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Special Issue on People with Disabilities and Social Welfare: Introduction

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GUEST EDITOR

Welcome to the JSSW special issue on disability. When it was first announced that there would be a special issue dedicated to the programs and policies of people with disabilities, we knew it was an important topic, but we didn't know what to anticipate regarding the number of submissions. Your interest and the number of submissions far exceeded our expectations—as well as the available space in this Journal to include all the thoughtful and well-researched manuscripts we received. We selected those articles that reflected the most cogent and contemporary issues facing program administrators, policymakers, and people with disabilities.

With this in mind, the first article in this special issue, "Dreams Deferred: Disability Definitions, Data, Models, and Perspectives," sets the stage for contemporary discourse regarding disability. Several unique definitions of disability are presented verbatim from the source. The reader may be inclined to conclude that either everybody can be termed 'disabled,' or the definitions are so exclusionary the it would be difficult to identify any truly disabled person. It is this paradox that has thus far kept the disability community from becoming the once hoped for civil rights powerhouse. The disability community,

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for the most part, remains fragmented and parochialized according to disability type. Common denominators, however, have united the fractions—primarily concerning access to transportation and voting precinct accessibility. It appears that wherever an issue is of concern to a broader population (and therefore, lobbying strength), special interests are set aside in pursuit of a common goal. In recent years, this has meant alignment with the older adult population which is represented by the powerful numbers and active voices behind the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). The failure to speak as a unified voice has, unfortunately, led somewhat to the dilution of the Independent Living movement which had a strong start with one individual, Ed Roberts, and other like-minded people with disabilities in Berkeley, California in the 1970s.

Other articles in this issue revolve around very topical subjects in the disability community. "Dimensions of Loss from Mental Illness," by Amy Baker, Nicholas Procter, and Tony Gibbons, provides insight into the psychosocial impact of a psychiatric illness, while "Connecting Youth and Communities: Customized Career Planning for Youth with Psychiatric Disabilities," by Kim Brown, addresses a very important and proactive approach to a critical problem in the expanding recovery movement among consumers with mental illness and their supporters.

Two of the articles, "Influences on Job Retention Among Homeless Persons with Substance Abuse or Psychiatric Disabilities" by Russell K. Schutt and Norman C. Hursh, and "E-Therapy as a Means for Addressing Barriers to Substance Use Disorder Treatment for Persons Who Are Deaf" by Dennis Moore, Debra Guthmann, Nikki Rogers, Susan Fraker, and Jared Embree, deal with one of the newer classifications of disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—substance abuse disorders. Substance abuse as a stand-alone disability can be difficult to address both on the micro and macro levels. In combination with a disadvantage (such as homelessness) or a disability, there is ample evidence to indicate a need to understand the synergistic relationship between substance abuse and other variables so that effective and targeted treatment programs and policies can be developed.

A very timely article by Alexa Smith-Osborne, "Does the GI Bill Support Educational Attainment for Veterans with Disabilities? Implications for Current Veterans in Resuming Civilian Life," addresses a pressing issue for soldiers who return home and choose to begin vocational training and educational programs. The challenges are many for returning soldiers who must identify areas of support for successful readjustment to civilian life. Does the GI Bill fulfill its promise of education for our thousands of heroes who are returning home to America in the middle of one of the darkest economic times in our nation's history?

Sandra T. Azar and Kristin N. Read's manuscript, "Parental Cognitive Disabilities and Child Protection Services: The Need for Human Capacity Building," touches upon one of the most sensitive issues confronting people with disabilities: the ability to be an effective parent. And finally, we have included the article "Reaching Beyond the "Moron": Eugenic Control and Secondary Disability Groups," by Gerald V. O'Brien and Meghan E. Bundy, that brings us nearly full circle to the very root of living with a disability—eugenics. As our society becomes more skilled at deciphering genetic codes and developing the technological systems to communicate that information to sources other than the individual (i.e.—insurance companies), eugenics and the birthright of an infant known to carry a disability have become fundamental bioethical debates both in and out of disability circles. How "Independent" can life be for a person with a disability if the option of selection and birth includes extinguishing perceived undesirable characteristics?

Imagine how most dreams of people with disabilities could be advanced and not deferred, if the commonalities between the disability groups could rise above the dissonant descriptions of disability held by policymakers, and if the debate over eugenics could be resolved at the individual level, rather than at the policy level. Perhaps a stronger civil rights movement would emerge, spurring inclusion rather than exclusion.

To advance the promotion of a just and inclusive society for people with disabilities will require a tenacity that has been exhibited in previous civil rights reforms in America. The struggles against oppression and stigma will be, and have been, exhaustive and irregular. The choice, however, is clear.

Perseverance must prevail to avoid the potential dichotomy and anomie reflected in the poem "Harlem" by great Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, whose writing articulates with a stinging lucidity the results of questioning the fight, or surrendering. Victory for a fully inclusive society can be near...if we do not succumb to deferring the dream.

Harlem

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

References

Hughes, L. (1990). *Harlem*. Retrieved August 7, 2009 from <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=175884>.