

# The Medical and Social Models of Disability

It is commonly accepted that there are two contrasting "models" or "views" of disability currently present within modern day society.

These are described as the Social and Medical Models of Disability and form part of the way we all conduct our actions, views and feelings towards disabled people. Most of us are in fact more familiar with the Medical Model as this has been operating longer in society and is the one we invariably grew up with.

The movement in society over the last sixty years from segregation to inclusion has been through and in many cases is still working itself through, these two models.

## **The Medical Model.**

Here the disabled person is seen as being ill or having a condition (referred to as the disability) and is in need of some form of treatment. In this model, or view, of disability the illness or condition is said to be seen first and the person second.

The emphasis here is on a culture of dependency backed up by views of disability brought about in part by a history of segregation in our society. The method of bringing about change for the disabled person is seen to lie within the medical and associated professions.

Increasing numbers of people now regard the Medical Model as one that creates a negative approach and tends to offer a somewhat limiting and outdated view of disability. However the mainstream of our society still tends to take this view. Much of present day law, as it affects disabled people, is still based on the Medical Model.

## **The Social Model.**

This model concentrates on the person as a valued member of a very diverse society. It suggests that the disabled person is a unique individual who has the right to the same opportunities in housing, education, transport and facilities as anyone else. It recognises that a person's impairment does not make them less of a human being.

In this model the "disability" is seen as the common oppression brought about by the non-disabled world. This suggests that a person can be disabled by society and this is why those who subscribe to the Social Model use the expression "disabled people". It is fair to say that much of the oppression is not deliberate but comes about because the non-disabled world has been taught consistently over a period of time that disabled people are different and somehow not normal. Any segregated provision, such as in the work place, in education or leisure, while very likely being offered at the highest level could prolong the movement to the often expressed goal of a more inclusive society. It could also maintain and even add to the negative reactions some of us have towards disabled people.

The solution according to this model is to bring about attitudinal, environmental and organisational changes within present day society. The move towards inclusive education, although in its early stages, is an example of this new thinking. As well as this it is felt that disabled people need to be encouraged to play an equal part in decision making processes, particularly when the decisions affect them personally.

# The Journey from Segregation to Inclusion

## Segregation is about:

- Service to disabled people provided.
- Categorising disabled people.
- Treating disabled people as special or different.
- Disability as a problem to be fixed.
- Service available is separate.
- Professionals being the experts.
- Special therapies.
- Separate curriculum.
- Deciding that some people cannot be integrated.
- Providing a different curriculum.

## Integration is about:

- Meeting the needs of disabled people.
- Changing disabled people.
- Equal treatment.
- Disability being a problem to be fixed.
- The benefits to disabled people of being integrated.
- Professionals being the experts.
- Learning helplessness.
- Helping disabled people to fit into a non-disabled world.
- Something which can be delivered.

## Inclusion is about:

- Rights of disabled people.
- Changing school - colleges - organisations.
- Equal shares for all.
- Recognising that everyone has gifts to bring.
- Respecting diversity.
- Everyone benefiting.
- A political struggle.
- The power of ordinary experience.
- Having an equal voice.
- Being accepted as oneself.
- Providing one curriculum.
- Recognising that there is a cost to inclusion and a cost to exclusion.

SEGREGATION



INCLUSION