

THE INVISIBLE ACCESS NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF PRACTICE.

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Introduction: One of the important aims of equal rights legislation is enshrining the right to equal and active participation in society for people with disabilities. Most such laws include sections emphasizing accessibility, the degree to which a system, facility or service is usable without modification by as many people as possible, as a major enabler of participation. Ramps and Braille-encoded elevator panels are nearly ubiquitous examples of common accessibility accommodations. Yet similar accommodations for people with intellectual disabilities are nearly absent, as their accessibility needs are often invisible to legislators, professionals and lay people alike.

Objectives: To describe and discuss accessibility needs of people with intellectual disabilities, and present a conceptual model of practice for the advancement of accessibility for this population.

Description: As an advisor to a *Commission on Equal Rights for People with Disabilities*, I was surprised to discover that accessibility guidelines and accommodations for people with intellectual disabilities are preliminary at best, and lack a comprehensive underlying model of practice. I developed a conceptual model of accessibility for this population by combining information garnered from the limited published literature with factors identified through a series of in-depth interviews with people with intellectual disabilities, family members, and service providers.

Discussion: The first step towards removing accessibility barriers for people with intellectual disabilities is reducing the stigma which prevents recognizing their bonafide accessibility rights. Once this is accomplished, creating accessible solutions relies on the integrated consideration of pace, complexity and literacy accommodations. By acknowledging not only the right of people with intellectual disabilities to receive services (e.g. health, education, occupation, transportation and leisure), but also their right to access buildings, complexes and facilities providing these services in an equal, respectable, independent and safe manner, we can foster an environment that embraces equal rights legislation, where people with intellectual disabilities can actively participate in society with maximum independence, privacy and dignity.

Conclusion: As occupational therapists, it is our professional and moral obligation to utilize our extensive knowledge of task analysis, intellectual disability and reasonable accommodations, to promote accessibility and social participation for people with intellectual disabilities.