



October 26th, 2012

Good Evening. Please let me thank everyone that is in attendance tonight. We all have full lives with many obligations and the time you have taken demonstrates a commitment to the betterment of our communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the dignitaries present and to thank you for making this public show of support. To the Board of the NWT Disabilities Council, your outstanding dedication and tireless efforts are what drive this organization. This year you brought new vision and a sustainable work plan for the future and I am deeply grateful to all of you for your continued support.

As for the team I work with. We said goodbye to some old friends as they left to pursue personal goals and greeted new friends as they brought fresh ideas and enthusiasm. However, throughout these transitions, one thing has remained constant the Council continues to be a workplace that is a joy to enter each day. The people that come to work, volunteer or complete student placements are committed to the individuals and families we serve. From the Board there is a trickle-down effect of an ideology that encourages a strong work ethic, allows members to think and develop new ideas, acknowledges successes and builds weakness into strength. It is a workplace where we all reach to succeed together. It is a workplace where we strive to make each member feel valued and welcomed for who they are.

With this as a foundation for our work the Council has sought to engage communities toward the same end. Approximately 11 percent of the population has a significant long lasting disability. This 11 percent has a direct impact on 53% of the general population through friends, families, co-workers and other relationships. This is why it is so critical, during this very important time of future-planning, that we get it right as a territory.

Inclusion is the word that everyone uses to sum up the ultimate goal of what a person with a disability desires. But what is inclusion? Is inclusion the ability for a person to occupy a space or is it the creation of a welcoming environment. In a territory, where the concept of communities is as real and strong as the rock on which it stands, we need to look to the elders and history to see how to move forward. We must create supports which develop commonalities and by doing this attitudinal barriers are broken down. As we become less different and more similar we are valued more. This does not mean any loss of individuality. In fact the opposite, we are sought out for who we are, we are looked out for not after. It allows for empowerment and self-esteem to grow. Imagine the difference between entering a room and everyone moving away or avoiding you in contrast to entering a room where you are welcomed and invited in. This is the "in" which is sought in "inclusion".



So we need to focus our energies, whether through respite or outreach, at creating welcoming and nurturing communities, communities which can sustain all members. We cannot accept that isolation, relocation, increased vulnerability of abuse and neglect, loss of self-esteem, increased stress and decreased mental wellness are inevitabilities for anyone. A solution does not create a climate of fear or a network of forced exodus from our family and friends.

Instead, from first to last breath we must put supports into place that build on changing attitudes, creating real and natural relationships and fostering them. Creating communities where no one is left out and all are welcomed. This will take a concentrated effort and considerable mind shift from the norm. Let's not be afraid of leading the way. Let's do the right thing and make sure every child has a friend, every young person grows up with strength and is valued as part of a contributing part of our society, every adult has the opportunity to live an active and productive life to their fullest potential and when it comes time to slow down, in the sunset years, that every elder can do so wherever they choose. Isn't that the wish of every new parent holding their child; why should someone with a disability expect anything different? In the words of Temple Grandin, "Different, Not Less".

Sincerely,

Ms. Denise McKee
Executive Director.