



**Comment on**

**Everyone, Everyday Discussion Paper**

**A curriculum resource to raise awareness  
about disability for ACT schools**

**March 2012**

# About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS acknowledges that Canberra has been built on the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people. We pay our respects to their elders and recognise the displacement and disadvantage they have suffered as a result of European settlement. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations, people living with disadvantage and low-income citizens of the Territory.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS' objectives are a community in which all people have the opportunities and resources needed to participate in and benefit from social and economic life and the development of a dynamic, collaborative and viable community sector.

The membership of the Council includes the majority of community based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and interested individuals.

ACTCOSS receives funding from the ACT Government - Community Services Directorate.

ACTCOSS advises that this document may be publicly distributed, including by placing a copy on our website.

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## Introduction

ACTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Discussion Paper on the *Everyone, Everyday* curriculum resource to raise awareness about disability in ACT schools. ACTCOSS commends the ACT Government and BLITS for their efforts in developing this valuable resource which will raise awareness and inclusion for people with disabilities in the Canberra community.

Research supports the arguments that inclusive education can improve attitudes towards children with disability and that inclusive education can result in more positive social relationships for all the children than segregated education.<sup>1</sup>

It is essential children understand a range of disabilities and are, more importantly, aware of the many talents and abilities of which people with disabilities are capable.

Creating inclusive classrooms is an important way in which the ACT is working toward social inclusion for members of its community. ACTCOSS supports the *Everyone, Everyday* resource as a tool for education and awareness which will promote disability inclusiveness not only in classrooms, but also in friendships, job opportunities and community life. If implemented as intended *Everyone, Everyday* will be a valuable building block for improving the recognition and inclusion of people with disabilities in the ACT.

## Training for Teachers

Appropriate training for teachers on how to use the *Everyone, Everyday* resource properly is vital. While ACT schools now provide inclusive education for students with disabilities, it is still necessary to equip teachers with the skills needed to promote inclusive classrooms in order to guarantee the best outcomes for all students. The policy preference for inclusive education in itself does not ensure effective implementation of the policy. Therefore it is necessary to prepare teachers for creating inclusive classrooms, adapting curriculums and properly assessing all children.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, merely providing a resource to teachers on promoting disability awareness will not ensure appropriate implementation of the tool. Teachers need to be trained on appropriate ways in which to deliver the resource, as well as how to facilitate discussion and address students' questions. Ensuring teachers are adequately trained in handling the resource will also allow the resource to be used in the way in which it was intended. With improper execution *Everyone, Everyday* could serve to deliver the opposite of its intentions by stigmatising children with disabilities, furthering feelings of exclusion and increasing the chance of bullying.

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1 D Thompson et al *Community attitudes to people with disability: scoping project*. Occasional Paper Number 39, for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2011, p.37.

2 *ibid.*

Many teachers acknowledge the need for inclusive classrooms and related programs but lack the resources to implement appropriate projects and discussions around disability awareness.<sup>3</sup> Training courses for teachers which include interactions with people with disabilities could also promote positive attitudes toward disability awareness, which will in turn help foster more positive attitudes toward people with disabilities in classrooms.

In addition to sufficient training, teachers need to have ongoing access to support resources which reflect current policy and best practice. While sufficient training should prepare them to confidently begin implementing the *Everyone, Everyday* tool, ongoing support such as online information and resources, as well as useful and relevant contacts will ensure teachers feel supported whilst maintaining inclusive and disability-aware classrooms.

### Recommendations

- Ensure appropriate and sufficient training is provided to teachers prior to the implementation of the *Everyone, Everyday* resource.
- Ensure teachers have ongoing access to support resources.

## Consultations

In the development of any resource, it is important the people impacted most are consulted with in a meaningful and appropriate manner. *Everyone, Everyday* is a resource designed for teachers, but the most significant impact of the tool will consequentially be on the people whom it is ‘talking about’, that is, people with disabilities.

Lived experience provides people with disabilities the skills and understanding to know what resources, policies and plans will affect them, both positively and negatively. The Australian Human Rights Commission reinforces the importance of proper consultation with people with lived experience, noting that ‘decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities should... actively involve persons with disabilities.’<sup>4</sup>

It is vital the voices and views of people with disabilities are incorporated into the resource *Everyone, Everyday*. ACTCOSS recommends the ACT Government undertake targeted and meaningful consultations with a variety of stakeholders including:

- Individuals with disabilities, including children and young people;
- Families with children with disabilities; and

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *National Disability Strategy: Australian Human Rights Commission Submission*, 2008, viewed 20 March 2012, <[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability\\_rights/commonwealth/NDS.htm](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/commonwealth/NDS.htm)>.

- Representative organisations who work with or advocate on behalf of people with disabilities, for example People With Disabilities ACT and Advocacy for Inclusion.

