

family

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Abstract

This article describes "family support" as a legitimate policy and explains the reasons for such a policy which include current practices of funding expensive but outmoded services and the need by families for more choice. It raises new questions encountered by families when looked at in the context of community obligations to one another. **Keyword: Families**

Family Support Coalition

Family Support and Communitarianism

Why “family support” policy? That is a legitimate question in an era when family values are resurgent in political debate, most states and the federal government face fiscal deficits, the states and the federal government fund expensive but outmoded services (institutions, sheltered workshops, ICFs, etc.), and families want more choice in service delivery.

A Legitimate Policy

In a nutshell, family support is a legitimate policy for several reasons. Its goals are worthy and achievable - to prevent out-of-home placement, to enhance families' caregiving capacities, to merge formal and informal support systems, and to create savings for the public.

And its *justifications* are compelling. The two-parent, “Dad at work, Mom at home” family is rare. Many services never really satisfied consumer needs and preferences. The federal government has reduced its social program commitment.

The “empowerment” ideology, the “consumer movement,” and governmental accountability advance the family support movement. Income redistribution policies (making more funds available to lower-income families) are achievable by family support programs. The “family system” approach (any

intervention will be more effective if it targets the entire family, not just a single member) also justifies family support programs.

Finally, family support is consistent with such disability ideologies as “least restrictive environments/means,” “normalization,” and the independent living movement's “power to the consumer” mentality (rebalancing the “power relationship” between provider and family).

What *barriers* exist? Evaluation data are scant, causing resistance. There is pressure to spend limited funds on traditional, time-tested services. Family support threatens professionals' control over families, programs, and budgets.

Responding to Communitarianism

Far more than family support policies are needed, however, if families are truly to get help in achieving their choices and satisfying their needs. A new doctrine, communitarianism, calls on all of us to emphasize our duties to each other and to the community. It seeks to nourish the ties of neighbourhood, workplace, and family.

Communitarianism has yet undeveloped implications in the disability field. At the very least, it asks us to consider how to elicit the sense of an inclusive community from

people without disabilities. This means going beyond legally required integration.

A Moral Obligation

To go beyond mandatory integration means persuading people without disabilities that it is a moral obligation to be inclusive. Communitarianism shifts the focus from legal to moral obligation; it therefore requires disability advocates to use different strategies (but not to abandon traditional legal and policy strategies).

Perhaps one way of doing that is to help demonstrate that people with disabilities are capable of contributing to the community - not just to a place (“community” as a site) but also to a sense of togetherness (“community” as a psychological environment).

New Questions

Seen in these “communitarian” dimensions, people with disabilities and their families encounter new questions. What are their obligations with respect to such matters as deficit reduction and entitlements; to what degree, if any, should they have their entitlements reduced or held at present levels so that federal and state fiscal conditions are improved overall?

To what extent can they claim a place in newly promised programs of national, state, and local service (such as teacher/ police/social - service

corps)? Will it be inconsistent with established ideology (which asserts that all work should be for pay) for them to be volunteers in these projects? When health-policy reforms take more concrete shape in Congress and state legislatures, what duties will people with disabilities have to engage in wellness programs? In short, communitarianism asks people with disabilities and their families to re-examine the relationships

between them, public policy, and people with disabilities. The re-examination moves the focus beyond family support to community reciprocity.

Obligation and Entitlement

Family support calls on the public at large to fund families. Communitarianism calls on families and individuals with disabilities to return something of value.

Indeed, the age of obligation may now be joined with the

age of entitlement and rights, and the age of moral claims may accompany the age of legal interests.

These changes, and their implications for public policy, is the focus of my two recent monographs,

The Communitarian Perspective and *Families of People with Disabilities*, available from the Beach Center at cost.

- **Rud Turnbull** ■