



Civil rights have been at the forefront of the news stories in recent months but one population that is often overlooked are people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). We stand, again, at the crossroads for people with IDD, and the tough decisions we face concerns community access. Historically, families were told to place their children with disabilities into institutions as these were deemed the best places to support their son or daughter. We came to understand that this wasn't the case for a variety of reasons, including a lack of individualized quality support. People with IDD began to move out of the institutions and back into the community and family homes as we developed new systems to support people to live in their communities. Similarly, segregated workshops were developed as a way to train and provide employment opportunities to people with disabilities. We now know that people with disabilities are capable of being employed in all sectors of business, earning wages that are the same as their coworkers without a disability. Our society is in the midst of a pivotal social transformation where people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, are not viewed as charity. This philosophical shift promotes people with disabilities as valued citizens who deserve the opportunity to be engaged in their community beyond where they live and work.

Recent laws have encouraged and supported people with IDD to have a more active role in their communities, but this new way has challenged all of us to think in different ways. For people with IDD and Autism, accessing the community is beyond just going to the mall or library. It is based on each person's unique preferences to engage in meaningful experiences. When people are active members of their community, they are safer, healthier, have stronger networks, build relationships, and have increased opportunities for jobs. This is at the heart of both the Olmstead Decision and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Transformation is the road to healthy growth and is essential when technologies are pushing this industry forward, empowering people to live interdependent lives and relying less on paid supports. We urge service provider organizations to adapt to the changing environment with new opportunities presented to them. Provider organizations that are creative, flexible, and innovative will be better equipped to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families.

People deserve the ability to make an informed choice of how they want to live within their community. Dignity lies in people's ability to make informed decisions about their lives. When there is no frame of reference, then there is no choice. When you support equity for people with disabilities, you support civil rights.

~The Board of Pennsylvania APSE

APSE: the Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst

APSE is a national organization promoting the advancement of employment equity for people with disabilities. [www.APSE.org](http://www.APSE.org)