### Recommendation

- Develop the *Everyone, Everyday* resource in consultation with appropriate stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities and their families, and representative organisations which work with or advocate for people with disabilities.

## Culturally appropriate awareness

There are many ways of understanding disability and ‘perceptions of people with disability are socially and culturally conditioned.’<sup>5</sup> Cultural understanding of disability influences the way individuals and communities identify and relate with people with disabilities.

## Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Cultures

There is little published research on the way in which disability is perceived and responded to within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is believed prior to European settlement in Australia Aboriginal people with disabilities were cared for no differently in their community than people without disabilities. Community members with physical disabilities were cared for within their extended family kinship system and were given similar roles and responsibilities as others.<sup>6</sup>

Aboriginal communities are often be inclusive of people with disabilities and as a result do not place the same emphasis on disability as other communities.<sup>7</sup> The limitation a person feels with regard to disability is greatly influenced by one’s interaction with others in the community, and therefore, Aboriginal people with disabilities may not feel limited in their activities or personally identify as having a disability.

If the resource seeks to help children learn about different types of disabilities, it is vital those children who may not identify as having a disability in their community are not isolated or singled out as a result of increased disability awareness.

It is of utmost importance this resource, which seeks to promote inclusion, is created in consultation with Aboriginal people with disabilities and

5 Creating Accessible Teaching and Support, *CATS Fact Sheet: Models of Disability*, 2012, viewed 20 March 2012, <<http://www.adcet.edu.au/Cats/View.aspx?id=4048>>.

6 Western Australia Disability Services Commission, *Aboriginal People with Disabilities: Getting Services Right*, 2006, viewed 8 March 2012, <<http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/publication/aboriginal.html>>.

7 *ibid.*

representative organisations who work with or advocate on behalf of Aboriginal people with disabilities, as well as with Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities and respective appropriate organisations. These consultations should seek to ensure appropriate identification and response to children with disabilities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

The provision of culturally appropriate awareness is a necessity in the development and implementation of the *Everyone, Everyday* resource. The resource should be developed using consultation with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have disabilities, as well as their families and organisations which advocate on their behalf.

ACTCOSS also recommends the inclusion of cultural awareness with regard to disability be added to the 'Activities relating to understanding disability and its effects'. Disability is perceived and responded to differently across various cultures and the importance one's culture and surroundings are to one's feeling of able-ness and inclusion are important components to be explored through *Everyone, Everyday*.

### Recommendations

- The *Everyone, Everyday* resource be developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities and representative organisations.
- The tool is developed in consultation with individuals, families, and organisations advocating on behalf of culturally and linguistically diverse people with disabilities.
- Cultural awareness with regard to disability is included in 'Activities relating to understanding disability and its effects'.

## Defining disability in a human rights framework

While legal descriptions of disability vary, the *Everyone, Everyday* resource should be developed with a clear definition of disability. ACTCOSS recommends keeping in line with the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* definition of disability, where

**disability**, in relation to a person means:

- (a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or
- (b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- (c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or

(d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or

(e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or

(f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or

(g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour.

and includes a disability that:

(h) presently exists; or

(i) previously existed but no longer exists; or

(j) may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or

(k) is imputed to a person.

To avoid doubt, a **disability** that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.<sup>8</sup>

This definition is similar to the definition found in the ACT *Discrimination Act 1991*.

It is vital the *Everyone, Everyday* tool is developed and implemented using the appropriate and inclusive language and definitions identified as in line with current best practice. As one of only two Australian jurisdictions with specific human rights legislation the tool should reflect and further the ACT *Human Rights Act 2004*. The ACT *Disability Services Act 1991* outlines a range of human rights principles to be furthered in relation to people with disabilities.

1. All people with disabilities are individuals who have the inherent right to respect for their human worth and dignity.
2. People with disabilities, whatever the origin, nature, type or degree of disability, have the same basic human rights as other members of society and should be enabled to exercise these basic human rights.
3. People with disabilities have the same rights as other members of society to realise their individual capacities for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.
4. People with disabilities and carers of people with disabilities have the same right as other members of society to services that will support their attaining a reasonable quality of life.
5. People with disabilities have the same right as other members of society to make and actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives and are entitled to appropriate and necessary support to

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<sup>8</sup> *Disability Discrimination Act (Cwlth) 1992*

enable participation in, direction and implementation of the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>9</sup>

If used to underpin the *Everyone, Everyday* resource, such principles can assist to ground the tool in an human rights framework.

### **Recommendations**

- The resource is developed and implemented using a clear and appropriate definition of disability, as well as inclusive language.
- The *Everyone, Everyday* resource sit within the ACT's human rights framework.

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9 *Disability Services Act (ACT) 1991*