

## Record

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**Abstract**

This letter, by the mother of a child with a disability, was reprinted from a local paper. She takes to task the attitudes of people who would wish to segregate children who have disabilities and gives strong reasons, from financial to community, why this is both short-sighted and wrong. She describes the education of her daughter in the local school, the benefits gained by all the students and the assumption that her daughter will be an employed contributing member of society as an adult. **Keyword: Inclusion**

The following letter appeared in the Airdrie and District Echo - November 27 1991 in response to an earlier one. The points raised are important. As well is the fact that this parent not only disagreed with the earlier letter, she did something about it. Unless people come forward in support of integration publicly, it will take longer to dispel the myths and prejudices which continue to exist about people with disabilities.

## **NOTHING DIRTY ABOUT BEING DISABLED**

Dear Editor:

[Re: Tories' plan for education faulty - Airdrie Echo, Nov. 13]

I read the above noted letter with amazement and disbelief. Surely the views in the letter are not those of a political party, but rather the individual views of the author.

It is my hope that no political party would authorise such an article, as the contents show true ignorance in the field of education of disabled children.

I have two children - one disabled and the other non-disabled. My non-disabled child has periodically found school challenging. Please let me assure you however that the whole class achievement was not held down to the level my son was at, no more than it will be with my disabled child in the school system.

David Bell, the letter's author, tries to justify placing disabled students in institutions by the mere fact that institutions already exist.

He states "We already know of many cases where a child may require considerable assistance both from a physical as well as a mental point of view just to exist in our society."

This statement does apply to many individuals who were raised in institutions, and would have applied to my own child had she been born 15 or 20 years ago. Luckily, research has been done into the potential of mentally disabled children, and to the surprise of medical professionals and the delight of parents, it was discovered that our children are educable and can be contributing members of society.

I would like to point out to Mr Bell that there is nothing dirty, rotten or wrong in being disabled.

These children are living in the bodies that God gave them. In the real world, some of us are gifted with brains, beauty and financial wealth. If we don't all meet the above criteria, where do you suggest exclusion should begin?

Should a person who only grows to five feet have less rights than a person who attains the height of six feet? Should a child who breaks a leg temporarily be institutionalised due to their temporary disability?

At one point our daughter attended an "institutional" developmental centre. When she was totally isolated with disabled children, she learned a lot of undesirable behaviour, and that she didn't have to talk because no one else did.

Children with disabilities are very frustrated by their lack of ability to communicate, and as a result the only way they can show their feelings or desires is through their behaviour.

All children learn through their role models, and in effect she had none. We had taken her out of the setting and integrated with non-disabled children. The negative behaviour drastically decreased due to the new set of role models, and she started speaking again. She was very challenged in this situation and as a result she blossomed in many ways.

My daughter now occupies a seat in a regular ECS classroom. The other children in the classroom treat her the same as they treat each other.

While my daughter's speech is not as good as the child next to her, she ensures that she is understood. Her colouring may not be as good as the other children's, but somehow I think the self-esteem of the other children is boosted when she says "oh beautiful!" about their artwork. And I think the other children try a little harder when they see my daughter trying to copy their example and make her picture as good as the next person's.

The other children are learning good value lessons because of my daughter. They are learning that it is okay to be different, it's okay to have curly hair, or freckles, or to be shorter than other children. These children are growing up with a little less prejudice than we grew up with.

My child has the potential to be employable as an adult, due to early intervention and the willingness of the current school system to allow her to reach her potential. She will have to be allowed to maintain a seat in the regular classroom to achieve these goals, however, if your form of government forces her to an institution for education, she will probably remain in the institution for the rest of her life.

Furthermore, my son does not deserve to be burdened by a low functioning, mentally handicapped person when my husband and I are deceased. We owe it to him to push his sister to the highest levels that she can achieve.

In closing I would like to point out that the cost of care for an individual in an institution is approximately \$300 per day.

The cost of a one-to-one aid for a child with a disability integrated into a "normal" classroom is roughly \$20,000 per year.

Does your party have a clear cut plan as to how we can afford the additional \$90,000 per year per child to keep these children in institutions?

My Down Syndrome daughter is totally accepted as a member of our community. She has had many challenges in her five years, and it has been the well wishes and encouragement from our friends and neighbours, local merchants and professional community that has kept our family going.

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I pray that you will not continue to allow your narrow-minded view to poison the public's attitude toward our daughter in your attempt to gain votes in the next election.

It is also my hope that if your party does win the next election, that your party will see fit to put funds into services for the public, rather than utilise funds to write position papers that are rarely acted upon.

*Bev Christman*