

# CHILD CARE

plus +

FALL 1994

Supporting Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings

Vol. 5, No. 1

## + Mainstreaming, Integration, Inclusion . . . Our Future

First there was mainstreaming, then integration, and now inclusion--why the changes? At first, it may seem silly to keep revising the way we talk about services for children with disabilities. However, the words we use describe our attitude. While the words themselves may not be terribly important, our attitude about including children with disabilities in activities with their peers truly matters.

**Mainstreaming** means bringing a child with a disability into the mainstream of society. Introduced in the 1970's, mainstreaming was the first major push to ensure that children with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in activities and educational experiences with children who have no disabilities. Children who are mainstreamed are enrolled in existing programs and participate in activities appropriate for their developmental abilities. For example, a child might go with "his class" to music, lunch, and gym but go to another class for math, spelling, and other academic subjects. Interestingly, all of the children seemed to benefit from these shared experiences, and we looked for more opportunities to bring children together. Mainstreaming is an important milestone because it reflected the belief that children with disabilities have the same needs as their peers.

In the 80s, the term **integration** emerged as being more descriptive of the services children with disabilities really need. Rather than a child participating only in selected activities with peers, we created a setting where every single child is an integral part of the program. This means that if the routine, environment, or activity is not working for even one child, we make modifications. Integrated child care has been a productive and exciting way for early childhood professionals to address the needs of children with disabilities the way we know best--in circle time, fingerprinting, field trips, and all the other valuable

learning experiences that happen daily in our programs. All day long, we observe the every-day-little-kid needs of children with disabilities and make simple modifications so no one is left out. Once again, all the children benefitted. More importantly, teachers/caregivers demonstrated that using early childhood best practices (with modifications here and there) works for children with disabilities.

Integration does not mean creating a miniature special education class within a child care program or turning a good early childhood educator into a special educator. Doing what we know best creates an environment in which the needs of children with and without disabilities can both be satisfied. For years now, early childhood educators across the country have been practicing integration--successfully including children with disabilities in their programs.

So the term **inclusion** isn't really new after all. It's simply a more descriptive way of referring to the way we do our job. The spirit of mainstreaming and the practicality of integration have been combined. Inclusion means that we recognize that every child should be included in our early childhood program and that the needs of every child (whether he or she has a disability or not) should be considered in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of our efforts.

In the past, we might have said "we're an integrated program" or "we accept children with disabilities." Some programs were integrated, and others were not. With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), programs cannot automatically deny access to their services because a child has a disability. It specifically includes child care programs when it says that no person with a disability can be refused services and opportunities available to those who do not have disabilities. We knew it all along.

Children--people--with disabilities benefit from and enjoy the same experiences as their peers without disabilities. Inclusion is the best way to describe the openness and the enthusiasm with which we are recognizing how important every-day-little-kid experiences are to children. If it's a fun activity or part of the routine, every child can and should be included!+

### IT'S INCLUSION WHEN:

- ★ everybody plays, learns, and grows--together.
- ★ each child is included in every activity, routine, and learning opportunity.
- ★ teachers and caregivers plan activities appropriate for both the developmental abilities and interest level of the children.
- ★ parents value diversity and the powerful way children learn from each other.
- ★ each child has opportunities to enjoy typical every-day-little-kid experiences.

### In This Issue

From the Source	Keep In Touch
Making It Work	Off To A Good Start
Notes from Home	Time To Take Off The Kid Gloves
Spotlight	Children as "Young Spirits"
What Do I Do When	Parent Handbook and Inclusion
Resource Review	ABC's of Inclusive Child Care

## + FROM THE SOURCE: Keep In Touch

It is important for you to know what is happening in other environments where the children in your program spend significant time. While you may already be aware of the importance of working closely with parents, it is equally vital to have open communication with other adults who have an impact on the child each day. Regular communication across settings is very effective in meeting children's developmental goals and providing consistency in meeting their needs. With parent permission, there are many options for sharing information. You can plan or problem-solve together and share documents, written information, equipment, and play ideas.

As children turn three years old, there are additional placements which may occur that make communication critical (and sometimes difficult). Does Casey have Head Start every afternoon? The teacher might like to know how much Casey enjoys the talking books in your book corner--you could call or write her a note. Does Sid go to preschool before she comes to your program? Talk regularly with that preschool teacher. Is Deshane going into a half-day special education program? You will want to be part of the team who develops his Individual Education Plan (IEP). And, in addition to talking to his teacher regularly, you could get more information by observing Deshane in his classroom during the year.

