

THE COMMUNITY IMPERATIVE

A REFUTATION OF ALL ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF INSTITUTIONALIZING ANYBODY BECAUSE OF MENTAL RETARDATION

Center on Human Policy
Syracuse University

In the domain of Human Rights:

- All people have fundamental moral and constitutional rights.
- These rights must not be abrogated *merely* because a person has a mental or physical disability.
- Among these fundamental rights is the right to community living.

In the domain of Educational Programming and Human Services:

- All people, as human beings, are inherently valuable.
- All people can grow and develop.
- All people are entitled to conditions which foster their development.
- Such conditions are optimally provided in community settings.

Therefore:

In fulfillment of fundamental human rights and in securing optimum developmental opportunities, *all* people, regardless of the severity of their disabilities, are entitled to community living.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE COMMUNITY IMPERATIVE

When was the Community Imperative written?

1979.

Who wrote the Community Imperative?

The Community Imperative was written by the Center on Human Policy at Syracuse University, under the leadership of the late Burton Blatt.

Who endorsed the Community Imperative in 1979?

In addition to Center on Human Policy staff and associates Ellen Barnes, Douglas Biklen, Robert Bogdan, Hillery Schneiderman, Jo Scro, Steven Taylor, and Wolf Wolfensberger--the Community Imperative was endorsed by over 300 parents, people with disabilities, researchers, and professionals. The initial list of signers included such leaders as: Gunnar Dybwad, Rosemary Dybwad, Robert Perske, Alan Abeson, Allan Bergman, Ed Roberts, David Braddock, Lou Brown, Allen Crocker, Seymour Sarason, Eleanor Elkin, James Ellis, Philip Roos, Frank Laski, Judy Heumann, Linda Glenn, Bruce Ennis, Marc Gold, Fred Krause, Horace Mann, Lotte Moise, Bengt Nirje, Tom Nerney, John O'Brien, Patty Smith, Edward Skarnulis, Ann Turnbull, Rud Turnbull, and Jean Vanier, among others.

Why was the Community Imperative written?

The Community Imperative was written in response to organized opposition to deinstitutionalization and community living. Specifically, the Community Imperative was intended to counter a 1978 memorandum submitted by 10 national experts in hearings in the *Wyatt* case in Alabama that argued that only a small number of institutional residents could be expected to adjust to community living and that training programs were inappropriate for a substantial number of them. The purpose of the Community Imperative was to establish that all human beings, regardless of nature and severity of disability, are inherently valuable, have fundamental rights, and are capable of learning, growth, and development.

Why has the Center on Human Policy reissued the Community Imperative?

Today, 21 years after the Community Imperative was written, deinstitutionalization and inclusion remain controversial in some states and localities. Current debates and controversies surrounding community living obscure fundamental disagreements over values and beliefs between those who support and those who oppose inclusion. The Center on Human Policy believes that it is necessary to focus attention on the principles underlying community inclusion. The time to debate the place of people with disabilities in the society and the community has long since passed. It is time to shift attention to assuring that community living is accomplished in a manner consistent with the values and beliefs expressed in the Community Imperative.

For further information, please contact the Center on Human Policy at the address on the front of this fact sheet.

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