typical jobs, attend local schools and higher education, choose their own housing and have meaningful relationships.

Community Inclusion In the neighborhood means being known and knowing neighbors by their first and last names and where the families live. It also means babysitting pets, helping out and participating in activities "typical" children and adolescents would do as a matter-of-fact.

We want our children to ultimately participate in the greater community on their own and with their friends to experience what the world has to offer. School and home can provide the seeds of learning to become a community member and experience the benefits of being self directed.

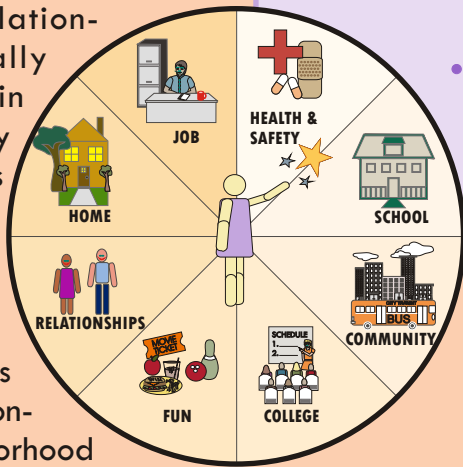


# NATURAL SUPPORTS

*Natural Supports* means personal relationships typically developed in the community that enhances the quality and security of life.

It includes family relationships, neighborhood friends, school buddies, clubs like Boys/Girl Scouts, as well as, civic or church activities.

*Natural Supports* are about all the people and relationships in your life (friends, family, and co-workers). It's the network you tap into during important times of your life. It's the individuals you count on for help. We assume most people want to live happy and comfortable lives. To achieve this, people usually rely on some kind of support system. *Natural supports* by definition are just that "natural." They are personal and community support that touch many facets of life. People who are our natural support network do not teach us skills or facilitate learning; they just



## EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY INCLUSION:

- Attending regular classes at the local school in our neighborhood
- Being involved with school teams, clubs and groups
  - Scouting and clubs
  - Volunteering in the community
- Taking the local bus around the city
  - Helping a neighbor
  - Going out to eat with friends
- Attending inclusive church classes

nurture and support. *Natural supports* are about being with people, not having people do things for us.

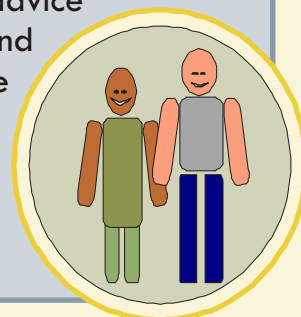
We believe the services and supports provided by the Lanterman Act should be opportunities for our children to learn necessary skills that lead to living an independent self-directed life. We support those services by practicing at home, applying the learning in the community and allowing time for our children to discover and explore their own independence.

We work as a team building relationships and community through accessing social workers for *resource ideas*, our teachers for *how to apply skills at home*, our friends for *advocacy*, and conferences to *learn* more about therapies and strategies.

## TIPS FOR PROFESSIONALS



As parents we depend on the professionals for guidance and expertise. Most importantly we need someone to listen and ask us questions. We are sometimes confused and get a lot of advice from other parents, teachers, conferences, our own families and by all the new research that is available. Most importantly, we need people to help us create a vision for our children's future. Then we need to know how to use services and supports to get there. We can help you, by helping us, become independent thinkers identifying resources, natural supports and people who have expertise.





## For Professionals... here are a few ideas that can help us, help ourselves

1. Listen carefully when we ask questions.
2. Guide us to resources in our communities for services and supports.
3. Help us to trust our own thinking.
4. Help us consider services that match our vision and goals.
5. Support our efforts to make our home the center of community inclusion for our child.
6. Direct us to opportunities in the community that will help our child have experiences to practice the skills they are learning.
7. Become familiar with sites in the community that would make great places for our children to attend.
8. Make our annual meetings less about paper and directed questions and more about getting to know our progress towards our long-term vision and goals.
9. Help us review our services and programs so they don't occupy our child's entire day.
10. Help us create a daily timetable that has structure, but opportunity for building friendships and spending time with neighbors and family.
11. Help us shoulder the responsibilities. Professionals who try to do it all deny us the gift of discovery and opportunity to strengthen our skills.

## PERSON CENTERED PLANNING

*A person-centered plan helps you create a vision of a future where you:*

Make your own choices & decisions for your child

Get advice & support

Build on your child's strengths

Help you achieve dreams you have for your child

Feel that people listen & respect you

Feel proud about your child

**Answer "Yes" or "No" to the following questions.**

At your last individual planning meeting:

Did you plan and run your meeting?

Did you invite people you wanted to the meeting?

Did you set the agenda & talk about things that were important to you?

Did you feel that you were listened to?

Did you feel that your opinions and wishes were respected?

Did you get commitments to a time line?

### For Parents... things to keep in mind

1. Unexpected things occur that requires a change of plans.
2. Observe and go with your child's emerging ideas and visions.
3. Their idea and vision may not be what you had in mind.
4. Maintaining the vision of the future, do not get caught in the details.
5. Remember - why it is so important to have a vision.
6. Be ready to make changes that allow your children to have their own thoughts, ideas, and interpretation.

