

## Ableism-Conform to the Normal World

Recently, a family member of mine forwarded me a posting on a Facebook page called "Rants and Confessions". My family member thought that based on my lifetime experiences related to disabilities, I might find a way to respond. In the posting, an anonymous person wrote about seeing a family in a restaurant with a child that the writer referred to as "down's syndrome". The anonymous writer proceeded to make incredibly offensive and derogatory remarks about the child and family. The post ended with the writer wanting to "punch the child in the face". The "rant" of this anonymous posting was horrific, I could not believe someone in a Wyoming town would say such things and be so cruel or closed minded.

The Facebook posting can be described by many words, prejudice, discriminatory, or ignorant, for example. It is also a classic case of Ableism-the practice of putting less of a value on a human life due to a disability. Ableism is a method of discrimination that favors persons without disabilities over those with disabilities. Ableist societies expect people with disabilities to conform to the non-disabled world, a world deemed "normal" by the non-disabled. The Ableist society excludes people from services, supports and access, sending the message that they are not equal and should have a less than equal standard of life. Ableism results in many people with disabilities having negative perceptions of themselves, low self-esteem or lack of confidence that they are a worthy contributor to society.

Some examples of Ableist practices, while mostly unintentional, include doors not being large enough for wheelchairs or that only 5% of tables in new restaurants are accessible to people with disabilities. No restaurant is required to provide menus in braille or fonts big enough for persons visually impaired. Most stores are accessible to people with disabilities, as a result of ADA standards, however, the ADA rules do not assure equal access. Often the aisles of a store are not wide enough to allow easy mobility. Restrooms are not open enough for wheelchairs and support staff. Curbs are not marked well; bus stops are too far from entryways, person's with mobility issues struggle with boarding planes safely if lifts are not available or the walkway uneven or slippery. Sometimes non-disabled persons park in designated handicapped spots. None of these examples are accessibility problems for the non-disabled. Simply put, not all stores, restrooms, parks, and public buildings are accessible to all persons with disabilities, however, all stores, restrooms, parks, and public buildings are accessible to people without disabilities.

Reading the Facebook post made me think about the eras prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Age of Enlightenment, when society thought that people with impairments; physical, sensory or mental were under the spell of witchcraft, possessed by demons or being punished by God. During this period, children with disabilities were left out in the elements to slowly perish because they did not meet the norm. Fortunately, during the Age of Enlightenment, we started to realize there were scientific or medical reasons for disabilities and we did start to make changes. Yet, three centuries later, there are people still closed minded, practicing prejudice and discrimination.

Over the centuries, professionals have developed, modified and thrown out many practices in providing supports for people with disabilities. We have, as stated above, sped up death, locked people away in institutions, hid them from society, given labels, changed labels and repeated efforts that did not previously work. Very often, developments or decisions are made that expect people to conform to the “normal” society rules and expectations. Rarely is the person with the disability considered to be part of the “normal” society, even though 1 in 5 of us has a disability label. Expecting a person with disabilities to conform to the non-disabled world does not result in equality, it results in a person being discriminated against even more, sending the message –don’t be who you are-just be like us, the “normal” ones.

According to Wikipedia, a disability is the consequence of an impairment that may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these that result in restrictions on an individual’s ability to participant in what is considered “normal” in their everyday society. If we were to accept people with impairments as part of the “normal society” and make accommodations eliminating restrictions, there would not be a distinction between disabled and non-disabled. There would not be Ableism or discrimination-we would all just be equal.

## **Carol Busbee**

### **Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities**

#### **Mission**

The MCPD's mission is to be an educational and solution orientated advisory board serving as a network, which is a catalyst and referral organization, promoting self-advocacy, equality and accessibility for all people regardless of their disability.

For more information, view the [Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities Website](http://www.cheyennesmcpd.org) at [www.cheyennesmcpd.org](http://www.cheyennesmcpd.org)