When you consider each adult a resource, you will not have to guess whether Reba took a nap on the bus coming from school (bus drivers are good observers--they just need to be asked). When you are regularly keeping in touch, you will know that Jake took his seizure medication a little later than usual (after he returned from the field trip) and you can adjust his afternoon dose. While using these resources takes planning at first, it will not take long for you to see the advantage of doing it. +

## + MAKING IT WORK: Off To A Good Start

You believe in inclusion. Your staff works hard to ensure that young children in your program are responded to as individuals. Each child's needs and interests are as important as another's. You search out and attend special training on infant care, modifying program materials, and learn how to care for children with a variety of abilities and disabilities. GREAT!!!

But when parents walk into your program to talk about enrolling their child, do they see immediately the same commitment to inclusion? Here are a few questions you can use to evaluate yourself and the message you give parents about your philosophy of inclusion:

✓ Do I talk to parents about meeting the individual needs of each child in my program . . . and then follow up with action? For example, do I expect the same performance from all children, or do I look at them individually to decide what I expect from each one?

✓ Look carefully at written enrollment and informational materials. Are my policies written so that they apply to every parent and every child, or have I added separate sections that only apply to a few?

✓ Are my routines and rules flexible enough to guide children as they grow and develop, even when growth and development differ for each child?

✓ Do I speak to children and adults with a "child first" philosophy--always speaking about a child as a child first and about a child's characteristics, such as blonde hair, a happy smile, or a disability, second?

An early childhood professional who embraces the ideas of inclusion demonstrates a child-centered philosophy. These providers nurture, educate, and care for children, and they do not try to make them all alike. Paying attention to these details helps parents know whether your program is a good "fit" for them and their child. +

## + NOTES FROM HOME: Time To Take Off The Kid Gloves

I spent the first few weeks Evan was in child care demanding that he be handled with kid gloves. I was sure they didn't know how to care for him and wouldn't know what he wanted because he can't talk. I worried that no one would remember how to fasten the straps on his wheelchair. I called twice a day to be sure he wasn't crying. Even though the staff at were well-trained and very loving, I was sure they didn't understand that Evan was special--that they couldn't treat him like the other kids.

One afternoon when I went to pick him up, I saw through the window that Evan and about three other boys were rolled up in blankets on the floor giggling hysterically. Convinced that he would be hurt, I rushed inside prepared to rescue my son. His teacher greeted me and told me how excited she was that Evan was making friends. I saw in her eyes that she was serious. I know it sounds amazing, but I never thought that Evan would actually have friends.

When he was just a baby and he was really sick, we were worried that he wouldn't live. Then as he got stronger, I worried about whether he would learn to feed himself, walk, or talk--all the typical milestones. But until I saw him happily surrounded by other little children, I don't think I ever thought about Evan having friends and an actual social life. Right then I knew that it was time to take off the kid gloves and let Evan be a normal little boy who just happened to have a disability. I realized he needed to get down on the floor and play, put his fingers in the fish tank, hide under the table, and roll up in a blanket with his friends. I know kids are supposed to learn a lot in preschool, but I wonder if anybody realizes how much the parents are learning!

Evan's mom +

## + SPOTLIGHT: Children as "Young Spirits"

Right next to the University of Montana, on quiet Connell Avenue is a delightful home surrounded by towering trees and flowering plants. Just a regular-every-day home, you say? But no! This is a house of "spirits" . . . **Young Spirits Child Care**, that is! This program is a quiet gem in Missoula's University district. Owner, Kathy McGlynn, has been graciously sharing her home, family, and pets with hundreds of young spirits for 13 years now.

As a family day care provider, Kathy emphasizes both indoor and outdoor play, many art experiences, and music of all types. Then Kathy weaves these activities with opportunities for children to develop language, have social growth experiences, and practice independence. Following the children's lead, she loves to incorporate history and literature into their play. AND, Kathy has been providing these carefully planned experiences and activities to children of all abilities and disabilities from the beginning. Inclusion is the whole reason she got into day care, including children with disabilities from the start.

Kathy strives to bring opportunities to the children and families in her program that are not typically offered in many family child care programs.

She seeks out university practicum students, brings in art and music teachers, and works along side of early intervention specialists to help with the completion of children's developmental objectives.

