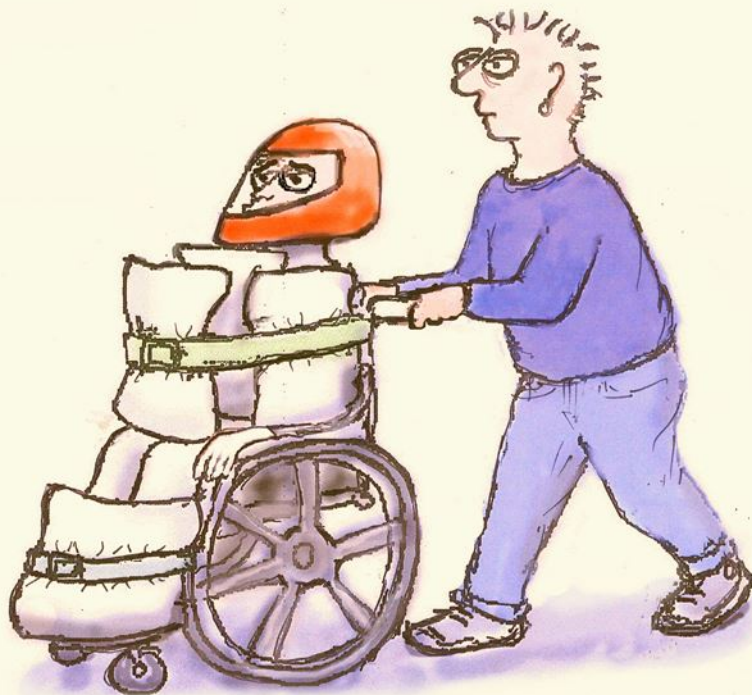


# Opportunity is Not Always 'Equal-Access'

Submitted by Sean McEwen on Mon, 2017/02/27 - 14:32

So much of who we are is based on the opportunities that we took advantage of. Some of those opportunities were as simple as education choices, jobs, relationships, vacation destinations and even getting a driver's license. Some of the opportunities we take might even represent a degree of 'healthy risk' like snowboarding, biking across town or taking a solo trip. Our opportunities add up, provide us with skills, knowledge and experience, and eventually shape who we are as individuals.

As important as opportunity can be in a person's life, not all of us have equal access. Many of the people CASS serves have had far fewer opportunities as a result of society's response to intellectual disability. For a very long time, people with intellectual disabilities have been cared for and supported in a well-meaning but 'risk averse' manner. This 'protection' from risk in many cases has led to people being protected from **opportunity**. Compounding these attitudinal issues are barriers such as poverty, stigma and service model limitations.



**Image Credit - [The Junction Neighbourhood Centre](#)** [1]

What does all of this look like in the life of a person with an intellectual disability? It can be pretty bleak. It's not unusual for people with intellectual disabilities to be socially isolated; up to 50% of people with [intellectual disabilities are chronically lonely](#) [2]. It's also unfortunately common for people with intellectual disabilities to have no one other than paid staff and a couple of family members in their lives. Romantic relationships are the exception rather than the rule and it's not uncommon to meet adults with intellectual disabilities who have never had a relationship. There is a long list of opportunities that didn't happen for many of the people that CASS now serves - never gone to college, never been on a trip with a friend, never had my own place, never drove a car, never been on a girls night out etc.

This is why CASS exists; we make sure that people make social connections and have opportunities. The [Capabilities Approach](#) [3], developed by Nobel Prize winning Economist, Amartya Sen, and Philosopher, Martha Nussbaum states that "what people can do and be is in turn contingent on **having opportunities to develop competencies**". The primary role of CASS is to ensure the development of competencies and opportunities and to help people experience meaningful participation in a variety of social environments and roles. This goal can't be met alone, however; the engagement of people and community is essential in the development of connections and opportunity.

If you, an organization you're part of or someone you know has ideas or opportunities for the inclusion of people with disabilities please contact us. We know a lot of great people who have much to offer.

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**Links:**

[1] <http://jnc.org.au/>

[2] <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jppi.12089/abstract>

[3] <http://www.iep.utm.edu/sen-cap/>