



MAPS

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ASSESSMENT
OF PROVIDERS AND SYSTEMS

Defining Belonging, A Core Dimension of Social Inclusion

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Executive Summary

The *Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act*, 2008, was developed by the Ministry of Community and Social Services with the goal of increasing social inclusion, choice and independence for persons with intellectual / developmental disabilities (IDD). Quality assurance measures require agencies to promote the social inclusion of the persons they support. To demonstrate compliance to the legislation and its accompanying regulations, agencies and governmental bodies need to be able to measure these outcomes, as well as the supports needed to achieve them.

Measuring how successful agencies are in promoting social inclusion is complex as it constitutes a multidimensional concept. Belonging, one of the core dimensions of social inclusion, is particularly challenging to define and measure. Yet, from the perspective of persons with disabilities, the success of services and supports in promoting social inclusion relies on their feeling of belonging to groups and their experience of reciprocal relationships.

This report attempts to inform policy makers, decision-makers and service providers on what constitute a sense of belonging. It underlines agreements and disagreements in the published definitions of “belonging”.

Belonging is based on five intersecting domains:

- Subjectivity,
- Groundedness to an external referent,
- Reciprocity,
- Dynamism,
- Self-determination.

Sense of belonging can be defined as a subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs, or personal characteristics. These feelings of external connectedness are grounded to the context or referent group, to whom one chooses, wants and feels permission to belong. This dynamic phenomenon may be either hindered or promoted by complex interactions between environmental and personal factors.

Having a sense a belonging to groups is crucial to one’s social inclusion and thus shouldn’t be overlooked when developing policies and services for adults with intellectual / developmental disabilities. However, it is a complex endeavour. Efforts are required in order to identify where policies and services may impact the sense of belonging of citizens vulnerable to exclusion. It is extremely challenging for policies and services to change personal feelings. However, they are likely to lay the conditions within which inclusion to groups to which one belongs is rendered possible.

This report is an intermediary report. In the Year 2012-2013, the MAPS team will further explore indicators of quality and performance of services in supporting their consumers’ social inclusion and sense of belonging.