# TIPS FOR BECOMING A PART OF THE COMMUNITY

## GENERAL TIPS:

Gather information about typical programs that are age appropriate.

Seek information from libraries, parks/recreations, schools, parents and neighbors. Locate newspapers and family magazines in your area.

If your child is interested in a program or class, visit the program together to meet the instructor and other families. Ask questions.

Participate in neighborhood family activities. Visit local parks and places where neighborhood children and their families go.

Volunteer time at your local neighborhood school. Participate in class and all school events, family activities and education seminars.

## TAKING A CLASS TIPS:

How many students are in the class?

Does the instructor speak to the children respectfully?

Does the instructor encourage interaction among children?

Is the instructor prepared and open to suggestions?

Are the activities and other children age appropriate?

Does my child need to bring any supplies to class?

Has the staff worked with a child with a developmental disability?

At the start of each class, talk about the class structure and about the joy of participating with a group.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TIPS:

**Be in the community:** Use the opportunity to be part of the community with your child from going to the store, dining out, going to the park, etc.

**Socialization:** Seek opportunities to share interests and time with your neighbors, family and friends. This will help to build your circle of support.

**Meet your neighbors:** Create activities like a small family gathering allowing your neighbors to get to know you, your family and your child.

## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDEPENDENCE AND CHOICE:

Look for opportunities to teach your child new skills such as: cooking, household chores, ordering food in a restaurant, etc.

Observe your child's strengths and interests to develop new skills. (Example: if your child likes cookies, create an opportunity to teach safety, gathering ingredients, and following a recipe.

Take pictures of your child's accomplishments so they can share their experiences and interests with others.



## TECHNIQUE TIPS

If your child is learning a new task or changing a routine, start with short periods and increase time as they are comfortable.

**Role Play:** If your child is in a new situation, such as a classroom, show them what it is like to be a student. It can show them how to interact in new situations.

**Social Stories:** Create stories that teach how to interact with others. (welcoming someone into your home.)

**Show and Tell:** Have your child share an important experience to others, allowing them to show what they have learned.

**Picture Exchange System:** Ensure the pictures reflect your child's interests/needs.

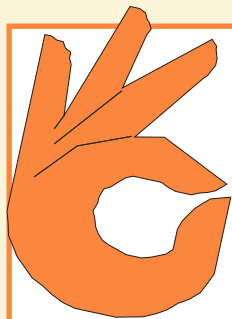
**Task Analysis:** Break down a large task to small steps. Write down each step and make sure all items needed are accessible. Go through steps describing the tasks.

(Ex: Filling a water balloon)

1. Pick up the balloon
2. Go to the sink
3. Hold the balloon opening with your fingers
4. Stretch the opening .
5. Wrap it around the faucet.

**Prompts:** Model the behavior, such as verbal or gesture cues, hand over hand assistance.

**Safety and Awareness:** When learning a new task or skill, survey the area so it is safe. If going into the community, choose a time that allows your child to be stress free.



# FIVE STEPS TO BUILDING THE DREAM

These steps were created by parents to help them think of ways to create new opportunities. Parents found these steps helpful in defining the activity and purpose.

# 1

## WHAT IS OUR VISION FOR OUR CHILD'S FUTURE?

Creating an inclusion vision of how we would like to see our child live. This is divided into two parts;

**FUTURE** - long term view of living in the community

**PRESENT** - focused view of what is possible today

# 2

## WHAT GAVE US THE IDEA TO TAKE THIS STEP?

We broke down our long and short term vision to address *one* area we felt was important for our child to experience today that leads to them becoming more involved at home, in the neighborhood, the community and or school life.

# 3

## WHAT I DID TO PREPARE?

We thought about an activity that was practical and created an outline to identify necessary steps. We answered the following questions - **WHAT** is the activity, **WHY** is it important, **WHO** can give me support if I need it, **WHEN** is a good time to begin, and **HOW** do I know it will be meaningful to my child?

# 4

## HOW DID I GET THERE?

Outline the necessary steps and complete preparation needed by the adults to ensure success. Include the small steps to take, the resource people, required parent/adult learning, child's interest, amount of time and day.

# 5

## WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT COMES NEXT?

A simple description of what happened (outcome), what we learned, and what can come next.

## Acknowledgments

### Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center

1000 South Fremont  
Alhambra, CA 91802  
626-299-4700  
www.elarc.org



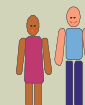
Liz Harrell  
Mary Hosokawa

### Parent Contributors



Carol Tanita, ELARC  
Cindy Liao, ELARC  
Corina Razo, ELARC  
Mary Hosokawa, ELARC  
Barb Devries, SARC  
BJ Kostyk, SGPRC

### Edit and Design



Mark Starford  
Tammy Evrard  
Donna Aikins

### Published by:



**The SCILS Group,**  
Non-Profit Consulting Group  
*Inclusion Solutions*

#### Southern California:



10061 Riverside Drive, #483  
Toluca Lake, CA 91602

#### Northern California:



Post Office Box 60-1477  
Sacramento, CA 95860



866-75-SCILS  
www.scilsgroup.org  
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