Any one of these things would make **Young Spirits** a special place to be, but Kathy McGlynn has also responded to another desperate need in her community. Kathy McGlynn is a Master Juggler. No, she doesn't juggle oranges or eggs (not that we know of, anyway), she juggles part-time schedules. In fact, at one time in recent years, Kathy had 26 children enrolled in her program which is limited by Montana law to six children at a time. Almost **all** of the children were part-timers! Responding to the need of nearby university students, staff, and faculty for "a few hours on Mondays and Thursdays," Kathy developed a flexible schedule that makes many

child care providers tremble with anxiety. Nine-month-old Caitlyn comes Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Two-year-old Mark comes Thursdays only, from 7:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Four-year-old Angie comes Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for all day (except for every second Wednesday when Angie has therapy). And Tia is there every day eager to play with each child as he or she comes.

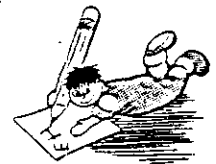
Kathy's schedule might open up a few hours a week when a child starts kindergarten, moves away, or leaves at the end of the term, but the hours are quickly seized by another parent whose needs have changed or who has been on her waiting list. Kathy accomplishes this formidable scheduling task with

a calm smile and an only occasional slightly harassed look, and is always ready for the next request for sledding or outdoor reading.

Young Spirits was inclusive before inclusion was "cool." Programs like Kathy's might have been on the minds of the authors of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when they included child care programs in the list of community services which should enthusiastically support the inclusion of people with disabilities.



You see, inclusion is so much more than a word . . . it is action . . . and it is a way of respecting young children. Inclusion isn't a new idea to early childhood professionals like Kathy--she practices it every day and sees the benefits for families, children, and early childhood professionals.+



For more information, contact:

Kathy McGlynn  
Young Spirits Child Care  
525 Connell Avenue  
Missoula, MT 59801  
(406) 549-0283

## + WHAT DO I DO WHEN

**QUESTION:** *We are developing a new parent handbook, and we want it to reflect our philosophy of inclusion. Should we say that we are "an inclusive program" or that we "include children with disabilities"?*

**ANSWER:** Because you cannot actually deny services to a child just because he or she has a disability, using either one of those choices probably does not add much to your parent handbook or brochure. It would be more helpful to parents who are interested in your program if, instead, you made sure that the handbook used inclusive language throughout. A parent wants to know how you will include their child in your program, and that's what you need to describe.

They also want to know if you have any special qualities, experiences, or training that would help prepare you to meet the needs of their child. You might, for example, describe the kinds of activities the children do and explain that each of these "can be adapted to match the interest and abilities of each child." If you include a biographical sketch of you and/or other staff members, include specialized training you have received or perhaps a description that you "value incorporating cultural and developmental diversity and work hard to make sure that every child's interests are represented in your program."

The idea is to describe, for all families, the many different ways in which you include every child in every part of your routine. There is no better way to describe inclusion! You might also be surprised to find that parents of children who do not have disabilities are just as interested in finding out that you will meet their

children's individual needs. If your parent handbook uses inclusive language throughout, every family will feel that your program is a special place for their child. +

*(If you have a question about children with disabilities in child care settings, please send your question to CHILD CARE plus+.)*

## + RESOURCE REVIEW

*ABC's of Inclusive Child Care* is a useful resource to encourage child care providers to accept children with disabilities. The 14-minute video discusses the benefits and importance of inclusion. It features three children who have been placed in child care. It describes the apprehensions that individuals experienced and how they later discovered that these children have the same needs as other children. Available from the Texas Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities, N. Lamar Blvd, Austin, TX 78751-2399 or call (512) 483-4093. +

*CHILD CARE plus+* is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

Editorial Board: Sarah A. Mulligan Gordon; Kathleen Miller Green; and Sandra L. Morris;

For subscription information, call 1-800-235-4122 or write:

*CHILD CARE plus+*  
Rural Institute on Disabilities  
Corbin Hall - The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812

*CHILD CARE plus+* is published quarterly. The subscription price is \$ 5.00 per year (four issues). Contents may be reproduced without permission.

**CHILD CARE** *plus+*

Rural Institute on Disabilities  
University of Montana  
Corbin Hall  
Missoula, MT 59812

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Missoula, MT  
59812  
PERMIT NO. 100